

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Engagement and the Northern School Setting:  
A critical ethnography among the Tlicho First Nation of Behchoko, NWT

by

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## **Abstract**

Aim: To learn more about how features of a school's setting create or erode the engagement of northern Aboriginal students. Theoretical underpinnings include a recognition that: education is a key social determinant of health; that social injustice and unequal power structures can negatively influence health and education outcomes among Aboriginal populations, and that the activity structure of everyday life can help us examine and understand the culture, beliefs and behaviours of specific populations and communities.

Methods: A critical ethnography was undertaken at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in the Tlicho First Nation community of Behchoko, Northwest Territories, Canada. The research site was examined using an activity settings lens. Activity settings are everyday contexts of human interaction. Examples include a family having dinner, a math class at school or a group of teens chatting on the subway. Activity settings structure human experience. Qualitative and quantitative data sources for this study included participant observation field notes from 6-months field work, transcripts from focus groups and interviews, a photovoice self-published magazine, a retrospective student cohort study, archival documents, and video and photographs of cultural artefacts.

Results: Engagement among Tlicho youth is not only linked to participation and an alignment of values, as described for youth in other contexts, but it is also associated with attendance at school, appropriate behaviour, one's trajectory, one's level of resilience and with high school graduation. This study supports a multi-factor model of influence on school engagement. There are influences related to all components of activity settings including: physical resources and funds; people and roles; time; symbols and whether parallel settings exist in the broader environment. School engagement is created, for example, through the provision of a flexible bus system, a variety of courses, a school sports program and cultural activities. Engagement is

eroded through the under or misuse of funds, the transience of school staff, the lack of Tlicho teachers and the changing demographic profile of the school.

Conclusions and Significance: Activity settings provide a promising way to examine and analyse educational environments. The evidence supports a multi-factor model of influence. Significant potential exists to intervene at the setting and context level to improve the school engagement, and thus the health, of Tlicho youth.

Recommendations and suggestions for continued work in this area are outlined.

## **Acknowledgements**

By any account, the doctoral dissertation is a long journey. To the staff and students at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School and the Tłı̄ch̄Q Community Services Agency in Behchok̄, my deepest gratitude goes out to you for being such hospitable hosts. The study would not have been possible without the trust you placed in me and without your strong commitment and dedication to the youth of your communities. This journey was also greatly facilitated by the financial and professional support of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation (through a doctoral scholarship) and the Markin Chair in Health and Society Program at the University of Calgary (through a doctoral fellowship). I must also acknowledge my supervisor Penny Hawe for helping me recognize potential hazards and road signs along the route and for knowing when to pull on the reins. I am very grateful. To other mentors who gave me sections of the map and then inspired me to go beyond the edges- Sheila Robinson, Nancy Edwards, Nancy Gibson, Melanie Rock, Marja Verhoef, and Vic Neufeld- thank you. To fellow students Heidi Brandstadt, Micaela Brown, Ken Caine, Catherine Ford, Deirdre Hennessy, Melissa Hyman, Pertice Moffitt, Emma Stewart, Laura Vanderheyden and Lianne Barnieh, thank you for being such interesting and inspired fellow travellers, you have made the journey more enjoyable and I have greatly valued your varied forms of input and companionship. Finally, to my parents Carmie and Ben (truly “the doctor”), my children Catherine and John Angus and my husband Chris, you gave me the fuel to keep going, you fixed me up after any crashes, you were patient, you never complained when our trip took unexpected detours and you always let me drive. Thank you- I am indeed blessed.

## Previous Presentations and Publications

At the time of the submission of this dissertation, the following publications and presentations had been completed which drew on the study material:

- Davison CM, Brown M and Moffitt P (2006) Student Researchers Negotiating Consent in Northern Aboriginal Communities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methodology* 5(2), Article 7.  
<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/pdf/davison.pdf>
- Davison CM (2006) *All that Glitters: Diamond Mining and Aboriginal Youth in Northern Canada*. Invited speaker at the Centre for Health and Society, School of Population Health, University of Melbourne, Australia. April 13.
- Davison CM & Hawe P (2006) *We Are All in the Lifeboat: Understanding the Education and Employment Pathways of Tłı̨ch̨ Indigenous Youth*. Paper presented at the annual Australian Health Promotion Association Conference, Alice Springs, Australia. April 23-26, p.100.
- Davison CM & Hawe P (2006) I Thought School was for Fools: Understanding macro-environmental influences on the school-engagement of Tlı̨cho Indigenous youth. Paper presented at the 97<sup>th</sup> Annual meeting of the Canadian Public Health Association, Vancouver, BC. May 26-31, pp. 43-44.
- Davison, CM and Hawe, P (2005). *Exploring the educational setting as an influence on school engagement among northern Aboriginal youth*. Poster presented at the CIHR Summer Institute on rural, remote and Aboriginal community-based research. June 5-10, Rocky Harbour, Newfoundland.
- Davison CM, Brown, M & Moffitt, P (2005) *Reconciling the differences between ethical review standards and the reality of research in northern settings*. Paper presented at the Sixth Conference of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society and the First Conference of the Canadian Society for Circumpolar Health, October 27-29, Quebec City, Quebec, Canada, p. 11.
- Davison, CM and Hawe, P (2005) *All that Glitters: Diamond mines and their impact on youth in northern Canada*. Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Canadian Conference on International Health, Ottawa, ON. November 5-9, p. 44.
- Davison, CM (2005) *Little Johnnie and the Supermarket: Exploring how the school setting impacts educational engagement in the north*. Research overview

presented during the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholars Workshop  
Toronto, ON. November 10.

- Davison CM (2004) *Modern Pathways and Evolving Definitions: Reframing “Aboriginal school drop-out” in a northern Canadian context*. Invited speaker, policy seminar hosted by the Centre for Health and Policy Studies (CHAPS), University of Calgary, Alberta, May 27. Policy brief by the same title prepared for the Centre for Health and Policy Studies, University of Calgary, Alberta. Available at:  
[http://www.chaps.ucalgary.ca/Publications\\_Projects/publications.htm](http://www.chaps.ucalgary.ca/Publications_Projects/publications.htm)
- Davison CM (2004) *Reframing “Aboriginal School Drop-Out”: An examination of educational disengagement, employment and resiliency among Aboriginal youth in northern Canada*. “Listening to the Voices” - CIHR Institute for Aboriginal Peoples Health, 4<sup>th</sup> Annual National Gathering of Graduate Students and Community Representatives Interested in Aboriginal Health. June 3-5, Edmonton, Alberta, p.18-19.
- Davison CM (2004) *Education and Employment Patterns Among Northern Aboriginal Youth: A study of resiliency, development and community health*. Oral presentation at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Northern Research Forum, Yellowknife, September 15-18. Available at:  
[http://www.nrf.is/Publications/The%20Resilient%20North/Plenary%203/3rd%20NRF\\_Plenary%203\\_Davison\\_YR\\_paper.pdf](http://www.nrf.is/Publications/The%20Resilient%20North/Plenary%203/3rd%20NRF_Plenary%203_Davison_YR_paper.pdf)
- CJBS Grade 10 Art Students, Aisbett M & Davison CM (2004) *CJBS for Life: What School Means to Me* 'Zine. A school and community-based publication of student art, photographs and writing. Chief Jimmy Bruneau School: Behchokō, NWT.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother-in-law, Sandra Gail Davison, who passed away on May 12, 2005. Sandra was a committed mother, grandmother, sister, friend, fellow-citizen and humanitarian. She worked tirelessly for the people of her community, especially youth. During her battle with cancer, she said she thought a great deal about young people who suffered with cancer and other hardships. In her final moments she whispered to me, “I’m going to do what I can to care for those children in heaven”. Simply put, the world needs more people like Sandra.

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## List of Symbols, Abbreviations and Nomenclature

ACADRE	Aboriginal Capacity and Developing Research Environments
ARI	Aurora Research Institute
Behchok̄	Pronounced bay-cho-ko (formally Rae-Edzo)
CCI	Canadian Circumpolar Institute
CIHR	Canadian Institutes for Health Research
CJBS	Chief Jimmy Bruneau School
CSA	Community Services Authority
DCSB	Dogrib Community Services Board
DDBE	Dogrib Divisional Board of Education
ECE	Department of Education, Culture and Employment (GNWT)
GED	General Equivalence Degree
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
Gamèti	Pronounced gam-ma-tea (formally Rae Lakes)
IBA	Impact and Benefit Agreement
MACA	Municipal and Community Affaires
NWT	Northwest Territories
PAR	Participant Action Research
RECSA	Rae-Edzo Community Services Authority
RESS	Rae-Edzo School Society
TCSA	Tłı̄ch̄ Community Services Agency
Tłı̄ch̄	Pronounced tlee-chon
Wekweèti	Pronounced wek-way-tea (formally Snare Lake)
Whati	Pronounced what-tea (formally Lac La Martre)

*“ I have asked for a school to be built...on my land... and that school will be run by my people, and my people will work at that school and our children will learn both ways, our way and the white man’s way.”*

Chief Jimmy Bruneau (1881 - 1975)

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation examines school engagement, as a determinant of health, among students at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ First Nation community of Behchok̄ǫ, NWT. The study focuses on interactions that take place between students and features of the school and community environment. It is an attempt to build understanding around the way in which contextual factors work as influences on the educational behaviours and pathways of students in the north.

Mass media, and much of the existing academic literature, provide a rather dismal picture of the experience of northern Aboriginal youth today. Recent reports document high student drop-out rates, lack of Aboriginal teachers, dysfunctional families, community substance abuse problems and high rates of injury and suicide (Davis 2001; Hains 2001; Kirmayer 1999; Statistics Canada 2004; Mackay 1995; Department of Education 2001; Department of Indian and Northern Affairs 1996). In the Northwest Territories, where more than half of the population is Aboriginal, youth suicide rates are reported to be five times higher than the national average, one third of children in the Territory live in poverty, and rates of alcohol consumption, sexual assault and sexually transmitted disease among Aboriginal young people are some of the highest in the country (Department of Education 1995; NWT Status of Women Council 1994; Health Canada 1999). In addition, it is reported that adolescents in the NWT are two and a half times more likely to have a child in their teens and three times more likely to be convicted of criminal activity than other Canadian adolescents (Auchterlonie 2002; NWT Status of Women Council & NWT Network 1994).

In school, Aboriginal students appear to be largely struggling as well. Although reports vary widely, and a single valid estimate does not exist, “school drop-out rates” for Aboriginal students in Canada range from 50-90% depending on the location and the way in which “drop-out” is defined and measured (Auchterlonie 2002; Chavers 1991; Purdy 2003; Statistics Canada 2004). In 1995, it was estimated that three quarters of the students in the NWT were not finishing high school (Department of Education 1995).

This is in comparison to a national “drop-out rate” of 12%, with provincial rates ranging from 7.3 to 16.4 % (Bowby & McMullen 2002).

On March 6, 2006, the Calgary Chronicle Herald ran an article entitled “Dropouts flipside to Alberta prosperity”. The author explained that one of the downsides of the ‘hot’ Alberta economy was that young people were leaving school to enter the open job market. Frank Peters, an Education Professor at the University of Alberta was quoted as saying, “We shouldn’t be surprised that we have substantial numbers of students who are at least going to take a break from school and get some money...there’s no doubt that in Alberta it’s less traumatic to drop out of school than elsewhere in the country” (Monchuck 2006). In the same vein, Margaret Fenton, a Forestry and Resource Officer at the BC Oil and Gas Commission commented that there is significant opportunity for Aboriginal people in British Columbia to work in the booming industrial sector without a high school diploma (personal communication, August 10, 2003). Informal discussions (in August 2003) between the candidate and youth in resource rich areas of northern Alberta, northern British Columbia, Yukon and the Northwest Territories<sup>1</sup> revealed that some students are leaving school early to work in the regional industrial sector, while others stayed in school only until they were eligible to enter apprenticeship positions. Some students were leaving school because they felt that the current school curriculum was irrelevant to them and their future goals; others were taking advantage of high school equivalency and upgrading programs offered in college settings rather than following through with a conventional secondary school education. These discussions painted a picture that was quite different from the negative frame constructed through out-of-context dropout rates and reports that focus attention on individual and community failings and deficits. Northern people spoke of inter-connectedness between youth, school and contextual factors such as the regional labour market, school curriculum and availability of out-of-school equivalency and training options. The Government of the NWT has publicly recognized that beyond individual factors, school results in the Territory are affected by factors of the larger social, political and economic environment, as well as factors associated with available

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<sup>1</sup> Undertaken as part of a Circumpolar Arctic Social Sciences Field Course, University of the Arctic.

resources, expectations for students and staff, policy and legislation, and curriculum and organisational structure (Department of Education, 1995). Up until this point however, very little study has been undertaken to understand the mechanisms of these wider environmental influences.

Discussions with northern people and a keen interest in learning about the contextual realities of Aboriginal adolescents in the north became the entry point into this study. This dissertation is as much a response to a gap in the academic literature, as it is a recognition of something that northern people have known for a long time: that education is important to northern people, that education is essential to positive individual and community health and that northerners and schools exist in a complex relationship which is intricately shaped by the current and historical context or environment.

### Arriving at the Topic

Doing rigorous and ethically sound research with indigenous communities is now almost synonymous with building strong ties between community members and researchers, and indeed with building capacity for undertaking research within the community itself. The process of creating collaborative relationships prior to the ‘official’ start of a community-based research project, and to sustaining them throughout the work, is often not an easy or straightforward one (Davison, Brown, & Moffitt 2006; Meadows et al. 2003). Collaborating with communities to investigate issues of local importance is a relatively new way of functioning in the research world, and for novice researchers especially, there are relatively few detailed accounts as precedents to follow and learn from. For this reason, the candidate provides a description of the key events that led up to the establishment of the investigation so that others may gain an understanding of how the study came to be located and structured in the manner that it did.

The initial seed for this investigation was planted ten years ago, when the candidate spent part of a year training to be a school teacher in a remote Inuit community in Nunavut Territory of northern Canada. There, it was common for only half of all registered students to be in class on any given day, many students in high school were reading English at a grade 2 or 3 level, and there had been a number of tragic youth suicides in recent years. The great majority of teachers in the community were ‘qallunaat’ or white people from away. Although the candidate had read the pessimistic reports of the experiences of youth in the north and had experienced some of the realities first hand, a negative impression was not what she took away from her time in Nunavut. Instead, she took away an understanding that northern living was different from living elsewhere and that northern people were also unique. She recognized the strength that existed in northern communities and among northern people, strengths that needed to be celebrated and built upon.

Upon entering the doctoral program at the University of Calgary preparatory classes (in research design and methods, bio-statistical and qualitative analysis techniques, epidemiology etc) were undertaken and a broad research proposal was written aiming to look at issues around school engagement among Aboriginal youth in northern Canada. Following this preparatory work, the candidate began to seek opportunities to learn more about health and educational issues, stakeholders and communities in northern Canada, so that the study could become more focused and to ensure that it would be relevant to northern people. This was also the time when the candidate actively sought a community or population group who might be interested in partnering in a research initiative of this kind. The candidate undertook four preliminary fieldwork visits to different areas of northern Canada to meet northern people, collect basic information about communities, learn more about industrial development in the area as well as the major health, education and community development issues being faced by different groups of northern people. The first of these trips was as a member of a Circumpolar Arctic Social Science PhD field-course, which involved a group of 20 Ph.D. students and 4 instructors travelling by bus from Prince George in northern British Columbia, through the Yukon Territories and on to Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, NWT. The group also

spent time in Yellowknife and Edmonton. Course participants engaged with local people along the route, discussed research interests, learned about northern issues first hand and completed small research projects (Davison 2003; Davison et al. 2003). During the course, the candidate learned more about the impact of natural resource development, oil and gas and mining, in the north. Local people were communicating stories of young people getting high-paying jobs in industry without a high school diploma. This was an interesting phenomenon from a public health and social determinants of health perspective and was a topic that begged further investigation (Davison 2004).

Following the field-course, two field visits were undertaken in the Bonneyville and Cold Lake region of northern Alberta. These periods of reconnaissance were largely made possible by resources provided through a private oil and gas company, Canadian Natural Resources Limited (CNRL).<sup>2</sup> Support included seed funding for the preliminary stage of the research project, air transportation to northern Alberta, and access to the Community Relations Office in Bonneyville.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the candidate had one very good access point in northern Alberta (through CNRL) and had met with a school principal who was interested in the project, a number of months were spent upon return to Calgary trying to find more contacts and a deeper level of engagement and commitment in the region. This was unsuccessful and it became obvious that a research site was not emerging.

The candidate was in contact with the ACADRE Network (Aboriginal Capacity and Developing Research Environments Network) in Edmonton, and also through them, the staff at the Canadian Circumpolar Institute. One of the senior academic researchers working with both Centres (Dr. Nancy Gibson) became a member of the candidate's

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Penny Hawe, the doctoral supervisor, holds the Markin Chair in Health and Society at the University of Calgary. Mr. Allan Markin is the owner and CEO of CNRL; he offered to provide stewardship for the research.

<sup>3</sup> The candidate specifically acknowledges Karmen Fayant of CNRL in Bonneyville for his time and support in the early stages of this project. Karmen personally toured with the candidate to nearly all the First Nation and Métis communities in the Bonneyville and Cold Lake region; he was very helpful and informative.

supervisory committee and was aware of the candidate's broad research interest areas and her desire to find a research site. On a subsequent research related trip to the Northwest Territories, Dr. Gibson had the opportunity to meet with a number of community members and school board representatives from the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ First Nation near Yellowknife. They were voicing concerns about youth, schooling and health as they relate to the opening of a diamond mine in their area. Dr. Gibson mentioned the candidate's interests and she was met with a positive response. Community members and representatives from the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ Community Services Agency (TCSA) were interested in discussing a potential research partnership. This was a significant breakthrough in the path of the study. After about six-weeks of planning a visit through emails and telephone calls, the candidate flew to the Northwest Territories and met with the school principal, the TCSA CEO, a group of school staff and a group of students in the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ community of Behchok̄ǫ. Although the candidate spent only three days with the community on this initial visit, she knew almost immediately that this would be the research site.

School and community representatives, who later became significant allies in the project, helped organize a number of discussion groups (with students, school staff, health care workers and women of the community) that helped orient the candidate to the major health and education issues in the community and region and they were able to lead the candidate to other points of contact in the broader community and in industry as well. There was a significant need to examine educational disengagement and health issues among youth in Behchok̄ǫ and this need was recognized and communicated by community members themselves.

There was a sense of readiness in Behchok̄ǫ, and a level of capacity for research engagement that was evident. After the initial visit, the candidate and her community contacts negotiated more details of the project and in August of that year (the beginning of the candidate's third as a doctoral student) she moved to Behchok̄ǫ to begin fieldwork.

This photo (figure 1.1) was taken during a 3-day cultural retreat and caribou hunt that the candidate attended with school staff, elders and other community members on the barrenlands north of Behchok̄. It communicates the sense of richness that was present in the research site as well as the sense of calm felt by the researcher when a site was finally arrived upon.



**Figure 1.1: Photo taken at Cultural Camp and Caribou Hunt on the Barrenlands north of Behchok̄ (Photo credit: Kyle Kelly, Behchok̄).**

### Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into thirteen chapters. This initial chapter serves as an introduction and provides the theoretical underpinnings of the research as well as a review of relevant literature. Chapter two provides an outline of the study, including a timeline and the guiding research questions and objectives. Chapter three outlines the methods that were used to undertake the investigation, chapter four is a description and introduction to the community of Behchok̄ and the Tłı̄ch̄ people, and chapter five is a

description of, and introduction to, schooling in Behchok̄ and the NWT. Results are presented in chapters six through eleven. Chapter six looks at the concept of engagement within the Tłı̄ch̄Q student's context. Further results are presented in relation to engagement and the physical environment (chapter 7), the social environment (chapter 8), parallel and constituent activity settings in the wider community (chapter 9), school and education policy and the school's relationship to authority (chapter 10) and diamond mining and the economic environment of the region (chapter 11). Although each result chapter holds its own brief independent summary, chapter twelve is an overall discussion and summary and the dissertation finishes with chapter thirteen, which provides a reflection on the study in terms of the preset objectives, an overview of the pertinent findings, and a discussion of avenues for further work.

## Definition of Terms

Aboriginal - although the preferred form of nomenclature in Canada varies from one community to the next, 'Aboriginal' will be used as a generic term to refer to people of Native ancestry- First Nation/Indian, Inuit and Métis (Friesen 1997; Raphael 1996). This study will focus on a specific Aboriginal group, the Tłı̄ch̄Q<sup>4</sup> First Nations people of Behchok̄, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Context – the use of the term 'context' in this study refers to features of the social, geophysical, cultural, institutional, and political environment in which a target activity setting is imbedded, or to which a target activity setting is related. This is akin to context as described by O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson (1993) in relation to activity settings.

Northern - it is recognized that many definitions of 'north' exist (Hamelin 1979; McNiven & Puderer 2000) and that great variety exists between northern communities

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<sup>4</sup> Out of respect for the Tłı̄ch̄Q people and their language, all attempts have been made to use the accents and spelling of the Tłı̄ch̄Q language for local place names and for the name of the Tłı̄ch̄Q First Nation themselves. A guide to pronunciation is provided on page 17.

and peoples. This study will examine school engagement among Aboriginal youth in Behchok̄ (formally Rae-Edzo), a Tłı̄ch̄ First Nation community 115 kilometres northwest of Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, Canada.

School Engagement – refers to the extent to which students participate in academic and non-academic school activities, and identify with and value school outcomes (Audas & Willms 2001). Disengagement can be manifest in early school leaving, truancy, absenteeism and withdrawal from school activities. This definition was taken in part from Alberta Learning (2003). School engagement and disengagement are operationally defined in chapter six.

School Setting - the school is viewed through the lens of an activity settings model put forward by O'Donnell, Tharp and Wilson (1998). In this vision, the school is an activity setting made up of people, physical resources, available positions and roles, time, symbols, and funds. Of interest are the tasks or activities that take place in the school, the personnel who are present, the motives of the participants in the setting, the cultural values being communicated and any scripts for conduct, norms or typical patterns of interaction that exist (Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Weisner 1993; O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993). The model is provided and explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

Youth – this research will primarily focus on Aboriginal young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years.

## Theoretical Underpinnings of the Research

*“Theory is a guide to practice, no study, ethnographic or otherwise, can be conducted without an underlying theory or model. The researcher’s theoretical approach helps define the problem and how to tackle it” (Fetterman 1989, p.5).*

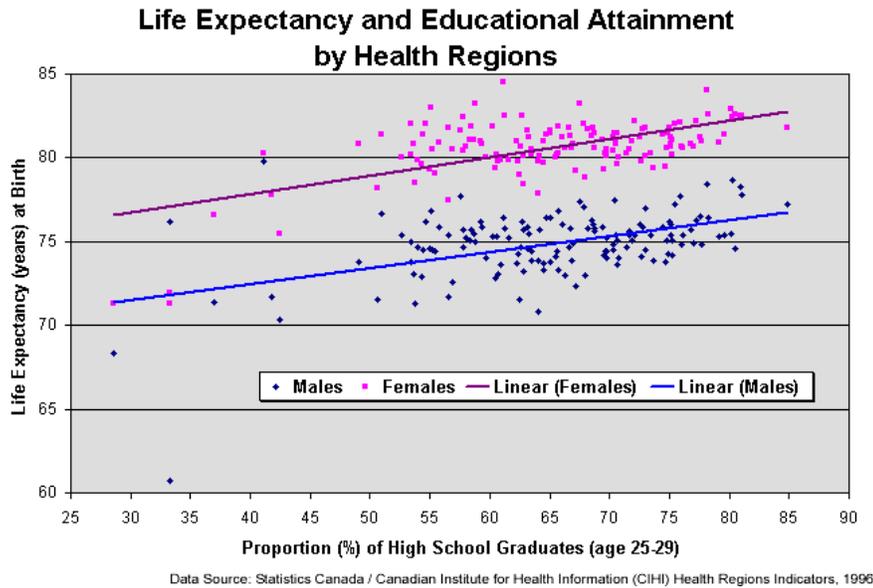
This study is being undertaken in a Department of Community Health Sciences and has a community and public health orientation. This means that education and schooling are being studied in a health context, as social determinants of health. Methodologically, the study is an ethnography that is informed by both critical theory and ecological theory (including activity-settings). The development of the study was informed by three theoretical, underlying assumptions: that education is a key social determinant of health; that unequal power structures and current and historical social injustices negatively influence health and education outcomes for Aboriginal people and; that the activity structure of everyday life can help us examine and understand the culture, behaviours and beliefs of specific populations and communities.

### 1.1.1 Education as a Social Determinant of Health

The principal argument behind the study of the social determinants of health is that health is distributed unevenly in populations and its distribution is strongly linked to factors associated with people’s social and economic situations (Evans, Barer, & Marmor 1994; Low et al. 2005; McKeown 1976; McKeown 1977). Education is one of the most significant social determinants of health. Well-educated people have higher levels of self-reported overall health and lower levels of morbidity, disability and early mortality (Deaton & Paxton 1999; Elo & Preston 1996; Grossman & Kaestner 1997; Kaplan & Keil 1993; Ross & Mirowsky 1999; Ross & Van Willigen 1997).

In Canada, the proportion of high school graduates in a region has been shown to be closely associated with the life expectancy of people in that region (Statistics Canada & Canadian Institute for Health Information 1996). Figure 1.2 shows this trend; regions reporting higher proportion of high school graduates also report a longer life

expectancy. This means that according to these data we can surmise that, all other things being equal, the longer a person stays in school in these Canadian health regions, the longer they are likely to live.



**Figure 1.2: Life Expectancy and Educational Attainment by Health Region in Canada** (Statistics Canada & Canadian Institute for Health Information 1996).

Although the link between education and health is well documented, our understanding of how the two factors inter-relate is less developed. The pathway that has received the most attention in the academic literature is that education exerts an affect on health through its influence on employment and economic conditions; well-educated people are more likely to work, to have higher incomes, and to be in safer and more satisfying jobs (Statistics Canada 2006; Winkleby et al. 1992). Following this, family and personal income as well as one’s level of control over, and satisfaction with, one’s job have been associated with health (Lynch et al. 1998; Ross et al. 2000; Wolfson et al. 1999). Although the economic argument is well documented, it has been shown that even at the same income levels, those with lower levels of education experience greater hardships than those with higher levels (Ross & Wu 1995). So separate, and in addition to, the economic tie, health and education also have other links. Scholars have shown

an additional association between education and health by way of the social benefits of attending school. Schools provide access to positive adult role models and supportive adult figures for some students (Edmundson et al. 1996; Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe 1993; Rosenfield, Folger, & Adelman 1980). School peer relationships have been shown to be positive influences on health (Bandura 1986; Fagan & Wilkinson 1998; Schunk 1987). There is convincing evidence to indicate that strong social networks positively impact health and school is a facilitator for social network building among some young people (Berkman & Syme 1979; Eckenrode 1983; Gore 1978; House, Landis, & Umberson 1988). Schools can also be places where some youth are supported and inspired and this has a positive influence on their self-esteem and confidence (Langer 2000; Teven 2001). Both the quality of education received and the quality of the educational setting attended have been associated with health outcomes (Ross & Mirowsky 1999).

Well-educated people are also more likely to engage in positive health behaviours (Patton et al. 2000; Ross & Mirowsky 1999; Ross & Wu 1995). This relationship has been shown to be dose dependent, in that, as education levels rise so do the associated positive health behaviours (Flay et al. 1994; Greenlund et al. 1996; Kandel & Wu 1995). Attending, and being engaged in, school is associated with healthier lifestyle choices (Bond et al. 2001; UNESCO 2000; WHO & UNESCO 1999). Alienation from school has been shown to be the most significant predictor of negative health behaviours among students (Nutbeam et al. 1993). A lack of academic success in school has been associated with leaving school as well as other potentially problematic behaviours such as risky sexual behaviour, unhealthy nutritional practices, inadequate physical activity, use of alcohol and other substances, violence, delinquency, suicide ideation and cigarette smoking (Ary et al. 1999; Ellickson et al. 1996; Rosenberg, O'Carroll, & Powell 1992; Tresidder et al. 1997).

Whether through economic, social or other pathways, education is closely associated with health, and in this line, the study of school engagement is also a study of health.

### 1.1.2 Critical Theory

In addition to the social determinants of health, this study was also informed by critical theory. Critical theory in the social sciences and critical pedagogy in education has evolved from the early works of such well-known scholars as: Immanuel Kant (i.e. Kant 2003); Karl Marx (i.e. Marx 2000); Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse of the Frankfurt School (i.e. Horkheimer 1975); Jurgen Habermas (i.e. Habermas 1981; 1987); and Paulo Freire (i.e. Freire 1973; 2000). Although methodological and theoretical consensus has not emerged among critical theorists, it is generally agreed that there are some underlying values that are commonly shared:

“Those of us who openly call ourselves criticalists definitely share a value orientation. We are all concerned about social inequalities and we direct our work towards positive social change. We share a concern [for]...the nature of social structure, power, culture and human agency” (Carspecken 1996, p.3).

Critical theory purports that thoughts and behaviours are mediated by socially and historically constituted power relations and that certain groups in society are privileged over others. The theory calls for a particular focus on social inequities and factors such as gender, class, race and age in research as well as requiring researchers to examine their own orientations and how these might affect what is studied, how topics are explored and how findings are interpreted (LeCompte & Shensul 1999b). In relation to schooling, McLaren (1998) states that the “major task of critical pedagogy has been to disclose and challenge the role that schools play in political and cultural life” (p. 160). McLaren also discusses hegemony, or the domination of a majority culture over subordinate ones via particular social practices and structures, as it relates to schooling. He notes the importance of examining and recognizing hegemonic relationships within society more broadly and within our schools and school systems more specifically. Essentially, critical theorists are concerned with social justice. Although some ambiguity surrounds the concept of social justice, the term generally relates to the fair distribution of society’s benefits and responsibilities (Rawls 1971), the relative position of one social group to others in society and the propagating role of institutions and societal structures in establishing and maintaining social arrangement (Aday, 1999;

Davison, 2006; Canadian Nurses Association, 2005). Critical theory has been described as a postcolonial approach to research (McLaren 1999).

Although some work has been done recently to develop a more philosophically complete critical methodology (Anderson 1989; Carspecken 1996; Lather 1991; McLaren 1998; Quantz 1992; Tripp 1992) disagreement remains among criticalists around the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge and the concept of truth. For the current study, critical theory provides an orientation to the research. LeCompte and Schensul (1999b) usefully discuss critical theory as an approach to research that reflects a particular way of looking at the world. They offer positivist, interpretive, ecological and network approaches as examples of approaches that ethnographic researchers draw from, many times in some combination. It can be argued, that any project relating to Aboriginal peoples, places and issues should have a critical orientation, thus recognising colonial history and grounding the work in values of social justice and equity.

### 1.1.3 Ecological Theory and the Activity Setting

#### 1.1.3.1 Ecological Theory

Ecological theory is grounded in the belief that the behaviour of individuals is influenced by factors associated with human and physical environments or systems and that these factors are systematically related and affect one another (LeCompte & Shensul 1999b; McLaren & Hawe 2003). Of particular interest are the relationships between individuals or institutions and social, political, cultural, institutional and geophysical aspects of their contextual environment (McElroy & Townsend 1979; Poggie, DeWalt, & Dressler 1992). LeCompte & Shensul (1999b) point out that ecological theory has been linked with ethnographic methodology as far back as the works of sociologist Emile Durkheim and the early 20th century anthropologists AR Radcliffe Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Much of Durkheim's work was around the sociology of education (Durkheim 1956; Durkheim 1973), Radcliffe-Brown

explored the organisation of Aboriginal societies (Radcliffe-Brown 1930; Radcliffe-Brown 1952) and Malinowski looked at the dynamic of culture change and race relations (Malinowski 1944; Malinowski 1961). Concepts from the natural sciences such as ecology and the ecosystem, have deep roots by analogy in other fields of study (Green, Richard, & Potvin 1996). Urie Bronfenbrenner has been widely recognized for the development of ecological theory as it relates to adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner 1986; Bronfenbrenner 1995; Bronfenbrenner 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998). Bronfenbrenner's hypothesises that in addition to factors that are associated with the individual (sex, age, health status etc) adolescent development is impacted by factors in five environmental systems: the microsystem (family, peers, school, neighbourhood, church etc); mesosystem (relationships between microsystems); exosystem (environmental factors which originate largely beyond the immediate realm of the individual, i.e.: mass media, social welfare, legal services, government etc); macrosystem (attitudes and ideologies of the culture) and the chronosystem (sociohistorical conditions or patterns of events and transitions over a life course). A large body of literature exists surrounding this ecological model.

#### 1.1.3.2 Activity Settings – An Introduction

For the purpose of this study, data collection and analysis were guided by an ecologically-based activity-setting model put forward by O'Donnell, Tharp, and Wilson (1993). Conceptually, activity settings were preceded by the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and by such scholars as Roger Barker (see for example Barker (1960; 1963; 1968), and John and Beatrice Whiting and their associates (see for example Munroe, Munroe, & Whiting (1981); Whiting (1980); Whiting & Whiting (1975)). Activity settings differ from other similar concepts such as the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner 2000), the micro setting (O'Donnell 1980) and the behaviour setting (Barker 1960) by how the setting is studied (McLaren & Hawe 2003), by the fact that they encompass both the objective reality and the subjective experience, by the fact that the activity is specific rather than general, by allowing researchers to look at the relationship of one activity setting to another and by their usefulness in guiding

community intervention and community development (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990; O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993).

Activity settings are “contexts of human interaction and joint production” (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990, p.116). They are the “social furniture of our family, community, and work lives” (Tharp & Gallimore 1991, p.3). Examples of activity settings include physical places like homes, schools and workplaces, events like a Sunday church service, a backyard barbeque or a community bingo, or more minute interactions such as a school bus driver greeting young people in the morning, a mother reading with a child or a teacher phoning home about a student’s behaviour. Activity settings can be also nested within each other; such as the way a classroom is nested within a school. Activity settings are best described in terms of their who, what, when, where and why (Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Weisner 1993; O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993). “The ‘who’ refers to the people present. The ‘what’ describes their actions, including routines and scripts [for norms of interaction]. The ‘when’ and ‘where’ describe the time and place. And the ‘why’ represents the activity’s objectives, participants’ motivations and interpretations” (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990, p.116). Within the objective features of a setting (i.e. the structural or temporal boundaries of a physical location or event), specific activities take place and these activities allow collaborative interaction to occur (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990). Interactions are the key to activity settings, through interaction, communication and the propagation of meaning and messages takes place. For example, within activity settings, individuals who have more knowledge or experience often assist those with less experience (this is termed assisted performance) and in this process, meaning is shared and propagated (Tharp & Gallimore 1988; Tharp & Note 1989; Vygotsky 1981; Wertsch 1985a; Wertsch 1985b). The activity settings young people participate in, say for example, a family eating a meal at the kitchen table, a father teaching a son how to set a rabbit snare, young people playing in a sports tournament or children working on a group project at school, give them opportunities to learn what is appropriate, and inappropriate, within in a particular culture (Weisner 1989).

What is meant by the term culture? There is no single, agreed upon definition of culture and it is often written about in vague and varied terms (Jackson & Meadows 1991). For this investigation, the candidate takes a position on culture that is in line with the Soviet psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (Vygotsky 1981; Wertsch 1985b) and with symbolic interactionism and the works of George Herbert Mead (Mead 1934; Mead 1938), Herbert Blumer (Blumer 1969; Blumer & Morrione 2004), Norman Denzin (Denzin 1992) and John Dewey (Dewey 1916; Dewey 1929). Symbolic interactionists believe that culture is the medium, or the artefact and activity, between the subject (the mind) and the object (society). The self is culturally mediated and arises from social experience and activity. Vygotsky contributes to the discourse with his explanation that cultural development takes place on two planes, the social plane between individuals, and the internal plane within individuals (Vygotsky 1981). Yapple (1989) expands:

“Culture is seen as a mediational system of tools and signs, the central feature that seems to differentiate humans from other species. It provides us with the capacity to recast reality. This activity creates a changing environment where the invention of one generation becomes both the wealth and curse of the next. In this, it is historically accumulated, serving as a storehouse of collective memories” (p.1).

Most importantly for this investigation, it is believed that we can gain understandings about culture and its relationship to human behaviour through the windows of social interaction that are everyday activity settings. Gallimore, Goldenberg, and Weisner (1993) describe the activity setting as a “perceptible instantiation of the ecological and cultural system which surrounds the family and the individual” (p.539). Researchers interested in the cultural mediated self and in activity settings ask such questions as, “By what aspects of history and experience is meaning created and transmitted? How and how best is the activity structure of everyday life transformed into the complex and vital structure of interpretations, meanings, values and decisions of specific communities?” (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993, p.503).

### 1.1.3.3 Activity Settings – Previous Studies

Although not very widely used, a number of previous studies have employed activity setting theory and analysis. Five groups of examples are provided here. The first group of studies explores the link between school engagement and the relative similarity or difference between the home and school activity settings of students. The next group of studies explores activity settings and social interactions as they differ by the cultural context or ethnicity of preschool children. The third set of studies demonstrates the use of activity settings theory in examining how macro environmental change influences features of microenvironments in rural Mexico. Next an example is given of activity settings used as an analytic framework to examine a specific body of literature on peer mentoring, and finally, a group of papers is reviewed relating to a whole school improvement intervention that involved the establishment and study of teacher activity settings at school.

In the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) (Tharp 1982; Tharp et al. 1984) researchers used ethnographic methods to examine the children's home and school activity settings and analyzed the data using an activity settings framework. The program aimed to improve the literacy levels and reading practices of Hawaiian children. One of the main findings was that at home, Hawaiian children were spending significant amounts of time with older siblings and were effectively learning tasks from them as guides and teachers. This information led researchers to determine that in order to support the engagement of Hawaiian children at school, opportunities should be made available for them to take on more significant peer teaching roles and responsibilities within the classroom. Indeed at home, it was natural and culturally common for them to do so. As a result of the activity setting analysis, a successful older-to-younger peer-reading program was developed.

A follow-up to the KEEP study was undertaken in a Navajo community on the mainland United States (Tharp 1994). Similar comparisons of home and school activity settings revealed that in the Navajo culture, children were spending significant amounts

of time with same-sex relatives (cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents). They also expressed a cultural value of thinking about a story as a whole rather than seeing it broken into parts. Therefore, interventions to improve school engagement among Navajo children needed to include female-to-female or male-to-male interactions and concepts being taught as holistically as possible. Again, this understanding helped in the development of a culturally relevant school reading program.

Trumbull and colleagues (2001) also examined home and school activity settings while using activity settings theory and analysis in their research with a small group of teachers in California. The authors undertook an intervention study entitled Bridging Cultures that aimed to build the cultural knowledge of seven teachers in the Los Angeles area. Although limited in size and scope, the study is a useful example of the use of activity setting theory in a training and capacity building situation. Researchers led teachers through a series of lessons exploring the classroom and home activity settings of the area's students. Teachers gained perspective into patterns of interaction, communication and learning in the home and school activity settings of different students and were then able to adapt their practices in the classroom accordingly. Teachers were also able to identify and make changes to other activity settings in which they engaged at school, such as parent-teacher conferences (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff 2000).

The link between culture, ethnicity and activity settings has been examined by Jo Ann Farver. She undertook a number of studies using activity settings theory to guide the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data about children's social interaction and play practices. Her first set of studies compared mother and toddler play behaviours in American, Mexican and Indonesian contexts (Farver 1992a; Farver 1992b; Farver 1993; Farver & Howes 1993; Farver & Wimbarti 1995). The study sample was made up of 90 children and their mothers (30 pairs from each country; 10 children at each age of 18, 24, and 36 months; half the children were girls and half were boys). The authors noted differences in the personnel available in the play sessions; Mexican and Indonesian children had busier social settings with more opportunity to interact with

more people, and people of varying ages, than did the American children. The scripts for typical interaction, the nature and purpose of activities, and the cultural values being communicated were found to be different in the three groups of children during play activity settings as well. Farver's second set of studies involved a comparative study of Korean and American preschool children's play behaviours (Farver, Kim, & Lee 1995; Farver & Lee 1997). This sample included 96 preschoolers (48 Korean, 48 American) of equal numbers of boys and girls. The study results indicated that Korean children were more engaged in parallel, rather than interactive, play and that they stayed engaged in focused activities for longer periods of time than their American counterparts. The American preschoolers showed more developed abilities in pretend and unstructured play. These studies demonstrate that children's social interactions and play practices can differ by ethnicity and that activity settings provide a useful way to examine children's culturally mediated behaviours and beliefs. The findings help us understand more about how early play activity settings give children in different contexts different opportunities for development. Farver concludes that activity setting analysis allowed her to evaluate theoretical assumptions about child development and to come to some understanding about the effect of culture on this process (Farver 1999).

Activity settings analysis was also used to examine the shifts in the people, scripts and tasks associated with basket weaving among the Zinacantec Maya in Chiapas, Mexico (Greenfield & Maynard 1997; Greenfield, Maynard, & Childs 2003). Here, authors found that activity settings associated with teaching young girls weaving changed dramatically between 1970 and 1990. As women began to engage in school activity settings, weaving patterns began to change. With social, economic and demographic change, weaving became a marketable product in the tourism industry and practices for learning to weave shifted from ones that were highly supervised (as might be required in a resource scarce environment) to ones that were more independent and based on trial and error (seen where resources were less scarce and innovations could prove profitable). Motivations had changed from weaving for themselves to weaving for others and for economic gain as well. The people involved in the activity settings also

changed; more teachers were coming from younger generations, for example, while in the past the elders were primarily responsible for the teaching of weaving. This study helps highlight the great potential that exists for activity settings to be used to examine the influence of macro-environmental change on features of microenvironments. In this case, change in the tourist industry and the pattern of schooling young women in Mexico, influenced the interactions that took place between senior and novice weavers and actually influenced weaving patterns over time.

O'Donnell (2005) undertook an activity setting review of peer mentoring studies as they relate to delinquent youth. Although the original studies did not use activity settings theory, O'Donnell used the theory and an activity setting analytic framework to assess the work collectively. The author found that looking at the literature through an activity setting lens helped him gain perspective on the role, "the physical environment and adult supervision had on social interaction, participation in settings and the development of social networks" (p.86). Specifically, activity settings analysis shed light on peer networks and this helped the author determine that activity settings and social networks were inextricably linked. He came to conclude that people's behaviours and their interactions with others form a relationship based on the activities they engage in. A later thesis developed from this work is that "who you know leads to who you are to who you know, until who you are *is* who you know" (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990, p.257).

The final example that was found of activity settings theory and analysis being used in previous research comes from Saunders and Goldenberg (2005). With their colleagues, these researchers developed a Getting Results Model for school change that involved creating specific activity settings within schools as an intervention to help in overall school improvement. New activity settings included academic achievement leadership teams, grade level teams, and principal's meetings, and in addition the staff were provided on-site assistance by the researchers and administration to help them maintain the new activity settings throughout the intervention (Saunders et al. 2001). The model was initially used in one pilot elementary school in Southern California that primarily

catered to Latino children and their families. The intervention was shown to produce substantial positive changes on a number of variables associated with teaching and learning outcomes (Goldenberg 2004; Goldenberg & Sullivan 1994). The intervention was then scaled up and implemented in nine intervention schools with six schools matched as comparison (McDougall, Saunders, & Goldenberg 2003). Similar achievement gains to the pilot phase were found in this subsequent stage of the research. Results were assessed through principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and on-site observations in all the schools by an external examiner before and during the intervention period. This important study concluded that additional activity settings in schools allowed for greater professional development and there was greater connectivity across activity settings and this helped support school change happening at many levels.

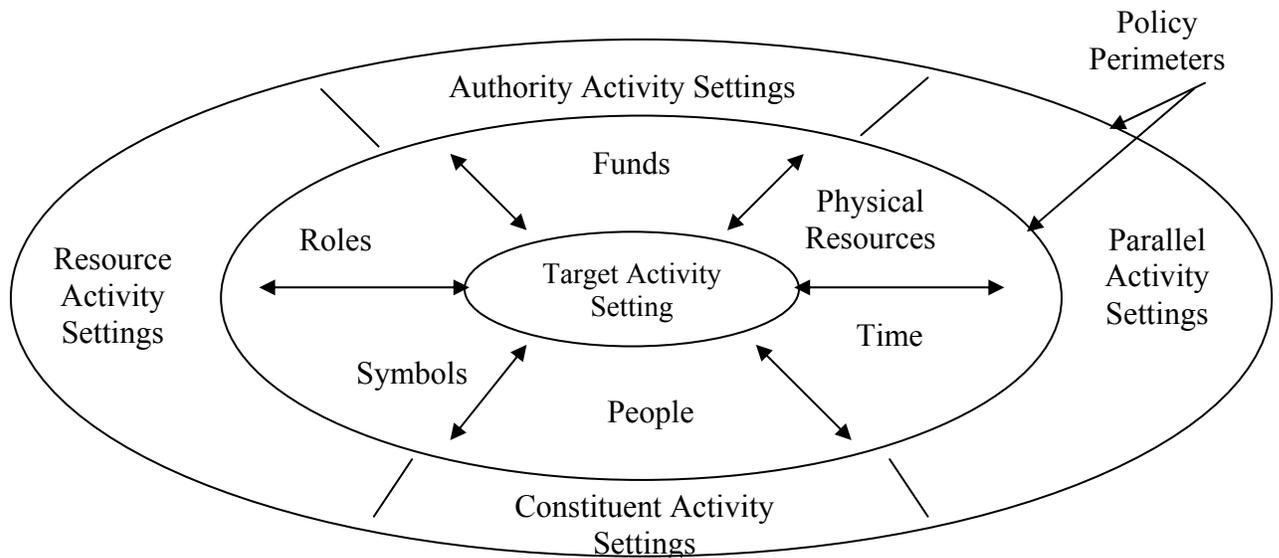
Overall, there has been much more written about activity settings from a theoretical standpoint than there has been from a practical one. However, the studies that do exist display the potential depth, breadth and application this field of study could have. Indeed, Farver notes that, “the activity setting approach is a promising alternative to current cross-cultural research paradigms” (Farver 1999, p.124). Beyond home and school studies and the Mayan weaving study which examined the implications of economic change over time, one limitation that is noted of the existing literature around activity settings is a relative lack of theoretical development associated with activity settings and their relationship to larger contextual factors such as wider policies, economic resources, and parallel settings in the contextual milieu. O’Donnell and Tharp (1990) articulate this limitation in saying that thus far, researchers “have not yet provided enough analysis of [the activity setting’s] relationship to the macro-setting” (p.253). The current study proposes to contribute to this area.

In addition to the studies already highlighted, one other should also be mentioned. It is a doctoral dissertation by Susana Helm entitled, “The Ecology of High School Failure” (Helm 2002). In her work, Helm uses a case study methodology with narrative analysis to explore contextual determinants of school failure. Her study is included here because

she discusses activity settings as well as a number of other ecologically based models as the theoretical basis for her work. However, she does not use activity setting as her main analytic framework nor does she refer to the activity setting model expanded upon by O'Donnell and colleagues. The focus of Helm's study was student interaction that takes place in schools, families, neighbourhoods and among peers, and how these interactions might influence school outcomes. Helm was interested in people's perceptions, and multiple perspectives, about the problem of school failure. She found that there was a certain amount of common ground shared by students, peers, school administrators, teachers and parents around the concept of school failure and that this could potentially represent a valuable and important vantage point from which to develop improved practice and prevention activities.

#### 1.1.3.4 The Model – A Target Activity Setting in Context

O'Donnell, Tharp, and Wilson (1993) have put forward a model for examining a target activity setting within context. The model is divided into two distinct spheres (figure 1.3). The inside sphere includes those factors associated with the immediate setting: people; positions; the physical environment; time; funds and symbols. The outside sphere relates to the larger context and to the relationship between the target or central activity setting and other activity settings that it may be in relationship with.



**Figure 1.3: The Target Activity Setting in Context** (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993)

Table 1.1 provides an overview of how to interpret each component of the activity settings model (as based on O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson (1993) descriptions) and examples of pertinent questions, as determined by the candidate, that one might ask in relation to each component. It should be noted that although each component is important independently, also essential in the use of this model is the dynamic between and interdependence of different components.

**Table 1.1: Interpreting the Components of the Activity-Setting in Context Model**

Component	Description	Examples of Pertinent Questions Asked
Target Activity Setting	The target activity setting is the activity setting on which the study is focused. For this investigation this was Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in the Tłı̄ch̄ community of Behchok̄, Northwest Territories, Canada.	Pertinent questions asked about all components of the model are related to the target activity setting, however overarching questions pertaining to the school might also include: What scripts for conduct (typical patterns of behaviours and norms) exist? What motives do people have for participation? What cultural values and beliefs are communicated? What are the tasks or activities? Who is present?
<b>The Inside Circle</b>		
<i>Physical Resources</i>	This includes factors associated with the physical environment of the school, the layout, infrastructure, inside and outside sub-environments, the flow of people and activities and the inter-relationship between the physical environment and other aspects of the target setting (people, funds etc.).	How does the physical environment hinder or help social interaction? How does the physical environment help articulate values? In what way might components of the physical environment be impacting student engagement?
<i>Time</i>	This involves a look at the use, distribution and relative importance of time, the meaning of time for those participating in the setting, schedules, routines, and how activities are temporally structured in the activity setting.	What are the daily, weekly and yearly schedules? Are activities temporally structured and how does this relate to other components of the setting (i.e. how does the daily schedule impede or enhance social interaction, how is time associated with the physical environment, does the lack of, or availability of, time affect people's positions or roles in the school?). How is time used in the target setting and how might this be related to student engagement?

<b>Component of the Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples of Pertinent Questions Asked</b>
<i>People</i>	This involves gaining an understanding of the population and sub-populations interacting in the setting, including, for this study, the students and staff (of all sorts) and guests that are at school. It also includes looking at specific sub-groups like parents, alumni, elders, non-attending youth etc.	How is school engagement influenced by who may be excluded or included in the school setting? How is the social or human make-up of the school influenced by other factors in the setting? How might the setting exclude certain subgroups of people? How are parents involved in activities at school?
<i>Roles</i>	In addition to wanting to understand the people that are in (or not in) a setting, it is also important to understand the positions that exist or the roles people play (or do not play) in the activity setting.	What roles do people fill in the school (formal and informal) and what is the relationship between roles in a setting and the other components of the setting? Are there enough roles in the setting, or perhaps too many for the people there? How might this dynamic influence school engagement? What is the place of formal and informal role-playing in the setting? How are roles communicated? How are roles temporally structured?
<i>Symbols</i>	Symbols can reflect the meaning of the activity setting and can be assessed to see how well they reflect a common understanding among members of a setting. Attachment to symbols can help create meaning and value that may help bind a group together.	What symbols exist in the setting and how do they relate to student engagement? Is there a shared common goal or shared values or meanings about school? How are people attached to symbols and how do these attachments influence behaviours? How are symbols communicated?
<i>Funds</i>	This included information about how the school and its activities are supported financially.	Who provides the funds (both directly and indirectly)? Who holds the purse strings (major and minor)? How are decisions made about funding? How does funding impact other aspects of the activity setting and impact school engagement more generally?

<b>Component of the Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples of Pertinent Questions Asked</b>
<b>The Outside Circle</b>		
<i>Authority Activity Settings</i>	<p>Authority activity settings are settings which act to establish, implement and/or enforce laws, rules, regulations, and directives or by authorizing the use of specific resources. This involved looking at how the school relates to other entities like the School Board, the Territorial Department of Education, the Territorial Teacher's Association, the Parent Teacher Association, the Territorial Worker's Union, the Municipal, Territorial and Federal Governments, the Band Council, and other community groups.</p>	<p>What entities have theoretical and practical authority over the school? How do other entities exert authority and how does the school react to these pressures? What school laws, rules, regulations, directives and authorizations exist? How do these structures impact student engagement?</p>
<i>Parallel Activity Settings</i>	<p>Parallel activity settings are other activity settings that might have activities, purposes or target populations similar to those of the target setting. In the case of this study, this included looking at the other school in the community, and any other settings in the community catering to youth or existing for the purpose of education. Most important was the relationship between the target and parallel settings, and the influence parallel settings had on the target (indirectly or directly).</p>	<p>Are gaps that are not being filled in the target setting being filled through parallel settings? Is there competition or support between settings? How does the existence or lack of parallel activity settings influence school engagement?</p>

<b>Component of the Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples of Pertinent Questions Asked</b>
<i>Constituent Activity Settings</i>	Constitute settings are places where constituents of the target setting meet and interact outside the target setting. For example, students meet each other in their homes and on the streets of Behchokō, parents of students may convene a meeting independently, alumni of the school may decide to organize an event together or there may be religious classes in the community involving many of the same kids as are at the school.	How do interactions in constituent settings impact school engagement? What role do constituent settings play in shaping perceptions of school? Is there competition, conflict or support between constituent settings and the school? How might a lack of constituent settings influence school engagement?
<i>Resource Activity Settings</i>	These are settings that have resources for the use in the target setting. Resources can be physical, financial, social or human. Resources may be already in use or available to be tapped into. In relation to this particular study, resource activity settings included the regional economic landscape, which is currently influenced by diamond mine activity, as well as cultural and human resources such as elders available to help with school trips or family units providing structure and direction for youth decision making. The community has also recently enacted a system of self-governance and this has potentially created new and diverse resource settings.	Are available resources tapped into? How have resources changed over time? Do resource settings exert indirect or direct pressure on the school? Are there trade offs for using certain resources and what may they be? How does the availability or lack of resource activity settings influence the engagement of students?

<b>Component of the Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples of Pertinent Questions Asked</b>
The Policy Perimeter	<p>O'Donnell and colleagues placed a policy perimeter between the inside and outside spheres in the model. This was to represent the pressures exerted and limitations placed upon the internal components of the target setting (the inside sphere) by the external or contextual settings (the outside sphere). For example, rules and regulations required of the school as outlined in the Education Act of the Northwest Territories. Although not included in the original model, for the purpose of this study, a policy perimeter was also placed on the outside of the outside sphere. This perimeter represented policies and potential limitations that were more peripheral, such as policies around trade and commerce or environmental assessment in the Northwest Territories, but that may have implications for education and for the school indirectly and need to be represented.</p>	<p>How might factors in the larger context limit what may be possible in the target setting? Is external pressure real or perceived? How have pressures changed over time? How much autonomy do those in the target setting have? How are policies enforced? Are there further policies that should be developed and enforced to positively influence school engagement?</p>

Data was collected through participant observation field notes and notes from informal interactions, formal interviews and focus groups, photos and video clips, personal drawings (for example, the flow of people in the target setting), student art projects and writing, school and community records and the collection of other relevant documents (local reports that are largely unpublished, newspaper articles, town notices, school announcements etc). More detail about these data sources is provided in chapter three.

The activity setting model used for this study is transactional (Altman & Rogoff 1987), meaning that it places human activity within a context and focuses on interactions within and between components of the model. The model allowed for an exploration into how the school related to other settings (such as the Territorial Government, the community Band Council and the School Board) as well as the relationship between the school and human, physical, cultural and historical resources available to the setting, and this was critical. One of the main reasons why it was essential to view the school as it exists within the community context was because of the importance of the cultural and historic aspects that are so closely woven into the ‘story’ of students and schools in northern and Aboriginal settings. The school, as well as being an interesting setting in its own right, is a very distinct place in the community; it is both pressured (from the outside) and exerts pressure (from the inside) and the activity setting in context model allows us to explore these relationships. In addition to being a window into the culture and development of a specific group of young people, the activity-setting model also provided a structured way to approach the collection and analysis of data and the thinking about school engagement. It was a helpful guide and lens through which the research questions and sub-questions could be asked. As the study progressed, it became obvious that certain factors in the model were playing a larger role than others in influencing school engagement. Each factor in the activity-setting model was not, therefore, treated equally. As understanding built, certain avenues were delved into deeper than others. Over time, the research began to focus on collecting data in certain areas more heavily; the results of this study do not answer all the questions posed in all the areas of the activity-setting model. Instead, they are a synthesis of the most significant findings that emerged by looking through the lens of the model and its related questions.

## Literature Review

### 1.1.4 Introduction

In order to gain insight into the current state of knowledge around school engagement, disengagement and dropout, a literature keyword search was conducted in six prominent academic databases: Academic Search Premier; Bibliography of Native North Americans; Comprehensive International Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL); ERIC (Education); MEDLINE and SocINDEX. In order to limit the results of the search to a manageable number for this dissertation, it was decided that only research articles and reviews would be included. The search also focused on articles published since 1990, with the exception of review articles, articles related specifically to Aboriginal people and /or northern issues and articles that were prominent or landmark pieces of work that were often referred to, yet published before 1990. The detailed search strategy is provided as appendix 1. Three hundred and fifty-four articles were eventually reviewed using the matrix method for literature reviews in the health sciences (Garrard 1999). In addition to a critical appraisal of the literature for type of study and quality of evidence, the following questions were also used as a guide:

1. How is school engagement or its related terms conceptualised or defined (i.e. descriptors used, assumptions, definitions, examples)?
2. What theory or theories are used in relation to school engagement and disengagement (or its related terms)?
3. What factors are discussed as being associated with school engagement and disengagement (or its related terms)?
4. Does the article discuss context or environmental factors in relation to school engagement (or its related terms)? If so, what is discussed and what are the findings?
5. Does the article pertain to Aboriginal students and school engagement (or its related terms) and if so, what were the findings?

### 1.1.5 Defining and Conceptualising Disengagement

A great variety of terms and definitions are used in the literature to describe a student's experience with, or relationship to, school when those experiences deviate from a "standard" uninterrupted pathway through some derivation of elementary, middle and high school. Authors commonly refer to the disengaged, the dropout and the early school leaver and use terms such as school withdrawal, school dropout, educational or school disengagement, school leaving, and attrition. Sinclair & Ghory (1987) talk about retreating students, Bernstein and colleagues (1999) about school refusers and Hemmings, Hill, & Kay (1994) simply about those who continue or discontinue schooling. The terms "stopping out" (Toby 1989), re-entry dropouts (Goldman & Bradley 1996b) and re-enterers (Goldman & Bradley 1996a; Goldman & Bradley 1997) have been used to describe students who withdraw from school for a period of time but then return. Karp (1988) discusses "dropping in" students, or those individuals who are reluctant to maintain a charade of acceptable behaviour and may have resentful attitudes towards school but do not dropout. Carley (1994) similarly describes students who remain in school but who are disengaged from most aspects of the setting and may be hostile towards it. The authors calls these students "hostile stay-ins" and reports that school staff labelled them as threats, people in pain, angry minds, unteachables, rebels, headaches, bad dreams, career challengers, and objects of hostility (p.1). Commonly, disengaged students are framed as a homogenous group of deviants (Aloise-Young & Chavez 2002) and the issue of school dropout as a serious social problem, the solution to which is keeping kids in school (Conant 1961; Gilmore & Smith 1989).

The term 'dropout' is the one found most often in the literature related to these topics. There is no single, agreed upon, definition of dropout nor is there a standard way of calculating dropout rates. Many scholars and educators use a definition that refers to the acquisition, or failure to acquire, specific credentials like the high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) (Clark 1998; Kolstad & Kaufman 1989; Sullivan 1988). Other scholars refer to time periods, either in relation to times of absence from school (Goldman & Bradley 1996a) or, in relation to the total amount of time it takes a

student to complete the requirements to graduate from high school and that certain students do not finish “on time” (Deyhle 1989; Franks 1990). The US Census bureau defines a high school dropout as a person of high school age who is not enrolled in school but is also not a high school graduate (Gage 1990). One common method for calculating dropout rates is by looking at the number of students who enter the first year of high school and compare this number to the number of graduating students from the same class three or four years hence (depending on the standard high school time period in that region). Balfanz and Legters (2004) used this method to compare the success rates of high schools in the United States and label this the promoting power of a high school.

Certainly, dropping out of school has been used as a concept to help focus attention on the issue of students leaving school prior to graduation, however as Rumberger (1993) points out, information about whether a student continues or discontinues their schooling tells us very little about the knowledge or skills a student acquires at school or the dynamics of their engagement in school. Audas and Willms (2001) prefer to use and think about the term educational disengagement as opposed to dropout because they feel it has a broader scope than dropping out, relating to attendance at school, as well as the extent to which students participate in academic and non-academic school activities, and identify with and value school outcomes.

Regardless of the terminology or definition used, there seems to be some agreement among researchers that early school leaving is a process rather than a single event or occurrence (Alberta Learning 2001b; Audas & Willms 2001; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs 1990; Jimerson et al. 2000). Wilson (1991) describes dropping out of school as the end of a continuum, which includes low academic achievement, absenteeism, and dysfunctional behaviour. Jeffries, Nix, & Singer (2002) present educational disengagement as “a slow and deliberate progression towards a student’s inability to flourish in the educational environment” (p.43). Hemmings (1996) refers to the, “developmental nature of student withdrawal [and]...the longitudinal nature of student attrition (p.19).

