

**The School Physical Education Program:
Developing First Nation Educational Resiliency**

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Abstract

Eight First Nation students were interviewed to gather their perceptions and personal meanings they ascribed to their involvement in the school physical education program. The participants are First Nation students from one First Nation community in Northwestern Saskatchewan. Each of the participants started the school year at the same publicly funded provincial school located outside the First Nation, but elected diverse educational routes. Four participants returned to continue their studies at the First Nation High School while four dropped out of school entirely.

Qualitative methods including individual interviews, focus group interviews, observation, document analysis, and journaling were utilized throughout the study. The decision to use interviewing as the primary data gathering technique was based on its ability to provide the framework within which "people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world" (Patton, 1990, p. 24). This method of data gathering places a greater amount of control and power in the hands of participants.

Dropout rates among the Canadian First Nation population are significantly higher than their non-Native counterparts (Anisef & Johnson, 1993; Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995; Ross & Usher, 1992). There are multiple sources of risk factors among the First Nation population which contribute to the higher dropout rate. Despite these impairments to educational achievement many First Nation

students are able to surmount the odds set against them. This study identifies five elements which provided the participants with the support necessary to develop educational resiliency.

The five elements served to rebuff external life stressors and assisted these participants in coping with their environment and ultimately contributed to their ability to remain in school. The elements are by no means independent from one another, rather, they work in unison and form an interdependent network which provided the necessary support to be successful in their educational endeavors. The elements which contribute to resiliency have five main themes and can be likened to a tipi. As the tipi protects its occupants from external elements and provides shelter and warmth, the five elements have served to protect these First Nation students from dropping out of school. The resiliency tipi is held together at the top by the first element, the school physical education program, while the remaining four elements comprise the poles and include; personal characteristics and attributes, family factors, constructive use of time, and school and community supports.

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Chapter One

“Many of life’s opportunities are cleverly disguised as problems”

(Gardner, 1987)

Introduction to the Study

This study attempts to listen to and understand the personal meanings First Nation students ascribe to their experiences in school and school physical education programs encompassing physical education, inter-school athletics, and intramural programs. The study examines the extent to which these school experiences have affected the ability of these First Nation students to continue and flourish in their education. Through the use of focus group interviews, individual interviews, observations, document analysis, and a reflexive journal, I participated in the students’ experiences and have recorded, as accurately as possible, what those experiences meant to them as well as to me. The openness and willingness of the participants to share ideas and perceptions aided in developing a fuller understanding of their educational experiences. It is anticipated that from this process of sharing constructive and useful insights a much needed viable educational alternative may be developed for First Nation students.

Researcher's Perspective

I think it may be prudent to provide the reader with some understanding of my personal background as it relates to this study as an effort to be forthright with many of my convictions and biases which are inextricably bound to this study. Throughout my life physical activity has been an integral part of the way I define myself. I have many fond memories of my physical education classes. From the earliest school days to high school I experienced success and recognition which did not happen as easily in other classes. I grew up loving physical activity and sports; these experiences in part motivated me to become a physical education teacher. As a physical education teacher, I attempt to model the benefits which can be gained from an active lifestyle and provide students with many of the opportunities which were afforded to me. To achieve this end I provide numerous and various opportunities for students to engage in physical activity. Over the years my philosophy of physical education has shifted from a subject centred focus to a view of physical education more in tune with the needs of the student. This shift came in part with my work with First Nation students, many of whom demonstrated at risk behaviours. The subject centred approach needed to be modified to meet the dynamic circumstances in which I found myself.

Many of the First Nation students I have taught and coached exhibit enthusiasm, skill, and competency toward physical activity and athletics. As a physical education teacher, I have had the first hand experience of witnessing the remarkable impact a well constructed school physical education program including physical education classes,

intramurals, and athletics can have on First Nation students and communities. I recognize the invaluable contribution physical activities have on many students' lives both within school and outside of school. Often it was one of the few classes where many of the students were not constantly being told that they were behind a predetermined standard for a particular grade level. The school physical education program offers these students the opportunity to travel and experience other communities and cultures. It also serves as a means to build self-esteem within the students and a sense of responsibility which is felt throughout the community.

After graduation I was offered a position working in a small Dene community located near the Arctic Circle. The school consisted of Aboriginal students from kindergarten to grade 10. The one or two students eligible for grade 11 and 12 went to larger schools outside the community to finish high school. Physical activity was held in high regard within the community as confirmed in the status, accolades, and awards given to participants of numerous athletic competitions and events. Sport programs were used as a first line of defence to prevent adolescent crime, violence, suicide, alcoholism and drug use, and served to counter many hours of unconstructive free time in this isolated community. It was also the first point in my education career that I started to question the environment in which I found myself. Why do these kids become involved in these unhealthy life choices? What had happened to all those excited, bright, cheerful students by the time they reached grade ten? How could a school start with thirty students in grade one and finish with two or three students in grade eleven and twelve? Where were these students going? Why were they not experiencing success in school?

What changes to school were necessary in order to meet these students' particular needs?

After my northern experience, I accepted a position as the physical education coordinator at a First Nation elementary school in northwestern Saskatchewan. The school offered a kindergarten to grade eight program which followed the provincial curriculum. It was at this juncture that I started posing questions, first to myself then to others, concerning what I had been observing throughout my education career.

Academically capable First Nation students left the band-controlled school after the completion of grade eight to attend publicly funded high schools and met with little success. The number of First Nation students remaining in the publicly funded high school located off the reserve slowly dwindled after grade eight. By grade nine and ten the attrition rate increased exponentially. Consequently, by the time students reached grade twelve only a minute fraction of the original grade one population remained. It became apparent that although the majority of these First Nation students left the band-controlled elementary school with the knowledge and skills necessary for grade nine many quickly dropped out of high school. These observations prompted me to question the effectiveness of publicly funded schools in meeting the needs of First Nation students. Why were so many academically capable First Nation students dropping out of school? What strategies need to be employed to retain these students? What could I do as a teacher and physical educator? Could physical education and the school athletic programs play a role in retaining a greater number of these First Nation students?

Genesis of the Study

As I entered the graduate program at the University of Saskatchewan I wanted to investigate some of the issues I had been confronted with as a practising physical education teacher. However, developing a particular focus needed time to first germinate and then mature. At the start of my program, when asked by a faculty member if I was interested in quantitative or qualitative research I may as well have been asked what is the annual amount of precipitation in the Amazon rainforest? I simply did not know. I had contemplated conducting research around the idea of physical education and the issue of First Nation high school dropouts, but the exact nature of the study eluded me. The formalized ideas for this study and choice of research design arose out of conversations with faculty and friends, readings, personal experiences, and the seemingly abundance of popular press articles concerning First Nation education. The final appearance of the study evolved from the rethinking of many of my own perceptions and ideas and then shaping and pruning them into a meaningful and workable study.

Establishing Trustworthiness

An established teacher student relationship exists between myself and the participants in this study. The participants were former physical education students of mine and many were very active participants in the school physical education program. These experiences afforded me the opportunity to develop a rapport with these students outside

the classroom which assisted in producing a close relationship with many of these participants. Therefore, establishing a trusting relationship has been an ongoing process for three years. My involvement in the school, coaching and organizing numerous events, and involvement within the community has assisted in establishing a greater level of trust with community members and students. This established relationship allows for a greater amount of participant trust and acceptance of the researcher. This higher degree of participant comfort with the researcher provided the opportunity to access the personal perspectives and opinions of the participants which may not have been afforded to outside researchers. This existing relationship between myself and the participants aided in the selection of participants who would be willing to share meaningful and often candid information. In addition, gaining access to the traditional gatekeepers and key personnel involved in the study was greatly enhanced by my insider role.

It should be noted that this study was delimited in scope. It involves a very specific group of participants who share a number of identifying characteristics. The collection of data was limited to the viewpoints of a small group of First Nation high school students from one First Nation community. The study was limited to the information and perceptions offered by the participants and was carefully interpreted by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher's personal experiences and opinions invariably influenced the data collection procedures and the sense made of the information.

Significance of the Study

First Nation students in Saskatchewan are dropping out of school at a much higher rate than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Brady, 1996; Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1995; Saskatchewan Education, 1997). If the dropout rate among the First Nation population continues to remain high and the Statistics Canada population projections are accurate there is cause for concern. These students will likely be relegated to the social underclass in Canada and experience lower economic and occupational prospects. Practical educational strategies must be developed in order to provide a viable alternative which meets the needs of these First Nation students.

Traditionally, people outside of First Nation communities have attempted to prescribe many of the solutions to the problems encountered by First Nation communities, peoples, and students without consultation. Students have been viewed as subjects and simply have had research 'done to them'. There has been little allowance for the opinions, perceptions, beliefs, or feelings of the people intrinsically involved in the educational process. Pedagogical researchers have paid little attention to curriculum as a classroom experience or to the situational factors that might shape teaching practice (Doyle, 1992). Doyle (1992) recommended that "to better understand this construct, researchers should study not only teachers and teaching but also students within their ecosystem" (p. 492). It is a viewpoint shared by Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) who suggest students are central to the educational process, but are rarely consulted. Ironically, the two groups most intimately involved in the day to day function of education, teachers

and students, have rarely been asked for their thoughts by researchers. As Erickson and Shultz (1992) ask: Do we, as adults, think we know how children think and feel about school without even asking them? Smith (1991) reported a similar neglect in the physical education literature and asked an important question: Where is the child in physical education research? Accordingly, this study offered First Nation students with an opportunity to voice their perceptions and discuss the personal meanings they ascribe to their educational experiences. Through dialogue and discussion with First Nation students insight was gained into viable educational alternatives which may be employed to retain a greater number of First Nation students in school.

Need for the Study

The First Nation population in Saskatchewan is growing at an exponential rate. Statistics Canada predicts that by the year 2011, 24% of 10 to 14 year old students in Saskatchewan will be Status Indians (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 1993). Simply stated, this means that in less than twenty years, almost one quarter of school children aged 10-14 in Saskatchewan will be Status Indian. The population explosion in the First Nation community coupled with a substantially lower graduation rate than non-Aboriginal students may be cause for concern. If current educational trends continue in the First Nation population the long term economic and social impact for these young adults and the province of Saskatchewan as a whole will be monumental. Dropout rates among Canadian First Nation students are significantly higher than their

non-Aboriginal counterparts. Brady (1996) noted that the dropout rate among Canadian First Nation youth was estimated at 70-80%, while the non-Aboriginal rate ranged from 18-36%. Lee (1983), in a study of First Nation students in the Frontier School Division in Manitoba, found that by grade 12 only 22% of the original students were still enrolled in school. This contrasted sharply with the Manitoba provincial completion rate of 86%. Furthermore, the Canadian Census conducted in 1991 found that 42.6% of First Nation adult population in Saskatchewan had less than grade nine education, while only 34.2% completed grade twelve (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995). Conversely, in 1992-93 students attending publicly funded Saskatchewan schools had a graduation rate of 76.9% (Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report, 1997, p.61). More distressing is a 1991 Saskatchewan School Trustee Association report which found that only 10% of the original First Nation student population enrolled in grade one went on to complete grade twelve (p. 5). Establishing accurate statistical information on First Nation students attending publicly funded schools is marred by complications. The discrepancies in the statistical information is explained in a later section in this thesis.

Researchers differ as to the root cause of the problem of school dropouts; however there is little doubt as to the consequences of leaving school prior to completion. As McNeal (1995) noted there is an increased probability of subsequent criminal behaviour, lower occupational and economic prospects, lower lifetime earnings, and an increased likelihood of becoming a member of the social underclass accompany dropping out of high school. If dropping out of high school prior to the completion of grade twelve has such a negative personal impact, it begs the question: Why are students,

particularly First Nation students in Saskatchewan, continuing to drop out at such an alarming rate?

In Canada, the vast majority of First Nation students attend one of four types of schools: federal day schools, which are located on reserves; provincial day schools, usually off reserve; band controlled schools on reserves; and separate schools, usually affiliated with church denominations (Kirkness, 1992). The MacPherson Report (1991) reported the following breakdown in First Nation student enrolment by educational institution in Canada. Federal schools educated approximately 8.7% of First Nation students, band schools have approximately 44% of the total population, and public and separate schools were responsible for educating 47.3% of the Canadian First Nation population. Though there is an increasing number of band controlled schools in Canada the majority of First Nation students attend provincially run public and separate schools. The Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report (1997) found that in 1996 Saskatchewan public schools were educating 15,565 Native students, who accounted for 20.4% of the total student population (p.61).

First Nation students attending provincially run public schools in a predominantly non- Aboriginal environment and society frequently experience many difficulties. Numerous studies (Bowker, 1992; Hurlburt, Kroker, & Gade, 1991; Lee, 1986; Reyhner, 1992) have been conducted to determine the reasons why First Nation students have difficulty in adapting to public school and why a majority eventually drop out. Common themes emerge from the research on First Nation dropout rates. Numerous researchers report cultural differences of the First Nation students, racial biases of the larger non-

Aboriginal community, negative self-image, drug and alcohol abuse, social and economic poverty found in First Nation communities, and language barriers as the primary reasons for leaving school (Bowker, 1992; Brady, 1996; Dehyle, 1992; Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 1993). Research indicates that grades seven to nine are the grade levels at which the highest dropout rate occurs among Saskatchewan First Nation students (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1985). MacKay & Myles (1995) suggest that this is in part due to the increased difficulty of the educational material, poor grades on exams, years of poor attendance, class work which seems pointless, and a seemingly uncaring school attitude towards Native students. However, there has been limited discussion and there continues to be a dearth of practical educational solutions to address the issue of First Nation school dropouts in Saskatchewan.

Educational researchers are beginning to study the positive effects that well constructed school physical education program has on students in a variety of academic endeavours (Fejgin, 1994; Marsh, 1993; McNeal, 1995). McNeal (1995) noted that participation in extracurricular activities, particularly athletics, significantly reduced the likelihood of students dropping out. Similarly, Marsh (1993) hypothesized that participation in sport had the potential to enhance students' identification and commitment to school. Fejgin's (1994) study demonstrated that sport participation had a positive effect on grades, self-concept, locus of control, educational aspirations, and resulted in a reduction in discipline problems. Despite the increasing evidence that school physical education programs have a positive impact on student school achievement, limited research has been conducted on specific student populations,

particularly within the First Nation community. This study examines First Nation high school students' experiences and invited participants to share their perceptions of the school physical education program and the role it played in their ability and desire to continue, alter, or terminate their education.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions and personal meanings First Nation students ascribe to their involvement in the school physical education program?
2. Does participation in the school physical education program play a role in First Nation students' decision to continue, alter, or terminate their education?
3. Does participation in the school physical education program impact First Nation students' academic performance and educational aspirations?

The research questions provided the undergirding framework for the study. However, in qualitative research these primary research questions are the beginning phase and the eventual outcomes cannot be predicted because of the highly individualized and idiosyncratic nature of qualitative research. Prior to conducting the research I was aware that these guiding research questions were going to expand and eventually lead to unpredicted themes which would need to be explored. In this

particular scenario, the importance of resiliency emerged from the research context to enrich and complete the study.

Definition of Terms

First Nation:

For the purposes of this study the term First Nation will be used synonymously with Native, Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Indian. The term Native includes Status and Non-Status Indians, Inuit, and Metis peoples. Non-Status Indians are people of Native origin who have lost their status or are not yet registered with the federal government. The Inuit are the original inhabitants of Canada's northern territories and are recognized by the Indian Act. Metis are people of mixed Native and non-Native origin who distinguish themselves from Indian and Inuit.

Status Indian:

Status Indians are First Nation people who are registered with the federal government in a manner consistent with the terms of the Indian Act; and, therefore hold certain legal rights and are entitled to specific federal benefits. These rights and benefits are a result of a series of treaties signed between Native groups and the federal government between 1871 and 1923 (Brady, 1996, p.19)

First Nation Community:

The term First Nation community is used synonymously with reserve. It is a federally recognized tract of land which through the treaty process has been allocated to various Native peoples. The First Nation community is controlled by the locally elected chief and council to develop acts and policies of governance.

Band-Controlled School:

A band-controlled school is a school which is operated under the jurisdiction of a First Nation community. The school receives funding from the federal government based on the number of Status Indians enrolled.

School Physical Education Program:

The school physical education program encompasses a variety of movement activities which stem from physical education classes, intramurals, and inter-school athletics. The intramural and inter-school athletic programs are both activity based in content, but differ greatly in the nature and structure of the activities.

Instructional Physical Education:

The instructional physical education program is a mandated curriculum from Saskatchewan Education which is compulsory for students in grades 1-10 in Saskatchewan. The grade 10 instructional physical education program is also known as Wellness 10. The aim of the instructional physical education program is to foster an appreciation and develop positive attitudes toward a lifetime commitment to physical activity.

Intramurals:

The intramural program is a structured activity program which involves students in physical activity outside of the regular program of studies. These activities vary in their content and may occur before and after school, during lunch and recess. Participation in these activities is voluntary and is non-competitive in nature. There is limited coaching involved in these programs; rather a supervisory role is performed by school staff.

Inter-School Athletics:

Inter-school athletics refer to those activities which pertain to athletics and sport which are conducted outside the regular curriculum or program of studies. The inter-

school athletic program may occur before and after school, during lunch and recess, and on weekends. Inter-school athletics are characterized by a more structured practice setting, is competitive in nature, focuses on one particular sport in season, may involve individual or team activities, is coached, and the primary source of competition is teams from other schools.

Dropout:

The term dropout is used interchangeably with school leaver, which refers to students who withdraw from school without completing grade 12. This includes students who began grade 12 but left without completing, as well as those who left prior to grade 12.

At Risk Youth:

At risk youth is defined as youth who live in an environment which places them at risk for developing serious problem behaviours. Those behaviours may include substance abuse, delinquency, violence, emotional disturbances, and educational difficulties.

Resiliency:

Resiliency is “the power or ability to return to the original form or position after being bent, compressed, or stretched” (Random House Dictionary, 1968, p. 1123)

Alternatively, it is “the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like” (Rak & Patterson, 1996, p.74). Resiliency in children is the capacity of those who are exposed to identifiable risk factors to overcome those risk factors and avoid negative outcomes such as delinquency, behavioural problems, psychological maladjustment, or academic difficulties.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

First Nation Drop Out Issues

In 1967, the Hawthorn report dealing with Canadian Indians detailed an astounding pattern of school dropouts and educational dysfunction in the Aboriginal community. Students between kindergarten and grade twelve were experiencing a dropout rate of 97% from public schools in Canada. Thirty years after this initial report many of the recommendations outlined have still not been addressed (Kirkness, 1992). In response to the Hawthorn report and the Trudeau government's lack of political will to satisfactorily address Indian concerns, members of the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) drafted a monumental paper. Presented in 1972, the concept of Indian Control of Indian Education gave First Nation communities clear direction as to their collective future. Essentially, the document was aimed to "make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 3). The paper called for full parental responsibility and control of Native education. The mandate was to develop and implement a First Nation curriculum, including culturally sensitive material which would serve as a means to "fully participate in our own social, economic, political, and educational advancement" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 3). A tacit objective underlining this mandate

was the goal of increasing and stimulating Aboriginal graduation rates. Selected aspects of Indian Control of Indian Education have been implemented with successful outcomes; however, First Nation graduation rates in Canada are still considerably lower than those of the non-Aboriginal community.

Determining an accurate accounting of the dropout rate among First Nation youth in Canada is plagued with difficulty. In part, this is due to inconsistent data collection procedures and a discrepancy between the reported and actual number of First Nation students dropping out. This may be due to very tenuous and unreliable data collection procedures used by the federal government to track the education of First Nation students in Canada. A recent investigation into the First Nation dropout rates in Canada by Brady (1996) reaffirmed this confusion and the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistical information. He noted that research into this issue is complicated because neither the federal government, nor any of the provincial governments, maintain a current, comprehensive data base on First Nation students retention rates.

Many of the problems associated with determining accurate statistical information on First Nation students in Canada is made more complex because of the Indian Act (Mackay & Myles, 1989). The Indian Act separated Aboriginal people into Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, Inuit, and Metis. The federal government maintains educational statistics only for the Status Indians who live in First Nation communities or reserves. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the federal government's financial obligation to Non-Status and Metis individuals does not differ from its obligation to the general population and, therefore, it does not maintain any data for a

substantial portion of the population classified as Aboriginal. The Office of the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan (1993) reported that few provincial publicly funded schools keep records which allow for easy identification of Treaty Indian students.

Compounding the difficulty in gathering accurate data is the federal government's record system, referred to as the nominal roll. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada maintains records only for Status Indians who attend schools in First Nation communities and those from the reserve who attend a school outside the community. The federal government funds band controlled schools based on the total number of First Nation students enrolled. The use of the nominal roll by the federal government as a means of calculating and dispersing funds to First Nation schools is problematic. The accounting and administration procedures at the band level are often inaccurate as there is no uniform data collection system. As Brady (1996) notes, the nominal roll does not account for parents who have moved away from the reserve, students who drop out and then return to school, or students who attend part time or take classes through correspondence courses. Furthermore, the federal government does not provide the bureaucratic vigilance necessary for accurate statistical data collection.

This viewpoint is shared by a number of First Nation government agencies in Saskatchewan. In a document prepared by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan (1993) with the assistance of a joint committee which consisted of members from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Department of Indian Affairs, Saskatchewan Indian and Metis Affairs Secretariat, Saskatchewan Education, Employment and Training, and Statistics Canada concluded that "there is a serious need

for more dependable demographics data" (p.1) This committee found that data collection was plagued with problems and inconsistencies including "reserves which refused to participate, misinterpretation of questions by individuals, census questions changed from one census to the next making comparisons difficult" (p. 10). These inconsistencies make accurate accounting and the collection of statistical information for First Nation students difficult.