There also seems to be some agreement among researchers that students who may be described as school ‘drop-outs’, often go through a process of disengagement that includes a series of in-school and out-of-school periods (Audas & Willms 2001; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs 1990; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson 2000). Results from a recent, national Youth in Transition survey show that many young Canadians who did not originally finish high school subsequently engage in ‘second-chance’ education. This refers to people who leave high school and then return to complete it at a later date or enrol in post-secondary or on-the-job training opportunities that may earn them high school graduation equivalency later. Other students engage in higher education, on-the-job training or employment that circumnavigates high school completion altogether. (Bowlby & McMullen 2002; Human Resources Development Canada 2000).

#### 1.1.6 Theorizing School Disengagement and Dropout

The volume of literature related to school engagement, disengagement and dropout is overwhelmingly large. The field of research emerged prominently in the 1960s with hundreds of articles being published in scholarly journals at that time. School leaving became cast as a deviant activity (Dorn 1996). For someone new to the field, a number of relatively recent reviews act as helpful guides (i.e. Alberta Learning 2001a; Alberta Learning 2001c; Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey 1997; Lawton 1994; and Rumberger 1987). Although the literature base is vast and the theories proposed for school disengagement many, it is generally accepted that the development and testing of theory in the field is still inadequate (Battin-Pearson et al. 2000; Dei et al. 1997a; Lawton 1994). Table 1.2 is a summary of the most significant theories, models and frameworks that were found in the literature. These 22 theories were presented formally in the literature with specific names and/or detailed etiological descriptions. They have been grouped into four sections, those theories relating to: students’ individual characteristics; social groups and social interaction; school’s institutional practices and characteristics and finally; theories relating to broader social and cultural factors.

**Table 1.2: Theories for School Disengagement and Dropout**

Theory	Details	Reference
<b>THEORIES RELATING TO STUDENT INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
Interaction and Student Retention Theory	Students enter school with a number of individual characteristics (i.e. race, gender, family circumstances, past experiences etc) that influence the student’s commitment to school and to graduation. Commitment levels influence the student’s degree of integration into, and interaction in, the social and academic systems of the school. The relationship between commitment, integration and interaction in turn influences graduation outcomes.	Tinto 1975; Tinto 1993
Academic and Academic Mediation Theory	Poor academic performance leads directly to school dropout. It is also considered a mediational factor leading to school dropout but linked with such factors as low school bonding, antisocial affiliation or family and individual background characteristics of students.	Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs 1990; Tinto 1975
Theory of Social Disadvantage	Some students lack home and community resources to benefit from conventional school practices and this leads to low academic achievement and school leaving. Such students are concentrated among those that are financially poor students, from minority groups, and are non-English speaking families in an English mainstream society.	Levin 1985
Frustration/Self-Esteem Model	School leaving is attributed to a process of disengagement that begins in the early grades, levels of frustration with school begin early and accumulate while self-esteem weakens or is never built.	Finn 1989
Literacy and School Disengagement	Students in predominantly English schools whose mother tongue is not English have a greater risk of early school leaving than native English speakers.	Advocates for Children of NY Inc. 2002; James et al. 1995
Deviance	Truancy and school dropout are associated with delinquency and other deviant behaviours in youth such as drug use or engaging in vandalism, theft and early sexual activity.	Elliot & Voss 1974; Elliott 1996
Cognitive Evaluation Theory	Individuals have an innate need to feel competent and self-determining in relation to their environment, including the school environment. This need compels students to build and maintain school engagement.	Deci 1975; Deci 1980

**Table 1.2: Theories for School Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Theory	Details	Reference
<b>THEORIES RELATING TO SOCIAL GROUPS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION</b>		
Reference Group Theory	Reference groups consist of the people an individual knows, or knows about, who can serve as negative or positive role models, frames of reference and comparison. Comparative reference groups allow students to judge whether they are advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to others, and normative reference groups help students define norms and expectations of individuals in specific populations (such as those of a particular social status or racial group). These groups can influence a student’s judgement and formulation of attitudes, self-esteem and actions around school.	Hyman 1942; Tudor & Carley 1998
Primary Socialization Theory	Primary sources of socialization for children and adolescents are family members, peers and school staff. When ties to school and family are weak, and ties to peers are strong, the child is theorized to be most at risk of leaving school.	Oetting 1999
Social Bond Theory	Pro-social behaviour, such as staying in school, is associated with young people’s levels of attachment (the strength of ties to others such as parents, peers or others at school), their involvement in conventional activities (i.e. recreation, school or family), their level of commitment (the time and energy spent in relation to school) and their beliefs about, and respect for, conventional laws and authority.	Hirschi 1969
Peer Groups and Class-Based Resistance	Anti-school peer groups actively engage in class-based resistance to what is viewed as middle-class schooling. This theory relates to peer-interaction as well as to school-based practice and characteristics. It is associated with the theory of uneven application of school rules and policies discussed by (Brady 1996) and explained on the next page.	Willis 1977
Participation-Identification Model	Students who become involved in school activities identify with, and become socially attracted to, other people in the school setting and subsequently lower their risk of dropping out. Therefore, the likelihood of a student completing high school increases if the student maintains participation in school related activities.	Finn 1989

**Table 1.2: Theories for School Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Theory	Details	Reference(s)
<b>THEORIES RELATING TO INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE AND CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
Uneven Application of School Rules and Policies	Uneven and unjust application of school rules and policies among a school's student population occurs and as a result certain students are favoured and supported over others. At times this idea is associated with deviance reputation theory and may also have racial and discriminatory undertones.	Brady 1996
Deviance Reputation	Students who fail to support or respect school norms, values or rules, are labelled deviants within the school and community. These students are then at greater risk of being denied supports and services designated for 'well-behaved' students. This theory can be conceptualized in a downward spiral pattern. Students who are labelled deviants may eventually re-define themselves, and in doing so, drift toward more deviant behaviours that may offer external rewards beyond the sanction of the school. Ultimately, because most schools do not tolerate, for example, frequent absenteeism, poor academic performance or truancy, 'deviant' students may be encouraged to leave the school system altogether.	LeCompte & Dworkin 1991
Community Government Support	Higher school graduation rates are the result of community governments who value graduates and recognize them as important components of the community strategic plan. This includes Aboriginal communities who have Native trustees, Band Education Committees and a Band Education Counsellor.	Mackay & Myles 1989; Mackay & Myles 1995
School Size	Students have a greater tendency to be and stay engaged in smaller, rather than larger, schools. This trend is primarily felt to be associated with the personalized attention that may be more possible to offer in a smaller school. Students also tend to get involved in more extra curricular activities in small schools. Large schools can contribute to student alienation if there are not enough meaningful roles for students share and occupy.	Alspaugh 1998; Barker & Gump 1964; Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom 1989
School Location	Students who have to leave their local community to complete their regular schooling are at greater risk of dropping out before graduation. Rural/urban school differences have also been linked to school outcomes.	Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom 1989
Time and Age of Transition	Students are more likely to dropout of school at times of transition from one school to a next (such as from elementary school to high school) and the older the student is at the time of transition the greater the chance of dropout (age is related to individual-level theories as well).	Alspaugh 2000; Franks 1990; Hains 2001

**Table 1.2: Theories for School Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Theory	Details	Reference
<b>THEORIES RELATING TO BROADER SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS</b>		
Cultural Discontinuity	Differences between minority and majority cultural worldviews can cause a sense of disorientation and distress for minority students and this has been linked with educational disengagement.	Ledlow, 1992
Structural Strain and Alienation Model	Changes at a societal level reduce the ‘fit’ between school and society and students and staff increasingly see their involvement in school as lacking purpose. School-society ‘ill-fit’ is theorized to lead to burnout in teachers and alienation and dropout in students.	Agnew 1985; LeCompte & Dworkin 1991; Merton 1968
Adolescent Cohorts and the Influence of Socio-Historical Events	Cohorts of adolescents experience specific socio-historical events, which influence their assessment, opinions and behaviours around life priorities, including education.	Poole 1989
Mass Media and Deviancy Amplification	Youth, who previously may only have been loosely associated with deviant behaviour, have their identity strengthened as they are exposed to media representations of themselves or their peer group.	Cohen 1973
Cost/Benefit, Net Return for Education	Differences in school enrolment and drop-out rates are associated with the direct and indirect costs and benefits of attending school for different students in different contexts. This has been theorized as it relates to male and female students, students coming from families of different social classes and students from urban and rural locations.	Akhtar 1996; Becker 1975
Discouraged Worker Theory	If opportunities in the labour market are poor, students may be inclined to dropout of school because educational attainment is not likely to bring them significant return. An alternative theory is that in situations where high unemployment rates exist, students may be more inclined to stay in school to build their skills and potential employability.	Raffe & Willms 1989
Affluent Worker Theory	In places where opportunities in the labour market are good, particularly for unskilled labourers, students may be inclined to leave school prior to graduation in order to enter employment positions.	Monchuck 2006; Raffe & Willms 1989

### 1.1.6.1 Theories Relating to Student Individual Characteristics

The first group of disengagement and dropout theories found in the literature relate to students' individual characteristics. These theories support the conception or framing of school disengagement as a phenomenon linked directly to factors of the individual child and their immediate family. This approach has been termed by some as the 'within-child deficit model' (Bowker 1992; Bowker 1993; Levin 1985). Tinto's Interaction and Student Retention Theory and the Theory of Social Disadvantage relate to a large number of factors that make up individual characteristics that students bring with them to their schooling experience. These include, for example, socio-economic factors and poverty (including potential homelessness and inadequate access to transportation), gender, language ability, low or failing grades, age as compared to others in a given grade, parental education level, teen pregnancy and parenting, family make-up, family circumstances, family encouragement and support, sibling school history, personality traits, learning style, racial and ethnic features, distance of the family home from the school, family mobility, drug and alcohol use and needing or wanting to work. Battin-Pearson and colleagues (2000) refer to these kinds of factors as potential individual "structural strains" that can influence school engagement. Levin's theory of social disadvantage (1985) and the theory linking mainstream language ability with school dropout pick up on important subsets of factors, those of socio-economic, language and cultural factors, as important influences among this longer list of individual factors.

Poor academic performance has been directly associated with school dropout. It has also been explored by scholars (i.e. Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs 1990; Janosz et al. 1997; Tinto 1975) as a mediational factor leading ultimately to school dropout but linked to such things as low school bonding among students, antisocial affiliation, personal deviance or other family and individual characteristics.

The frustration-self-esteem model proposed by Finn (1989) attributes school leaving to low self-esteem and high frustration levels in students as a response to negative, early school experiences. The theory pertains not only to the student's individual

characteristics, but additionally, to the broader school environment as a source of frustration for certain students early in their lives.

A variety of deviant behaviours, including the use of illicit drugs (Krohn et al. 2007) and engaging in early sexual activity (Hofferth & Hayes 1987; Hofferth, Reid, & Mott 2001) have been associated with school truancy and/or dropout among high school students. The link between deviance and school outcomes are discussed by such scholars as Elliot and Voss (1974); Elliott (1996); and Fagan and Pabon (1990).

A final theory for disengagement or dropout found in the literature relating to individual student characteristics is that of cognitive evaluation theory and intrinsic motivation (Deci 1975; Deci 1980). This theory purports that individuals have an inherent need to feel competent and self-determining in relation to their environment. With regards to the school environment, this need compels a student to build and maintain school engagement.

The evidence supporting individual-centred theories, and their related factors, is strong for some and almost nonexistent for others. One of the most well supported individual factors linked with school disengagement or dropout is that of socio-economic status. After an extensive review of the literature, Rumberger (1987) notes that socio-economic status is the most important factor in student dropout. Although socio-economic status most often refers to the financial resource available to a student and their family, it is also a proxy for a whole host of other characteristics such as a student's housing situation, access to transportation, access to study aids and other school supplies, parental levels of education, parental employment status, family mobility, single parent families, teen parents and students wanting or having to work. A large number of studies have linked SES, and these associated concepts, to school engagement (see for example Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey 1997; Anisef & Johnson 1993; Gilbert et al. 1993; Rumberger 1983; Rumberger 1995; Russell 1986; Xiao 2001). Based on data from a Statistics Canada survey of consumer finances, Ross, Scott, and Kelly (1996) determined that the rate of early school leaving was twice as

high among students in low SES groups, Hahn (1987) reports a rate of more than three times as high. Interestingly enough, Borus and Carpenter (1983) contend that the likelihood of a student returning to school, after dropping out, is not associated with SES. These kinds of anomalies have yet to be fully explained.

Level of parental support has been singled out in a number of studies as one of the key variables in predicting educational engagement or disengagement. For example, in her qualitative study with nearly 1000 female dropouts in the United States, Bowker (1993) concludes that although there is not one single characteristic that can predict educational success or failure, a significant factor is family support. She also goes on to note that the influence of support goes beyond the immediate family, saying that a significant predictor of educational success is the presence of at least one caring adult in the student's life during adolescence. Karp (1988) came to a similar conclusion saying that among dropouts studied in the Ontario school system, the majority expressed a lack of quality adult relationships and this was felt to be an important contributor to their school disengagement.

The association between ethnicity and school disengagement has been highlighted in a great number of studies (see for example Aloise-Young & Chavez 2002; Balfanz & Legters 2004; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine 1997a; Driscoll 1999; Rumberger 1995). The evidence overwhelmingly points to an association between ethnicity and school engagement with North American data indicating that Aboriginal students often have the highest rates of disengagement, most commonly followed by Hispanics, then African-Americans, Caucasians and finally students of Asian origin and others (Young & Hoffman 2002). It has been noted however, that few differences between the school disengagement patterns of students from different ethnic backgrounds exist once other characteristics such as socio-economic status are accounted for (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey 1997; Frank 1990; Rumberger 1995).

Related, yet separate from factors of ethnicity, mainstream language ability, or literacy level, has also been studied in relation to school engagement (James, Chavez, Beauvais,

Edwards, & Oetting 1995; McDermott 1974; Rumberger 1987; Rumberger 1995; Steinberg, Blyden, & Chan 1984; Trueba 1989). In a recent study of more than 24,000 English Language Learners (ELL) in the New York City Board of Education, ELLs were found to be most at risk of dropout (as compared to non-ELL students in the same area) and those ELLs who were late arriving in the school year or those who were older than the average student in their grade were at particularly high risk (Advocates for Children of NY Inc. 2002). The authors note that there has been general failure of the school system to provide adequate language support services for students, and there is significant need for better training for teachers and an effective English as a Second Language curriculum. They concluded that an individual's English language ability was an important baseline, and on top of this, disengagement and dropout was also associated with a "one-size fits all approach" to education (p. 7). In this regard, on top of individual factors, school and system level factors also contributed to the school engagement or disengagement of English language learners.

A number of scholars have looked at school-aged pregnancy and parenthood as contributors to increased rates of school disengagement and dropout (Anderson 1993; Bradley, Cupples, & Irvine 2002; Brook, Cohen, & Kasen 1998; Finkelstein et al. 1982). The evidence thus far is mixed. Although teen pregnancy has been found to influence school engagement, reports indicate that the relationship between teen pregnancy and parenting and school engagement varies depending on ethnicity and other socio-cultural factors (Manlove 1998; Stevenson, Maton, & Teti 1998) as well as location and type of antenatal and postnatal care (Barnet et al. 2004). Further study is warranted.

Research evidence has consistently indicated that school disengagement and dropout is strongly correlated with lower levels of academic achievement, whether it be defined as acquiring fewer school credits (Waterhouse 1990) reading below grade level (Grossnickle 1986; Hess & Greer 1986) having lower educational aspirations (Okey & Cusick 1995; Rumberger et al. 1990) having lower grades (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey 1997; Ekstrom 1986; Fagan & Pabon 1990; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, &

Tremblay 1997) or grade failure (Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay 1997; Radwanski 1987; Rumberger 1995). Indeed, Hahn (1987) concluded that students who had received low marks, failing grades or who were held back in a grade were four times more likely to drop out of school than students who were more academically successful. Interestingly, Wood (1994) examined the grading patterns of schools associated with more than a million students in an American mid-west city and found that as students with lower average grades dropped out, the distribution of grades from A-F did not markedly change. She labels this as “grade distortion” and highlights it as a significant concern because if the continuum of grades is more or less fixed, regardless of the actual student body, as lower-end students drop out, a new group of previously more successful students is now relegated to their place on the bell-curve. These students then enter a higher risk category for dissatisfaction and potential disengagement from school in a downward-spiralled pattern.

Significant study has been undertaken in relation to the link between alcohol and drug use and school engagement (Bray et al. 2000; Ellickson et al. 1998; Ellickson, McGuigan, Adams, Bell, & Hays 1996; Fagan & Pabon 1990; Fagan & Wilkinson 1998; Wichstrom 1998). In general, frequent alcohol intoxications have been found to be associated with an increase in risk of early school leaving. Wichstrom (1998) demonstrated that this effect is mediated by parental attachment and confounded by truancy and association with deviant peers.

Student employment is another individual factor that has been studied in relation to school engagement. The evidence here is also mixed. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 indicates that more than 35% of the dropouts stated they left schools because they were seeking or had found employment (Jordan, Lara, & McParland 1996). Krahn (1996) notes that it is becoming increasingly common for young people to be moving back and forth between primarily being students and being employed. Evidence is provided for the negative influence of work in relation to school engagement (Gilbert, Barr, Clark, Blue, & Sunter 1993; Marsh 1991; Radwanski 1987) however, the work of Carr, Wright, and Brody (1996) and Green (1990) for

example, contradicts this idea and presents favourable effects of youth employment. As part of unravelling these contradictory findings, Weller and colleagues (2003) note that the influence of employment on school outcomes varies depending on the number of hours and type of work taken on by students, and further study is warranted in this area. Indeed, working more than 15 hours per week has been flagged as a potential cause for concern in relation to school engagement (Radwanski 1987; Steinberg & Dornbusch 1991; Sunter 1993).

Deci's cognitive evaluation theory (1980) is supported by studies which place school disengagement and dropout primarily in the hands, and minds, of individual students. In their study of American dropouts returning to education to achieve a GED, Altenbaugh, Engel, and Martin (1995) note that those who had dropped out of school, "saw their school leaving and dropping back experiences to be due to no other factors than their own decisions. Family, school and social conditions certainly shaped their choices, but these students consistently saw their actions as based on self-direction" (p.20). In a case study of a school intervention program aimed to support school engagement, Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay (1997) confirmed previous studies (Fendrick 1981; Wyatt 1977) showing that providing activities to increase levels of self-determination and feelings of competence among students worked to attract previously disengaged students to school and motivated them, as well as other students already attending school, to stay.

#### 1.1.6.2 Theories Relating to Social Groups and Social Interaction

The second set of theories found in the literature relates to students' social groups and social interaction. These five theories attribute disengagement or dropout to factors relating to the individuals or groups that students interact in, and with. The first, reference group theory, explains school disengagement and dropout in terms of the influence specific individuals or groups have as role models or frames of reference and comparison for students. Reference groups were first defined by social psychologist Herbert Hyman (Hyman 1942) and the concept has been adopted by scholars in the fields of marketing, information studies, cultural studies and education as well (Carley

1994; Clark 1993; Dawson & Chatman 2001). Reference groups are groups of people who may influence the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. Peers, family members, teachers, co-workers and celebrities as they are represented in the media, can all act as reference groups. Normative reference groups help people decide how they should behave within a particular context and situation. Comparative reference groups give individuals a point of reference upon which they can make comparisons about themselves in relation to how they perceive others (Hyman & Singer 1968; Tudor & Carley 1998). It should be noted however that although social influences, such as the influence of peers, on a student are recognized, in a recent review, (Hymel et al. 1996) note the relative lack of research attention that has been paid to these types of influences on dropout behaviours.

Reference group theory is closely linked with theories of socialization and social control. Travis Hirschi put forward a social control theory, called the theory of social bonds, specifically as it relates to criminal behaviour and deviancy (Hirschi 1969). The theory of social bonds has also been used to explain school disengagement and dropout (Aloise-Young & Chavez 2002; Chen & Thomas 2001; Libbey 2004; Thornberry et al. 1990). In this respect, students are more inclined to stay in school if they exhibit social attachment or ties to other people, if they are involved in activities such as school sports or clubs, if they exhibit commitment to school by way of time and energy expenditure and if they have some measure of respect for conventional laws and authority. Peer-rejected youth are at particular risk for school problems including disengagement (Woodward & Fergusson 2000; Zettergren 2003). Aloise-Young and Chavez (2002) also discuss Primary Socialization Theory as it relates to early school leaving. This theory refers to the primary socializing agents in young people's lives, essentially peers, family and school, and states that when ties to school and family are weak, and ties to peers strong, the student is at greatest risk of leaving school early (Oetting 1999; Oetting & Donnermeyer 1998). This theory has also been supported by the work of Ary, Duncan, Duncan, and Hops (1999).

In his ethnographic study of working-class students, Willis (1977) theorizes that the "lads" were interacting with school based on a class-based resistance model which was derived from perceptions of school as an institution of the middle, not the lower, classes. Brantlinger (1993) undertook a qualitative exploration of student's social class as it relates to interpretations of school and found that low-income students perceived that they were being treated unfairly at school, that penalties were felt to be disproportionate to infractions. Low-income students felt they were being treated differentially not just by school administrators and teachers, but also by other students. The author states that, "the formal organization of school, such as stratified curricular tracks and scaled grading practices, and the informal interactions, such as high-income students' exclusiveness, were legitimated by views of social classes... Although the organization of the school may not be responsible for social class rifts, it did nothing to bridge the chasm" (p. 10). Her conclusions support Willis' theory of peer groups and class-based resistance as well as the theory of uneven application of school rules expanded by Brady (1996).

A participation-identification model was brought forth by Finn (1989). The author proposes that students who participate in school activities have a greater chance of staying in school and this is in the most part due to the social ties that are built and strengthened through extra-curricular involvement. This theory is built on earlier work that links extracurricular involvement and educational attainment (Bell 1967; Otto 1975; Otto & Alwin 1977) and that explores the influence of extra-curricular involvement on peer groups (Eder & Parker 1987). Mahoney and Cairns (1997) find support for Finn's theory in their longitudinal cohort study of 392 adolescents followed over a six-year period between grades 7 and 12. The authors also find evidence to support the claim that the relationship between extra-curricular involvement and school engagement is stronger among those students identified as being at risk of dropping out in grades 7 and 8 than among those who are identified as being not at risk of dropout at that time. Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992) demonstrate a positive relationship between participation and engagement among African American and Hispanic youth as well. McNeal (1995) and (1997) demonstrates a pathways model with a 1.7 fold

increase in dropout risk (when other factors are controlled for) in those students who did not participate in school sports as compared to those who did.

### 1.1.6.3 Theories Relating to Institutional Practice and Characteristics

The third group of theories for school disengagement and dropout in the literature are those relating to the practices and characteristics of schools as institutions. “The issue of student-school interaction must be taken into account when attempting to understand dropout behaviour” (Kronick et al. 1989, p.68).

Brady (1996) introduces the theory that school disengagement and dropout is linked to uneven and unjust application of school rules resulting in a differential treatment of students, in turn influencing their success or failure at school. Variations in school goals, disciplinary practices and supervision in relation to gender and levels of delinquent behaviour have been documented (Figueira-McDonough 1986). Clark (1998) notes that, “the rules for those with and without access to political power differ...schools are not necessarily democratic institutions” (p.21).

The theory of deviance reputation put forward by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) has both a social interactive and a institutional component. Students who are labelled “deviant” within the school system may begin to use fellow deviants as a normative reference group; they gain social support from deviant peers, which may draw them away from pro-school behaviours. This is a social interactive link with school engagement. There is also a deviance reputation pathway that is more closely linked with institutional practice. Students who become labelled *deviants* within the school system may be denied certain support services, and because their presence may make the work of teachers, administrators and other, more well-behaved, students difficult, deviant students may actually be encouraged to leave school (LeCompte & Dworkin 1991). The nine school-leavers who participated in Clark’s participatory action research study reported boredom through inappropriately applied low placements and standards,

feeling invisible, feeling without representation or being represented by an incorrectly bad or negative reputation at school (Clark 1993).

In a review of the dropout literature related to Native American students, Reyhner (1992) identified six school-based reasons associated with school-leaving among this population group: large schools; uncaring or untrained teachers; passive teaching methods; inappropriate curriculum; inappropriate testing; and tracked classes. Long distances from a student's home and the school were also found to discourage parents from taking more active roles in school activities. Communities that had Native school board trustees, a Band education committee or Band education counsellors, in contrast, showed higher graduation rates (Mackay & Myles 1989; Mackay & Myles 1995).

Other scholars have linked the size and location of a school to student engagement as well. In an early study, Barker and Gump (1964) demonstrate that students tend to be more engaged in small, rather than large, schools and that school success is linked to school size via its influence on a students' participation in, and attachment to, school activities. Bigger schools have also been rated as less welcoming than smaller schools (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum 2002). There have also been a number of studies exploring rural/urban differences in school engagement patterns. In a cross-sectional study of school dropouts from two rural American high schools, Kaminski (1993) demonstrated important differences between her rural and comparative urban data around school dropout. Of the 25 females surveyed 60% left school due to pregnancy; this was three and a half times the American national average at the time. Of the 18 males surveyed, one third of them left school to work. This study did have a small sample and only a 22% response rate to a mailed survey. In a similar cross-sectional survey of 483 rural high school students, Hardre & Reeve (2003) showed that teachers in rural schools support the "motivational resources" or the self-determined motivation and perceived competence, of students and in doing so, support them in staying in school. The results of these and other studies (Altenbaugh, Engel, & Martin 1995; McCaul 1989; Xue 1996) indicate school size and location influences on school outcomes.

The time and age of transition of students from primary or elementary to secondary school has also been theorized to be associated with dropout and disengagement patterns. For example, Hains (2001b) determined that among her sample of Aboriginal high school students in Edmonton, Alberta, dropout occurs most often in the first month of school and the first month of a new semester and is common where students transition from local elementary schools to the regional high school. A review of the student attendance, graduation and school leaving records of 45 high schools in the United States showed that the higher the grade a student was in when he or she transitioned to high school the greater the chance of school dropout. So for example, students who attend schools where they enter high school in grade 10, have a higher chance of dropping out than those who enter in grade 9. The highest dropout rates occurred among grade 11s (Alspaugh 2000). In a longitudinal cohort study of 93 grade eight students, Franks (1990) found that the highest rates of dropout occurred between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade, followed by the time between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### 1.1.6.4 Theories Relating to Broader Societal and Cultural Factors

The final group of theories for school disengagement and dropout found in the literature, are those that pertain to broader societal and cultural factors. As Epstein points out, these theories recognize that educational variables cannot be meaningfully analysed in isolation from the economic and cultural matrix of society of which they exist (Epstein 1982).

Of all the societal and cultural theories proposed, the one most commonly associated with minority student dropout is that of cultural discontinuity. This theory purports that students leave school before graduation because they find irreconcilable differences between the cultural norms and practices that exist at school and the cultural norms and practices they experience outside of school (Hymes 1974; Ledlow 1992a). Ledlow (1992a) explains, “the cultural discontinuity hypothesis assumes that culturally based differences in the communication styles of minority students’ home and the Anglo culture of school lead to conflicts, misunderstandings and ultimately failure” (p.23).

Various scholars have supported this theory (e.g. Erickson 1987; Philips 1982). Brady (1996) notes that the theory of cultural dissonance/discontinuity has often been used as an explanation for why large numbers of Canadian Native youth exit the education system prior to graduation, however, the theory does not explain why the tendency to dropout among Native youth varies widely in association with family economic circumstances, why dropout rates vary so widely from community to community and why the school experiences of Native dropouts closely resemble those of non-Native dropouts. Ledlow (1992), Wilson (1991) and others concur that a cultural ecological explanation cannot be accepted as the only explanation for [minority] students' lack of success in school. After reviewing the literature on school dropout among Native American students, Reyhner (1992) found that although cultural discontinuity was associated with school dropout in this population, many students who had strong Native orientation were able to succeed in mainstream schools because of "the strong sense of personal and group identity their native culture gives them" (p.39). The three Native American students studied by Jeffries, Nix, and Singer (2002) dismissed the idea of cultural discontinuity, but the authors state that failure to perceive cultural barriers does not mean they do not exist.

The structural strain and alienation model is similar to that of cultural discontinuity in that it links school dropout or disengagement with an ill fit between the experience of students at school and their experiences in environments and situations outside of school (Agnew 1985; LeCompte & Dworkin 1991; Merton 1968). Goals and expectations are influenced by perceived societal norms. Students who are disengaged from school, or engage in other deviant behaviours, do so because of gaps between expectations and achievements and a failure to achieve positively valued goals (Akers 2000). Poole (1989) also theorizes that cohorts of students experience specific socio-cultural events in their school lifetimes and these events can have an influence on their perceptions of school and subsequent behaviours in relation to schooling. Events such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996) for example, served to highlight and articulate some of the injustices experienced by Aboriginal students and their families with respect to the residential

schools era in Canada and the perceptions and behaviours of Aboriginal people attending school since the Commission may have been influenced by this discourse.

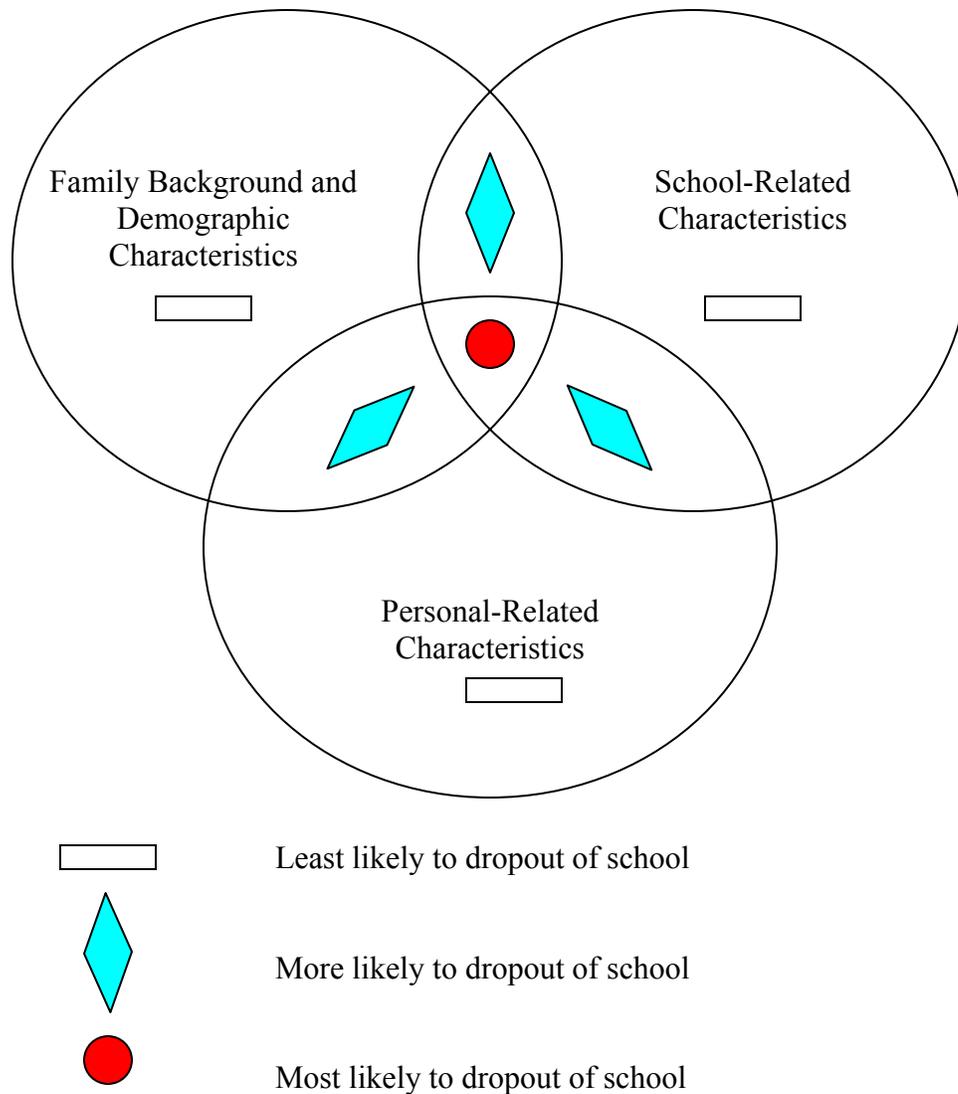
A limited number of studies have examined the role local labour market conditions play in student's decision to leave school and the evidence is mixed. Raffe and Willms (1989) introduced the 'discouraged worker' theory, which says that if opportunities in the labour market are poor, students may be inclined to dropout of school because educational attainment is not likely to bring them significant return. The work of Dolton and colleagues (1999) also supports this hypothesis. Rumberger (1983) looked specifically at ethnic minority students and found that lower unemployment rates were associated with an increased propensity to drop-out of school. Rice (1987) found that poor labour market conditions positively affect school retention because students were staying in school either, because there was no work available to compete for their time and interests or, because staying in school allowed them to build their skills and potential employability. In a study of early school leaving rates across Scotland, Monchuck (2006) found that pupils were more likely to dropout of school where employment opportunities were abundant. This could be called the 'affluent worker theory' and is supported by anecdotal evidence among school-aged youth in northern Alberta (personal communication, Margaret Fenton, B.C. Oil and Gas Commission, August 10, 2003). Audas (1994) and Micklewright, Pearson, and Smith (1990) found no significant relationship between the probability of dropping out of school and unemployment rates in the UK and Canada. Audas & Willms (2001) indicate a need for more research into the relative importance of these factors in a young person's decision to leave school.

#### 1.1.6.5 A Multifactor Model of School Disengagement

Many scholars now believe that rather than being the result of one or even a limited number of factors, school disengagement is "a complex phenomenon with multiple causes existing in several different domains...student-centred, school-related and community/environmental factors associated with early school leaving are not separate,

but rather can co-exist and interact in a myriad of ways causing early school leaving” (Alberta Learning 2001b, p.3-4). Clarke (1994) notes that, “factors may interact synergistically to increase the likelihood of dropping out” (p.87). Bowker (1993) concluded that school disengagement is the result of, “an accumulation of school, personal and family problems” (p.15).

Following an extensive literature review and two studies of early school leavers in Alberta, a conceptual model for factors affecting early school leaving was proposed (Figure 1.4) (Alberta Learning 2001a). The model delineates factors in the realms of the family, school and individual that may contribute to early school leaving and notes that those who experience factors in one, two and then three realms are at ever increasing risk of early school leaving.



**Figure 1.4: Conceptual Model for Factors Affecting Early School Leaving**  
(adapted from (Alberta Learning 2001a, p.21).

Based on a qualitative study of 30 dropout and non-dropout students in Hong Kong, Wing-Lin and Miu-Ling (2003) propose a similar multi-system model that includes the family, the school and peers as interacting influences on individuals and dropout. Other scholars support a similar multifactor, or layered, model of influence (i.e. Hemmings 1996; Hemmings, Hill, & Kay 1994; Kronick, Morton, Peterson, & Smith 1989). Phelan (1992) refers to “clusters” of influence such as family background, personal problems or school related factors that work in conjunction.

A multifactor conceptualisation for the aetiology of school disengagement appears to have emerged in the more recent literature. This conceptualisation may be the grounding for an overarching theory of school engagement/disengagement but the modelling, development and testing of this kind of model is still inadequate.

### 1.1.7 School Engagement and Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal students are often identified as ‘at-risk’ populations because of the presence of factors proven to be correlated with adverse circumstances (i.e. poverty, minority status, substance abuse) in their lives (Hains 2001a). It is well documented that Aboriginal people in Canada have poorer health and educational outcomes than their non-Aboriginal peers. While the exploration of school engagement and disengagement among ‘mainstream’ students has a long history, studies looking at patterns of educational disengagement among minority and Aboriginal students are less common. Ledlow (1992) indicates that, “there is little actual research which specifically addresses the causes of American Indian student dropout” (p.22), Brady (1996) agrees saying, “while there is substantial literature examining the issue among mainstream and various minority group students, little has been written, until recently, concerning early school leavers of Native origin in North America” (p.2). Overall, the literature that does exist indicates that there is considerable disparity in the levels of disengagement between different cultural, socio-economic and ethnic groups in North America (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine 1997a) and that some of the most disparate circumstances are found in relation to Aboriginal populations (Garrett 1999; Garrett 1995; Mackay & Myles 1995). Table 1.3 is an overview of studies that have looked at Aboriginal student disengagement or dropout, with a focus on students in North America, as found in the literature review undertaken for this investigation (the literature review search strategy is provided as appendix 1). It should be noted that studies pertaining to northern Aboriginal students and communities have been summarized in table 1.4 and so they are not included here.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Backes 1993	To compare and contrast the learning styles of Native and non-Native students (both graduates and dropouts).	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey. Personal learning style assessed using the Gregorc Style Delineator.	Sample included 98 Chippewa Metis graduates, 135 Chippewa Metis dropouts, 94 non-Metis graduates and 31 non-Metis dropouts. The Metis and non-Metis students were sampled from two different high schools.	Results indicate no significant difference between the graduates and dropouts in either group, but that there were significant differences in personal learning styles between the Metis and non-Metis students.	A dropout is defined as a student who has discontinued attendance but who has not graduated or transferred. The study is limited by its sampling technique, in that Metis and non-Metis students were sampled from schools in different States, and may not have been well matched for comparison.
Bowker 1992; Bowker 1993	To determine factors that may contribute to the educational success or failure of Native American women.	Qualitative, open-ended interviews. Questions relating to potential school factors, family factors and personal factors.	991 Native women from 3 states, 5 reservations, 7 tribal groups and among high school and college graduates as well as dropouts. The age range was 17-36 years.	Educational success or failure was found to be a result of an accumulation of school, personal and family factors (i.e. problems with the law, substance abuse, low self-esteem, peer pressure, low socio-economic status, the education level of the parents, home environments without established rules and restrictions, language inabilities, being a child of a single parent, poor attendance at school, unsupportive teachers, poor academic achievement, and pregnancy). There was not one factor that was most prominent, however one of the most significant factors was family support and there being at least one caring adult in the life of the adolescent.	The study was undertaken over a period of two years and the author, a Native American woman, personally undertook and analysed each of the interviews.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Platero, 1988; Brandt, 1992	To determine a dropout rate, and explore factors associated with dropout, among Navajo students.	<p>Two part, cross sectional, quantitative. Navajo Area Student Dropout Study.</p> <p><u>Part 1:</u> School characteristic questionnaire completed by school administration.</p> <p><u>Part 2:</u> Questionnaire completed by Navajo students and dropouts in the American Southwest Statistical comparison on 100 variables.</p>	<p><u>Part 1:</u> Administrators from Navajo schools (n=101)</p> <p><u>Part 2:</u> Random stratified sample from 33 Navajo schools of 670 students and 219 dropouts.</p>	Dropout positively associated with absenteeism, age of English acquisition, distance and time of travel to school, number of school transfers, history of disciplinary problems, alcohol and substance abuse, having dropped out before. Persistence in school associated with support and engagement from home, holding traditional values and beliefs, proficiency in English and Navajo languages, taking early vocational courses, and small schools. The most common reason for dropping out was stated to be boredom and not feeling challenged by school. Other major contributors were problems with other students, excessive absenteeism, pregnancy and marriage. Larger schools had higher dropout rates. Sex differences were not significant.	<p>School dropout defined as not being in school, but not having graduated, transferred, or died.</p> <p>Thirty-two recommendations are given for dropout prevention.</p>
Cameron 1990	To examine Native student dropout rates, graduation rates and participation in government exams in relation to proportion of Native students enrolled.	Quantitative, multiple cross-sectional. Data collected from school self-reports of student enrolment, dropout, graduation, and exam participation.	36 secondary schools in British Columbia, Canada.	Schools with a higher proportion of Native students had higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates and lower participation rates on the grade 12 government exams than those schools with a lower proportion of Native student. However, over the ten year period of the study, the graduation rate of Native students in schools with a high proportion of Native students increased by 16%.	Reports collected each year between 1980 and 1990.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Clarke 1994	To examine personal, cultural, school and family factors associated with American Indian students' decisions to stay in school until graduation, or to dropout.	Qualitative and quantitative mixed method design. Part 1: 140-item questionnaire Part 2: Semi-structured interviews.	Part 1: 165 individuals (108 graduates, 55 dropouts and 2 undetermined). Part 2: 76 graduates and 37 dropouts. Participants came from Northern Plains tribal groups on reservations in Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.	Dropouts demonstrated statistically significant difference in reported self-esteem, skipping school, expectations and attitudes about teachers and being held back in one or more grades at school. They point to factors within the school that contribute to feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, and alienation beginning as early as the first few years of elementary school. These include lack of attention, interaction, reinforcement and encouragement between students and staff, direct or indirect messages of failure or in competency, lack of opportunity for academic success, and being held back in a grade. The authors discuss alienation as one of the key discriminates between dropouts and graduates.	The authors call for the role of the teacher to expand significantly beyond merely classroom teaching and identify the important place positive adult role models have in the lives of successful youth.
Coladarci 1983	To learn more about the factors leading to dropout among Native American students in a particular Montana school district where the student body was 90% Native American and the dropout rate was 60%.	Quantitative and qualitative mixed method, cross-sectional design. A 27-item questionnaire was developed which served as the basis for the qualitative in-depth interviews.	224 recent dropouts were identified and 46 of them were located and agreed to participate.	The following factors were found to be associated with school dropout among Native American high school students in this Montana school district: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal application of school rules</li> <li>• Student teacher relationships; perceiving that teachers did not care</li> <li>• The content of schooling not being linked to life goals</li> <li>• Drug and alcohol problems</li> <li>• Lack of parental support and problems at home</li> </ul>	To explain the response rate, authors note that 35 dropouts had moved, 6 were deceased and 12 refused to be interviewed. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to contact the remaining 125 (visits to last known address, contacting relatives etc).

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Deyhle 1989; Deyhle 1992	An exploration of the school experiences of Ute and Navajo high school students in the United States.	A seven-year ethnographic study using four data sets: (1) a master data base from school records (2) ethnographic field notes and collected documents (3) interviews with school leavers and, (4) a questionnaire.	1489 Navajo and Ute high school students tracked through school records over a ten-year period. A convenient sample (of 168 Navajo dropouts) was interviewed and completed the questionnaire.	Factors associated with Navajo and Ute students leaving school include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor teachers or teachers who had low expectations</li> <li>• Content of schooling not being well aligned with their home life, goals and experiences</li> <li>• Participation in school contributing to cultural loss.</li> <li>• Inappropriate teaching methods</li> <li>• Lack of parental support</li> <li>• Lack of school / parent interaction</li> <li>• The need or want to work</li> <li>• Distance to school</li> <li>• Reading ability</li> <li>• Feeling unwanted at school</li> <li>• Pregnancy</li> <li>• Academic difficulties</li> </ul>	
Eberhard 1989	To provide data to help characterize urban, American Indian, secondary school dropouts.	Qualitative and quantitative mixed method design. Part 1: School reports of four cohorts of students each over a four-year period. Part 2: Group interviews with students and parents.	<u>Part 1:</u> Four cohorts of graduating urban American Indian students between 1980 and 1987 (total n=368). <u>Part 2:</u> Two pupil groups and one parent group undertook interviews (details not provided).	Dropping out was found to be associated with lower academic achievement; being held back (retained) in a grade; family mobility; tribal affiliation and the specific school attended. It was not associated with gender. The dropout rate calculated by author between 1983 and 1987 was 88%. The school district reports a 10% rate for 1987. The author comments on this disparity and the need for standardized measuring and reporting systems for dropout numbers.	Results of the parent and pupil group interviews were not reported separately from school report data.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

<b>Citation with Date</b>	<b>Aim and/or Research Question(s)</b>	<b>Type of Study and Data Collection</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Main Finding(s)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Franks 1990	To investigate the high school dropout rate among students in the Mississippi Choctaw Native American Band.	Quantitative, longitudinal cohort design. School reports of enrolment, graduation, and dropout.	All entering grade 8 students in 1984, in six Choctaw schools, for five years until their date of expected graduation from grade 12 (n=93).	The overall dropout rate was found to be 83% with a school variance of from 66% to 100%. The highest rates of dropout occurred between the eight and ninth grades (51%) and between grades 11 and 12 (41%). Slightly more (4%) females dropped out than males, the cohort graduating class were 16 on-time graduates including 7 females and 9 males. Female students tended to dropout in earlier grades and rates of dropout among males were higher in the later years of high school. 41% of the cohort was held back (retained in a grade) at least one time during the five year time period of the study.	The study is limited because the authors did not follow students who left the schools to see if they re-enrolled elsewhere.
Gade 1992	To determine whether American Indian dropouts could be identified by personality type.	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey using the Self-Directed Search Tool (Holland 1985a; Holland 1985b).	596 Aboriginal students (321 girls/275 boys) from 8 high schools in Manitoba, Canada. Among the sample, 103 girls and 65 boys dropped out during the year of the study after completing the instrument.	The Holland tool is based on the hypothesis that vocational interests are expressions of personality types and that those of the Realistic (preferring manual, mechanical and agricultural occupations) type, were more likely to find it difficult to adjust to typical school environments. Gade found that overall, there was a higher rate of Realistic type among the dropout group, and also that female students were at a higher risk of dropout, especially those of the Realistic and Social types (Social prefer social work, teaching and domestic jobs).	The study is limited because in general there was a very narrow concentration of occupational interest among the students and this had distinct implications for the use of the Tool and of Holland's theory with this population.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Hains 2001a; Hains 2001b	Why do Native students leave secondary school early?	Qualitative, traditional Aboriginal research methodology using talking circles, a vision quest four-day fasting exercise and small group discussions with students.	The research was broken into three separate sub-projects and engaged a total of 25 male and 29 female Aboriginal students from two High Schools in the Edmonton, Alberta area.	Findings suggest that there are a number of factors impacting Aboriginal students' success at school: relationships with teachers; drug and alcohol abuse; lack of family support; racism; lack of appropriate counselling; pregnancy; peer pressure; times of transition, the need or want of employment and poverty. The author also notes trends in school dropout, such as a dropout being more prevalent in the first month of a new school year.	The study also discusses the potential for further development of traditional Native research methodology.
Hurlburt, Kroeker, & Gade 1991	To assess the relationship between study habits, attitudes about school and school persistence.	Quantitative, cross-sectional. Students were administered the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes, Form H (Brown & Holtzman 1967)	160 Plains Cree and Saulteaux students (Manitoba, Canada) in grades 7-12 (96 students grades 7-9 [64 girls/32 boys] and 64 students grades 10-12 [32 girls/32 boys]).	Negative attitudes about school are more prevalent in junior high school boys. Girls in all grades were more comfortable with teachers and educational goals and they liked school better. Survey results indicate that attitudes about relationships at school and relevancy of school rather than specific study habits may be key in addressing persistence issues. The authors note however that they believe the problem of school dropout is contextual, systemic and embedded in the educational process shared by students and schools.	The sample represents all the students who were in attendance on test day.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
James, Chavez, Beauvais, Edwards, & Oetting 1995	To explore and compare factors associated with school success and school dropout among female and male, Anglophone and Native American students.	Quantitative, secondary data analysis of data from two large dropout studies (the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Indiana Dropout Study and the National Institute on Drug Abuse Dropout Study).	A total sample from the two data sets of 1,607 (American data).	For females, males, Anglophones and Native Americans, problems with teachers and English language ability were associated with school dropout. The Native American students who reported speaking their Native language at home in childhood had a higher chance of school dropout. A reportedly strong Native American sense of identity was not clearly linked with either educational success or dropout, however, students who reported identifying with both Anglophone and Native American culture (biculturalism) had a greater chance of educational success.	
Jeffries, Nix, & Singer 2002	To qualitatively explore the experiences of American Indian students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to add context to statistical accounts of school failure among the population.	Qualitative, in-depth case studies of three American Indian students. Data collection included observations and interviews (transcribed verbatim) with the students, peers, teachers, and school administrators.	Three American Indian high school students (2 males and 1 female) from Spotted Eagle High School in the Milwaukee Public School System.	School disengagement was “a slow deliberate progression toward a student’s inability to flourish in the educational environment...the myriad of personal and educational difficulties faced by the three participants are complicated and part of a context that can not be understood in isolation” (p.42). Students chose to leave school because of: 1) lack of comfort within the school environment (the school was unsafe and too large); 2) lack of education among their families associated with economic and social instability; and 3) wanting financial independence to earn respect and combat poverty.	Spotted Eagle High School attempts to support American Indian students, assuming that cultural discontinuity may be a factor associated with their early school leaving.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Mackay & Myles 1989; Mackay & Myles 1995	To examine the causes of failure, dropout as well as success among Aboriginal youth in Ontario schools.	Qualitative and quantitative mixed method design. Part 1: A 42-factor inventory was developed and used as a survey. Part 2: The inventory was used as a guide for interviewing key informants around the themes of: language skills, parental support and home-school communication.	310 key informants who were Native and non-Native parents, educators, students and school dropouts in Ontario.	Inadequate English language skills were associated with failure and dropout, factors associated with inadequate language acquisition included: lack of appropriate instruction in the elementary grades; parental lack of education and skills; scant reading at home; poor libraries on reserve and inappropriate television influences. Higher graduation rates were linked to schools with principals who promote and encourage Native student leadership, the recruitment of Native teachers and classroom assistants, and frequent and effective communication between the students' home, the Band and the school. Communities with better success had Bands that valued graduates and integrated them into the strategic plan of the community, had a native school trustee, a Band education committee and a Band education counsellor.	
Riles 1995	To compare on-time high school completion with the percent Native American student enrolment in school districts in the American northwest.	Quantitative review of aggregate data on graduation rates and ethnic breakdown of students in each district.	Data from 744 school districts in the American northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington states)	Results show variable associations, in Alaska, Idaho and Montana, graduation rates among Native students are higher where a higher percentage of Native students are enrolled (up to a cut-off of 80%). In all other places, and in Alaska, Idaho and Montana after 80%, graduation rates decline as percentage of Native students increases.	The study is limited by its measure of graduation rate and its failure to account for the potential confounding variables related to Aboriginal students' districts having high poverty and low levels of overall education.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Swisher, Hoisch, & Pavel 1991	To determine a national dropout rate for American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) students and establish a national repository for AI/AN dropout information.	Quantitative, cross-sectional. Dropout statistics collected from state, national, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and tribal agencies in the 20 states with the highest number of AI/AN students in the US.	American Indian and Alaskan Native students attending public, private and BIA schools.	Because educational agencies collected data and computed dropout rates using different, and often incomparable, methods, it was not possible to meaningfully combine them to come up with an accurate national AI/AN dropout rate.	This project was undertaken by the Centre for Indian Education at Arizona State University and is commonly referred to as the NEA study (funded by the National Education Association).
Trotter 1992	To inform the development of culturally sensitive in-school intervention programs for at-risk Navajo youth.	Qualitative and quantitative mixed method design. Part 1: A baseline survey with Navajo youth. Part 2: Ethnographic participant observation, open-ended interviews and 14 focus groups with Navajo youth.	174 Navajo students in grades 9 or 10 (at the beginning of the study) who displayed characteristics that may put them at risk of dropping out of school (i.e. poverty, unplanned pregnancy, criminal behaviour, self-harm, drug or alcohol abuse, failing classes and being expelled).	Five cultural themes were found to be essential to integrate into any prevention program with Navajo youth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual autonomy</li> <li>• Experiential learning</li> <li>• Appropriate public recognition of expertise (especially among instructors)</li> <li>• Family centred</li> <li>• Respect for elders and those in authority</li> </ul>	The project took place over a 4-year period.

**Table 1.3: Studies Examining Aboriginal Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Whitbeck et al. 2001	To examine factors associated with school success among American Indian middle school students.	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey.	196 American Indian students (equally representing ages 10-15 years, 5-8 <sup>th</sup> grade, 115 male and 97 female) from 3 reservations in the American upper mid-west.	Results of the bi-variate analysis indicate that maternal support ( $r=.32$ ), involvement in school clubs and sports ( $r=.18$ , $r=.26$ ) enculturation ( $r=.21$ ) and self-esteem ( $r=.38$ ) are positively correlated with school success. Enculturation and self-esteem were not correlated with each other. Results from the multivariate analysis indicate that parental education, income and family structure do not significantly influence school success. Enculturation, participation in school clubs and sports, maternal support and age are significant predictors of school success.	
Wilson 1991; Wilson 1992	An examination of the school experiences of Sioux students (in a Canadian location) as they make the transition between a reserve elementary school to a non-reserve high school.	An ethnographic study including the collection of background information and the conduct of interviews and participant observation among teachers and students in reserve and non-reserve schools.	Sioux students (in an undisclosed Canadian location) who must make the transition to a school off-reserve when they complete elementary school.	Cultural discontinuity cannot be accepted as the only explanation of school failure and dropout. Macro-structural factors, such as discrimination, inherent negativism, and unsupportive communication/interaction patterns, structures and school policies that existed in the non-reserve environment contributed to the students' inability to find success. Students felt frustrated and isolated and often were absent from school in order to support friends who were going through difficult personal issues. There was a general lack of understanding of the cultural conflict that Aboriginal students faced during school transitions.	The author notes that dropping out of school for many students is the most adaptive coping strategy at that specific time, but that many of them go on to find success at later time, and in other settings, in their lives.

### 1.1.8 Summary of Table 1.3

Of the twenty studies included in table 1.3, twelve had a principle aim of learning more about the school experiences and the educational success or failure of Aboriginal students. Five studies were testing a specific theory of disengagement or dropout, two were attempting to determine a specific dropout rate and one study was undertaken specifically to inform the development of an intervention. The five studies testing specific theories included Backes (1993) who studied Native and non-Native learning styles and how these might correlate with educational outcomes, Riles (1995) and Cameron (1990) who examined high school completion among Native students as it relates to the proportion of Native American students in a high school, Hurlburt, Kroeker, and Gade (1991) who looked at the relationships between study habits, attitudes about school, and school persistence among Aboriginal students and Gade (1992) who theorized that American Indian students at risk of dropout may be able to be identified by personality type. However, even considering these studies, theoretical discussion and development is still relatively weak. Many studies begin with a focus on the experiences and characteristics of the individual student, and with building theory around what factors may be influencing student success and/or failure. Interestingly enough however, even with this student-centred approach at the outset, many studies report a multifactor model of causation that reflects a holistic or ecological understanding of the aetiology of school disengagement and dropout. For example, Bowker (1992; 1993) aimed to learn more about the educational success or failure of Native American women (a student-focused aim), while her findings indicate that educational outcomes are linked to an accumulation of personal, family and school factors (a more holistic or ecological view). Similarly, Mackay and Myles (1989) and (1995) aimed to examine the success and failure of Aboriginal students in Ontario schools, and again, although the aim reflected a rather conservative, student-centred view of the dropout phenomenon, the authors go on to explain a broad range of school and community factors associated with school outcomes, such as whether a community has a Native school board trustee or whether the community has integrated high school graduates into their strategic planning. Overall, many scholars framed their studies as

student centred in the beginning, but later go on to discuss the disengagement and dropout of Aboriginal students as a complex issue that relates to factors at individual as well as school or community levels.

Among the twenty studies, five were qualitative in design, ten were of a quantitative design, and five were of a mixed method design. Among the quantitative studies, five were cross-sectional surveys, three were cross sectional analyses of data from school reports, one was a longitudinal cohort and one was secondary data analysis of two large national surveys. The mixed method studies were mostly surveys followed by complementary qualitative interviews or focus groups. What are largely missing from this list are intervention studies (of case-control or clustered randomized control trial design). These types of studies would be useful to inform action and build overall understanding around what works, and what does not work, as interventions to maintain or improve the educational engagement of Aboriginal students.

With respect to the population group among whom research has taken place, all but one study focused on First Nations people, a single study's sample was Metis. Six studies were undertaken in Canada, fourteen in the USA. One study specifically focused on Aboriginal women, and one on urban Aboriginal students. Three studies looked at the issue of educational disengagement and dropout among the Navajo people of the United States, the Navajo being the single most studied population.

When the main findings of the twenty studies are examined as a whole, a few trends are evident. First, as mentioned previously, many studies began with a focus on individual student experiences and then go on to report findings that are multifactorial and demonstrate an ecological or holistic understanding of the aetiology of early school leaving. Second, although cultural discontinuity is discussed and is a theory of disengagement that is widely recognized, where it is discussed authors agree that it cannot be accepted as the only explanation for disengagement or dropout among Aboriginal students. Third, among the factors that have been studied in relation to

Aboriginal student disengagement and dropout, there are a few key influences that appear to have risen above others in significance. These are family support, Native and English language ability, relationships with teachers and other significant adults, and levels of self-esteem. It is also clear that many factors associated with disengagement and dropouts are in some way linked to socio-economic status and level of poverty and so these influences cannot be overlooked.

#### 1.1.9 School Engagement among Northern Students

In addition to the concerns of Aboriginal people more generally, there is a wide range of educational and health issues that either solely effect, or are more prevalent in northern populations. Previous research indicates that a disparity in the rates of, among other things, diabetes, suicide and educational disengagement exist between northern and southern regions of Canada (Health Canada, Statistics Canada, & Canadian Institute for Health Information 1999). It is hypothesised that this disparity may be due to a combination of factors such as the size of northern populations, the difference in access to goods and services, climate and environmental factors, housing, the racial (and therefore genetic) makeup of northern communities or educational and occupational opportunities (Veugelers, Yip, & Mo 2001). On a national scale, northern regions across Canada consistently reported lower proportions of high school graduates (Natural Resources Canada 1996). Although northern populations are not exclusively Aboriginal, there is a high percentage of Aboriginal people in the north and where research exists that differentiates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal northerners, health and educational outcomes are consistently poorer for Aboriginal people (Health Canada, Statistics Canada, & Canadian Institute for Health Information 1999). While the literature surrounding educational disengagement among Aboriginal students is limited, that exploring the issue among youth in the north is even more rare. Table 1.4 provides an overview of the studies that were found as part of the literature search relating to the issue of school engagement among northern students. In this case, studies pertaining to students in the Canadian territories and northern parts of provinces, as well as Alaska were considered.

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout**

<b>Citation with Date</b>	<b>Aim and/or Research Question(s)</b>	<b>Type of Study and Data Collection</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Main Finding(s)</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Alaska Department of Education 1990	To determine an accurate dropout rate for Native students from Alaskan schools.	Quantitative, cross sectional review of school records from 17 school districts.	15,507 total students made up the sample with and 2672 Native student dropouts.	Dropping out was most common in the 11 <sup>th</sup> grade, more students were dropping out of the urban districts than the rural ones and more Native students were dropping out than non-Native (by twice the rate in almost all districts). One third of the Native students who dropped out had also been suspended or expelled during the year for excessive absence, only 5% recorded academic failure as the reason for leaving. Nearly one half of the dropouts left for unknown reasons and further attempts to gain this information were not recorded.	One-year dropout rates have limited meaning because they do not take into consideration students who transfer between schools or those who return to school at a later time.
Auchterlonie 2002	To examine and describe the transitions youth experience in the NWT.	Quantitative and qualitative mixed method design. Surveys, interviews and focus groups with youth (aged 15-29) and youth-serving agencies as well as previous document collection.	202 NWT youth completed structured questionnaires, 93 front-line agency workers and community leaders in focus groups, 171 youth in focus groups from 12 different communities in the NWT.	Youth experienced similar transitions to southern Canadian youth, transitions in relationships, work, school and ways of living. Common school transitions included leaving school, returning to school, completing school, entering and/or completing upgrading, and entering and/or completing post secondary education. The generally poorer health and well-being, education and other socio-economic circumstances of NWT youth make their transitions more difficult than for youth elsewhere in Canada. Authors stress the important influence of home and early childhood environments and the need for holistic approaches to supporting youth in transition.	

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991	To examine Dene people's current living environment, the type of training and work in which they are engaged, and their perceptions about training, work and the future.	Quantitative cross-sectional surveys with adults and youth, supplemented by the collection of published and unpublished documents.	Surveyed 635 adults (aged 18+), 1662 students (grades 7 to 12) and 189 teachers across the Northwest Territories.	There were significant differences in the survey result of Native versus non-Native respondents. Socialization of native students takes place in extended family networks. Native students had less exposure to wage-employment lifestyles at home. A large proportion of Dene students indicated they would move to a larger centre or southern Canada. There has been an erosion of the teaching of traditional bush skills. Dene girls are more wage-employment oriented than Dene boys.	This list of key findings is significantly truncated and only focuses on the student data. For full results, see the research report.
Barnhardt 1994	To examine the conditions that contribute to the success of indigenous minority students in higher education in Alaska.	An ethnographic study including interviews, reviews of student records and participant observation.	50 Alaska Native teacher education students who graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) between 1989 and 1993.	The study identifies multiple factors that have contributed to the academic success of Alaska Native students, including: a teaching and learning environment responsive to the interests and needs of culturally diverse students; student support services respectful of the interests and needs of culturally diverse students; strong family and community support; supportive prior school and life experiences; and exceptional individual efforts. Accommodations and adaptations by both the students and the institution were essential.	

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Condon 1997	To examine the experience of Inuit adolescents in Holman Island, NWT.	An ethnographic study including interviews, document collection and participant observation.	The community of Holman Island (pop. 310) including 111 children and youth between the ages of 11-19 years. Survey interviews with 22 girls and 21 boys, in-depth interviews with 6 boys and 4 girls, informal interviews with parents, teachers and young adults.	“Schools have become the primary acculturative agents in most modern Inuit settlements” (p.157). Southern style schooling has had an impact on the behaviours, language and aspirations of Holman Island youth. The author found that most youth were caught between the culture and expectations of their ancestors versus those of formal schooling. The research report provides detail about the education, schooling and aspirations of Holman Island youth in a traditionally anthropological manner.	Although this study examined adolescent life in general, a large section of the research report deals with education and so is included here.
Davis, Anderson, & Jamal 2001	To learn more about schooling in isolated communities in northern Canada.	Quantitative, cross sectional survey.	16 schools (5- Labrador, 3- Nunavut, 6 - Saskatchewan and 2- BC) surveyed using a tool designed by (Anderson 2006). Email and phone calls completed in some cases.	The author highlights the principle challenges faced by staff and students including high student drop-out rates, high staff turn-over, lack of Aboriginal teachers, dysfunctional families and community substance abuse problems.	Further details are not given about sampling strategy, response rate, specific questions asked, questionnaire development, analysis or follow-up.

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Douglas 1994	To learn about the re-contextualizing process in Arctic Bay, Nunavut, as community members begin to undertake new roles and become actors in the school system.	An ethnographic study including participant observation and background document collection.	Inuujaq School, Arctic Bay, Baffin Island, Nunavut.	Inconsistency and conflict exists between the school's values and the Inuit way of life. At times, schooling appears to threaten established family and community roles, people's practices and values and source of identity. The school community partnership is evolving and its current focus is on community control. A strong community-school partnership is felt to be a key factor in cultural vitality.	The researcher visited the community five different times for the study and engaged in "many months" of participant observation" (p.5).
Hamilton 1994; Hamilton & Seyfrit 1994; Hamilton & Seyfrit 1997	To examine gender differences in attitudes towards education and migration among rural Alaskan students.	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey.	430 rural Alaskan students (from 15 different high schools) and 144 recent graduates.	Two thirds of the respondents said they expected to leave their rural community, with more females than males expecting permanent migration. Young women also tended to be more ambitious and successful in attending post-secondary education. These education and migration patterns are affecting the gender balance of rural Alaskan communities.	

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Hamilton & Seyfrit 1993	To explore relationships between the type of community a rural Alaskan student lives in, and their educational aspirations.	Quantitative and qualitative mixed method design. Cross-sectional survey followed by small-group interviews by locally trained interviewers.	Surveys completed by 282 students in the Northwest Arctic Region (74% response rate) and 148 in the Bristol Bay Region (67% response rate). 144 and 68 (respectively) participated in group interviews. Students ranged from grades 9 to 12 in 15 rural Alaskan communities.	Students who live in towns, versus villages, in rural Alaska show greater confidence in their educational preparation for potential post-secondary study; they feel weaker ties to their home community and are more likely to aspire to attending college. Out-migration of youth for post-secondary education is higher from towns than from villages. More females than males are migrating out of rural Alaskan towns and villages.	
Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, & Hagstrom 1989	To examine, and seek to explain, changes in student dropout rates as larger, boarding schools were left for smaller village-based high schools in rural Alaska.	Qualitative, in-depth interviews with trained local researchers in the youth's first language.	264 students identified as at-risk of school leaving and 192 students who had left school within the last year. Age from 11-19 years, 75% Aboriginal, equal of each gender.	The shift from boarding schools to small village high schools dramatically reduced the dropout rates of rural Alaskan native students. In addition to eliminating the need to travel and live away from home (formally a significant barrier for students) the reduction in dropout was also linked to smaller school size, more personalized atmosphere, a sense of community and individualized instruction.	

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Lutra Associates 1992	To learn more about early school leaving in the Northwest Territories.	Quantitative and qualitative mixed method design. Cumulative file data, survey interviews and focus groups/meetings undertaken by trained local interviewers.	198 students in 10 communities in the NWT (140 identified as being at risk of dropout, and 58 dropouts). 297 people participated in focus groups or meetings.	Factors related to early school leaving touched on the community, home, school and personal lives of students. Results are reported in the form of “the student...” so they are individual focused. For example, factors said to pertain to the school include: students whose family has low home/school contact, students who have problems with schoolwork, teachers and school rules, and students who have failed grades. Early school leaving is higher where community members are dissatisfied with control of education, are concerned about the lack of community support for education and are unclear about the value and purpose of education.	
Seyfrit et al. 1998	To explore relationships between ethnic identity and rural Alaskan students’ educational aspirations.	Quantitative survey data followed by visits to each community to collect narrative accounts through informal conversation and participant observation.	762 9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade high school students in 19 schools in rural Alaska.	Students who describe themselves as Native were less likely to leave rural Alaska after high school, but multi-variate analysis determined that ethnicity was indirectly associated with migration through such factors as the level of parental and grandparental support to attend college or work outside the community. Gender differences were significant, more female than males aspired, and migrated, out of the local communities after high school graduation.	

**Table 1.4: Studies Pertaining to Northern Student Disengagement and Dropout (continued)**

Citation with Date	Aim and/or Research Question(s)	Type of Study and Data Collection	Sample	Main Finding(s)	Comment
Tomkins 1998	To document how changes that occurred within the school and community impacted the attendance rates and overall educational success of the community's students.	Qualitative, ethnographic. Data was collected through participant observation, interviews and document retrieval during a five-year period between 1987 and 1992.	This study was undertaken by a principal in a small Inuit school in Anurapaktuq, Nunavut.	Tomkins highlights four factors that were key to the school's change and subsequent positive outcomes:  a) More effective leadership; b) Reducing misconceptions that were occurring between primarily non-Inuit teachers and the Inuit students, parents and other community members; c) Reducing the rate of teacher turnover; d) Creating a caring community within the walls of the school.	
Vallerand & Menard 1984	To study the implementation of a one-year school-based program of activities (outdoor activities, job experiences and a radio station) and the influence of these on student attendance	Quantitative, multiple cross sectional. Data on late registrants and class attendance was collected at the start, mid-point and year-end of the year the program was offered and two years following.	Dene students in a grade 7-9 class in Fort Resolution, NWT.	More students were attracted to school, and more students remained in school, during the year the program was offered than in the following two years. Authors note that these results confirmed previous studies related to similar program interventions with Native students, one in California (the Ventura Program, (Fendrick 1981)) and one in British Columbia (the Mt. Currie Program, (Wyatt 1977)).	The authors do not provide details of their calculations but state that their hypergeometric distribution analysis yields equivalent results to a Fisher Exact Test 2x2 table.

#### 1.1.10 Summary of Table 1.4

Among the fourteen studies<sup>5</sup> included in table 1.4, six focused on Aboriginal populations in Alaska, five on populations in the Northwest Territories, two on populations in Nunavut and one on populations in Nunavut as well as Labrador, northern Saskatchewan and northern British Columbia. Research participants included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, teachers, parents and other adults, community leaders and representatives from youth-serving agencies. Six studies were of quantitative cross-sectional survey designs, four were qualitative or ethnographic and three were of mixed method design, combining surveys with either interviews or focus groups. The research represents a wide range of studies on a number of topics, some very innovative, relating to education and students in northern North America. A number of projects explored the education and training experiences of northern youth in different contexts (Auchterlonie 2002; Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991; Barnhardt 1994; Condon 1997), two studies were testing specific theories about factors relating to educational engagement among northern students (Hamilton & Seyfrit 1994; Seyfrit, Hamilton, Duncan, & Grimes 1998), one project aimed to determine a specific dropout rate (Alaska Department of Education 1990), one study examined the implementation, and factors for success, of a school-based intervention (Vallerand & Menard 1984) and five studies explored community or school level factors as they related to education in the north (Condon 1997; Davis, Anderson, & Jamal 2001; Douglas 1994; Hamilton & Seyfrit 1993; Tomkins 1998). Among these community or school-focused projects were three studies examining the change processes that took place within schools and communities that had experienced an increase in student engagement over a given period of time, a study looking at community type (village or town) as it related to educational outcomes, and a study examining schooling in isolated northern communities more generally.

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<sup>5</sup>One additional study was found, an unpublished Masters thesis at the University of New Hampshire by Jody Grimes entitled, "Community Context and Academic Outcomes in Alaskan School Districts" a copy of the thesis could not be obtained but it is based on the same Alaskan studies as outlined by Hamilton and Seyfrit (1993;1994;1997).

Aside from the regional centres and capital cities, communities in Alaska and the Canadian territories and northern provinces are rural and in many cases, remote. The findings from the studies included in table 1.4 indicate that the rural and remote nature of communities in the north means that the experience of students in these places is unique, and often closely linked with such things as migration and concerns over cultural viability. Students and schools in northern communities face distinct challenges: students who wish to complete their education, whether at the high school or post-secondary level, may have to leave home to do so; schools commonly experience high rates of staff turnover; southern style schooling is a relatively new phenomenon in some northern communities and community members have to find ways to ensure that schooling meets the needs of the local people and not undermine traditional cultural practices. There are significant differences between the education and migration patterns of female versus male students and there are often significant differences between the educational experiences of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal students. One size does not fit all in terms of educating northern students.

The research that has been done on educational issues in northern North America is still rather sparse, and patchy in its coverage of populations, issues and geographic locations. Overall however, the studies that do exist are varied and many quite innovative. There is some evidence of theory testing and development, of intervention evaluation and of more general surveillance. Studies have been undertaken in a quantitative as well as qualitative, ethnographic and mixed-method approaches. Similar to the studies on Aboriginal students more generally (from table 1.3) the majority of research has been done in a cross-sectional nature and it appears that case-control, cohort or randomized-control trials have not been undertaken in relation to educational issues in the north thus far.

#### Overall Summary of the Literature Review – Identifying Gaps

The documents that have been identified here come from a review of the dropout and disengagement literature with a particular focus on empirical studies, and reviews of

empirical studies, relating to North American Aboriginal student disengagement or dropout and/or educational issues in the north. The search yielded three hundred and fifty four pertinent research articles or reviews.

Overall, the existing literature base is vast yet largely repetitive, being characterized primarily by reports of attempts to calculate, or establish, accurate dropout rates (largely unsuccessfully) or determine specific factors associated with student failure in a variety of contexts. School dropout is studied more than other forms of school disengagement, such as truancy, withdrawal from school activities or changes in attendance patterns. Much of the previous research has failed to adequately account for individuals that return to school (at the secondary or post-secondary level) after dropping out. This means that many dropout statistics are inaccurate and that little is known about the student who completes a high school diploma or other training in a less than conventional manner. “Unconventional” educational patterns are particularly evident among Aboriginal populations yet seems to be rarely recognized in the drop-out literature (Human Resources Development Canada 2000).

Studies more often document dropout, and its causes, rather than examining the relative success of actions to counteract this phenomenon. Research commonly has a student focus. More recently, some research that begins with an individual student focus broadens to a discussion of family and school influences in the reporting of the results. In this respect, there has been some discussion of an accumulation of influence from factors at individual, family, school, and community levels. But, significant theoretical development of, or consensus around, this kind of multifactor model, is not evident. Audas and Willms (2001) note that the current evidence base is largely void of studies that recognize the influence of community factors, such as the availability of educational opportunities outside the school setting, community location, or the state of the labour market on patterns of educational disengagement. Ledlow (1992) notes that, “further research from a macro structural perspective is needed to adequately describe and ultimately explain American Indian student attrition” (p.24). Gilbert and colleagues (1993) conclude that, “better knowledge of how students interact with the school

environment should increase understanding of the practices and policies that could be implemented to encourage students to remain in school until graduation” (p.33).

Existing research is also almost exclusively ahistorical (Altenbaugh, Engel, & Martin 1995), meaning that the phenomenon of school disengagement and dropout has not been examined in relation to specific temporal contexts, sociocultural and global events and trends.

Previous research has also not often recognized the potential biases in schools and school curriculum, which make high school completion less likely for particular groups of students or the relative economic or social returns to, or value of, a secondary education for different populations. Recommendations for further research in relation to students from diverse population perspectives, particularly minority youth have already been proposed (Alberta Learning 2001a). The majority of North American studies of Aboriginal student disengagement and dropout look at the phenomenon from the American First Nation perspective rather than Aboriginal people in Canada, or for example, the Metis. Although a variety of types of research is being done around the topic of disengagement and dropout, there is also, “less being done from a qualitative or naturalistic perspective” (Alberta Learning 2001a, p.5).

The literature on school disengagement and dropout can therefore be characterized as largely made up of studies that:

- Are focused on school dropout rather than other forms of educational disengagement;
- Are focused on factors associated with the school failure or success of individuals;
- Fail to consider unconventional educational pathways;
- Aim to document the phenomenon of dropout and disengagement rather than report on the success or failure of attempts to improve it;
- Are ahistorical and thus do not take into consideration broader temporal and societal influences on disengagement behaviours;
- Aim to develop, rather than test, existing theories of disengagement and dropout;

- Are of quantitative cross-sectional designs;
- Study mainstream American students;
- If Aboriginal students are the study population, the focus is on First Nation groups in the United States.

An ethnographic study, grounded by activity settings theory, which examines educational disengagement and context level factors and is focused on Aboriginal students within a northern Canadian community, is an appropriate innovation that will contribute to, and fill gaps within, the existing literature base.

## **Chapter 2: OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

### **Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of the study was to gain an understanding of how factors of the school setting, and the larger context in which the school setting is located, influence the engagement of young people in school. It was hoped that this study would inform further research as well as community practice and intervention to support the ultimate, education and long-term improvement of the health and well-being of northern Aboriginal people.

The development of the study was informed by three theoretical, underlying assumptions: that education is a key social determinant of health; that unequal power structures and current and historical social injustices negatively influence health and education outcomes for Aboriginal people and; that the activity structure of everyday life can help us examine and understand the culture, behaviours and beliefs of specific populations and communities.

In order to work towards the study aim, the following objectives were set:

1. To spend a prolonged period of time within a northern Aboriginal community and school.
2. To examine the school as an activity setting as well as examining the larger context in which the school lies.
3. To gain an understanding of what school engagement means in a northern Aboriginal community context.
4. Using the activity setting model, to gain an understanding of what factors are associated with school engagement.
5. To involve Aboriginal youth and people from the local community in the research process.

6. To widely disseminate the knowledge gained from this study, in order to assist in the development of effective future research, practice guidelines, interventions and/or public policy.

## Research Questions

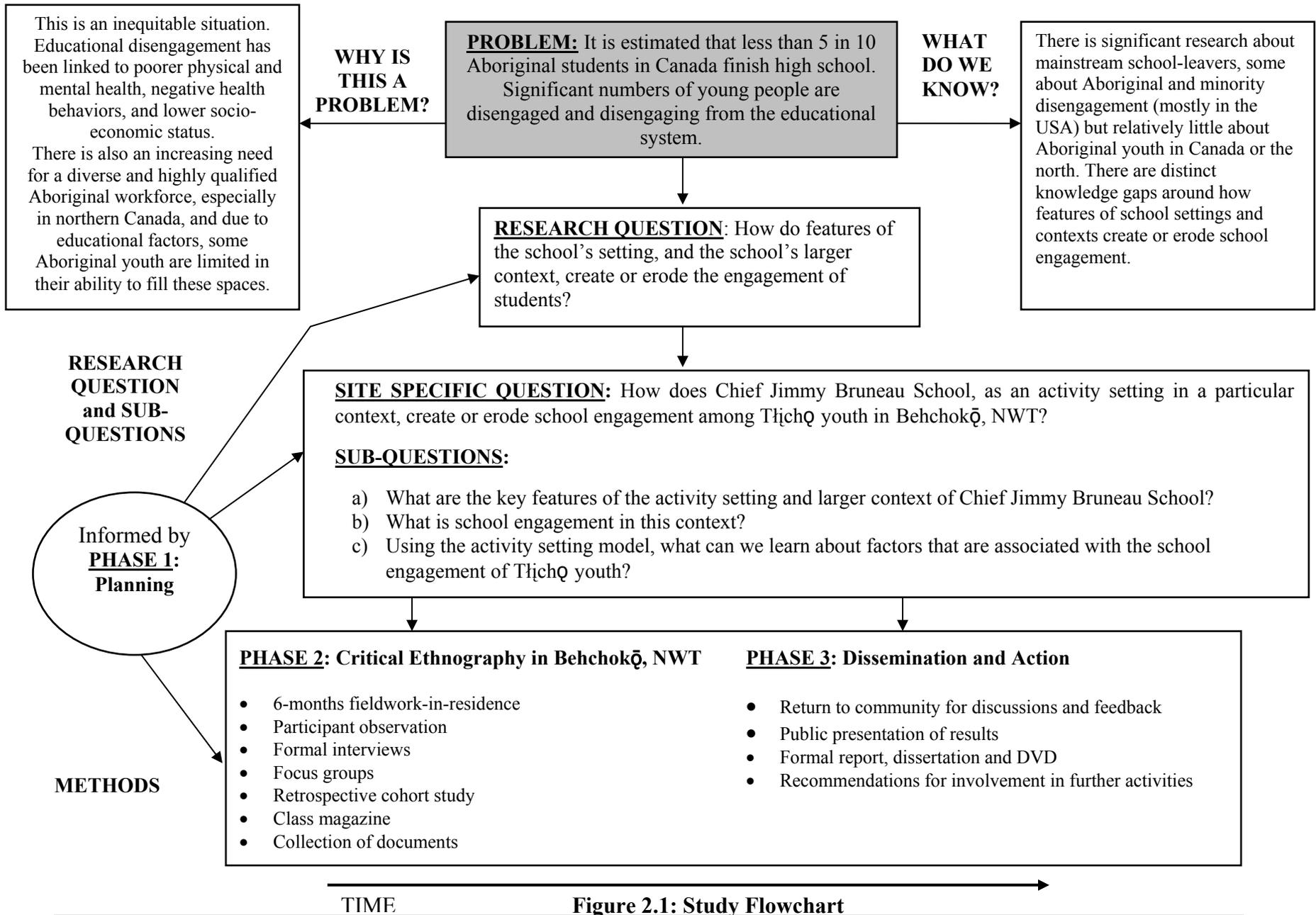
The main research question for the study was - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* This was made more specific for the community in which the study became focused by asking – How does Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, create or erode school engagement among Tłı̄ch̄Q youth in Behchok̄, NWT?

Sub-questions included:

- a) What are the key features of the activity setting and larger context of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School?
- b) What is school engagement in this context?
- c) Using the activity setting in context model, what can we learn about factors that are associated with the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth?

## Study Outline and Timeline

Figure 2.1 is the study flow-chart which outlines the underlying issue or problem, the research question and sub-questions, the methods and three phase orientation of the investigation. The study was undertaken in three phases. Table 2.1 shows the progression of work throughout the three phases of the study over a period of four years.



**Figure 2.1: Study Flowchart**

**Table 2.1: Study Timeline**

Activity	Year 1 Starts 06/2003				Year 2 Starts 06/2004				Year 3 Starts 06/2005				Year 4 Starts 06/2006			
	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	Q
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>Phase 1: Planning</b>																
Conceptualization of research issue	o															
Initial literature review	o	o														
Establish University supervisory committee		o														
Writing general research proposal		o														
University ethics and scientific review - received October 25, 2004			o													
Preliminary northern fieldwork			o													
Candidacy Exam - February 6, 2004			o													
1st contact with community, relationship building				o												
1 <sup>st</sup> visit to community - June 1-3, 2004					o											
Planning specific data collection, analysis and feed-back methods					o											
Negotiating details of fieldwork / entry					o											
<b>Phase 2: Field Work</b>																
Entry to field - August 21, 2004					o											
Continue building relationships					o	o	o									
Aurora Research Institute (ARI) Northern Research License - received February 2005.						o										
Data collection as planned in Phase 1						o	o									
Inductive analysis of data						o	o									
Data collection adapted as per inductive analysis							o									
Continued data collection until saturation (deductive)							o	o								
First stage interim findings reported to school - February 6, 2005								o								
Exit field - February 13, 2005								o								
<b>Phase 3: Culmination</b>																
Update and expand literature review in light of findings									o	o	o	o				
Return to community and school to present interim report – Oct. 10-21/05										o						
Writing dissertation									o	o	o	o	o	o		
Preliminary report to ARI														o		
Submission and defence of thesis															o	
Preparation of community, school and ARI final reports / DVD															o	o
Return to community and school for presentation of reports / DVD																o
Potential future action points																o

o = The year and quarter in which action was undertaken, each year starts in June.

Phase 1 was the planning phase that involved conceptualization of the project, a literature review, establishing a supervisory committee, the writing of a research proposal, undergoing ethics and scientific review, undertaking preliminary fieldwork, completing the candidacy exam, identifying a study community and building relationships and preliminary contacts there, planning specific data collection, analysis and feed-back mechanisms, and negotiating details of fieldwork with members of the community. Ethical approval for this project was received on October 25, 2004 from the Calgary Health Research Ethics and Scientific Board (appendix 2). A northern research license was also obtained from the Aurora Research Institute of the Northwest Territories (appendix 3). At this stage the project was entitled “The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth”.

The second phase of the research was the fieldwork component of the investigation. The candidate was immersed in the study community for the purpose of intensive data collection for six months and was in contact with the community for a period of more than three years. The candidate was advised by community members to come at the beginning of the school year and to live at the school residence during fieldwork. The candidate entered the field on August 21, 2004. Appendix 4 includes the letters of support provided by representatives at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, the Dogrib Community Services Board and the Dogrib Community Services Board of Education.

During the fieldwork phase of the research, the candidate engaged in hundreds of hours of participant observation in all parts of the setting, and around the community and region. She undertook a photovoice project with grade 10 Art students, which meant attending their classes regularly. Data collection also included formal interviews, focus groups, the collection of local documents and a retrospective cohort study. Data collection and analysis progressed iteratively, with inductive analysis (allowing themes and patterns to immerge in the analysis process) informing subsequent data collection and deductive analysis (the testing of emergent theory) helping to build the candidate’s interpretations of the data. Further details regarding data collection and analysis are

provided in chapter 3. The candidate left the field on February 13, 2005. This was part way through the second school semester:

The third phase of the study was the culmination stage. Immediately following fieldwork, the candidate spent seven months continuing to analyse, organize and reflect upon the data that was collected. She returned to the literature to attempt to place the potential findings from the study in perspective with the existing evidence base. During this time she was in email and phone contact with community members from Behchokō. The candidate returned to the field from October 10-21, 2005 to feedback ideas and get responses to the initial reports. The candidate went through the interim findings formally three times, once to the school principal, once with the school staff and once with a representative of the Tłı̄ch̄Q Community Services Agency. She also had discussions with a sub-group of staff and students about the interim results and about potential future projects. The groups decided they wanted to look into designing a school website (none exists presently) that would also include the perspective of students about schooling at CJBS. In response to input from staff about the interim report, the candidate did some additional data collection that included collecting data about reading scores and behavioural referrals for the members of the grade 10 cohort. This involved accessing the cumulative files for all the cohort members again and documenting this information where it was available. The candidate also spent time with school administration and staff finding out how projects she had been involved in, or had been following, had evolved since leaving the field. The school had received a large grant and had developed an entirely new Tłı̄ch̄Q Trades and Technology Training Program wing of the school (made in part of the old residence). The candidate was able to tour this facility, collect some documents about it and have informal discussions with the staff and students there.

Between January and December 2006, the candidate wrote the dissertation. During this time, she also submitted a brief interim report to the Aurora Research Institute. Following the submission and defence of the dissertation, the candidate will return to the community to present the final report to the school, to the Tłı̄ch̄Q Community

Services Agency and the community at large. Along with a copy of the dissertation, a number of more condensed textual documents specified for particular audiences, and potentially a DVD for students, will be developed.

## Chapter 3: METHODS

### Rationale for the Research Approach

#### 3.1.1 Introduction

Ethnography is both a product of, and approach to, research. Ethnographic inquiry has its origins in cultural anthropology. It was developed in the late 1800s as a way for primarily “western” or European anthropologists to explore and document life in what were then described as exotic, primitive or tribal villages (see for example Boas 1888; Lumholtz 1902; Malinowski 1929). Although the majority of these early works were done by males, for notable female and indigenous contributions of the same era see for example Mead (1938); O’Neale (1932); Rasmussen (1927); and Rasmussen (1929). In the majority of these early works, the ethnographer was “a figure of authority claiming the right to explain people’s lives from his or her singular point of view” (Porter 2003, p.58). This framing of a non-Western “other” within a western paradigm came under great scrutiny and criticism. This led, in part, to a crisis in confidence or representation among anthropological ethnographers (Marcus & Fischer 1986). A detailed account of the history of ethnographic methodology and of its methodological debates and divergences is given elsewhere, (Boyle 1994; Gatewood 2006; Poewe 1996; Tedlock 2000) however, it is essential to note that ethnography began largely as a way for anthropologists to look at, and write about, primitive or exotic cultures but has evolved as a research tradition that now takes many forms. Today, along with anthropology, ethnographies are commonly undertaken in the fields of sociology, education, nursing and the health sciences, among others.

Although many genres and styles of ethnographies exist, it is argued that there are core principles, values or characteristics that define ethnographers and the work they do. For example, ethnographic work aims to be holistic, contextual and reflexive (Boyle 1994; Lutz 1981) and aims to understand behaviour and investigate patterns of social interaction from the emic or insider’s perspective (Boyle 1994; Gumperz 1968).

Ethnographies are also informed by the concept of culture. In a review of the “muddles” or confusing situations facing ethnographers today, Margaret Eisenhart notes that the first is “the meaning of culture” (Eisenhart 2001, p.16). As mentioned previously, there is no single, agreed upon definition of culture but for the purpose of this investigation, a symbolic interactionist view of culture has been adopted. In this respect, culture is seen as a mediational system of tools and signs (Yaple 1989) or with relation to Mead’s culturally mediated mind, culture is the medium between the subject (the mind) and the object (society) (Mead 1934). Cultural development takes place on two planes, the social plane between individuals, and the internal plane within individuals (Vygotsky 1981).

Ethnographic inquiry has also been characterized by methods of prolonged fieldwork or immersion and by participant observation activities (Fetterman 1989). Beyond field notes and journals, ethnographers may also collect data in the form of interviews and focus groups, textual and visual media, cultural artefacts, historic records etc. Data sources can be both qualitative as well as quantitative (Atkinson & Hammersley 1998).

### 3.1.2 Educational Ethnography

Educational ethnography, defined by Spindler (1982b) as, “the study of any or all educational processes whether related to school or not” (p.2) and the ethnography of schooling, “the study of educational and enculturative processes that are related to school and intentional schooling” (p.2), evolved out of classical anthropology between the 1920s and the 1950s (Yon, 2003). The early history and evolution of the field has been well documented (Burnett 1974; Fisher 1998; Heshusius & Ballard 1996; Spindler 2000; Wax, Diamond, & Gearing 1971). This approach to research gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. Wilcox (1982) notes that prior to the 1980s, educational ethnographers were most interested in understanding schooling as it related to cultural transmission (i.e. Gearing 1973; Kimball 1974; Leacock 1969; Rosenfeld 1971; Sennett & Cobb 1972) and schools as arenas of cultural conflict particularly based on language differences and variations between home and school practices (i.e. Cazden & John

1971; Lightfoot 1978; McDermott 1974; Mead 1951; Rist 1972). Ethnographic research in schools, and about schooling, was being undertaken from both a micro-level (i.e. Borman 1978; Burnett 1976; LeCompte 1978) and a macro-level view (i.e. Ogbu 1974; Ogbu 1978; Spindler 1974). Although not meant to be an exhaustive list, there are a few seminal educational ethnographies that are cornerstones of the discipline and important to make reference to. For example, ethnographer Philip Wesley Jackson published the influential work Life in Classrooms in 1968 (Jackson 1968) where he examined the link between schools and the society they serve. In addition to his theoretical contributions around instructional interchange and teachers' multiple roles, Jackson effectively demonstrated the usefulness of participant observation in educational settings. Alan Peshkin of the University of Illinois also examined the relationship between school and community, this time in rural America, in his educational ethnography Growing up American (Peshkin 1978). Peshkin spent two years in a school in "Mansfield" USA studying the communal functions of school and his work helped advance our understanding of educational ethnography particularly the researcher's role in interpreting and reconstructing data. Harvey Wolcott's classic, and often cited, educational ethnography Man in the Principal's Office (Wolcott 1973), is another example of a seminal study which greatly informed the evolution of the field. Wolcott used ethnographic methods, which he brought from his training in anthropology, to examine the behaviours and beliefs of an elementary school principal in an attempt to shed light on the everyday realities of the position. The study involved more than 2-years of participant observation and other fieldwork and was a rigorous study undertaken at a time when educational ethnography was still in relative infancy. The original intent of the study was to become a *mirror* for educators (Wolcott 1982) but the author notes that the most significant contribution of the work was not this outcome, but rather the exploration of the educational ethnographic method as a potential model for research and evaluation in schools overall.

Another classic educational ethnographic work that must be mentioned is Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs by Paul Willis (Willis 1977). In this work, Willis examines the way working class students react to, and interact with,

school and he describes the resistant "lads" and the more obedient "ear'oles". The author explores the topics of cultural transmission through schooling and what school means for different classes of students. Although Willis' background is in Literature and Cultural Studies, this ethnography has become required reading in most field Sociology courses in the United Kingdom, mainland Europe and North America. As part of an interview done with Willis upon the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the work Kleijer and Tillekens (2003) note that "After it was published in 1977, *Learning to Labour* had quite an impact on the social sciences. Reading it, many of those working in the field became aware of the potential of cultural studies and ethnographic research" (p.1).

### 3.1.3 Categorizing the Current Work

This doctoral study can be categorized under a number of the sub-categories of ethnography. It is an applied ethnography, in the sense that it is oriented to creating positive social change and to the understanding, and finding of ways to improve, sociocultural problems (LeCompte & Shensul 1999b). It is a critical ethnography because it is grounded in critical theory with a recognition of how inequitable distribution of resources influences human beliefs, behaviours and outcomes (Carspecken 1996). The study can also be described as a school or educational ethnography because the target setting is a school and the investigation is about understanding the experience of youth in relation to education in a particular community (Spindler 1982a).

A school-based ethnography was selected because essentially it was the most appropriate research methodology to respond to the main research question of the investigation: How does Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, create or erode school engagement among Tłıchǫ youth in Behchokǫ, NWT? To gain an understanding of the school as an activity setting, it was necessary for the candidate to physically observe and participate in the setting over a period of time. LeCompte & Shensul (1999b) point out that ethnographic approaches to research are useful to. "...define a problem when the problem is unclear [or] when it is

complex and embedded in multiple systems or sectors [and] to identify the range of settings where a problem or situation is occurring” (p.29). Although significant oral tradition exists, and there is some textual documentation of changes in the culture, language and way of life of the Tłı̄chǫ people, there are limited records of the experience of youth and particularly limited information about youth in relation to western schooling after the residential schools era. Community members were concerned about youth issues, particularly issues related to staying in school, loss of traditional language, alcohol and drug use and the potential negative impacts from recent diamond mining activities in the region. Neither a specific research problem or question, nor the settings, sectors and systems, which might make up components of the problem, were clear at the outset of the study. An ethnographic approach to the study allowed this to evolve and become clearer as the candidate became more familiar with the local people and contextual realities. Working with schools can also help facilitate research with youth; indeed in the Dogrib region it is common. As part of the recent Dogrib Community Addictions Strategy for example, the project committee decided to work with schools saying, “During our public community consultations, many young people were too nervous to come forward. The Addictions Committee decided to work through the schools in our Board to get their opinions” (Cecilia Zoe-Martin, 1999, p.i). Geographically the research pertains to people in a primarily Aboriginal area of Canada’s north. There must be a recognition of the mutual colonial history and the historic imbalance of power that has existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and between youth and older adults in this region. Critical ethnography, with its explicit orientation towards the examination of social inequalities, the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency (Carspecken 1996) allows us to acknowledge historical injustices and potentially contribute to positive social change. Engaging in prolonged fieldwork also helped the candidate communicate, by way of her actions, respect for local people and an understanding of the importance of fostering strong community ties and giving back to the community. It was also felt that prolonged time in the field could help improve the quality and the internal and external validity of the research; rather than studying research participants, ethnographers are in place to learn from people (Spradley 1979) and with prolonged time in the field,

differences in perception between the investigator and the research participants can also be clarified as they happen (Morse & Field 1995).

#### 3.1.4 Contemporary Studies that Informed the Current Work

In response to the great diversity of work being undertaken under the ‘critical ethnographic’ and ‘educational ethnographic’ labels, and with the hopes of orienting the place of the current study in relation to the theoretical and methodological stances of previous scholars, examples of three studies are provided here. Each of these investigations informed the current study in a specific way, whether through its design, content area and/or theoretical orientation. The first was a critical ethnography undertaken by George Dei, Josephine Mazzuco, Elizabeth McIsaac and Jasmin Zine from the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Their work, entitled Reconstructing Drop-Out: A critical ethnography of the dynamics of black students’ disengagement from school, examined school disengagement among African-Canadian students in the Ontario school system (Dei et al. 1997b). The authors call us to look beyond individual factors traditionally associated with dropping out of school and have examined how forms of social difference such as race, class, and gender as well as social, structural and institutional practices affect school engagement. This study provided a useful structure on which to design the current work, including interview and focus group guides that were helpful references in the early part of the study’s development.

A critical ethnography undertaken by Michelle Fine, from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, also significantly informed the current study. Her work, entitled Framing Dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school, explored school engagement and inequity among students at an urban high school in New York City (Fine 1991). Although from an urban American context, Fine’s work is well designed, clearly explained and creatively presented. She insightfully explains how her research question evolved from “why would an individual

student drop out?” to “how could an educational institution produce majority failure?” (p.139). Her role as social researcher and social critic was also a useful model.

The current study was also significantly informed by an applied ethnography by Richard Condon of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arkansas, entitled, Inuit Youth: Growth and Change in the Canadian Arctic (Condon 1997). This study was part of the Harvard Adolescence Project that examined the experience of adolescents around the world, as they are part of rapid global changes. Here the author examines the changing lives of Inuit youth in the northern community of Holman Island, NWT. This text provided an example of ethnographic work undertaken quite recently with youth in a northern Canadian community. Although the work deals with Inuit, rather than First Nation youth, and it is of a more classical anthropological nature than the current study, it provided useful descriptions of, and ways to think about, change in the contemporary arctic and contained significant amounts of detail about school, work, and adolescent behaviours among youth in the Canadian north that were useful comparisons.

### Focusing on the Experience of Youth

The intention of this study was to maintain a focus on the experience and perspective of young people themselves. The candidate spent time with students in the places where they interacted, engaged students in research related projects, hired a student research assistant, interviewed youth and held focus groups with youth as well. Although an activity setting model was used as a lens through which the research question and sub-questions were asked, a type of second lens was also applied. This was the ‘youth experience’ lens and it involved three questions that remained central to the work in all ways. The first question was: What Are Youth Doing? This meant focusing on what Aboriginal youth in this particular community *do* in relation to schooling and education. What are the educational and occupational pathways of local youth? What do youth do at school (in classes, in other academic settings at the school like the library and computer room, in extra-curricular activities, in detention, at the office, at

lunch and break, extra help after school, and on the school grounds)? What do youth do when they are not at school (evenings, weekends, holidays, and days when they are absent)?

The second over-arching question that kept this study focused on the experience of youth was: What do youth say? This was about gaining an overall understanding of what youth (of different types) say about school and education. What do youth say to each other, to teachers and to researchers about school and education? Are there different messages being communicated by youth at different times and to different people? What patterns can we find in message delivery and what does this tell us about youth and school? How do the behaviours or actions of youth differ from what they communicate? How do youth use non-verbal communication to express feelings about school?

The third question that was used to maintain the focus of this investigation on the experience of youth was: What do youth leave behind? Here, things such as artwork, school displays, graffiti on the walls and legacies that were left at school from students past were of interest. This included influences from past students on routines and social structures (such as the continued existence of a certain club or a specific institutional practice). This kind of data provided another data source into the thoughts, feelings and values of youth. An art class project was initiated as part of the research for example; the theme was ‘what does school mean to me’. Drawings, photos, videos and written comments were used in this project and these are all examples of things that youth leave behind. These records helped build additional insight into what youth think and feel about school, insights that complemented the data collected from participant observation and from collecting textual documents or undertaking interviews.

### Case Selection

The candidate wanted the study to be an academic exercise that would contribute meaningfully to the knowledge base, but, it was also hoped that the study could be

undertaken so that it would also be responsive to community needs and priorities and potentially inform positive social change. In the least, the candidate wanted to be able to make a positive contribution to the setting while carrying out the investigation. To help ensure that this would happen, the following actions were undertaken:

- A) Informal visits were made to communities in the north prior to the establishment of a concrete research question or agenda. These visits were to provide a general orientation for the candidate and helped the study be more responsive to local issues. The visits included three trips (two to northern Alberta and one to the Yukon and the Northwest Territories) to collect basic information about communities (name, type of community (reserve, settlement etc), a brief history, population, number and type of school, and an overview of the major industrial development in the area). The research candidate also completed a critical synthesis of previous research related to educational engagement among Aboriginal youth.
  
- B) Informal discussions with potential ‘key-informants’ or ‘gate-keepers’ were undertaken. With the assistance of known contacts at the Canadian Circumpolar Institute (University of Alberta) and the Alberta ACADRE Network (Edmonton), the candidate was introduced to a number of people in northern communities including teachers, principals, youth, workers, employers, industry representatives, recreation staff etc. The research candidate was able to informally discuss the following:
  - 1. A brief personal introduction and discussion of general research interests.
  - 2. Asking what they felt were the most significant educational and youth issues in their community or area.
  - 3. Understanding this person’s role in the community and relation to the issues.
  - 4. Ask if they knew of any other educational research or projects happening in area or if they could suggest other sources of information.

5. Ask if there might be any opportunity for the research candidate to do some volunteer or ‘job-shadowing’ activity in their community, to learn more about youth and educational issues there.
  6. Ask if it would be possible to contact them again in the future about the project.
- C) Once the broad topic of “educational disengagement” was determined, the candidate established three criteria that had to be met in a potential study site:
1. Need – was educational disengagement among Aboriginal youth a concern in this setting?
  2. Feasibility – would the candidate have sufficient access to the setting?
  3. Participation – did local community members have an interest in being involved?

As outlined previously in this thesis, contact with community members in Behchok̄ was made through a known contact at the Canadian Circumpolar Institute. The community was looking to establish research partnerships and was particularly interested in looking at adolescent and community health issues. (Shatzman, 1973) point out, “...it is often advisable to ‘case’ possible research sites with a view to assessing their suitability, the feasibility of carrying out research there, and how access might be accomplished should that area be selected” (p. 19). A visit to Behchok̄ was undertaken by the candidate to determine whether it might meet the study criteria. She was particularly interested in gauging the potential interest in participation in the study by those at the school and in the local school board. She also wanted to explore the feasibility of potential living arrangements in the community. The visit was three days in length and during this time the candidate undertook a guided tour of the school and community, engaged in small group discussions with school staff, students and other community members. And spoke at length with administrators at the school and school board about the potential research. After the visit, the candidate was in contact with the community by phone and email and more detailed negotiations about the

fieldwork took place. After a 6-month period of preliminary fieldwork and an initial visit to the community, Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Behchok̄ was selected as the principal site, or case, for the investigation. An overview of the school is provided in chapter five.

### Sample Selection

Data collection and analysis was an iterative process. Purposeful and maximum variation sampling methods were used to designate potential participants for interviews and focus groups. In this method, individuals are approached because they are “...information-rich and can illuminate useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton 2003, p.40). With maximum variation sampling, the researcher samples variable positions in relation to a topic, and in doing so, is able to gain perspective around the common and the universal. Thus, sampling for maximum variation helps illuminate consistent patterns across diverse perspectives (Patton 2002).

Participants for each of the interviews and focus groups were selected based on particular insights and understandings that they might have had given their positions within the community and/or school. For this reason, each of the interview and focus group guides (provided as appendices 4 and 5) is unique, although some standard questions were asked of most participants. The interviews and focus groups were scheduled at the interviewee’s convenience. All interviewees provided oral, informed consent as approved by the University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine’s Health Research Ethics Board and the Aurora Research Institute of the NWT. The selection of participants for interviews and focus groups was also influenced by the input of community partners such as school staff, administration and elders. For example, the candidate communicated her needs for a student focus group with a particular composition to the school administration and they helped facilitate the process of student selection. In another case, an elder suggested a particular community member for interview and the candidate followed through with this suggestion. Purposeful and maximum variation sampling allowed for this kind of flexibility while at the same time,

the candidate was careful to ensure variation in age, gender, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal representation, educational status and occupation where appropriate. As analysis progressed, the investigator searched for additional individuals, from whom data might counteract previous ideas. Within maximum variation sampling, this is called searching for negative cases and it was a useful way to examine emerging theory about the data. Final interview sample size and composition was determined in relation to data saturation. Seventeen interviews were sufficient in light of the richness of each interview and the quality of other data sources that were available to the candidate. More details about the interviews, mini photovoice interviews and focus groups are provided subsequently.

### Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data sources were used for this study. The principal data source was participant observation field notes from 6-months immersion in the community and another two to three years of engagement with the community less frequently. Other data sources such as formal interview transcripts, transcripts from focus groups, school documents, local artefacts and visual media supplemented the field notes. The following sections provide more detail about each data source for this investigation.

#### Participant Observations Field Notes

The candidate spent six months living in the Tłı̨cẖ First Nation of Behchoḵ, NWT. Her field notes included 220 typed, single-spaced pages of notes and direct quotes from hundreds of hours of participant observation. Field notes were records of such things as daily routines, interactions, behaviours of students, school staff and others, the use of symbols and resources, public presentations, events in the school and community, notes from informal discussions with school staff, students and members of the community, and detailed accounts of other visits, interactions and observations throughout the

school and the Behchok̄ region. Field notes were shared and discussed with the doctoral supervisor.

### Reflexive Research Journal

The candidate maintained an on-going journal in the style described by LeCompte and Shensul (1999b, p.153). The journal included thoughts and personal reflections, particularly as they relate to theory and project development and the evolving role of the candidate throughout the investigation. The reflexive research journal complemented the participant observation field notes by including more abstract and incomplete ideas and by being a record of the candidate's journey through the entire doctoral program at the University of Calgary, not just the fieldwork component. The reflexive research journal also helped the candidate maintain a record, for audit purposes, of the process of selecting the research setting, the evolution of the research question and method, as well as the acts of data collection, analysis and write-up.

### One-on-One Interviews with Key-Informants

Seventeen semi-structured, one on one interviews were conducted. Interview participants included eight males and seven females (one male and one female were interviewed at two separate times about different topics). Seven people with Aboriginal ancestry and eight non-Aboriginal individuals participated in formal interviews. Participants included elders (2), school administrators (4), teachers and other school staff including youth counsellors (4), government officials (1), adult educators in the community (2), and Band Council employees (2). Ten of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Seven interviews were recorded with detailed, hand written notes instead of a tape recorder and these notes were later typed. Interview participants were able to review and adjust their transcript if they wished. Interviews ranged from 35 to 100 minutes in length. Appendix 5 contains the interview guides used for this study.

## Focus groups

Three focus groups were undertaken with a total of 22 individuals.

- a) School staff: (6 members, 1 Aboriginal). An invitation was made by the candidate via the school administrator to specific school staff to participate in a focus group for the project. Potential participants were identified based on the purposeful and maximum variation sample technique described previously.
  
- b) Students: (9 individuals, all Aboriginal). An invitation was made by the candidate via the school administrator to specific students to participate in a focus group for the project. Potential participants were identified based on the purposeful and maximum variation sample technique described previously.
  
- c) Community Health Care Workers: (7 individuals, 2 Aboriginal). This focus group was arranged in conjunction with members of the Alberta ACADRE Network at the University of Alberta. An invitation was made by the candidate and two researchers from ACADRE via an administrator with the Dogrib Community Service Board to specific health care workers to participate in a focus group for the project. Potential participants were identified based on the purposeful and maximum variation sample technique described previously.

All focus group data was collected through detailed, hand-written notes and these notes were later typed. Focus groups ranged from 45 – 60 minutes in length. Appendix 6 includes the focus group guides used for this study.

## Public Presentations

Sections of verbatim notes were taken at five key public presentations that were attended by the candidate during the fieldwork component of the study. These have been separated from the participant observation field notes because they include exact quotations and were more similar to interview transcripts than the rest of the field notes. The following are included among these public presentations that became important data sources:

- a) Public presentation by a school administrator to local and regional school staff (60 individuals). Topic: The history of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School and the Dogrib Community Services Board (40 minutes).
- b) Public presentation by a Band Council staff member to local and regional school staff (60 individuals). Topic: Education and the Dogrib People (40 minutes).
- c) Public presentation by a school administrator and a Tłı̄ch̄Q elder to local and regional school staff (12 individuals). Topic: Dene Kede: The Development of the Traditional Curriculum (90 minutes).
- d) Public presentation by a School Review Committee from the GNWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment to the CJBS staff (30 individuals). Topic: Results of the 2005 CJBS School Review (90 minutes).
- e) CJBS Student Public Speaking Contest. Twenty-two students did speeches for an audience of students, parents, other community members and judges. The speeches were between 10-15 minutes in length on the following student selected topics: respecting yourself; rape; religion; drinking and driving; keeping the Dogrib language alive; famous people

from Rae-Edzo; hobbies, Shakespeare; The Brothers Grim; The Way of the Samurai; why I am proud to be a Canadian; peer pressure; literacy; music; the date rape drug; what to do on your first date; how to make friends; travelling; smoking in public places and teenage pregnancy.

### CJBS Graduation Records

A binder containing the academic transcripts of all graduates from CJBS is maintained at the school. The academic transcripts indicate the student's name, address, and date of birth, as well as a record of all classes and diploma exams taken (with results) by year taken. Graduates must have a minimum of 100 credits (minimum passing grade of 50%) with a specific mix of courses (as outlined in the graduate requirements for the Alberta curriculum that has been adopted by the NWT). A credit summary (indicating total number of credits and breakdown of required courses) was available for each graduate.

The school also keeps a record of the academic transcripts for students who have not met the academic requirements for graduation but are no longer attending school. Although not a comprehensive list of school leavers, this record represents most of the students who have obtained some credits but have likely left the school permanently (i.e. they are now adults and have moved on to other schools or work places for example).

### Attendance and Registration Records

The candidate was able to get printed attendance and registration reports from the school attendance system. The following reports were obtained:

- a) A statistical summary of the attendance register for grades 10-12 from 2000 (September) – 2005 (February) including students' names by homeroom, days enrolled, number of late days, days absent, days present, % time present, totals by sex, totals by homeroom.

- b) Class roster reports for grades 7-12 from 2000 to 2005 including students' names by homeroom, registered grade and student ID number

### Student Cumulative Files

A cumulative file is kept by the school for each student that has attended, or is attending, CJBS. Student cumulative files include the students' demographic information (address, age, sex, language spoken at home) academic record and copies of past report cards, standardised test scores (including reading, language comprehension and math test scores of many varieties), discipline records, records of school transfers etc. The candidate had access to the cumulative files for all students and the files for the students in the grade 10 cohort were examined in detail.

### The Treaty 11 Band Council Scholarship Committee Reports

The Treaty 11 Band Council Scholarship Committee maintains a record all of the students who receive, or have received since the inception of the committee, financial support in the form of academic scholarships from the Band Council. The policy of the Band Council is to support all Tłı̄ch̄Q students who chose to pursue post secondary education or training of some form (regardless of high school graduation). Therefore, the list of scholarship recipients is synonymous with the list of all students who have attended, or are attending, post secondary programs. The list includes information on which course of study the student is taking and which institutions he or she is attending.

### Emails from the Dogrib Intranet

The candidate was given an address to be on the Dogrib Intranet, the electronic mail system for the region. Emails that were sent to the candidate, either as the principal recipient or as a copy, were included in the data set. A decision was made however not to attempt to gain consent to quote from these directly, instead, emails were used as

records of events, activities, and actions and in combination with other sources of data, they acted as important sources for confirmation, contradiction and triangulation purposes.

### Physical Artefacts, Displays, and the Physical Environment

Physical artefacts, displays, and features of the physical environment of the school and community were photographed or video recorded, and accompanying text was recorded verbatim in participant observation field notes. This data included recordings of student activities (i.e. sports tournaments, class change and meal times, routine assemblies, classroom work etc) and school and community events (i.e. cultural activities, visits by special guests, theme days, routine gatherings etc) as well as recordings of students' artistic displays, cultural objects at the school and in the community, displays on bulletin boards, graffiti, copies of photo collages from the student travel club, photos of students' homes and other local buildings, recreational sites etcetera. This data was used to complement and compare with text-based sources of data.

In addition to the photos and video recordings taken by the candidate herself, there was also a videotaped recording of Chief Jimmy Bruneau's public address at the opening of the school in 1971 (which was transcribed) and a Treaty 11 DVD about the Dogrib Journey and the Tłı̨cẖ Agreement that were used as data sources.

### Textual Documents

The candidate collected two large file boxes filled with textual documents useful to the study. Textual documents included such things as copies of reports, letters, evaluations, local newspaper articles, and announcements. There were also a significant number of reports and previously transcribed interviews made public from studies done in the past in Behchoḵ. The following is a more detailed list of the school and school board documents that were used as data sources:

- a) Strong Like Two People: Making a Mission Statement for the Dogrib Schools
- b) A Guide to Integrating Dene Kede Curricula to Existing Curricula
- c) Alberta Learning June 2004 CJBS School Report
- d) School Review Data and Reports (1993, 2000, 2004)
- e) Review of the CJBS Residence 2002
- f) Review of High School Graduates from CJBS
- g) Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School Student Registration Guide
- h) Trails of Our Ancestors, Whati Trail 1998
- i) Pride Questionnaire report: CJBS March 23, 1998
- j) Historical letters / correspondence regarding school issues (most from 1989-1990 proposed development of alternative program and the 1997 independent studies issues)
- k) A proposal for the development of a regional high school in Behchok̄, 1991
- l) CJBS Strategic Plan 1993-1994
- m) School Renewal Plan 1997 (with corresponding staff response)
- n) Interagency Alternative School Proposal 2004
- o) Six CJBS yearbooks produced since 1984
- p) Reminders and notices from the school administration to the staff during the 6-month fieldwork period.
- q) Notices, announcements and displays from school bulletin boards during the 6-month fieldwork period.

Below are textual documents that were pertinent to the investigation but were collected from sources outside the school or school board in Behchok̄:

- a) Treaty 11 Scholarship Committee Newsletters
- b) Transcripts of the House of Commons Debate about the Tłı̄ch̄ Agreement (2004-2005)
- c) NWT Education and Culture Branch Newsletter(s)

- d) Stories from our Youth: The affects of addictions on our community
- e) Tłı̄ch̄Q Agreement: Land Claim and Self Government Agreement  
Among the Tłı̄ch̄Q and the Government of the NWT and the Government  
of Canada (2003)
- f) The Drumbeat: A literary magazine by the students of the Dogrib  
Community Services Board
- g) NWT Industrial Mining Skills Strategy (2004)
- h) Adolescent Girls in the NWT: Academic Preparation and Career  
Planning
- i) St. Michael's Parish Minutes of Parish Council Meetings Sept-  
December 2004
- j) Post Secondary Indicators Report 2001 NWT Department of Education,  
Culture and Employment
- k) Territorial Student Support Needs Assessment 2000
- l) People: Our Focus for the Future – Education, Culture and Employment  
A strategy to 2010
- m) NWT Labour Force Development Plan: 2002-2007
- n) NWT Youth in Transition Study
- o) Our Education, Our Future: What NWT Girls Said
- p) We know and Love Tłı̄ch̄Q Nde (comments and concerns from the  
Dechilaoti Elders)

#### Local Newspaper Articles

Articles were clipped from News North, Above & Beyond, The Yellowknifer, and Nunatsiaq News, between August 2004 and March 2005 that relate to Tłı̄ch̄Q people, culture, education, Behchok̄, CJBS and other youth issues in the north. Copies of a comprehensive collection of newspaper articles about the return of a tribal caribou skin tent to the community in 1997 were also acquired.

### Retrospective Student Cohort

A retrospective cohort of high school students from a previous grade ten class at CJBS was identified. This followed a local request from the TCSA and the suggestion that “the most accurate way to study students is to look at entering [students] ... years later and determine what has happened to them” (Chavers 1991, p.i). The cohort was made up of 76 individuals (41 [54%] male and 35 [46%] female). This represented all of the students who were registered in grade 10 at CJBS as of September 1<sup>st</sup> in a previous year. The exact year is not made public so that anonymity may be maintained in this relatively small sample of students from a small community. Of interest in this cohort were members’ education and employment patterns, and parental status. Data was collected from school records including cumulative files, attendance records, the graduation record, records from the Band Council Scholarship Office and from two verification interviews, one with a member of the school administration and one with a Band Council staff member. Because the community from which the sample is drawn is small, (population of less than 2000) the two key-informants for the verification interviews knew almost all the members of the cohort personally. School data about past and current students (their academic record, graduation status, attendance and registration details) was accurately and completely recorded by the school. The Band Council had a complete list of students who have attended higher education programs. These documents were made available to the investigators for the study. Attempts were made to verify and triangulate the information collected; for example, the scholarship list and records from the school were cross-referenced with information collected in interviews. It is recognized that a small amount of inaccuracy may exist in the data collected, particularly as it relates to work status (people in the region can be highly transient and work may be of varying durations and locations). There may also be some inaccuracy in reporting whether or not a student is also a parent (this is not always public information, particularly for males). If cases were missed, it means that the parenting rates presented would be low estimates. A cross sectional analysis was done on the data as of November 1<sup>st</sup> four years after the start of the cohort. If the students progressed at a pace of one grade per year, we would expect the majority of them to be

out of high school at the year four cross section of time. It was recorded whether students were still in school (and if so which grade), whether they had graduated, whether they were working or had gone to other schooling, and whether or not they were known to be parents.

### A Photovoice Class Magazine

A photovoice project was undertaken with a tenth grade art class of 23 students ranging from 15 to 25 years old. This project was facilitated in partnership with a CJBS art teacher. Photovoice was first described in 1992 by Carolyn Wang and Mary Anne Burris of the University of Michigan. It is a participatory action research strategy that places cameras in the hands of research participants and aims to help them explore locally relevant topics and effect positive change through photographs, in-depth discussions, exhibitions etc (Wang & Burris 2003). This strategy has been used previously to look at such things as the experiences of Aboriginal youth living on reservations (Hubbard 1994), the perspective of women on low-income in Calgary (Women and Fair Income Group et al. 2004), the health promotion practices of First Nations mothers (Moffitt & Vollman 2004) and the first-hand experiences of homeless people (Wang, Cash, & Powers 2000). The CJBS photovoice project took place over an 8-week period during the first semester of the 2004-2005 school year. The candidate attended 4 hours of class per week with the grade 10 students. To begin, the art teacher introduced the unit and the idea of producing a class 'Zine under the theme: What school means to me. A 'Zine is an artistic self-published booklet or specialized magazine and the teacher suggested this would be an appropriate way to compile the photos, personal drawings, activities and discussions from the photovoice project. The 'Zine could, if completed well enough, be shared around the school and around the community. The teacher taught photographic and drawing techniques, composition, page layout etc. The candidate introduced the research component of the activity and during the eight weeks of working together, the candidate and the teacher took turns leading the class discussions around questions such as: What does school mean to you? What makes you happy? What is your best and worst school experience? Who is your

favourite teacher and why? And, if you had a magic wand what would I change about school? Students were given disposable cameras and were guided through photo taking activities around weekly themes. Written responses and notes from class discussions were collected and the students matched these with photos and drawings when they produced the pages of the 'Zine. Students were encouraged to be creative and their input into ideas for themes and activities were integrated into the project as it progressed. As an additional activity, an elder was invited to the class to share his experiences of residential schooling and the students were able to listen to his stories, take photographs and ask questions.

### Photovoice Mini-Interviews with Youth

Five of the students in the grade 10 Art class who were over the age of 18 agreed to chose and explain two of their own photographs during a short, videotaped interview with the candidate. The following questions were used as an interview guide:

- a) Can you please show and describe the photo you have selected to talk about?
- b) Why did you choose this photo?
- c) How does this relate to the theme “what school means to me?”

These interviews were transcribed and inputted into Atlas.ti as text documents hyper linked to the selected photos. The brief video recordings were transcribed for analysis.

### Previously Transcribed Interviews with Elders

A series of interviews were undertaken with Tłı̨cẖ elders in 1991 and 1992 for a community research project to document elders' traditional knowledge about such topics as childbirth and childhood, traditional way of life, hunting, male and female adolescence, food gathering, food preparation and Tłı̨cẖ families. Elders agreed to have the transcripts of these interviews made public and catalogued at the CJBS library.

More than 30 interviews were undertaken and catalogued. The following five interviews were selected as the most pertinent to the current study and copies were obtained as data sources:

- a) Interview between Celine Kyakfwo (63) and Marie Adele Rabeska (1991)  
Topic: Childhood
- b) Interview between Marie Klugiu (77) and Marie Adele Rabeska (1992).  
Topic: Childhood
- c) Interview between Pierre Wedzin (no age given) and Marie Adele Rebeska (1992) Topic: Aboriginal Way of Life
- d) Interview between Jimmy Nitsiza (no age given) and Diane Romie (1992).  
Topic: Family and Childhood.
- e) Interview between Elizabeth Nitsiza (59) and Marie Adele Rabeska (1992)  
Topic: Childhood

### Data Management

The candidate kept hand-written notes in two bound journals (one for participant observation and one for the reflective research journal), these notes were then transcribed and kept in a computerized filing system on the candidate's private computer. The computer was password protected. Field notes, interview transcripts and notes from the focus groups were transcribed and uploaded into Atlas.ti computer software. Atlas.ti allowed the candidate to organize the data in document hierarchies and to code and search text. The software also allowed textual documents to be linked to each other or to audio and visual media files. This system of organization was used to its fullest capacity, for example, designated photos were linked to the mini-photovoice interview text, interview transcripts were hyper-linked with sites in other documents (other interviews, focus group texts or sections of field notes) to highlight key points of similarity or difference. Only the candidate, the doctoral supervisor and members of the supervisory committee had access to these computer files.

Private documents (i.e. printed copies of emails or interview transcripts, school notices, photos, letters, minutes of meetings etc) were kept in coil bound binders and file boxes in a locked filing cabinet, first at the candidate's office at the school, and then at her home office. Other non-private documents (i.e. clipped newspaper articles, copies of reports, newsletters, public copies of previously transcribed elder interviews etc) were kept in scrapbooks and coil bound binders in file boxes, first in the candidates office at the school, and then at her home office.

## Data Analysis

### 3.1.5 Transcripts and Field Notes

Forty primary documents, including interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, photovoice mini-interview transcripts, notes from public presentations and all field notes were uploaded into a hermeneutic unit of Atlas.ti over the period of the study. The candidate coded each document initially with first order codes through a process of constant comparison as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Coding is assigning sentences or paragraphs of text, numeric or alphabetical codes representing concepts, categories or themes. The first stage of coding is often a loose kind of counting process where the investigator codes the data according to content, noting the frequency of certain phrases, ideas, events, activities or behaviours occurring in the data (LeCompte & Shensul 1999a). Constant comparison means that as documents are coded, and the code list expanded, each of the previously coded documents is re-visited to look for text that relates to codes that have emerged in subsequent documents. In this manner, all documents are compared with, and contrasted against, one another (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The initial coding of documents was more thematic than theoretical and was used for locator assistance. Appendix 7 is the first order code list for this study. Since an activity-setting model guided data collection, first order codes included themes such as "Resources", "School Messages/Symbols" or "Relationship to Time", from the model, but they also included codes such as "Dogrib Language and Traditional

Culture”, “Events” or “Use of Metaphor”, that would help the candidate locate specific places in the text as the study progressed. Some first order codes verged on theoretical (early emerging ideas) such as “Factors that Seem to be Barriers to Education/Schooling” and these were developed further in subsequent coding activities. Data was periodically grouped under each code to see what was available for each. This helped determine where data gaps were as well as where saturation may have occurred. Data gathering was adjusted according over time. This early coding process was one of constant comparison because if a new code was added, all documents were re-read to see where that code may also apply elsewhere. The coding process was undertaken by the candidate but was discussed, and validated by, the doctoral supervisor. During first order coding, the candidate also used Atlas.ti memos to record her theoretical ideas and possible avenues of further investigation as they emerged.