Despite the inconsistent data collection procedures, researchers have demonstrated through independent studies that the First Nation dropout rate is exceedingly high and is much higher than that of their non-Aboriginal contemporaries. Anisef and Johnson (1993) estimated that "70-80% of First Nation youth in Canada drop out of school, while the non-Aboriginal dropout rate was approximately 36 %" (p. 20). Lee (1983) in a study of the First Nation students in the Frontier School Division in Manitoba, found that by grade 12 only 22 % of the original students were still in school. This contrasts sharply with the Manitoba provincial average completion rate of 86 %.

In Saskatchewan the results are strikingly similar. The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (1985) reported that in 1980-81 Saskatchewan First Nation students dropped out of school at a rate of 90.5 % while the non- Aboriginal students' attrition rate was 40 %. Further analysis of the data demonstrated that almost 60 % of status Indians and nearly one half of all Metis and non-status Indian students withdrew between grades 7-9. Ross and Usher (1992) analysed the 1986 federal census and found that approximately 24% of Treaty Indians had completed grade 12, compared to 58% of non-Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan. More recently, the Canadian Census conducted in

1991 found that Saskatchewan First Nation students had a graduation rate of 34.2% (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995). Conversely, the Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report found that in 1992-93 Saskatchewan publicly funded schools had a graduation rate of 79.6% (Saskatchewan Education, 1997). More distressing is a recent Saskatchewan School Trustee Association report (1991) which found that 10% of the original First Nation students enrolled in grade 1 went on to complete grade 12. The low graduation rates within the First Nation community in Saskatchewan demonstrate the necessity to develop sound educational alternatives for First Nation students.

There has been considerable research conducted on the impetus which drives First Nation students out of public schools. A variety of common themes develop throughout the research on First Nation drop out rates. These include the cultural differences of the Aboriginal student, racial biases of the larger non-Aboriginal community, negative self image of Aboriginal youth, drug and alcohol abuse, social and economic factors, and language barriers as primary reasons for leaving (Bowker, 1992; Dehyle, 1992; Brady, 1996). Reyhner (1992) stated that "large schools, uncaring and untrained teachers, passive teaching methods, inappropriate curriculum, inappropriate testing, tracked classes, and a lack of parental involvement" are reasons many First Nation students drop out (p. 39). Many of these students experience a discrepancy between their cultural beliefs and the context of the larger society and school. The educational process for First Nation students in a primarily non-Aboriginal public high school often proves to be problematic. As Reyhner (1988) stated "many students

develop strong feelings of alienation and soon learn to withdraw psychologically and in time physically" (p. ix).

Other researchers have chosen to examine the personal problems confronting First Nation students to explain the high dropout rates. In Brandt's (1992) survey of Navajo youths he found that students experienced many personal problems including:

Being bored with school, problems with other students, retained in grade due to absenteeism, pregnancy, marriage, problems with teachers, legal problems, substance/alcohol abuse, disciplinary problems, to help the family, academic failure, older than other students, poor transportation, language problems, and medical problems (p. 57).

Furthermore, Coladarci (1983) reported that approximately one third of the dropouts in his study of First Nation students in Montana identified peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol as a salient factor in their decision to drop out of school. Similarly, Lin (1985) found alcohol to be a major factor in the high dropout rates of First Nation males in Montana.

Many of the factors that inhibit educational progress among the First Nation population in Saskatchewan, such as poverty, poor health, overcrowded living conditions, substance abuse, and trouble with the law are analogous to the problems and life difficulties encountered by the urban poor of the United States. The claim must be established that there is a great deal of congruency between these two groups based on socioeconomic conditions and class, and that these factors diminish the distinctions based solely on ethnicity. Cheffers (1997) study describes the teacher preparation program at Boston University called the Tuesday and Thursday program. Elementary students are bused to the university for regular physical education classes. The program

was a political attempt to stop segregation based on ethnicity and to integrate at-risk students from the inner city with other student populations through sport, physical education, and games. Cheffers (1997) found that when confrontation arose it was between socioeconomic classes and was not based on ethnicity. He noted that students of all ethnicity were capable of playing together, but confrontation emanated between students because of socioeconomic status. It is credible then to claim that the students from the neglected economically downtrodden areas in the United States, though from different minority groups, share a great deal in common with the First Nation students of North Ridge based on socioeconomic conditions. It is plausible then to transfer many of the findings from studies conducted on the urban, underserved poor in the United States to the situation found at North Ridge First Nation.

It is prudent to establish a link between the urban inner-city experience and the daily struggles encountered on reserves in Saskatchewan. Many of the problems faced by the inner-city poor are also present in many First Nation communities. There are limited economic prospects on reserves and many people live well below the poverty line. This is evidenced by the Statistics Canada low income measure which reveals that over 55% of the Aboriginal families in Saskatchewan were living in poverty in 1992. This was over three times the 15% rate of non-Aboriginal families living in Saskatchewan. The study also found that among children the rate was considerably higher, finding 61% of Aboriginal children in Saskatchewan were living in poverty. Furthermore, Saskatchewan Aboriginal families experienced higher levels of poverty than other Aboriginal families in the rest of Canada as a whole (Ross & Usher, 1992).

Compounding the lack of financial resources is the state of housing found in many First Nation communities. Ross & Usher (1992) reported among Saskatchewan reserves, 44% of dwellings were without central heating compared to 5% of the rest of Saskatchewan. It was found that the median occupancy rate was 6.5 per house with 37% of dwellings with more than one person to room as compared to one percent in the rest of Saskatchewan. Furthermore, only 36% had running water with sewage disposal systems. The authors also reported that 15.5% were overcrowded with three or more people per bedroom, and only 30% had garbage pickup. Nationally approximately 60% of First Nation homes on reserves lack running water, sewage disposal, or indoor plumbing facilities (Ross & Usher, 1992). Due to overcrowding in some homes, the conditions conducive to successful study are often absent as there is often little space or resources for homework.

Often the factors of inadequate housing, poor living conditions, and financial need result in poor health. As Ross and Usher (1992) state "poverty and poor living conditions affect school performance through its influence on health which can lead to physical and learning disabilities, chronic illnesses, increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, and accidents and injuries" (p. 37). The poor health conditions found among the First Nation population prompted the Institute of Canadian Child Health (1989) to conclude that:

Another way to express the health disadvantages of Native children is to say that we have a Third World problem within our society. The pattern of disease among Canada's Native people resembles the main killers of the developing world. The state of poverty in which they live makes them particularly vulnerable to health hazards (Health and Welfare Saskatchewan, 1989, p. 117).

Economic marginalization with its poverty and lack of economic opportunity, are widely regarded as related to high levels of community, family, and individual dysfunction (Ross & Usher, 1992). Many of the visible symptoms of this breakdown abound at North Ridge First Nation with high levels of alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, increased demands on the criminal justice system, personal injuries, and suicide. These problems are not unique to North Ridge First Nation, rather it has been estimated among adult Aboriginals, 35-40% abuse alcohol and 20-25% abuse drugs (Health and Welfare, Saskatchewan Region, 1989, p. 41). First Nation youth are especially vulnerable to the effects of these problems. Rutter (1990) found children from dysfunctional families were more apt to have low self-concept and little attachment to a positive social network. Aboriginal teenagers across Canada are “four times more likely to die from injury as are non-Aboriginal teenagers, and Aboriginal youth aged 15-19 experience a suicide rate 6.6 times the national average for this age group” (Avard & Hanvey, 1989, p. 111). Almost, one half “46.5%, of young Native offenders admitted to correctional facilities possess less than nine years of education” (Ross & Usher, 1992, p. 46). Furthermore, for many these periods of confinement impede, and in other cases terminate, the formal education process of young Aboriginals.

Poverty induces and increases the likelihood of dropping out of school (Ross & Usher, 1992, p.36). Non-Aboriginal students drop out at twice the rate of non-poor students, and for Indians, the overall impact of dropping out can be expected to be much higher because of the greater levels of poverty (Ross & Usher, 1992, p. 36). The authors found that providing many of the extra costs of attending public school such as designer

clothes, supplies, and extra equipment proved problematic for families from low incomes. This makes it difficult for many poor adolescent students, Aboriginal or not, to maintain their self-esteem among their more affluent peers. Such pressure may lead to a strong desire to drop out.

It has been established that First Nation youth come from one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in Canada; often they live in substandard housing, have the shortest life expectancy, and are poorly nourished (Bowker, 1992; Ross & Usher, 1992). Until the early 1980's, the terms at-risk and high risk youth were not associated with student dropouts. However, more recently, this terminology has been used synonymously with student dropout. A movement has developed to identify these at-risk youth and use intervention strategies prior to their dropping out of school. Based on the overwhelming evidence provided in the literature, First Nation youth often display at risk behaviours that mirror the larger society of at risk youth (Catterall & Cota-Robies, 1988). Many at risk youth come from a distinct ethnic group with low income families or one parent homes. In a recent article, Mitchell (1998) reported that nearly half of the Native children in Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg come from single parent families. Frequently, these students come from homes where a language other than English is spoken and there is a history of drug and alcohol abuse. As Bowker (1992) outlined, First Nation students frequently live in dysfunctional families and suffer from physical, psychological, or sexual abuse. The education levels of their parents and older siblings often stop short of high school completion. As students they have often experienced repeated failure in school and may have endured a variety of racism, stereotyping, or

discrimination from early childhood.

Traditionally, First Nation education was largely an informal process that provided the young with the specific skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within the context of a spiritual world view (Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill, 1986). The First Nation community has never embraced Descartes' philosophical understanding of the mind-body split which has been readily adopted and disseminated throughout Western culture. The First Nation community has always had a holistic understanding of the interrelationship between the elements of the mind and body. Armstrong (1987) described the traditional Aboriginal people's view of education as a "natural process occurring during everyday activities thereby ensuring cultural continuity and survival of the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the cultural unit and of its environment"(p. 14).

Physical Education in First Nation Education

Historically, athleticism and physical prowess have been revered within First Nation communities. Originally this prowess was determined by skillfulness at the hunt, physical ability for protection, and athleticism in games. Activities often simulated hunting, food gathering, tipi building, relaying vital messages, or fighting (Wise, 1976). Physical activity has from a historical perspective played a significant role in Aboriginal culture and has been used to "display strength, courage, and self-discipline" (Saskatchewan Education and Employment, 1995, p.22). Games developed and tested

the strength, stamina, speed, pain tolerance, and courage required for life. Often these skilful athletes became leaders and were held in high esteem by the entire community (Grueninger, 1988).

Coleman (1961) and Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) independently reported in their studies that the status derived from athletic achievement may vary depending on the value placed on the activity by the community. Based on the historical importance of athleticism many First Nation communities placed a higher status on athletic achievement than in other cultures. Warick, (1998) in a recent article, discussed the role athletics has played in the educational reform occurring in Pelican Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan. This reformation was confirmed by community members, students, and the guidance counsellor who stated that “a lot of kids had low self-esteem. A lot of them had no place to go, and that can lead to trouble. Attitudes are changing, and sports are a big part of it”(Warick, 1998). The school reported a grade completion average close to 80%, up from 15% ten years ago.

Many First Nation students distinguish themselves in sport and athletics throughout the province, as evidenced at the 1997 Saskatchewan Indian Summer Games. The competition drew 2,800 First Nation high school athletes from across Saskatchewan. More than 2,400 First Nation high school athletes competed in the Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games in Prince Albert in 1997. Interim Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Morley Watson, stated that “many First Nation communities in Saskatchewan are using sport and culture as a tool to keep young people out of trouble and in school” (Warick, 1998).

Studies in sociology, psychology, and physical education have noted that participation in school athletic programs is positively related to academic achievement (Camp, 1990; Haensly et al., 1986; Schafer & Armer, 1968), enhances educational aspirations (Spady, 1971; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973), self-esteem (Crain et al., 1982; Grabe, 1981; Phillips, 1969), and reduces the likelihood of dropping out (Finn, 1989; Hall, 1984; McNeal, 1995; Melnick, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1990; Vaughn, 1968). In a national survey of American high school students Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) noted six reasons why participation in inter-school athletics may enhance academic outcomes.

These include an increased interest in school, including academic pursuits, high academic achievement in order to maintain eligibility to participate in sport, increased self-concept that generalizes to academic achievement, increased attention from coaches, teachers, and parents, membership in elite groups and an orientation towards academic success, and expectations of participation in college sport (p. 391).

There has been limited discussion among researchers as to the role school athletic programs have in specific populations, particularly the Canadian First Nation population. However, in a recent study of African-American and Hispanic youth, Melnick et al (1992) found that "athletic participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for some minority youth" (p.295). More recently, McNeal (1995) stated that "participating in the athletic arena significantly reduces the student's likelihood of dropping out, whereas participation in the academic and vocational spheres does not" (p.74). Eder and Parker (1987) also determined that athletics' prominence in the school and peer culture clearly serves to keep students in school.

Many researchers have investigated the positive relationship between

participation in school athletic programs and enhanced student self-concept. Hall et al (1984) found that “extracurricular activities, including inter-school athletics, represent a rich array of opportunities and experiences which may be one of the reasons many students stay in school, much less find personal meaning for this time in their lives” (p. 60). Marsh (1993) suggests that promotion of athletics has positive effects across a wide variety of educationally relevant outcomes for a diverse population of students. He found that the largest effects were found in social self-concept. In addition, Marsh (1993) reported that participation in sport led to an “increased commitment to, involvement with, and identification with school and school values” (p. 35). This finding may prove to be an essential aspect of an effective means to stimulate First Nation student adherence in public schools in Saskatchewan. Similarly, Finn (1989) found that participation in “extracurricular activities, such as athletics, may have the potential for contributing to the students’ sense of identification with the school” (p. 129). Furthermore, enhanced academic self-concept may result from this increased identification with the school.

Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) found that involvement in school athletic programs tend to “engender higher perceived peer status and is not necessarily detrimental to academic pursuits” (p.181). Research has demonstrated that inter-school athletics is associated with more status, prestige, and power within school societies (Eder & Parker, 1987). Morgan and Alwin (1980) supported this conclusion as they found that of all types of extracurricular activities, athletics persistently has the highest levels of status and prestige. Athletic participation was shown to enhance popularity and contribute to

greater involvement in extracurricular and community activities (Melnick, et al, 1992). Support for inter-school athletics has been reaffirmed by Holland and Andre (1987) who found that participation in inter-school athletics was correlated with higher levels of self-esteem, academic ability in males, educational aspirations, and lower delinquency rates. They suggested that involvement in athletics can “play an important role in the school’s contribution to each adolescent’s development” (p. 456). As Fejgin (1994) remarked “participation in high school competitive sports provides positive experiences that enhance student adjustment to school rules, schoolwork, and the basic values of an achievement oriented society” (p. 224). The reported positive effects of student participation in the school athletic program may provide a viable educational alternative for a specific section of the First Nation population in Saskatchewan.

Chapter Three

Context and Methodology

Chapter three is the point in which my perspective as a researcher becomes interwoven with the story told by the participants and community as they relate their understanding of education and the school physical education program. Therefore, in this chapter I will give a description of how my study was planned and then implemented. In the first section I will discuss my decision to use case study as my research design and then an overview of my procedures will be given. I will then describe the processes involved in choosing the study site and the participants. Details are also provided as to the exact nature of why I chose to utilize interviews, how I conducted them, and ultimately collected and interpreted data. In addition, an overview of the ethical guidelines used in this study will also be discussed. To assist the reader in coming to a complete understanding of the context of the study, the community, school, and participants will all be fully described. Finally, I will describe the process involved in establishing myself in a new role as researcher in a familiar situation.

Research Design

With the genesis and infant like steps which followed in the development of this

thesis one truth became apparent: if I wanted to gather and collect insightful, meaningful, rich, and textured data I would need to use the qualitative approach to delve into the problem. As Locke (1989) states, qualitative research provides another way of knowing, a different view of the social world, and for any given purpose that different way of knowing may make all the difference. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest the qualitative approach to conducting research is a means through which to understand how individuals make meaning out of their experiences by attempting to understand the perspective of the participants. Qualitative inquiry is a valuable way to unearth participants' understanding and the multiple realities which exist in any research rich context. As Merriam (1988) states, "qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities - that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception" (p.17). Quite often recommendations and programs are developed without consultation and dialogue with those involved. I believe it is imperative to understand and listen to give those who are personally affected an opportunity to discuss their experiences. This is a strength of the qualitative approach that I wanted to utilize.

Investigators use case study design in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved. The use of the case study method allows the researcher to approach problems in a holistic manner. There is a focus on the whole rather than the parts, on process rather than the outcomes, in context rather than a specific variables, and in discovering rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1988). As Stake contends, "the principal difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the case, not the whole population of cases" (p. 256). As

he purports, case study research is the study of a bounded system. A case study must have defined boundaries to narrow the scope from the larger context in which the study is embedded. Case study research attempts to represent the emic perspective, that is, reality as constructed by the individuals (Gall, et al., 1996). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, the case study attempts to see the world “through their eyes” (p. 365).

Overview of Methodology

In an effort to investigate the research questions I had posed, I decided to use focus group interviews, individual interviews, observations, document analysis, and journaling to detail the experiences of eight First Nation students with regards to their involvement in the school physical education program. Despite their young ages, the participants in the study have had a plethora of life experiences, both within and outside of school. For these reasons I employed qualitative data gathering techniques in an effort to gather a truly representative account of the research situation.

Originally the study was to entail three groups, students attending a publicly funded high school, students who withdrew from a publicly funded high school to attend the band-controlled high school, and students who dropped out of school entirely. However, by the start of the second semester all of the First Nation students enrolled in South Park High, the publicly funded high school, had either dropped out or continued their education at another institution. Though this transformed my study it also reaffirmed the need for the study. Consequently, I had to alter my research design to

address this scenario. After consultation with my committee, I decided to focus on the two remaining groups of students. I interviewed students who left South Park High for North Ridge High, the band controlled school, as well as students who had dropped out of both these institutions and were no longer going to school. The eight participants were selected based on purposive sampling techniques. Each of the participants met the criteria outlined for the study, had a willingness to participate in the study, and had the potential to provide meaningful information for the study.

The participants attending North Ridge High were easily contacted and an initial meeting was planned with the four participants in mid-May of 1998. The second group of participants was much harder to schedule. These students were not attending any educational program at the time of the initial meeting in mid-May of 1998. These participants were scattered about the reserve and had very individualized daily routines. The collection of data occurred in the following sequence.

In mid-May a pilot of the focus group interview was conducted to determine the thoroughness of the questions, competency of the researcher's interviewing skills, and participants' willingness to be involved in this type of forum. The pilot of the focus group was conducted with First Nation students who resembled the participants in the study. The focus group interviews provided some good data, but many of the ideas appeared to be quite superficial. I found that one or two individuals dominated the conversation and inhibited others from talking. I felt that particular participants had perceptions which needed further exploration. It appeared that some of the participants began to brainstorm and think as a group rather than individually. In addition, I felt that

some of the participants were not comfortable discussing personal issues in a group format. For these reasons I decided to conduct individual interviews and use focus group interviews for the first and last meetings with each of the groups.

The first focus group interview served to familiarize the participants with the type of study I was conducting, assisted in establishing a comfort level with the researcher, and served as a starting point for the study. Each of the participants agreed on an individual interview time which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. A final focus group meeting was conducted with both groups after the completion of the individual interviews. The final focus group meeting served to put closure on the data gathering process and allowed participants to clarify positions and contribute final thoughts to the case study.

The interviews were conducted over a five week period from mid-May to the third week of June 1998. Typically the interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were audio-taped in order to be transcribed at a later date. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed for the generation of thoughts around a concept, but also provided the freedom for participants to become divergent and discuss other emergent themes. Informal interviews and conversations with the participants were conducted outside the school in the community and at sporting events. Commentaries from these interviews were recorded in my reflexive journal.

The participants still in school were also observed in their regular classroom as well as in the gymnasium over the course of this study. These observations were informal and were utilized to gain a full understanding of the students' daily school

experiences, and to confirm or refute claims that were being made about programming.

To completely understand the educational setting each of the high school teachers was informally interviewed as was the director of education. A variety of educational documents were analysed using document analysis. The data collection process continued until “theoretical saturation” was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Theoretical saturation is the point in data collection when the researcher concludes that no new data are emerging and you have uncovered the full range of what there is to observe (Gall, et al., 1996). In this study, the point of theoretical saturation came when participants felt they had expressed themselves fully and had no more information to share or add regarding the study. At this juncture, I felt I had provided the participants with numerous opportunities to share perceptions, had observed them in the classroom and gymnasium, the school and community environment and felt that I had exhausted all available sources of information.

Overview of Procedures

Site and Participant Selection

The choice of the study site and the selection of particular participants was primarily based on the researcher’s knowledge of the community, community members, students, teachers, and administration. I felt that this first hand knowledge would be beneficial in the selection of quality participants and assist in the development and

completeness of the study. I knew that choosing a familiar site and participants was a potentially perilous scenario. While I was able to gain access and was granted privileges an outsider may not have been able to attain, I also ran the risk of taking events and statements for granted which outsiders may have found interesting. However, as Agar (1980) suggests, even professional ethnographers studying the same data can arrive at very different conclusions (p. 7-8). Therefore, transferability of the findings of this study and the circumstances therein are the responsibility of the reader.