As a first order code list developed, lists of all the quotations for certain codes were brought together and new documents were created. These documents were re-coded with higher or second order codes. This involved looking for patterns and themes among all the quotations, For example, all quotations related to the code ‘Relationship to Work’ were taken out and this document was re-coded and second order codes emerged such as ‘Increase in the Transience of the Population’ and ‘Changing Focus and Purpose of Schooling’. This helped the candidate identify and think about the relationship between first order codes as well as new concepts. Specific codes or families of codes, such as “Relationship to Work”, “Aboriginal / Non-Aboriginal Relationships”, “Relationship to Past / Change”, “Relationship of School as an Institution to Students” and “School Community Dynamic / Links” were selected right away for more in-depth analysis because participant observation field notes led the candidate to believe that they were the most key areas.

In the early stages of the study, analysis was primarily inductive (patterns, themes and categories were ‘discovered’). As mentioned however, initial codes did flow from relevant theory, the activity-setting model and from the framing of the original research topic. Later in the study, data-collection and analysis progressed to become more

deductive (testing and affirming inductive findings, examining deviant case etc.). Since data collection and analysis were concurrent, findings from early stages of data analysis informed on-going data collection. The research was flexible enough to allow this to happen.

### 3.1.6 Other Documents, Visual Media and Artefacts

The candidate collected a great number of textual, physical and visual media that were not inputted as computerized text into the hermeneutic unit of Atlas.ti. Instead, these other pieces of data were read or observed and thought about in order to situate and advance coding and theoretical understanding of what was being experienced personally in the field and communicated by interview and focus group participants. These other data sources were also used, later in the study, to confirm or negate potential findings. The art class' 'Zine, for example, was a 33-page document with photographs, personal drawings, and segments of text. The 'Zine was analysed qualitatively by looking at the overall make-up of the document and asking questions like: What is represented and not represented? What messages are the students communicating? What themes exist? How does the selection of images and ideas relate to findings from other data sources? Does this data source seem to tell the same story about the experience of youth and the meanings they hold for school? This was a process of contrast and comparison. In addition to insight that was gained from this activity and from the coding exercise, it was also necessary to move away from the detailed texts/media and view the research question from a more holistic perspective. Patton (2003) states it well when he says, "phenomena are often part of complex systems that are more than just the sum of their parts. Phenomena are embedded in social, historical and temporal contexts" (p. 41). This was a conscious act that the candidate undertook routinely. It ensured that the candidate asked questions like, what are the participants not saying or doing? How would this setting be different if historic events played out differently? How does the distribution of power influence what people say and do and the beliefs they hold? What precedents have been set? These

questions were essential to pose because, hidden, avoided, and more nuanced themes may have been easier to overlook.

### 3.1.7 Graduate and Attendance Records

The following statistics were derived from CJBS graduate and attendance records from 1994 – 2004:

- a) Total graduates segregated by sex, year of graduation and type of completion (high school diploma or high school leaving certificate)
- b) Age (mean and range)
- c) Number of credits obtained (mean and range)
- d) Length of time between point of initial registration in high school and graduation (mean and range)
- e) Grade 12 English mark (mean, mode, range)
- f) Number of times grade 12 English was taken

### 3.1.8 Grade 10 Cohort

A data spreadsheet was constructed with the following variables for each of the 76 student cohort members:

- a) Student cohort ID number (1-76)
- b) Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)
- c) Date of birth (month, day, year)
- d) Age as of November 1, year 4 (years)
- e) Graduated by November 1, year 4? (0 = no, 1 = yes)
- f) Still in school as of November 1, year 4? (0 = no, 1 = yes)
- g) If yes to (f), grade? (10, 11 or 12)
- h) If no to (f), is the student suspected to be just at home (0 = no, 1 = yes)

- i) If no to (f), is work the primary activity? (0 = no, 1 = yes)
- j) If no to (f), is other schooling the primary activity? (0 = no, 1 = yes)
- k) If yes to (f), what other schooling? (0 = other high school, 1 = trades, 2 = other college, 3 = University, 4 = other)
- l) Is the individual a parent as of November 1, year 4? (0 = no, 1 = yes)

The age of 16 cohort members could not be accurately determined because the date of birth was not provided in the cumulative file. Information was also collected pertaining to standardised reading and math test scores as well as discipline referrals. However, these records were not kept comprehensively and so this data was used for qualitative purposes only. Descriptive statistics, including totals and percents segregated by sex and parental status, were derived for graduates and non-graduates, for those still attending school and those not attending (with respective current grade levels) at the year 4 cut-off, those working and those in other schooling at the year 4 cut-off. Relative risks (risk ratios) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated using Stata 7 statistical software in response to the following hypotheses:

- a) The chance (risk) of graduating is the same for male and female students.
- b) The chance (risk) of graduating is the same for parents and non-parents.
- c) Among the non-graduates, the chance (risk) of being a non-attende is the same for parents and non-parents.

The calculations and statistical output for the relative risks is provided in appendix 10.

A logistic regression model was also constructed. The independent variable (y) was graduation as of November 1, year 4 (dichotomous no/yes). The dependent variables were gender ( $x_1$  dichotomous male/female), parental status ( $x_2$  dichotomous no/yes) and age as of November 1, year 4 ( $x_3$  dichotomized as “youth” 18 years and under, and “adult” 19 years and over). The calculations and statistical output is provided in appendix 11.

### 3.1.9 The Creation of Composite Characters

In order to report the findings of this study in a way that was descriptive and rich, while at the same time able to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants, composite characters were created. This technique is used and described elsewhere (see for example Werner, 1998; Spickard, Landres & McGuire, 2002). Three student composite characters are described and referred to in chapters six, eight and twelve of this dissertation. Composite characters help give life to the key findings. The detail of each character and his or her situation, and relationship to school, is grounded in the data itself and the three “individuals” were created using maximum variation as an underlying principle. Represented among the three students are: males and females; students of different grades; students from different home-towns; parents and non-parents; students who graduate and those who do not; students in different living situations; students who play sports and those who do not; and so on. Readers should be reminded that these characters are not based on actual students.

#### Enhancing Credibility

The quality, credibility or trustworthiness of ethnographic research is often judged by a study’s rigor, meaning, whether there was a strictness or exactness in the application of the research method including how the method was selected, described and followed (Patton 2002). Rigorous methods are required so that misinterpretations and other errors do not occur or are, in the least, minimised and identified (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Morse & Field 1995). To ensure the credibility of this research the following strategies were employed (adapted from Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis, & Harris 1989):

Triangulation of data sources (interview transcripts, educational documents, field notes), investigators (sections of analysis done by candidate and doctoral supervisor), of collection techniques (interviews, focus groups, participant observation), of types of information (attitudes, artefacts, behaviours), of time (fieldwork continuing over a 6

month period and then a return to the field for 2 weeks following), and of analysis techniques (qualitative and quantitative) was employed.

Participant observation or the candidate's "firsthand observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities" (Patton 2003, p.4). This reduces the concerns of reactivity (change of behaviour in participants because they know they are being studied). Prolonged contact with study participants/co-researchers also enabled the candidate to collect many kinds of data and to continuously validate data as it is collected and analysed.

Bracketing of researchers personal biases thus making these biases explicit. This recognizes that although complete objectivity was not required or possible, providing non-judgmental analysis was critical. In ethnography, the researcher's ideas and biases are to be actively bracketed (purposely recorded and set aside from collected data). Patton elaborates that the ethnographer must be:

"...reflective about his or her own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher's focus become balance- understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness" (Patton 2003, p. 41).

The use of a reflective research journal to accompany participant observation field notes helped facilitate this process.

Member-checking – continuous checking (with participants and with the doctoral supervisor and supervisory committee) concerning how the data is represented and interpreted as well as the fit between coding categories (a product of analysis) and the data collected throughout the project.

Independent audit- of the research candidate's decision trail, data collection and analysis techniques by the research supervisor. Consultants, experienced in the practice

of ethnography and community-based research with Aboriginal populations were also sought to advise on aspects of the research design.

### Role of the Candidate

The candidate was the facilitator of this study and worked under the supervision of her doctoral supervisor, Dr. Penny Hawe, and her supervisory committee. At the school and in the study community, she was introduced as a University student and researcher.

Appendix 8 is a notice that was distributed at the school at the beginning of the school year to inform the staff and students about the candidate's presence in the school. This information was also announced at a school-wide assembly (see appendix 8).

Despite this, because the candidate was a former teacher with experience teaching in the north, and was in the school everyday, some people in Behchok̄ (including students) did assume her to be in a teacher's role, or a school support staff role such as a teaching assistant or counsellor. The candidate was given an office to use for research purposes in the counselling area at the school. She spent the majority of her time there or, in other parts of the school around the staff and students. The office had previously been for a reading program that was now being undertaken in a different location. The space had a desk with a computer and a printer and access to the Internet. There was a large table with chairs, a white board, a blackboard and a couch. The office was located in the juncture between the senior and junior high school classrooms in the same area as the full-time school-community counsellor and the part-time social workers/counsellors. There were often students visiting at break, lunch and after school. A few students would come almost daily. Others would come and sit on a couch outside the office door; there were times where the candidate had to ask students to return class if they were in this area during class time. Cases such as these were the only time that the candidate felt she was compelled to take on teacher-like authority. Mostly however, the candidate was autonomous and free to do the research as she decided. The office door had her name and 'school research project' on the front. The candidate was made to feel welcome in, and attended, staff meetings and school wide events such as

assemblies, visits by guest speakers, cultural days, staff retreats, staff training, school sports events and other similar activities. She took on small volunteer jobs helping with community bingos and attending the school canteen during sports tournaments. She was interviewed as part of a 5-year school review, participated in a NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) school survey and focus group and was asked to sit as a temporary member on a committee looking at options for alternative schooling in Behchok̄. The candidate was not required to do supervisory shifts with students, or be evaluated by, or report to, school administration, however, she was expected to be a good role model for students and to follow school rules. She was conscious to clarify her role whenever possible so that misunderstandings would not occur, and tried to maintain a role differentiation between herself and the teachers and other school staff. Inevitably, the research became framed as both as an academic pursuit as well as a community-based, practical endeavour.

The candidate's accommodation was a two-bedroom apartment in the school residence that was provided by the TCSA free of charge. The residence was attached to the school where the research took place.

### Ethical Concerns

The Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS) has established *Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North* (appendix 9). This document highlights the importance of key ethical principles like community consultation and participation, building mutual respect, providing accountability and ensuring informed consent. These principles will be strictly adhered to throughout this research project. The project was also approved by the University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine's Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board (appendix 2) and the Aurora Research Institute of the Northwest Territories (appendix 3).

Ethical concerns specific to this study included:

Confidentiality of Participants – the decision was made to make the name and location of the study community public because it was essential if specific context-level features were to be discussed. However, all information collected from study participants was, and continues to be, held in strict confidence. All efforts have been made by the candidate to ensure that participants’ identities would not be recognisable in the final report or publications. This means, particularly because the data comes from a population in a small community, that identifying details have been omitted or adapted in the final text, and where possible, aggregate data is presented rather than individual data.

Consent – A number of issues arose within the project in relation to informed consent. The candidate had concerns around what informed consent actually meant and when and how it should be obtained. It was the usual practice of the Ethical Review Board at the University of Calgary to use, and provide a template for, a written consent form. This was considered unacceptable by the research candidate because the form was much too long, was provided only in English, and made reference to subjects that were potentially confusing for the participant and not relevant to the present study. Also, in written form, the document reflected a feeling of “signing away” that was felt to be particularly disrespectful for use with Aboriginal people especially because of the historical precedence set with the signing of land treaties in Canada. All participants in the interviews and focus groups were aware of the candidate’s research project and agreed to participate. Oral consent and a modified consent form (in both English and Dogrib) were used for interviews (for copies of forms see appendix 12). Although there was a space for a signature, participants were not asked to sign; instead, the forms were used as guides for discussion prior to an interview or focus group. The candidate wrote a paper with two other graduate students, doing research in northern Canada, related to issues around obtaining consent while doing research in northern Aboriginal communities (Davison, Brown, & Moffitt 2006). A copy of this paper is provided as appendix 13.

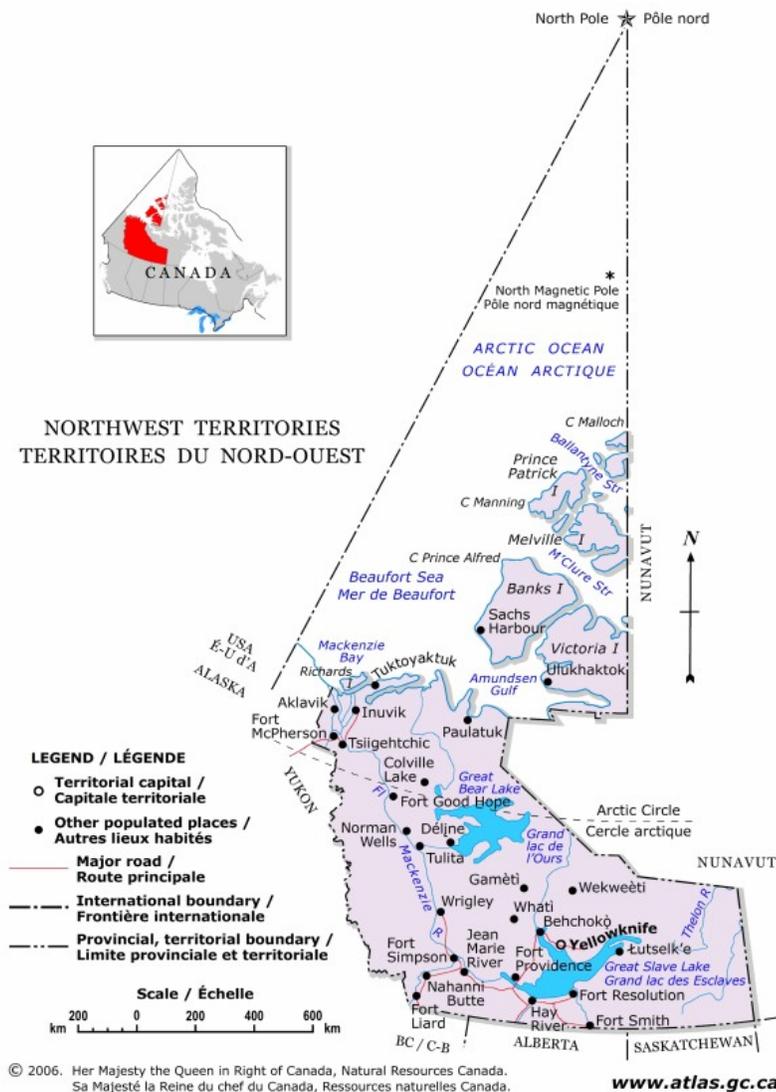
Research with Minors – Although the age range of interest for this study was 15-25 years, due to difficulties in obtaining parental consent for individuals under the age of 18 years, one-on-one interviews were not undertaken with minors for this study. Instead the candidate undertook a series of complementary data collection techniques for this age group. Parents were informed about the grade 10, photovoice class project and the student focus group (both of which included minors), students and/or parents/guardians had the opportunity to opt out if desired. The candidate was also able to collect data from this younger age group through public displays, documents and presentations such as the CJBS student public speaking competition, student displays and bulletin boards, student writing in local publications and input they had provided for other recent studies such as the PRIDE questionnaire, the 2005 School Review and the GNWT report “Our Education, Our Future: What NWT Girls Said”. In addition, the candidate ensured that she undertook adequate participant observation activities with this age group (spending more time observing them at school, attending their sports and extra-curricular activities, touring the community in the evening to observe them in the free-time etc). Students 18 years and older (common at CJBS) were able to consent for themselves to participate in any aspect of the project.

Raising Personal or Politically Charged Issues – the research candidate ensured that appropriate referral protocols were in place before beginning fieldwork. This included contact details for counselling services, as well as school, community and government representatives. The candidate was responsive to issues that arose and ensured debrief sessions were facilitated as required.

## Chapter 4: DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY

### The Physical Landscape

The Northwest Territories (Figure 4.1) is a 1,171,918 square kilometre piece of land stretching from the Nunavut border to the East, the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Yukon border to the West and the borders of northern Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia (at 60 degrees north latitude) to the south. Prior to 1999, NWT also included the land which is now designated Nunavut Territory.



**Figure 4.1: Map of the Northwest Territories** (Natural Resources Canada 2006).

In his report from the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry of the 1970s, Thomas Berger remarked that the north is viewed by outsiders as a frontier, and for the early explorers, fur traders and perhaps even today's natural resource developers, a land to conquer. However, while it exists as a frontier for some, for northerners, it is a homeland and a place where indigenous people have lived for thousands of years (Berger 1988). One of these indigenous groups is the Tłı̨ch̨́ or Dogrib First Nation people of the North Slave and southern MacKenzie Valley region of the NWT. For centuries, the Tłı̨ch̨́ have made their livelihood by hunting and fishing throughout the boreal forest and barrenlands around the present day communities of Behchoḱ̨, Whati, Wekweèti and Gamèti. Their traditional area is called Mowhi Gogha De Niitlee.

Behchoḱ̨ (formally Rae-Edzo) is a twin-community that makes up the largest of four present-day Tłı̨ch̨́ First Nation communities in the Northwest Territories. It is located 115 kilometres northwest of Yellowknife. Rae is on the southeast shore of Marion Lake and Edzo is about 13 kilometres away by road on the east shore of a channel between Marion Lake and the north arm of Great Slave Lake in the North Slave Region of the NWT (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000). Figure 4.2 shows the North Slave region, and the location of Rae, Edzo, and the other Tłı̨ch̨́ outlying communities Gamèti, Whati and Wekweti.



**Figure 4.2: Map Showing Behchok̄ and the North Slave Region of the Northwest Territories, Canada (Northern Frontier Visitor's Association 2006).**

The landscape around Behchok̄ is made up of rivers and lakes, rocky outcrops, intermittent boreal forest and the low-lying scrub of boggy lowlands. The climate is cool and dry, with temperatures in the region ranging from thirty-five degrees Celsius in the summer to minus forty-five degrees Celsius in the winter. Common wildlife include caribou, bison, fox, wolf, marten, muskrat, beaver and bear. The region is world-renowned for its hunting and fishing (NWT Tourism 2006). Figure 4.3 is an aerial photograph of each of the communities taken in 2001.



**Figure 4.3: Aerial photographs of Rae and Edzo (MACA 2001)**

## The Tłı̨chǫ People

The Tłı̨chǫ First Nations people make up a distinct branch of the Dene or Athapaskan linguistic group (Helm & Thomas 1966).

“Until very recently, northern Aboriginal people followed the migration of the animals, and moved across the land and along its waterways depending on the season. It is only in the last fifty years that most people have come to settle in sedentary communities...the traditional lifestyle based upon traditional pursuits remains important, and hunting, fishing and trapping remain parts of the livelihood of many northern Aboriginal people” (Martin 2001, p.7).

Today, the Tłı̨chǫ people are largely settled in the NWT communities of Behchokǭ, Whati, Wekweti, and Gamèti with small numbers residing in Dettah, Ndilo, Yellowknife and other communities further afield (Martin 2001). Other Dene groups include the Deneshne (Chipewyan), Deh Gah Got’ine (Slavey), K’asot’ine (Hare or Hareskin) and Dinjii Zhuh (Loucheux or Gwich’in) First Nations. Samuel Hearne (1745-1792), Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820) and John Franklin (1786-1847) were some of first people of European, or western descent, to document encounters with the Tłı̨chǫ of the MacKenzie Valley (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991; Helm 1972). In 2004, 93% of the Aboriginal residents of Behchokǭ were listed as able to speak an Aboriginal language (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2006).

“The traditional area of the Tłı̨chǫ First Nation is called “Mowhi Gogha De Niitlee”, it is the area described by Chief Monfwi during the signing of Treaty 11 at Fort Rae on August 22, 1921” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Government of Canada, & GNWT 2006, p.1). The Tłı̨chǫ people have strong cultural ties to the natural landscape and to the flora and fauna of the region. In March 1994, the NWT Status of Women Council and the NWT Network of the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women undertook a survey and discussion groups with female students and their teachers in fourteen schools in the NWT, including CJBS and Elizabeth MacKenzie Elementary school in Behchokǭ. Through surveys and discussions groups with young women in

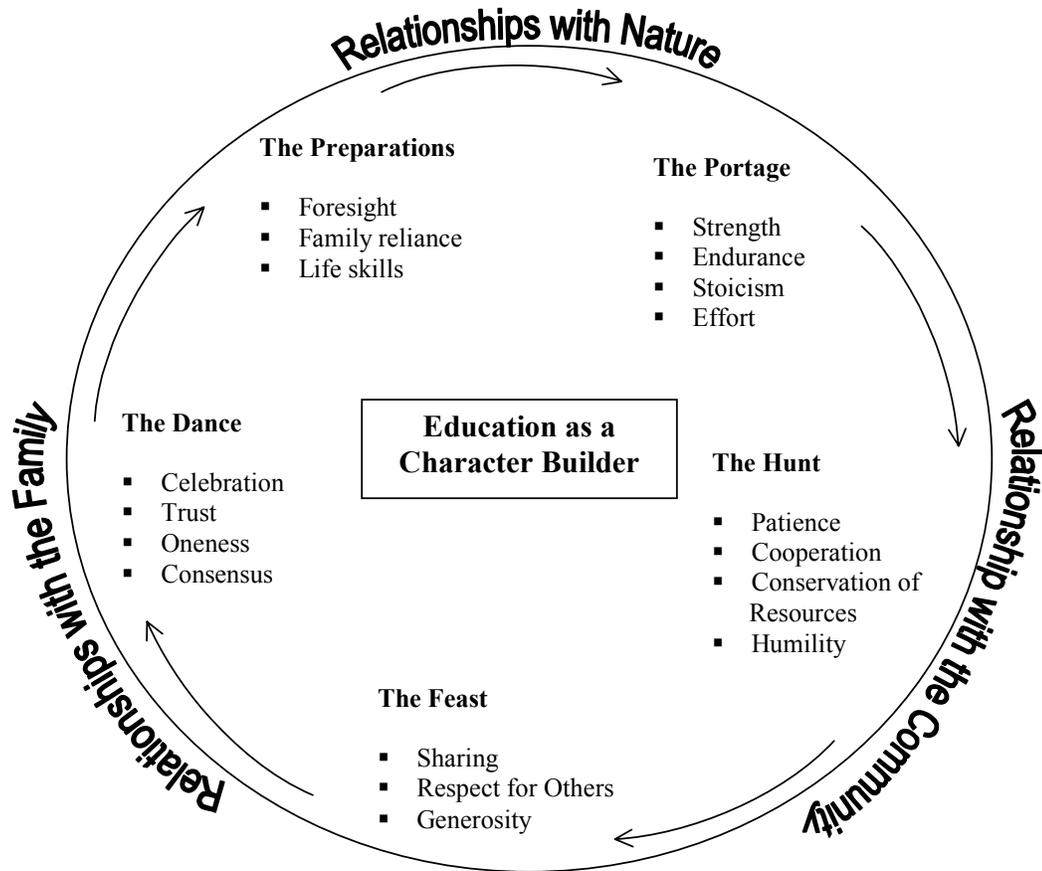
Behchok̄ (n=139; grades 6-12), researchers found that respondents were still engaging in many on-the-land activities including fishing (54%), berry picking (33%), activities related to hunting (28%), walking and exploring (21%) and playing (21%). Many of these young women also talked about being able to identify plants and animals on the land. More than a third of the respondents acknowledged the land as being an important aspect of their lives (NWT Status of Women Council & NWT Network 1994, p.21).

Although fewer than in the past, many Tłı̄ch̄ people still hunt, trap, fish and camp on the land today. It is felt however, that although these traditional activities are still essential to the livelihood of many Tłı̄ch̄ people, and to the maintenance of certain aspects of their culture, “a great deal of effort frequently provides only a marginal income to support a family. There is full recognition that the future belongs to those who have education and skills to earn a living in the wage economy. Today, there is a strong desire for jobs and for the skill development that will lead to jobs” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005, p.iii). In general the Tłı̄ch̄ Nation is a positive and progressive group of people.

#### Religion and the Tłı̄ch̄ Worldview

“At the heart of the Dogrib culture...lies a spiritual understanding of the world which forms the foundation for their world view or cosmology” (Bright 1999, p.91).

Community member John B. Zoe articulated a Dogrib Cosmology of Education using the metaphor of the hunt for a meeting in 1989 (Figure 4.4).



**Figure 4.4: A Dogrib Cosmology – Metaphor of the Hunt** (Government of the Northwest Territories & Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1989)

He comments that traditionally, “activities related to the cycle of life of the individual taught the values that sustained the community. Each category of activity around the circle is important not for the isolated skills which it represents but for the underlying values the activity teaches” (Government of the Northwest Territories & Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1989, p.12).

The Tłı̨ch̨Q people first encountered Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries in the 1850s and 1860s. Christianity, primarily Roman Catholicism, became integrated into the traditional spiritual practices and beliefs of the Tłı̨ch̨Q around that time. The spirituality and the church play an important role in Tłı̨ch̨Q communities today, with

“uniquely Dogrib aspects to the services” (Bright 1999, p.91). On a recent community canoe trip, one youth documented the integration of Roman Catholic style rituals and prayers with a more traditional connection to the land and to Tłı̄ch̄ǫ ancestors, “The elders guided us a long a trail to the village gravesite...we all sat before the grave of an elder as [a lay person] led us in the Sunday service and prayers...around two o’clock, we had packed and were ready to leave. As is the custom just before leaving, we paused for a prayer” (No Author Given 2006a, p.5).

### The Settlement of Behchok̄ǫ

The first trading post was established in the Behchok̄ǫ area in 1790 (Dogrib Community Services Board & Deh Cho Divisional Board of Education 2000). Fort Rae, a Hudson’s Bay Fur Trading Post was constructed in 1852 and was named after the British explorer Dr. John Rae (Hilleke 1973). By 1890, it was estimated that more than 600 people regularly traded at the post. In 1900, the Northern Trading Company established a post at the current day site of Behchok̄ǫ, and in 1904, the Hudson’s Bay Company abandoned ‘Old Fort Rae’ and moved to the same location as well (Dogrib Community Services Board & Deh Cho Divisional Board of Education 2000).

Chief Monfwi signed government Treaty No. 11 on August 22, 1921 on behalf of the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ people<sup>6</sup>. At the time of signing, the Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa remarked that the group of indigenous people at Fort Rae was the largest, at about 800, and the most inaccessible in the Territory; these people hunted in every direction from the Fort, some up to 200 miles away (Government of Canada 1957, p.3). The government stated that the Treaty was being made so that, “there may be good-will between [Indian subjects] and His Majesty’s other subjects, and that His Indian people may know and be assured of what allowances they are to expect and receive from his Majesty’s bounty and benevolence” (p.4). The Treaty asked the indigenous peoples to, “cede, release, surrender and yield up to the Government of the Dominion of Canada, for His Majesty the King and His Successors

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<sup>6</sup> His name is noted as Chief Morphy on the Treaty documents.

forever, all their rights, titles, and privileges whatsoever to the lands' covered [by the treaty]” (p.4). In return, the indigenous people would maintain their rights to hunt, trap and fish throughout the Treaty territory, though, “saving and excepting such tracts as may be required or taken up from time to time for settlement, mining, lumbering, trading or other purposes” (p.5). The indigenous people were also promised reserves of land on which they could continue their traditional way of life as well as a series of annual monetary benefits (paid directly and in a convenient manner) and resources such as axes, augers and grinding stones. In addition, the Government of Canada agreed to pay, “the salaries to teachers to instruct children of said Indians in such manner as His Majesty’s Government may deem advisable” (p.5). As early as 1930, people in Rae were voicing concerns that their understanding of the Treaty was significantly different from the understanding held by the government (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000).

Until the late sixties and early seventies, the community of Rae consisted of only tents, small shacks, the trading posts, a few storage buildings and a hospital that was built in the 1940s. Electricity was brought to the community in the 1950s and in 1960, the road was built connecting Rae with Yellowknife and other points south (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000).

On April 1, 1971, Rae-Edzo became the first Aboriginal community in the Territories to achieve Hamlet status (Hilleke 1973). According to the 2001 census, the population of Behchok̄ was 1545 people in 2001 (94% of whom declared Aboriginal decent) (Statistics Canada 2005). 2005 estimates put the population at 1951 persons (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2006).

Prior to World War II, the Tłı̄ch̄ people had little involvement with Euro-Canadians beyond some limited activities through the fur trade and Missionaries. Following the war, sustained government interventions such as the provision of medical services,

social assistance and welfare began to emerge. Helm (1972) points out<sup>7</sup> that, “the lure of services at Rae, especially the post office with its monthly distribution of family allowance and old age pension checks, had in the last two decades increasingly pulled people into residence at the Fort” (p.56). In a subsequent publication, Helm identifies three significant transformations that occurred during the 1960s that had a significant influence on the way of life of the Tłı̄chǫ people. First, a road was built connecting Rae with Yellowknife, next there was increased interest by multi-national oil and gas consortiums in constructing a pipeline in the MacKenzie Valley and finally, the majority of Tłı̄chǫ children were exposed to Euro-Canadian schooling (Helm 1979).

### The Colonial Legacy

In Canada’s Northwest Territories, colonialism has had a deep and negative impact on the health and lives of Aboriginal people (Adelson 2005; Berger 1988; Fumoleau 1975; Moffitt 2004; O’Neil 1988; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) 1996). Smith (2003) remarks that for indigenous people, the arrival of colonists has always meant death and destruction. This has been due not only to the negative impacts of guns, infection, exploitation or poverty but more profoundly, the deep spiritual oppression that results from having your culture and independence taken away. “Like dandelions, [Aboriginal people] have been seen as a nuisance cluttering up the landscape; like weeds, [they] have been pulled up by their roots and expected to die” (Blaeser 1994, p.3).

Colonialism in northern Canada takes the form of western religious indoctrination, the imposition of Western educational systems and practices, and the introduction of western norms, rules, organisational structures and ways of living (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait 2000). Newcomers to the north brought different worldviews, lifestyle behaviours

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<sup>7</sup> June Helm was a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iowa. Between the 1950s and the 1970s she spent significant amounts of time with the Tłı̄chǫ people documenting, among other things, their myths and legends, kinship systems, and hand game activities. She has numerous publications from this time.

and personal values, this did not only impact Aboriginal people's lifestyle, but also the way they saw the world and their sense of being (Department of Education 1991). For Aboriginal women, the effects were even more profound as they faced multiple barriers, individual and institutional discrimination along with disadvantages on the basis of race, gender and class (Browne & Fiske 2001). Adelson (2005) points out that it the, "ills and illnesses [of Aboriginal people] must be seen, at least in part, as the direct and indirect present-day symptoms of a history of loss of lands and autonomy and the results of the political, cultural, economic and social disenfranchisement that ensued" (p.559). Healing is an essential part of any discussion about Aboriginal issues today; in particular it is important in our discussions around the meaning and purpose of Aboriginal education (Bright 1999). Indeed, although it is important not to overlook the many positive and important impacts of schooling today, the introduction of formal schooling had dramatic and negative influences on the lives of the indigenous people. Schooling was one of the principal forces exerting pressure on nomadic peoples to settle in sedentary communities (Helm 1979).

### The Tłı̨ch̨ Agreement

The Tłı̨ch̨ people began working on a comprehensive land claim in the 1970s. The 'Dogrib Treaty 11 Council' submitted a regional land claim, which came to be known as the Tłı̨ch̨ Agreement, to the federal government in 1992. The Tłı̨ch̨ Agreement was the first combined comprehensive land claim and self-governance agreement in the Northwest Territories (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004). The Dogrib Treaty 11 Council (established in 1990 to represent the four Dogrib Bands of Rae-Edzo, Wekweti, Gamèti and Whati), the Government of the NWT and the Government of Canada negotiated the agreement. The document was signed in Behchok̨ on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2003 and received royal assent (the final stage of federal approval) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2005 (Turtle Island Native Network 2005). The Agreement came into affect on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2005.

Thirty-nine thousand square kilometres of land between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories is now owned by the Tłı̨chǫ community governments. This includes surface and subsurface rights in an area where precious minerals (i.e. diamonds and gold) and other valuable natural resources are found. The agreement pertains to all Tłı̨chǫ citizens, as documented in the Tłı̨chǫ citizen’s register (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Government of Canada, & GNWT 2004; The Tlı̨cho, The Government of the NWT, & The Government of Canada 2003).

The Agreement represents a great achievement of the Tłı̨chǫ people and of the governments of the NWT and Canada, and it also represents a great opportunity. It is hoped that the signing of the Agreement will contribute to a further stabilization of the economic environment of the region (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005) and to more employment and educational opportunities, more economic development closer to home and a greater ability to protect and promote Tłı̨chǫ culture, language, heritage, lands and other resources (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Government of Canada, & GNWT 2004). In relation to the delivery of key programs and services, such as education, health care and other social programs, an Intergovernmental Services Agreement has been signed between the Tłı̨chǫ, the GNWT and the Government of Canada providing for the administration and delivery of these programs for the first ten years, or until 2015 (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Government of Canada, & GNWT 2004). This was done to ensure continuity in provision of services as the Tłı̨chǫ Community Governments come fully online.

“With the settlement of our land claim and self government agreement, we have significant increase in power and authority. We are very much in control of our own destiny. This enables us to develop strategies and take initiatives that will build capacity of our people and provide for a better future” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005 p.iii).

## Industrial Development and Employment

Mining and oil and gas development have a long history in the NWT. Oil was discovered in Norman Wells in the 1920s, and there was also private sector mineral

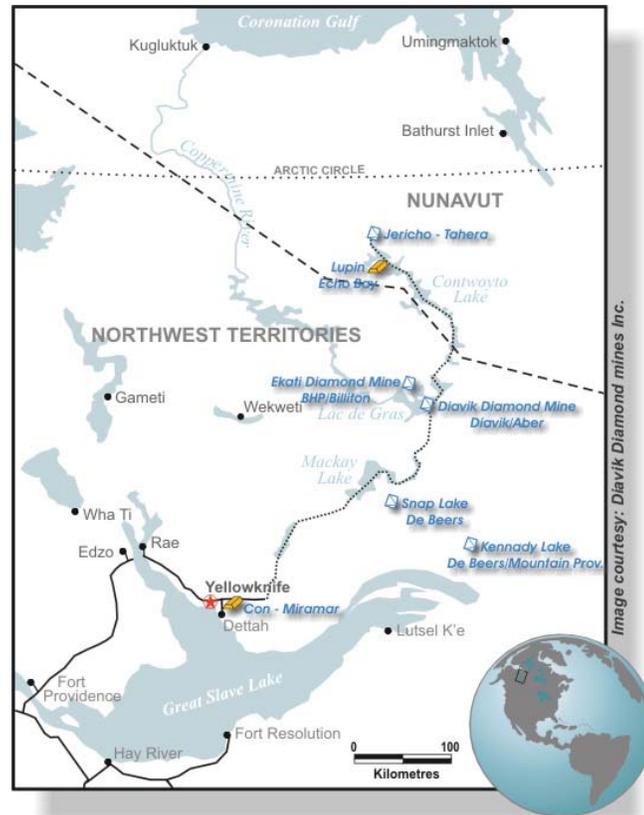
exploration and extraction occurring in the same period. These activities led to a significant improvement in transportation routes and communication networks in northern Canada (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991). Although there are ventures that have been sustained over a significant period, such as tourism or gold mining, economic development in northern Canada can be largely characterized by boom and bust cycles. These cycles have been the result of non-renewable resource development activities including the opening, depleting and then closing of single resource initiatives, they have been reactive to cyclical trends in the global economy and they have been associated with the construction or rapid change phase of a mega-project like a dam or a major highway (Bone 2003). When one examines economic development and employment in the north these cycles must be considered and a continuum of development looked at rather than situations at single points in time.

Under and unemployment has been an on-going concern for the people of Behchokō since they settled in the community and entered into the market economy. Until very recently, wage-earning employment was not sufficiently available in the community to support everyone who wanted to live there. Although initially a viable option, trapping has become a less and less feasible source of income for the Tłı̄chǫ people (Helm 1979). The rate of engagement in trapping among the population declined steadily between the 1950s and 1980s and has remained relatively flat since 1988. Fifteen percent of the population report being involved in trapping (in 1988 and again in 2005) (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2006). Annual incomes from trapping however are not normally enough to support the individual, let alone their family. In 1994, The NWT Status of Women Council stated that job opportunities in the NWT were mostly in the government and non-renewable resource sectors, they highlighted a particular demand for nurses and trades people. They note that in areas where land claims have been implemented, “extensive job opportunities in self-government and public administration will or already exist” (NWT Status of Women Council & NWT Network 1994, p.8).

The economic and employment situation in Behchok̄ has changed dramatically in the past ten years. It is currently experiencing a boom period. In 1995, the average family income for the community was listed as approximately \$36,600, and by 2004, the average family income had risen to approximately \$64,300 (NWT Bureau of Statistics 2006). With the signing of the Tłıchǫ Agreement, the Tłıchǫ people have negotiated significant land ownership and they are also benefactors of government payments (to a total of \$100 million) and a proportion of the royalties for development in the Mackenzie Valley (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Government of Canada, & GNWT 2004). The Treaty 11 Band Council and now the Tłıchǫ Community Governments, have also signed Impact and Benefit Agreements with the Diavik, Ekati and Snap Lake Diamond Mines operating in the region ensuring a series of local benefits such as employment, training, safe environmental practices and annual royalty payments for the community (De Beers Canada 2006b; Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005).

“With the development of three diamond mines in the region, proposed gas pipeline coming down the MacKenzie Valley, and the job requirements of the new Tłıchǫ government and the Dogrib businesses, the lack of jobs is no longer a problem. Plenty of jobs will be available for the next decade and beyond. The problem is the lack of education and training to get the jobs” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005, p.ii).

Charles Fipke and Stewart Blusson documented the first discovery of diamonds in northern Canada in 1992 (Clark, 1999). At present, five diamond mines are either already functioning or are in the development stages in northern Canada. Those already producing diamonds include the Diavik and Ekati mines (both in the Tłıchǫ region of the NWT) and the Jericho Mine in Nunavut. Mines that are in development stages include the Snap Lake and Kennedy Lake (or Gahcho Kue) mines in the NWT. These are proposed to go into full production in 2007 and 2012 respectively (De Beers Canada 2006a). Figure 4.5 shows the current and proposed mine sites and communities in the region of the mines.



**Figure 4.5: Map of the Diamond Mine Locations in Northern Canada**  
(Diavik Diamond Mines Incorporated 2003)

In relation to the Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBAs) with the Diavik, Ekati and Snap Lake Mine developers, former Grand Chief and lead negotiator for the Tłı̨ch̨o nation, Joe Rabeska, said:

*“When we negotiated our first IBA, we focused on jobs and employment for our people. When the second diamond mine was developed, the IBA we negotiated focused on business opportunities. This agreement (Snap Lake) with DeBeers provides Tłı̨ch̨o citizens with new opportunities to get their strength from the land through the programs and services that our government will be able to offer” (De Beers Canada 2006b, p.1).*

Currently, there are nine companies listed under the Dogrib Nation Group of Companies. These include companies for human resources (i.e. labour sourcing and on-the-job training), travel services, drilling, construction, power, and environmental impact assessment and forestry services. In addition, there are six companies under the Behchok̨o Corporation (construction, logistics, truck transportation, explosives,

sporting goods and outdoor equipment, and hotel and property management) (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005, p.2-3). It is expected that this kind of development will continue as more diamond mines come online and the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ Agreement matures. Indeed, the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ people continue to face rapid changes as a result of economic and industrial development and more are forecast (Bright 1999). To meet some of the training and human resource requirements, the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ Community Services Agency was the first jurisdiction to develop a mining industry curriculum in the NWT. The courses were originally developed for delivery in the local schools so that students who may wish to enter industry would be better prepared. These courses complemented options that were already been offered at the high school including WHMIS, First Aid and Job Preparation (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005). In 2005, the TCSA also opened a Tłı̄ch̄ǫ Trades and Technology Training Program. This program offers courses such as basic apprenticeship preparation and career readiness, underground mining technology, conservation and administration (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005)

Professor Heather Myers of the University of Northern British Columbia points out that, “while the impacts of such intense activity can be exciting, generating big incomes, lots of business, rapidly increased mobility, high expectations – the “frontier” spirit some might call it – boom and bust development tends to leave behind serious impacts” (Myers 2003). Barnaby and colleagues(1991) expand by saying that industrial development in the North has created social stratification and an unequal distribution of power, wealth and social prestige in Aboriginal communities. “In the monetary economy of the contemporary North, some people have larger incomes than others. Some may eventually acquire power and social prestige. Their families may inter-marry and form an upper social stratum within native society” (p.59). Industrial development in the north has created some haves and some have-nots, this is beginning to become evident in the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ communities as well.

The Tłı̄chǫ have been supporters of a number of processes and regulations that have been put in place to try and ensure that current diamond mining activity has positive and long-term impacts for the people and environment of northern Canada.

In recent years, the employment participation rate in the NWT has improved significantly, even for young people. Seventy percent of Aboriginal youth ages 15-19, surveyed for the 1999 NWT Labour Force Survey, reported having worked in the previous year (Bureau of Statistics 1999). The rate increases are more significant for women whose participation rates climbed from 56.0% in 1984 to 67.8% in 2001. The employment rate for males has stayed more steady, 67.4% in 1984 and 69.5% in 2001, but still fluctuates by season (Department of Education 2001, p.17). Today there is an overall need for skilled labour in the NWT. Young people who complete high school and some kind of post secondary training can have many opportunities.

#### The Tłı̄chǫ Healing Path Wellness Strategy

The Tłı̄chǫ people have gone through some very dramatic changes in a very short period of time. “Our whole way of life has changed and a lot of people haven’t been able to deal with it. They haven’t addressed it at all” (Dogrib teacher quoted in Bright 1999). As the traditional Dene social system stopped functioning, problems like drinking, criminal behaviour and a lack of cooperative spirit emerged. Young people stopped going to feasts thinking they had little to contribute (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991). The situation is better today than it was in 1991 in Behchokǭ, but there are still a good number of Tłı̄chǫ citizens who struggle themselves with addictions to alcohol, drugs and/or gambling or are dealing with these issues along with friends and family members.

The Tłı̄chǫ people recognize the seriousness of these issues. In response, Tłı̄chǫ leadership partnered with the Tłı̄chǫ Community Services Agency to develop and implement the Tłı̄chǫ Healing Path Wellness Strategy and open a Wellness Centre in Behchokǭ. The Wellness Centre has a staff of five counsellors who are either Tłı̄chǫ

themselves or have significant experience working in northern Aboriginal communities. The staff are trained to offer individual counselling, mental health services and to design individually tailored wellness approaches. The aim of the strategy is to help support Tłı̄ch̄ǫ people in their path away from addictions and towards personal healing and wellness. It is also hoped that additional wellness services can be offered for youth at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School as well (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005).

## Chapter 5: SCHOOLING IN BEHCHOKO AND THE NWT

### Family and Land-Based Education

Traditionally, the education of young Tłı̄chǫ people happened within family units. Different aspects of a child's education would be taught by various members of the family (Martin 2001). Information was often taught through the telling of stories in an oral tradition that would be passed on from one generation to the next, particularly from grandparents to their grandchildren (Bright 1999; Department of Education 1991). Learning also happened by way of experience and observation; children's education was closely tied to the family's daily needs and to practical, concrete situations (Bright 1999; Martin 1991). In a traditional Tłı̄chǫ education, parents would deliver a curriculum that was very practical and relevant to their future life and the needs of themselves and their families. "If the "students" did not master this knowledge, they would perish in the bush or become useless like a broken stick. The teaching methods used by parents emphasized involvement rather than verbal explanation" (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, p.36).

At a meeting to develop the mission for the Dogrib Community Services Board in 1991, community member John B. Zoe remarked,

"Long before the white people came, our people used to teach each other. We taught the children by telling them stories and having them watch the adults work. Those ways are no longer visible and it is like a darkness has come over us" (John B. Zoe quoted in Martin 1991, p.76).

The darkness he refers to is part of the colonial history of Canada. With the coming of non-indigenous people, things changed drastically in the lives of the Tłı̄chǫ. Not only was their way of life dramatically affected but also their entire world-view was challenged. In the past, education, work and spirituality were integrated holistically. Under western or European direction however, education was determined to be the duty

of the school, work was about specialized tasks for financial payment and spirituality was about the church. This dramatically changed the way each of these activities was thought about (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991).

### Early Schooling - The Missions and the Federal Government

The whole process of being ‘schooled’ in the mainstream educational system has been a relatively recent development for Aboriginal people. Indeed, “few things have been more alien in the lives of northern children than schooling as it has often been delivered” (Martin 1990, p.7).

“When we went to school we were taught only the English culture. When the teachers opened the books for the first time, everything was written in words. For those of us who lived at home, all those words were foreign... We were taught... all about government matters, all about the written English language, but never about the history of how the Dogrib lived in the past” (Edward Erasmus quoted in Martin 1991, p.5-6).

In northern Aboriginal communities, discussions around the history of schooling often delineate two time periods. The first time period was the Mission and Federal Government era from about 1860 to the 1950s where schooling was facilitated mostly by the church, first with little government involvement, and gradually with more involvement and the construction of schools by the Federal government. The Territorial Government period begins in the mid 1950s when schooling was taken up as a responsibility of the Territorial government. Territorial control continues in most northern communities, although the establishment of regional school boards, Band run schools and the signing of self-government agreements is changing this pattern slowly.

For a good part of the Mission Era, both churches (the Anglican and Roman Catholic) as well as government officials subscribed to what was referred to as the Native Wilderness Equation (Carney<sup>8</sup> quoted in Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, p.63)).

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Carney’s 1971 dissertation entitled “Relations in Education between the Federal and Territorial Governments and the Roman Catholic Church in the MacKenzie District, Northwest Territories 1867-1961” is not available to the public. One copy was retained by the GNWT Department of Education, ...

Aboriginal people were not expected to gain, nor given access to, a high standard of education because it was felt to be mostly irrelevant to them. The purpose of school at this time was to educate Aboriginal peoples about organized religions and convert them to either the Roman Catholic or Anglican faiths. School was also to be a preparatory experience for life on the land. The aim was to assist Aboriginal peoples to integrate their traditional native way of life with the Christian ethic. Although initial contact between northern Aboriginal people and Missionaries did not occur until the 1850s and 1860s, by 1927 the proportion of native people who reported being Catholics was 70%, this rose to 83% by 1939 (Carney quoted in Barnaby, Shimpō, & Struthers 1991, p.63).

The beginning of European or western education of the Tłı̨cẖ people was in the 1920s and 1930s when priests and nuns cared for Aboriginal children who had lost their parents (many people died from introduced illnesses such as smallpox and influenza). In caring for these children, the priests and nuns taught them about the Catholic or Anglican faith, as well as giving them skills for survival such as how to fish for food and how to collect firewood to heat a home. The care of orphans was taking place at the time of the signing of Treaty 11, and the education of the children was included in that agreement. It wasn't until the federal government began to offer money to the religious staff for each child being educated by them that children were sought out to attend school, whether they were with their parents in the bush or not (Martin 1991, p.55). This set up a dynamic where Anglican and Roman Catholic schools were in competition, not only for religious converts, but also for the government money that accompanied each student. Barnaby and colleagues expand, "the introduction of schools was not based on the needs of the native people but was motivated by power struggles among non-native groups. Unfortunately for the Dene, important decisions concerning school education were made without consulting the native peoples. The justification for this was they have no direct interest in the matter. The result of these decisions eventually had a great effect in their social organization and culture" (Barnaby, Shimpō, & Struthers 1991, p.61).

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Culture and Employment and was made accessible for review by Joanne Barnaby, Mitsuru Shimpō and Cynthia Struthers of the University of St. Jerome's College, Waterloo, Ontario in 1991.

Residential schooling had many negative impacts on indigenous groups in Canada, including the Tłı̄ch̄ǫ. Students were taken from their families, sometimes for years at a time, and many of them, being forced to speak English, French or Latin at school, lost much of their mother tongue. Twenty percent of the adults living in Behchok̄ today attended residential schools, and 77% of the adults in the community have a member of their family who attended these institutions (Statistics Canada 2004). These schools were in Fort Resolution, Fort Smith, Fort Providence and Fort Simpson (Dogrib Community Services Board 2002). One of the most commonly attended was the Sacred Heart Residential School in Fort Providence. The Grey Nuns operated this Roman Catholic school which, having been open from 1867 to 1960, was one of the longest running residential school in Canada (Government of the Northwest Territories 1991).

Residential school children were instructed not to use their native language and when they returned to their home communities, they were often unable to understand, or even recognize, family members and were not skilled in the land-based activities that had been essential for family survival only one generation previous. Former NWT Premier and Dene activist Stephen Kakfwi recently wrote a song entitled, In the Walls of His Mind, which talks about his experience as a residential school survivor:

*Remember the years they took all the children  
And they locked them away where they taught them to pray  
There were children each night who were quietly crying  
They are in the walls and the halls of my mind*

*How many little souls, that surely were dying?  
And they will bury so deep the shame that they keep  
They will all be alone in their Garden of Eden  
Alone in the walls and the halls of their minds*

In the Walls of His Mind

Stephen Kakfwi, produced by Rick Poltaruk, Dancing Sky Studios

## Education and the Government of the Northwest Territories

Andrew Moore, a secondary school inspector from Manitoba, visited all communities with schools in the Mackenzie delta in the summer of 1944. His report to the GNWT (The Moore Report) offered a number of factors that may be leading to ineffective schooling of Aboriginal people in the region (i.e. uncertified teachers, inadequate libraries, lack of adult education, native indifference about school attendance, failure to relate the curriculum to the child's environment etc). Moore recommended that the school system be the responsibility of a central public body rather than the church. Moore did not support the Native Wilderness Equation, but instead recommended that academic subjects be taught to Aboriginal people (Moore 1945). Within ten years of Moore's report, the school system began to move towards a government run model. On April 1, 1955 the Federal Government announced, "A New Educational Programme in the NWT. The purpose of the programme was to transform hunters into wage-earners... The government threatened native mothers saying that if their children were not found in classrooms, they would not receive Family Allowance cheques" (Asch 1986, p.283).

In the 1950s, there were only 500 students in all of the Northwest Territories enrolled in NWT schools. This number jumped to 3000 in the 1960s. With a growing population base, the number of students in the Territory continued to increase. By the 1970s nearly 80% of students were estimated to be in school, but less than half of these students had access to grades beyond the elementary level. In 1995, it was estimated that 90% of school-aged youth in the Territory were enrolled in school, and this represents about 16,000. The school system in the NWT is relatively young in comparison to many of its provincial counterparts (Department of Education, 1995).

Responsibility for education was not fully assumed by the Territorial government until 1969, when the Department of Education was established. The system, as it exists today, did not begin to take shape until 1980 with the Special Committee on Education (Lutra Associates 1992). The school system in the NWT follows the Alberta

curriculum. Although there continue to be modifications to the curriculum to make it more relevant to northern students, such as offering ‘home-grown’ courses and integrating Dene Kede, or Aboriginal language and culture material, grade 12 students are still required to pass Alberta Departmental Exams in order to graduate from high school (NWT Status of Women Council & NWT Network 1994, p.7).

Rates of early school leaving were high when high school courses were only offered in larger centres. Students from smaller communities were required to leave their homes and stay in the school residences in regional centres. Students often found the transition difficult. When high school courses began to be delivered in the smaller communities, school participation increased dramatically (Department of Education 1999). Today the percentage of people with less than a Grade 9 education throughout the NWT continues to decline, the rate was 24% in 1986 and only 15% in 1996 (Department of Education 2001) (p.12). Trends in the postsecondary enrolment of NWT students indicate that more females than males are obtaining a postsecondary education and that females also have higher rates of high school completion (Department of Education 2001, p.14). Unfortunately, there are still significant differences between the educational attainment levels of Aboriginal people and Non-Aboriginal people in the territory. For example, “55% of Aboriginal adults have less than a high school diploma as their highest level of schooling compared to 13% of Non-Aboriginals, while 2% of Aboriginals have a university degree compared to 24% of Non-Aboriginal people” (Department of Education 2001, p.13).

A GNWT Education policy that has significant influence on the facilitation of schooling in the territory is the Departmental Directive on Inclusive Schooling, which came into affect on September 30, 1993. Inclusive schooling is a mandatory policy and is defined as:

“A philosophical and practical educational approach, which strives to respond to individual student needs, and is intended to ensure equal access for all students to educational programs offered in regular classroom settings. It is mandatory within the NWT school system...[It is] characterized by equal access, this means the

right of all students to participate in educational programs offered in regular classroom settings with their age peers. It is also characterized by an approach to schooling which builds on student strengths and responds to student needs (meaning diverse educational strategies, as well as provision of services such as additional support personnel, transportation, specialized equipment etc). This approach may also involve the development of individual education plans (IEPs)” (Department of Education 1993b, p.6-7).

Inclusive Schooling is meant to be community based, with the provision of educational programs in the home community and it should promote the involvement of all parents/guardians in their children’s education. As a result of this directive, students in schools were placed according to age into grades rather than basing grade placement on educational abilities. The Department clarifies however that although students of all types of abilities may be integrated into one classroom, they are not necessarily all engaged in exactly the same activities (Department of Education 1993b).

#### Community Control over Education

The period of time between the establishment of the first church-run residential school in the 1860s and the development of Federal and Territorial government-run schools has been called a time of darkness, “Aboriginal people had lost their traditional autonomy and as a consequence became powerless and confused. This powerlessness and confusion ultimately led to the growth of a generation of young people who were cut off from their past, and who also had no future because they lacked sufficient skills in both Aboriginal and the non-native society” (Zoe in Martin 1991, p.111). No one had asked northern Aboriginal people what their preferences might be in relation to education. Generally, it was assumed that if something was good in the South it would also be good in the North (Gillie 1977). This was not an effective strategy and resulted in schools that were dependent upon outside funding, outside curriculum and outside expertise for their functioning (Wile 1996). However, developments such as the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry under the direction of Thomas Berger and the negotiation and signing of land claims, self-governance agreements and industrial impact and benefit agreements have led to a gradual return of power to northern people

themselves. In Behchok̄, as a result of lobbying by Chief Jimmy Bruneau and other Tłı̄ch̄ elders and community members, the Rae-Edzo School Society (RESS) was established in 1969. Through the work of this Society, Rae became the first Aboriginal community in the Northwest Territories, and one of the first in Canada, to take control of its school system (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000; Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005). This was an important turning point in our mutual colonial history.

“Where people feel that the school belongs to them, they are more comfortable playing an active role in their children’s schooling by providing direction and by contributing to the implementation of that direction. They are real partners in the education process and view that role both as a right and a responsibility” (Department of Education 1991, p.13).

Against some opposition by the Territorial government, the Rae-Edzo School Society was also successful in establishing a regional Dogrib School Board in 1989. The Dogrib Divisional Board of Education (DDBE) was formed to represent schools in the Tłı̄ch̄ communities of Rae, Edzo, Gamèti, Whati and Wekweeti (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000). Then, on May 22, 1997, the Dogrib Community Services Board (DCSB) was established. This combined the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education with the Rae-Edzo Community Services Authority (RECSA). This was a unique combination of health, social services and education under one governing community authority (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005; Martin 2001). A number of themes emerged in community consultations while developing the vision and mission statement for the DCSB. The Tłı̄ch̄ people described a strength and independence that existed among them as a people and among their families before the coming of the church and the government. It was felt the loss of this of control and the development of dependence led to the emergence of some very difficult social issues the communities are facing today. Having local control and independence as well as the importance of learning from both the land and from the “modern” world were recurring themes (Martin 1991). “Strong Like Two People” remains the vision statement of the DCSB.

The Tłı̄ch̄ǭ people have actively combated the seizure of their own power and control, particularly over education. They established an independent school society that was responsible for the schooling of Tłı̄ch̄ǭ people, they established a regional Dogrib School Board and they developed an integrated institution for the provision of education, health and social services for Tłı̄ch̄ǭ people. Most significantly, they negotiated and signed a comprehensive land claim and self-governance agreement. All of these activities, at the time they occurred, were either a first in NWT and in the country, or one of only a small number of similar initiatives happening anywhere. It is evident that the Tłı̄ch̄ǭ people are regularly breaking new ground.

### Chief Jimmy Bruneau School

A one-room schoolhouse was built in Rae in 1946. A Federal Day School was established in 1951 and expanded to four rooms in 1957. Students could begin school in Rae, but if they wished to continue into higher grades, would go to residential schools in other communities (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000; Martin 2001). Student numbers at the Day School were small in the beginning, because families were largely still on the land. The widespread exposure of Tłı̄ch̄ǭ children to Euro-Canadian schooling did not really occur until the 1960s (Helm 1979).

In 1966, a regional and town-planning consultant firm from Alberta: Makale, Holloway and Associates, was asked by the federal government (and later by the newly formed Government of the NWT) to begin an inquiry into building a school for the people of Rae. A letter from the Medical Office of Health at Rae to the Regional Engineer of the Department of National Health and Welfare in 1965 informed their inquiry, he stated, “To even consider establishing a residential school complex at Rae is the height of folly” (p.7) (as quoted in Hilleke 1973). At that time, there were more than 750 dogs in Rae (some not tethered), for most of the year water was collected through a hole in the ice on Marion Lake and there was no appropriate sewage disposal system. The whitefish in Marion Lake, which made up a primary food staple for the local people, were infested with the encysted larvae of a fish tapeworm. In 1970, there was a severe

outbreak of gastroenteritis in Rae. Many lives were lost and it was estimated that 80% of the community's inhabitants contacted the illness (Hilleke 1973). These conditions were a cause for obvious concern. Makale, Holloway and Associates concluded that a new site (now known as Edzo and approximately 13 kilometres by road from Rae), would be a much better site for the development of a healthy community (Makale in Hilleke 1973). It was proposed that the school would be built in Edzo as well as a small hospital and a number of residences. Eventually it was hoped that the whole town would relocate (Martin 2001). The government stated that it would assist the people of Rae with the transition to the new town. It was felt at the time that there could be no improvements made to the living conditions in the site of Rae and therefore, "no logical reason to oppose the move" (Hilleke 1973, p.12). The Band Council in Rae lent support to the establishment of the new site at a meeting in 1965. However, there was opposition to the move by others in the community. Primarily, this was related to the decision that the Government would not assist with the movement of the church, as it was a private building. Most residents of Rae had adopted Catholicism by this time and leaving the church was not really an option for them (personal communication, Father Jean Pochat, January 16, 2005). There was also some evidence of opposition among a group of young people in Rae who proposed that if they did move, non-Aboriginal people should not be permitted to live at the new site (Hilleke 1973).

Regardless of any opposition by local community members, the new site was selected and Poole Construction Company was contracted to build the school and a residence complex in Edzo. Local people were given jobs in the project (personal communication, Joe Mantla, September 8, 2004). Chief Jimmy Bruneau School was officially opened on January 9, 1972 (Dogrib Community Services Board 2002). Just prior to its opening, a group of representatives from Rae visited Rough Rock Demonstration School run by the Navajo Nation in Arizona, USA. This school emphasised Navajo language and cultural teaching and was a significant influence on the development of programming at CJBS (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000; Martin 2001). Chief Jimmy Bruneau was Chief of the Tłı̄chǫ people from 1936 to 1969, he was a strong advocate for

education throughout his life. At the opening of CJBS, through the use of a translator, Chief Jimmy Bruneau said,

“Nobody said I could not speak my own mind and make my own decisions... I have asked for a school to be built...on my land... and that school will be run by my people, and my people will work at that school and our children will learn both ways, our way and the white man’s way” (Chief Jimmy Bruneau 1972;Dogrib Community Services Board 2004, p.9).

The Rae Edzo School Society oversaw the building of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School (Dogrib Community Services Board 2002). It was the wish of the Tłı̄chǫ people to have a school within the community so that young people did not have to be sent away to complete their education.

CJBS was initially designed as an open concept school. At the time, the Principal remarked: “The purpose of having open-concept teaching is to create a home atmosphere. This is good for teachers who are going to team-teach. It also enables maximum amount of movement” (Indian Brotherhood of the NWT 1971, p.1). During the first few years however, the open concept was felt not to be effective and evolved into a more standard classrooms with temporary walls constructed using furniture, boxes and movable dividers (personal communication, Father Jean Pochat, past Rae-Edzo School Society representative, January 16, 2005). The school was refurbished in 1991 and underwent a complete retrofit (redesigning the space and constructing permanent walls between classrooms and offices) in 1995-1996 (Dogrib Community Services Board 1998).

CJBS, was the first and for a long time the only Native run school in the NWT, however there was very limited governmental support for the initiative from the beginning. Carney (1978) points out that the Government of the NWT tolerated the project at best, and left it alone, most probably to fail, so that it could exist as part of the rationale for “not extending local control to other northern communities” (p.2).

CJBS initially offered classes from kindergarten to grade eight. In 1990, there were 54 Tłı̄ch̄o students attending high school in Yellowknife and living in the school residence or home boarding there (Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1991). During this period, any students wishing to go on to high school had to travel to Yellowknife to attend either the public Sir John Franklin High School or the Roman Catholic St. Patrick High School. Students stayed at Akaitcho Hall Student Residence. With the building of Elizabeth MacKenzie Elementary School in Rae in 1994 and the establishment of a regional school board, CJBS became a regional high school servicing all of the Tłı̄ch̄o communities. High school students from Whati, Wekweèti and Gamèti were housed first at the school residence and later home boarded in Rae. This was part of the Community High School Initiative of the GNWT, an initiative that began in 1989. Smaller communities gradually expanded their school programs to offer grades 10-12. The first high school courses were offered at CJBS in 1991, these were at the grade 10 level, with grade 11 and then grade 12 offered in 1992 and 1993 respectively. There was a large influx of new students in these first classes. This indicated that there had been a pool of people in the community who had not finished high school previously but wanted to, and were now taking advantage of opportunities to do so close to home. CJBS continues to have a small elementary school for Edzo students (usually no more than 45 at any time) but focuses the majority of its programming on grades seven through twelve (CJBS Yearbook Staff 1992). The first Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School students to graduate from the school were in the spring of 1994 (CJBS Yearbook Staff 1994).

CJBS functions under the GNWT policy of inclusive schooling. Inclusive schooling is, “schooling which facilitates the membership, participation, and learning of all students in regular classrooms and other activities” (Department of Education 1993a, p.21). At about the same time as the direction about inclusive schooling was issued, the GNWT also indicated that students should be placed in grades by age rather than by completion of curriculum milestones. This is sometimes referred to as social progression or progression by placement. Today, students in classrooms at CJBS have a very wide range of academic abilities (Wile 1996). Some students at CJBS have been placed on

Individual Education Plans (IEP). An IEP is, “a comprehensive, written education plan, with stated objectives, based on the student’s strengths and needs. IEPs require parental/guardian approval and undergo periodic formal review. IEPs are developed for some, but not all, of the students for whom program adaptations and support services are in place” (Department of Education 1993a, p.22).

In the academic year 2004-2005, CJBS had a total of 358 students (47 in the elementary, 119 in grades 7-9 and 192 in grades 10-12). There were 24 professional teaching and administrative staff and 19 support staff members. The school continues to assist in the coordination of a school cafeteria and free lunch program, a day care, a building engineering office, a school residence (currently used only intermittently), a counselling office and a bus program (Dogrib Community Services Board 2004). The school is open to adult learners (in its regular programs and classes) and has been offering some unique courses:

“Though the territorial educational system has focused almost exclusively on the training of youth, the Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School has, for a number of years, been inviting adult learners into the high school to complete their high school education...In addition, the school has been the first place in the NWT to introduce some mining and industrial skill courses” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005, p.ii-iii).

## Chapter 6: RESULTS 1 – THE CONCEPT OF ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

*“I would have left years ago if it weren’t for the kids, we have the most unique kids on the planet.” (School staff, interview, primary source<sup>9</sup>)*

Three grade 10 Tłıchǫ students stand together in the smoking area at CJBS. It’s a cold day and they hunch over to keep the neck of their hooded sweatshirts from letting in the wind. Jordan<sup>10</sup> is seventeen; he is registered in grade ten, but has been suspended so many times in junior high school that he hardly feels like he learned a thing. This year he wants school to be different. Admittedly though, four weeks into the year, and he has surprised even himself to still be here. Darryl also stands with Jordan. They are cousins and both live together at their grandmother’s place in Rae. He is a few years older than Jordan and he is hoping to move in with his girlfriend soon. They have a child together who is now almost a year old. Darryl’s taking some grade 10 and some grade 11 courses, he is planning on writing the trades exams in the spring and he wants to get out of school as soon as he can to make a living. The third student is Amy. She is new at the school because she is from Wekweètì and just started high school at CJBS. She hates her home-stay family so far and wishes she had the same kind of freedom she had back home; there are too many rules and too much housework here. At least she can smoke at school, and it’s fun hanging out with new people. She likes her classes to; the teachers are nice even if they do give too much homework. Amy wants to graduate from high school some day and get a job in the new Tłıchǫ government.

In this ethnographic study, the candidate asks the question: How does Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, create or erode school engagement among Tłıchǫ youth in Behchokǫ, NWT? For Tłıchǫ youth, school engagement is as multifaceted as the stories and experiences of Jordan, Darryl and

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<sup>9</sup> Quotes and excerpts labeled “primary sources” are those that were taken directly from the candidate’s own field notes or interview and focus group transcripts. Secondary sources are quotes taken from the previously transcribed interviews or published texts of others.

<sup>10</sup> These are composite characters and are not meant to represent actual persons. A description of the method for constructing composite characters is provided in chapter three.

Amy. This chapter will draw from field notes, interviews, focus groups, CJBS graduate and attendance records, the grade 10 cohort data and supplementary textual documents to begin to construct a model of engagement for Tłıchǫ youth. For this study and from an activity setting perspective, Tłıchǫ youth are the focal “who” of the setting. We want to learn more about their actions and routines (the “whats”), as well as their objectives and motivations (the “whys”) around school. The chapter begins with a discussion of topics that are key to the experiences and interactions of Tłıchǫ youth: features of home and family life in Behchokǫ; the Tłıchǫ language and culture; peer relationships; young parenting, and gender norms. Patterns of schooling among Tłıchǫ students will also be presented. Next, the chapter looks at the motivations of Tłıchǫ youth in school with a focus on the importance of graduation and on schooling as the best pathway to gainful employment. The final part of the chapter presents a summary of the concept of school engagement as it relates to Tłıchǫ students in the Behchokǫ context.

## Who is the Tłıchǫ Student?

### 6.1.1 Home Life

No matter what one may have read or heard about the positive impacts of diamond mining or other resource development in this area, Behchokǫ still appears to be a relatively poor community in the material sense. There are a number of new vehicles, but the homes are largely in a “council” style, prefabricated box designs with plywood construction and fading paint. There are numerous buildings with boarded up windows. Media reports of crime in Behchokǫ provide shocking accounts of assault, abuse, neglect and vandalism. In July 2006, the community faced the brutal attack of a 91 year old man after a break and enter in the seniors complex (No Author Given 2006b); in June 2002, a teenager was stabbed and killed during a party in Rae (Scott 2004), but despite these recent highly publicized events, the people of Behchokǫ know that things have improved. An elder remembers a walk through town he did on Christmas Day fifty years ago:

*“I remember I went out visiting around the community on Christmas day in the 50s after Mass. Most of the whole community was drunk at that time. I came home and was quite depressed about that, because I just didn’t know where this community was going. And now, there is extended family, there are elders and children all together in one house and the kids are playing with their toys on the floor, and there is lots of food, they might share one bottle of wine or something, but other than a core group of the alcoholics who are drinking, in most families there isn’t the drinking that there used to be. There are nice family gatherings. That is a very positive change” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Even though the communities of Rae and Edzo are small, there are some areas that appear to be a bit better off than others, a visitor might notice that the area nearer the entrance to Rae has newer and larger homes. Edzo feels wealthier as well, most of the non-Aboriginal people in Behchok̄ live on the Edzo side where there are housing complexes. The roads are dusty in the summer and snow covered in the winter. In the fall of 2004 the drive from Yellowknife to Behchok̄ took approximately 75 minutes over a gravel, pot-holed road that was constantly under construction. One day in October a steamroller was parked right beside the welcome tepee at the turnoff for Rae. This was quite indicative of some of the pressures on the more traditional aspects of the lives of the people here. Things have changed drastically over a relatively short period of time; at times it seems like modern influences have come like a steamroller to pressure traditional practices and beliefs.

Inside the modest dwellings of Rae and Edzo, the home life of youth in Behchok̄ varies quite significantly by family. In general however, there are some great things about living in this community, and there are some real challenges too.

Field notes: June 2, 2004

*Today I had the distinct pleasure of sitting down with nine students for a discussion about life in Behchok̄. Janet (the principal) introduced me and then left us to talk. The students seemed very calm and were well behaved and interested throughout our conversation. I started by asking what the best part of living here was and the students talked about the good sports teams, supportive teachers, drum dances and the community carnival. They also talked about being able to drive to places like Fort Providence and Edmonton to go shopping. All of them had been to West Edmonton Mall. When I asked them what challenges they*

*have, as youth in Behchok̄, there was silence. They asked me what “challenge” meant and I said that they were things that made it tough to live here. The first thing they said was not being able to speak the Dogrib language to elders. This kind of surprised me as I didn’t think it would be the first thing mentioned. When I asked them who spoke Dogrib at home, four of them said they did and the others could only understand a little. I asked if they spoke Dogrib to each other and they said it depends, but not usually. The next thing they mentioned was that it was tough keeping away from drugs and alcohol and keeping themselves occupied. “Yes it’s everywhere, we see alcohol and marijuana a lot” one student commented. When I asked the kids what they thought the most important health problems were in the community, they paused for a bit, then they said smoking, drinking, and STDs (they laughed) then obesity (and they laughed some more). “Tobacco, alcohol and snuff, kids use all of these. Kids as young as 12 smoke, usually they start between 12 and 14”. Another student mentioned the community has problems with gambling, bingo and cards. And the others all agreed. One girl said she wasn’t sure if these were health problems, but teenage pregnancy and stress were issues. When I asked about personal relationships and having sex when they were young, they all said, yes, yes, that too and laughed. “As young as 12 or 14. In the evenings they just think we’re walking around, but we’re not!”*

Young people talk about successful sports teams, supportive teachers and enjoyable cultural events that happen in Behchok̄, but they have also experienced a loss of language, the detrimental affects of tobacco, alcohol and drug use, gambling problems and teen pregnancy. When asked what factors are contributing to the success or failure of Tłı̄ch̄Q students in school, a school staff member remarks:

*“Some kids just find their livelihood at home is just so despairing, is so pitiful, and I am thinking of many kids in Rae that I know what their situations are like... school is like 5 or 6 on their top ten so I mean it is just trying to make some sense of their life that is just so important. They are just so confused and so lost and so hurting.” (School staff, interview, primary source)*

In 1998, when 187 students were asked in a school survey who they lived with (mother, father, both parents, a combination of parents and step-parents or others) more than a third of tenth graders at CJBS reported living with someone other than their mother or father (Pride Canada 1998). In the same survey, Behchok̄ students were asked about their use of drug, alcohol and other addictive substances. 90% of tenth graders said they smoked cigarettes in the past year, 84% of them said they drank beer during this time, and 55% had used marijuana. The majority of the grade 10 students said that alcohol

was either very easy, or fairly easy, to obtain (Pride Canada 1998). These numbers are high in comparison to statistics from parts of southern Canada that indicate that the proportion of high school students who drink is no more than 60% and who use cannabis to be no more than 30% (Adlaf et al. 1995; Poulin & Wilbur 1996). In light of the situation of weakened family structures, and prevalence of tobacco, drug and alcohol use, it is recognized that there are distinct needs in the community to support families and the strengthening of adult role models and influences for youth:

*Person 1: [There are] not enough healthy adults in the community that can care and role model for the kids. The students can do unhealthy things without repercussion at home. There is a general lack of parenting (Person 2: Not in every family but a lot). Person 1: There are few role models, problems are cyclical in nature (Person 2: Yes, it happened to their parents and it will happen to the kids) Person 1: This has effects on emotional status. We are seeing temporary bonds being sought through relationships at a young age; kids are taking care of kids. (Health care worker, focus group, primary source).*

For students who do well, it is often a reflection of families who have found ways to stay healthy and maintain strong supervisory and motivational structures for their children:

*“If you look at them you will also see that right from when they entered school, the school system until now, they have had either they had the family and parental support or someone in their life, that has pushed them to do well in school” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

### 6.1.2 Tłı̄ch̄q Language and Culture

Some young people have very supportive parents, siblings and extended families and the opportunity to go to the bush and learn traditional skills from their parents and grandparents. As part of a community wellness strategy, the Dogrib Community Services Board interviewed local youth. One young person comments:

*“I am living with my grandparents and I love living with them because they don’t drink or do drugs. Sometimes in the winter my grandpa and I would go caribou*

*hunting. My grandpa often tells me stories about long ago. He talks about how people used to live in the hard times. My grandmother, who stays home a lot, takes care of the house. She makes clothing for me to use in the bush. I like the fact that my grandparents are not drinking because they always have a lot of money for me and always have a lot of food in the house. At night we are able to have a good sleep, which I really appreciate” (Tłı̄ch̄Q youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, secondary source).*

Instead of this kind of supportive and culturally rich environment, other young people in Behchok̄Q are faced with growing up in alcoholic homes, with raising younger siblings or their own children, with limited opportunities to build self-esteem, and very little supervision or guidance from positive adult role models. In the same DCSB documents youth shared stories of being left alone while their parents went out drinking and playing bingo or cards, witnessing spousal abuse and other forms of family violence, and lacking even basic resources to buy food and clothing. These young people spoke about having very little support in school and about leaving school before graduation. One elder points out that because change has happened so rapidly, today’s students are growing up in a time very different than their parents and, most certainly, than their grandparents, and it is hard for the different generations to relate:

*“I think it is getting more and more complicated because ten or fifteen years ago the kids, the youth that were coming into the school, their first language was Dogrib and they, a lot of times if they weren’t in school, they weren’t at home watching TV they were at home going out to get fish from the nets and going and getting fire wood and they were doing traditional chores for their families. Today the kids coming in have English as their first language, they spend large amounts of time in front of video games so, as people, as young people they are very different from their older brothers and sisters were ten years ago, or fifteen years ago, they had a whole different thing” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

This situation influences the parents’ and grandparents’ ability to identify with the concerns and experiences of contemporary Tłı̄ch̄Q youth. When asked what was tough about living in Behchok̄Q, the first thing that CJBS students talked about was the problem of not being able to communicate with the elders in the community because of their inability to speak the Dogrib language. The loss of language is an ever present and

growing concern. School staff and elders are now finding that even entering elementary school, students are speaking primarily English:

*“If I go to the primary school, you know grade 1, some teachers tell me, forget about Dogrib, only English, in grade 1! That is TV, TV in the home” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

The influence of popular media and other sources in the mainstream English Canadian culture is significant. Although there are Tłı̄ch̄Q language classes at the schools in Behchok̄ō, including CJBS, these places are predominantly English environments. The candidate was immersed in the school environment for a full three months before she heard two students engage in a conversation with each other in the Tłı̄ch̄Q language.

Tłı̄ch̄Q language classes are offered by the Mofwi Adult Education Centre in Behchok̄ō, but they are often poorly attended and not used by youth. In 2004, the candidate attended these Tłı̄ch̄Q language classes along with two teachers from CJBS and four Tłı̄ch̄Q women from the community. At seven students, this was a usual sized class for this course and it is offered no more than twice a year<sup>11</sup>.

The situation with language loss among Tłı̄ch̄Q youth does not entirely mirror the case for Tłı̄ch̄Q cultural practices and understanding. Although life has changed drastically for adolescents in Behchok̄ō over the past 50 years, young people largely still have a sense of pride in being Tłı̄ch̄Q and have an understanding of their cultural heritage. The youth themselves communicate a sense of connection with the land and the traditional way of life of the Tłı̄ch̄Q people:

*“We pride ourselves on being independent and on living in two worlds. Nature is important;, we use caribou, rabbit and moose for food. The north is a very great place to live.” (Tłı̄ch̄Q youth, public presentation, primary source)*

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<sup>11</sup> The principle course resource was the Tłı̄ch̄Q Yatì Enìhtl’è, or Dogrib Dictionary which was published by the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education in 1992. This was the same year as the first teachers graduated from a Community Teacher Education Program in Rae-Edzo. The dictionary was to support the teaching of Tlı̄cho language and culture in Tlı̄cho schools.

Although today's young people may not be hunting, trapping and doing beadwork as everyday activities, contemporary Tłıchǫ youth can still relate to these kinds of traditional practices. Reflecting on the experience of students undertaking a community-organized canoe trip in the summer, an elder remarks:

*“They do the experience every summer, the canoe trip. All the young people while in the bush they are A-1, perfect, they love it. They love it. You know there are up to 60 teenagers with elders and it is a hard life with portages, those big canoes and no more radios but they love it. It is in the blood, it's in the blood. I mean it can be rough at times boy, I am amazed at times you know when I hear what is happening in the bush eh, on those trips you know, how strong they are, how well behaved they are, it's their life you know. It's still their life. I am sure when they see a canoe there, they know what it means. You know, it speaks to them.” (Elder, interview, primary source)*

There is a sense of pride among many youth about being Tłıchǫ. Students wear jackets with the message “Dogrib Nation” emblazoned on the back. In a speech entitled “Famous People” one Tłıchǫ student went on to describe “famous” Tłıchǫ student athletes that are currently at CJBS instead of movie stars or international sports personalities. An administrator puts it succinctly saying:

*“I think there is a lot of pride there in being Dogrib” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

### 6.1.3 Peer Groups

Field notes: November 30, 2006

*Today during the public speaking competition one of the students talked about the topic of rape. She brought in a personal experience and started to cry. When she finished her speech and ran off, a number of her friends left from the audience to console her. Afterwards I spoke about the incident with some of the school staff. I mentioned how impressed I was with speeches and how open kids were about talking about tough issues. One of the teachers said she was always impressed that the students were there to support each other with no questions asked.*

Peer groups are strong among Tłıchǫ youth. Most young people would count friends as their strongest supporters. In some cases where positive family influences are not

available, youth take on roles similar to that of family members. In response to the question, “What do you think is really great about the school and the youth in this community?” a school staff member comments:

*“The relationships in peer groups is very strong, there are extremely strong friendships here” (School staff, focus group, primary source)*

Another staff member notes that:

*“There is such a great acceptance here, our kids are very, very merciful, they are very, very neat that way. You know, we have got some kids, surely there is lots of teasing, in some cases there is some bullying but I think a lot of times a lot of our kids are really accepted... You know, they seem to be able to co-ordinate and get along fine.” (School staff, interview, primary source)*

There are fewer, and less deeply engrained, social cliques at CJBS than the candidate has experienced working in other schools in southern Canada. When asking about this observation during one-on-one interviews, the interviewees tended to agree saying:

*“There are some...it does depend on the year, but they are pretty cool with each other, they are all pretty good.” (School staff, interview, primary source)*

One student did a speech at school about how to make friends. This section of his speech demonstrates that he is aware of students who may feel left out, and is concerned about them and their feelings:

*“You so badly want to make friends but you can't do it? Some ideas are to stay after school and play drums, piano or guitar, or you can participate in Dene Games. You can also help people you don't know if they are struggling with homework or other problems...Smile it is the quickest way to make friends, most people will stay away from an angry or scary face. Give a compliment say something nice. Ask your new friends questions about themselves. Make sure you have something to add to the conversation as well, get to know yourself by keeping a diary or journal. Be a friend, show an interest and be kind and friendly. You can plan activities together. Inviting a friend over after school for activities that more than one person can do - not like computer games, is a good idea... The reason I am saying this speech is that I see a lot of people walking around the*

*halls at lunch with no friends. Try these ideas. Masi cho.” (Tłı̄ch̄ youth, public presentation, secondary source).*

This sense of empathy is common among young people in the community. Another student spoke about peer pressure saying that it wasn't always easy to resist against the pressures of friends, young people value their friendships most of all.

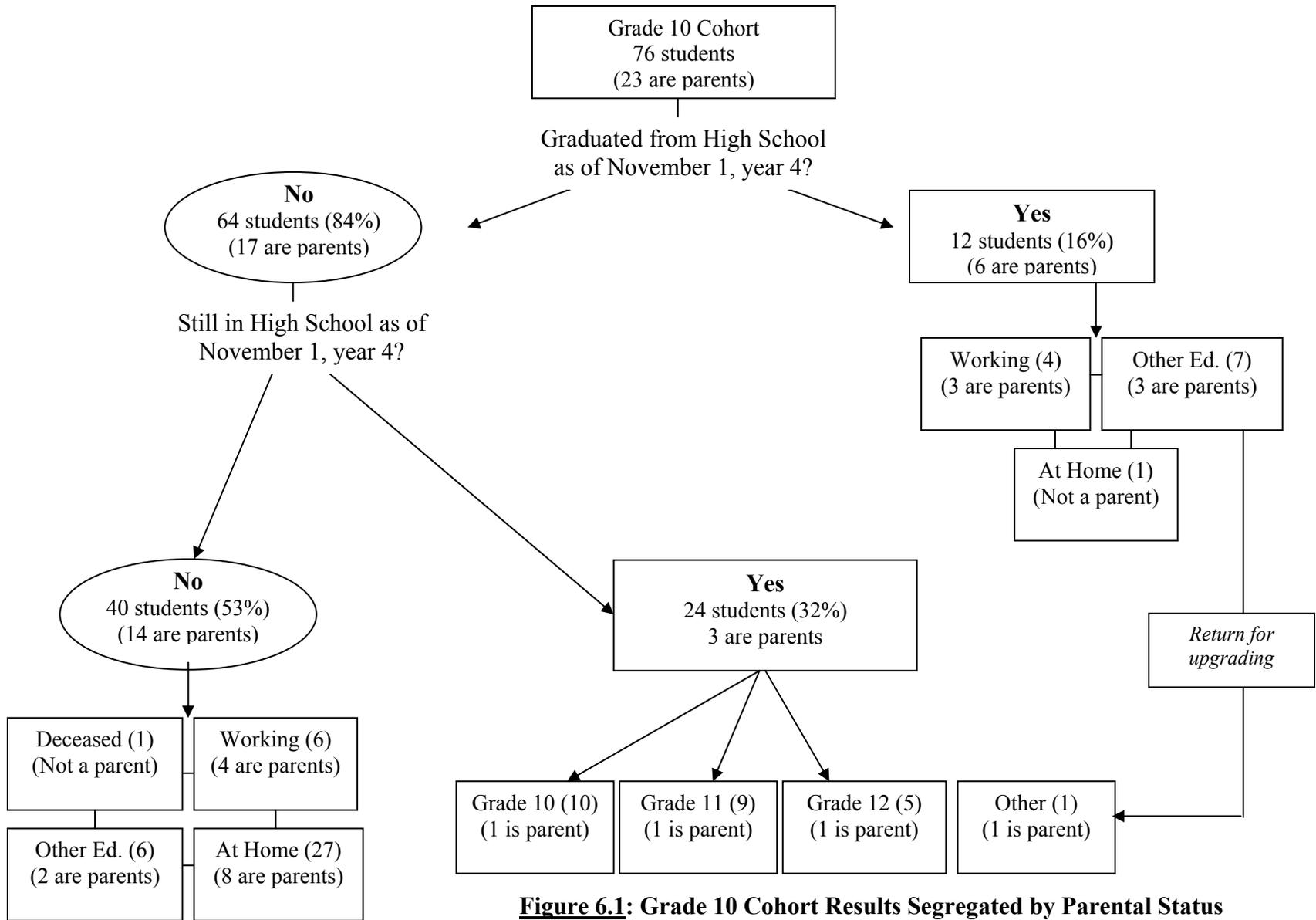
#### 6.1.4 Young Parents

During a regular day at CJBS one often sees infants and toddlers in the halls and the entrance area near the daycare centre. Students who are also parents can chose to have their child in the school daycare and visit with them during the lunch hour and breaks. Teenage pregnancy does not have the same social stigma attached to it among Tłı̄ch̄ people as is commonly found in southern Canada. “Parents sometimes even want their daughters to have a child so that they can raise it. Or, often because of the existence of extended families the child is readily accepted. The teenager may also view taking care of a baby as having something (as opposed to nothing) to do. It can not be assumed that teenage pregnancy is viewed as a problem” (Government of the Northwest Territories & Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1989, p.7). If teenage pregnancy is presented as potentially negative, it is usually because the mother may have to leave school when the child is born and thus may be limiting her life options. Students who have children of their own or have the responsibility for caring for younger siblings often struggle with school. This is more often the case with female students but it does pertain to males as well:

*“She stopped coming to school also at one point because she has a child. She is also the mother of a toddler... she has a primary role...of taking care of her younger siblings also and she is not able to [come]” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

The data from the grade 10 cohort study that was undertaken for this investigation indicate that as high as a third of the students in this class are also parents. Information

pertaining to the parental status of each of the cohort members is displayed in Figure 6.1. The figure shows the cohort data broken down by the number of parents in each group.



**Figure 6.1: Grade 10 Cohort Results Segregated by Parental Status**

As of November 1st, 23 (30%) of the students in the grade 10 cohort were known to be parents, both males and females. Of these 23 people, 6 parents have graduated (17 have not). Of the 17 parents who have not graduated from high school, 3 of them are still registered high school students, 14 are not. In calculating the risk ratio, or relative chance of graduation between parents and non-parents (for calculation details see appendix 10) it was found that a parent was more than twice as likely to graduate than a non-parent. However this result was not statistically significant (95% confidence interval of 0.83 – 6.39) and therefore may have occurred by chance alone.

Among those who have not graduated (n=64), risk ratios were calculated for the chance of no longer being in school on the November 1<sup>st</sup> cut-off. If you were a parent you were 1.4 times more likely to have left school as compared to non-parents, with a 95% confidence interval of 1.03 – 1.99. This finding appears to indicate that among the non-graduates, parenting is impeding school attendance. Among the ‘drop-out’ group (those who have not graduated and are not longer in school), one third of the 25 students who are ‘just at home’ are parents. Verification interviews revealed that parenting responsibilities at home (whether of the students own children or of siblings and other family members) are significantly impacting students’ ability to work or study elsewhere.

To shed some further light on the relationship between graduation, parental status, age and gender, logistic regression analysis was undertaken modelling graduation status as the dependent or outcome (y) variable, the principle exposure variable of interest as parental status ( $x_1$ ) and independent variables gender ( $x_2$ ) and age ( $x_3$ ) as potential confounders or effect modifiers. The full analysis is provided as appendix 11. The age data is limited due to missing values and small numbers in each of the strata and therefore it is not possible to draw an accurate conclusion whether age is an effect modifier or confounder in the relationship between graduation status and parental status. It appears, however, that among the younger students at least, the relationship between graduation status and parental status is dependent on gender.

### 6.1.5 Gender Differences

Thus far, we have examined the home life, peer groups, language, culture and parenting practices of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth as an almost homogenous group. It is obvious that this homogeneity is artificial and that there is a continuum of experiences within the group. Experiences of 15 years olds differ somewhat from those of 25 year olds, for example. Those youth who have spent their entire lives in Behchok̄ō may have slightly different perspectives from those who have moved to the area from outlying Tłı̄ch̄Q communities. These disparities are recognized and touched on throughout the dissertation, however, it is essential to pause and mention the real distinct differences that exist between the experiences of young males and young females in Behchok̄ō.

Historically, women were expected to find a partner quite early in life, and care for children and the home while the male hunted and fished and provided for the family. Women were not permitted to go on the trap-lines or to be drummers, as these were traditionally male roles. When Tłı̄ch̄Q people started to attend school however, it was often the females that were sent because the males were needed more close to home:

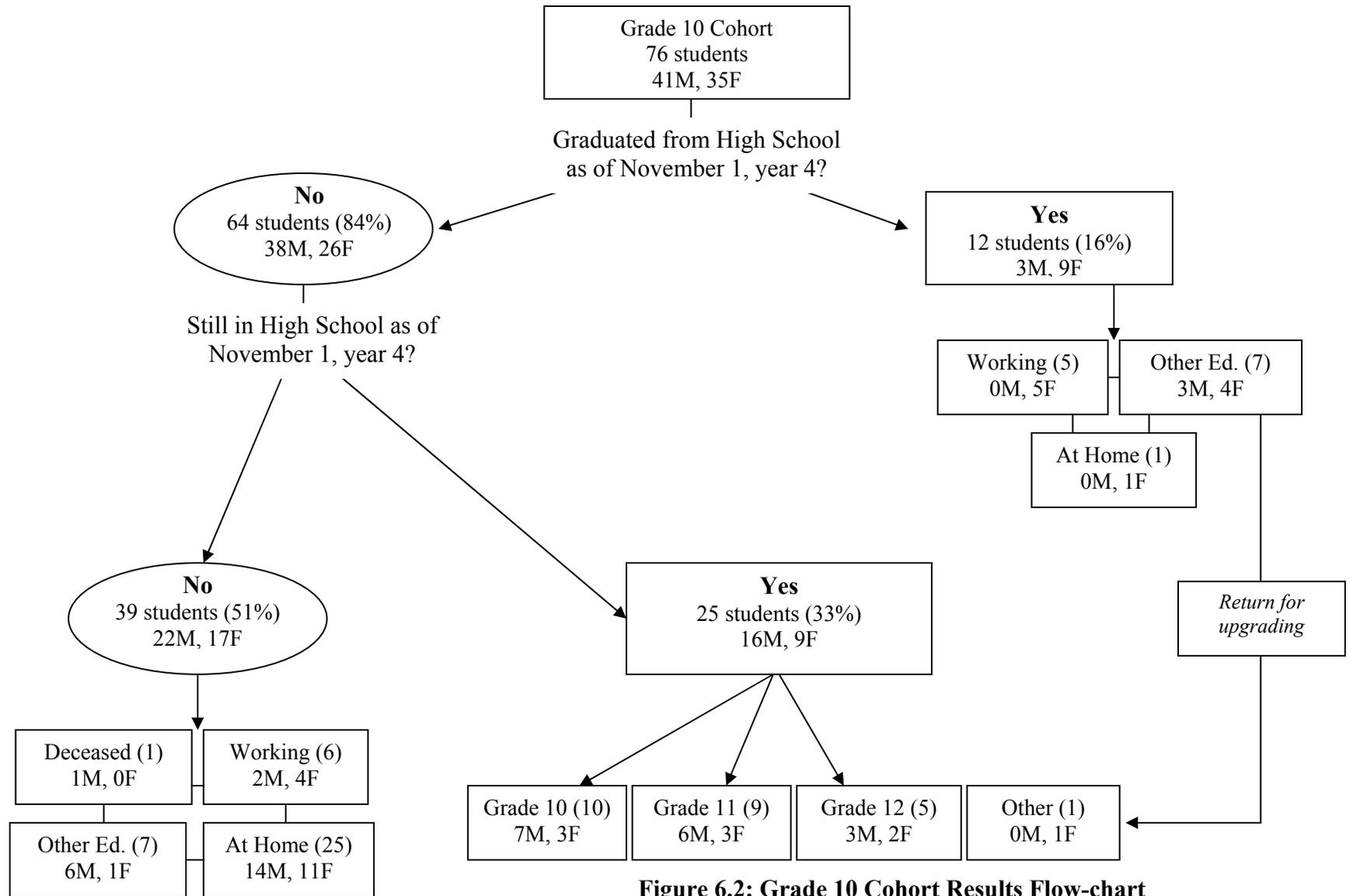
*“It would have been the women who were more likely to be sent off to school, and the reason for that is because the men, well they were needed at home. The women could go and they got their education that way, I can see the impact of that” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

In looking at CJBS graduation records, from 1994 to November 2004, there were a total of 136 graduates<sup>12</sup>. There were 97 female and 39 males graduates. Female students have a higher graduation rate. In the grade 10 cohort that was examined for this study, there were twelve graduates (a graduation rate of 16%), three of who were male and nine of who were female. In calculating the risk ratio, or relative chance of graduation between male and female students (for detail of calculations see appendix 10) a female student was three and a half times more likely to graduate than a male student with a

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<sup>12</sup> Graduates are defined as those with a high school diploma (having finished all course work and diploma exams required for graduation) as well as those students who received a high school leaving certificate (completed their course work but did not meet diploma exam requirements).

95% confidence interval of 1.03 – 11.98. Figure 6.2 shows the breakdown of students in the grade 10 cohort as of November 1, four years after the start of the cohort study. For each box in the flow-chart, the number of students is given in brackets and, in some cases, the percentage of the total number of students (n=76) is given as well. The data in each box is also stratified by gender [male (M) and female (F)].



**Figure 6.2: Grade 10 Cohort Results Flow-chart**

Among the students of the grade 10 cohort, five graduates were working. All of the working graduates were female. Further investigation into this data (by way of verification interviews) revealed that these women have filled positions within the community: at the health centre, at child and family services, at the school or the Friendship Centre, for example. One female graduate was working as a maid at a local diamond mine. Conversely, of the students who have dropped out (39 of the original 76 students were not in school but have not graduated)<sup>13</sup>, twenty-two were males and seventeen were females. On November 1<sup>st</sup> of year four, one of the students was deceased, 6 are working, 7 are engaged in some kind of further education and 25 are at home not working or studying. Six of the seven students who did not finish high school but are now in further education are male. Verification interviews indicate that this number is representative of those men who go on to undertake training in the trades such as pre-employment carpentry or heavy equipment operation, without their high school diploma.

The employment positions taken up by males and females today also tend to differ. Males are more often engaged in manual labour and the trades, while women tend to take jobs in business and office administration, education and community services. Although some of these positions are supportive rather than leadership roles, it is recognized that women are key to the functioning of the community:

*“Women were taking more of the supporting roles at the mine, men don’t even make their own beds, there is housekeeping and there is cooking and cleaning. There would be some women working in government and some secretaries and that kind of thing... well the women here are generally more educated and of course in the community if you want something done you go to a women, the women are definitely powerful members of the community” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Young Tłı̄chǫ males have different expectations placed upon them and often follow different paths than their female counter parts. The cultural shift from a hunting,

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<sup>13</sup> This is approximately half of the original cohort group, or a ‘drop-out’ rate of about 50%.

nomadic, land-based society to a sedentary, market economy has arguably had the greatest influence on the male members of the community. While women continue to care for children and the tasks of the home, men have largely lost their way of life, of hunting and trapping, and have had to make the most significant adjustments. One elder remembers that when they first moved from the bush to Rae, there were more than 500 men here unemployed. When asked whether there were any men still trapping, the elders responds:

*“Yes, for a bit of money, some have it in their blood. Some have to go out, [local man] in the Fall he has got to go out, in the spring he’s got to go out. I mean a man like him, [in the bush] he’s perfect, he knows his job, he knows everything what to do. In town what is he? Who is he? In the bush he is a master he is a teacher he is perfectly at ease. In the town, he is nobody, no self-respect, gone.”*  
(Elder, interview, primary source)

Many people in Behchok̄ talk about the youth having to be “Strong Like Two People”, or being able to live well in both the traditional and modern ways. This has been more of a challenge for males as they struggle to find new meaning in their lives away from the role of hunter and protector.

#### What Patterns of School Engagement are Evident at CJBS?

Overall, data from the grade 10 cohort indicates that most CJBS students are taking longer than 3 years to complete high school that a good number of young people are leaving school prior to graduating, that a significant number of students are also parents, and that a small number of students leave school early and take up employment. Female students have a higher chance of graduating than males, and the majority of graduates have taken up employment positions locally. There is a group of students who are engaged in other educational activities, such as college and training in the trades, some with, and some without a high school diploma. It appears that becoming a parent does not necessarily predict negative educational outcomes but, further investigation into these patterns is warranted.

The next section of this chapter delves further into the patterns of schooling evident among youth in Behchok̄, specifically focusing on temporal patterns of schooling, the non-progressive student, the workers, those in other education and the “walk-about”.

## 6.1.6 Temporal Patterns of Engagement

### 6.1.6.1 Early Semester Surges

*“It’s the end of the first full week of classes. I think everyone is breathing a sigh of relief. Today we had an assembly in the afternoon and all of the students were called down to an area of the hallway near the cultural classroom. Hundreds of kids in jeans and hooded sweatshirts were spilling out on all sides of the assembly space. It was obvious that there really wasn’t enough room for everyone to sit and listen comfortably. As we waited for the assembly to begin, Marty<sup>14</sup>, one of the returning teachers, told me that at the assembly last June, there were only about 50 students. When I asked why they used this space instead of somewhere like the gym where there would be more room, Marty said they wanted the assembly to feel more personal and intimate and eventually, sometime during the school year, we would all fit. I took a moment to process what the teacher had said, eventually, enough students would leave school and things would get comfortable again. I looked around and imagined how different the space would feel with only 50 students. Where would the rest be, and how and why did this process occur?” (Excerpt from field notes, September 3, 2004).*

Here the candidate reflects on her experience attending a student assembly at the end of the first week of school. At this meeting, students flowed out all sides of the room, yet later in the year, the student numbers had decreased to a point where assemblies are comfortable again, in the sense of seating. There are distinct temporal patterns of school engagement among Tłıch̄ youth. Over a year, engagement is at its obvious peak at the beginning of the year, and then again at the beginning of the second semester. Literally, there are attendance *surges* during which the high school population at CJBS can nearly double:

*“We have the surges, you are going to see it in two weeks from now. We are going to have our student population in the high school double what it is right*

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<sup>14</sup> Pseudonyms have been used.

*now, which in turn will have a lot of effects on everything else, from behaviour at lunchtime to behaviour issues in the senior high...it continues after March Break, sometimes up to... into April and then behaviour usually goes down again because not as many student are here. And the students that are coming to school are buying into what we expect” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The pattern of students leaving later on in the semester happens more drastically in the spring, where as a teacher notes:

*“The majority of learning happens in first semester. We have lost even good students in second semester. Our attendance right now, in January [at the end of semester one] is nothing compared to what we’ll see in April and later [at the end of the year].” (Teacher, interview, primary source).*

Surges in school attendance have become a predictable normative behaviour at school. Significant energy is expended to try and keep students in school: there are meetings with teachers and administrators; phone calls home and meetings with parents; and personal one-on-one discussions with students wherever possible, but inevitably, many students fade out. Some stay for only a short period, perhaps a few days or a week, others might last a month or two. Although most people would rather these students did not leave school, there is also a subconscious, yet collective, sigh of relief when they do, and things become more manageable again. Peers, family members and others can also subtly support these yearly surges in attendance:

*“A recent change in my life is when I started going to church and my family started to accept the fact that am going to finish the semester” (Youth, Art class Zine activity, primary source).*

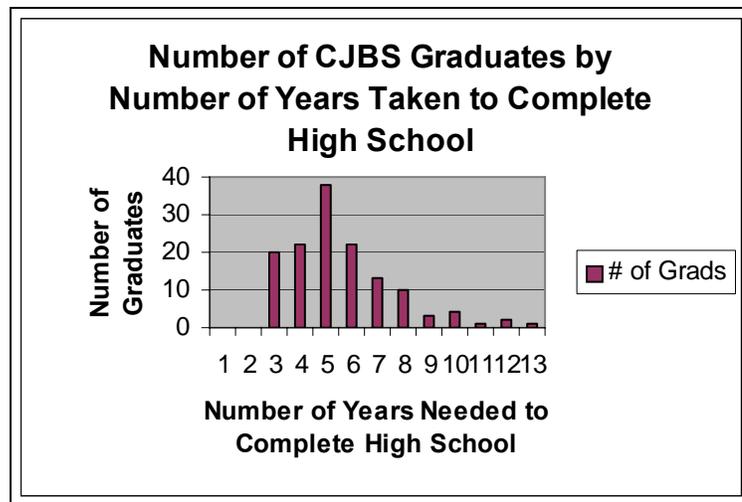
There is little flux in engagement over a period of a day at CJBS. This is principally due to the fact that the majority of students at the school take the bus from their homes 13 kilometres away in Rae. If a student makes it to school in the morning there is less chance of he or she leaving during the day than might be seen if the school were closer to the main community.

### 6.1.6.2 Starting and Stopping

Another temporal pattern evident among students from Behchok̄ is that of starting and stopping their schooling for periods of time. This was already mentioned briefly in relation to young parents and semester surges. But it is important to note that reports from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment of the NWT indicate that in general students from the NWT are more likely to have their formal education interrupted, both in high school grades and between secondary and postsecondary education, spending time in the labour force or raising children (or both) (Department of Education 2001).

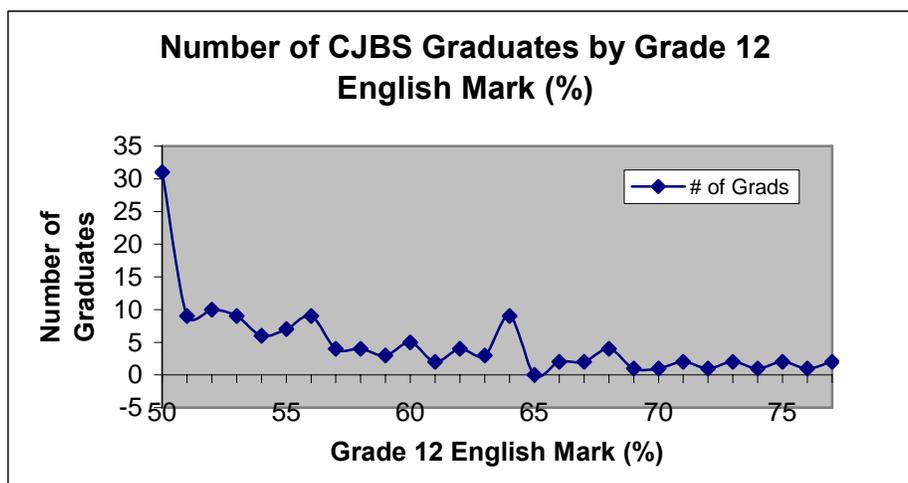
### 6.1.6.3 Repeating Courses and Taking Longer

Academic records have been kept for CJBS graduates since the first graduating class in 1994. Between 1994 and 2004, the average age of a CJBS graduate is 21.97 years (ages range from 17 to 46 years). The average length of time between a student's first registration in high school and their graduation is 5.6 years (range 3 to 13 years). Figure 6.3 shows the number of graduates in each group organized by the number of years it took the group to complete high school.



**Figure 6.3:** Number of CJBS Graduates by Number of Years Taken to Complete High School

A significant hurdle faced by many CJBS potential graduates is the requirement to successfully complete at least one course in English at the grade 12 level. Between 1994 and 2004, the average grade 12 English final mark (a combination of 50% course mark and 50% diploma exam mark) for CJBS graduates is 57.2%. The most commonly achieved mark (the mode) is 50% (obtained by 31 of the 136 graduates or 29%). The highest grade 12 English mark ever obtained by a graduate of CJBS is 77% (achieved twice). Figure 6.4 shows the range of grade 12 English marks of CJBS graduates.



**Figure 6.4:** Number of CJBS Graduates by Grade 12 English Mark (%)

Seventy-one of the 136 graduates (52%) took Grade 12 English more than one time. In all but 5 cases, the student was required to take the course over because they were not successful in passing the course in the first attempt (a final grade of less than 50% which could be due to failing the course component, the diploma exam or both). In the remaining cases, 5 were attempts by students to upgrade or improve their grade 12 English mark (3 of these attempts were successful). Table 6.1 shows the number of graduates by the number of times they took a grade 12 English course.

**Table 6.1: The Number of Graduates by the Number of Times They Took Grade 12 English**

Number of Attempts	Number of Graduates
1	65
2	50
3	11
4	7
5	3

In relation to students repeating courses, a former teacher at CJBS writes, “Most students fail one or more courses per year, students pick courses which are inappropriate for their level of literacy, many students repeat courses and some with impunity repeat three or more times, many students have been promoted by placement (Wile 1996, p.5-6).

#### 6.1.7 The Non-Progressing Student

Distinctly related to the temporal patterns described in the previous section, one of the most prevalent patterns of schooling among Tl̄ich̄Q students is that of non-progression. Non-progressing students repeatedly register and attend school and then eventually stop attending (sometimes very gradually) only to return again and again:

*“[A] non-progressing student... it is the repeated pattern...there is probably...50 kids that... fall in the same category... You want them so badly to be able to get it together enough to stay in school and finish because they do have the ability” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The youth themselves talked about dropping out of school for a period of time and then returning to school:

*“Yes I have dropped out before. I was bored with school, I thought school was for fools, but now I know differently” (Youth, focus group, primary source).*

Others speak out against this kind of behaviour:

*“I don’t mean to be mean, but what are people doing who are repeating courses over and over? Why can’t you just get down to the work?” (Youth, public presentation, primary source)*

Outcomes for non-progressing students are varied. Some non-progressing students will eventually gain enough credits to graduate from high school but will just take longer than three or four years to complete grades 10 through 12. Others will continue to try but will meet only limited success. These students may either eventually stop trying, some going on to other employment or educational opportunities, or will continue to try but may do so at less frequent intervals. The school attempts to support and provide guidance for non-progressing students. Registered high school students must meet with the Principal of the school at the beginning of each semester. There have been instances where some students have been gently encouraged to re-think their reasons for coming back and consider ending the practice as they may be viewed as an unacceptable drain of resources:

*“[He] is one though that we are trying to counsel not to come back to CJBS anymore. We just can’t help him anymore, really we have done what we can...he just has so many needs... we have done what we can” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Limited opportunities exist for students who want to obtain their high school diploma but have had difficulty at the community high school. Although there is an adult education centre in Rae, very few courses are offered there and high school equivalency is not one of those offered. High school equivalency is offered in Yellowknife. A variety of forms of alternative schooling and alternative education programs have been attempted in Rae the past, there has been some success but much difficulty associated with program sustainability:

*“We have had ten [alternative programs] , we have had lots of them over the years and have had a variety of successes. They start and they stop and for some reason, we haven’t kept a program that kept going year after year” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Alternative and adult schooling options are points of on-going discussion in Behchok̄.

### 6.1.8 The Workers

There are essentially three groups of student workers in Behchok̄ō. First, there are those who graduate and find employment after high school. Many high school graduates from CJBS find work in Behchok̄ō. There is an overall need for skilled workers:

*“[Getting self-governance] is about human resources, development and training for the Dogrib people...developing the community human resource...not just focusing on the mine...we need all kinds of human resources” (GNWT Official, interview, primary source).*

The second group of students work. This can be either part time or full time and may be during the school year or on holidays. Students who are attending school find jobs in local shops, offices or for local services. Many students also work in the summer. In response to the question, “Do you take summer jobs and can you stay with them after the summer is over?”, two young people respond:

*Person 1: Oh yes we can get jobs almost anywhere [in the summer]. You can work at Treaty 11 Council, Community Social Services or the mine. Person 2: You can also do things like highways, garbage collection, security or construction. Person 3: For some you have to be 18 and over. Person 1: “No you can’t stay after the summer is over. Most times you are just filling in for someone on holiday (Youth, focus group, primary source).*

The third group of student workers are those who have not graduated, who are not attending school, but who have found work. There may be immediate gratification in earning a salary (even if it is from a labourer position) for some students, but there is uncertainty whether or not the heightened labour market is actually causing youth to leave school to work:

*Person 1: “Yes kids are leaving school to work, kids are leaving school because of the mine.” Person 2: “I would disagree with that” (Health care worker, focus group, primary source).*

Another interviewee comments:

*“Some young people decide to drive a truck or whatever and get paid \$70,000 a year and you don’t need a grade 12 for that, especially if they already have kids at home they have to support.” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Employers do not directly encourage young people to leave school to work, in most cases they would much rather their employees achieve at least a grade 12 education, and promote college or university as the gold standards. Students at the school understand that they are not supposed to leave school to work:

*“No we can’t [quit school to work], we’re supposed to stay in school until we’re 18” (Youth, focus group, primary source).*

However, there are students who have chosen to leave school knowing that there may be work and good wages available in a variety of places, especially labourer positions at the diamond mine and in construction. At present, this appears to be a small number of people (mostly male). In many cases these young people return to school or decide to do something else after realizing how limited the opportunity is for advancement, and how difficult and often repetitive tasks are, for those with less than a grade 12 education.

*“She was a chambermaid at [the mine] but recently quit because she said she was getting tired of the work and there was never an increase in pay” (Band Council employee, interview, primary source).*

*“The temptation in grade 10, you know, you might land a little job eh, but you can buy a car you can be free you know, that’s the temptation you know, but then after a while you start to realize oh oh, my grade 10 is nothing. [Question: Right so then what?] Some go back to school, uh, some well they suffer. Temptation to go into alcohol to forget” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Essentially, however, there are employment positions for people in Behchok̄ regardless of formal qualifications. One interviewee said it concisely:

*“If you are dependable, you are in demand”. (Band Council employee, interview, primary source).*

This comment points to a set of standards for workers in the north that are based on characteristics that are not just linked to educational qualifications. A dependable, hard working person would likely be able to find work.

*“Up north I think it is OK... I just think that they have to have different expectations and standards. I don’t think the piece of paper matters. If you can do the job then you can do the job, it doesn’t matter. And I think that is the way the north needs to stay” (Band Council employee, interview, primary source).*

The interview and focus group data also indicates that even if there might technically be jobs available for those with little skill or experience (such as students considering or having left school), not just any person can fill open employment positions. Often, the skills that are required to complete high school are the same ones employers are looking for in their workers. The opportunity to sustain employment, particularly without finishing high school, is not a realistic possibility for all young people in the region. Interviewees reflected on the job opportunities at the diamond mine and the accessibility of these positions to people in Behchok̄:

*“The mine has been good but only for those people who can hold it together; people who leave school usually aren’t them” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“I think for some occupations you do [need grade 12], but I know there are special considerations for local people. But there are a lot of other issues involved to, like alcoholism really stops some people from working, despite degrees or whatever” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

#### 6.1.9 Those in Other Education

There are a group of student who take up other education whether before or after graduating from CJBS. The Tłı̄ch̄q Scholarship Committee provides financial support for Dogrib people (defined as those on the Band list kept by the Band Council) who are attending post secondary education. In 2005, 82 Dogrib students were receiving grants from the Committee to attend college, trades and University programs. Appendix 14 provides a breakdown of this information by school, gender and academic program.

Many students who begin post secondary training do not complete their programs, particularly on the first attempt. Some students find it difficult to live away from home for the first time and feelings of isolation become barriers to academic success. Many also struggle with the academic workload, particularly on top of other responsibilities they have in their lives:

*[She] went to college last year and bombed out. [She] is a very good student actually, it's just that her children are small and she just wasn't ready" (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Statistics Canada 2001 Aboriginal People's Survey data indicate that for the 675 Aboriginal people in Behchok̄ over the age of 25, 10 people have university degrees and 110 have college diplomas or have become certified in the trades. Seventy-three percent of this population reported having 'less than a high school education' (Statistics Canada 2004).

Students are encouraged by the staff at CJBS to finish high school before going on to post-secondary training. Not all students do, and this is also a factor that may impact their success rates:

*"He didn't finish high school, but went on to do heavy equipment operators training...he got kicked out for missing too much time and now he is back in [town]. I wished he had not gone off to get a trade before finishing school" (Band Council employee, interview, primary source).*

Until very recently, students who were graduating from CJBS did not have the academic requirements to enter directly into university. Instead, they were attending college, trades or a university access program first, or instead of, University. Another group of students take high school courses in other places, such as Yellowknife or Three Hills in Alberta. A few students have also returned to CJBS after graduation to upgrade their marks to have more success in post-secondary admissions and courses. In 2005, the first CJBS students graduated with enough academic courses to be considered directly for university admissions. It will be a number of years before this becomes

common practice however, and even more time before we will know how the students taking this path fare during post-secondary training and beyond.

#### 6.1.10 The ‘Walk-Abouts’

Besides those young people who decide to work, those with parenting or care giving responsibilities and those who are in post-secondary education, there is a separate group of young people who were said to be doing nothing:

*“There were a lot of people in town... who are just doing nothing” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In 1989 the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education undertook an assessment that identified 294 young people in five Dogrib communities between the ages of 15 and 21. It was determined that of these 294 people, less than one third of them could be identified as either in school or working. The rest were referred to in the report as ‘walk-about’ or young people who remain in their communities not engaged in school or work and usually living with their parents or relatives (Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1991). In the 2004 School Review, parents expressed concern about the young people in their communities who, for various reasons, were not in school. It was felt that the school and the Community Services Authority (a community association that speaks on behalf of the parents) should work together to find solutions to this problem (Dogrib Community Services Board 2004).

Statistics Canada data from the 2001 census indicates that for children aged 6-14 in Behchok̄, they spend an average of 3.2 hours per day watching television or playing video games (Statistics Canada 2004). School-aged young people can often be found at the entrance to the Co-op grocery store on school days. Youth can also be seen walking on the streets or riding their skidoos in Rae as well. In the evenings, groups of students go to the Sportsplex, they hang out together on the front porches of houses, they walk around town and they find places to congregate inside. Sometimes groups of students will come together in a house where the parents are not at home, such as when adults

have gone to Yellowknife (a 100 kilometre drive away). There are some homes and some families that are less tolerant than others of young people just ‘hanging out’, missing school or spending time with their friends:

*“What we are often talking about here is families... historical in families, because you will also see in families that have great success getting their kids through school...At that house and everyone comes to school 100% of the time... So that is a family commitment from those two parents to make sure that those children come to school...and they are fed, and for the most part they are rested.”*  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).

### What Motivates Tłı̄ch̄Q Students at School?

When we reflect once more on the student assembly at the beginning of the school year, on the students eager to attend, eager to engage, eager to succeed, a logical question to ask is what motivates these young people? Many will not make it to Christmas, leaving for any number of reasons; they may become walk-about, or workers, they may eventually try other routes in schooling or return to the high school at another time. As student numbers surge again at the beginning of each new semester, what makes the students return? First, there is a distinct dichotomy between students who graduate and those who do not. There is great value placed on a high school diploma among young people, adults and elders in the community. While speaking to CJBS Art students during the photovoice activity, this elder advises young people to:

*“Try hard and finish their high school. I mean it for their own good, if they made it, their grade 12, you don’t have to worry about a thing. You are going to make good money, you are going to get a good house, you are going to have a good vehicle, you don’t have to ask other people to write for me because they are going to know how to write”* (Elder, public presentation, primary source).

Attending college and university is viewed as the ‘gold-standard’. The same elder goes on to say that if a student finishes high school and then goes to university:

*“They could do everything. They might be Chief, they might be a game warden, they might be a lawyer. We don’t know, whatever they want. That’s why I ask them to try hard” (Elder, public presentation, primary source).*

To become a high school graduate is a motivation for youth. The school exhibits framed photos of all its graduates in a prominent place in the school; graduates are featured in local newspapers and are praised and celebrated by the community as a whole. Students talk about their desire to graduate and importance of graduation:

*“Another way you can respect yourself is to have positive goals. Like going to college, be a better student or friend, have a goal to finish high school, to be something, to help in the community. I have friends who have goals to be a teacher, a nurse or even work for a big company. They also have goals to get help with their addictions, they can achieve these goals if they just work at it” (Tłìchǫ youth, public presentation, primary source).*

It is both an end in itself, something that young people in Behchokǫ aspire to achieving, but it is also a means to an end in that it is the surest path to well-paying gainful employment. The proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is most certainly a motivation for Tłìchǫ students. Graduates truly have great potential for receiving funding to attend higher education and an almost unlimited opportunity for work:

*“[A]nything in the health profession, or social service profession, they are guaranteed jobs, let’s face it in most of the trades they are guaranteed jobs, anything related to mining and now it will be oil and gas coming up too” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

However, although graduation is heralded as the ‘best’ option for youth and there is support and opportunity for students after they graduate, there are still significant numbers of students who do not complete high school. In 1989, the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education and the Government of the NWT estimated that although people now had relatively easy access to education, only about 20% of all Tłìchǫ students were achieving their grade 12 diploma (Government of the Northwest Territories & Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1989). Statistics Canada data from the 2001 census

indicate that the graduation rates have not markedly improved since that time and that 71.3% of adults in Behchok̄ have not finished high school (Statistics Canada 2004).

### What Characterizes Tłı̄ch̄ Student Engagement?

By southern Canadian standards, many of the educational pathways evident in Behchok̄ would appear to be problem, deviant or disengaged behaviours: non-progressing students; walk-about; teen parents who stop coming to school; young people who leave school to get a job; young people who are failing and repeating classes, for example. Although some of these do represent educationally disengaged behaviour, this judgement should not be uniformly applied. Cultural and community norms are such that 100% attendance is a rarity and some students leave school for periods of time, whether to take care of children, to get a job or just to take a break, but in most cases these students return to school later. Previous results in this chapter highlight that it is common for students to take longer than 3 years to finish high school, a significant number of students are parents before they are twenty and there are some students who leave high school but continue on in other educational and employment activities. These should not automatically be considered negative pathways. In light of these kinds of norms, ‘southern’ perceptions of school engagement have to be adjusted. At the beginning of this study, school engagement was defined as, “the extent to which students participate in academic and non-academic school activities, and identify with and value school outcomes (Audas & Willms 2001). Disengagement was said to be manifest in early school leaving, truancy, absenteeism and withdrawal from school activities. This definition was taken in part from Alberta Learning (2003). This conceptualisation of educational disengagement pertains to student participation, a student’s values being aligned with those of the school and being physically present at school and in school activities. School engagement at CJBS, a northern Aboriginal school, is conceptualised in some ways similarly, and in other ways very differently, than this original definition. Results from this study indicate that engagement is closely linked with progression towards graduation, attendance, good behaviour, a positive trajectory and resilience.

### 6.1.11 Students who Graduate Exhibit Engagement

In Behchokō, graduates are largely considered successful people who exhibit qualities of engagement. Graduates finish high school and have the golden opportunity to go on to be generally productive citizens, trying to get a post secondary education, holding down a job, raising a family or caring for elders, for example. Graduates also have a chance to live a healthy lifestyle free from addictions. In this sense engagement and success are closely linked. Although success is measured by some in material goods, such as the amount of money someone makes, the kind of vehicle someone drives or house someone lives in, it is usually considered holistically and almost always includes living healthily. Even community leaders and politicians, who have a measure of power and prestige, would not be considered successful unless they had other aspects of their lives together. During a focus group, for example, students said that one of their politicians was “embarrassing”, and not at all successful, because he was seen drunk in public places and had gotten into trouble with the law.

What appears to be lacking in this vision of success and engagement is any nuance or shade of grey. A graduate is engaged and successful regardless if she finished school with a 51% average and took 6 years to do it. At the end of each semester, a list is posted by the office at CJBS congratulating those students who passed all their classes, and also a list congratulating those students who, “passed all their classes but one”<sup>15</sup>. This is essentially the CJBS Honour Role, and indeed, no other list by overall average or academic rank was displayed while the candidate was in the school. Thus, unlike in many southern school contexts in Canada, getting high marks is not used as a principal measuring stick to judge student engagement or success. A sustained and consistent effort appears to be more celebrated.

What is problematic, of course, is that once the student leaves the confines of CJBS they are thrown into either school or work situations in which success or engagement

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<sup>15</sup> Out of 150 high school students, 41 passed all their classes and 36 passed all their classes but one.

may be conceptualised differently. It may not just be enough to show up for work in the morning and do the least amount of work possible to keep the job. It may not be just enough to pass your college courses with 50%; these grades are, in fact, bare minimums. One elder used the phrase “watered down grade 12” to refer to the fact that although students may be achieving their high school diploma, many of them are finding it very difficult to succeed in other work and academic situations afterwards:

*“So far, modern school education hasn’t helped too much. With the grade twelve diploma, there is nothing for Native youths. They cannot go back to the bush and they cannot take good non-Native jobs because the quality of their grade 12 is watered down. The school system is helping create social problems among young Dene rather than solving them” (elder Johnny Charlie Tetlich quoted in Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, p.20, secondary source).*

#### 6.1.12 Students who Attend School are Engaged

Similar to other places, attendance is important to school engagement at CJBS. Students are encouraged, almost beyond anything else, to ‘stay in school’ and this means attending school as regularly as possible. A student who attends school regularly is celebrated, ensuring their attendance is considered the first and the key step in supporting educational success.