Access to the Site:

Permission was granted from the formal gatekeepers at North Ridge First Nation. Consent was granted by the Director of Education and the principal of the high school and the Chief and Council of North Ridge First Nation.

Ethics and Confidentiality:

The ethical guidelines for research in behavioural science established by the University of Saskatchewan was adhered to throughout all phases of the study. The participants and schools involved were given pseudonyms to assist in ensuring anonymity. Access to the participants was obtained from the director of education, parents, and the students. The participants were asked to sign a release form and were briefed on their rights as participants. It was made clear to the participants that their

responses would not be shared with teachers or administrators. It was stressed to the participants that there are limits on the confidentiality that can be guaranteed. The researcher could not ensure that members of the focus group interviews would not share that information from the meeting outside of the group. However, the researcher made every effort to emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting issues of confidentiality in focus groups. The participants were given the opportunity to: withdraw at any time from the study, make changes or additions to the recorded interview, and see the written chapters of the thesis prior to its submission.

Pilot

In an effort to ensure the completeness of the interview questions as well as to test my ability to conduct interviews I decided to conduct pilot interviews. Four participants were recruited to participate in the pilot of the focus group questions. These participants resembled the participants in the study in a number of important aspects. Each of the pilot study participants was from the same First Nation community where the study was to be conducted. The participants of the pilot study had dropped out of high school prior to completion for varying personal reasons. In addition, I knew each of the pilot participants well because of my involvement within the community and at the school. Each of the participants in the focus group pilot study signed permission slips and all ethical guidelines were followed as in the formal study.

After the pilot interview I asked each of the participants for feedback about the

focus group interview. Though the members of the pilot study assured me that the questions were legitimate and they felt comfortable with the interviewing method, I was left with an uneasy feeling. I felt that with sensitive issues and personal problems emerging some participants were wary about expressing themselves in a group format. Therefore, I decided to pilot an individual interview. The questions remained the same and I interviewed two of the four participants. The other two participants had previous commitments during the scheduled pilot individual interview times. The responses from the individual interviews were much more revealing and the participants were more comfortable and seemingly more willing to share their feelings than in the group format. Therefore, I decided that it was in the best interest of the study to use a combination of both focus group and individual interviews.

Context

North Ridge First Nation

North Ridge First Nation has approximately 1850 band members with a large portion of the members living off the Reserve. Presently, there are approximately 750-800 band members living on the Reserve. The Reserve encompasses approximately 16,500 acres in the northwestern part of Saskatchewan. The community is nestled in the rolling hills and is surrounded by the natural beauty of the nearby lakes and river. At the heart of the town site is the elementary school, community centre, and a new health

clinic. The new housing projects have developed around the concept of a town site and the majority of band members live within the town site with the remainder living in houses strewn about the Reserve. The band office and high school are located in the same structure at the far south west part of the town site overlooking the powwow grounds. The powwow grounds are set in the poplar woods beside two well groomed baseball diamonds. The community has a gas station and a convenience store which is located beside the band office and high school.

The community embraces physical activity and offers a variety of opportunities for youth and adults alike. Though in its infancy the newly established recreational committee devotes a great deal of time to forming leagues and organizing athletics for the children of North Ridge. In addition, North Ridge has a proud tradition of showcasing the athletic ability of its youth in the Saskatchewan Winter and Summer Indian Games as well as the Indigenous Games. There is a yearly awards banquet held in recognition of the achievements of athletes of the community.

South Park

Prior to the establishment of North Ridge High School the vast majority of students received their high school education in the adjacent town of South Park. The town of South Park is located 15 kilometres south of North Ridge First Nation. There is an interdependent relationship which exists between the communities. Most band members rely heavily on the services provided by the town of South Park, while South

Park relies on the business from North Ridge residents.

South Park High School is a publicly funded school which has a student population of 300-325 from K-12. South Park has approximately 750 people who are primarily employed in the oilfield and agricultural business sectors. The outlying farms are home to approximately 300 people. The school is well established and has been in operation for almost 40 years. The vast majority of students in South Park are from European heritage thus, the First Nation students are a visible minority within the school. The school offers an extensive physical education program including: inter-school athletics, intramurals, and physical education classes. There are two paraprofessional staff employed at South Park with First Nation heritage.

North Ridge High School

North Ridge High is a band controlled high school which came into existence in late November of 1997. This relatively new project is housed within a large complex which was once home to a technical institute. The building now operates as a band office, administration headquarters, and high school for the Reserve. North Ridge High school has modern facilities with all the amenities of a typical school. The school has a new and technologically advanced computer room which has 25 computers available for students use. The school occupies the south wing of the building and offers three distinct programs. The program which is the focus of this study is the grade 10 high school program which adheres to the Saskatchewan Curriculum and parallels the courses

offered at South Park. The second program is designed as an alternative program which offers a modified grade 10 utilizing computer assisted learning. The school also offers an adult grade 12 program instructed and funded by adult education professionals. In addition to North Ridge High there is a band-controlled elementary school (K-9) which has been operating for 15 years.

The student population of North Ridge High consists of students from a number of different First Nation communities in the northwest part of Saskatchewan. North Ridge high school receives funding for the education of First Nation students from the federal government based on the total number of students enrolled. North Ridge High had an initial enrolment of 120 First Nation students, but this number has been fluctuating between 90-100 students. Twenty one students started in the grade 10 program in November of 1997, and the class experienced a peak enrollment of 28 students. However, at the time of this study, late May and June of 1998, only 6 students attended class regularly. The students attending grade 10 at North Ridge High range in age from 15 to 17 years.

The students from the high school share the gymnasium at the elementary school. The gymnasium is a large cavernous facility with a hard tiled floor and a beam structured ceiling. Though not the most aesthetically pleasing structure it has all the necessary equipment to conduct a successful high school physical education program. The present physical education program is conducted by a physical education specialist.

Participant Selection

The selection of participants was based on the premise of conducting purposive sampling as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). That is, respondents are selected on the basis of what they can contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988). Each of the participants in the study was able to provide meaningful information and unique perspectives into the impact the school physical education program had on their educational experiences.

Each of the eight participants in the study is a Status Indian student from North Ridge First Nation which is located in the northwestern part of Saskatchewan. At the start of the year all the participants were enrolled in South Park High. The participants have chosen two distinct and diverse educational alternatives. The first group of four participants consisted of First Nation students who dropped out of school after enrolling in South Park High prior to the completion of grade 12. These participants decided not to continue their education at any educational institution. The second group of four participants consisted of First Nation students who decided to leave South Park High School in favour of continuing their high school education at North Park High School on the Reserve. This study utilized both of these groups equally and attempted to develop synergy around these participants' perceptions of the school physical education programs and its capacity to impact students' lives.

The Participants

James

“Sports are my life. It’s who I am” James quips. He is the quintessential athlete, born with a gift. He has the ability to master a variety of complex movements in an array of athletic endeavours which he has sharpened and honed into a fine craft over his fifteen years. He is dedicated to hours of extracurricular practice both in and out of school at every sport. In sports he has the ability to be as graceful as a ballerina but can be as tenacious as a pitbull. Just fifteen years old, James creates magic in any physical activity of his choosing. It is quite hard to imagine such power and finesse coming from this slight, muscular young man. He has an air about him, exuding confidence and determination in all avenues he travels. He exhibits mastery of the skills required of games only after a few attempts. His athletic abilities have led to numerous awards, trophies, ribbons, and accolades from family, friends, teachers, and the community. His bedroom is a shrine to his favourite sporting teams and players as well as to his own athletic achievements.

James, an only child, has lived with his maternal grandmother and grandfather since he was a small child. His grandparents are both chronic alcoholics and James has been forced in many instances to look after them. However, given the circumstances, they are nurturing and encourage him as much as they can. James has attempted living with his mother at various junctures throughout his life. Most recently was the start of this past school year, but personality clashes and accepting discipline from a distant

mother were not accepted by James. James's father is a gifted athlete whom James idolizes. His dad is the best athlete James knows and he attempts to emulate his prowess at sports which is often reinforced by his father.

Well spoken and articulate, James chose to stop attending South Park High school and eventually dropped out from North Ridge High school during the second semester. This was accepted by his grandmother who felt he could start fresh next year. A positive, quiet leader, James has traditionally done well in school and has many friends. However, he felt discouraged this past year and stated: "There was too much going on... too many people were bagging on me." James is unsure as to what the future holds, but he knows he will eventually finish school.

Since dropping out of school James has had a few part-time jobs working for the band and his father, but he admits that he is bored and ready to go back to school. James has tried alcohol at parties, but says he just wanted to "see what it was about." He doesn't smoke because it affects his lungs and athletic ability. James manages to fill his abundant free time by participating in any athletic event going on in the community as well as by hunting with friends.

Tyler

At sixteen years of age Tyler seemingly continues to add height daily to his six foot one frame. He is a pleasant young man who through his daily actions demonstrates respect, knowledge, and the values instilled in him by a caring and concerned grandmother. Tyler has lived for most of his life with his grandmother, although he still

has contact with his mother who struggles with her own drug and alcohol addictions. Tyler's father has been incarcerated for murder and Tyler has not seen him in the last twelve years. Tyler's grandmother is a strict disciplinarian who establishes clear expectations for his behaviour. She is very traditional and has ensured that Tyler understands the Cree culture and language.

Tyler modestly accepts praise and awards for his athletic ability. Quick to smile, Tyler often has a marvellous tale to tell about one of his misadventures with "the boys", his euphemism for his close friends. Tyler is willing to accept advice and feedback regarding his athletic performance, he is then capable of integrating it into his own personal style. He accepts a hard fought loss as readily as he accepts awards and trophies. Tyler's outlook is best described by one incident in which he wore a large smile after he scored a fabulous basket against his own team during a basketball game. He is not only out to win but to have a great time doing it.

Tyler completed his first semester at South Park High and passed all his first semester classes which included Wellness 10 (physical education and health). Tyler transferred to North Ridge High for his second semester in February. His transfer to North Ridge was due to an incident after a provincial volleyball game in which he and other athletes were caught drinking. Facing the prospect of being banned from all school athletic events for the remainder of the year he decided to attend North Ridge for the second semester. His appreciation for physical education can be evidenced in the fact that even though he already had credit for Wellness 10 from South Park High, Tyler decided rather than having a spare he would audit Wellness 10 at North Ridge High.

The transfer from South Park high school to North Ridge high school negatively affected Tyler's performance. Accepting of discipline and structure, Tyler had difficulty adapting to a school which seemed to lack this structure. "Students do what they want... they go for smokes during class breaks or just skip out." Although Tyler did not drop out, his attendance and attitude suffered at North Ridge High. He is fearful that he will not attain any additional credits in term two from North Ridge High. Tyler was greatly disappointed by the second term of education, but believes he will still graduate on time by finishing two and a half semesters in the remaining two years of high school.

Tyrone

Years of physical labour, weight lifting, and a passion to become a police officer have aided in the development of Tyrone's seventeen year old physique. Standing six feet tall and weighing 205 pounds Tyrone has the build of a powerful man. The powerful physique which he possesses would instill fear and respect in all his adversaries, but his personality is quite the contrary. He is just and fair, quiet and often only speaks when questions are directed towards him. It is his manner not to interrupt or add commentary unless asked, however his insights are often remarkable and insightful.

He actively pursues a variety of athletic endeavours including track and field, hockey, weight lifting, and baseball. He finished his first semester of grade 10 at South Park High and chose to return to North Ridge High for the remainder of the year. Though he already had credit for Wellness 10 he received permission to audit the class rather than have a spare. A veteran of a variety of public and band controlled schools

Tyrone has rarely spent more than one year at any educational institution. Therefore, uprooting during the middle of the school year was nothing out of the ordinary for Tyrone.

Living at home with both of his parents, he is the second youngest of four children. Both parents are employed and have attained grade 12 and some vocational training. Tyrone often works summers for his father and uncle. He has established a close relationship with one of the RCMP constables stationed at North Ridge and has decided that he would like to be a RCMP constable. Tyrone freely admits that he has had difficulty in making close friends with people from outside the reserve and states often he has to wear a “mask” to fit in. At the end of the second semester Tyrone had finished all the credits necessary to start grade 11 in the fall.

Rose

Rose is a grade 10 student with straight, chestnut brown hair who is quick to smile. At fifteen, she had attended South Park school since kindergarten and decided to attend North Ridge High after most of her peers had returned to the Reserve. Rose has demonstrated the ability to balance an active lifestyle with academics and does very well in both endeavours. She has a strong commitment to obtain an education which will enable her to choose a career when she gets older. Upon graduation she is interested in becoming a computer specialist.

Rose participates in a number of organized athletic sports as well as participating in physical activity during her own time. She is actively involved in volleyball, softball,

and track and field, but balances these interests with her passion for computers. Rose is presently taking Wellness 10 at North Ridge High. Her decision to attend North Ridge High in part was based on her dislike for the present physical education instructor at South Park High school.

The eldest daughter of three children, Rose lives with her mother and father. Her mother is a secretary and her father is a minister. Both of her parents abstain from drugs and alcohol and provide a warm and caring environment for their children. Since both her parents work, Rose has been charged with supervising and looking after her two younger siblings. She describes her relationship with her mother as "great" when they have time to share together. She stated that "sometimes looking after the kids is boring, but it's okay and sometimes I get paid." Rose is looking forward to grade 11 and expects good things to come out of having an education.

April

April is a sixteen year old who does not mince her words. She is brazen, fiery, outspoken, and often speaks her mind in a manner which leaves no room for confusion in her meaning. Her forthrightness provided a great deal of valuable information about what was good and bad about her physical education experiences and education as a whole. She took every opportunity to express her ideas to the fullest and did not leave me second guessing her position.

First and foremost April is an athlete who loves competition and savours the thrill of victory. To this end she is willing to commit hours of her time towards the

pursuit of athletic achievement. Fearless, April is the last person to back away from a challenge or obstacle in any athletic venue. With dwindling numbers of female athletes in her grade, April has competed in many organized athletic events on men's teams. However, school work comes with great difficulty and requires her entire devotion and a great deal of commitment in order for her to be successful. April returned to North Ridge First Nation from South Park High school this year to "try out" the new school. While at South Park she was the starting setter for the senior girls volleyball team which is the most prestigious girls' team at the school. However, with the completion of the volleyball season she looked favourably at the opportunity of starting fresh at a new school. April actively engages in a variety of athletic endeavours and participates eagerly in Wellness 10.

April is Tyler's cousin and they live together with their grandmother. She has also been instilled with a sense of respect for elders and the Cree culture. As such she has accepted her role within the household which includes helping with the laundry, cleaning, and cooking. However, she is quick to point out that "Tyler could do his own laundry and that he doesn't have as much work around the house as she does." April also babysits for extra money for a variety of families throughout the community.

April managed to complete the courses required for grade 11, except mathematics, which she will have to take again next year. Her passing can be attributed largely to her regular attendance, desire to finish school, and work ethic. At this juncture April is still unsure of what she wants to do when she finishes school.

Anna

At five feet two and with shoulder length hair Anna is courteous and at times almost seems timid, but this is not her true underlying nature. She is an articulate young woman who is quite capable of expressing her opinions and feelings. After a brief settling in period she demonstrated her quick wit and also her frustration with the educational situation she was thrust into this past year. "I had nowhere to go except South Park. North Ridge didn't offer any grade 11 classes because I was the only student. I didn't want to stay at South Park.... there were no Indians left there."

At seventeen, Anna completed the first semester of grade 11 at South Park High. However, with the start of North Ridge High all of her First Nation friends returned to the band controlled school. Unfortunately, she was the only First Nation student in grade 11 and the new school did not offer grade 11 programming. The isolation of attending South Park High school without any of her First Nation friends was overwhelming and she decided to drop out of school. Spending her days at home babysitting her baby brother has given her a great deal of time to think about her situation. She was thankful to have someone listen to her thoughts on the past year. "It seemed to me that nobody cares that I am not going to school...it's like they had more important things to worry about. It's only one kid I guess."

Until the end of grade 9 Anna was an active participant in sports and athletic activities, but with increasing school and family pressures she curtailed her athletic endeavours. She now only participates in recreational and special events primarily on the Reserve. The eldest girl in a family of seven, Anna has had to look after her siblings

as long as she can remember. "Things are better now that mom has remarried..... I don't have quite as much work to do anymore." Until last year her mother worked as a health care officer, supported the family, and relied on Anna to raise and look after the younger children. Her mother now has more time to help with the kids which gives Anna more free time. Anna anxiously awaits going back to school to finish grade 11 and is debating whether she will go into social work or nursing after high school.

Leslie

With shoulder length brown hair with a slight frame, at fifteen years old Leslie is the youngest participant in the study. However, with adversity and personal hardship comes maturity. She has lived more experiences in her fifteen years than many people experience in a lifetime. Abandoned by her mother and raised in the homes of a variety of relatives, Leslie and her brother have bounced around throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta. She finally settled with an aunt at North Ridge First Nation and is relatively comfortable. Leslie feels she has a personal obligation to care for and nurture her 10 year old brother. Leslie was one of the first students to enrol at North Ridge High school, primarily to be closer to her brother who attends elementary school at North Ridge First Nation.

The pressures exerted on Leslie were too much for her to handle and she eventually dropped out of school. She expressed her desire to finish high school, but needed to get her personal life straightened out first. Leslie has used drugs and alcohol in the past, but does not want to repeat the same pattern as her mother. An active

participant in physical education and a member of a variety of inter-school athletic teams when she was in elementary school, Leslie only plays these sports recreationally now. She hopes to have more time to become involved with sports and athletics when she returns to school next year.

Clayton

Laughing and ready to tell the latest joke circulating the Reserve, Clayton is the elder spokesman of the group. Seventeen and in grade 10, Clayton knows every rumour and scandal circulating the Reserve. Educated at North Ridge First Nation for his entire education, except for grade 9, he jumped at the opportunity to return to North Ridge with the opening of the new high school. After initial rejuvenation at school Clayton experienced dissatisfaction with North Ridge High school and soon dropped out.

His long braided hair, which hasn't been cut since he was a young child, is his identification among his peers. Clayton channels his athleticism into his prowess at dancing and he competes in numerous powwows throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta with a great deal of success. He participates in a variety of community level sporting events and was integral in many of the school teams. However, age restrictions often hampered his involvement in some school sporting events. He remains active at whatever sporting events are available and is a regular at recreational drop in evenings at the gymnasium.

Clayton is the eldest son of a large family of eight, headed by a strict and imposing mother. Clayton spends part of the school year with his father at a nearby

Reserve who has taught him to hunt and trap. Clayton is the man of his mother's house, providing meat for the table and maintaining vehicles. Clayton's achievements in school can be attributed to hard work and dedication; however if he doesn't put in a concentrated effort he struggles to pass. The past year has seen Clayton's marks drastically decrease along with his effort. He has started to use alcohol and drugs on a frequent basis and has been arrested a number of times for auto theft. At the end of the 1998 school year Clayton was fearful that the latest incident was going to result in "jail time." Clayton did not receive any credits from the second semester of grade 10, but is optimistic of his ability to graduate from high school.

Data Collection

It is critical that a number of meaningful qualitative techniques are utilized to ensure that reliable data collection and effective analysis procedures are employed. In conducting case studies the researcher becomes the instrument which relies on the "ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviours, customs, and the like" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.193). In an effort to add reliability to the findings, I felt it was imperative that corroboratory evidence be used to enhance the trustworthiness of the case study. To enhance trustworthiness in the findings, the process known as triangulation was employed. That is, using multiple sources of data, methods, investigators, or theories to confirm the emerging findings (Denzil, 1970; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). Triangulation assisted in eliminating biases that might

result from relying exclusively on any one data collection method, source, analyst, or theory (Gall, et al., 1996). To aid in developing triangulation, the present study included: document analysis, focus group interviews, individual interviews, member checks, observations, and a reflexive journal. As Erlandson et al (1993) stated the “greater the convergence attained through the triangulation of multiple data sources, methods, investigators, or theories, the greater the confidence in the observed findings” (p. 139).

Interviews

Focus Group Interviews:

At the onset of the study I had determined that the primary source of data collection would be the use of focus groups; however due to circumstances previously discussed, the role of this technique was minimized. However, the focus group technique was utilized to serve a number of important functions in the study. It served to familiarize the participants with the type of study I was conducting, assisted in establishing a comfort level with the researcher, and served as a starting point for the study. Furthermore, the focus group meetings aided in developing a sense of group involvement. As Krueger (1994) suggests “focus groups possess the capacity to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone can not achieve” (p. 45). At the initial meeting in May of 1998 each of the participants was informed of the requirements to be included in the study, the background behind conducting the study, and when interviews and

observations would be conducted. At this meeting participants agreed on an individual interview time which would last approximately 45-60 minutes. A final focus group meeting was conducted with both groups after the completion of the individual interviews. The final focus group meeting served as a means to put closure on the data gathering process and allow participants to clarify positions and contribute final thoughts to the case study. The focus group interviews ultimately served as a means to develop group cohesiveness, sensitivity, and assisted in the administration of the study.

Individual Interviews:

The individual interviews were conducted over a five week period from mid-May to the third week of June 1998. Each participant was interviewed once individually. Typically the interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were audio-taped in order to be transcribed at a later date. The interviews were semi-structured which allowed for the generation of thoughts around a concept, but also provided the freedom for participants to become divergent and discuss other emergent themes. The use of open-ended questions permitted me to obtain information through direct questioning as well as the opportunity to investigate emergent themes and information. The interviews facilitated sharing of personal perspectives, experiences and perceptions about school, physical education, and inter-school athletics.

Lederman (1990) noted a fundamental assumption of interviews is that people are valuable sources of information about themselves and their environment. Interviewing

holds that individuals involved within a particular situation may in fact be sources of information, and as such be may be able to make a positive contribution to the research question. Patton (1990) contends that interviews “provide the framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world, or that part of the world about which they are talking” (p. 24). Interviewing permits the participants to relate first hand experiences and knowledge in their own voice and from their own perspective on a given situation. The interview technique served a fundamental and necessary component of the study as it assisted in addressing the need of a culturally sensitive tool. The interview process provided these First Nation participants with a method of control and involvement in the research process. As Krueger (1994) noted, “sensitivity is essential in environments where disenfranchised people are cautious to share their views with those in power” (p. xx). The interviews enabled the participants to have legitimate control over the direction of the study and a forum to express their viewpoints.

Another powerful aspect of the individual interview method is the flexibility which it provides to both the participants and the researcher. The individual interviews provided me with the opportunity to address specific research questions while permitting the participants to respond in a wide variety of individualized ways. Each of the interviewing techniques served as powerful instruments to delve into the personal meanings each of the participants ascribed to school and the school physical education program.

The Reflexive Journal:

The reflexive journal supports not only the “credibility but also the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 143). The reflexive journal is a diary which the researcher used to record daily information about the study. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, the journal provides information about the researcher’s schedule and logistics, insights, and reasons for methodological decisions. The reflexive journal served as a sounding board for many of the personal questions and thoughts I had about the study. These notes were an ongoing progressive diary of my experiences as a qualitative researcher. Informal interviews and conversations with the participants conducted outside the school in the community and at sporting events were recorded in the reflexive journal. The use of field notes assisted in the reflective analysis of the case study and served to assist in recording impressions and supplementing the insights gained from the interviews. The reflexive journal served as a log to record critical incidences and appointments regarding the study. This process assisted the researcher in recognizing biases, personal perspectives, impressions, and provided narrative notes for the case study. Typically, in the evening, I would write a brief excerpt of how the day went and impressions of the effectiveness of the study. The journal itself eventually came to be part of the audit trail for the study (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Observations:

Observations are a viable and worthwhile means of collecting data in case study research. Observation allows the researcher a first hand account of the participants' behaviours, their interactions, and the context of the study. The use of observation in conjunction with interviewing, and document analysis assisted in developing a clearer and more complete understanding of the case study. As Merriam (1988) suggests, the researcher must be aware of their biases when conducting observations, as they affect how data are seen, recorded and interpreted. The presence of the observer alters and distorts the real situation. However, as Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated:

In situations where motives, attitudes, beliefs, and values direct much, if not most of human activity, the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer. The human being who can watch, see, listen, question, probe, and finally analyse and organize his direct experience (p. 213).

Observations were utilized as a part of the ongoing interpretation of the context of the case study. The observations assisted in the development of interview questions and enhanced the researcher's understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Participants were observed informally in the regular classroom setting as well as in the gymnasium with the consent of the teacher. The observations contributed to the wholeness of the study, aided in establishing a context for the research situation, and allowed the participants to directly refer to details from the classroom. I had instructed these students and taught at the school, but there were unfamiliar staff members and administrators who were integral to the case study. The observations provided me with

the opportunity to gain an understanding of the classes and the instructors in which the participants were involved.

Member Checking:

Case study research attempts to represent the emic perspective, that is, reality as constructed by the individuals. Gall et al (1996) suggest the trustworthiness of the researcher's reconstruction of an individual's emic perspective can be corroborated by member checking, which is the "process of having the individuals review statements made for accuracy and completeness" (p. 575). Member checking often reveals oversights and errors that can easily be corrected to truly reflect the participants' perspective. Therefore, after the transcribing process was completed and prior to the submission of this thesis, each of the participants was given an opportunity to read over their transcribed interviews to ensure the statements made during the interviews were accurately recorded and were indeed truly representative of their perspective. This process assisted in ensuring statements within this document accurately reflect the participants' viewpoints.

Document Analysis:

Documents of all types can help the researcher "uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 118).

Erlandson et al (1993) stated documents include anything in existence prior to and during the study including “historical or journalistic accounts, works of art, photographs, memos, accreditation records, television transcripts, newspapers, brochures, meeting agendas and notes, audio or video tapes, budget or accounting statements, notes from students or teachers, speeches, and other case studies” (p. 99). These documents are valuable sources of potential information and are credible sources of information. However, prudence and discernment are necessary to avoid becoming overwhelmed by extraneous data (Erlandson et al, 1993). Merriam (1988) provides a valuable guideline for the use of documents as she suggests if “it contains insights relevant to the research question and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner” (p. 105).

There was a multitude of documents which assisted in developing a greater understanding of the research situation. Posters and pictures of successful First Nation business leaders adorned the walls of North Ridge High School. The posters were intended to inspire First Nation students to excel and served to remind them of the importance of achieving an education. Posters depicting health concerns were abundantly exhibited within the hallways including: responsible drinking, safe sex, gambling addiction, and solvent abuse. Displaying these health related posters indicated the pro-active approach being taken by school administration, but also demonstrated the multiple health and social issues affecting the students at the school. Student artwork was also prominently displayed in classrooms and on bulletin boards in the hallways. The use of primarily First Nation material as displays created an atmosphere which

placed an emphasis on the culture of these First Nation students. Further evidence of attempts to bring First Nation culture into the school was noted in memos indicating: dates and rides to powwows in Saskatchewan, reminders about cultural club meetings, and a sign up sheet to fundraise to go on cultural trips to Wanuskewin and Poundmaker. Ultimately, these documents provided the additional framework and understanding I needed to comprehend the context of the study.

After examining documents concerning North Ridge drop out rates, curriculum development time lines, and school mission and policy statements, I felt it was necessary to expand my interviews to encompass the Director of Education. This interview became a necessity as many of the documents I was sifting through had his input and I felt it relevant to discuss their importance to the study with him. This interview adhered to the guidelines used for the participants in the study, except the interview was not audio-taped. The interviewee did not feel comfortable with being audio taped and felt a more informal meeting was appropriate. Notes were taken during the interview and additional comments were recorded after the completion of the interview.

A great deal of insight about the research situation was gained through the analysis of documents. However, I had to be cognizant that many of the documents available for analysis were not created with the researcher in mind. This information was graciously shared by the administration and teachers of North Ridge High School and proved to be invaluable. As Merriam (1988) cautions the documentary data may not have been developed for research purposes. "The materials may therefore be incomplete from a research perspective, may not come in a form the researcher fully understands,

and determining authenticity and accuracy may prove difficult” (p. 106). Despite these limitations, document analysis served as a beneficial source of data as it is “highly stable and is capable of grounding an investigation in the context of the problem” (Merriam, 1988, 109).

Data Analysis:

Qualitative research is not a linear, step by step process; rather data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity. As Merriam (1988) suggests analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, and the first document read. Simultaneous data collection and analysis “allows the researcher to direct the data collection phase more productively, as well as develop a data base that is both relevant and parsimonious” (p. 145). As Merriam (1988) states, “data collection and analysis are indeed ongoing processes that can extend indefinitely” (p. 125). There is almost always another person who could be interviewed, another observation that could be conducted, always more documents to be reviewed. When should a researcher stop data collection and move to the next phase of data analysis? Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four guidelines for terminating the data collection phase of a study. They propose to conclude a study when there is an “exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories, emergence of regularities, and over-extension has been reached” (p. 350). Once the decision to terminate data collection is made there is a refocusing and organization of data so the data analysis phase can begin.

The goal of data analysis is “to come up with reasonable conclusions and generalizations based on a preponderance of the data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139). Interpretational analysis is the process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the case being studied (Gall et al., 1996). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest at the beginning stage of data analysis a key step is in identifying units of information that will be used as the basis for defining categories. A unit is a section of the text that “contains one item of information and that is comprehensible even if read outside the context in which it is embedded” (Gall, et al., 1996, p. 563). Units of information came from focus group and individual interview transcripts, observational notes, journal notes, and document analysis. Units can be a phrase, sentence, or a paragraph, but they need to meet two specific criteria. The units must reveal information relevant to the study and it must contain the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345).

I utilized my personal computer and a Word Perfect program to analyse the data. I had transcribed all the participants’ interviews on to a Word Perfect program which conveniently aided the cutting and pasting of units. I made a master copy of the original document and then proceeded to cut and paste the second copy of the document. This facilitated the process of ensuring the unit remained in the context of the original interviews. The first step I undertook in interpreting the data was to separate the text into meaningful units. At this stage the information I had collected was loosely tied together around the idea of the school physical education program and high school

dropouts. I proceeded to place the information into meaningful individual units on the computer and started the process of assigning each of these units of information into categories.

The development of categories involved both convergent and divergent thinking. Convergence, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is determining what fits together, that is, which pieces of data converge on a single category or theme. Divergence is the task of fleshing out the categories once they have been developed. Each of the categories must be internally homogeneous while the differences between categories must be distinctly heterogeneous. A category is a means to classify the units which are emerging from the case study. Categories require the development of a label and definition which serves to classify each of the units within a category. This was a time consuming and frustrating process as categories would be developed with relevant units placed into categories, then the number of units would increase and start differentiating, ultimately requiring sub-categories or entirely new categories. The development of categories required careful analysis of the data in order to determine which data shared sufficient similarities that they could be considered instances of the same concept. These units with shared concepts eventually became a category.

After selecting and developing a category system, each unit was entered into an appropriate category. It was necessary to examine each unit carefully because the units could possibly fit into more than one category or they may not fit into any of the preexisting categories. These units were coded and tentatively left until the other units were categorized, and then they were reevaluated and either placed in a new category or

into a preexisting one. During this process I found that some of the categories were ambiguous and needed to be clarified. This was an ongoing procedure which I followed throughout the data analysis.

Once the coded units were conveniently placed into appropriate categories, I faced the next challenge. The units had been removed from their original place in the interview transcripts or from other sources of data. This was not a major hurdle because each of the coded units could be relocated on the original interview transcript. During this segment of the analysis I found it necessary to develop additional subcategories as some units no longer fit the initial category as the wealth of information in each category grew. As Gall et al (1996) suggest, “the process of comparison and revision of categories is repeated until satisfactory closure is achieved” (p.566). Using this approach, I continually clarified the meaning in each category, created distinctions between the categories, and decided which categories were most important to the study.

This paring down and differentiating of ideas proved to be very challenging and rewarding. The challenge was to take this great wealth of information and somehow make sense and meaning out of it. The rewarding aspect was that point in time when the light finally came on and a voice in my head said “Hey, this is starting to make sense.” The process of constant refinement and trying to ensure the participants’ voices were being heard in the work was the best part. I believe each of the participants’ true nature and character can be felt by reading the vignettes and captions from our interviews together.

Chapter Four

“....before the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed...”

(Longclaws, 1989)

Findings

The dust hangs heavily in the air on a beautiful May morning as I speed towards my destination of North Ridge High. Located on North Ridge First Nation, North Ridge High is nestled in the northwest corner of Saskatchewan. Situated between the cottage country to the north and the prairie to the south North Ridge First Nation presides over a mosaic of Saskatchewan scenery. The spring sun echoes my optimism and lightness of spirit as I embark upon this long awaited challenge. I am flooded with memories of the road which I have travelled twice daily for three years while on my way to teach, coach, and partake in the daily lives of the people of North Ridge. However, today I am embarking on a much different endeavour, I am a researcher here to conduct interviews and gather information. Scripted interview questions and images of former students play through my mind. These students will also adopt a new role today, that of participants. As I wind my way through the scenic hills I see the familiar landmarks of the road. There are the one or two outlying houses, further removed from the Reserve, the well groomed cemetery off to the left, the sharp hairpin curve in the road, and finally the last right turn into North Ridge First Nation.

North Ridge First Nation, as many other First Nation communities in Saskatchewan, has an inordinate number of community problems. There are limited economic prospects for its community members, a high unemployment rate, poor and insufficient housing, and a high incidence of violence and crime. The community suffers greatly from the ills of dysfunctional families which seemingly have an endless flow of abuses. The daily struggles encountered by the children at North Ridge manifest in a variety of ways and impact the very nature of the community and school. An excessively high youth crime rate, violence among students, alcohol and drug use, teen pregnancy, and school dropouts are evidence of the multitude of adversities impacting the children of North Ridge. By high school many of the students have succumbed to the multifaceted pressures and instability of their community and have chosen to drop out of school. And yet, despite these circumstances, there are a few young students who are able to get to school, study and learn, and ultimately succeed, which is astounding considering their overwhelming circumstances.

The conditions which exist in many First Nation communities have been linked to the development of hopelessness and have been described as "third world" by government agencies in Canada (Health and Welfare Saskatchewan, 1989). Buildings sagging under the weight of years of neglect, houses with broken or boarded up windows, and doors hanging off their hinges echo the despair felt within the community. A school in need of renovation with smatterings of obscenities and graffiti adorning the walls, broken glass strewn about the playground, swings and playground equipment in disrepair all contribute to the sense of hopelessness felt at North Ridge. Garbage is

littered throughout the fields, burned out and abandoned cars adorn the sides of the road and front yards of homes, chronic alcoholics wander aimlessly, and a spectrum of daily abuses await the majority of children at North Ridge First Nation. These are the sights and surroundings in which many youngsters play and live at North Ridge First Nation. It becomes part of their reality and is accepted as the norm. For these individuals the surroundings of the home and community contribute to the helpless condition. As Martinek (1996) suggests, the will to change things is significantly undermined when the elements associated with poverty prevail throughout a child's developmental years.

Parents have a monumental influence over their children in modelling both positive and negative behaviours when coping in this environment. A child's first role model is their parent and they look to this caregiver for guidance. According to Greenberg (1992), the "important adults in a child's life set the example that makes an obvious or subliminal impression on him" (p. 17). Klein (1990) stresses that children learn much of their behaviour from watching important adults in their lives. Children raised in these impoverished surroundings are exposed to a variety of behaviours which reflect hopelessness and indifference. At home, for many, this modelling continues. Parents and guardians absolve and escape many of their daily miseries through alcohol and drug use which conveys to the children yet another negative influence. The First Nation school dropout rate in Saskatchewan is a testimony to the debilitating effects of hopelessness. First Nation parents contending with their own daily struggles often leave the child to develop their own guidelines for functioning in this environment. In many situations, parents are unable to properly guide or answer many of the questions young

children have as they attempt to understand the chaotic world around them. Seligman (1990) believes when this happens, children will model the behaviours presented to them and assess ways in which they should respond in similar situations. Children living in impoverished situations observe the daily functions and means their parents use to survive in their surroundings and emulate them.

The impact of the Canadian residential school experience on many First Nation families has been well documented. Generations of families have lost traditional parenting skills and have experienced a plethora of hardships. Warry (1992), after an extensive review of over 135 research studies of Native children at-risk concluded that:

.... the residential school experience is credited with the systematic destruction of many Indian families... these schools which required Native parents and children to be separated for periods of 10 months or longer each year, are attributed with producing a generation of parents who were raised in institutional environments (p. 42).

For some parents, traumatic experiences in residential schools left them with “a bitter legacy souring them against formal, structured education institutions” (Ross & Usher, 1992). As well, for many, the years of abuse and neglect have shown itself in self-abusive behaviours of alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence (Bowker, 1992). Further support is found in the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which called for a public inquiry after devoting fifty pages to the horrific experiences of children at residential schools. Tibbetts (1998) reported the effects of the residential school have been passed down through two more generations affecting both children and grandchildren of survivors, some of whom are strangers to their own Aboriginal culture. Consequently, due to many of these life circumstances, it is understandable how some

First Nation parents have unintentionally had a negative impact on their children's educational progress.

Thus far this account paints a bleak and dark picture of North Ridge First Nation; however, there is always hope. Optimism comes in the form of resilient children (Benard, 1993; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1990), that is, children who despite the seemingly insurmountable odds set against them are able to lead healthy, productive lives. Benard (1993) defines a resilient child as "one who has the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks" (p. 44). Gordon and Song (1994) refer to these individuals as "risk defiers," "abuse survivors," or "superkids." Historically, research has focussed on identifying risk factors that contribute to the development of negative behaviours in youth. Consequently, as Mundy (1996) stated: "this prevailing philosophy required eliminating risk factors in the environment - poverty, abuse, neglect, and mental illness - before any impact could be made upon a child at risk for criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, school drop out and the like" (p.78). Based on this view there is little that we, as physical educators and teachers, can do to alleviate the complexity of the external conditions which poverty and social conditions impose on First Nation students. Clearly, such a perspective can lead professionals concerned with at risk youth to feel disheartened, overwhelmed, and thinking, "what's the use.... we can't really do anything to help" (Mundy, 1996, p. 78).

However, with the emergence of research into resiliency as an intervention for at risk youth, hope is restored. Resilient youth give us hope and encouragement as educators, for it is clear that despite unfavourable odds, many of these youth go on to

lead healthy and productive lives. As Martinek and Hellison (1997) state, "They have beaten the odds against good development and have demonstrated the self-righting nature of the human condition. In all likelihood, they have used protective factors in themselves, their family, school, and community to rebuff life stressors" (p. 36). As educators and advocates of at risk youth the next step is to learn from these resilient students and to put into practice a viable educational alternative to meet the needs of First Nation students.

In the classic thirty two year study of the children of Kauai in Hawaii, Werner (1992) found at risk youth are quite capable of rebounding from life's stressors. Her participants had experienced four or more of the following risk factors: poverty, perinatal stress, family discord, divorce, parental alcoholism, and parental mental illness. Despite the presence of multiple risk factors, "one of three high-risk children grew into competent young adults who loved well, worked well, played well, and expected well" by age eighteen (Werner, 1992). By age thirty two, two-thirds of the children who had developed problems during adolescence were leading successful adult lives. Further evidence of resiliency in youth is found in Rutter's (1985) study with disadvantaged inner city youth of London. He found that half of the children growing up in adverse living conditions did not repeat that pattern later on as an adult. Werner's (1992) and Rutter's (1985) research supports the notion that some children can escape the negative life patterns imposed on them and are not necessarily predestined to repeat them.

At the onset of my study I attempted to select participants from two distinct groups; high school dropouts and students remaining in school. The intent was not on

identifying differences between these two groups, but rather to develop synergy around the idea of resiliency in First Nation education. What experiences did both of these groups of participants have in school and the school physical education program that aided or inhibited their educational progress? It became apparent during the interview process that all of the participants involved in the study were at varying stages of completing their high school education and could be considered resilient. Some of the participants were suffering temporary setbacks which would delay their on time graduation, these participants were determined to complete grade twelve. Whereas, the legitimate dropouts were students who had dropped out of school prior to entering high school and had not attended an educational institution for a period of time longer than one year. Consequently, each of the participants in this study could be considered resilient, though at varying stages of educational accomplishment. What factors serve to strengthen First Nation students' resolve to stay in school, study, and make long term life and educational plans? The following section describes the elements which served as preventative agents for the participants in this study. Five main themes were identified which served as protective factors for these First Nation participants, allowing them the opportunity to continue and flourish in their education. The themes are by no means independent of one another. Rather, they work in unison and form an interdependent network which provided the necessary support for these young students to be successful in their educational endeavours. The elements which contribute to resiliency in these First Nation youth have five main themes and can be likened to a tipi (Figure 1). As the tipi protects its occupants from external elements and provides shelter and warmth, the

five themes have served to protect these First Nation students from dropping out of school. The five themes served to rebuff external life stressors and assisted these participants in coping with their environment and ultimately contributed to their ability to remain in school. The resiliency tipi is bound together at the top by the primary focus of the study which is the school physical education program. As this was the impetus of the study, questions were geared around this concept, and therefore comprise the bulk of the information and responses. Understandably, these ideas have managed to become intertwined with the other four themes and serve to be a common link between many of these themes. However, of equal importance was the emergence of the remaining four themes which served to strengthen the resiliency tipi. Individual tipi poles have little strength, but taken collectively they can provide a powerful shelter to shield its occupants from the external environment. Therefore, one cannot underestimate the importance of the remaining four themes which include personal attributes, family factors, community and school supports, and constructive use of time.

The first theme can be identified as personal characteristics and attributes. Many of the participants possess qualities which encouraged people involved in their lives to want to help them succeed and achieve their goals. Family elements of stability, discipline, guidance, and caring contribute to the second theme and proved to be a key ingredient for participants' success in school. The third emergent theme is the participants' ability to constructively use their time. Many of the participants were engaged in required activities, chores, responsibilities, sports, work, hobbies, and extracurricular activities which assisted in reducing the amount of unconstructive and

unsupervised time. The fourth theme which served to aid these resilient students was their school and community supports. The school provided a refuge from the instability of the home and community. Furthermore, the caring and nurturing classroom provided a much needed environment free of negative influences which fostered a sense of identity and belonging. The final theme is the school physical education program which served to offer resilient students the opportunity to identify and belong to the school, build self-esteem, establish positive peer relations, and constructively use their time. It is apparent that the school physical education program is ultimately only one of the supports these participants utilized to thrive in their education.

Theme One

Personal Characteristics and Attributes

Resilient children have hope and optimism that they can deal with life problems and maintain a positive outlook (Benard, 1991; Seligman, 1990; Werner, 1984).