Special attendance awards are given to students with great attendance records at the end of each year. Although the school and many students and their families consider regular attendance important, there are also situations in which absences from school are understood and in some cases expected and supported. A young female student who has a child, for example, may take some time off school and if she does not return to school right away or even during the time that her children are small, it is not uniformly considered a disengaged set of behaviours. Instead, the community is supportive and understanding of the challenges facing young mothers and there is very little, if any, stigma associated with teen parenting. The school does what it can to support those young parents who want to try and continue with their schooling, but people at school and in the community are, in general, very understanding of those that are not able to do

so. It does not mean that they would not rather the teen pregnancy rate be lower, but it is a reality that the community is dealing with and everyone is trying to be as supportive as possible. The community is also very supportive of students who take time away from school because they are facing difficult family circumstances or are dealing with their own addictions issues. Students who go away for treatment, for example, or students who have to move suddenly are not looked down upon or considered disengaged when they miss school. Instead, the school and the community at large tries to support these students in their difficult times and welcome them back to school when the time is better for them:

*“He is planning on coming back second semester... he just said that he needed a break from school, for some personal problems. So hopefully he will do it”  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Instead of basing values about disengagement on raw attendance or participation rates, engagement in Behchokō is closely linked with what a student is doing instead of attending school, and in some cases the reasons they might have left school. The ‘walk-about’, for example, might be more likely to be described as disengaged students, whereas, the young parents might not.

#### 6.1.13 Students Who Are Well Behaved are Engaged

Chief Jimmy Bruneau school runs on a model of expected student behaviour based on two structures. The first is called Effective Behavioural Support (EBS). EBS is “a system of school-wide processes and individualized instruction designed to prevent and decrease problem behaviour and to maintain appropriate behaviour. It is a team-based problem-solving process” (definition taken from a presentation made to CJBS staff by the EBS coordinator, September 2004). The second structure used to guide the behaviours of students and staff at the school are the five ‘Golden Rules of Life at CJBS’. The five rules are:

1. Have Positive Goals: Be strong like two people, attend school, be on time for classes, and do your best for your future, your family and your community.
2. Respect Yourself: Take care of your mind as well as your body; stay in school; study hard; play hard; don't drink alcohol or use drugs.
3. Respect Those Around You: Be kind, courteous and use clean language; do not steal swear or fight with others; follow the school rules.
4. Respect Your School: Do your work promptly and without complaint and be careful not to damage the building or waste its resources.
5. Ask For Help When You Need It: Don't suffer alone; if you are lonely, need help, advice or just someone to talk to, go to your teachers, teacher advisor, counsellors or other supportive adults.

Behaviour that is in line with EBS expectations and the 5 Golden Rules of Life is not only highly valued in the school setting but heralded and well-behaved students are much celebrated. A student's level of school engagement is judged in part by their behaviour while at school. Well-behaved students are often model students who are considered sufficiently engaged or who have "bought into" schooling.

The five golden rules are listed on framed posters displayed in each classroom and throughout the hallways and gathering areas of the school. Features of the EBS program are detailed on school bulletin boards. The school staff works hard to ensure that a consistent message with regard to acceptable behaviour is communicated through a variety of media around the school.

A system of rewards has been put in place at the school to recognize appropriate and positive behaviour. CJBS staff members are given a number of Golden Tickets at the beginning of the week. Over the course of the week, if they witness a student behaving well, being a model student, or even showing an improvement they can award Golden Tickets. Students put these tickets in a draw box, and during assemblies names are drawn for prizes such as books, cd's, backpacks, fishing rods, sports equipment, board games, art supplies etc. Teachers are also asked to nominate a few students each week

to receive extra special mention, these students get to draw the golden tickets out of the box, and in some cases they are also awarded a prize.

#### 6.1.14 Students on a Positive Trajectory are Engaged

Another measure of school engagement at CJBS is a positive change from previous negative patterns. At the school assembly at the beginning of the year, a school administrator made a remark about a particular student who had been singled out for a good deed that week:

*“I am very proud to hear her name, that’s a big change, if that indicates a change she is making in her life that is a very positive thing. You all know how significant this is, it is no surprise to anyone that last year she was not allowed at the school, we had to suspend her many times last year and eventually she was expelled for the year. Now to hear -and from a new teacher who did not know the history- that she has made a change, that is a wonderful thing, a very positive thing”*  
(Administrator, public presentation, primary source).

School engagement in this context is also associated with engagement in other aspects of life. Students who attend community events, spend quality time with friends, are optimistic about the future, engage in healthy lifestyle options or are open to new and positive ideas, would be more likely considered engaged in school whether this is justified by their exact activities within the school building or not. For example, a ‘good kid’ who is never a problem, someone who enjoys kicking around the soccer ball around with her friends, or who gets along with his parents and attends school quite regularly would be considered engaged at school. This is primarily because this student does not exhibit a disengaged personality or behaviours overall. By the ‘southern’ definition however, this student may not actually be engaged in school. Other than attending school and sitting in classes four of the five days weekly, he or she might not participate in any other activities there and does not necessarily identify and share common values with those facilitating education. Essentially, in this environment, a student who is engaged overall in life and does not cause trouble at school, is considered engaged – enough. Engagement is a continuum and these students are not deemed the most in need of intervention.

### 6.1.15 Resilient Students are Engaged Students

It is true that some students are facing very challenging home and personal situations. Students who face these realities, yet show resiliency, even in small ways, are especially recognized:

*“There are some real miracles at this school, I mean being able to succeed irrespective of their life situation or the environment they are in. We have very resilient kids at this school and they really support one another” (School staff, focus group, primary source).*

There were many cases in which certain students were called “miracles” and “amazing success stories” because they attend school regularly and do well even in light of very difficult situations they may be dealing with elsewhere. There are also those students who have gone through very difficult experiences in the past and find ways to live successfully today. This is a special kind of engagement that is highly valued:

*“[Trevor] is wonderful, he is doing great. But just so you know, [before] he was not allowed to come here... On-going issues, skipping class, wandering, swearing at teachers, fighting other students, bullying, and other issues that I don't want to get into but just on-going. He got into trouble with the law, that was the kind of turning point for him, because of that social services also intervened and he was sent to a [treatment centre] I think maybe he was a success story, he was sent to a program for a long time. I think it was a year and a half...he came back now in August and really his attendance is still much to be desired, but my goodness he has been a pleasure to have in our school” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In summary, although school engagement is, to some degree, about participation and the alignment of values, as in the generic definition, among TlìchQ students it is also closely linked with a specific conceptualisation of success. For these students success and engagement are related to high school graduation, attendance, good behaviour while at school, a positive trajectory and resilience.

### Chapter Summary

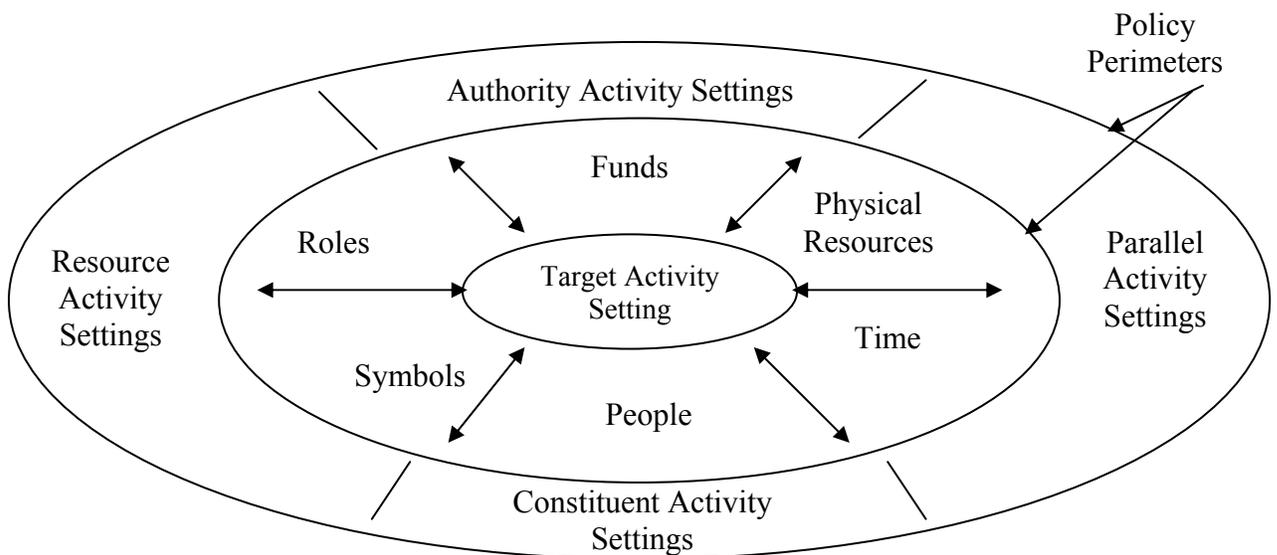
The main points of this chapter are summarized as follows:

1. Although home life situations vary, and things in the community have improved, there are still many young people who face difficult personal and family situations including problems with addictions, inadequate supervision and lack of adult role models;
2. The Tłıchǫ language is endangered as fewer and fewer young people are able to claim proficiency. However, knowledge and pride in other Tłıchǫ traditional cultural practices is still relatively high;
3. Parenting at young ages is common in Tłıchǫ people;
4. There are distinct differences between the education and employment patterns and experiences of males and females in Behchokǫ;
5. Patterns of engagement in school include temporal patterns such as early semester surges, starting and stopping, repeating courses and taking longer, as well as the patterns of non-progression, leaving school to work, working while being a student, working after graduation, leaving high school and attending other types of training, graduating and then attending higher education and leaving school to just be at home, whether with young children or not;
6. Becoming a high school graduate is highly valued and graduation, along with getting an education in order to get a good job, is a motivator for Tłıchǫ youth;
7. Although school engagement is linked to participation and alignment with school values, as in the more mainstream definition, for Tłıchǫ people engagement is also closely associated with attendance, graduation, being well behaved while a school as well as demonstrating a positive trajectory and resilience.

## Chapter 7: RESULTS 2 – SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND THE SCHOOL’S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

### Introduction

As described in chapter one, an activity setting model (figure 7.1) and theoretical framework guided the collection and analysis of data for this study and it also influenced the way the results are presented.



**Figure 7.1: The Target Activity Setting in Context** (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993)

The inside sphere of the activity setting model includes those factors associated with the immediate setting: people; positions; physical resources; time; funds and symbols. This chapter, and the subsequent one, relate most closely to features of the inner sphere, the school’s immediate physical and social environments. The outside sphere of the activity-setting model relates to the larger context that the school is set within and to the relationship between the target activity setting and other activity settings that it is in relationship with. These features are the focal points of chapters nine through eleven. In attempting answer the question - *How do features of the school’s setting, and the school’s larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* – this chapter

contributes findings in relation to features of the physical environment of the school and how these influence engagement. The physical environment and physical resources of the school refers to such things as the location and layout of the school, the available funds and infrastructure, inside and outside sub-environments, the flow of people, symbols, social spaces, the location of activities and the inter-relationship between the physical environment and other aspects of the target setting (people, funds, time etc.). Data sources drawn on for this chapter include participant observation field notes and photographs, interview and focus group transcripts, school and government documents, and transcripts from mini photovoice interviews with youth. The chapter begins with a school tour and description of the physical environment, and then moves into a discussion of how features of the physical environment influence student engagement. The final part of the chapter includes a discussion of financial resources and how they influence student engagement.

#### The Physical Environment: A School Tour

Chief Jimmy Bruneau School (CJBS) is a long, dark brown building at the end of a short gravel road in Edzo, NWT (Figure 7.2).



**Figure 7.2: Chief Jimmy Bruneau School Rear Entrance**

The outside of the school is simple: a small playground; a flagpole; a weather worn school sign; a few cars parked in the bus turning area out front. An outdoor ice rink is adjacent to the school, but it has not been used in many years. Behind the school is a large playing field and rough gravel track. There are some walking trails leading off to the bush nearby. The school is in a small residential community, called Edzo that is made up of about 70 houses and a few two-story apartment blocks, a fire hall and seasonal swimming pool. The school grounds are clean but not manicured, there is some graffiti and a broken-down van behind the school, but otherwise the building looks well maintained. The school residence, which is no longer used for students, makes up one end of the building. Next to the residence are the day-care and cafeteria. The school has changed quite drastically over the 35 years of its history:

*“Chief Jimmy Bruneau School is a monument to progress in the NWT...in 1988 all the walls were battleship grey because the caretaker had gotten a deal on the paint. There were holes in the walls, f\*\*\*-you written everywhere, the floors had orange peels all over them because they had a lunch program and the kids would just throw their orange peels on the floor” (Administrator, public presentation, primary source).*

Today a visitor to the school remarked:

*“On the first day we arrived I went to the bathroom in the students wing. I noticed there was graffiti on the wall that was a bit obscene. The next day I went to the same bathroom and the graffiti was gone. That really says something to me. People really try and take care of this place as best they can” (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source).*

The Official goes on to say that:

*“All five senses are experienced here, the school has gone way beyond just posters showing Aboriginal people. The school is inviting, positive, the artwork, the cultural artefacts, the Aboriginal reference area in the library” (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source).*

Uniquely, the school is located 13 kilometres from the main residential community of Behchokō.

*“The school being out of the community, you know being 13km away, is quite difficult. The kids leave in the morning, it is dark, they come back and it is dark and their life is in the school...It is difficult for parents to go to Edzo, unless they have transportation” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

On the outside, Chief Jimmy Bruneau School is a pretty standard northern school, older and more worn looking than some, but cleaner and more orderly looking than others. As visitors enter the building, however, perceptions often change.

In November 2004, CJBS hosted delegates for one day of the Northern Research Forum, an international conference being held in the Northwest Territories. The school often volunteers to host visitors to the north and receives many requests to conduct tours of the building. Delegates for the Northern Research Forum came to the school for one full day and attended a keynote address, concurrent conference sessions and a community feast with elders and then Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson and John Ralston Saul (figure 7.3).



**Figure 7.3: Northern Research Forum Delegates Arrive at CJBS**

The overwhelming sentiment expressed by delegates and special guests of the Forum, was that they were extremely impressed by the school, the Tłı̄ch̄ people and the

community of Behchokō. The delegates echoed comments that are common among visitors to the school, CJBS is welcoming, beautiful, clean, well organized, and full of cultural, historic and educational artefacts that indicate a pride among the school community. The people are open and friendly, proud of their heritage and keen to share with visitors. The main entrance of the school contains a large circular drum held up on four large pillars. A drumbeat represents the heartbeat of the Tłı̨chǫ people. Inspirational phrases have been artistically added to the drum to represent the four sacred directions. Ahead, on the wall is a mural depicting Chief Jimmy Bruneau and the mission statement and guiding messages for the school:

*For 1000's of years, Dogrib parents taught their children through activities of their daily lives. Children learned the skills they needed to survive and the values they needed to live in harmony with their families, their communities and with the land. Our people took pride in passing on their knowledge, skills and values to the children and in the excellence of their education, our survival as a people was assured. In this century, we became dependent on the church and the government to educate our children and in this loss of control, we find that our families, the community, language and culture are threatened. Our very survival as a people is at stake...*

*Chief Jimmy Bruneau was committed to the development of schools that would return control of education to the parents, support them in their tasks as the first educators of their children, and teach young people the knowledge and skills they need to survive today, and the values they need to live in harmony with their families, our communities and our land.*

*“So if children are taught in both cultures equally, they will be strong like two people...what the old Chief talked about is for some good time in the future...he looked far ahead for us and we gain from it” (Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie, November, 1990, secondary source).*

To the left and right of the entranceway on the wall, and in fact throughout the school, are photographic collages of students on past school trips, and during school events and activities. These collages are complemented by displays of cultural artefacts as well: a large wooden carved set of rosary beads; a painted caribou hide; a beaver skin stretched on a drying rack or a traditional birch-bark canoe in a glass case.

Also on the walls throughout the school are plaques with the five golden rules of life.

The main part of the school is designed as a square. Down the first hallway is the gymnasium area, which is filled with sports banners and trophies. CJBS students are ‘The Champions’. Indeed, “[t]he school has received territorial and national acclaim and recognition for its success in sports and drumming” (Dogrib Community Services Board 2000, p.11). Along the same corridor as the gym are a few offices; the signs on the doors refer to an elder’s room, a school radio station and a student leadership office. In 2004-2005 these clubs and activities were not active.

*When I asked about the signs on the doors and about student leadership activities and student led clubs etc. the teacher commented that there used to be these things. The lack of them now was partially due to the fact that human resource/ staff was transient and everyone has their own interests and projects they take on (like student council, radio station etc) (Excerpt from field notes, January 28, 2005, primary source)<sup>16</sup>.*

Near the end of the corridor is an elders’ wall recognizing elders in the communities, through a series of portraits, for their inspiration, wisdom and guidance. There is also a traditional birch bark canoe in a glass case; this was the product of Tłìchǫ K’ielà or the Dogrib Birchbark Canoe Project undertaken by the community (figure 7.4).

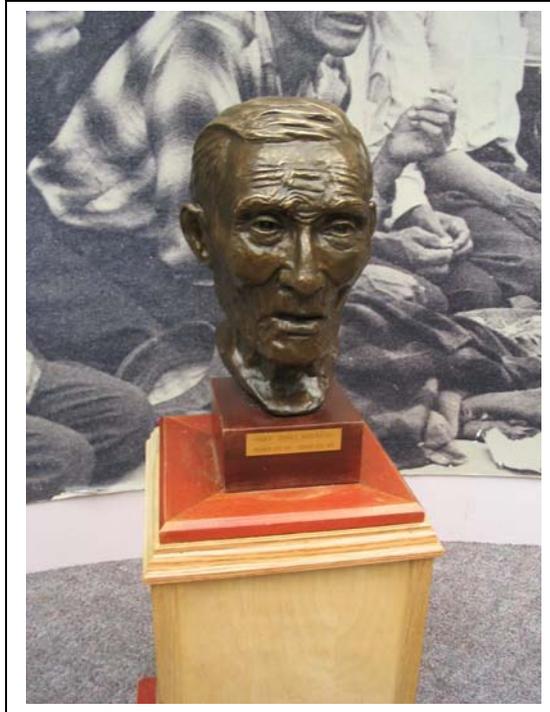


**Figure 7.4: Traditional Birch-Bark Canoe and Wall of Tłìchǫ Elder’s Photographs.**

<sup>16</sup> A student council was re-started in the second semester of the 2004- 2005 school year.

In the same area are maps and paddles on the wall showing the routes students have taken during ‘Trails of Our Ancestors’ canoe trips.

At the end of the first hallway is a small platform and cultural room, in front of which school assemblies are held. In the centre of the platform is a bust of Chief Jimmy Bruneau (figure 7.5) and on the walls surrounding the platform are photos of the Chief.



**Figure 7.5: Bust of Chief Jimmy Bruneau in a School Assembly Area.**

One photo in the display around the bust of Jimmy Bruneau is from the opening of the school; it shows Chief Jimmy Bruneau shaking hands with the then Minister of Indian and Northern Affaires, Jean Chretien. The inscription reads:

*Jimmy Bruneau was born December 12, 1881 ... Chief Monfwi died on Good Friday in 1936. After his death, Jimmy Bruneau became Chief of the Dogrib people. He could see that many changes had already taken place and that in the future more changes were coming. Chief Bruneau watched as many young people were taken away to school in Fort Resolution and Fort Smith. He saw that children were being separated from their mothers and fathers and sometimes, if they became sick and died, they never came home. Those children that did return*

*home after several years in residential schools, could only speak English and did not know how to work on the land with their families.*

*Bruneau understood that times were changing and that with these new times, people needed the knowledge and skills that they could learn in school. He wanted children to be educated, but not at the cost of losing their language and culture. Bruneau began talking with the elders about having a school in Rae and with their support, began to lobby the government. It was because of his determination that a school was finally built in this community, and young people were no longer sent away from their families.*

*Chief Jimmy Bruneau believed that parents, not outsiders, must make the important decisions regarding the education of their children. He believed that children must learn knowledge and skills taught in schools but also learn traditional knowledge, skills and values of the Dogrib. Through his work, members of the community formed an education society to govern the affairs of the new school. In August 1971, the powers and duties of the Rae-Edzo School Society were set out in an historic agreement with the Commissioner of the NWT, making Rae-Edzo one of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aboriginal communities in Canada to have local control of its own school.*

*On January 9, 1972, Chief Jimmy Bruneau spoke at the opening of the new school in Edzo... Chief Jimmy Bruneau died on January 16, 1975 at the age of 89. Hundreds of people attended his funeral to pay respect to this great Chief who was so important in the lives of so many people. He was a man of vision and great strength who set the finest example of leadership for our people. In the words of one elder, "He looked far ahead for us and we gain by it".*

Every Friday afternoon at the school, students come to this area of the hallway and sit together on the floor for a student assembly. Younger students are nearer the front and older ones near the back. The main purpose of these assemblies is for teachers to recognize particular students in front of the others, but especially at the beginning of each semester, the assemblies can be crowded and it can be difficult for students to hear.

Continuing around the hallway are the high school (grades 10-12) classrooms and the school garden area. A local diamond mine helped fund a small greenhouse at the school, which holds approximately 35 different varieties of plants (figure 7.6).



**Figure 7.6: A School Greenhouse Sponsored by a Local Diamond Mine.**

One of the educational assistants cares for the greenhouse along with a special needs student. This area of the school also has some general seating for students and the guidance and counselling offices. The school has a two part-time personal counsellors as well as a full-time school community counsellor. The school community counsellor is a Tłı̄ch̄Q person who can speak to community members in the Tłı̄ch̄Q language if they would like. This staff person provides a direct link between the school and the families in the community; they do home visits, especially if there are attendance or behaviour issues; they take students home when they are sick or if there is an emergency; they liaise with social services when necessary and they drive the school van to shuttle students back and forth to Rae. The van is particularly helpful for young mothers who may not like taking the bus with their children or who miss the bus because they are not ready in the morning. The candidate's office was also in the same area as the counselling staff:

*First full day in Rae-Edzo. Met up with Janet this afternoon and she showed me to my office (with computer, printer, internet, phone, desk and office supplies, two*

*large tables and chairs for focus group activities, white board, bulletin board, locking filing cabinet and couch). It was incredible. She said that she really wanted me to feel like part of the staff here (excerpt from field notes - August 22, 2004, primary source).*

In a nearby area there is a classroom for students in the Success Class. Members of the CJBS school staff and an administrator from the School Board developed the Success program. The program is funded from money that was procured from proposals to funding sources outside the school board. The goal of the Success Program is for all of the participating students to find success in school. One teacher explains:

*“The “Success Program” is where certain students with behavioural and learning difficulties can be taught with more individual attention... Students come in with grade 2-3 reading level and with some emotional difficulties, with challenges in dealing with their teachers in the classroom. They go through the success program which deals with their social issues, which deals with trouble shooting, like what is your reading snag and let’s figure it out and then work on with it... And then within that program, allow them to find success” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Seven junior high school boys make up the Success Class in the 2004-2005 school year; some of them will eventually be re-integrated into the regular classroom. Other students may never return to the regular classroom.

Following along the corridor is the area where graduates are featured. Individual portraits line the walls by year since 1993. There are many more females than males; most of the graduates appear to be in their late teens or early twenties.

After the portraits of the graduates is another meeting area with some tiered seating. When the President of Iceland came to the school in the autumn of 2004, students met with him here, for example (figure 7.7).



**Figure 7.7: CJBS Students Meet the President of Iceland in Another School Assembly Area**

The students asked the President if there was a teenage pregnancy problem in Iceland. They asked him what it was like to live in Iceland and whether he enjoyed being a President. Across from this meeting area are the Junior High School classrooms (grades 7-9). Teachers are encouraged to put up displays and to change them regularly. Many of these displays have inspirational messages such as this poem by Sara Nachtman:

I Won't be Left Behind  
*By Sara Nachtman*

*I run my fastest, but still I get beat  
I land on my head, when I should be on my feet  
I try to move forward, but I am stuck in rewind  
Why do I keep at it? I won't be left behind*

*The harder I am thrown, the higher I bounce  
I give it my all, and that's all that counts  
In first place, myself I seldom find  
So I push to the limit, I won't be left behind*

*Some people tell me you can't, some say don't, some simply say give up  
I reply, I won't, the power is here  
Locked away in my mind, my perseverance is my excellence  
I won't be left behind.*

*Make the best of each moment, the future is soon the past  
The more I tell myself this, the less I 'come in last'  
Throughout my competitions, I have learned what winning is about  
A plain and clear lesson, giving up is the easy way out  
So every night before I go to bed, I hope in a small way I have shined  
Tomorrow is a brand new day  
I won't be left behind*

The junior high school area leads back to the entrance area, the main office and a number of seats in front of a small canteen or 'trading post'. The canteen sells snacks to raise money for a student travel club, and for special causes like Tsunami Relief or AIDS orphans in Africa. In the morning, although there is a staff room, staff members do not use it. Instead, a four or five staff members, usually the same ones, sit at the seats in front of the canteen and welcome the students off the bus. Others will make coffee in their classrooms and begin their day. Some teachers will convene in the photocopy room, at the office, or in the hallways chatting with students. The atmosphere is most almost familial; the teachers are mostly young and have been in the community for a few years. The principal boasts that in 2004, there was zero staff turnover, a feat that is rare in northern schools.

The classrooms at CJBS are set up similarly to those found in most other schools in North America; a white board at the front with a teacher's desk and a series of student tables or desks in rows or groups. The exception to this is the library, which has beautiful stained glass windows and a small cultural room off the main library room. The other exception is the cultural classroom where TḥchQ language and cultural objects are displayed throughout and the tables are often placed in a circle or pushed to the side. In addition to the standard classrooms, however, CJBS also has a number of alternative teaching spaces such as a small log cabin and tepee on site and a tent, trap line and the beginning of a log cabin out on the land (figure 7.8).



**Figure 7.8: An Elder Cooks Traditional Bannock at the Log Cabin at CJBS.**

These alternative spaces are used for cultural classes and special events. The cultural and language program at CJBS varies by season and by grade. Currently, the program focuses on providing opportunities for students in grades K-9 to spend time on the land and learn about the ways of their ancestors:

*“In the spring time there is muskrat trapping, beaver trapping, fishing. Fishing is pretty well all year round. In the winter time if the caribou are close then the program instructor will go out with a group of students to try and get caribou...some ladies [were hired] and they were in the cabin trying to fix the hides so we can use them for sewing...so the students got to see that process...As much as possible we try to get the students out on the land...Many of them, their favourite moments or experiences were trying new foods. A lot of them, they don't eat traditional foods at home. So for some of them, they would say I really like the bannock, or I really like the fish” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Tłıchǫ language classes are provided three times a week for students in the elementary grades and twice a week for those in junior high. Formal cultural and language programming is not provided in the same way for high school students. These young people have to sign up for locally designed courses such as Tłıchǫ Yatıi (language

classes), Gonaewo (Our Ways) and Beading and Sewing. In the 2004-2005 academic year, there were not enough students to run most of these courses:

*“For 10-12 we have locally developed course, T’lichu Yatii 10, 20 and 30. The way the schedule has worked out, last semester and this semester, which is disappointing, there haven’t been enough students to schedule a class in those courses. And I think a couple reasons for that, my own personal opinion, is that many students don’t see the value of it, or don’t see how it will help them after they have graduated. For other students the courses that they need in order to graduate are required courses and T’lichu Yatii is not a required course”*  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).

## How Features of the Physical Environment Influence School Engagement

The remainder of this chapter will provide examples of ways in which physical aspects of the setting influence student engagement. Sub-sections include discussions around the location of the school, the overall layout, the daily schedule, the influence of symbols, and the influence of financial resources in the setting.

### 7.1.1 Location of the School

As outlined in chapter five, CJBS was built in Edzo, which is 13 kilometres by road from the main community of Rae. The activity settings of the school are physically separated from those of home and community. The majority of students at CJBS are from Rae and have to be bussed back and forth to school every morning and afternoon. The bus leaves Rae between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. in the morning, doing a tour of town to pick up students in different locations. Most mornings, there is also a late bus for those who miss the first one. After school, students are shuttled home in two waves of busses as well, the first when school finishes, and the next at 4:30 p.m. when extra-curricular and extra-help sessions are finished. Lunch is provided free for students at school.

The location of the school has mixed influence on students directly. For some, this separation is useful and important. In response to the question, “What is really great

about this school?”, staff members in a focus group described CJBS as a safe haven, a sanctuary and an oasis; these are useful metaphors. Some students find that they can go to school each day, and the school as oasis allows them to be separated from whatever challenges or situations they may be facing at home.

*“I visit homes everyday and sometimes I think- how can you live like this. How can you be motivated to study in this surrounding? But for some it’s all they have ever known” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

CJBS is a place where they can really focus on their studies. If the school was in Rae, students may have more distractions or may go home throughout the day; this could have a negative affect on their attendance and engagement. In Edzo, once students are at school, most of them stay until school is out. Exceptions to this are if a student is ill or if there is an emergency and they are taken home by van.

*“It is partly because those people who want to study and who are serious about it, they take the bus and they go, and they can work. At here, at [the Elementary School] the kids wander in and out, you know, they are close to the community you know. But on the other hand, [the High School] is removed from the community, it is a different world” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

*“Yes the way it is separated...there are some positives, like, a lot of people know about that [the separation] and they come anyway because they know it takes work to get on with life. They come every day and some parents help out, you know they really want them to finish school, they get up early, they go to bed early so they can catch their bus, there are a lot of parents who are very positive for their kids. They support them” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

For other students however, the distance between school and home negatively impacts their engagement. If a student misses the morning busses, he or she will likely not have a way of attending school for that entire day. Half day attendance, whether because a student missed the bus or because a student is not taking a full course load, is not common. The distance and lack of public transportation makes it especially difficult for adult students who may wish to take one or two courses for upgrading or to work towards finishing their GED. In addition, Behchokō’s northern location means that in the autumn and winter the mornings and evenings are dark, and in the spring and summer there is light almost around the clock. Students sleep patterns can be erratic

(sometimes staying up all night when it is light out) and this has implications for catching an early morning bus and for their engagement at school. During a mini photovoice interview (primary source), Carrie comments:

**CMD:** *What's your other picture?*

**Carrie:** *I took this picture of me giving the finger to the whole classmates because some are in my way. And, and that's all, that's it.*

**CMD:** *How come you are sleeping on the desk?*

**Carrie:** *Because when I was tired, I stayed up late, to three, two in the morning. I woke up and feeling miserable, I couldn't do it. So I took a nap and put out a finger to the classmates.*

When needed, the school provides a place for students to take a short sleep during the day:

*"This morning there was a male high school student who came and tried and sleep on the couch outside my office.. He seemed really tired but he went without any problem. Later the Vice Principal came and allowed him to have a bit of a sleep in the counselling office. I asked her about that process and she said some students just aren't going to learn in class because they are so tired. You talk to them about getting enough sleep at home (and eating well etc) and you don't allow them to make a habit of it, but sometimes the best thing is for them to have a little sleep and then go back to class. The sleeping time may be a way that they have adapted to the 'realities' of life here?" (Excerpt from field notes, August 31, 2004, primary source).*

This quote reflects the sense of understanding that exists among staff and students at CJBS and a keenness to find ways for students to succeed regardless of what they may face outside of school.

Some students are able to find rides from Edzo to Rae by hitchhiking or asking around town, but this is not guaranteed or common. In the winter, when the ice is safe, a small number of students drive snow machines or walk between the two communities.

Although not common, recently there are also a number of students with their own vehicles.

**CMD:** *What picture did you pick to show us today?*

**Steven:** *My vehicle, right here (a large pick up truck).*

**CMD:** *Oh yes, your vehicle. So why did you pick that picture?*

*Steven: Because it looks good; I drove it back here.*

*CMD: You drive it back and forth to school, that's how you get to school?*

*Steven: Yes (Student, mini photovoice interview, primary source).*

The lunch program is a related spin-off to the location of the school. Lunch is provided free of charge to each student through a government funding scheme. The majority of students will eat lunch in the cafeteria at school each day. Nutritionally, the menu is well balanced and provides a stable food source for young minds. Students who spend their lunch hour together in the cafeteria under the supervision of teachers are able to socialise in a safe and warm location, they can strengthen friendships and engage with students of different age groups, particularly older students who often act as role models. This is generally a time of positive social interaction and it brings students from all grades and groups together for semi-structured activity.

While the location of the school has a mixed influence on students, it has an almost entirely negative influence on the integration of parents and other community members in the setting:

*“Many parents indicated that the location of the school is a real factor to their involvement in school activities. Some suggested moving the entire school to Rae would go a long way to making parents feel that they are an integral part of the school. Many people do not have transportation or a way of getting there. Parents remarked ‘I would really like to be a part of that school’ ” (Dogrib Community Services Board 2004, p.18, secondary source).*

One elder remarks:

*“The gap between the elders and the young people is getting wider and wider. It is difficult for parents to go to Edzo, unless you have transportation and I mean, it is a beautiful school OK as you know, fine, but it's kind of a foreign land, you know? You don't know exactly where you stand there” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

CJBS and the community of Behchok̄ are making attempts to ensure that parents are involved in the school and its activities. They do this through such things as parent and

elder involvement in special events and trips on the land, teacher visits to students' homes, and the use of a school-community counsellor who is fluent in the Tłıchǫ language to communicate with parents and grandparents where appropriate. Some parents and other adults in the community still view the school as a “foreign land” however and the location of the school is a constraint on integration efforts. Through impeding the participation and integration of parents and other adults in the setting, the physical location of the school is influencing the amount and type of support community members can offer to students and to the school overall. The ability of parents and other community members to act as resources for the school is seriously undermined. Although this also works in the converse, where potential negative influences from the community are also mitigated, the potential benefits of being an “oasis” do not outweigh the drawbacks in the case of parent integration.

#### 7.1.2 Overall Physical Layout of the School

CJBS was initially designed as an open concept school. This means that there was very limited separation between classrooms, the library, the gymnasium, offices and other school areas. At the time of opening, the Principal remarked: “The purpose of having open-concept teaching is to create a home atmosphere. This is good for teachers who are going to team-teach. It also enables maximum amount of movement” (Indian Brotherhood of the NWT 1971, p.1). While this design was well researched and consciously selected, it presented significant challenges for teachers and students almost immediately. An elder remembers:

*“Quite a few schools were toured in Alberta with open areas and they were impressive. But unfortunately we didn't study the background of those pupils. They were upper class; mothers most of the time didn't work and could spend a lot of time in the school. They had a large staff, the typical one or two child family, well looked after, you know well educated, polite, and they fit. But we didn't realize (laughs). In Edzo, you know, it was a huge supermarket! Look Johnny's little sister Jane at the other end, he takes a beeline! Gone! It didn't work, right from the first year (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Temporary, makeshift dividers appeared in the first year and were used up until 1991 when the school was refurbished. In 1995-1996 the school was entirely refinished inside. There was a need for more control, for more organization and for fewer noises and other distractions. Today the school is laid out in a square with a library in the middle and classrooms, a gymnasium, a cafeteria and number of smaller offices and common spaces for student to congregate around the outsides. The idea was to make the school more like a mall where students would be able to walk around and have numerous smaller places for social interaction:

*The design was meant to be an attractive place with all kinds of nooks and crannies for people to sit. And I know some teachers don't like it because they think kids hide there and it's a problem but the intention was to be like a Mall. It was supposed to be attractive, comfortable, a safe place for kids to come (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The classrooms and smaller social spaces encourage small, rather than large, group congregation. This layout allows for controlled interaction versus the chaotic environment that was the open concept. It does mean, as the administrator states, that students can sometimes use these smaller spaces as hiding spots during class time, but overall, the spaces are well monitored and order is largely maintained in them. Visitors to the school remark that there is a sense of calm and order in the setting:

*"The first day we arrived I remember hearing one of the bells and thinking how well behaved the students were. There was order in the hallways; people weren't running or pushing to get out of class. The sound of the school culture permeates the building; there is a sense of harmony here. A sense of getting along" (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source)*

Aspects of the physical infrastructure at CJBS serve to encourage this sense of order or control. For example, its four-walled classrooms have desks in rows or groups with the teacher almost always at the front. The administrative offices are near the entrance of the school lined up behind a secretary's desk. Beyond aspects of the physical infrastructure, things like the daily routine, the curriculum from which students are taught, the methods of evaluation, and how teachers interact with students also serve to

propagate the feeling of order and control. The school runs on a structured routine. Good behaviour is celebrated and being able to control one’s temper, and being polite and respectful characterize good behaviour. For some, the order and control are positive characteristics that enhance school engagement:

*“The kids enjoy being there because it is nice and clean and you know it is well organized, you know well scheduled. But it is different, from the community, it is quite different” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

But for others, they lead to an air of sophistication which can serve to alienate:

*It is very sophisticated ...it’s a different world. I mean, when I walk in there, I feel like I don’t belong there (Elder, interview, primary source).*

### 7.1.3 The Daily Schedule

The school day at CJBS for the year 2004 – 2005 was broken down as in table 7.1.

**Table 7.1: CJBS Daily Schedule for the Junior and Senior High School**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8:45	Busses arrive from Rae
9:00-10:03	First class
10:03-10:12	Break
10:12-11:15	Second class
11:17-12:20	Third class
12:20-12:50	Lunch
12:50-1:05	Teacher advisor time
1:07-2:10	Fourth class
2:12-3:15	Fifth class
3:15	End of the school day
3:15-4:30	After school activities
4:30	Late bus leaves for Rae

Two unique features of the schedule that have an influence on student engagement are the provision of a late bus, and the shortened lunch period. The 4:30 bus has been put in place for students who stay after school for extra curricular activities and extra help sessions. There is no public transportation to the school from the community of Rae.

Having the extra bus, and not assuming that students can find a ride home, means that all students have the opportunity to engage in after school activities. Indeed, many students stay to participate in some activity or in quiet study time. The school has put in place a system whereby students who stay have to get a bus pass from a member of the school staff in order to get on the late bus. This helps ensure that students are not staying at school simply to “hang around”. Students play on sports teams, participate in an after-school club such as drama or music, or they do their homework in the library or in a specific teacher’s classroom. The after school bus allows students to have these opportunities and it is particularly helpful for those students whose homes may not be conducive to doing schoolwork.

The second unique feature of the school schedule that has an influence on student engagement is the shortened lunch period. Students at CJBS have only 30 minutes for lunch instead of the more common 45 or even 60 minutes at many other schools. The decision to have a shortened lunch period was made consciously by the CJBS and TCSA administration. Since the majority of students do not go home from school at lunch, it was felt that students should be given enough time to eat, but not enough time to get bored or restless outside of class. The students bemoan this lack of free time, but it is felt to be an effective way of reducing the incidence of negative behaviours such as vandalism, fighting, and bullying at school. For those students who feel alienated or marginalized at school, the unstructured time can be most difficult:

*I am tending to get some of the social wallflowers that don't seem to have a place to go at lunch or break visiting my office. They come in and draw on my chalkboard or chat or do some puzzle books. One student who comes regularly has a noticeable disability, two others say they don't have many friends and don't like going to eat lunch in the cafeteria, another young person is not currently attending school but lives in Edzo and just comes in to say hello. Although there is not a lot of bullying here, I think there are always students who find the social part of school difficult (Excerpt from field notes, October 31, 2004, primary source).*

A student gave a speech at the annual CJBS public speaking competition entitled “How to Make Friends”. The student said the reason he decided to make a speech on this topic is that:

*“I see a lot of people walking around the halls at lunch with no friends” (Student, public presentation, primary source).*

The shortened lunch decreases the unstructured time that may exist as a difficult part of the school day for some students.

#### 7.1.4 The Influence of Symbols in the Setting

Symbols, symbolic interaction and routines help communicate particular values, goals and expectations in relation to school. CJBS is ripe with symbols and physical features that are in place to encourage, support or recognize common values and shared meanings. In the past, the school was designed in an open concept format. Today the school has been designed around a square with many smaller common spaces for students to congregate. As discussed previously, the physical structure of the school communicates values around the importance of openness and social interaction but also the need for control and order. The special area of the hallway for highlighting the success of CJBS graduates reflects values of academic achievement and the importance of sticking with school and working towards graduation. The many sports banners and trophies displayed reflect values for sporting activities and athletic prowess of students, as well as extra-curricular participation, varied forms of success and the building of students’ self esteem. The prominent display of Catholic rosary beads and the praying of the Lord’s prayer in the morning at CJBS communicates an alignment with Christian ideals and aspects of the Catholic church. Probably the most pervasive symbols are the messages “Strong Like Two People” and the Five Golden Rules of Life.

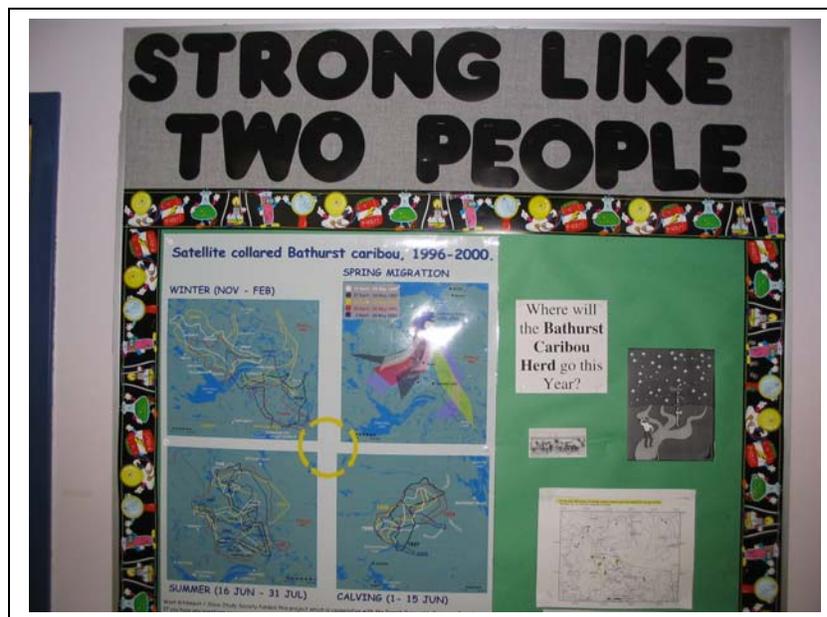
##### 7.1.4.1 Strong Like Two People

“Strong Like Two People” is the vision of the Tłı̨ch Community Services Agency. The vision and mission of the TCSA were developed through a process of consultation with Tłı̨ch elders and other community representatives. A meeting discussing views, values and expectations relating to education and the Tłı̨ch people was conducted with

community members, in the Tłıchǫ language, and was recorded, transcribed and then later translated and published (Martin 1991). Today, “Strong Like Two People” remains a unifying goal among young, old, non-Aboriginal and Tłıchǫ people in Behchokǫ. The ideal is that Tłıchǫ schools will help students become strong and knowledgeable in both Tłıchǫ and mainstream traditions or approaches. The majority of CJBS students know and understand the ideas behind the “Strong Like Two People” figure of speech. When asked what school meant to one student, she commented:

*“What does school mean to me? It means everything because it’s my school... I want to graduate here but nowhere else because I know a lot of people here and I have a lot of friends here and grew up here. This school is special because it’s been our generation and they want us to learn to be strong like two people”*  
(Youth, Art class activity, primary source).

There are numerous references to being strong like two people in the physical environment at CJBS and it is referred to often by staff and students in school assemblies, in documents at school and on bulletin boards (figure 7.9).



**Figure 7.9:** An Example of a “Strong Like Two People” School Display

One way that CJBS and the TCSA act on their values and vision of “Strong Long Two People”, is by take up culture-based schooling. This means that school programs and the learning environment at the school, “reflects, validates and promotes values, world views and languages of the community’s cultures” (Department of Education 1999, p.30).

“Culture-based schooling implies that decisions about educational activities at all levels are directed and driven by individuals and groups who represent the cultures of the NWT. Culture-based schooling recognizes the value of students’ cultures and created pride in them. Thus, it provides not only more meaningful school experiences for students, but also enhances their self-esteem and provides them with greater opportunities for success” (Department of Education 1991, p.12, secondary source).

The challenges of meeting the culture-based schooling and “Strong Like Two People” ideals are very real. Fifteen years ago, Barnaby and colleagues (1991) pointed out that, “Young Dene sit on the margins of both native and non-native societies...they are not autonomous in either the Dene world or the non-native world” (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, p.96). This incongruence still exists today. Some feel that students that are not proficient in either world:

*“Some of the children growing up here know a little bit of the Dene culture but not enough, and with that, they know a little of the English culture but not enough, because they have not completed school. They don’t really know where they are going in either culture. They don’t have any idea...If a person has no idea of what to do in their life, they will get involved with unimportant things like alcohol and drugs” (John B. Zoe quoted in Martin 1991, p.24, secondary source).*

Although there is widespread support for the “Strong Like Two People” ideal, there are some local people who have concerns about the provision of cultural activities at school:

*“Even though we do the best to our ability to plan these [cultural] events, sometimes parents feel that it is not a good thing, that the students should be doing other academic work instead and so they don’t send kids” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The reality of life for Tłıchǫ students today is that they are growing up with ties to both the traditional, Tłıchǫ culture and the mainstream Euro-Canadian culture. The school, although communicating its support for traditional Tłıchǫ beliefs and practices, has distinct challenges in achieving the vision of “Strong Like Two People” because it is itself a mainstream institution with particular western characteristics. For example, the Alberta school curriculum is the basis for teaching and major evaluations are done via written tests and exams in the English language. There are distinct differences between the traditional ways of teaching and learning among the Tłıchǫ people and the way teaching and learning is undertaken at CJBS today:

*“We are not showing them. On the land it is showing, repeat it again and again and again. And then after they see that for a long time they get to try and practice with help. And then they are eventually proficient at it. That is not how school is” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

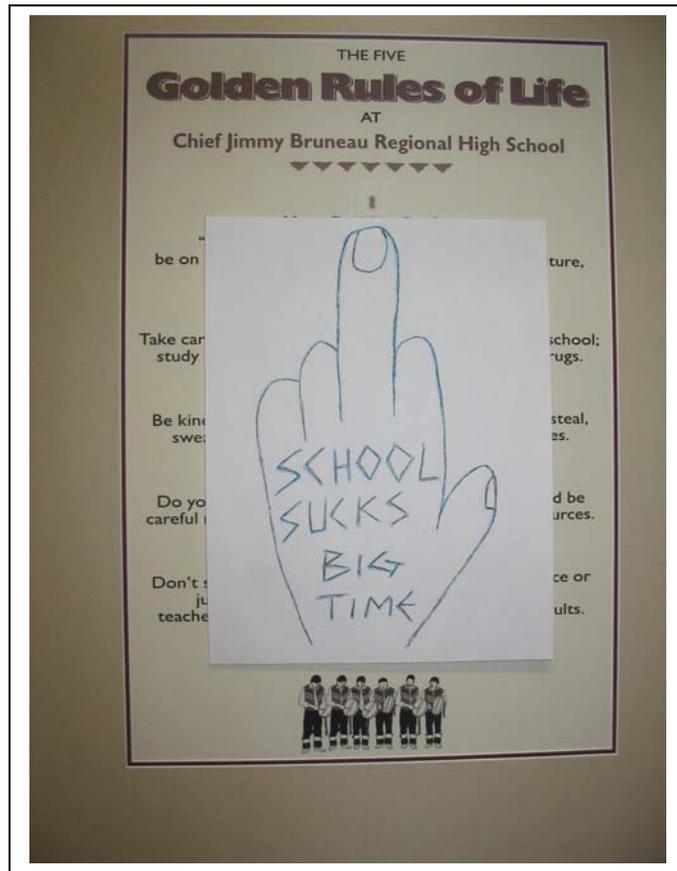
The recently ratified Tłıchǫ Self-Governance Agreement places greater responsibility for education back in the hands of the Tłıchǫ people. The Agreement, which is to be phased in over the next ten years, stipulates that the Tłıchǫ people decide how their people will be educated. A member of the local Band Council reflects on the Agreement:

*“Changes will be gradual. We might notice a few new buildings or organizations in the community right away but really it is about human resources, development and training for the Dogrib people. That is what the Agreement is all about, developing the community human resource... We don’t have to feel that we have to fight it [the government] anymore, it is ours and lets grow with it (Band Council employee, interview, primary source).*

With the Tłıchǫ Agreement and self-governance, there exists opportunity to make some adjustments to education in Behchokǫ to better support the strong like two people vision.

#### 7.1.4.2 The Five Golden Rules of Life at CJBS

A second example of a prominent set of symbols or messages at CJBS that have an influence on student engagement, are the five Golden Rules of Life. The Golden Rules are displayed in each classroom and posted in hallways throughout the school. The Golden Rules are referred to often at the school by staff and students. During a class ‘Zine project that was undertaken for this dissertation, when asked, “What Does School Mean to You?”, one student responded by taking a photograph that showed a framed picture with the five Golden Rules of Life on which he had taped a piece of paper which said, “School Sucks Big Time”. This photo is re-created as figure 7.10.



**Figure 7.10:** Photo Reproduction a Student’s Reaction to the Golden Rules of Life

This student had recently been expelled from school and in previous years had had some other behaviour difficulties. What is most fascinating, is that the student chose to show his contradiction, defiance or objection with respect to school as a contradiction to the five Golden Rules of Life. In a sense, the student validated these rules by recognising them as the force that he was countering against. When asked about this particular student, an Administrator comments:

*“Why does he keep coming back here is the question? The only answer I have is that deep in his heart he know that he is safe here, that he is cared about here and actually, that there are going to be rules and structures to keep him in line here” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Every student at CJBS may not profess to personally identify with the Golden Rules of Life, but the Rules have become an effective symbol and structure on which other programs, services, procedures, policies and discussions have been linked, and in this way they are positively linked with school engagement. The Golden Rules have been used as a backbone on which to hang expectations for student behaviour, more formally outlined and dealt with through a program for enhancing positive behaviours among students called Effective Behaviour Support or EBS. Susan, a grade 8 student, won a golden ticket for staying after school to do some extra studying for exams with her Math and Science teachers. Rodney got an award for being a role model on the volleyball court and mentoring younger players. As part of the 2004 – 2005 CJBS School Review, the Schools Official comments:

*“The five Golden Rules permeate the building, they are displayed and used by staff and students...Does the school motivate? Instil pride? Build self-esteem? Yes, there are assemblies recognizing students, things here representing both cultures, you may take for granted what you have created here, but do not” (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source).*

Uniquely, it is not just “good” students who are recognized in assemblies. As outlined in chapter six, students who show resilience and a positive trajectory are also celebrated. A student who may have had some major behavioural issues in the past can be recognized for making it through a week, for example, without a referral to the office. The principal will often single out students who are showing improvements.

This gives young people, who may have had negative interactions with school in the past, an opportunity to shed these preconceptions.

## The Relationship Between Financial Resources and Engagement

“Today there is no lack of resources. The Tłı̄ch̄Q businesses, developed over the last decade, can provide financial resources and expertise. There are a variety of partners- resource companies and educational institutions- who are more than willing to become involved with us” (Dogrib Treaty 11 Council & Dogrib Community Services Board 2005, p.ii, secondary source).

The resource landscape in Behchok̄Q has changed dramatically in even the past decade. In this context, the term “resources” does not only refer to financial or economic resources, but also other types of resources like the human and cultural resources of the Tłı̄ch̄Q people. The influence of non-financial resources are discussed in subsequent chapters, here the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q students is discussed in relation to the amount of financial resources available in the target setting, how these monetary resources are distributed and whether the resources are sustained over time.

### 7.1.5 Sources and Amount of Funding

The details of funding schemes are in flux with the gradual implementation of self-governance, however it is possible to think broadly about funding for schooling as coming from either government or non-government sources. Foundational or core funds that the school receives for the everyday operations of the school, the running of its core programs, and the educational services that are mandated by the Territorial Education Act, primarily come from the Tłı̄ch̄Q Community Governments or the Government of the NWT. The amount of core funding has been determined annually using a formula that takes into consideration the number of students at the school, as well as other factors such as the size and location of the community. In the past the Dogrib Divisional School Board and the Dogrib Community Services Board have acted as middlemen and women who manage these funds and, by way of school budgets,

distributed them accordingly. Today, the Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency takes this role on behalf of the Tłıchǫ Government. In the past, a second source of government funding also existed. This was money directly funnelled to school programs and services from the Band Council, or local government. An example of this would be post-secondary scholarships for Tłıchǫ students. This funding came from Impact and Benefit Agreements with industry. As a result of the Tłıchǫ Agreement however, the Bands have been integrated into the Tłıchǫ Community Governments and so this second stream of funding is not differentiated from the first in the same way that it was in the past.

The second place financial resources are found for school purposes is from outside or third-party funding. These finds are largely, but not exclusively, non-governmental. These funds may be received in response to proposals written, donations given, partnerships formed, and so on. Third party funding is a very important source of funding for school programs at CJBS.

*“[Third party funding] it could be huge, well I think it is huge in the Board”  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“There is money there, if you can write a proposal and are lucky enough to get the money you ask for then you can do these kinds of things with the students”  
(School staff, interview, primary source).*

The amount of funds available in a school has direct influence on school engagement. The more money that is available, the more programs and services that can be offered and staff members hired.

*“I think a lot of it has to do with funding. If we didn’t have money to buy our skidoos, we wouldn’t be able to go out on the land as much as we do now, especially in the winter. So I think a lot of it depends on the funding”  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“Now we get a lot of funding through MACA [Municipal and Community Affaires] through proposals. So we are able to do cultural activities”  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Being able to offer a variety of programs and services helps ensure that there may be something of interest for a variety of students. Foundational funds pay for core programs, often times it is the subsidiary programs which target specific issues or student populations that can make a difference in supporting, or not supporting, students at risk of school failure and school disengagement. The Success Program at CJBS, for example, is paid for from third party funding. This program is an important resource and source of support for students who have not yet found success in the regular classroom. Additional resources for the library, to hire educational assistants, to pay for counselling services, or extra supplies for the cultural program have all been provided or supported by third party funds. These external sources also provide “bonus” features at the school, such as a school greenhouse, that although perhaps not required, are welcome additions to the school environment.

#### 7.1.6 Distribution of Funding

While the availability of funding is essential, even if funds are available, their management and distribution has distinct impact on their potential to positively influence student engagement. Foundational or core funding is budgeted each year and while some policies and programs, such as inclusive schooling, are mandated, there is also some flexibility in the budgeting process, and priorities for allocating funds may differ depending on the administration and needs of the particular time. There are differing opinions on how funds should be distributed. In the past, for example, the Treaty 11 Band Council provided significant funding for scholarships for Tłı̨cẖ students to attend post secondary educational programs. Some felt that more of this money should be used to support students while they were in high school. As another example, some administrators in Behchoḵ feel that core funds need to be targeted at younger students and to the majority rather than those most at risk. In this case students over the age of 21, would not be priorities for funding (and service) allocation and less might be done directly by the school to try and support their school engagement. There are those in the community who would disagree with this rationale, but as this administrator points out, limited resources make targeting every student unrealistic:

*“I hope our school is student centred, I hope that the school is all about what is best for the majority of our students, and I say that with hesitation because I am supposed to say for all students, but I don't think that that is realistic. I think that we do the best we can with what we have and so if the majority of our students are able to grow here academically, grow here as individuals socially, feel safe here, are cared about here and are loved here, in appropriate ways, then I will do what I can to support our staff and support our students in the programs”*  
(Administrator, interview, primary source).

There are situations in which the school just does not have the resources that would be needed to offer in order to keep certain high needs students in school:

*“The support needs to be there, I get to the point of representing our school, and say this child can not function right now in what we are able to offer them in terms of support, resources, time tabling, scheduling, discipline- whatever it is- they are just unable to. And they actually present a real threat to the learning environment of other people around them”* (Administrator, interview, primary source).

Money that is received because of specific proposal or donations is often earmarked and its availability and distribution depends upon people's initiative to apply for funding and the availability of third part funding for different issues and populations. In the case of CJBS, funds have been acquired for specific functions of the cultural program, for example, but they are still in need of additional counselling services. There are also situations in which funding is available, but the money is not well used, or is not used in its entirety. Misuse or under use of funds impedes the potential for positive impact:

*“[We] went to the Band and to the Chief and got money to run the alternative program this year and it has just been...well, I have been so frustrated this Fall. Just opportunity, after opportunity, after opportunity lost”* (School staff, interview, primary source).

#### 7.1.7 Sustainability of Funding

Funds that are not sustainable have much the same effect as the transience of staff within the target setting. A program gets going and may be effective at reaching and

supporting some students, and then has to be closed down because funding is no longer available. Unsustainable funds and staff transience are sometimes one in the same because staff may be hired with acquired funds or particular staff members successful at acquiring funds for programming and then this funding is lost if a staff member moves on:

*“Well without Joan here securing the funding I am not sure to be honest [if the program will continue]. [She] found the third party funding so I don’t know how long it will last” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Once funding is acquired, there are often significant reporting and evaluation requirements for funding maintenance and renewal. Failure to meet these requirements jeopardises the sustainability of the financial support:

*[We] got \$100,000 from Municipal and Community Affaires and hired [instructors] to teach this course. But then it just ended and then [they] didn’t send the reports in and fought with them over the reports... Well it is biting the hand that feeds us” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Financial resources available to the target setting do support school engagement. They ensure the provision of a variety of programs and services, and their availability allows the school to acquire infrastructure, and other innovations to support the work they do. However, the maldistribution and unsustainability of some funding sources impede the extent to which these resources can be positive influences.

## Chapter Summary

The main points of this chapter are summarized as follows:

1. The location of the school has a varied influence on the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth. For some, the school is an “oasis” which provides a conducive place to study away from the challenges of daily life. For others, the physical

distance between school and home, and the lack of public transportation beyond school buses, impedes engagement.

2. The location of the school is a barrier to the integration of parents and other community members at school. This means, that the capacity of elders, parents and other adults to act as supports and resources for students is undermined by the physical distance between Rae and Edzo. This erodes school engagement.
3. The school's layout encourages order, control and small group interaction. The day is run by a strict schedule and there are specific rules and expectations that govern school. This approach has varied influence on school engagement. For some, the order, schedule and cleanliness are welcomed and conducive to study. For others however, the school can be a foreign or alienating place.
4. Physical structures and routines such as the provision of the late bus can encourage participation in after-school activities and in doing so, support school engagement.
5. Unstructured time is limited at school. This policy helps students who have trouble socially to avoid social free time, which can be stressful for them. It may also have an influence on reducing negative behaviours such as vandalism and bullying. Overall, limiting free time helps create engagement in this population.
6. CJBS is rife with symbols that act to communicate values and meanings that the school works to have shared. Two examples of this are the messages behind "Strong Like Two People" and the "Five Golden Rules of Life". Both of these are symbols that act as reminders of the values of respect, asking for help, having positive goals (specifically defined) and finding ways to be strong in both the mainstream and Tłı̨cẖ ways of knowing and being. These types of symbols help create school engagement.

7. Financial resources from both government and non-governmental sources can support school engagement by aiding in the provision programs and services and allowing the school to acquire infrastructure, and other innovations. However, the maldistribution and unsustainability of funding places limits on effectiveness.

## Chapter 8: RESULTS 3 – SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT AND THE SCHOOL’S SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

### Introduction

One morning late in August, the school secretary came over the public address system at CJBS to say:

*“Happy Birthday Dean<sup>17</sup>! Your mother called this morning just to let us know that it was your birthday. She wanted you to know she was thinking of you and wanted to wish you a very happy day. From all your friends here at CJBS and from your family, happy birthday!” (Excerpt from field notes, primary source).*

As mentioned previously, during a school public speaking competition, a student spoke to the audience about the topic of rape. When she was finished her speech she was crying and had to run off the stage. A number of her friends left from the audience to console her. Later, the Principal remarked that she was always so impressed by the CJBS students. Students and staff at the school are always there to support each other. There are no questions asked, it is always unconditional support.

One of the staff members at CJBS has a special note on his desk:

*“On my way out of the room I noticed a sign on the desk “Wake up Craig” with a telephone number beside. I asked about it and he said that he called this student or his mom every morning to wake him up and get him to school. This morning he called and it took 25 minutes to get an answer. But the student came (Excerpt from field notes, January 20, 2005, primary source).*

These examples show how unique and how supportive the social environment can be for many students at CJBS. One might be hard pressed to find a school in southern Canada where a mother’s birthday call would be announced in this way. It was not viewed as strange or out of place and the student was not teased. How many high school students would speak so openly about rape to a group of peers and other school and community members? How many teachers would show such caring dedication as to

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<sup>17</sup> The name has been changed and the exact date is not provided for reasons of anonymity.

call a student at home every morning? Certainly there is something special about the social environment of CJBS. In attempting to respond to the question - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* - this chapter reviews how different features of the social environment of the school work to influence school engagement. The social environment, as seen through the lens of the activity setting model, includes the people in the setting, the roles they take and how they interact. This includes an exploration of peer relations, social groupings and hierarchies. In addition, an examination of the school's social environment includes a look at the relationship between people in the setting and those outside the setting, such as parents and other community members. The chapter is broken down into four sub-sections: social interactions between staff and students; social interactions among students; the integration of parents and other community members within the school; and then a final sub-section on educational expectations, perceptions and standards. Data sources drawn on for this chapter include participant observation field notes, notes from the grade ten class 'Zine photovoice project, interview and focus group transcripts, and school and community documents.