Of all the characteristics of the resilient child, Benard (1991) argues that it is the lack of optimism and hope which has the greatest impact on an individual's vulnerability to at risk conditions. Optimistic and hopeful youth have qualities which enable the individual to set goals, persist, and believe that a bright future lies ahead. Resilient children possess the "feeling of confidence or faith that things will work out as well as can be reasonably expected, and that the odds can be surmounted" (Werner, 1984, p. 71). Seligman's (1990) work on learned helplessness found that children who feel they have little, or no control over social and academic outcomes when faced with a

challenge will quickly give up. Hopeful youth, unlike their learned helpless counterparts focus their energies on developing strategies to overcome challenges. Resilient children possess this optimism and seldom demonstrate the passive behaviours associated with learned helplessness. They are able to apply alternative solutions and utilize outside sources for assistance (Benard, 1993).

Many of the participants in this case study have clear, realistic goals and are optimistic about their future. They have hope, despite all the negative circumstances in their lives, and are confident that they can achieve their long range goals. The participants in this study expected to do well when they applied themselves and recognized poor performance as a result of not working hard enough. Facing the grim outlook of not receiving any additional credits in the second semester of grade 10, Tyler is remarkably optimistic and firmly accepts the blame for his poor performance. "I didn't work hard enough this semester.... I missed too many classes and didn't do my work." Despite this turn of events Tyler is hopeful that he will still graduate on time and stated that "Next year I'll work hard again and start fresh.... I won't have any spares if I want to make up for this semester." As Benard (1993) states, without hope the drive to change one's circumstances becomes diluted. Tyrone stated that after grade 12 he plans to join the RCMP. Education is a means for him to achieve his goal of becoming a police officer. "I just want to pass and head for the barracks in Regina." Tyrone has clear goals and is motivated to achieve them. He has spent time working with the local constable and has attended a number of career days to get more information about his career choice.

For some students a particularly difficult experience, either direct or vicarious, reinforces the importance of education. These experiences often serve to crystalize long range plans and goals. McMillan and Reed (1993) state that these experiences might be called "reality checks" because they seem to motivate students towards positive goals. The reality check may have been dropping out of school, becoming pregnant, being in drug rehabilitation, or experiencing some other event or circumstance that showed them that without an education their opportunities would be limited. As a result these resilient students tend to be very mature in their explanations and goals. Tyler's reality check came earlier this year in the form of a school suspension for drinking. Tyler, along with some of his volleyball teammates, was caught consuming alcohol after participating in a provincial volleyball game while enrolled at South Park school. As a consequence these players were not allowed to participate in any school athletic events for the remainder of the school year. Tyler learned a hard lesson and compromised a semester of work because of it, but felt that "it was fair....; we were told not to drink." Though a setback to his on time graduation, Tyler has resolved to "work harder next semester."

James, Anna, and Leslie expressed a great disappointment in dropping out of school. This experience has strengthened their resolve to return to school and finish their education. When asked if she was going to return to school next year, Anna quickly replied: "Yes! I would never have quit if some Indians were going to school over there (South Park). I don't want to sit around and do nothing... I want to graduate and get a good job." At the time of Anna's decision to drop out of South Park school there was no grade 11 programming being offered at North Ridge High school due to low enrolment

numbers. James felt that this year had been a “waste of time” because of the repetitious nature of the school work. After dropping out, James found that the boredom of not having a social network and a lack of school work had given him time to refocus his goals. He decided that he would like to attend a college or university to participate in varsity athletics and study. James realized that “... if I don’t get a scholarship I’ll need a job. If I couldn’t make it at a higher level (in sports or athletics) I’ll need some kind of backup.” Unlike James and Anna, Leslie enjoyed the freedom which came from not going to school, but she is determined to go back and finish school. “I had lots of free time. It was good sometimes, but I want to have a good job and I want to have a good living... so I need to finish high school.”

Several investigators (Rutter, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Werner & Smith, 1982) have noticed a pronounced sense of independence and sociability in resilient young children. In addition, these children often exhibit some control over their environment (Chess, 1989).

The ability to interact socially with others appears to be a very strong trait characterizing resilient children. Research conducted by Chess (1989) has demonstrated that from early childhood on, resilient children tend to establish positive relationships with adults and peers. These relationships assist them in developing bonds with family members, classmates, teachers, and community leaders, thereby creating a strong social support system for dealing with adversity. Resilient at risk students possess temperamental characteristics that elicit positive responses from individuals around them (Werner & Smith, 1992). These personality traits begin early in life and are manifested

in adolescence as children seek out new experiences and become self-reliant. This begins the cycle of positive reciprocity that enables these children to reach out to other people and expect help (Benard, 1993; McMillan & Reed, 1993). Their positive attitudes are usually rewarded with helpful reactions from those around them. Thus, they come to see the world as a positive place in spite of the difficult issues with which they have to deal. Rose has found most people involved in her life are supportive of her goals and education. "My parents encourage me and so do the teachers at school (North Ridge). They all want me to succeed and are friendly."

Resilient children are autonomous, that is, they have a clear sense of who they are and can act independently (Benard, 1993). Most importantly, they have the ability to exert some control over their environment. Autonomous behaviour has been shown to be helpful in dealing with stressful events experienced by at risk groups. Although many of the participants have dysfunctional home lives many have been able to remain involved in activities which provide them with opportunities outside their homes. James has over the years been able to actively pursue athletics even though both of his guardians are chronic alcoholics. "My grandparents have problems with alcohol, but I still play every sport around here." James' thoughts are echoed by April as she commented that "my mom used to drink a lot and it used to bother me, but now it's not so bad. It never really stopped me from getting together with my friends or playing sports and stuff." Chess (1989) has referred to this process as 'adaptive distancing,' whereby children can separate themselves from dysfunctional family life. Berlin and Davis' (1989) investigation of families with alcoholism and mental illness found that

resilient children were capable of detaching themselves enough to maintain outside pursuits and challenges. Such distancing set them apart from those children who had difficulty in maintaining positive relationships with peers and other adults. In some of the homes in which Leslie has lived there have been problems with alcohol and drugs which limited her ability to attend social functions and school events. "I remember missing school Christmas concerts and dances because nobody could drive me because they were partying and drunk. I missed after school activities because I had to look after my brother because they might be drunk or something. I guess I missed a lot of things as a kid, but my auntie here is good to me and my brother."

Solomon (1992) cautions one must be cognizant that urban and rural poverty represents a culture separate from the outside world with its own set of values, language, and rituals. Solomon (1992) contends that most at risk students recognize the importance of schooling, but behave in such a way that gets them into trouble. Their cultural values lead them to oppose the system and authority. For individuals living in poverty being autonomous and in control manifests itself in a much different manner than in mainstream society. "Strategies such as intimidation and abusive behaviour, confrontations with authority figures, and selling drugs are a few examples of the ways children and youth have tried to gain mastery over their environment" (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 38). Clayton has a great deal of difficulty understanding the reasons for his unsuccessful school experience. "Sometimes I fool around, but I think I try pretty hard. I guess sometimes I don't listen and get into trouble for fooling around or not doing my work, but that's who I am... chaa." Clayton's admitted disruptive behaviour,

his lack of effort in completing his homework, and his attitude of doing as he pleases is in part his way of displaying independence and control over his environment. In part, Clayton's behaviour has contributed to his status among many of his peers and this social network has contributed to his ability to remain in school. As Martinek and Hellison (1997) suggest this type of behaviour has legitimized his status in school and among his peers. As Clayton stated: "It's who I am." Clayton believes this behaviour demonstrates that he has mastered the necessary skills to be autonomous in his environment.

In a recent qualitative study of the perceptions of academically successful at risk students, many students spoke of satisfaction gained from experiencing success in self-fulfilling activities (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Self-fulfilling activities are activities which the child independently and freely decides to participate and commit to. These students were motivated by a desire to succeed, to be self-starting, and to be personally responsible for their achievements. They attributed poor performance to internal factors such as lack of effort, not caring, not trying, not studying as much as they needed to, goofing off, and playing around; most respondents thought that poor performing students could do better if they put in more work and got serious about school. Tyler stated that this semester had been a trying experience and that he didn't have enough support to ward off many of the negative behaviours at North Ridge First Nation.

I came back here this semester partly because all my Native friends left South Park and I would have been alone there. I didn't do very well here (North Ridge)... so I think that I will go back to South Park next year. There's just not as many things going on in South Park. Ya know... there's always a party here (North Ridge), drinking or just skipping school, sometimes it's hard for me to focus on school stuff. Everybody I know is doing a lot of this stuff I couldn't avoid it.

Tyler recognizes that his education is a priority “because, it’s my future. Without education you don’t have a job.” Tyler acknowledged that his grandmother allows him to make independent decisions about where he would like to attend school. “She lets me decide where I want to go to school... it’s my choice.” Ultimately, Tyler has the power to decide where he would like to attend school next year and with that knowledge comes a sense of resolve to make amends for the fruitless semester at North Ridge.

Theme Two

Family Factors

Resilient children have had the opportunity to form a warm bond with a responsive caregiver (Rutter, 1985; McMillan & Reed, 1993; Werner, 1982).

Research with resilient youth demonstrates that these youth have had the opportunity to establish a close bond or involvement with at least one person, not necessarily a parent, who provides them with stable care and adequate attention (Benard, 1993). Adult support and involvement with youth are central to fostering resiliency. Tyrone understood the importance of family and it weighed heavily in his decision to return to live at home with his parents, rather than at boarding schools in other parts of Saskatchewan. “My parents wanted me to finish school at South Park high, but I felt North Ridge would be better.... I could be with my own people and still live at home.” Ultimately, Tyrone chose to attend North Ridge high because of the increased level of comfort offered from a First Nation school, the close proximity to childhood friends, and the opportunity to live at home. A caring and positive relationship can be identified

between April and Tyler with their grandmother. April and Tyler's decision to return to school at North Ridge was based in part for their concern for their grandmother. April stated: "I had to leave (South Park) because I had to look after my grandmother. She wanted to come back too because we lived in South Park for about two years. She wanted me to come back to the reserve because she said I would finish easier....because of family and friends at North Ridge." Tyler also stated that his decision to return to North Ridge was in part influenced by his grandmother's desire to move back to North Ridge First Nation. "Grandma wanted to move back too She had spent two years away from the reserve."

Support for resilient children may be from people other than parents, such as siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, or people involved in the child's daily life who become positive role models (McMillan & Reed, 1993). April stated that she partied once in awhile on the weekend, but that "mom, grandma, and my aunties keep me in line." April has found family structure through her extended family who all have adopted a role in raising her. Attachment refers to "positive emotional ties, a sense of belonging, and a sense of doing well in a social context such as family, school, and community activities with friends" (Mundy, 1996, p. 81). Tyrone's desire to join the RCMP is fuelled by his relationship with a local police officer. "Well I guess.... this officer here is a bit of an idol I guess, because he's got a lot of authority. He hasn't gone on power trips and I guess he makes a lot of money. I don't know. I play hockey with him and he is a good guy." By establishing this relationship, Tyrone has added direction in his life from a well meaning role model.

Resilient children seem to be adept at eliciting positive responses from many people around them (Werner, 1984). James has found that through the years he has been acknowledged by teachers, family, and friends for his athletic ability. "My grandma, mom and dad all support me when I play sports. They will often come to watch and cheer. I want to do well for them." James, April, Tyrone, and Tyler have all been honoured with numerous medals, ribbons, plaques, and trophies. They have played on local teams, school teams, provincial and Indigenous teams. Tyler stated that: "They (the community) have banquets and award dinners for some of us in the spring along with a round dance." These participants have been able to relay success in sports to forge positive relationships with others in the community and people around them.

Interestingly, family composition seems to have no significant relationship to at risk students' success or failure (Peng et al., 1992). Students living with both parents do not necessarily have a higher level of resiliency than students in single parent families or other configurations. Instead, good parent-child relationships and supportive attachments appear to act as protective factors from the environment. Parents who are committed to their children and provide informal counselling, support help in achieving success. Their parental commitment lends a feeling of coherence to the family unit. Rose stated that her mom often offered her advice and support for her decisions. "I am given a great deal of freedom when it comes to school, I still have to do my work and stuff but mom and dad, especially mom, gives me really good advice. I find it helps a lot in making hard choices." Werner (1984) maintains that these strong family ties help at risk youth to believe that life makes sense and that they have some control over their

lives. This sense of meaning becomes a powerful motivation for many resilient at risk students. Anna commented that “my mom always asks how things are going and stuff. She is concerned that I have a easier life than she had... Ya know... not making bad decisions and mistakes.”

Parental attitudes also seem to have a major influence on the psychological well-being of the child. Werner and Smith (1982) report that resilient adolescents often come from homes in which firm and consistently enforced rules and limits are applied. Rutter (1987) concludes that good supervision and well balanced discipline may protect a child who is from a high risk background.

Family support seems to be an attribute of successful at risk students (Werner, 1984). Parents of resilient students have higher expectations for their children’s education. Such expectations exert pressure on the children to remain engaged in school and work toward high achievement. These students are more likely to interact with parents, to have more learning materials at home, and to be involved in out of school educational activities than are non-resilient at risk students (Peng et al., 1992). Rose has a stable home environment which encourages success in school and has learning resources at home for her use. “I have my own computer at home... well it’s the family computer, but I use it the most. My parents always remind me how important going to school is and they make sure I get my school work done.”

In her study of inner city African-American families, Clark (1991) notes the importance of a home environment that reinforces the school achievement of their children. She found that “there was frequent dialogue between parents and children, parents encouraged academic pursuits, and were warm and nurturing towards their

children. These parents also established achievement norms, monitored their achievement, and reinforced appropriate behaviours” (p. 48). Rose stated that “My mom makes sure that I get my work done. She is always asking if I have homework or tests and about school stuff. Homework comes first with my parents, I have to finish it before I can do anything else.”

The family can be a protective mechanism in a dysfunctional community; however it may also serve to be a source of vulnerability if family patterns do not reinforce the skills necessary to do well in school. Family disorganization and the lack of family-school interaction, along with parental feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, result in poor academic achievement (Clark, 1991). Clayton revealed that his home life at times served as a deficit in his ability to do well at school. “I have a large family. Right now there are thirteen of us living in a three bedroom house. I share a room with three brothers and the baby. There really is no quiet place in the house to do my homework and study.” James commented that “Grandma told me I could just take the rest of the year off and start fresh somewhere else next year.” James’ grandmother was concerned for his well being at school but inadvertently sent him a negative message. James took his grandmother’s advice and used it to justify dropping out of school.

At times, April felt overwhelmed by family commitments and pressures which negatively influenced her school performance. As April stated:

School wasn’t tough and I didn’t need help. I just had a lot of problems when I was going to school... my family problems... I had to look after my grandma, my mom, my aunties, and uncles. I couldn’t do my work. I always had to do stuff like everyday when I came from school.... dishes, cooking, cleaning, laundry. I

had to drive all over. I had to take care of my grandma.... I didn't have time to do the (school) work.

In part, these household responsibilities led to April's desire to finish her education at a boarding school. "I want to be in a residence because it will be just like you are living on your own. I can start looking after myself over there and doing my own stuff."

Theme Three

Constructive Use of Time

Researchers have found that children's participation in chores, responsibilities, sport teams, and even part time work is another protective factor (McMillan & Reed, 1993; Mundy, 1996). They conclude that giving children responsibilities tells them that they are worthy and capable individuals who can make important contributions (Landers and Landers, 1978; Werner, 1984).

Landers and Landers (1978) reported the results of a study which assessed the association between extracurricular participation and delinquency acts of 521 male students in one high school. Landers and Landers (1978) research "demonstrated a relationship between participation in extracurricular activities and a lower incidence of delinquency" (p. 302). In an attempt to explain the observed findings, Landers and Landers (1978) speculated that the participants may have benefited from relief from boredom, moral lessons, perceived peer status, constructive use of time, and positive role models. Tyrone has observed a number of critical incidences since returning to live at North Ridge. "Kids here have a lot of bad influences, there is always something going on... drinking, smoking up, break ins and stuff. That's a reason why I play almost every

sport and join every team around here... it gives me something to do with my spare time.” In addition to Tyrone’s involvement in sports and athletics he is kept busy working part time with his father and uncles as well as participating in a ride along program with a local RCMP constable. “I work for my dad and uncles in their construction company most of the summer and some weekends. I go with the police once and a while... like a ride along. I get to see what they do and it should help me when I apply to the force... It’s pretty good too. I don’t have that much free time I guess.”

In the qualitative study conducted by McMillan and Reed (1993), resilient students used their time positively and were meaningfully involved in school and other activities. Active involvement in extracurricular events at school and in other areas seems to provide a refuge for resilient students. James commented that he participates in sports and extra curricular athletics “because they are important to me they give me something to do when I’m out of school. Now that I quit school ... it’s about the only thing left I have to look forward to doing.” James still participates in an evening sports program coordinated by the community.

Involvement in required helpfulness appears to be a factor in resilient students’ experiences (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Required helpfulness may mean volunteer work in the community, tutoring at school, or taking care of siblings or otherwise helping at home. Rose noted that she has numerous responsibilities within her family. “I have chores to do everyday, and I have to look after my little brother and sister when mom and dad are busy. I don’t mind because they give me an allowance and I like helping when I

can.” These activities seem to lend purpose to the difficult life of an at risk student and serves to increase their caring about others. They realize there are people that even they can help (Werner, 1984; Philliber, 1986). James is responsible for many aspects of his grandparents well being. “I often go hunting, fix up the car, and take odd jobs and stuff. I can basically do whatever I want.... but I want to help them out as much as I can.”

April has a great deal of home responsibilities which has limited her time to become involved in at risk behaviours, but has also contributed to her resentment towards these extra responsibilities. “I just wish I didn’t always have this much chores to do. I still have time for sports and stuff, but I dunno. I just want a bit more time to myself and for my school work.” These concerns are echoed by Leslie who has spent a great portion of her young life caring and nurturing her younger brother. “I don’t have time to get into trouble. I like sports but looking after my brother takes up a lot of time. The only time I get to myself is when I’m at school or when he’s with my auntie.” These responsibilities that Leslie has for her younger brother, in part, led to her appreciation of the extra time she had when she dropped out of school. “He (her brother) was in school most of the day, so I could finally do a few things that I wanted to do. I kinda got into more trouble when I didn’t have to look after him so much. Ya know partying and stuff, but it was sorta good I guess.”

Theme Four

School and Community Supports

Schools as an institution can demonstrate caring (Rutter, 1985). Positive experiences in school help provide students with a sense of belonging, bonding, and encouragement (Benard, 1993; Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Werner, 1990).

Despite adverse home and community conditions schools can provide a necessary refuge offering a caring and supportive environment for at risk youth (Benard, 1993).

Children who lack caring and supportive homes, and frequently schools, environments that nurture their needs for love, care, attention, and support are sorely needed. Tyrone has been to seven different schools in his ten years of education and noted that:

When I was in reserve schools people that are not really smart or whatever... they (teachers) take care of them. Teachers give more attention to them anyway. In South Park if you're not really that smart they forget about you and then you're behind. Here (North Ridge) I can be with my own people I guess. I can be myself and I get more attention if I need help. I'm with people I grew up with.

April found the small class sizes and the familiarity of North Ridge better because "you can just speak out when you want. You don't have to be shy because you already know these people real good."

Caring, supportive environments also provide children with adequate positive attention. At risk youth frequently get the attention of teachers through their misbehaviour. Instead, what is needed is positive attention for positive behaviour. Prior to dropping out of school, Clayton admitted he was a discipline problem and blamed a portion of his behaviour on boredom. "I fooled around at times and I got into trouble with teachers because of it. I don't really know why I do it... to have a good time I guess... lighten things up a bit. School is pretty boring sometimes." When asked what parts of school were boring Clayton replied: "Well, it's hard to say, just the way some

teachers are, ya know? It's not really subjects, but the way teachers act. Some are too serious and don't joke around or anything." As a result of his off task behaviours, Clayton often found himself in trouble with teachers and administrators which resulted in poor academic performance in many classes.

Tyrone never felt like he belonged at South Park and said he couldn't really be himself. "I always put on a mask when I went to school.... It was kind of like the 'Indian tough guy' type." The persona Tyrone portrayed served to distance him from the non-Aboriginal students and furthered his sense of alienation and feelings of not belonging at South Park high. Tyrone maintained friendships with the First Nation students attending the South Park high school. In part, this led to his return to North Ridge as he desired to attend a school with his own people. "I just kept to myself (while at South Park)."

Tyrone stated "as soon as I came here I could be myself. It was like a huge weight had been taken off my chest.... I guess." Tyrone's sentiments are echoed by Leslie as she related her experiences in non-Native public schools. She explained:

Sometimes I didn't feel like I fit in at those schools (public schools). Some kids could be really mean and would say things about me... being Indian. Friends told me not to let them bug me, but it still bothered me. I've been called a bitch and other things by some white kids and the school and principal did nothing. He almost made me feel like I was making it up to get someone into trouble. After that I just stopped telling them about things... I guess in a way I stopped trying at school.

Leslie's negative school experiences in part led to her decision to attend a First Nation institution where outward forms of racism would be minimized.