### Social Interaction Between Staff and Students

The interaction between students and adults at CJBS has a significant influence on the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄ı̄ youth. When asked what school meant to them, CJBS students consistently referred to their interactions with teachers, administrators and other adults at school. These student quotes (primary sources) are taken from the class 'Zine project that was produced as part of a photovoice activity for this dissertation. There were many photos of school staff to accompany the quotes:

*"He's my coach, but he is also my friend."*

*"Janet is the best principal because she loves us all."*

*"My teachers make me happy at school."*

*"David is my favourite teacher because he always gives good advice."*

Indeed, as one administrator points out, a significant predictor of resiliency and positive school relationships is the support of at least one positive adult in a young person's life, and many of these adults are people that students encounter at school:

*“We have lots of kids that don't succeed. Over the years we have tried many different things. And in the research one of the main concepts we hear a lot is resiliency. The ability of a child to take some hits in life and still come out of it. The task for schools everywhere is how do we build resiliency in our kids? The answer that keeps coming back time and again is that they just need one person who truly believes in them” (Administrator, public presentation, primary source).*

Teachers can encourage students to continue with their schooling even when students may be experiencing difficulty, they can offer extra help when needed, and they can be a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear. Teachers often become friends and role models for students. The support teachers provide students is evident at CJBS:

*“Students are truly put first by the staff. The staff's dedication and commitment should be commended, at all levels and positions. From start to finish there is a relationship, a rapport that I think I have only seen in one other school in my whole career” (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source).*

This is a very significant comment and compliment from a senior official.

Unfortunately, one of the most significant difficulties in northern schools, including CJBS, is that of staff turnover, or the transience of the school staff. An administrator expands:

*“I have been here a long time and I can't remember the number of principals...I can't even begin to remember the teachers that have gone through, I mean it is just constant...the reliance on the southern workforce... they don't come to live here, they come here to work and earn money and leave. And out of 100% of your teachers you get maybe 30-40% that like it and stay for 5 years, you know 4-5 years, out of those people you get an even smaller percentage that make it their home, a very, very small percentage...it has been a system that has been largely, I think paralysed by transient staff” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

This transience is not just reserved for staff members, students and their families also move around:

*“A group of about 30 students were left at the end of the assembly on the first day of school. This meant that Janet did not know they were coming this morning and had not assigned them to a teacher advisor yet. Janet said it could be as many as 60 some years, there are a lot of transient families here” (Excerpt from field notes, August 27, 2004, primary source).*

The paralysis associated with the transience of people at CJBS is a real threat to the system of interactions and relationships that are built at the school. When a student finds an adult they can trust and talk openly to, it can be very difficult for everyone as teachers move on. High staff-turnover also undermines the quality and quantity of services provided for students:

*“The mental health programming at the school has just gone up and down and up and down constantly, the services that we provide for kids, until finally I gave up with outsiders. It is just, they come for a year or a year and a half and then they are gone, you can’t build programs there. So it’s tremendously slower, bringing people from the community in but we’ll do it” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In the past, the school drumming program at CJBS was wonderfully successful. It engaged many young men and instilled a sense of pride in the Tłıchǫ traditional practice of drumming throughout the school and community. The drumming group put out a CD and performed in many places, including Australia:

*“The drummers were a very important part of the school this year...Our drummers were the highlight of the evening and great ambassadors for our school” (CJBS Yearbook Staff 1998, p. 30, secondary source).*

Today however, this program is no longer running. This is due in most part to changes in staff and to the lack of specific interest among new staff members. The Army Cadet program is another example of an activity that many young people were involved in and was helpful in building engagement and self-esteem, but that folded after the lead teacher left the community in the summer of 2004. Although representatives from NWT Cadets came to Behchokǫ offering to help someone new facilitate the program, no one was able to take them up on the offer and the program ended. Program closures

are disappointments that local people have to live with as non-local school staff with specific skills, abilities and interests move in and out of the community:

*“When you lose a teacher with a certain gift, or a certain student with a certain skill, then you lose a certain component of your...I don’t know if it is your spirit or your school creation. What ever it is you lose something” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Staff members build relationships, and in many instances academic and extra-curricular programs, and these are lost if they leave. This pattern is a real, and constant, strain on youth and the community at large. As a result, new staff members from away may be welcomed more slowly or local people more hesitant to foster ties. Parents and other community members may be reluctant to get involved in an activity if they feel it may be short lived. For those staff members that do stay longer than a year or two, there can be significant pressure on them to help facilitate much needed services. They can get over burdened and this can lead to burn out:

*“I used to be the head coach but I had to back out because I was spending so many hours of direct coaching time plus hours of paper work every week” (School Staff, interview, primary source).*

Fortunately, there are a number of key non- Tłıchǫ staff members that have been in the community for more than 10 years. These people are very committed to their work and to the community, and they feel a strong sense of obligation. This obligation however, can be stressful and a potential deterrent for newcomers. It is generally felt that it would be more ideal to have local Tłıchǫ people as teachers and as facilitators for the various youth activities. When asked what the benefit of having Tłıchǫ people working at CJBS one Administrator comments:

*“The benefit I would see is the students seeing people from the community in these positions and then think to themselves- if they can do it I can do it to- you know? And also I remember being out on the land, going on the canoe trips, and when the elders speak in the morning, when we do our prayer, many times I thought gee I just wish [the non- Tłıchǫ staff] could understand what they are*

*saying. Because a lot of times through translation a lot of the feeling, the meaning is lost, and it is just not the same. And so for that reason again it would be nice if we had more Aboriginal staff so that they could relate to and talk to the students in the Tłıchǫ language. Where in English it is just not the same” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Some students may feel hesitant about discussing issues with staff who are of a different ethnic background:

*“Something is wrong, and you keep asking me, ‘what is the matter?’. The reasons I haven’t told you before is that I am too embarrassed to talk to you in the classroom at school” (Tłıchǫ youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p.17, secondary source).*

The number of Tłıchǫ staff working at CJBS has varied over time. In the 1970s, when the Rae-Edzo School Society ran the school and it was independent of the Territorial system, staff members were almost all Tłıchǫ people. In the 1980s however this changed:

*“In ’88, there were really no Dogrib people working in the schools at that time. There were Dogrib people as janitors and bus drivers and even the educational assistants [but not teachers]” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Today this situation has improved somewhat as a number of Tłıchǫ people have become certified as teachers and administrators and have taken up posts at the school and at the TCSA. The majority of the support staff at CJBS, such as councillors, maintenance and cleaning staff, building engineers, educational assistants, cooks, bus drivers, library assistants etc. are Tłıchǫ. This is key to providing long-term sustainability and continuity in programming and in relationships in the setting. It is also a key to the successful integration of Tłıchǫ traditional and mainstream educational practices and programming there. However, there is still a long way to go before the professional teaching staff is made up of more Tłıchǫ people than non- Tłıchǫ. In 2004-2005, there were 24 professional teaching and administrative staff at CJBS and only three of them were Tłıchǫ.

## Social Interaction Among Students

Jordan, Darryl and Amy, the CJBS fictional students in the smoking area from chapter six, are representative of young people at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Behchok̄. There are youth like Amy who are from outlying communities. Others are like Darryl, who are young parents or like Jordan who have had, or are having, troubles at home and in their personal lives. But, like Jordan, Darryl and Amy, there are young people who have great drive and determination to succeed, who have specific goals, hopes and dreams, and who are happy and well supported by peers and family members. CJBS has students with all kinds of talents and skills from the musician to the mathematician or mechanic, from the poet to the public speaker. In September of 2004, there were 192 high school students at CJBS. Almost 100% of the student body were Tłıch̄, the majority were from Behchok̄. CJBS is a supportive and positive environment for most of these students:

*“We have the most sensational kids and sensational staff. This is a ‘good’ place. This is one of the most positive places in the community, certainly one of the few for some of these kids” (School Staff, Interview, primary source).*

*“It’s cool to be in school. School means fun” (Student, class ‘zine, primary source)*

There are of course, those who don’t see or experience CJBS in a positive way:

*“When I entered the school of CJBS, I knew that I was in a good school but when I took a real good look again, I know I am not in a safe place. There are still drugs going around the halls and the teachers don’t know about it and no one talks about this. Because the one that brings it forward will be the one with blood on their face” (Tłıch̄ youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p. 13, secondary source).*

*“One of the teachers asked a student to sit down during the assembly and he said ‘I have to stand at the back because they are going to beat me up and I have to*

*run away at the end of the assembly'. This wasn't a joke. Kids have lots to deal with, and school is a place where not all of them come and feel safe because it brings friends and enemies all together (Excerpt from field notes, September 3, 2004, primary source).*

Peer interactions are very significant influences on school engagement among Tłı̄ch̄Q youth. Peers can be negative or positive influences, but in either case, they do influence. Peer relationships at the school, and in Behchok̄ more widely, are very strong:

*“The school is the most positive place in Rae-Edzo. The relationships in peer groups are very strong, there are extremely strong friendships here” (School staff, focus group, primary source).*

*“School is all about friends” (Student, class 'zine, primary source).*

*“My friends are fun to hang out with, my best friends I can trust with my biggest secrets” (Student, public presentation, primary source).*

School-based social interaction among students takes place in the structured setting of the classroom, in the semi-structured settings of the school bus, cafeteria, gymnasium and library and in the more unstructured settings of the hallways, the smoking area and the school grounds. Away from school, students interact in their homes, on the streets of Rae and Edzo, at the Sportsplex, at church, at the Northern Store and the Co-op, and in settings in Yellowknife such as the Mall and other shops or fast food restaurants. Some students participate in extra-curricular activities together such as soccer or Tae Kwon Do. Students also travel together on trips to other communities for such things as sports tournaments, visits to museums, tours of universities and colleges, trips with the travel club or shopping.

Quite uniquely, CJBS does not have strong student cliques or groups. When asked about this a staff member comments:

*“I think less here than most places because the one who smokes and who kicks the soccer ball and who is not so good at soccer kind of gets in with everyone... You*

*know, and they seem to be able to co-ordinate that and get along fine, for the very most part” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

As the staff member points out, there are some situations in which specific students are teased or bullied, but this is not prevalent. Many students have known each other since they started school or before. There are also many cousins and distant relatives among the student body. Young people know each other well. The students are largely accepting and get along. This is a positive influence on school engagement; most feel welcome.

There is one evolving situation at CJBS however where some students are beginning to feel less and less welcome. Due to the changing age demographic of the student body at CJBS, older students are beginning to feel more alienated. The community of Behchok̄ is growing, and with this growth comes an increase in the number of students at school. At the same time, students are staying in school longer. At CJBS, it regularly takes students five or more years to finish high school (grades 10-12). It is common for students to take indirect routes to graduation, such as starting and stopping and non-progression over a period of years. As the student population grows and more students stay in school longer, the demographic make-up of the student body at CJBS is altered. Younger students are becoming a critical mass that is influencing the ethos of the school. This age mix is impacting school engagement, particularly among older students who do not always feel comfortable attending school with so many younger students. Older students are feeling less and less welcomed at school, not because of something the school is actively doing, or not doing, but because of the changing demographic profile.

*“One of the girls was in a new teacher’s class and she left in the first 5 minutes, she was in the hall and Jared, a high school teacher, came up. She said the other students were all really young and she didn’t feel comfortable in there. Jared suggested that he could go down and introduce her to Sam directly and that she should try it for today. She said that would be OK. (Excerpt from field notes, August 27, 2004, primary source).*

*“There are a few that like to come back to finish, but now our school is changing so much, like there are more younger kids than there used to be years ago and some of the older ones are starting to feel uncomfortable being with the younger ones” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Older students may start the semester, but feeling out of place, do not stay in school long. CJBS does not actively discourage older students from coming back to school, but there are internal pressures around limited resources.

*“He just has so many needs, he is 25 years old, we just can’t do anything else. It is not like he is progressing at all, it’s not like anything has changed. And we have to focus our limited resources on school aged kids 21 or under in my mind anyway. Because he had those supports when he was young right? So now it is somebody else’s chance to get them” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In the minds of some, available resources must be focused on the bulk of the student body and this means focusing on younger students in general. Unfortunately, there are currently very limited options for maintaining any kind of educational engagement in Behchok̄ beyond CJBS.

### Integration of Parents and Other Community Members

As mentioned in chapter seven, there is limited integration of parents and other adults from the Behchok̄ community actively engaged in the school. It is certainly not that Tłı̄ch̄ parents don’t support schooling, in fact almost all parents want a formal education for their children, but there is:

*“a gap then in the parents wanting that for their children and the children not coming here consistently and being able to be successful, there are other factors in there that are unique to each family.” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

This gap is sustained by the influence of features of the school’s physical environment, such as the physical location of the school and the lack of regular public transportation. However, it is also related to features in the social environment as well. Essentially the school exists as a primarily western institution, with non-local teachers who use English

as the only working language. Adults in the community, especially the older adults, may not be confident in the English language:

*“I don’t think parents understand what a teenager is, because they have no experience, they have never been to school, they have never been to the high school and they see them growing up, um, I know for example that quite a few don’t speak Dogrib anymore, except only street Dogrib, you know going to the store, buying bread whatever, but not real Dogrib. And parents don’t understand English you know? So there is no communication” (Elder, Interview, primary source).*

This lack of communication and lack of cross-generational understanding means that the availability and use of parents, grandparents and other community members as a human resource for the school, and for students, is limited. In addition to the language barrier, many adults in the community, and particularly the older adults, have not attended school like CJBS and so have limited experience with, and knowledge of, the practices and process of schooling as undertaken at CJBS:

*“Different people think of school in a different way. Especially if you have grandparents that never went to school, school has changed a lot, like when we have an open house, people come, they maybe know school just off TV or what other people have said.” (School staff, focus group, primary source).*

A healthy community with an active and available population is one of the most important resources a school can have. In the case of Behchokō, parents rarely volunteer to assist or facilitate extra-curricular or school-based activities, at parent-teacher evenings very few parents attend and just in general, very few parents are seen at the school each day. One school staff reflects on the fact that parents may not have a very clear idea of what actually happens at school on a day-to-day basis:

*“I think it also, in talking about communication still, it is always an on-going challenge in trying to get the public at large to better understand what are the day to day successes and challenges of our school and all the schools. Because I still think there is a big gap between parents who are getting their kids on the bus and sending them to school everyday and really the realisation of what we are doing here with their kids. I think there is this inherent trust that if I send my child to school they’ll learn, and I think though that all the details of all the day to day activities of what we do and what we are teaching is still a big gap between the bulk of the community” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

These barriers do not affect all parents or families equally. There are some who will be actively engaged in their students' lives regardless of potential barriers. These people are as dedicated to ensuring that their children obtain a quality education as adults anywhere:

*“You can't always focus on non-trusting. My son dropped out one month before the second semester. There was peer pressure outside the school. When he goes out, there are some homes where there are no parents and they just stay up all night and so I have to try and talk to other parents or I ask him about it. We went over what he was having problems with and it wasn't all school things, it was more. I don't have a problem with the school, if I do I can just go over there” (Parent, public presentation, primary source).*

The patterns relating to parents and their integration at school remain a concern however and have a negative influence on the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄ youth. During the 2004-2005 CJBS school review, one of the most significant concerns expressed by the reviewers was the relative lack of meaningful involvement of parents and other adults from the community in the activities of the school setting:

*“The education system and the parents have to be involved as one. You have to be involved, as a parent you know your own child's strengths and weaknesses. To make the educational system work, we as parents have to work with the people providing the education” (Parent, public presentation, primary source).*

### Educational Expectations and Perceptions

Interactions that take place in the school's social environment work to communicate, propagate and support particular expectations and perceptions in relation to school. The expectations and perceptions people have, be they school staff, community members or the youth themselves, can be resources for use, or that are missing, in the target setting and these resources impact the engagement patterns of young people. If, for example, parents and school staff expect students to graduate from high school, this expectation can help support the school in their efforts to build the high school program, and to distribute funds in a way that favours potential graduates and graduate preparation.

The Tłı̄chǫ people value education and want to ensure a bright future for their children:

*“I didn’t finish high school, I only got grade 7 so I wanted my children to have the best education in both worlds, the Dogrib and the Western world” (Parent, public presentation, primary source).*

Most parents support this dual focus of education, supporting traditional teachings as well as a mainstream academic focus of school. This is the essence of the idea “strong like two people”.

*“It is very, very important to us to have our young people graduate. Our language is also an important thing, ask any elder or person in the community, it is the way we keep in tact with ourselves” (Parent, public presentation, primary source).*

The perceptions and expectations of parents and school staff reflect a sense of what is currently common and realistic. Instead of celebrating high averages and only students who graduate, the school congratulates students who have passed all of their courses in a semester, or who have passed all of their courses except one, for example. This is the “honour roll” at CJBS. This realism is a useful tool in helping students set realistic expectations and for students to find their own pathways to success of different kinds. This realism however, is not always reflected among CJBS students. Seventy-five percent of youth who responded to the 2002 Youth in Transition Survey expected to complete post-secondary education, even though at present only forty-one percent of them are likely to finish high school. Only 14% expected that they would quit high school, although the rate of school leaving is more than 50% (Auchterlonie 2002).

Students’ expectations around school have the potential to act as positive resources, motivators and ways to lift self-esteem. However, when expectations are inappropriately set, they can also act as negative forces in the opposite manner. Among Tłı̄chǫ students there is little nuance about what education and educational success mean. Attending school means being educated:

*“Many students appear to think that by being in the building and by passively sitting in the class or taking notes from the board, they are being educated” (Wile 1996, p.13, secondary source).*

And, school success means attending school, following school rules and eventually going on to graduate. These goals are set regardless of details around how well they do while in school, what options they have after graduating, or how well they can perform tasks like reading or mathematical calculations. These student, and at times parental, expectations leave little room for varied definitions of educational success.

## Chapter Summary

The main points of this chapter are summarized as follows:

1. The social environment of CJBS provides support for many Tłı̨cẖ youth and this helps create engagement.
2. Interaction between students and adults at CJBS are important influences on school engagement in both a positive and a negative sense.
3. Transience among staff and students at CJBS is a threat to the system of interactions and relationships that are built at school. Transience has a negative influence on the quantity and sustainability of services and activities for youth at CJBS and in Behchoḵ. Staff turnover undermines the availability and quality of human and physical resources. Transience has a largely negative impact on school engagement.
4. Ideally, more of the school staff would be Tłı̨cẖ people as it is felt this would positively influence school engagement among Tłı̨cẖ youth. Currently, the majority of the teachers at CJBS are non-Aboriginal people originally from other places.
5. Peer relationships are strong and are important influences on engagement behaviours.

6. CJBS students are generally accepting and get along well. Student cliques are nearly non-existent. These school characteristics supports engagement.
7. The changing age demographic of students at CJBS now favours a younger majority or critical mass. Older students can feel alienated in this context. This changing demographic erodes engagement among older students.
8. English is the working language at CJBS and this can serve to alienate, or prevent the participation of, some parents, grandparents and other community members who are not confident English speakers. Inadequate English language skills among students are also a barrier to school engagement.
9. Some community members have limited experience with, and knowledge of, the mainstream education system and this can serve to alienate them; school engagement is negatively affected.
10. The educational perceptions and expectations of parents, school staff and students can be positive supports, but if inappropriately set, may be deterrents to school engagement.

## **Chapter 9: RESULTS 4 – ENGAGEMENT AND THE COMMUNITY: UNDERSTANDING THE GAPS, COMPETITORS AND SUPPORTS**

### Introduction

In attempting to answer the question - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* – this chapter presents the findings from the exploration of features of settings in the school's larger context. The relationship between the CJBS and parallel and constituent settings in Behchok̄ was examined in order to try and better understand how these relationships may influence school engagement. Parallel activity settings are other activity settings that might have activities, purposes or target populations similar to those of the target setting. Parallel activity settings in Behchok̄ included the other school in the community and other settings in the community catering to youth or existing for the purpose of education, such as the Mowfi Adult Education Centre. In addition to parallel settings, constituent settings were also looked at. Constituent settings are places where constituents of the target setting meet and interact outside the target setting. For example in relation to CJBS, parents of students may convene a meeting independently, alumni of the school may decide to organize an event together or there may be religious classes in the community involving many of the same kids that are at the school. The influence of parallel and constituent settings on the target setting, and vice versa, can be direct or indirect. Questions that were asked in relation to these relationships and influences included: Are gaps that are not being filled in the target setting being filled through parallel or constituent settings? Is there competition or support between settings? How does the existence or lack of parallel or constituent activity settings influence school engagement? What role do parallel and constituent settings play in shaping perceptions of school? Data sources for this area of the dissertation include participant observation field notes, interview and focus group transcripts, notes from previously conducted interviews, school, community and government documents, and data from the grade 10 class 'Zine photovoice activity.

Two main findings are evident and will be expanded on in this chapter. First, that there are a number of parallel or constituent settings which are felt to be missing in Behchok̄ and that this has an influence on the role the school plays, or is expected to play, in relation to youth. Second, some of the existing parallel and constituent settings are competitive with school and there are distinct implications of this for youth within the community.

## Settings That Are Not Available for Youth in Behchok̄

### 9.1.1 Extra-curricular Activities

It is widely recognized that the Behchok̄ community lacks positive extra-curricular opportunities for youth. Beyond school sports, a few school-based clubs, and some seasonal events like the winter and spring carnivals, there are few other organized programs:

*“[The Sportsplex] oh, it’s a bingo place... The only sports they have is with the school. But in the town there is no sports director, no one doing programming organizing you know teams, nothing. I mean we are very poor in that way. We don’t, and we know it and we address the problem at least, verbally at least. We know we don’t do justice to young people” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

This is not only a concern for youth, but for all community members:

*“Our people have gone through such a big change in such a short time. Our whole way of life has changed and a lot of people haven’t been able to deal with it. They haven’t addressed it at all...There’s a lot of things that men had to do in the past. All that is taken away. There’s really nothing to replace it...people don’t know what to do with all this free time they have” ( Tl̄ich̄ teacher quoted in Bright 1999, p.104, secondary source).*

The lack of extra-curricular settings outside the school has a variable influence on youth in Behchok̄. For some, the lack of parallel settings encourages them to attend school, particularly for the social and extra-curricular experiences. School is a safe and fun place for most students:

*“School means that it is a place to learn and to be safe. At home there is nothing to do and to me school means it’s a place to experience something new and learn and hangout with some friends at break and lunch” (Student, class ‘zine activity, primary source).*

*“I go to school because I like it and it is fun. The other reason I go to school is because it is boring at home” (Student, class ‘zine activity, primary source).*

One elder articulates:

*“[School is] not only a safe environment, but I believe, a place to be, to belong; a young person’s space. They’ve got their sport, they’ve got their things which unfortunately in the community, we don’t supply” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

Unfortunately, the lack of extra-curricular activities has also been blamed for young people engaging in unhealthy activities such as drinking, taking drugs and gambling at young ages:

*“Right now we have nothing in the evening and the town is boring so what else could we do but drink, use drugs, gamble or get into trouble? Why couldn’t we have tons of stuff going on in every night? The young people would be so busy that they won’t have time to think about drinking or doing drugs” (Tłı̄chƷ youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p.1, secondary source).*

Over the years, the community has developed an infrastructure to support extra-curricular activities. They have a number of outdoor rinks, and one indoor arena, a Sportsplex with a gym and games area, some outdoor basketball courts, a curling rink, and an indoor swimming pool that is used during the summer months, for example. Unfortunately however, this infrastructure is often not well maintained and effective programs are lacking:

*“The Sportsplex is not maintained properly. It has been abused, there are a lack of programs, and a lack of a recreation facilitator” (Adult Community Member, public presentation, primary source).*

*“The curling rink is so seldom or not used, it hasn’t been used at all this year. [It] really should be transformed...” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

A few years ago, there was an attempt to kick-start the development of a youth centre. Third party funding was received and there was a small house that was available:

*“We had it going and it ran for a month and a half and we hired a local person and the kids played there and it was safe. But it got broken into, and they never fixed the toilet. It was kind of like clogs in the chain... it can be quite frustrating” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

There are also too few informal gathering places that are convenient and healthy:

*“Today the Sportsplex is too far for the people to go to easily, and a time has to be called or set just to have a dance or to hold a feast. When we want to have a hand game, we don’t know where to go, so it’s as if we have nothing else to do but watch T.V.” (Zoe in Martin 1991, p.65, secondary source).*

Overall, it would be a positive step to have more extra-curricular activities for youth, whether they are formal or informal and for current programs, services and infrastructure to be used more effectively. The school has an important role in providing these kinds of opportunities for youth, through its own after-school programming, but it should not be the only player supporting youth in this way.

### 9.1.2 Support Services for Youth

Another type of setting that is missing in Behchok̄ō, is that of youth counselling and support services. As discussed previously, there are a significant number of youth in Behchok̄ō who are dealing with addictions issues, abuse, family break-down and low self-esteem themselves or who are supporting friends and family members going through these kinds of difficulties. Services do exist to support these young people, but it is widely recognized that services are inadequate and the need remains great:

*“The extensive counselling supports needed are not offered in our schools, nor are they sufficiently available in our communities. Health and social services agencies are doing their best but their hands are full; they cannot meet the needs*

*of these students as well as the needs of the community” (NWT principal quoted in Department of Education, 1995, p.15, secondary source).*

During the 2004 – 2005 CJBS School review, “everyone said loud and clear that there is a distinct need for more counselling support full-time, in the school, all the time” (GNWT Official, public presentation). Currently, the school employs two part-time counsellors and a full-time school-community counsellor. There are also counsellors available in Rae through the Tłıchǫ Healing Path Wellness Strategy and Wellness Centre. Social services are involved with youth in the more extreme cases but caseloads are very busy and these services are stretched very thin. In addition, young people who have significant addictions issues may also be sent out of the community to a treatment centre.

The lack of counselling and support services for youth means that young people are not getting the support they need and to succeed in school. In the past, a variety of attempts have been made to improve this situation:

*“[There was] an inter agency team which involved the RCMP, Social Services and Counsellors and we sat down and talked with teachers about students who were high need and then what programs and services we were going to assist those students and advocate for those students. What programs they could work with. And it was really great because we had a member on the team...we had social services and a counsellor. It was just a really good thing to be part of, but we lost our full time counsellor at the school. So we did do it for two years afterwards but mostly it was a band aid service” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

The staff member feels that systemic change is required rather than the band-aid service of a single committee separate from formally sanctioned government and school structures.

Similar to that of personal counselling, support services for young people with learning difficulties are also lacking. A member of the school staff explains that with the limited funds, time and human resources for learning support, some students won't make it in the “lifeboat”:

*“There is not really enough time in the day because there are some [students] that I feel that we are going to lose anyways. So I guess it is almost like that lifeboat question, and you can be plagued by asking yourself who do you keep in the lifeboat and who do you throw overboard? So I just go back to the elementary, that’s where I concentrate most of my time” (School Staff, interview, primary source).*

### 9.1.3 Adult Education and Alternative Education Options

Adult and alternative educational programs and services have been offered in cycles in Behchok̄. Over the years there have been a number of programs initiated and for a variety of reasons often associated with funding, personnel or interests they have not been sustained. This is particularly true for programs of alternative education, or education that is provided, outside the school setting, for youth that are not able to integrate and succeed at school.

*“Typically they have they have been alternative programs outside the regular class. I can think of any number. We have had bush-based programs where kids lived primarily in the bush and only rarely came to the school, we have had programs that were focused primarily on sports, and art, and drumming and culture- to bring those kids that don’t do well in school, into the school program” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

A similar story can be told for programs of adult education. Many older students want to return and complete high school, in some form or another. One obvious need in Behchok̄ is for more, or different kinds of, adult education. There is no night school option, and there are no GED equivalent classes. The adult education centre in town offers some college based courses for adults, but this is limited and would not be of the sort of training that would lead to the completion of a high school diploma, or its equivalent.

Existing resources could be used more effectively in an effort to support people who would like to finish high school, do academic upgrading or carry on to college or university training within Behchok̄ and outside the walls of CJBS:

*“They don’t use the Mowfi Adult Education Centre because of lack of trained instructors. But they would use it if someone could teach the stuff. The building is a nice little spot for upgrading that they could use to. It is not used as much as it could be” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

*“People (aged 25-30) are in the high school system because there were no places for them in adult education...Youth have been coming in [to the school] since last September ages 25-35. Some do some education at the mine (Math, Computer Science, Communications...) but community based upgrading is a gap. There are a lot of obstacles to deliver a short-term education program at the community level” (Administrator, public presentation, primary source).*

#### 9.1.4 English Literacy Support at Home

It is not traditional to read to children in the home, and compared to students who grow up in homes where reading is done and expected, TìchQ youth may be disadvantaged:

*“I mean you probably read every night before you go to bed, probably because you were read to every night before you went to bed and a lot of these kids aren’t. It does not mean that they are bad or evil, it’s just not a written culture, it’s not a book culture. So we are asking them to be a book and written culture.” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Illiteracy and difficulty with the English language can be barriers for students and/or their parents and guardians in relation to school. CJBS has one Program Support Teacher who works with some students to improve reading levels. In the past, the school has had reading programs, but in general, there is still significant need for more resources and time to be spent on student literacy.

#### Settings that Compete for the Time and Attention of Youth

The previous section outlined a number of settings that were missing or could be of use to the target setting if they were more developed. This section looks at those other settings that exist and are competitive with schooling, meaning that they negatively influence or contradict the work of the school or the efforts of the staff and students.

### 9.1.5 Other Community Activities and Priorities

Although there is a recognized lack of positive extra-curricular activities for youth in the community, there are still many things happening in Behchok̄ and the neighbouring city of Yellowknife. There are bingos every week, sometimes many nights per week; shopping trips to Edmonton, Grand Prairie and Yellowknife; special guests visiting the community; meetings of all sorts and varieties; weddings; funerals; church services; sports tournaments and card games. These events are important activity settings that help youth build a sense of identity. Although not as many people spend time in the bush today as was found previously, there are still some community members who spend time hunting and fishing and families who attend community assemblies organized across Behchok̄ and the outlying Tłı̄ch̄ communities as well. Classes at the school are often altered if someone in the community dies or if a special guest comes to the building; students who travel south or to the bush with their families may miss periods of school; and sports tournaments can also cause students to miss school.

*“In seven years of teaching in Native communities, I have never met a parent who did not want his children to get an education. But there seems to be a real problem in managing life in such a way that children go to school everyday. The ‘bush’ no longer is a major competition with the high school. Winter roads, big bingos, papal visits, carnivals, meetings that displace classes in small schools all serve to destroy momentum that we manage to achieve in our schools from time to time” (teacher quoted in Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, pp.114-115, secondary source).*

All of these other activities can compete with the activities and goals of the school and are equally prevalent today in Behchok̄ as they were for this teacher in 1991. While the candidate was in the field, for example, there were numerous special guests who visited the school including the President of Iceland, the Governor General, the father of the student who was killed in the school shooting in Tabor, Alberta, and previous students who came back to tell their stories. There were also special events like conferences, cultural days, healthy living events, and holiday activities as well as

weekly assemblies and sports tournaments in and out of town. From time to time activities would arise quite suddenly such as the visit of a CBC reporter to the school to talk about the self-governance agreement with students. Planned and impromptu events communicate values of community support, the importance of tradition, family and culture, and the need for flexibility, but, they do compete with school for students' time and interest and can cause a disruption to the normal routines at school.

#### 9.1.6 Tłıchǫ versus Western Settings

*“As a Dogrib teenager I see our language dying. We are influenced by the white culture; elders are sitting in their cozy houses and waiting for youth to come by. People like the priest and some teachers are learning the language, they are more interested in our culture than us” (Student, public presentation, primary source).*

People at CJBS and in the community of Behchokǫ communicate a distinct dichotomy between Tłıchǫ and non- Tłıchǫ, or western mainstream, settings and practices. This dichotomy is often difficult to reconcile and exists as a barrier for effective educational practice in the community.

As explained previously, CJBS exists as an essentially western or Euro-Canadian setting and for some it is alien:

*“Schooling as it presently exists in Rae is a complex institution built on assumptions that are alien to most families (Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1989, p.21, secondary source).*

In an interview with researcher Marilyn Bright in 1999, a Tłıchǫ teacher communicates her troubles with integrating Tłıchǫ and mainstream educational values and practices. She is asked to teach the Alberta science curriculum in an elementary classroom in a Tłıchǫ school:

*“Teaching science was really difficult, because as Native people we have completely different beliefs than what the curriculum tells. For example, for primary grade if you're talking about living things, one thing that I will never forget, one time I got really stuck right in the middle of my teaching...When I first*

*started, I picked up a rock and said, 'is this a living or non-living thing?' and some of the kids said, 'yeah it's a living thing' and some other kids said, 'no, this is not a living thing, it can not breathe or it will not grow, does not eat'. Right there in the moment, I had to make a decision of where I was going to put it. So it was really difficult, because growing up we are told within our culture that things like rocks and stuff like that are living things" (Bright 1999, p.90, secondary source).*

The gap or divide between the school setting and traditional Tłı̨ch̨Q settings, such as the student's homes, is real, and strategies to bridge the distance, such as the school's cultural program, have only been partially successful thus far.

In the face of competing settings, the majority of Tłı̨ch̨Q families are trying to find ways to reconcile the differences through some form of compromise between traditional and mainstream values and practices. Sometimes this means altering Tłı̨ch̨Q ways to fit better into the ways of the school:

*"Younger parents were beginning to speak to their children more in English than in Dogrib, sometimes hoping that schooling would be easier for the children if they were fluent in English" (Bright 1999, p.112, secondary source).*

And other times it means altering mainstream educational practices to better fit the Tłı̨ch̨Q. Regardless of the method of compromise, the tension still exists and has an influence on Tłı̨ch̨Q school engagement. The influence acts through limitations on the level of support able to be offered by parents and other community members, by limitations in the communication between school staff and adults at the students' homes, and by tensions experienced by individual students between what they have been taught, and have experienced, within their homes and families, and what they are taught and experience at school.

## Chapter Summary

1. As depicted in the O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson (1993) activity setting model, there are parallel and constituent activity settings within the school's larger

context that have an influence on the target setting and school engagement among youth.

2. Tłıchǫ and western or mainstream values, approaches and activities are in competition for young people's interest and engagement in Behchokǫ.
3. Community settings that are largely not available for youth in Behchokǫ include extra-curricular activities outside of school, support services for youth, adult and alternative education and English literacy support at home. Not having these kinds of settings erodes and undermines school engagement.
4. Planned and impromptu events and activities that happen within the community, although important for building young people's sense of identity, compete with the target setting for their time and attention. These events have a mixed influence on school engagement.
5. The differences between western and Tłıchǫ educational beliefs and practices serve to erode school engagement and finding a bridge between the two worlds is a challenge that still has to be effectively met.

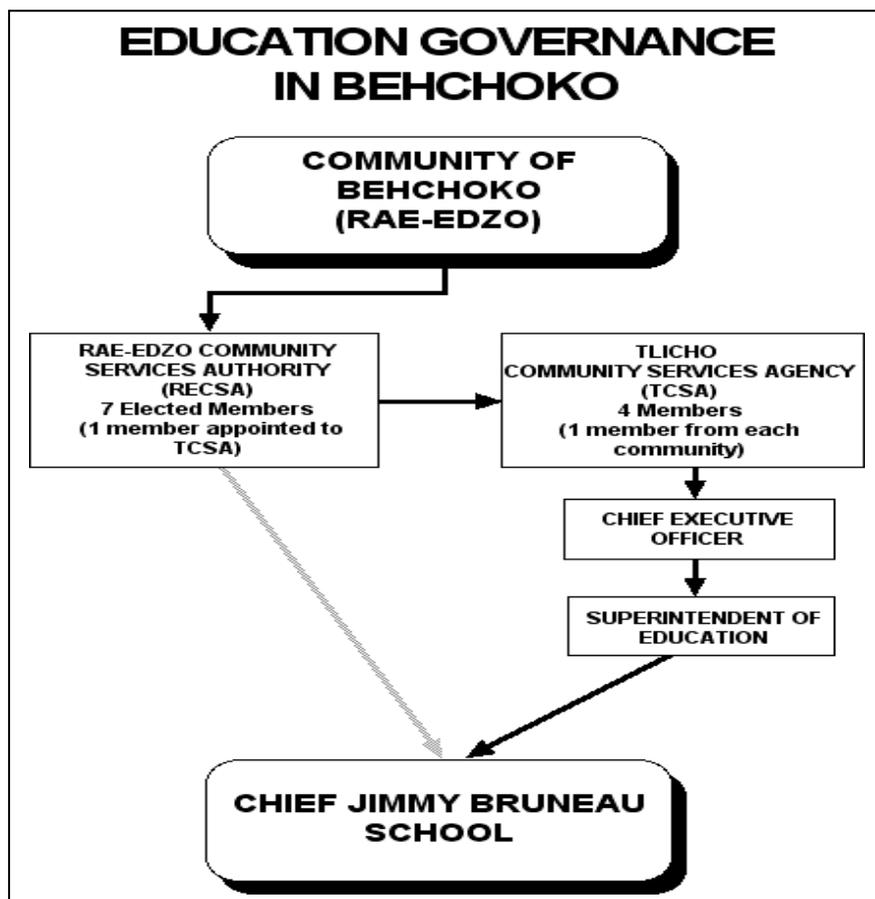
## Chapter 10: RESULTS 5 – THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION POLICY AND AUTHORITY ON SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

In attempting to answer the question - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* - the next set of influences that will be expanded on for this dissertation are those that relate to authority and policy. Authority activity settings are settings that “sanction the existence of activity settings” (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993, p.508) and act to establish, implement and/or enforce laws, rules, regulations, and directives or by authorizing the use of specific resources. Authority activity settings related to CJBS include such entities and policies associated with the Territorial and Federal Governments, the Rae-Edzo Community Services Authority (RECSA), the Tłı̄ch̄q Community Government (formerly the Band Councils), and the Tłı̄ch̄q Community Services Agency (TCSA), (formally the Dogrib Community Services Board). With the signing of the Tłı̄ch̄q Agreement, the Rae-Edzo Community Services Authority (RECSA) has become the entity responsible for education, health and social services at the individual community level. The TCSA is the regional body that ensures the management, administration and delivery of programs and services in education, health and social services to both Tłı̄ch̄q and non-Tłı̄ch̄q citizens in the four Tłı̄ch̄q communities (Government of the NWT, 2006). The TCSA has the task of liaising with other government entities and for ensuring that the educational system in the region is well facilitated and adequately funded. It also establishes goals for schools and administrators and is responsible for reviewing and adapting these goals annually as required. Figure 11.1 depicts the governance structure of the educational system in Behchok̄<sup>18</sup> and this figure is included here to add clarity when the different entities are discussed.

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<sup>18</sup> The candidate would like to acknowledge Yellowknife-based educational researcher Chuck Tolley for providing this model for the candidate.



**Figure 11.1: Educational Governance Structure in Behchokō**

O'Donnell and colleagues placed a policy perimeter between the inside and outside spheres of their activity settings model. This was to represent the pressures exerted and limitations placed upon the internal components of the target setting (the inside sphere) by the external or contextual settings (the outside sphere). In the case of CJBS, for example, rules and regulations required of the school are outlined in the Education Act of the Northwest Territories. Although not included in the original model, for the purpose of this study, a policy perimeter was also placed on the outside of the outside sphere. This perimeter represented policies and potential limitations that were more peripheral, such as policies around trade and commerce or environmental assessment in the Northwest Territories. These have implications for education and for the school

more indirectly. An exploration of policy and authority activity settings in relation to Tłı̄ch̄Q students and CJBS involved asking questions such as: What entities have theoretical and practical authority over the school? How do other entities exert authority and how does the school react to these pressures? What school laws, rules, regulations, directives and authorizations exist? How do these structures impact student engagement? Is external pressure real or perceived? How have pressures changed over time? How much autonomy do those in the target setting have? How are policies enforced? And, are there policies that are potentially missing in order to effectively support school engagement? Data sources drawn on for this chapter include participant observation field notes, interview and focus group transcripts, school and community documents, and government legislation. The chapter begins with a discussion of some mandated educational policies and procedures that have particular influence on school engagement. Three policy areas are focused upon: curriculum requirements and standards; inclusive schooling and social progression; and the discipline policies of the school and school board. Included here is a discussion relating to the autonomy of the school in relation to the government and other community organisations and the potential flexibility of educational policy. The chapter finishes with a brief mention of the policies and practices of external bodies, such as local employers and post secondary institutions, and how these influence the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth as well.

### School Engagement and Mandated Educational Policies

Educational requirements and policies for the Northwest Territories are outlined in the 1996 Education Act of the NWT. The Education Act provides policy and curriculum direction. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment of the NWT works with local educational councils and authorities to implement the Act:

“The Department develops curricula, directives, and guidelines to meet the unique cultural and language needs of students in the Northwest Territories. The education councils and educational authorities implement and adapt curricula and

develop programs to meet the needs of students in each of their regions. Local education authorities, representing parents and the public in each community, provide guidance and direction to the schools” (Council of Ministers of Education Canada 2006, secondary source).

### 10.1.1 Curriculum Requirements and Standards

As outlined by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment of the GNWT, in order to obtain a high school diploma, Tłıchǫ students need to obtain at least 100 credits with the following requirements:

English 10 – 5 credits	Community Service – 1 credit
English 11 – 5 credits	CALM – 3 credits
English 12 – 5 credits	Career & Tech. Studies – 5 credits
Math 10 – 5 credits	Northern Studies – 3 credits
Math 11/12 – 5 credits	Physical Education – 3 credits
Science 10 – 5 credits	Fine Arts – 3 credits
Science 11/12 – 5 credits	Career & Program Planning – 1 credit
Social Studies 10 – 5 credits	Unspecified – 26 credits
Social Studies 11 – 5 credits	Additional Grade 12 – 10 credits

The possible unspecified courses include:

Math 30 Pure	Work Experience – 15, 25, 35
Math 30 Essentials	Biology 20/30
Physical Education 20/30	Chemistry 20/30
Fine Art 20/30	Dogrib History * - 15
Social Studies 30/33	Tłıchǫ Yati* - 15, 25, 35
Introduction to Cooking	Science 35*
Cosmetology	Gonewo * 15, 25, 35
Drama	Trails of Our Ancestors* – 15
Parenting	Dogrib Sewing and Beading * 5
Photography	

The unspecified courses with a asterisk are locally developed and specific to Tłıchǫ schools. Besides these locally designed courses and courses such as Northern Studies, the courses offered at CJBS are based on the Alberta provincial curriculum and grade 12 students at CJBS are required to pass Alberta diploma exams in order to obtain their high school diploma. The curriculum is minimally adjusted to take into consideration

local context. For example, Physical Education classes at CJBS include sections on traditional Dene Games. These adaptations are not standardized, however.

The variety of courses, and particularly the provision of cultural programming, is beneficial for student engagement by allowing different types of students to find success and have educational experiences that more closely match their particular skills and interests:

*“There are students who do really well in the bush but then when they are in the classroom they have a hard time, and then students who do really well in the classroom but then when they are in the bush they are kind of lost. And then there are students that do good at both” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

When asked whether the varied curriculum and the provision of cultural classes helped student engagement, a school staff member said:

*“Yes, especially when we have a program like Gonaewo [traditional teaching]. Many students came just for that because they loved that interaction with [the Instructor] the hands on activity. Our students do so well with hands on activities... Some students go to school Monday to Friday and to do assignments, say reading and writing, especially if they are struggling in that area, that is not a motivator for them. But to be out on the land and doing things that they know require hands on...where they are learning things, they are getting in there, it has a connection to who they are as a people” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

There is sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to allow for the provision and adaptation of material to fit local cultural norms. Courses like Gonaewo and Tłı̄ch̄q Beading can be taken as electives. However, beyond these unspecified or elective credits, there is real inflexibility regarding the required courses for high school graduation at CJBS. Some of the required courses can be significant barriers for Tłı̄ch̄q students. For example, grade 12 English, including an Alberta diploma exam, is a graduation requirement. As presented in chapter five, the average grade 12 English final mark for graduates of CJBS was 57.2% and the most commonly achieved mark was 50%. The highest grade 12 English mark ever obtained by a graduate of CJBS was 77%. Many CJBS students take grade 12 English more than once before finding success, and some are never able to pass the course and are thus not able to obtain their diploma. In a review of the

cumulative files for the students in the grade ten cohort, results from standardised language tests, such as the Stanford Diagnostic and the Gates and Brigrance Screening tests, indicate that many students were working at language levels below, and in some cases, very far below, grade level. At the same time as CJBS educators are being faced with low English language skills among their students, the course requirements as outlined in the Alberta curriculum are becoming more challenging:

*“Over the past ten years there have been some significant changes in the curricula that Alberta and the NWT have offered in, in particular, English Language Arts and Math....more skills [are required] in a particular grade level or course and that needs to be done in the same amount of time; there is more packed in” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In reaction to this, and in an attempt to support student engagement, the school infuses flexibility into its course offerings. For example, some courses are offered over more than one semester and students are given more time in the classroom:

*“Our time table I believe reflects and changes every year and changes even from semester to semester to try and better meet the needs of our students. So we offer courses over a longer period of time, it could be year long- instead of offering it for 6 hours a week we offer it for 9 hours a week or 12 hours a week” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

### 10.1.2 Inclusive Schooling and Social Progression

Inclusive schooling and social progression are educational policies in the NWT that have a distinct influence on educational engagement. As outlined in chapter five, the NWT policy of inclusive schooling (established in 1993) is defined as:

“A philosophical and practical educational approach, which strives to respond to individual student needs, and is intended to ensure equal access for all students to educational programs offered in regular classroom settings. It is mandatory within the NWT school system...[It is] characterized by equal access, this means the right of all students to participate in educational programs offered in regular classroom settings with their age peers. It is also characterized by an approach to schooling, which builds on student strengths and responds to student needs (meaning diverse educational strategies, as well as provision of services such as additional support personnel, transportation, specialized equipment etc). This

approach may also involve the development of individual education plans (IEPs)” (Department of Education 1993b, p.6-7, secondary source).

When the policy states “classroom settings with their aged peers” this refers to the practice of social progression. Students at elementary and junior high school levels are progressed based on age and not on the completion of curriculum outcomes. As a result of inclusive schooling and social progression, CJBS classrooms are made up of students with a very wide range of academic skills and abilities. Teachers are responsible for finding ways to adapt lessons and activities so that they meet the needs of each student. One teacher reflects on this challenge:

*“Well my first year here I had a grade 7 class, and it was actually quite challenging because most of the students would have failed academically and I actually had kindergarten to grade 6 reading abilities within that grade 7 class” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

The policies of inclusive schooling and social progression indicate that within the NWT school system, participation is highly valued and it is not to be jeopardized, even at the expense of academic standards. The system reflects a belief that students will perform best in groups of same *aged* peers and not necessarily same *ability* peers. Results from this study support the idea that social progression and inclusive classrooms do have a positive influence on engagement at the lower grades. Students are very sensitive and cognisant of their age in relation to other students and this has an influence on their comfort level at school. However, what becomes an issue is that all students at age 15 and 16 arrive at grade ten at the same time regardless of curriculum milestones met and this leads to significant problems for many students since they have to meet high school curriculum requirements in order to obtain their diploma. In high school, students move up the grades based upon the completion of certain credits and not by age:

*“The Inclusive Schooling Act...actually works fairly well until Junior High but when they go to high school things fall apart. Like there are some students in grade 8 now that read at a grade 2-3 level and according to best guesses or professional guesses, myself and another reading teacher feel that they will plateau at a reading level of 3-4. So they are going to struggle through high school. There comes a point where I feel, unless you reach a 5-6 reading level, it is a miracle to pass high school” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

### 10.1.3 Discipline Policies

Section 22 of the NWT Education Act outlines the responsibilities students have at school. A student must:

- (a) conduct him or herself responsibly while on school premises;
- (b) comply with the school rules and the code of conduct for students;
- (c) co-operate with the principal, teachers and all persons authorized by the District Education Authority to provide school programs and other services;
- (d) be respectful of the cultural, spiritual or religious values or beliefs of others while on school premises;
- (e) be respectful of the person and of the property of others while on school premises; and
- (f) participate in the education program and make his or her best effort to learn.

Mark is a grade 10 student at CJBS<sup>19</sup>. During the 2004-2005 school year, he was suspended for seven school days for verbally abusing a teacher and for refusing to cooperate in the classroom. He had received three discipline referrals to the office in one day from three different teachers. The school principal contacted his mother immediately. Following his suspension, Mark spent a week in the bush with his grandfather. He was referred to counselling and treatment for alcohol addiction. While he expressed an interest in getting treatment, his battle with alcoholism is on-going. Maureen is another high school student at CJBS. She was suspended for three school days for being blatantly defiant in her classes. She was referred to counselling for anger management issues. Anthony was suspended for five days for refusing to cooperate in class and complete his work. This was a pattern that had been going-on for several years. According to the Education Act (section 35) a principal can suspend a student from school for:

- (a) persistent opposition to authority;
- (b) habitual neglect of his or her responsibilities under the Education Act;
- (c) the intentional damage or destruction of school property;
- (d) the use of profane or abusive language;
- (e) consuming or being under the influence of alcohol or non-medicinal drugs on school premises; or

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<sup>19</sup> A reminder that pseudonyms are used throughout the dissertation. Details represent composite sketches taken from discipline records at the school.

(f) conduct that, in the opinion of the principal, (i) interferes with the work of other students or school staff, (ii) is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of other students or school staff, or (iii) creates a situation that constitutes a seriously harmful influence on other students or school staff (Education Act, Part 35).

There is a significant amount of judgment that needs to be used by school administrators when applying the Act in practice. The school has a certain level of practical autonomy and its discipline practices are a result of a combination of formal and informal policies:

*“We have done a lot of our own setting standards here and a lot of it is informal, it is not written and it is passed down, funny enough when I think about it, orally. It is passed down from one teacher to the next or from one administrative group to another administrative group and I think that some of the standards, the standards that we have here at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, for academics, for behaviour, may not be congruent with other schools are doing in the region and not even congruent with what the Board policies are and/or the direction the Board is even seeking in some ways” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“Not all policy written in stone, it can be wishy-washy, it is all dependent on whether we are going to push it, or remember to look into it, you know? Some standards are initiated and/or established by the DCSB. I think though the majority, in all honesty, are established by our own staff here” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

CJBS has been described as very independent and indeed as being rogue:

*But the reality is that I see [CJBS] as a rogue because [it] doesn't work in a larger system, [it] works very independently. And there are times when that is a good thing and a bad thing depending on the systems” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

School administrators influence school engagement directly because they make ultimate decisions about students who have to be asked to leave the school (suspensions and expulsions) and they also have one-on-one meetings with high school students as they register for their classes each semester. One Administrator talks about the experience of meeting with students who want to come back to school after a period of time away.

*“I think for them, the biggest obstacle is the administrative staff, because we are the first people that they come to see. A lot of them don’t want to have the conversation, why are you here? They don’t want to have that conversation... because we have known them for years and years most of these people. They know we are going to ask, what is going to be different this semester? What is your plan or goal? How can we help you with your plan or goal? They are going to have to have that conversation with us” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

This administrator goes on to note, that for the students who do take the step and have a meeting about registering again, this is a baseline for any judgements on their commitment to attend school. If they can undertake the ‘entry’ interview, it is a big step and a significant symbol. When asked whether the school also facilitated ‘exit’ interviews for those students who leave school, the administrator said that they try but often the students stop coming gradually and it is not an acute occurrence that causes them to leave. In either case, teachers are encouraged to stay in close contact with parents and guardians and follow-up on students who start missing school. However, reality dictates that finding out exactly why students leave school and having a discussion with them about this at that time is not always possible.

The Education Act states that the District Education Authority (in the case of Behchokō the DCSB or TCSA) is responsible for establishing a more specific discipline policy. CJBS uses Effective Behaviour Support (EBS) to help standardise discipline practices and communicate uniform messages about behaviour expectations at school. EBS is a process of standardising discipline that is coordinated by a school-based team. Although there are base documents and uniform messages as part of EBS, specific forms and practices are tailored to a school’s unique needs. For example, the EBS discipline referral form for CJBS lists the following as problem behaviours:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Fighting/violence             | Plagiarism                                 |
| Threats                       | Being absent without leave on school trips |
| Verbal abuse towards teachers | Chronic lateness                           |
| Blatant defiance              | Skipping classes                           |
| Bullying                      | Theft                                      |
| Drugs/Alcohol                 | Dangerous behaviour                        |
| Vandalism                     |  |

Sexual behaviour  
Weapons  
Serious harassment

Inappropriate use of matches/lighters  
Viewing inappropriate Internet sites

The form lists possible motivations (with an area for staff members to tick and then comment) as trying to obtain or avoid attention from adults or peers, being distraught, trying to obtain something or trying to avoid specific tasks or activities.

The way student Tłıchǫ misbehaviour is defined and dealt with has distinct implication for the engagement of Tłıchǫ youth, particularly among those who may have behavioural issues. The administration of the school wants to maintain high standards of behaviour and have to decide where lines will be drawn. Some students fall on the wrong side of the line and are asked to leave. For some, this decision making process is not objective or standardized enough. The school review of 2004-2005 recommended that, “the school, as soon as possible, explain the progressive discipline policy to students, parents and the community, and annually thereafter (Dogrib Community Services Board 2004, p.30). The need for better communication and a shared interpretation of school discipline as guided by the Education Act has created tension. The tension results in a palpable distance between the school and the student needing disciplinary action and their family. It also contributes to a tension between the school and the RECSA and the TCSA. Community members do not always chose to communicate their concerns or disagreements:

*“[Some people] won’t say what they really want to say. I know one member of the CSA, she told me on a weekly bases all the trials and tribulations of the school and all the kids that were getting kicked out and the deep concern of the parents and people about these kids that were getting kicked out. And so why aren’t you guys doing something? ...Nothing ever happened and I have attended a couple meetings and that person, they never speak out” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

A number of people interviewed for this study talked about the difference between what is supposed to happen in relation to school and education policy, and what actually happens. When asked how the school is regulated, an administrator remarks:

*“I think there is a systems answer and then I think there is a practical answer about what really happens on the ground... As a system answer the school is no different than a school anywhere else in the country. You have a Ministry of Education or a Department of Education and a Government that develops an Education Act that sets out of the school system and what the roles are of each of the players and so on. And provides a type of framework. And then you have a Department that interprets that Act and sets up, the Act sets out the authority for the Board ...that sets out directives on various parts of the school system, things like inclusive schooling or student discipline or language and culture and so on in secondary schools...There is supposed to be a systems connection right through but the reality in the north is that mountains are high and the Emperor is far away” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The mountains are high and the Emperor is far away; CJBS is in an isolated position, geographically and theoretically, from the key governing or authoritative bodies and because of this, there is limited surveillance of the activities that happen at the school on a daily basis. Instead of school practice being directed by firmly enforced school policy that is grounded in a singular, approved interpretation of the Education Act, it is often directed by strong people, albeit with the best intentions of youth at heart, who interpret policy in a particular way and who speak, and act, out or make sure others do so.

The administrative team of any school has the task of setting the tone, the direction and the ethos of the school and making sure it functions smoothly. At CJBS and the TCSA, they have a strong team of administrators who are held in high esteem:

*“The staff holds the leadership team in very high regard. The administration is going way beyond the call of duty. Parents also have good support for the leadership of the school (GNWT Official, public presentation, primary source).*

Individuals interviewed for this study, however, indicated that there has been tension between the school representatives and some Tłı̨ch̨̨ families in Behchok̨̨ around the role of the school in disciplining children.

*“I find overall that it has been my experience that 95% of the parents are absolutely against suspensions, they do not want their child to be suspended*

*period. And they don't like the idea of their child not being allowed to come to school for any kind of extended period of time" (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

A school administrator recalled a time recently when a parent, very upset by her child's recent school suspension, came to the school and raised her voice angrily in the front office. Other parents have complained to the CSA when their sons or daughters are suspended or have their extra-curricular privileges revoked. In contrast to this, however, there are parents who are happy for the discipline undertaken by the school. In these cases, the school acts as the 'heavy' when behaviour gets out of control. A few years ago Behchok̄ had a community curfew. On weeknights at 10:00 pm, a siren was blown and all young people had to be off the streets or the RCMP could pick them up. One Administrator remembers:

*"And all the parents liked [the curfew] because they could say, well we have no choice, you'll get picked up by the cops if you are out, so you'd better come home" (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

These kinds of imposed rules have been useful for some in the past to keep young people on a positive track. Over fifteen years ago, Barnaby and colleagues (1991) noted that, "According to [the elders'] analysis, nobody wants to accept responsibility for disciplining Dene children; the school assumes that it is the parents' responsibility, and vice versa. Consequently, a social vacuum is created, and the children behave as they wish" (p.104). Today this is still the case with some families but, there has been progress towards understanding, communication and a partnership between the school and parents with respect to student discipline. This work is ongoing.

#### Post-Secondary and Employment Influences on School Engagement

Government and community entities such as the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the DCSB and the RECSA are authority activity settings that have formal policies that influence practices at CJBS and in turn influence student engagement. Historical practices and particular individuals also influence the development and

implementation of informal and formal policies that also impact student engagement. In addition to these actors, employers in the region and post secondary institutions that Tłı̄ch̄Q students might attend also exert some authority over the school.

Currently in the NWT, there is, “a big push that for the trades, [students] have to have academic courses” (Administrator, interview). CJBS has altered its programming to align better with postsecondary requirements since the beginning of their high school offerings in the early 1990s. Not only does the school offer sufficient and the appropriate courses for students to obtain a high school diploma in the NWT, they also offer courses so that students will be able to get the prerequisites needed for admission to post secondary training if they desire. The standards and expectations for entrance to postsecondary institutions end up, therefore, partially dictating the courses that will be offered at CJBS. They also influence how students are taught and to what standard, since post secondary education is a goal of many students and in general of the school. Meeting prerequisite standards and being prepared academically for post secondary education is a significant challenge for many Tłı̄ch̄Q students and for CJBS overall. Admission standards are getting tougher:

*“Post secondary training whether it be trades, college and university if you are looking at their entrance requirements, they are becoming tougher and tougher and tougher. And over the past ten years there have been some significant changes in the curricula that Alberta and the NWT have offered in particular, English Language Arts and Math...that has had a huge impact on our school too. And it has also [reduced]the number of Dogrib students either from our school or from the region who have gone on to post-secondary programs” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“The requirements to get into programs that are needed for example in the health field, social services, or education, the standards ...their entrance requirements, they are becoming tougher and tougher... Math 30 is becoming a pre-requisite for everything from hairdressing at SAIT in Calgary to a cooking program at NAIT, to auto mechanics to you name it” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

Curriculum expectations and standards for entrance into postsecondary programs can act as motivators and common goals for students, parents and school personnel. In cases where standards and expectations are too far out of reach, however, they serve to

discourage and deflate students who may feel they have very few options after completing high school. At present, some students return to CJBS after graduating to upgrade their marks, and there are some who are already succeeding in postsecondary courses with the level of training they receive, but these students are in the minority.

A second influence on schools and students that is particularly evident in the NWT is that of the workforce and of employers. This influence will be explained further, in relation to the diamond mine industry, in chapter 11. Hiring practices of employers in the region do have an impact on how students are trained/educated at high school and for how long:

*“The school does about one trip a year to the mine, it is an encouragement to finish grade 12. The mine offered a trip by plane for a day for a few years, there was a tour of the mine. There are different jobs in the mine. The reps ask them what they want to do and explain to them what they need. That grade 12 is better than grade 10, that they pretty much need their grade 12 for anything now. Right now they do hire grade 10s or lower because of the IBA [impact and benefit agreement] but they need training. The training happens at the mine, in the evening” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

CJBS has recently begun a regional Tłı̄ch̄ǫ Trades and Technology program, for example, that is in place to help students prepare for meaningful employment positions within companies participating in the current economic landscape of modern day NWT.

## Chapter Summary

The main points of this chapter can be summarized as follows:

1. The variety of courses, and the cultural programming, offered at CJBS act to positively influence engagement;
2. The school takes advantage of allowed flexibility in the delivery of courses (flexible deadlines, hours of instruction, duration of courses and so on), which positive influence school engagement;

3. There is significant inflexibility in the graduation requirements for Tłıchǫ youth and this can be a significant barrier to engagement for some students, particularly in relation to grade 12 English and the Alberta diploma exams;
4. The policies of inclusive schooling and social progression work to enhance engagement at earlier grades but result in some students arriving at grade ten without the appropriate academic preparation and in this sense they are being set-up to fail;
5. Discipline policies and practices have a direct impact on school engagement;
6. There is significant room for judgement in decision-making at CJBS and for this reason, the school administration have key roles in policy development, uptake and implementation and thus in supporting, or eroding, school engagement;
7. Policies are not always interpreted in the same way by students, parents or other community members and by school staff, school administration and government representatives;
8. The school has significant practical autonomy;
9. Standards, expectations and requirements of post-secondary institutions and employers have an influence on courses offered at school and on course content and this has an impact on school engagement among Tłıchǫ youth.