Enriched school experiences can be a special support for families. When risk

factors are multiple, quality childhood programs can enhance children's lives. (Mundy, 1996; Werner, 1984; Winfield, 1991)

Resilient children seem to find more support outside of the home environment, usually in school, than non resilient students (Mundy, 1996). Most resilient students attempt to involve themselves in classroom discussions and activities; school is more than academics for these students (Werner, 1984). Most are involved in at least one extracurricular activity that becomes an informal source of support. The extracurricular activity not only increases involvement, belonging, and self-esteem, it also provides a network of people who have a common bond and work in cooperation with each other (Werner, 1984). April found that she had better interracial friendships than many of her other First Nation friends because of her involvement in inter-school athletics. "I got along with most of those girls, especially the ones on the volleyball team. We all wanted to do good." Tyler's comments concur with April's as he stated that "I got along better with the guys at South Park because I played sports with them. We were on the same teams and had things in common I guess, they're alright."

Extracurricular activities at school, especially sports, seem to mitigate the powerful and widespread peer pressure not to do well. Many resilient students seem to feel they must be involved with a non-academic activity in order to fit in with the majority of students. This involvement maintains the resilient at risk students' positive engagement in school (Rak & Patterson, 1996). April stated, "I participate in a lot of sports mainly because most of my friends are involved. Ya, and there aren't that many of us, so if we don't get everyone out we sometimes don't have a team." Winfield's

(1991) research indicated: "factors such as access to a high quality curriculum, adequate counselling, and extracurricular involvement during the high school years operates as a protective mechanism" (p. 8). Clayton commented, "I always liked gym the best of all the subjects. It was always a good time... well most of the time anyway. It was good because I didn't feel like anyone was better than me and I was always one of the better players. Even the teacher would say that I was good at those sports." When asked what parts of the physical education program he enjoyed the most Clayton replied, "probably the sports... ya know Sometimes it's good just to have fun and play games and sports. I never felt left out or behind when I was in phys. ed." The physical education curriculum provided Clayton with the opportunity to become a positive contributor to the classroom. He was capable and competent in the gymnasium and felt he could do as well or better than any student in the class. Clayton felt he had an opportunity to compete with his classmates on a level playing field. Most students, including those who have not had positive experiences in school or who are poorly motivated academically, view physical education as distinct from their academic day. The freedom from desks and books, and the chance to be socially interactive and physically expressive, invite different ways of relating interpersonally with peers and teachers. Additionally, for some, "its connection to sport infuses the physical education class with a level of interest unparalleled in other parts of the curriculum" (Miller, Bredemeier, & Shields, 1997, p. 116).

In some cases the instability and problems of the larger community served to diminish the impact of enrichment activities at school. Tyler felt that the negative

behaviours and carefree attitude toward education held by many community members at North Ridge adversely impacted him during the second semester. Tyler stated North Ridge First Nation has a multitude of problems which unintentionally impacted his educational progress. "I don't care enough... there's too much stuff going on. There are too many bad influences out here and I can always find something to do besides what I should be doing." These thoughts were repeated by Leslie who felt that "kids here have a lot of bad role models and stuff. There are parties and stuff all the time, everyday of the week at people's houses."

Perhaps the single most important intervention in the classroom is the teacher. Research concurs that teachers of young children can have an enduring and profound effect on the children they teach (Garmezy, 1991; Weinreb, 1997).

As Garmezy (1991) notes an effective teacher can successfully "dampen the antisocial tendency, lacklustre performance, loss of self-esteem, and flagging competence that can be the consequence of risk elements present in an environment marked by disadvantage and deprivation" (p. 428). James had difficulty in adjusting to a new principal as well as an unfamiliar home room teacher.

When they changed principals everything kind of shifted around. Teachers changed this year. My teacher was a good teacher and she was helping me with a lot of stuff. The new teacher is not as good, well he's a good teacher but it's just that the work is too easy and there is a lot of free time. I felt like I just wanted to stay home everyday because I wasn't getting anything done... what's the point in wasting my time when we don't do any challenging work.

Ultimately, dissatisfaction with the work in his classroom led to James's poor attendance. His poor attendance then triggered a school attendance policy which

prohibited him from participating in extra-curricular activities. This chain of events culminated with James' decision to drop out of school entirely. James stated, "I have always been involved in sports, ya know... representing North Ridge, but now I can't because of the attendance policy. In a way I was kinda stunned when I was told that I couldn't participate. I thought maybe I would get a second chance, but that was it, so I guess I just kinda gave up on school all together."

Teachers who relate to at risk youth in such a way as to enable the youth to establish a meaningful relationship and attachment with them are especially important to at risk youth. As the research points out, this kind of relationship does not necessarily have to be with a parent in order for it to be successful (Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1984). Teachers must be able to provide meaningful communication and understanding to at risk youth. April felt a strong attachment to her volleyball coach and felt she could confide in him. "He would listen to some of the problems I was having and would help me with school problems or stuff with teachers." When April's family decided to return to North Ridge she stated that "Some of those girls didn't want me to leave and the coach wanted me to stay. They wanted me to stay because of the sports." Anna fondly remembers her grade seven teacher who demonstrated kindness towards her.

I was having quite a few problems at home with my mom.... a lot of teenager stuff. Anyway, I wasn't getting much sleep and was coming to school tired and grumpy. I fell asleep in his class because I was so tired. After class he talked to me about my sleeping. He didn't get mad or anything, he just asked if everything was alright at home and stuff. He didn't make me feel bad for sleeping and made a joke about how boring his class must be. Anyway, he was a nice teacher and I liked to talk to him.

Teachers play an important role in the success of resilient students. In three

qualitative studies, resilient at risk students mentioned school staff who had taken a personal interest in them as being important to their success (McMillan & Reed, 1993; Rak & Patterson, 1996, Werner, 1984). Both interpersonal relations and professional competence are important to at risk students. They cite the following interpersonal qualities of a teacher as important; having respect for them as persons and as learners, being able to get along with them, listening without being intrusive, taking them seriously, being available and understanding, helping and providing encouragement, and laughing with them. Clayton was reminded of a teacher who had a positive impact in his education when he was younger. "I had a lot of trouble in math.... I tried to do the work but I had trouble. I fooled around in class, but he would turn everything I did into a joke and tried to help me out. I learnt a lot from him and I still like math now."

Participants felt they could talk to good teachers about almost anything and that the teacher would listen without judging the student. Leslie indicated that she had a few teachers over the years whom she felt she could confide in. "I could talk to a couple of teachers because they would listen and seemed to care about me and what I was saying, but some teachers don't care if you have problems or anything." Conversely, teachers can have a negative impact on students' resiliency and contribute to helplessness and vulnerability. Tyrone felt that the teachers at South Park high "wouldn't really give the attention I needed, I guess, so I could learn. And if I was behind on something I'd have to work really hard just to get back into the class and catch up with them. They wouldn't give me more attention to help me more and stuff like that." Tyrone expressed that he had difficulty in math, but he felt that the teacher wasn't very approachable. "In math I

had a hard time. I kept asking and asking and then he'd just tell me to look in my notes.

I wouldn't understand my notes and I'd kind of be scared to ask him I guess to help me."

April felt that a teacher may have disliked her and treated her unfairly because she was Aboriginal.

Ya, a lot of things bothered me when I was in my English class there (South Park). I don't know, this one test we did, I looked at my test and I had failed it. I checked my test with a friend's sheet, she's a white girl, or whatever. I looked on her sheet and she had the same answer as me and I had it wrong and she had it right. I just thought..... oh, he failed me because I'm Indian.

James stated he dropped out of school for a number of reasons, but he felt "that some of the younger teachers on staff didn't really like him. I don't know, but for some reason they'd always be mad at me for something." These participants' feelings led to resentment towards the teacher, subject, and ultimately the school.

Importance of strong peer relationships and a social network. Friends play a major role in school adjustment and enhancing feelings of belonging (Cauce, 1986; Clark, 1991; Wang, 1997).

After the family, friends are the next most important source of social support (Clark, 1991). Friendship selection is influenced by similarity and reciprocity of liking (Berscheid & Walster, 1983). That is, similarity in physical characteristics, attitudes, personality, and academic ability are components of adolescent friendships. April was disappointed many of her Native friends had left school, but she was extremely upset when her best friend dropped out. "She was my best friend. I always went to school with her but I don't go to school with her any more. I find it lonely sometimes... there's nobody really to hang around with here at school." Tyrone's decision to return to North

Ridge was in part determined by decisions made by his peers. "Mitchell was going back to school in Battleford and Tyler said he was coming back here (North Ridge), so I didn't want to be the only one there.... like the only Indian I guess. I came back here because of my friends and family." Tyler left South Park partially "because my friends left and family things and that was about it." Peer relationships played a critical role in James's decision where he was planning to attend school next year. When asked where James intended on going to school next year he stated: "Either South Park High or North Ridge High I'd probably go here (North Ridge) because I wouldn't really like it by myself in South Park (the only First Nation student)." These thoughts were shared by Anna who attempted to remain at South Park high after all the First Nation high school students returned to North Ridge.

I was the last one (First Nation student) to leave (South Park), everyone else had already left. It was a hard decision because I knew if I left I wouldn't finish the second semester of grade 11. I tried to stay by myself for a couple of weeks, but it was too hard. I felt really alone and I had a hard time making myself go to school. At first I just missed a couple of days, but then I stopped going.

Because many First Nation students are from a different cultural background than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and have faced blatant and subtle stereotyping throughout their education, they often have difficulties establishing interracial friendships. One of the primary reasons Tyrone gave for leaving South Park high was that he "didn't get along with the (non-Native) students. It was simple things like not dressing appropriately. You know... just teenage stuff." Tyrone added that he felt the non-Aboriginal students may not have liked him "because I'm Native." Tyrone had difficulty accepting this and stated: "I don't know what it was... but some of those guys

would talk to Tyler and them, but they wouldn't talk to me. I don't know why. I often wonder." Friends have an impact on adolescents' feelings of academic competence and their attitudes toward school. Cauce (1986) found that the best predictors of social competence for lower class African-American students were the number of reciprocated best friends a student had, perceived social support obtained from friends, and friends' attitudes toward school. Students with the best academic records, who valued education and perceived themselves to be academically competent, had friends who also placed a high value on education. Rose stated that since transferring to North Ridge high school many of her new friends do not place a high value on education. "The friends I had in other schools did really well in school and studied for tests and stuff. Here a lot of the students don't seem to care if they pass or fail. I find it hard sometimes to do well when there are so few kids in the classes who try."

Clark (1991) found that for African American adolescents, developing friendships with children of other ethnicities resulted in greater achievement effort and higher grades. April, Tyler, and Rose were able to establish friendships with children of a variety of ethnicities while at South Park. These students felt as though they belonged and were part of the school. Conversely, Tyrone and Anna had difficulty in establishing friends at South Park high school and felt alienated which led to their decision to leave South Park high school. Leslie, James, and Clayton had not established meaningful interracial relationships during the period in which they attended South Park high. Riles (1995) found that where First Nation students are concentrated, on-time graduation rates decline; but graduation rates climb where Aborigines are a greater fraction of the student

population, but not more than 80%. April recommended a way to improve South Park high school would be to “have more Native students go to school there... about half. So you’d just be used to the classes and have your friends on the same sport teams as you.”

As Clark (1991) suggests, reciprocated friendships are necessary for children to feel that they possess peer competence, an important dimension of self-esteem for adolescents. The self-esteem which is derived from participating in the school physical education program is twofold. Not only do these participants gain social stature, confidence, and self-esteem from participating in the physical education program, but it appears that this stature may transfer to the ability to develop a larger social network. April at first was uncomfortable participating in sports with a majority of non-Native girls, but found that this experience assisted her in developing more non-Native friends. “Ya, I always felt awkward. I always did sports and was the only Native girl sometimes doing sports with all those white girls, but I managed to make more friends with those girls (non-Native) than other girls from the reserve did.” As Clark (1991) suggests, interracial friendships are enhanced when students have an opportunity to participate together in extracurricular activities. April said, “Our coach told us to get along. Like we were doing the same thing together all the time and were trying to be the best team. I got along with the girls on the volleyball team because we wanted to win.” Clark (1991) suggests that interracial friendships are facilitated when they share a common goal, such as getting good grades or winning a sports event. However, when it came to track and field, April preferred to practice with the Native boys. April did participate with the girls, but found the familiarity of the First Nation boys and added competition that

accompanied training with them beneficial. "I'd do track with the boys... the Native boys. Sometimes I would do track with some of the girls there.... cuz they were in my category and I was supposed to train with them. I just liked the competition from the boys."

Theme Five

School Physical Education Program

Hovland (1990) stresses the importance of involving students in a broad school physical education program:

During the season when students are involved discipline problems drop, attendance increases, academic achievement of participating students increases, and out of school problems decrease dramatically. One can only conclude that there is a positive link between academic achievement and involvement in activities beyond the school day (p. 18).

Through their involvement in the school physical education program, resilient children are able to identify with school and its structure more readily (Finn, 1989; Marsh, 1993).

Finn (1989) found that participation in "extracurricular activities, such as athletics, may have the potential for contributing to the students' sense of identification with the school" (p. 129). Marsh (1993) furthered Finn's (1989) research and reported that participation in sport led to an "increased commitment to, involvement with, and identification with school and school values" (p. 35). Finn (1989) and Marsh (1993) have suggested enhanced academic self-concept may result from this increased identification with the school. This is evidenced by April who did not find the rules and

policies of South Park school inhibiting or restrictive when she was actively involved in volleyball. She tolerated the demands placed on her by the school and her volleyball coach in order to remain on the team. "He wanted a good team and so did I. I just wanted to play for the team." The school physical education program provides a rich array of opportunities and experiences which may be one of the reasons many students stay in school, much less find personal meaning for this time in their lives (Hall, 1984). In April's case, sports and athletic participation were aspects of her education which she wanted to exemplify. To achieve this end, April has been giving serious consideration to attending a First Nation residential boarding school next year. "There's more good sports over there (at the residential school). Ya, I just want to go over there and play sports. I'll go over there and play hockey. They travel around like everywhere for sports... volleyball, baseball, track and field and they go to Regina. They go to provincials all over." April acknowledged that she had been able to participate in provincial championships while attending South Park school, but she stated that she preferred "a Native school and a residence." April identifies with a school which has a balance between sports, residence, and a First Nation institution.

A student's inability to make school athletic teams may result in lower self-concept and disassociation with the school and its structure. Tyrone tried out for the volleyball team, but was one of the last cuts, he had difficulty in accepting this decision. "I was six feet tall and there were guys that were five feet tall. They beat me out and I was wondering why. I asked the coach and he said "it was because of my skills, but I don't know... In our Phys. Ed. classes we always played volleyball and I thought I was

better than them.” Tyrone was left with the feeling that he was not wanted and felt that “they had their two token Native guys on the team already” and they didn’t need him. In part this rejection from the school volleyball team contributed to Tyrone’s sense of alienation and desire to return to North Ridge. “I just felt I had been cheated out of a spot... It’s hard to forget those kinds of things. I guess I pretended I didn’t care about it but it bothered me a lot. It all builds up throughout the semester and I decided to come to North Ridge.”

Research has repeatedly reaffirmed the role of sports and extracurricular activities in the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996; Fejgin, 1994; Marsh, 1993); nevertheless, legislators and school boards continue to wage war against these components of school life. Conventional wisdom continues to insist that participation in these activities must be permitted only as a reward for good academic performance. James is quick to point out how difficult this past school year has been for him. “Sports are my life and when I couldn’t play I really didn’t want to go to school.” James was not allowed to participate in the school physical education program because of the school’s attendance policy. North Ridge school requires that students regularly attend and miss no more than fifteen days of school a semester; however teachers are allowed to implement the policy if they feel it is warranted. The administration thought that these students will work harder to ensure that they can participate in the extracurricular aspect of the physical education program. However, for James the policy had the opposite effects of those intended, it served to make school an alienating place that no longer held any interest for him. This disinterest

in school led to more absences and ultimately he dropped out. The physical education program at North Ridge school had provided James with a reason to attend school, although at times his attendance was lacking, but when the program was removed he no longer identified with the school. James felt that “there should be more sports to keep students interested in school. If I could change the school I would have phys.ed. everyday and after that I’d have math.” Research supports James’s opinion as McMillan and Reed (1993) suggest that “extracurricular activities need to be expanded and promoted in schools where there are large populations of at risk students” (p. 140).

When children find a haven and a source of self-esteem in hobbies and creative interests, a protective buffer develops (Brooks, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1982).

When at risk youth are encouraged by significant others to participate in activities and interests, they provide these youngsters with an “opportunity to internalize a source of pride and self-esteem” (Weinreb, 1997, p. 17). Self-esteem is a measure of individual self-worth which is often referred to as self-concept. There is growing recognition among researchers of the role self-esteem plays in academic achievement. Marsh (1993) suggests that promotion of physical activity has positive effects across a wide variety of educationally relevant outcomes for a diverse population of students with the largest effects on social self-concept. Multiple studies have indicated that there is evidence which supports the existence of a positive relationship between involvement in

school physical education programs and higher levels of self-esteem (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996; Fejgin, 1994; Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1993; Smith, 1994; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992).

In part, an understanding of this research led North Ridge First Nation to acknowledge its athletes through an annual awards banquet. The Director of Education indicated that "recognizing students' achievements in school athletics is one means to help them feel like they belong in the school. It builds students' self-esteem when they are recognized in the community as doing something positive." The Director of Education felt that the sports programs in the community and particularly the athletic endeavours encouraged at the school were paramount to establishing a comprehensive school program. "Presently we have a physical education program from kindergarten through grade 12 with a trained specialist. Physical education and athletic opportunities are a great way for our students to showcase their talents and abilities." Evidence suggests that participation in the school physical education program leads to higher levels of self-esteem and this increased self-esteem leads to greater academic achievement (Fejgin, 1994). The Director of Education viewed the physical education program at the school as a means of achieving a greater level of self-esteem among the students of North Ridge First Nation. Support for school physical education programs and athletics has been reaffirmed by Holland and Andre (1987) who found that participation in athletics was correlated with higher levels of self-esteem, academic ability in males, educational aspirations, and lower delinquency rates. Consequently, the interrelationship between these factors must be explored to determine their impact on

participants and non participants in the school physical education program. Building confidence and self-esteem is a critical element of adolescent education. If individuals report growth in the school physical education program, then the structure and role of athletics may need to be investigated.

Participants in the school physical education program experience a greater amount of status and attention in the school from both teachers and peers (Braddock, et al., 1991; Morgan & Alwin, 1980; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973).

“Interscholastic and intramural sports participants derive social status advantages, popularity, and a sense of importance among their schoolmates that are directly related to their involvement in school athletics” (Braddock et al., 1991). This is not surprising, given the special prominence that researchers have found athletes to occupy within the adolescent subculture of schools (Braddock, 1982; Coleman, 1961; Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973). Students who participate in the school physical education program are less likely to be involved in school related social misconduct problems, more likely to look forward to their core curriculum classes, and less likely to be judged by their teachers as not giving full effort in their class work. Taken together, these data offer evidence that physical education participation can and often does have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement in traditional academic norms and behaviours.

Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) found that involvement in school physical education programs tend to “engender higher perceived peer status and is not necessarily detrimental to academic pursuits” (p.181). Research has demonstrated that participation in the school physical education program and athletics is associated with more status,

prestige, and power within school societies (Eder & Parker, 1987). Tyler was aware that he received extra attention from both students and staff at South Park high because of his involvement in inter-school athletics. "I don't know. The teachers were nice to me and everything. They joked around with me a lot and asked me if I was in training and that stuff." Tyler also found that he was treated differently by some staff members than many of his non-participating Native peers. "Some teachers would cut me some slack on assignments, but I did my work.... the teachers seemed to try to like me more than some of my friends."

Morgan and Alwin (1980) supported this conclusion as they found that of all types of extracurricular activities, inter-school athletics persistently has the highest levels of status and prestige. April was quite aware of the impact that her participation in the school physical education program had on her popularity. April found that students at South Park high school would talk to her more readily than some of her Native friends because of her involvement in school sports teams. "Ya. Just because you're good at sports people were nice to you and talked to you." Participation in the inter-school athletic teams was shown to enhance popularity and contribute to greater involvement in extracurricular and community activities (Melnick, et al, 1992). Tyler also found that through his participation in sports many of the non-Native students wanted to be friends and get to know him.

Ya, sports helped a lot. A lot of the white kids talked to me a lot. They hung around with me because I was doing all of these sports. It helped me have a bit of a relationship with them outside of school. Some thought I was cool because I was a good athlete or whatever and would talk to me more than some of the other guys from the reserve.

Clayton stated that during physical education classes he was often selected to lead teams and was given extra responsibilities from his physical education teacher. "I helped set up or take down equipment and I would get to be the captain of teams or help organize a bit I guess." These extra responsibilities assisted in building Clayton's self-esteem and sense of ability.

Involvement in behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, violent and delinquent behaviours, premature and unsafe sexual activity that may result in pregnancy or diseases such as AIDS, and dropping out of school may occur when adolescents do not feel valued by society (Mundy, 1996). A need to feel valued may be one of the reasons why young people choose sport as an avenue for seeking recognition. "If they are able to achieve status as an elite athlete, they will become role models, be rich and famous, and be idolized by others" (Danish & Nellen, 1997, p. 103-104). James' self concept decreased after dropping out of school. At school he had a large social network of friends who in part validated his identity as a premier athlete in the school and community. As he stated at the onset of the interview "Sports are my life." Throughout his life he has been revered and rewarded for his contribution to school teams and the school physical education program, but when this avenue was removed from him he felt incomplete. "I dunno... it's hard for me to explain. I spent so much of my time playing sports and stuff.. I was kinda lost when it was taken away. I still play recreational sports in the evenings, but it's different." Holland and Andre (1987) state, "The school and community contexts in which extracurricular activities take place are likely to influence the perceived nature and value of extracurricular activities among students" (p.

445). At North Ridge First Nation athletes and athletic competition is held in high regard; this can be evidenced by the number of banquets, award ceremonies, round dances, and accolades showered on participants. The community has organized and participates in a multitude of sporting events at considerable expense and utilization of human resources. Therefore, these young athletes experience a higher level of recognition among peers and within the community as being valuable and of importance.

Participation in the school physical education program reduces the likelihood of dropping out of school (Hall, 1984; Finn, 1989; McNeal, 1995; Melnick, 1992; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1990; Vaughn, 1968).

In a recent study of African-American and Hispanic youth, Melnick et al (1992) found that "athletic participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for some minority youth" (p.295). April stated: "I like taking Phys. Ed.... and the best part of school is sports." When asked why she enjoyed sports and physical education so much she replied, "cuz I love doing sports. I love sports. I get the chance to be with my friends and go to a lot of places." Tyler was asked why he was auditing Wellness ten even though he already had credit for the course. "I don't know. It's something to do. I enjoy hanging out with my friends and playing some games and activities." More recently, McNeal (1995) stated that "Participating in the athletic arena significantly reduces the student's likelihood of dropping out, whereas participation in the academic and vocational spheres does not" (p.74). Eder and Parker (1987) also determined that athletics' prominence in the school and peer culture clearly serves to keep students in school. A school suspension at South Park high school prevented Tyler from

participating in athletics for the remainder of the school year and served as an impetus to attend school at North Ridge high school. "I left because they said I couldn't do track and field because of what happened when we went to provincial volleyball. That was a major reason why I came back (to North Ridge)."

April's commitment to the South Park high school volleyball team required a great deal of dedication to both practice and school. "I only missed two or three days of school for the entire volleyball season. Cuz if we missed too much school we weren't allowed to play. The coach made sure we were all coming to school and doing good at our school work." The volleyball coach had policies in place that ensured April had regular attendance and completed her school work. "Ya if you didn't rally (practice) during intramurals or if you missed our practices or if you were late. He knew we were all in school all the time anyway." April's involvement with the girls' volleyball team served to increase her commitment to school and her studies.

Participation in the school physical education program serves to enhance academic achievement (Camp, 1990; Haensly et al., 1986; Schafer & Armer, 1968), self-esteem (Crain et al., 1982; Grabe, 1981; Phillips, 1969), and promotes educational aspirations (Spady, 1971; Spreitzer & Pugh).

Much attention has been directed towards personal benefits derived from participation in school physical education programs. The social benefits which can be accrued from participation in school physical education programs are often overlooked due to the fact that they do not lend themselves to scientific analysis (Martens, 1986, p. 87). Social benefits attributed to participation in the school physical education program

include the development of friendships, cooperation and teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, and responsibility (Martens, 1986, p. 86-87). Wuest and Bucher (1995) describe the positive contributions of sport participation in the following manner:

Physical education and sport provides unique opportunities to enhance social and emotional development and to enrich the lives of the program participants. Carefully designed programs help participants develop personally through settings that allow them to learn how to cooperate and work together to achieve common goals. Such programs also challenge individuals to exhibit sportsmanship and to adhere to the principles of fair play, which promotes self-discipline, self-responsibility, and self-confidence (p. 41).

April maintained a passing average while at South Park high school during her first semester of grade 10, she also committed to the most intense sporting team at the school in addition to her responsibilities at home. She complied with a school policy requiring regular attendance and a passing average in her classes in order to participate. April stated: "You had to have good attendance and good skills. You had to have good marks. For your tests you had to pass your tests cuz he (the coach) would know if you were having a test or something. He would find out if you passed or not. I worked hard at school to make sure I got to play." In a national survey of American high school students Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) noted six reasons why participation in the school physical education program may enhance academic outcomes.

These include an increased interest in school, including academic pursuits, high academic achievement in order to maintain eligibility to participate in sport, increased self-concept that generalizes to academic achievement, increased attention from coaches, teachers, and parents, membership in elite groups and an orientation towards academic success, and expectations of participation in college sport (p. 391).

The principal of North Ridge High was aware of the students' interest and enjoyment of physical education classes and athletics. In part, this awareness of his

students' interest in physical education led to his decision to offer the course first period in the morning.

Physical education is offered to high school students first period everyday in an attempt to get students to school on time. Most of our students, in particular those who have difficulty in other classes, find Phys. Ed. to be a class they can excel at. It builds their self-esteem and gives them a reason to get here in the morning.

The school physical education program, particularly inter-school athletics, enabled Tyler to maintain an interest and a desire to do well in school. While attending South Park high school and playing volleyball Tyler passed all his first term classes. When his eligibility to participate in the school physical education program was removed, Tyler's attendance, marks, and attitude toward education floundered. There are a number of studies which support the existence of a positive relationship between participation in school physical education programs and academic achievement. Soltz (1986) describes a comparative study of high school students who participated in interscholastic sport versus those who were non-participants. In stating his conclusions Soltz (1986) indicated the following:

These data argue strongly that student athletes' grades do not suffer as a result of participation in sports. To the contrary, athletes GPAs are significantly higher than nonparticipating students'. In addition, significantly fewer athletes receive a failing grade during competition than when they are not actively competing (p. 23).

Soltz (1986) conclusions can be applied directly to Tyler's comments on his inability to do what he perceived as an easier workload when not involved in the school physical education program. This was also evident in James's ineligibility to participate in inter-school athletics due to a school attendance policy. "I was doing good in my classes, not

great but alright then I don't know. I couldn't play anymore sports or anything so I kind of gave up a bit." Eventually, James lost total interest in school and dropped out.

Chapter Five

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must be what the community wants for all its children”

(Dewey, 1956, p. 7).

Recommendations

Nowhere are the problems and needs of children as great as in Canada's First Nation communities where the lives of so many children are in disarray. Their families, communities, and community agencies, including schools, are desperately depleted of resources and spirit. Problems abound, including unemployment, crime, child abuse and neglect, and addiction to drugs and alcohol (Bowker, 1992). As Wang (1997) suggests, “This litany of troubles sometimes overshadows the problem of widespread academic failure in the schools, which could cripple the next generation” (p. 255). Despite these difficulties, many First Nation youth manage to rise above the problems and mature into healthy, competent, well-educated adults. Children are remarkably resilient (Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1984); they respond readily to caring adults and a supportive community. What can we, as stakeholders in First Nation education, do to enhance the resiliency of First Nation students to positively impact their educational prospects?

Research has demonstrated that “many children do not succumb to deprivation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what it is that protects them from hazards they face” (Rutter, 1979, p. 70). Research in educational resiliency is based on

the concept of human capacity to withstand and adapt despite developmental risk and adversity, a human phenomenon rooted in the work of developmental psychology (Garmezy, 1974). Five powerful and pervasive themes were identified in my study which influenced a child's resiliency in education; personal characteristics and attributes, family factors, community and school supports, constructive use of time, and the school physical education program. The mix of these environmental features, in combination with each individual child's vulnerability to particular stressors, determines the impact of environmental adversities on their educational accomplishments (Wang, 1997). As educators, we must enhance the positive influences in the lives of First Nation children if we hope to make First Nation education truly reflective of that envisioned by the Indian Control of Indian Education document (1972).

Schools are the primary focus when we seek to improve the education in First Nation communities. However, school improvement efforts must also take into account that significant learning occurs outside the school. The capability of schools can be greatly enhanced through a better understanding and appreciation of community resources and influences, family educational goals, and factors that foster resiliency and learning success. The growing problems facing First Nation children and families stem from a variety of economical, political, and social pressures. The economic disparity and social conditions which have plagued Canada's First Nation population for generations will not be remedied immediately or easily. The solutions are by nature complex and require long term programs of study that integrate knowledge and expertise from many disciplines and professions.

Schools in Saskatchewan are responsible for effectively serving an increasingly culturally diverse and economically heterogeneous student population. It is estimated that in seven years more than 25% of the student population in Saskatchewan will be Aboriginal in heritage (Saskatchewan Education, 1997). Implementing effective school responses to student diversity requires major institutional changes and approaches to school restructuring that can lead to significant improvements which are genuinely responsive to the diversity of student needs. This need is particularly pressing in schools where there is a large population of students who live in poverty and face adverse life situations due to a litany of circumstances. What is needed is a coordinated and unified approach by all First Nation stakeholder groups to impact change within this impoverished group.

I believe a cultural renaissance is occurring in many First Nation communities throughout Saskatchewan. Communities are reclaiming their culture, language, and traditions which were nearly eradicated by years of European assimilation and oppression. Through this reclamation of traditions and culture many First Nation people are taking strides to improve families and communities. Schools are inextricably linked to the community and family and with their advancement comes educational improvement. There are many needs in First Nation communities and short term, independently applied programs will not achieve their intended goals. I recognize and acknowledge that there are multiple factors and issues which need to be addressed in order to effectively enhance educational resiliency among First Nation youth. At the onset, I stated that the study was going to examine the school physical education

programs contribution to the educational development of First Nation youth. However, the participants of this study altered the direction of the study. The study has been enriched by the participants' perspectives and these perspectives have served to enhance the findings of the study. The concept of resiliency was such a powerful theme that it became the driving force of the study and comprises the bulk of recommendations.

The recommendations have stemmed from my research with the First Nation youth of North Ridge First Nation; the applicability to other scenarios will have to be evaluated by individuals associated with those organizations. Too often the same approach is used for all children and those who do not fit that approach are likely to fail. The strategies and recommendations which follow will likely be more successful with students who have a greater appreciation and involvement with the school physical education program. Interventions that do not take a child's unique qualities into account will be less effective. One must remember that other aspects of the school educational or extracurricular program may be substituted for the school physical education program at the top of the tipi. Every child has individual preferences and receives benefits from the participation in these areas of interest. Educators should be cautioned that there are no quick fixes or silver bullets; what is needed is a long term commitment to the development and enhancement of programs serving First Nation youth.

The school physical education program in developing resiliency.

The school physical education program can be an effective means to build and

develop resiliency in First Nation youth. Understanding the components which effect resiliency in First Nation youth is imperative if we as physical educators want to effectively impact change. The challenge for schools is to develop appropriate and desirable educational programming for First Nation youth that adhere to the tenets of resiliency. Multiple researchers concur that the school physical education program may be an ideal medium for achieving this goal (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; McMillan & Reed, 1993; Mundy, 1996). The school physical education program becomes an effective component in a resiliency strategy once the participants begin to recognize that the essential elements involved in athletic participation can be transferred to other areas of their lives. This idea has been encapsulated in the work of Danish et al (1990):

When knowing oneself becomes as important as proving oneself, sport becomes an essential element in personal growth and self expression. In other words, there is nothing magical about a ball, or for that matter, any sport object or sport venue. It is not the sport per se that teaches the life skills; it is a sport experience that is designed in such a fashion that its participants can transfer what is learned to other domains such as school, home, and the workplace (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1990, p. 6).

The school physical education program may provide an ideal situation to develop resiliency in First Nation youth. Martinek and Hellison (1997) believe that "Social competence, autonomy, and optimism and hope are potential products of a good physical activity program" (p. 41). These are essential characteristics of resilient youth (Benard, 1993; Werner, 1984). Martinek (1997) suggests the highly interactive character of the physical education program affords it the "potential for teaching life values and effective decision making through physical activity" (p. 4). Research has concluded that the "physical education program is a rich context for promoting sociomoral development"

(Miller et al., 1997, p. 114). Collingwood (1997) found that “physical training can be as critical as other educational or therapeutic strategies for not only changing health behaviour, but also for impacting values and psychological functioning” (p. 67). His research indicated that “a physical training program could be a valuable intervention that can help youth develop responsible behaviour and be better able to choose a health enhancing as opposed to a health compromising lifestyle” (Collingwood, 1997, p. 81). The challenge for schools then is to develop physical education programs that will promote and cultivate the traits associated with resiliency.

How do First Nation participants in the school physical education program benefit from physical activity? For transferability to take place, participants first must believe that they have skills and qualities that are of value in other settings. Most participants in the school physical education program do not recognize that many of the skills they have acquired in order to play sports, or for that matter, to survive in their neighbourhoods, are transferable to other areas of life (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Too often, adolescents believe that excelling in the physical education program only requires the use of the body from the neck down. Athletes must plan, set goals, make decisions, and seek out instruction as a routine part of their athletic participation. When participants in the school physical education program recognize that the mental skills they possess are critical to their success in sport, they not only improve their athletic performance but are in a position to transfer the skills to other areas (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

Several aspects of the school physical education program may facilitate the

process of academic resilience and attachment for First Nation youth. As noted earlier, components of the school physical education program tend to require consistent investment in the form of practice and conditioning, an adherence to rules of fair competition, a willingness to work with other students for common goals, and the ability to persist in the face of losses. Participation in the school physical education program can then be seen as a mechanism that can enhance and complement academic resiliency. Academic resilience and attachment parallels athletic persistence and determination that is generated in the day to day activities of coming to practice, stretching and conditioning the body, competing, and finally starting the process all over again, despite occasional losses (Braddock et al., 1991; p. 113).

The school physical education program, hobbies, and creative interests help promote the growth of self-esteem. Being recognized and supported for special talents is an essential element of the human condition. Involvement in an activity considered special by peers appears to increase self-esteem and a belief in one's ability to succeed (Werner, 1984; Coburn & Nelson, 1989; McMillan & Reed, 1993). Werner (1993) and Brooks (1994) maintain that building self-esteem in young people is a fundamental ingredient of any intervention procedure. Involvement in the school physical education program may provide an important social-psychological support system by connecting the students to others in meaningful ways. Success in these activities may be important in enhancing self-esteem by providing recognition and a sense of accomplishment (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Rutter (1987) contends that self-esteem and efficacy are in large measure based on an individual's successful accomplishment of tasks that are

important to that individual. Athletic participation is clearly important to many First Nation youth who devote considerable time, energy, and other resources to its pursuit. Involvement in the school physical education program has even been conceptualized as investment and is, unlike many other adolescent activities, usually a function of a student's own decision rather than the decision of parents and teachers (Nettles, 1989). The school physical education program creates important opportunities for students to excel and to fit into the school community in a meaningful way (Coleman, 1994; Wilson, 1990). These kinds of opportunities are especially important for First Nation students, who may lack legitimate opportunities to invest their skills and efforts outside the school setting. In addition, sport involvement may be the primary sphere of investment that provides young First Nation students with social rewards both in a wider social environment and among their peers. This intersection of peer and societal endorsement is of considerable importance to First Nation youth and may help to provide additional opportunities for future legitimate pursuits in both educational and economic arenas. This is evidenced in Braddock's (1991) study of African-American males as he found that "sport participation is positively associated with aspirations to enroll in academic or college preparatory programs in high school, to complete high school, and to attend college" (p. 128).

Regular attendance at school is associated with positive social behaviour and citizenship. Participation in the school physical education program has been associated with higher levels of attendance (Marsh, 1993) and lower dropout rates (Finn, 1989). School physical education programs provide students with an opportunity to interact with

their peers in a positive environment, while helping them identify with school. "The extent to which a youngster identifies with school is related to such behaviours as absenteeism, truancy, dropping out, and delinquency" (Finn, 1989, p. 126-127). Well planned and closely supervised school physical education programs help participants develop social values and a sense of belonging. Kaplan (1996) states "Young people need to belong. They need to form trusting and mutually satisfying relationships with others. Students will internalize the values of groups which meet this need" (p. 10). Through participation in the school physical education program, schools provide students with an opportunity to develop characteristics of positive citizenship such as responsibility, cooperation, and fair play.

Research has consistently shown that school physical education programs can be an effective intervention context to enhance personal and social responsibility in at risk populations (DeBusk & Hellison, 1989; Hellison & Templin, 1991). Through carefully designed physical education programs First Nation youth can model and practice self-responsibility and extend this sense of responsibility to others and their communities. As Park (1983) suggests, physical educators have a unique opportunity to teach ethical values and influence the moral behaviour of students through sports and games. It is imperative that school physical education programs teach values to offset the negative values being presented in the community. This is a controversial issue in publicly funded education; however, explicit values and clear expectations are needed. As Gardner (1994) states: "Absence of instruction in values is the least of our problems. What is a problem is that the values taught may be destructive. The young person is

bombarded by value instruction, for good or evil, every waking hour" (p. x). The values that are relayed to students through physical education programs must coincide with First Nation epistemology and traditional values. Care must be taken to ensure that the community values are understood and coincide with those within the classroom. A potential example may be a value held by most physical education teachers of inclusive participation. In a dance unit, one might attempt to integrate traditional First Nation dances. This is potentially fraught with hazards as there are a myriad of traditional customs and values associated with First Nation dance. Rather than offending members of the community the prudent course of action would be to ensure the program of study and values are compatible with those of the community. However, one must remember, if physical education programs leave a void it will surely be filled by other, perhaps negative, values.

The school physical education program applied by itself can not repel the litany of life circumstances which children of poverty face. However, the school physical education program can play a pivotal role as part of a larger intervention strategy employed with First Nation youth. Pitter and Andrews (1997) in an overview of school physical education programs serving inner city youths in the United States are cautionary regarding the capability of school physical education programs to change a multitude of life circumstances. "Although sport may provide a means of motivating youth and providing them with a more positive outlook on life, it can not reverse the chronic unemployment, poverty, violent crime, and house decay impacting their life chances" (Pitter & Andrews, 1997, p. 96).

Constructive Use of Time

It was evidenced in the study that resilient participants' used their time positively and productively. They were actively involved in sporting teams, extracurricular activities, community events, school functions, and required house work at home. These constraints on their free, unsupervised time limited the opportunity to become bored and involved in negative behaviours. This positive involvement did not leave these participants with much spare time. Active involvement in the school physical education program was one of the primary sources for these participants' engagement in school and served as a refuge from the continual negative bombardment of attitudes within the community. Increased levels of self-esteem have been documented in numerous studies as a result of being involved in inter-school athletics, sport and the school physical education program (Geary, 1988; Marsh 1993). This recognition and additional support for their special abilities is important to children. McMillan and Reed (1994) postulate that such involvement may "provide an important social-psychological support system by connecting the students to others in meaningful ways" (p. 138).

Required helpfulness assists resilient children in realizing there are others who they can help. Required helpfulness may take the form of many activities; volunteering in the community, helping at home, babysitting, caring for an elder, helping others at school, caring for siblings are but a few examples. These activities limit the unproductive free time while providing purpose, direction, and level of caring for others.

Inter-agency Approach

There is an emerging organizational, professional, and institutional movement to address the multiple and interconnected needs of children and their families by bringing together social and health agencies, schools and other educational institutions (Wang, 1997). The goal is to create learning environments that support learning success by focussing on meeting the “physical and social needs of students and their families by linking these families with the multiple resilience enhancing resources of their communities” (Rigsby, Reynolds, & Wang, 1995). Community agencies desperately need to coordinate their efforts in service to First Nation children and families.

Presently, agencies are independent and uncoordinated in their service efforts. There is a legitimate effort being made by these service agencies to improve the quality of life and learning for these children, but the effort is fragmented. As Martinek and Hellison (1997) suggest, “numerous well-intended programs for addressing the problems of the poor have failed because of ill-defined goals and a fragile commitment to a philosophy undergirding the program” (p. 41). What is needed is a collaborative, coordinated, integrated, well planned approach spearheaded by all the associated agencies directed at the needs of First Nation youth and their families. The present piecemeal approach offered by each agency independently will not overturn the tide which is bearing down on First Nation communities and schools.

It is imperative to understand the causes of hopelessness and its link to vulnerability in at risk youth (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Martinek (1996) stated that

hopelessness can be related to two main factors: influence of significant others and environmental conditions. How does one agency involved with at risk students attempt to solve the myriad of problems faced by countless individual cases? Simply stated they become frustrated, overworked, and burn out trying to solve the multitude of societal and economical problems. However, if the problem is coordinated and the effort is united there is hope that these issues may be resolved. This approach coordinates the efforts of all concerned and brings many stakeholders interested in child welfare to bear on a given circumstance. Teachers are continually feeling the pressure to assume more and more roles when what is truly needed is the people with the expertise administering programs within the school context of an inter-agency approach.

Forging school connections with family and community.

At North Ridge First Nation, as in many other First Nation communities, the school is the focal point of the community. The school serves as the central site for recreational, political, and social functions and is the meeting place for youth and adults alike. Despite the multitude of negative influences which exist within North Ridge First Nation, the school cannot simply ignore the context in which it finds itself. For legitimate improvement to occur the parents and community need to have a voice and a stake in the success of the school. According to Nettles (1991), community characteristics of "high rates of poverty and crime, to name but two, are part of the problem. By other accounts, communities can be a part of the solution that seek to

provide for students social services, caring adults, and enhanced opportunities for intellectual and psychosocial growth” (p. 132). The community is an integral part of any solution concerning the youth of First Nation communities. Members of at risk families and communities are concerned with a multitude of issues and life circumstances which threaten their youth and themselves. Therefore, programs must be directed to meet the needs of not only the youth, but those of the family and the community. Programs which encourage parent and community involvement in school based programs for youth is necessary. When students see significant adults in their lives demonstrating caring, concern, and modelling behaviours which enhance not only academic achievement but basic concepts of being a good role model then progress has been made. This protective mechanism for First Nation youth can be enhanced by “stability, self-direction, and problem solving ability of significant adults” (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 40). It is imperative, therefore, that intervention programs help foster an understanding of and support for family members.

Many First Nation parents have been stripped of traditional parenting skills through years of assimilation and the residential school experience. The residential school proved to destroy First Nation families and communities. These problems cannot be quickly remedied, but communities which offer parenting classes and other proactive programs are taking positive steps to reclaim their pride and hope for First Nation families. Reconnecting the primary caregivers with at risk children will serve to fortify the chances for increasing resiliency (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

Importance of significant others, teacher expectations, and a caring environment.

Werner (1984, 1986, 1990), Garmezy et al. (1984), Bolig and Weddle (1988), Beardslee and Podorefsky (1988), and Dugan and Coles (1989) identified role models outside the family as potential buffers for vulnerable youth. Gordon and Song (1994) emphasize the importance of having a meaningful relationship with a significant other. They underscore the important role that the significant other plays in modelling, guiding, providing, and mentoring to those who try to defy the odds set against them. "The experience of accountability to, or identification with, another person is viewed as a universal factor in human development" (Gordon & Song, 1994, p. 36). As educators, we must provide students with the opportunity to have contact with an adult who cares and offers support. As inner-city Oakland physician Barbara Staggars observed:

With all the kids I know who make it, there's one thing in common: an individual contact with an adult who cared and who kept hanging in with the teen through his hardest moments... People talk programs and that's important. But when it comes down to it, individual person-to-person connections make the difference... Every kid I know who made it through the teenage years has at least one adult in his life who made the effort (Foster, 1994, p. 53-54).

Given the incredible stresses the First Nation family system is experiencing, school has become a vital refuge for a large portion of that population. Often the school serves as a "protective shield to help children withstand the vicissitudes that they can expect of a stressful world" (Garmezy, 1991, p. 419). Children can use school activities as a support for healthy adjustment, particularly if the school offers a caring and nurturing environment. The level of caring and support within a school gives a powerful

indicator of positive outcomes for youth. Werner (1990) in her research of the children of Kauai acknowledges that “among the most frequently encountered positive role model in the lives of the children of Kauai, outside of the family circle, was a favourite teacher. For the resilient youngster a special teacher was not just an instructor of academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification”(p. 45). Rak and Patterson (1996) suggest that “the persistent interest of a teacher who meets the child daily in the classroom can be vital in supplementing the mentoring provided by others” (p. 372).

It is apparent that if First Nation students are to be successful in their academic endeavours they must have positive relationships with significant others. A great number of First Nation children, for a variety of reasons, are not connecting or receiving adequate guidance from their primary caregivers. Consequently, these positive role models and relationships must be established outside the traditional environment, and teachers involved in these students’ lives must take a leading role in providing this much needed relationship. While many teachers feel legitimately powerless to change personal circumstances or family dysfunction, we can serve as mentors and provide social support. Noddings’ (1988) research into the power of caring relationships found that “at a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, and take delight in each other’s company” (p. 45). As Weinreb (1997) suggests, “You might be a life raft for a child experiencing threatening risks and highly stressful life events. Can you dare

to care for a child you suspect lives with big-time troubles" (p. 15)?

School reform

The existence of alternative schools and alternative programming suggests that publicly funded schools are not meeting the needs of all students in Saskatchewan. This is particularly evident if one analyses the First Nation drop out literature. In an ever growing pluralistic society the traditional public school is experiencing a dearth of intervention strategies for First Nation students. This is especially true in impoverished communities where children often do not get much academic and social support outside of the school. Weiner (1993) argues that it is the schools that are at risk not the kids, and they need to change in fundamental ways if they are to truly meet kids' needs. Comer (1987) acknowledges this research and states: "The sources of risk are in the schools, as well as in societal and family conditions outside the school" (p. 14).

The school environment must be developed to promote a sense of student empowerment, optimism, self-efficacy, and a sense of personal responsibility. Providing First Nation youth with the opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility in school is a natural outcome in schools that have high expectations. According to Rutter, (1979) schools with low levels of delinquency were schools in which children were given a lot of responsibility. They participated actively in all sorts of things that went on in school; they were treated as responsible people and they acted accordingly.

Strong support exists for the notion that if a child makes a contribution to their social network, it facilitates the development of resilience. Such actions help children feel good about themselves and develop a sense of ownership and commitment (Brooks, 1991). Participation and responsibility in school is part of a fundamental human need for students, the need to have some control over one's life (Benard, 1993). Several educational researchers believe that when schools ignore these basic needs of students and adults, they become alienating institutions (Glasser, 1990; Wehlage et al., 1986). According to Sarason (1990), "When one has no stake in the way things are, when one's needs or opinions are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere."

The challenge for schools educating First Nation students is to engage them by providing meaningful activities and roles within the school. First Nation students attending predominantly non-Native publicly funded schools in Saskatchewan are often segregated and held as distinct through visible distinctions of skin colour and ethnicity. These barriers need to be addressed as the nature of schools in Saskatchewan becomes more pluralistic. These barriers can be dismantled through students' participation in cooperative endeavours such as the school physical education program. As Kaplan (1996) states "Active intramurals and strong cocurricular programs give students' enjoyable and interesting ways to belong to a group, to apply their new knowledge and skills, to contribute to the good of the whole, and to have fun with others " (p. 10).

Snyder and Spreitzer (1992) indicate that involvement in school physical education programs provides a payoff in terms of social status. Moreover, Marsh (1993) reports that participation in school physical education programs favourably affected social self-concept in high school students.

High expectations and the support necessary to achieve educational goals

Teachers and schools often fall victim to the impoverished surroundings of the larger community and like “many of their students, teachers too, lose hope” (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 40). As Benard (1993) states, in order to “see the strengths in children, teachers must be able to see their own strengths” (p. 48). Lack of parental and public interest in schooling at North Ridge First Nation assists in contributing to lower teacher morale and expectations for their students. Ultimately, these lowered expectations have a profound effect on student motivation. Martinek (1991, 1995) found that low teacher expectations reduces the quality of teacher-student communication, lowers self-concept, and performance expectations, and diminishes task persistence. Research has demonstrated that schools and teachers that establish high expectations for all students, and provide the support necessary to achieve those expectations, have high rates of academic success (Brophy & Good, 1974; Purkey, 1970; Good, 1987). In a study of impoverished schools in London, Rutter et al (1979) found that there were considerable differences in rates of delinquency, behavioural disturbances, attendance,

and academic attainment. The successful schools shared certain characteristics: an academic emphasis, clear teacher expectations and regulations, a high level of student participation, and alternative resources such as library facilities, vocational work opportunities, art, music, and extracurricular activities. It is evident that North Ridge High School and other schools educating First Nation students must establish clear, realistic, and high expectations for their students in order to stimulate a greater level of achievement.

The number of First Nation dropouts is indicative of the loss of hope experienced by students, teachers, and schools. These schools have in many regards become accustomed to the inordinate levels at which First Nation students drop out of school. Often teachers and administration expect or anticipate their early departure, yet for the most part they do not counter by providing effective alternative programming or meaningful restructuring. Many teachers, due to the life circumstances faced on the Reserve, have lower expectations of First Nation students. Often teachers view First Nation students empathetically which may result in lowered expectations and a pandering to and acceptance of inappropriate behaviours. Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, many First Nation students are stereotyped and judged prior to the commencement of the school year. They are put in the remedial classes and special programs without consultation because of their Aboriginal ancestry. There is a pervasive attitude among many schools and teachers that these students have learning disabilities, behaviour problems, and are lacking appropriate educational skills for their grade level.

As Weinstein (1991) suggests, teachers must convey the message: "This work is important; I know you can do it; I won't give up on you." These messages exert a powerful motivating influence, especially on students who receive the opposite message from families, communities, and peers. For many First Nation youth coming from impoverished living conditions, violence and abuse, and dysfunctional homes, a caring teacher may provide a child with an astonishing revelation. "A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel, she thinks I'm worth something; maybe I am" (Kidder, 1990).

Parents, teachers, or other adults in the community often lack high expectations for at risk youth. In fact, one of the characteristics that distinguishes at risk youth from resilient youth is the self-perpetuating cycle of low self-expectations. At risk youth have negative beliefs about themselves and their situation, "I'm not acceptable," "I can't succeed," and therefore lower their own expectations. Teachers must learn to view these students more positively and take care in the verbal and nonverbal messages they are sending. These negative messages only serve to confirm the negative feelings and beliefs they have about themselves. Positive messages that communicate expectations of success, not failure, are critical in breaking the negative self-perpetuating cycle of failure. Messages that convey an attitude of "You can do it," "You can be successful," have contributed to children seeing themselves as bright capable, and successful in life experiences (Mundy, 1996, p. 81).

Curriculum

Historically the content of First Nation education has been imposed from outside the First Nation community. The prescribed curricula have not encouraged First Nation children to develop pride in their heritage and culture, and indeed appeared to many students as irrelevant, uninspiring, and derogatory. For generations, the school system actively sought to destroy First Nation cultures and languages with varying degrees of success. The school curriculum is still transmitted almost entirely in English with First Nation languages subjugated to elective classes. A multicultural curriculum or immersion tells children of First Nation heritage that their cultural roots and languages are valued. As Winfield (1991) suggests:

Adolescents develop various types of identities that have important consequences for future success in school. Those who develop a raceless or bicultural identity are less at risk for academic failure; however, they are also alienated from peer groups at a time when peers play an important role in their development (p. 10-11).

Therefore, a strong identification with one's own culture may prove to be a desirable launching pad for a more practical appreciation of other cultures.

Citizenship refers to an individual's ability to exhibit behaviours which are consistent with the expectations of a society or organization. A stated function of school is to prepare students for a meaningful role in society. Therein lies a great difficulty for many First Nation students; for which society or culture are they preparing to enter? The education many First Nation students receive is often to the subversion of their own

culture and traditional beliefs. Euro-Canadians celebrate Columbus as a great adventurer and explorer who paved the way to the new world, while the First Nation perspective could legitimately portray Columbus as an exploiter of many cultures and responsible for cultural genocide. It is in this dichotomous environment in which First Nation students find themselves, often torn between traditional cultural values and those of the publicly funded school requiring citizenship as a passport to entire mainstream Canadian culture.

Schools educating First Nation students must start to assess the strengths these students possess and develop programming around these areas. For the participants in this study, it is easy to discern that the school physical education program plays an integral role. A rich and varied curriculum provides opportunities for students to be successful not just in academics but also in the arts, in sports, in community service, in work apprenticeship, and in helping peers. In doing so, it communicates the message that the unique strengths of each individual are valued. Schools that integrate academic and vocational education for all their students convey the message that both skills are vital to future success. Research has repeatedly reaffirmed the role of sports and extracurricular activities in the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996; Fejgin, 1994; Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1993; Smith, 1994); nevertheless, legislators and school boards continue to wage war against these components of school life. Conventional wisdom continues to insist that participation in these activities must be permitted only as a reward for good academic performance. A school curriculum that assigns greater priority to these activities that

students enjoy is one of the many school innovations that should be tested in a significant number of demonstration projects (Owens, 1991).

Due to a variety of circumstances, including low self esteem, First Nation students find themselves drowning in an ocean of inadequacy. However, every child has an “island of competence” (Brooks, 1994, p. 549); areas which are sources of pride and accomplishment. As part of an intervention strategy, parents, teachers, and other significant adults in the child’s life can identify and reinforce these islands of competency. Doing so may result in a ripple effect, motivating the child to venture forth and confront new tasks or challenge ones which were previously considered too difficult. This may be accomplished through an integration of subject areas which utilize curricular areas of strength to address areas of curricular weaknesses. Teachers and schools should build on student strength to reinforce areas of student’s weaknesses.

Concluding Thoughts:

There is evidence that a carefully constructed school physical education program, a caring teacher, and a will to make a difference may empower a student to defy the odds of their environment. Danish and Nellen (1997) recognize that one form of intervention may not be stand alone; rather “it may be more effective when complemented by other interventions targeting specific health compromising behaviours” (p. 104). One must remember the cautionary words of Pitter and Andrews (1995), who in an overview of

school physical education programs in the United States stated: "Although sport may provide a means of motivating youth and providing them with a more positive outlook on life, it can not by itself reverse the chronic unemployment, poverty, violent crime, and house decay impacting their life chances" (p. 96). Collingwood (1997) reiterates:

The application of physical education programs for at risk youth is not the total answer to meeting the needs of at risk youth. There are many other behavioural needs that must be met. However, getting youth involved in a systematic physical education program can serve as a readiness intervention to prepare youth for more in depth and expansive prevention and treatment programming (p.75).

Schools and teachers teach more than subject content and perhaps what students learn about themselves is as important as curricular knowledge. When the classroom fosters personal growth in conjunction with academic learning, it can enrich the lives of all students, and may provide First Nation students who have little support outside school with an opportunity to build a future.

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Appendix A

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

Submitted to the Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Science Research

1. Researchers:

Dr. Louise Humbert, College of Physical Education, U of S.

1a. Buryl Bernard, M. Ed.

2. Title of Study:

The Role of Physical Education and Inter-School Athletics in the Retention of
First Nation Students in Saskatchewan: A Case Study

3. Abstract:

Dropout rates among Canadian Native students are significantly higher than their non-Native counterparts (Anisef & Johnson, 1993; Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995; Ross & Usher, 1992 ; Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report,

1997). The Canadian Census conducted in 1991 found that Saskatchewan First Nation students had a disappointing graduation rate of 34.2% (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1995). Conversely, the Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report (1997) found that in 1992-93 Saskatchewan public school students had a graduation rate of 79.6%. The Office of the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan (1993) report stated that by the year 2011, 24% of the 10-14 year old students in Saskatchewan will be Treaty Indians. If the high dropout rates among the First Nation population continues and the population projections are accurate there is cause for concern.

Historically, athleticism and physical prowess has been revered within First Nation communities. Originally this prowess was determined by skillfulness at the hunt, physical ability for protection, and athleticism in games (Wise, 1976). Often skilful athletes became leaders and were held in high esteem by the entire community (Grueninger, 1988). Interim Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Morley Watson, stated that many First Nation communities in Saskatchewan are using sport and culture as a tool to keep young people out of trouble and in school. The study examines the relationship between participation in high school physical education classes and inter-school athletics and student outcomes of grade completion, academic performance, and educational aspirations in Saskatchewan First Nation students. Specifically, what are the perceptions and personal meanings First Nation students ascribe to their involvement in physical education and inter-school athletics.

4. Funding:

Funding is solely provided by the researcher.

5. Subjects:

The participants for this study will be Status Indians from one First Nation community in northwestern Saskatchewan. All the participants in the study will have demonstrated an interest and involvement in physical education classes and inter-school athletics. In addition, each of the participants started the school year at the same rural, public high school in northwestern Saskatchewan. The participants will be further classified into one of three more narrowly defined groups. The first group will include students who are currently attending the Saskatchewan public high school in which they were enrolled in at the start of the school year. The second group will have started the year in a Saskatchewan public high school but left to return to a band-controlled high school on the reserve. The third group will have started the school year in a Saskatchewan public high school but have since dropped out of school. Four participants for each group will be selected based on purposive sampling (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). It is anticipated that these three distinct groups of First Nation students will offer strikingly different perspectives on their diverse educational experiences and unique circumstances which led to their educational decision. All participants will be

asked to provide informed consent prior to participating in the study. A sample consent form is appended.

6. Methods and Procedures:

Qualitative methods including focus group interviews, student observation, and document analysis will be employed throughout the study. The decision to conduct focus group interviews was based primarily on the technique's ability to provide the framework within which "people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world" (Patton, 1990, p. 24). This is an important aspect of the focus group method as it addresses the need for a culturally sensitive tool. In addition, the focus group method puts a greater amount of control in the hands of the participants. The interaction among the participants replaces their interaction with the interviewer, leading to a greater emphasis on their point of view.

Using the file folder system, the entire documentation from the case study will be transcribed and photocopied (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Then individual units of information will be coded and placed into tentative categories. The categories are emergent from the documentation and develop around a theme or clustering of ideas. The photocopied pages are then cut up and coded sections placed into file folders labelled by category.

7. Risk or Deception:

There will be no deception at any time during the study. The risks to participants will be limited. The researcher will explain that participation in the research is voluntary and their participation in the study will not affect evaluative procedures in any way. It will be made clear to all participants that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

8. Confidentiality:

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. All information collected during the research will be locked in an office at the university and treated as confidential. The names of the participants will not be used in any printed or published reports that are produced. No school officials such as teachers, or principals will be present during any portion of the focus group interviews. It will be made clear to the participants that their responses will not be shared with teachers or administrators. It will be stressed to participants however, that there are limits on the confidentiality that can be guaranteed. The researcher can not ensure that members of focus group interviews will not share that information from the meeting outside of the group, however the researcher will make every effort to emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting issues of confidentiality in focus groups.

9. Consent:

Consent forms will be completed by all participants prior to the first interview (appended).

10. Debriefing and feedback:

Feedback will be given to the participants throughout the course of the study. Information gained from the focus group meeting will be shared with the participants prior to the commencement of the next focus group meeting. Member checks will then be used to ensure the participants perspectives were truly reflected in the focus group interviews. Participants will be given the opportunity to review thesis chapters prior to there submission to ensure accuracy. This will give those involved in the study the opportunity to confirm, expand, or refute any of the data collected.

11. Signatures:

_____ Date: _____

Dr. L. Humbert

Associate Professor, College of Physical Education

_____ Date: _____

Mr. Buryl Bernard

Graduate Student, College of Education

_____ Date: _____

Dr. R. Faulkner

Dean, College of Physical Education

Appendix B

Consent Forms

Buryl Bernard
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, SK.
S7N 5C2
Tel: 966-7579

Dr. Louise Humbert
College of Physical Education
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, SK.
S7N 5C2
Tel: 966-6473

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am writing this letter to ask for your help with an educational project involving your son/daughter. The study looks at First Nation students involvement in physical education classes and inter-school athletics and the effect on grade completion, academic performance, and educational aspirations. As a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan the study will be compiled into a thesis and serve as partial fulfilment of a Master's of Education degree.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. If your son/daughter decides to participate, he/she will be involved in focus group interviews with fellow students to discuss their experiences with physical education classes and inter-school athletics. These interviews will be done in groups of four students. To avoid disrupting scheduled classes, the focus group meetings will be at lunch time or after school. Your son's/daughter's decision to participate or not to participate will not affect their grade in school.

All information collected during the study will be securely stored for a minimum of five years and treated as confidential. In addition, pseudonyms will be used to ensure the information gathered from this study remains anonymous to safeguard the location of the community, school, and your son's/daughter's name. No school officials such as teachers or principals will be present during any portion of the focus group interviews. The participants responses will not be shared with teachers or administrators.

You should be cautioned that there are limits to the guarantee of confidentiality when participating in focus group interviews. I can not ensure that members within each focus group will not share the information from the meeting with people outside the group. However, I will make every effort to emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting issues of confidentiality in focus groups. Consequently, by signing the consent form your son/daughter agrees not to discuss the information shared within the focus group with others.

In an effort to gather representative and accurate statements of your son's/daughter's interview I would like to request permission to tape record the interviews. The tapes will be securely stored, used only by myself, and will not be redistributed. If at any time during the interview your son/daughter feels uncomfortable with being tape recorded the machine will be shut off. In addition, your son/daughter will be given the opportunity to confirm the information provided before it is submitted to my thesis committee. If your son/daughter wishes, they may withdraw from the study at any time.

If your son/daughter would like to participate in this project please complete the attached form below. Please read this letter with your son/daughter to ensure their willingness to be involved. If you or your son/daughter have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact Buryl Bernard at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, 966-7579 or my supervisor Dr. Louise Humbert at the College of Physical Education, 966-6473.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this educational project.

Sincerely;

Buryl Bernard

Parent/Guardian Consent Form:

I have read and understand the purpose of this study and my son's/daughter's involvement in the project. I am aware that my son/daughter will remain anonymous throughout the study and in any written results of the data collected through participation in the project. I am aware that my son/daughter has the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent letter for my records. Furthermore, my son/daughter agrees to treat the information shared during the focus groups as confidential and will not discuss this information outside the focus

group.

I _____ give permission to allow _____
(Parent/Guardian's name) (Student's name)

to participate in the project conducted by Buryl Bernard.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Guiding questions for interviews:

I First Nation participants who dropped out of a public high school in Saskatchewan:

What were some of the reasons why you left high school?

What were your physical education classes like?

How involved were you in inter-school athletics?

How could the school be changed to meet your needs?

Did you enjoy participating in physical education and inter-school athletics?

What was the best part of school?

What was the worst part about school?

Do you enjoy being physically active?

Did you like public school?

How important is education to you?

Was there an academic policy required to play inter-school athletics?

Did this policy affect your ability to participate in inter-school athletics?

What were the inter-school activities you participated in?

I liked high school when?

I didn't like high school when?

Do you intend to finish your high school education?

Guiding questions for interviews:

II First Nation participants who decide to leave a Saskatchewan public high school in favour of a band-controlled high school.

Why did you choose to attend the band-controlled school?

Are your physical education classes better or worst now?

Did participation in inter-school athletics increase or decrease with attending the band-controlled school?

How involved were you in inter-school athletics at the public school?

How could school be changed to meet your needs?

Do you enjoy participating in physical education and inter-school athletics?

What is the best part of school?

What is the worst part about school?

Do you enjoy being physically active?

Do you like public school?

How important is education to you?

Is there an academic policy required to play inter-school athletics in the public high school/ band-controlled school?

Did this policy affect your ability to participate in inter-school athletics in the public high school/band-controlled school?

What are the inter-school activities you participated in?

I like high school when?

I don't like high school when?

Figure 1
Resiliency Tipi