## Chapter 11: RESULTS 6 – DIAMOND MINING AND TLİCHŦ STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

Diamond mining has come into a boom period in the Northwest Territories during the past ten years. This is a new industry in the region. The diamond mines exist as resource activity settings in the school's larger context. The impacts of the diamond mining industry on TłıchŦ citizens are complex and diverse and they cannot be entirely disentangled from the impacts or influences from other sources. However, it is clear that there are already changes occurring as a result of diamond mining in the region and that it is an important influence to examine when asking - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* With respect to the recent boom in resource development (particularly diamonds), one administrator notes:

*“Resource development has been so dramatic, if you have come in the last 5 years you wouldn't even be able to recognize. It is really unbelievable. The greatest land staking rush in Canada's history. The diamonds – those have significant impact, some would say negative, some would say somewhere in the middle and others would say very positive impacts.” (Administrator, public presentation, primary source).*

Interviews, focus groups, notes from the field and school, community and government documents brought out five themes related to the interplay between diamond mining and the lives and educational pathways of TłıchŦ youth. First they reveal an increase in transience of the population in the region, which is having an impact on the home-lives of youth and their relationship with school. Second, the data indicates that the mine is a significant community resource but also that there is inherent inequity in the benefits of mining, between men and women especially, at the community level. The data also indicates that the existence of the mine favours one particular school of thought, over others, regarding the value and purpose of schooling. Finally, the mines seem to be

having an impact on the way people view themselves and the futures of their communities in the north.

## Five Ways that the Diamond Mine Industry is Influencing Tłı̨cẖ Youth

### 11.1.1 Increase in Transience of the Population

The mine requires most workers to be on two-week rotational shifts. This means that workers are ‘in-camp’ for fourteen days typically working twelve-hour shifts, and then are out of camp for fourteen days. With more members of the community working, there is also more discretionary income for vehicles and for travelling and this also increases their transience.

*“[There is a] more transient population now, working at the mine, having more money to travel. People moving around even in small remote communities” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

*“...they are away from the homes for two weeks yeah, but now days it is consuming eh? It’s Walmart, its Extra Foods, it’s Edmonton. They go to Edmonton, they just pick up and go to Edmonton...every weekend” (Elder, interview, primary source).*

The two week schedule and the increase in financial resources have led to a number of changes at the family and community level that have an impact on the lives of youth. Most notably, there is an overall decreased presence of adults in the home leading to inconsistent parenting in some families. The mine is certainly not the only factor affecting the presence or absence of adults in the home, but it is a contributing factor; not all children are getting the supervision and support they need from adults:

*“...the kids really run the show. I think that there is more money in town, because of the mine but now parents are hardly ever at home... They have replaced parenting and guidance and caring with money (Elder, interview, primary source).*

*“It really comes from the family, there is a lack of guidance. Some of the kids are really raising themselves” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Traditionally, it was not uncommon for parents to give one or more of their children to a grandparent to be raised. It is not uncommon for young people to be living with, or raised by, their grandparents. The presence of the mine has contributed to this kind of practice and to the inter-generational mixing of children and grandparents. As mentioned previously in this dissertation, grandparents were generally still living on the land when they were young people, some went to residential school for a few years but many have very limited experience with formal education or a true understanding of what it is like to be a young person today. In many cases, grandparents are farther removed from the current educational system than those of younger generations. They are also more likely to speak their traditional language than the parent generation. Grandparents may be less able to empathise and connect with their grandchild as a young person and student. Their ability to assist with homework or their ability to communicate with the school about the student's work and progress may be limited.

*“[We] will bemoan, oh we can't get the parents to come to the school and so on, and well of course they don't because their parents before them didn't care for school and had really negative experiences with school so they don't feel comfortable coming.” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

Health care workers in the region brought up one further point about the impacts of mining on the communities. They commented that with the increase in transience, there appears to be an associated increase in street drugs use and in the incidence of sexually transmitted disease among the population. Health care workers reported that rates of STIs among youth in the community have also risen.

#### 11.1.2 Diamond Mines as a Community Resource

The diamond mines exist as significant resource settings for communities in the region. The mines provide financial resources for school activities by way of transfers from IBA (impact and benefit agreement) negotiated benefits and through direct funding in response to proposals and applications (third party funding):

*“We also get [money] from the Band through the [IBA] money that the community is given from the mine” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

*“The proposal [money] is all bonus- that is all extra. Yes it helps to pay for [the instructor’s] salary, it helps to pay for equipment. Like two years ago, ...we got brand new skidoos... we were able to buy gear for the students” (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

In addition to financial resources, the mine also provides, or makes available, non-financial resources. For example, mining representatives visit schools to teach students about the industry, mining companies offer mine tours for local people and the mine provides educational resources about the industry for use in the community:

*“Sometimes the mine, and other companies, they come and they have meetings...they come to our school to sometimes explain to students... what their job is and what they do” (School staff, interview, primary source).*

A high school in the region has a small greenhouse funded by a diamond mine company. One of the mines provided mineral samples and geological maps for teaching purposes.

In the summer of 2005, a regional trades and technology training centre was established to facilitate modular courses for training local people in essential job related skills, particularly those applicable in the mining industry. The program was partially funded by a grant from the Mining Skills Development Strategy of the federal government and partially through a large donation from local diamond mines. This action further supports the conclusion that diamond mining exists as a significant resource in the north that is having an impact on the focus and purpose of schooling and the potential educational and employment pathways of young people in the region. By locating the centre within the region, geographic barriers that have previously prevented local people from training have been greatly reduced.

### 11.1.3 All Benefits from Diamond Mining are not Equal

The third theme brought out in the data is that there is unequal participation of men and women in work at the mine. Employment at the mine is essentially broken into three types. First, the professional work that is done by highly trained staff such as mining engineers and trades people. Next there are manual labour positions and positions that require less training such as driving a truck or unloading vehicles when materials are delivered to the mine by road. The third kind of jobs that are available are those which support the function of the setting such as catering and housekeeping. Most commonly local young men (some with less than a grade 12 education) work as labourers at the mine while local young women, if they choose to work at the mine, do the catering, housekeeping and administrative support tasks.

Men now have the opportunity to become significant breadwinners for their families and this is an important change because it has not historically always been the case. Women more commonly stay at home to care for their families. The two-week shift rotation at the mine is very difficult to manage for those who have dependents at home. Women who choose to work outside the home tend to take other employment positions, especially community-based service and retail positions. Women have higher high school completion, participation in higher education and labour market participation rates than men in the region. But, these trends do not correspond with the types of jobs women are doing:

*“Educational completion rates and labour market participation rates for women are higher, but this is not reflected in the type of employment they get” (NWT Government Representative, interview, primary source).*

### 11.1.4 Supporting One View of Schooling

The mines, and the change in the local labour market, have had some impact on the focus and purpose of schooling in neighbouring communities like Behchok̄ō. For example, mining careers are featured at school events:

*Person 1: “Career days... used to have a nursing booth, but now it’s just the mine, the mine had a laser light show!”. Person 2: “Yes, the mine is luring them away from professional fields like nursing and teaching, those that could be sustainable...the mine should not be the end goal of education” (Health worker, focus group, primary source).*

The overall increase in employment opportunities in the region has put pressure on schools to offer programs to help ensure that local young people can take advantage of the strong labour market. The school is very focused on preparing students for higher-education (in hopes that they will move on to gainful employment); that is, college, trades apprenticeship and, more recently, university:

*“There is much more emphasis...in the trades, and there is a big push in the trades that they have to have academic... in English, in Math and often in one or two of the Sciences and Social Studies. [The] school is preparing for that...it is a slow progress, but we need to be a school that offers both routes, not only to be able to get a regular high school diploma for a college level, entry course. But, we also need to be able to offer a wide variety of Science, Math and English Language Arts classes [for trades and University]”. (Administrator, interview, primary source).*

The purpose for schooling in this context is largely career preparation. It is generally recognized that there are jobs available, particularly in the resource development industry and thus, the mine is highlighted as a desirable option for young people.

*“Mining is a solution, [a] good wage and security”. (Elder, interview, primary source).*

School is highly valued, but it appears to be valued as a means to an end more so than an end in itself.

*“That’s why they have got to try hard and finish their high school. I mean it for their own good, if they made it, their grade 12, you don’t have to worry about a thing. You are going to make good money, your are going to get a good house, you are going to have a good vehicle..., they might be Chief, they might be a game warden, they might be a lawyer. We don’t know, whatever they want. (Elder, public presentation, primary source).*

### 11.1.5 Supporting a Positive Vision of the Community and Its Future

*“Yes, I see a lot of people drinking in Rae or Edzo. It makes our community look really bad when we have visitors. I wonder what they think about us?” (youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p.12, secondary source).*

Diamond mining in northern Canada seems to be having an impact on the way people in the region view themselves and the future of their communities. In response to the question, what do you think will happen when the mines close down, one youth in a focus group responded:

*“Maybe we will all be poor again”. (Youth, focus group, primary source).*

This reflects an undertone of oppression and marginalisation. At the same focus group however, another young person responds:

*“Maybe they will find gold under those diamonds”. (Youth, focus group, primary source).*

Diamond mining, with its bolstered labour market and local economy, is coupled with governance changes in the region and this has been a powerful combination to shift perceptions about the current and future situation of these communities. When another interviewee was asked what he thought might happen after the mines closed, he said that developing the human resource through training and opportunity to work was the most important thing. He felt that people from the region could travel by plane to other areas of Canada to work after the mines closed. They could be in northern Alberta in two hours, for example, and there would be work there. Once people got used to the two-week rotations and a long-distance commute, he felt it would not really matter where they went to work. His was an optimistic, long-term vision; a vision that spoke of hope and potential. Thus far, there is a sense that diamond mining has impacted local communities by way of an increase in employment opportunities and influx of financial resources. This is particularly the case in communities who successfully negotiated IBAs with mine developers. Table 9.1 outlines the positive and negative influences of diamond mining thus far on youth in Behchok̄.

Summary of Impacts of Diamond Mining on Youth in Behchokō

**Table 9.1: Summary of Impacts of Diamond Mining on Youth in Behchokō**

<b>Generally Negative Impacts</b>	<b>Generally Positive Impacts</b>
Increase in transience of the population, leads to an even further decrease of adult figures in the home. Youth more autonomous less supervised.	Increase in monetary income through wage employment contributes to factors like appropriate housing and adequate food.
Increase in discretionary income for some is negative (spending on travelling to large centres, gambling, alcohol and drug addictions). Money replacing appropriate parenting.	Increase in discretionary income is positive for some (reduced stress levels, better nutrition, higher participation in community and extra-curricular events etc).
Some youth leaving school to work.	Training and other educational programs (increasing community and individual capacity).
Inequitable distribution of resources in the community (creating haves and have-nots).	Influx of financial resources into the community, for example: a) scholarship program from IBA transfers b) programs and services as response to proposals to mines
Focus of schooling as career preparation (especially in mining and trades) may leave out other program focal points like the arts (or the inherent importance of being educated).	School programs and focus in trades/career preparation beneficial for those who would like to work in these areas. Spin-off benefits for workers in general.
Increase in transience of the population is associated with an increase in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.	The male/female wage earner dynamic supports young males able to be breadwinners and females / youth being given opportunities to work in the community.
	Positively impacting the community narrative about its own situation (the glass is half full). Positive international attention around diamond mining.
	Other resources made available in the community, i.e. teaching packages, tours of the mines, public talks and career days etc.
	More positive adult role models (workers, those taking on extra family responsibilities etc)
	The inherent individual and collective benefits of community members being employed (self-esteem, confidence, pride etc)
	An opportunity for youth to learn more about industry, economics, politics etc.

## Chapter 12: OVERALL DISCUSSION

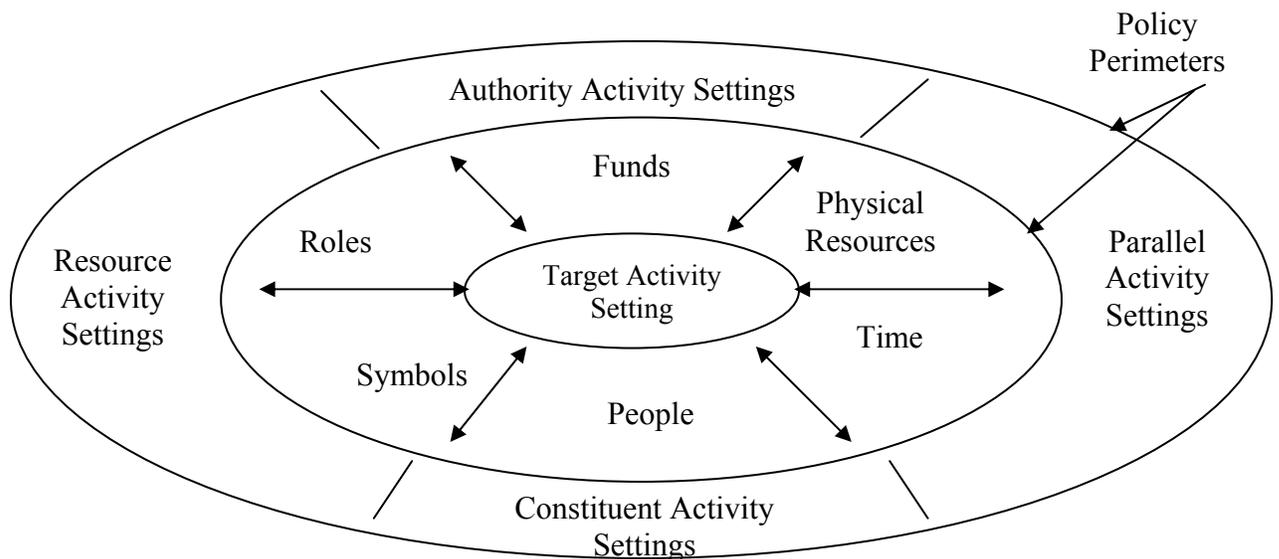
### Introduction

The main research question for this ethnographic study was – *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* This was made more specific for the community in which the study became focused by asking – How does Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, create or erode school engagement among Tłı̄ch̄Q youth in Behchok̄, NWT? Sub-questions for the study included:

- a) What are the key features of the activity setting and larger context of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School?
- b) What is school engagement in this context?
- c) Using the activity setting in context model, what can we learn about factors that are associated with the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth?

The candidate spent six months in residence in the Tłı̄ch̄Q community of Behchok̄, NWT. She maintained participant observation field notes, undertook interviews and focus groups, completed a retrospective cohort study of a previous grade ten class, collected local documents and undertook a photovoice project with students at CJBS. The qualitative data were analysed using a style of constant comparison coding similar to that outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics, relative risk and logistic regression calculations. The study was underpinned by three theoretical assumptions: first, a recognition of the link between education and health; second, an understanding that social injustice and unequal power structures can negatively influence health and education outcomes especially in Aboriginal populations; and third, a recognition that the activity structure of everyday life can help us examine and understand the culture, behaviours and beliefs of specific populations and communities. An activity settings model put forward by O'Donnell, Tharp, and Wilson (1993). The model (figure 12.1) places the target setting,

Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, in two distinct spheres. The inside sphere includes those factors associated with the immediate setting: people; positions; the physical environment; time; funds and symbols. The outside sphere relates to the larger context and to the relationship between the school and other activity settings.



**Figure 12.1: The Target Activity Setting in Context (O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson 1993)**

This model guided data collection, data analysis, the presentation of results and the overall outcomes. Essentially, “activity settings provid[ed] an analytic template which when laid over the raw stuff of events and activities, help[ed] guide, and help[ed] us describe, our observations in culturally meaningful ways (O'Donnell & Tharp 1990).

The results of the study were presented in six chapters. The first, chapter six, provided evidence for a model of Tłıchǫ student engagement and demonstrated the specific ways in which Tłıchǫ people define school engagement. Chapters seven and eight provided results relating to the influence of features in the school’s physical and social environments. These chapters relate mainly to features of the inside sphere of the activity settings model. Chapters nine through eleven were a presentation of data relating to the influence of features in the external sphere, or the school’s macro environment. Parallel and constituent settings that either support or compete with the

school setting were discussed in chapter nine followed by a chapter on the influence of policy and relationships of authority on school engagement patterns among Tłı̨ch̨ youth. The final results chapter was an examination of the diamond mining and Tłı̨ch̨ youth. The discussion begins with a discussion of the “WHAT”. What is school engagement among Tłı̨ch̨ youth and what is unique, or not unique, about engagement in this context? A model for Tłı̨ch̨ student engagement is proposed. Next the discussion moves to the “HOW”. How do influences from the setting and context act on youth to create or erode school engagement? A table summarizing insights garnered from chapters 7-11 is provided. When the six results chapters are viewed in entirety, there are a number of common and repeating themes that represent a distillation of the evidence into key insights. The overall discussion of these key insights is structured as follows. The discussion begins with the idea that the school is like a lifeboat and faces the challenge of keeping all students aboard. Next, the difference between home and school activity settings and the resource-stressor dynamic experienced by Tłı̨ch̨ youth will be discussed. Finally, insights related to how macro-environmental change influences social scripts and community narratives will be explained. After a presentation of these key insights, the chapter moves into a reflection on how activity settings theory and ethnographic methodology facilitated the study, and on what the key contributions and drawbacks of these methodological approaches were. The chapter closes with a presentation of the main contributions and limitations of the work as a whole.

The WHAT: What is Tłı̨ch̨ School Engagement and What Makes it Unique?

### 12.1.1 A Model of Tłı̨ch̨ Student Engagement

Figure 12.2 is a model of Tłı̨ch̨ school engagement integrating key findings presented in chapter six of this dissertation. The Tłı̨ch̨ student, represented in the shaded circle, is the central component in the model. Each individual student has particular personal characteristics and immediate influences in their lives such as family members and friends.

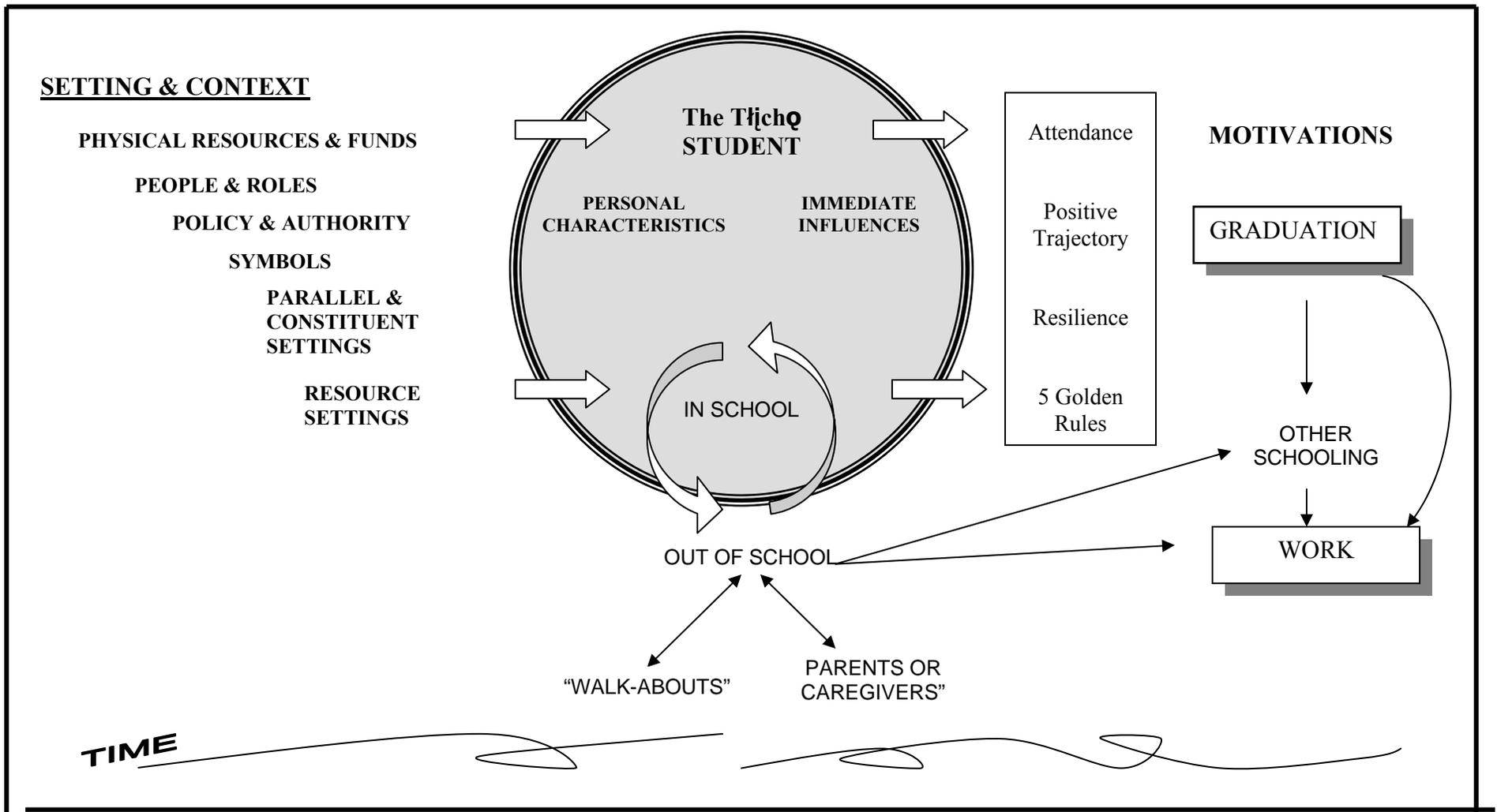


Figure 12.2: Model of Tlichø School Engagement

The student can be in school or out of school and this relationship is commonly a revolving one. Students who are out of school may be at home as parents or care givers (for their own children or other family members) or might be “walkabouts”, a local term used for those not working, parenting or going to school. Students out of school may return at any time. Tłıchǫ students are largely motivated by plans to graduate from high school and/or get work. Some students chose to take the route from school directly to work before graduating (either out of choice or necessity) while others finish high school and may either go on to further schooling and then work, or go on to work right away. Students who are engaged are viewed as successful, and success and engagement are on a continuum and are associated with attendance at school, being on a positive trajectory, being well behaved by abiding by the five golden rules of life and/or being resilient. These conceptualizations of engagement are condoned and propagated through scripts for social conduct and through community narratives. These concepts are described in the following sub-section. Time in the model is not depicted as running from point A to point B in a straight, continuous line because the data from this study indicates that Tłıchǫ students often take longer to complete high school, may have a number of schooling sessions with starting and stopping occurring at various intervals and may have to repeat parts of their schooling or spend times in a non-progressive state. Features in the school setting and larger context influence the motivations, the educational pathways and the school and work outcomes of Tłıchǫ students. There are various components of influence: physical resources, funds, time, symbols, people, roles as well as resource, parallel and constituent activity settings in the larger context. As mentioned in chapter six, this conceptualization of engagement differs from that of other studies (for example Alberta Learning 2003; Audas & Willms 2001) which focus on participation and an alignment of values.

### 12.1.2 Applying the Model

To demonstrate the applicability of the model, let us return to the fictional Tłı̄ch̄Q students in the smoking area from chapter six<sup>20</sup> and learn more about how their high school experiences might have progressed. In grade ten, Amy was new to Behchok̄ō, she was originally from an outlying Tłı̄ch̄Q community and stayed with a host family in Rae who she did not always get along with. Amy was doing well in school; she was working hard in her classes and was motivated to succeed academically. She almost always stayed after school to study or finish her homework in the library. After school one day, at the beginning of grade eleven, she met a fellow student named Curtis. He was in grade eleven as well but was older than Amy. He was staying after school because he played on the volleyball team and they were having a practice. Amy and Curtis started seeing each other outside of school. After a party one Saturday evening, when Curtis' parents were out of the house and the two of them were drunk, Curtis and Amy had unprotected sex. Amy became pregnant; she was sixteen. Because Amy's family was in another community, she went back home during her pregnancy and to raise the baby. She left high school in grade eleven but hoped that someday she would be able to return. Currently though, because there is no high school in her own community, and she is not able to support herself and her child alone in Rae, she does not know when that might become possible. Curtis is still in contact with her but she doesn't think they will end up being together in the long term. Amy is disengaged from school because she is no longer attending, but she still has an interest in school and intends to return. She is a young person who follows school rules and still has the motivation and potential opportunity to exhibit a positive trajectory and resilience. In these respects, she is still partially engaged in school, this highlights the fact that engagement is a continuum. Amy is a Tłı̄ch̄Q student (the shaded circle in the model) who has particular personal characteristics and immediate influences. Her school engagement was influenced by the fact that CJBS was not in her home community and this had an impact on supervision, relationship to authority and to the resources of her

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<sup>20</sup> A reminder that these are composite characters who do not represent actual persons. A description of the methods used for constructing composite characters is provided in chapter three.

home and family. She was influenced by new peers (people) and by normative early sexual activity and teen parenting in Tłıcẖ communities (roles and scripts for normative interaction). She left school because she became pregnant and had to raise a child. Amy is now out of school and is at home as a parent, but she is motivated to return to school somehow in the future.

The next student was Jordan; he had had some behavioural problems in the past and was no stranger to suspensions and detentions. When we met him, he had stuck it out at CJBS for four weeks of the first semester. He really wanted school to be different this year. But, unlike Amy, Jordan did not have the academic skills needed to succeed at high school. He is reading at a grade three level and has never had sufficient extra help. Throughout the years he was progressed by his age and he continued to get further and further behind. His academic frustration manifested itself in bad behaviour which itself became a barrier to his learning. Jordan didn't make it through that first semester. He is at home now in Rae not doing much. He is frustrated and doesn't know if he'll try to start school again next year. He thinks maybe he'll find work on a local construction crew when the weather is good. Jordan is a Tłıcẖ student (the shaded circle in the model) who had particular personal characteristics, including his reading level and short temper, and immediate influences that influenced his school success. He lives with his grandparents and because they never attended school, and speak mainly Dogrib, they can only offer limited support to him in relation to formal schooling. Jordan's engagement was influenced by this lack of home *resource*, and by the *people* in his life and the *roles* they are able to take. Jordan was also fit into the role of a "trouble maker" and he found this role hard to break away from. Jordan is disengaged from school; he is frustrated and currently not academically able to succeed at high school. There is a lack of options for him in Behchoḵ. Jordan will try to find an alternative path, perhaps one of employment in the construction or industrial sector. It is hoped that Jordan will not find a path towards negative behaviours such as alcohol, drugs or gambling.

Darryl was the third student we saw that day in the smoking area at CJBS. He is the oldest of the three and a cousin to Jordan. Darryl was already a father and was

motivated to complete his grade eleven courses so that he could take the trades exam, get trained in a trade and get employment as soon as possible. He wanted to be able to support his son and girlfriend. Darryl made it through that first year; it was difficult but he sought help from a few teachers at the school who gave him significant support. These teachers also persuaded Darryl not to take the trades exam after grade eleven, but instead to go on to grade twelve and obtain his high school diploma. Although he had to take grade twelve English two times, Darryl did eventually finish his required courses and proudly graduated from CJBS. Today he is training to be a heavy machine operator at a local college. With wages from his part-time work, he has been able to rent a small place for his girlfriend and child and he hopes someday that he will be able to have his own house in Rae. Darryl had significant motivation to succeed at school; he was slightly older and had a young family. These are aspects of his particular personal characteristics and immediate influences. He was also motivated to stay in school however, because he had the opportunity to get trained and get a job in local industries (resource activity settings). He had specific teachers at school (people) that were significant *resources* as well.

The stories of Amy, Jordan and Darryl help highlight some of the influences commonly exerted on, and experienced by, Tłı̨ch̨ students in relation to school.

### 12.1.3 How Does Tłı̨ch̨ Student Engagement Compare to Others?

Other scholars have discussed school engagement and similar concepts (i.e. school connectedness, school connection, school attachment, school bonding, and identification with school). Libbey (2004) provides a very useful review of this work. The current study determined engagement in the Tłı̨ch̨ context to be associated with attendance at school, being on a positive trajectory, being well behaved by abiding by the five golden rules of life and/or being resilient. This model of engagement aligns most closely with those studies that discuss a student's relationship to school in the context of overall participation (not necessarily just academic participation) (Finn 1993; Jenkins 1997; Jessor et al. 1995), having a belief in and valuing school (Hagborg 1998;

Jenkins 1997; Voelkl 1996), and with aspects of discipline and a belief in school rules (Brown & Evans 2002; Hagborg 1998; Jenkins 1997; Ryan & Patrick 2001). The current study in that it provides a conceptualisation of school engagement that also includes a relationship to a student's trajectory and their level of resiliency. These concepts inherently link school engagement to a student's interaction with stressors in the environment (both inside and outside of school) and with a comparative variable, or a relative level of participation or attitude based on historical values and a student's potential future direction. This is a model of engagement that is holistic and linked closely to out-of-school factors. The current study demonstrates the essential link between school engagement and engagement in other aspects of life and community. It also shows that engagement is a relative concept, along a continuum, that must be understood in light of a student's relationship to school over time.

#### The HOW: Mechanisms of Influence of the School Setting and Larger Context on Tłıchǫ School Engagement

Table 12.1 is an overview of the findings from chapters 7-11 in relation to how Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, creates and erodes school engagement among Tłıchǫ students. Four of the influences are written in italics; these are expanded upon further in subsequent sections of this discussion.

**Table 12.1: Summary of Findings - How Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, creates and/or erodes school engagement.**

<b>MECHANISM of INFLUENCE</b>	<b>CREATE</b>	<b>ERODE</b>
<b>Physical Resources and/or Funds</b>		
A variety of courses offered, especially courses for workforce or post-secondary educational preparation.	×	
The bus system (with late busses and a special van for parents with children).	×	
The lack of public transportation between Rae and the school.		×
The geographic location of school for those who may have negative interactions outside school and view school as an “oasis”.	×	
The geographic location and language of instruction of the school and its impact on the integration and ability of parents and community members to serve as resources for youth.		×
Physical layout of the school, which encourages small group, peer interaction.	×	
The school is clean, controlled and well supervised.	×	
Unique support structures such as providing a place for students to sleep if needed and allowing students who are parents to pass the lunch line at the cafeteria.	×	
Third-party funding acquired for extras at school such as special cultural events and supplies or a school greenhouse.	×	
Lack of, or the under use or misuse of, funds.		×
Unsustainable funding.		×
Financial support for any student who goes on to post secondary training.	×	
The addition of programs such as the Tłı̄ch̄Q Trades and Technology Program.	×	
<i>A mismatch between the particular resources that are available to students and the needs of students due to the stressors they face.</i>		×

**Table 12.1 (continued): Summary of Findings - How Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, creates and/or erodes school engagement.**

<b>MECHANISM of INFLUENCE</b>	<b>CREATE</b>	<b>ERODE</b>
<b>People and/or Roles</b>		
Positive peer relationships that are recognized and supported by the school staff.	×	
School staff members who care about students and who are dedicated to being effective teachers and positive adult figures in the lives of their students.	×	
Transience of people in and out of the setting.		×
The general lack of student cliques.	×	
Lack of Tłı̄ch̄Q teachers.		×
Changing demographic profile of the school, for older students.		×
Lack of adequate school counselling services.		×
Lack of options for adult and alternative education.		×
<i>It is difficult to act in the interest of a minority group of students, particularly those with behavioural issues, without putting the needs of the student majority at risk.</i>		×
<b>Symbols</b>		
Graduates of CJBS are celebrated and used as role models.	×	
Communicating realistic expectations (i.e. the CJBS “honour roll”).	×	
Attempts at cultural and language integration (i.e. cultural and language classes, Dene Games events etc.).	×	
Sports banners and trophies and photos of school events and activities are displayed and celebrated.	×	
<b>Policy and/or Authority</b>		
The policies of social progression and inclusive schooling (create engagement at younger grades but erode engagement in high school as many students arrive unprepared).	×	×
Students who do not follow school rules are given very little leniency (creates engagement among the general school population but erodes engagement among misbehavers).	×	×

**Table 12.1 (continued): Summary of Findings - How Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, creates and/or erodes school engagement.**

<b>MECHANISM of INFLUENCE</b>	<b>CREATE</b>	<b>ERODE</b>
<b>Policy and/or Authority</b>		
The school has a high level of practical autonomy (depending on the programs and policies, may create engagement for some and erode it for others).	×	×
Clear and strictly enforced school rules (create engagement for those that react well to structure and guidelines, but erodes it for those who counter authority, feel restricted by rules and leave).	×	×
Curriculum and diploma exam requirements that are unrealistic for many students.		×
Post-secondary admission standards that are unrealistic for many students.		×
<b>Time</b>		
Offering courses with flexibility in routine and timeline,	×	
The school lunch program and shortened lunch period.	×	
<b>Parallel &amp; Constituent Activity Settings</b>		
Young parents.		×
School extra-curricular activities and sports teams.	×	
Lack of activities in Behchokō for youth to be involved in (creates engagement for those who participate in school activities instead but erodes engagement for those who are negatively influenced by too much free time).	×	×
<i>There is a distinct divide between the activity settings and social interactions at home and at school.</i>		×
<b>Resource Activity Settings</b>		
Adults out of the home working and travelling thus increasing youth autonomy and decreasing supervision.		×
<i>An evolving community vision or narrative now, “glass half full”.</i>	×	
The development of resource extraction industries, which spurred a renewed purpose for education (creates engagement for those who may be interested in this industry, may put off others).	×	×

## A Discussion of Key Insights

This study supports a model of multifactoral influence on school engagement. There are features related to physical resources and funds, people and roles, time, and symbols as well as resource, constituent and parallel activity settings that influence school engagement among Tl̄ch̄ students. *Four key insights* are highlighted in italics:

- It is difficult to act in the interest of a minority group of students, particularly those with behavioural issues, without putting the needs of the student majority at risk (the lifeboat problem).
- There is a distinct divide between the activity settings and social interactions at home and at school (a reflection of cultural discontinuity).
- There is a mismatch between the particular resources that are available to students and the needs that students have due to the stressors they face (the resource/stressor dynamic).
- There is an evolving community vision or narrative towards a “glass half full” perspective (the importance and influence of narratives and social scripts).

These insights represent a distillation of ideas from throughout the thesis and have surfaced as particularly important pathways through which factors of the school’s setting and the school’s larger context influence school engagement. The illumination and discussion of these ideas is one of the significant and unique contribution offered by this thesis.

### 12.1.4 The School as Lifeboat: The majority versus the fringes

In chapter four, the idea of the school as a lifeboat was presented. The entire quote is as follows:

*“There is not really enough time in the day because there are some that I feel that we are going to lose anyways. So I guess it is almost like that lifeboat question,*

*and you can be plagued by asking yourself who do you keep in the lifeboat and who do you throw overboard? ...I think in the high school there is a group of students that can't survive, and then there is another group of students that are surviving and I can't believe they are! Then there are other students who aren't surviving for social or emotional reasons that totally have the brainpower to do it but they are not coming... I don't even know at a certain point what we could do" (School staff, interview).*

The school has the arguably impossible task of keeping all passengers in the lifeboat, or of supporting all of its students to finding success at school. Resources are scarce and the actions taken by the school to support the engagement of the majority of students might not do so, and could even be deleterious for students on the margin or most at risk of disengagement. The same is true in the reverse, what could be done to maintain the engagement of a few high needs students might be done at the expense of the needs of the student majority. Indeed, a number of the factors in table 12.1 are listed as being able to create engagement among some students and erode it for others. For example, CJBS has strict discipline practices and gives misbehaving students very little leniency with regards to poor behaviour and being able to stay at school. The feeling is that a high standard of behaviour is necessary to maintain a certain school climate or environment so that the majority of students can thrive. Unfortunately, the students who have behavioural issues themselves have a very small margin for error and often have to undergo school suspensions or expulsions, each of which are negative influences on their school engagement. However, if the school were to focus on these students and give them additional chances and more lenience to stay at school, valuable resources would be used on a small number of students and the school's standards may be compromised. The lifeboat is a useful metaphor. It denotes that the school is a place of hope and of possibility but it also reminds us that along with the responsibilities, the school also has limits. Like a lifeboat, the school is limited by its size, design and in the number of people it can help.

The idea of the students at the fringe or margin versus the majority of students was expressed by one of the administrators who noted hesitantly that the "school is all about what is best for the majority of our students" and then goes on to say, "I am supposed to

say for all students, but I don't think that that is realistic. I think that we do the best we can with what we have, so the majority of our students are able to grow here academically, grow here as individuals socially, feel safe here, are cared about here and are loved here, in appropriate ways”. This places the majority of students as the focus of efforts and as the target of resources rather than the students most at risk or at the fringes of school life. One of the school staff talked about being so overwhelmed with student need, “I think that the need here in the school is overwhelming...trying to meet all of the needs of all of the students I find to be just an overwhelming task”. The sense of overwhelming need and the inherent limitation of the school to meet the needs of all its students is an important aspect of the setting. Decisions have to be made about how to allocate finite resources and who to focus upon as a receiver of resources. It may be difficult to admit, but every student does not have equal priority. And in the case of CJBS, their practices often favour the student majority over students at the fringe or margin of the school, particularly those with behavioural concerns. Often times, this favour of the majority occurs out of necessity due to limited resources and the goals and values associated with high school graduation and academic success. In order for students to do well, the school needs to provide the appropriate environment, one free of significant distractions, dangers or delays.

Although with obvious exceptions, CJBS currently works with a model built around the goal of supporting the student majority. It keeps expectations and standards high and through these actions, maintains an ordered, safe and productive school environment. As an institution, its actions have been successful at improving overall engagement. Since the beginning of the high school program in 1993, CJBS has continually produced qualified graduates. Today it has one of the highest graduation rates in the NWT and the Tłı̨ch̨ people are recognized as being one of the most represented northern Aboriginal groups in post- secondary education in Canada. Unfortunately, this approach to schooling has had, and continues to have, its casualties.

#### 12.1.5 Differences Between School and Home Activity Settings

A number of influences listed in table 12.1 relate to a distinct divide between the school as an activity setting and the activity settings students experience in their homes and in other parts of the community. This is a reflection of what other scholars have termed cultural discontinuity (Hymes 1974; Philips 1982; Erickson 1987; Deyhle 1989; Wilson 1991; Deyhle 1992; Reyhner 1992; Ledlow 1992; Brady 1996). This divide is exacerbated by such factors as the geographic location of the school in relation to the students' homes and the lack of public transportation, English being the principal language of instruction at school, the lack of Tłı̄ch̄Q teachers to provide cultural links between the school and homes, and the southern focused curriculum and diploma exams. Many of the older people in Behchok̄Q did not attend formalized schooling in the way it is set up today so they do not always have knowledge about how it functions. In addition, some community members attended residential school and during that time they may have lost their Dogrib language. For many, residential school was not a positive experience. In this way, parents and other adults in the community are limited in their ability to act as resources for students. Although there are roles that are offered and possible for parents and other community members to play at school, they are not largely present in the setting.

Social interactions differ between school and the students' homes. Although there is a great variance in how social dynamics and discipline are experienced at home, several students are unsupervised and others have some supervision but face very little discipline. At home, students interact almost exclusively with fellow Tłı̄ch̄Q people. Students' homes are generally small and it is common for students to live with extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins or all of the above. Time outside of school is largely unscheduled with significant amounts of unstructured time for socializing with peers on the streets and in the homes of Behchok̄Q. Some students still have the Dogrib language spoken in their homes, especially those who live with grandparents. There are a number of students who still have opportunities to engage in traditional Tłı̄ch̄Q activities such as hunting, fishing, picking berries, or camping on the barrenlands. These activities facilitate learning through hands-on experience, direct observation and guided practice. At CJBS, students are asked to follow a set routine and

behave according to the five golden rules of life. Free time is limited and when the students are able to socialize, interactions take place in controlled and supervised small groups. With few exceptions, the adults students interact with at school are teachers and school administration who are almost all non- Tłıchǫ people. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of their students, nevertheless, although there are some hands-on activities, most lessons are based on learning through notes and text. The Dogrib cosmology depicts education as a character builder. As highlighted in chapter four, community member John B. Zoe explained the Tłıchǫ view and vision of education through the metaphor of the hunt (figure 4.4). This model is at least partially at odds with schooling as delivered in most mainstream situations. In the majority of southern Canadian contexts, education is for acquiring knowledge, and sometimes skills, so that individuals can be successful in pursuits after high school. There is little place, or value placed upon, such characteristics as oneness, consensus, sharing, generosity or patience, which are features of the Tłıchǫ cosmology. The mainstream system is one that focuses on individual success and pits student against student in a competition for the highest grades and most accolades.

The differences between the school activity setting and the activity settings of the Tłıchǫ students' homes and other areas of the community are significant. Interactions take place between different people who occupy different roles, time is used differently and the resources available to youth in each setting are also different. Cultural values are nearly at odds. Over the years since the opening of CJBS, the school and the community services agency have made many attempts to better align school and home settings. Originally the school was an open concept design. This design was chosen by the Rae-Edzo School Society, an independent Tłıchǫ organisation responsible for Tłıchǫ education at the time of the opening of CJBS, to "create a home atmosphere" (Indian Brotherhood of the NWT 1971, p.1). The Tłıchǫ people were searching for, and open to, alternatives to the southern Canadian approach to schooling. They recognized that some adaptation to the "standard" approach was needed in order to integrate Tłıchǫ cultural values and ways of living. Unfortunately, the open concept design made teaching difficult and staff found it almost impossible to deliver the curriculum as

required. Representatives who remember recall the “supermarket” that was school during that time. Teachers were not able to deliver the lessons they were required to undertake. It was a clash of cultures, a clash of approaches and ideas. On one hand the community wanted a home atmosphere with a communal feel, but on the other, they wanted to be able to deliver the curriculum to a large number of students of all different ages. There were very few volunteers or extra supports to do so. Tłı̨ch̨Q and non- Tłı̨ch̨Q teachers alike put up walls to segregate classroom spaces in the first year.

Today, there is evidence of other approaches to better align school and home settings in Behchok̨. Cultural artefacts and photographs of community elders are displayed at the school, the Lord’s Prayer is said in Dogrib each morning, culture and language programs and special cultural events are facilitated and teachers visit the homes of their students each semester. A significant number of the support staff and three of the teachers at CJBS are Tłı̨ch̨Q. Teachers are encouraged to integrate as many points of local and cultural interest in their lessons as possible, and this happens frequently. Even in light of these attempts however, CJBS continues to be a “foreign land” for many people in Behchok̨. This is primarily because of the points given at the outset, the school is located geographically separated from the main community of Rae and there is no public transportation, English is the principal language of instruction at school even though Dogrib is the traditional language of the Tłı̨ch̨Q people and it is still spoken in the community, there is a lack of Tłı̨ch̨Q teachers at the school who could provide important links between school and Tłı̨ch̨Q home settings and there is a southern Canadian focus to the curriculum.

Tłı̨ch̨Q youth are called to be “Strong Like Two People”. The ideal is that they are knowledgeable in, skilled at, and proud of their Tłı̨ch̨Q traditions and they also find ways to succeed in the mainstream world. Regardless of the differences between school and home settings, young people are being called to navigate a way through these differences and find success in both worlds. This is a distinct challenge for the Tłı̨ch̨Q youth of today. “Young people often find themselves caught between the ‘old ways’ and the demands of modern society. Their connections with their past and, hence, their

sense of identity, are sometimes tenuous, they are often separated from both worldviews” (Department of Education 1991, p.5). This challenge cannot be underestimated. The people of Behchokō are actively working to define the modern Tłıchǫ and this work has distinct implications for CJBS and for schooling overall.

The difference between school activity settings and those of the home and community has been discussed previously in relation to other population groups (Tharp 1982; Tharp, Jordan, Speidel, Au, Klein, Calkins, & Sloat 1984; Tharp 1994; Trumbull, Greenfield, Rothstein-Fisch, & Quiroz 2001). The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) was a research project that examined the home and school settings of Hawaiian Native students, and then in a follow-up, Navajo youth. It was found that the people that Hawaiian and Navajo students were interacting with at home, namely older siblings and cousins or same-sex relatives, were different from those often interacted with at school. By developing older-younger and same-sex peer reading programs, the schools were able to mirror home experiences and thus improve the educational outcomes of these students.

In the Tłıchǫ context, differences between home and school settings might be reduced, for example, if the curriculum was delivered to ensure adequate hands-on learning, repeated observation and assisted practice. Increasing the number of Tłıchǫ people in the setting, especially in teaching and administrative roles, and providing more integrated language and cultural aspects, would also better align school and home experiences. These are just some examples. The people of Behchokō are working together to find local solutions, such as the Tłıchǫ Healing Path and Wellness Strategy, to meet the needs of their people. With the signing of the Tłıchǫ Agreement, the Tłıchǫ have been given back the control of their own education. This is an important time and a distinct opportunity to find better ways to deliver schooling that meets national and international standards yet is done in a culturally appropriate manner.

### 12.1.6 A Mismatch in Resources and Stressors

The situations in which students go to bed at night and the lives they leave as they catch the school bus in the morning are the baseline on which the school's immediate environmental factors add their influence. This resource baseline is associated with factors within the home and the community. Some students have a strong baseline and are well supported in their school by family and/or other community members. Unfortunately, however, a strong baseline is not the norm. Interviewees spoke about factors in the social environment that acted as barriers for students: wide-spread alcohol and drug addictions; problem gambling; lack of adequate adult role models for youth and early pregnancy. The interview and focus group participants talked about the lack of good parenting in the lives of many young people and the significant impact this is having on them. Youth are relying more and more on their peers for support. Intimate relationships and having children at an early age have become ways to fill a social and emotional void in the lives of many young people. Students are also facing language difficulties. The interviews indicate that, a high school diploma is, more than anything, a testament to a student's English literacy levels.

To borrow terminology from Gore and Aseltine (1995), we can understand the concept of the baseline in terms of the match, or mismatch, of available resources to threats or stressors in young people's lives. The matching theory of social support (Berndt 1989; Cauce, Hannan, & Sargeant 1992; Cutrona & Russell 1990; Gore 1985; Jackson 1992) dictates that stress-buffering processes are impacted by this relative match. Resources can be physical and financial such as adequate money for food, clothing, school supplies and a measure of financial security within the home, but more often they pertain to human and social resources such as peers and family members who the student can talk to and garner support from, elders the student can learn traditional teachings from, teachers the young person particularly connects with etc.

This study demonstrates that school engagement among Tłı̄ch̄ youth is associated with not just an overall lack of resources –something that is commonly touted- but with a

mismatch between the resources young people have available to them and the specific threats or stressors young people face. For Tłıchǫ students, stressors or threats can originate at home, in the community and at school. At school, students have difficulties in particular subjects or types of academic work, such as reading and writing or math, and they may have trouble adhering to school rules or getting along with their teachers and peers. Other students have difficulties getting to the bus on time or completing their homework for example. At home, students can face all types of stressors, from inadequate social support and supervision, to abuse, or substance abuse problems themselves or among their immediate relatives and friends. Students that have shown positive school engagement patterns and outcomes have had a good match between the resources available to them and the stressors faced. A student who has academic problems but has adequate support at home to do homework and at school to receive extra help, shows better engagement. Students who have social issues at school such as being bullied or striking out at fellow students exhibit better engagement if they also have adequate counselling, support from key adults at school and at home. Interviewees spoke about ‘miracles’, or students who were coming from very broken homes yet were resilient and engaged in school. In these specific cases, the students had supports to counteract or ‘buffer’ the stresses they experienced. Matching theory indicates that social supports and other resources can not only buffer stress, but they can do so more effectively if they are better matched to the specific stress experienced.

It is important to make the distinction between an overall lack of resources and a mismatch in resources. For those students who have very few stressors, very few resources might be needed to get them through school. Other students may have many stressors, with many needs, but they can be successful if the support structures and resources are well aligned to meet these needs. It is when students have particular stressors and needs and the resources available to them are not well matched to meet these needs that concerns arise. This situation may exist in a environment very rich in resources, but perhaps is rich in the wrong kind of resources for this particular student.

Resources and threats or stressors are the concepts that tie together the two spheres of the activity setting model used for this study. The inside sphere deals mostly with the school's internal environment and with the people, time, roles, symbols, funds and physical resources of the target setting. The outside sphere is made up of the resource, authority, constituent and parallel activity settings as well as policy that exist along with the target setting. These exist together in some dynamic. This study helped clarify that this dynamic relates primarily to the resources and threats available to and experienced by individuals in the target setting, namely students. It seems obvious that the resource activity setting relates to resources, but to follow this argument further, features of constituent, parallel and authority activity settings also act to influence student resources and stressors. For example, the Government of the NWT has mandated that Inclusive Schooling must occur in all NWT schools. This means that students of all ability levels will be integrated into age similar classrooms. This policy influences students in the classroom and influences everyday experiences at school. Inevitably this policy influences engagement behaviours and outcomes. For Tłı̄ch̄ students integrated into inclusive classrooms, are gaining support through same-age peer resources and the self-esteem of moving up grades with peers. They experience stressors, however, as inclusive classrooms can be hard to instruct and very challenging for teachers to provide for all students, as well as stressors when they arrive at grade ten and now have to perform to curriculum standards. In another example, parallel and constituent settings that exist, or do not exist in the community can act as resources that buffer stressors in young people's lives. A Tae K'won Do club for example, provides positive peer interaction, physical activity and discipline training, interactions with coaches and the opportunity to train and travel to compete. This kind of dedication and commitment as well as the support athletes get from other team members and from coaches carries over to school. The resource-stress dynamic is one way to think about how macro and micro factors inter-relate to influence student engagement, and it is an important way to conceptualise influence so as to find points of potential intervention to improve engagement patterns and better support young people to stay in school.

### 12.1.7 Macro-Environmental Change, Community Narratives and Social Scripts

Thus far, the key findings have been organized around the idea of the lifeboat and the student majority at odds with minority groups, the influence of home-school differences and the resource-stressor dynamic on the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth. An additional key finding relates to the influence of marco-environmental change on the social scripts and community narratives evident in Behchok̄. Change has happened drastically in every aspect of the Tłı̄ch̄Q people's lives in the last fifty years. When examining Tłı̄ch̄Q youth and their relationship to school, it is essential to place current day experiences in this historical context. Tłı̄ch̄Q people have almost entirely left their nomadic and hunting way of life to settle in communities and participate in the wage economy. There has been development of three diamond mines in the region, proposed developments in the Mackenzie Valley and the recent passing of the Tłı̄ch̄Q Agreement, all which influence life in Tłı̄ch̄Q communities. These changes have not always been smooth, Barnaby, Shimpo, and Struthers (1991) quoted an elder saying:

*“It's just like we are lost in a strange land. How can we find our way back to the quiet ways that we once knew?” (p.105).*

And similarly a young person quoted in a school board document:

*“We all need our lives back, whatever this is or used to be” (Tłı̄ch̄Q youth quoted in Zoe-Martin & Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p.19).*

“Finding our way back” and “we need our lives back”, these quotes confirm primary source findings from this study that indicate that the Tłı̄ch̄Q people are still working to navigate their way between a traditional way of life as nomadic hunters and today's experience of participating in the wage economy and being settled in towns. Drastic social and environmental change has meant that many aspects of the Tłı̄ch̄Q's culture and way of life have either been threatened or lost completely. These changes have influenced the stories Tłı̄ch̄Q people tell about themselves, and their sense of identity. Community narratives are, “shared stories told by community members about themselves” (Harper et al. 2004, p.200). In Behchok̄, there are two strong narratives

that exist. One master narrative, since settlement, has been one of an underlying sense of separation or difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between the Tłı̨ch̨o people and others (essentially white people or authority or government figures). The narrative is characterized by a sense of loss, conflict, and oppression. It is reflected in lots of ways but most notably in discussions about social problems in the community, loss of language, culture and way of life and residential school experiences. One interviewee, a school administrator, recalls attending a school meeting many years ago when the first question asked was “whose side are you on?”.

The second narrative that exists strongly in the setting is an underlying sense of potential, of hope, of positive change, empowerment and a bright future. This is reflected in narration around the mine and labour market, around positive changes in individuals and the community as a whole and around the evolution of self-governance. One interviewee discussed the fact that with self-governance, the government is no longer the other or the opposition. It is now ‘ours’ (the Tłı̨ch̨o people’s) and now is the time to take responsibility for it. This empowerment narrative was evident in interviews and focus group especially when talking about the success of high school graduates at CJBS and the signing of the Tłı̨ch̨o Agreement.

A prominent Tłı̨ch̨o elder told this story that was quoted in a school board document:

*“In the convent they called us “good for nothing Dogrib” ...Since we are made from a part of a dog<sup>21</sup>, they thought we would never be able to do anything...I thought in the future when we are still living, will we still be called that? How is it going to be? ...So they used to say that and now many years have passed and these “good for nothing Dogribs” have control of their schools; they control the store and they control the Sportsplex...I want our children who will be attending school to complete their education...I want them to train in all fields and not leave one out...Social Studies, Economic Development...I want them to see the lands our elders lived on...I want them to learn about these things. So for that to take place, we have to build a foundation and make it strong” (Elizabeth MacKenzie quoted in Martin 1991, p.96).*

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth is referring to the story of the origin of the Tłı̨ch̨o people. This story, as told by the late elder Vital Thomas, is recorded in Helm and Thomas (1966).

This story confirms findings from this study that indicate a sense of optimism and pride that exists. Regardless of the issues and challenges faced by Aboriginal youth in the north, the data indicate that the air in the region is optimistic. Recent developments in resource extraction and changes in governance structures have had a significant impact on northern communities already. The labour market is booming, infrastructure is improving and many local people are expressing a ‘glass half full’ perspective. In the youth focus group for example, when the young people were asked what might happen after the mines close down, one youth in a focus group responded, “Maybe we will all be poor again”, while another responds, “Maybe they will find gold under those diamonds”. While the first response reflected a feeling of oppression that has been prevalent in the region since early colonial times, the second response speaks of change, of hope. The feeling overall is optimistic and has long-term vision. This vision speaks of hope and potential.

“Our people see a better world ahead of us, a world where addictions do not rule their lives and trouble their communities... People have a special vision for youth and the youth share this vision. They know that they are now caught between two worlds and are having difficulty sorting out who they really are. As our people look to the future, they see young people who are ‘strong like two people’. They have learned the skills they will need to survive and flourish in the white man’s world. But, they are Dogrib to their very core: they speak their language, they know their custom and traditions, they are proud of their culture and heritage, they are guided by Dogrib beliefs and spirituality” (Dogrib Community Services Board 1999, p.2).

Not only are these ideas evident in the stories community members tell about themselves, or community narratives in Behchok̄ō, but also they are evident in the social scripts at school. O'Donnell, Tharp, and Wilson (1993) describe scripts as the way norms of interaction are communicated. In the youth focus group one student proclaims that he had dropped out of school before because he didn't see the importance of school, but, that - *now he knows differently*. In the photovoice class ‘Zine a student took a photo of the 5 golden rules of life poster with a note saying *school sucks*. Students are internalizing community narratives and these become played out in scripts of interaction. In one case, the student is not afraid to say that he has turned around and now wants to succeed in school, and the other is communicating a more

conventional counter school and counter authority script. These norms of interaction and stories that community members tell about themselves have powerful influence over behaviours in relation to school. What was obvious from this study is that there is a renewed conviction among youth; this comes across in the stories of students who have decided to go against the odds, who are exhibiting resiliency. These young people are standing up and convincing their families that this year, they will finish the semester; this year things are going to be different.

The school as an institution has a very distinct place in both the oppressive and the more optimistic narratives and scripts. In the first narrative the school essentially represents the ‘other’, the ‘white’, or colonial authority. Although very few Tłıchǫ people are actually ‘counter school’ today, many Tłıchǫ people don’t seem to relate well with it as if it is not natural or not felt to be owned by them. Those associated with the school recognize the truth behind the first narrative. There is a distinct effort to send messages that the school ‘is yours’ (the community’s). Counteracting the historical perception of school – they have cultural artefacts at school such as Chief Jimmy Bruneau professing to be ‘Strong Like Two People’ (taking in the white and aboriginal ways). But regardless of what the school has tried over the years, at present, the school really does not seem to be ‘theirs’ (the local people’s). The teachers are not local people (with three exceptions) and there are very few parents or grandparents involved in the school at all. Although there are attempts to counter the first narrative, it still appears underneath. When the non-Aboriginal teacher’s children get older (and progress in school) they almost always leave the community. Some people in the community feel that the education is still below par, that they are still oppressed in one way or another. There is a lingering feeling of conflict, of ‘otherness’, that among some, continues. It is hoped that with the signing of the Tłıchǫ Agreement and with community self-governance and local control over education, this dynamic may change in the future.

School plays a big part in the second, or more optimistic, narrative as well. It is likened to the key that is necessary to open all the doors of opportunity. People in the setting constantly profess that school is the way to a bright future (to jobs, to money, to power,

to happiness) it is almost the panacea. The school supports the second narrative in many things it does (and messages it professes). ‘Get your grade 12’, ‘Students who graduate are successes’. They celebrate students who have finished high school and gone on to college, they bring them back as guest speakers, and they use them as role models. There is a sense that the school is preparing students for work (work at the mine and in the trades especially as something that is accessible to them).

The two narratives are parallel and yet at times conflicting. In a CJBS yearbook dated November 1994, a grade 12 graduate offers advice to her fellow students, “Staying in school will someday give you the respect you deserve” (CJBS Yearbook Staff 1994, p. 42). This is an example of the two narratives coming out in the same message. There is a brighter future, yet finishing school may help counter disrespect that is felt to be inherent in the students’ lives. Some people are more ‘bought into’ one narrative or the other. In almost all cases (no matter which narrative a person may more closely ascribe to) school is held up as the best option. There is not always a great feeling about school in the past, and there is recognition that school is not perfect today, overall people feel that schooling is necessary and important.

### Placing the Current Study in Perspective

The place of the current study with respect to the existing knowledge base is outlined in three parts of this chapter. The first section briefly outlines the way in which the study acts to confirm and build upon previous work around the mechanisms of influence on students’ school engagement. The next two sections move to a presentation of the overall contributions of the research in relation to the literature content and the methodological innovations.

#### 12.1.8 How Do the Findings Support and Build Upon Previous Work?

As figure 12.2 indicates, engagement in the Tłı̄ch̄Q context is influenced by a number of features in the school and wider environment, and is associated with context specific

motivations, temporal patterns and outcomes. This supports a multifactorial model of influence, which reflects an accumulation of influences among school, personal, family and community factors. This kind of model has been put forward and supported elsewhere (Barnhardt 1994; Bowker 1992; Bowker 1993; Lutra Associates 1992; Mackay & Myles 1989; Mackay & Myles 1995). Of particular importance, for the current study, were factors within the school and with the school-authority dynamic, such as for example, the relationships and level of support between students and staff or the way school policies are applied. Similar school-based factors were highlighted in previous work with Aboriginal youth as well (Clarke 1994; Coladarci 1983; Deyhle 1989; Deyhle 1992; Tomkins 1998).

Also in accord with previous studies (i.e. Alberta Learning 2001b; Audas & Willms 2001; Ensminger, Lamkin, & Jacobson 1996; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs 1990; Jeffries, Nix, & Singer 2002; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson 2000) school disengagement among Tłı̄ch̄Q students was not a single event or occurrence, but rather a continuum or process with significant drift between in-school and out of school periods. As Alspaugh (2000), Hains (2001b) and Franks (1990) demonstrate, there also appears to be key points in time where school engagement or school leaving are more prominent.

The current study showed an important relationship between the location of the school, both geographically and in relation to the students' homes, and school engagement patterns. Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, and Hagstrom (1989) documented similar ties when they examined changes in school engagement patterns as secondary schools were brought into local communities in rural Alaska as opposed to just having high schools in larger cities and regional centres. Reyhner (1992) discussed a similar relationship between school engagement and school location in a review of school-based causes of school dropout among American Indian students.

The current study lends support to the theory of cultural discontinuity, as one component of influence towards school disengagement. Differences between the

activity settings of home and those of the school make staying in school more difficult for some. Similar findings are outlined and discussed in Brady (1996), Erickson (1987), Hymes (1974), Ledlow (1992) and Philips (1982). The current study represents the first time this kind of finding has been discussed in relation to northern Aboriginal youth.

The study indicates that there is an important influence of community narratives and social scripts on students' relationship to school. Clarke (1994) found similarly with a different group of Aboriginal students that direct and indirect messages of failure or incompetency at school, influence engagement behaviours among them.

#### 12.1.9 A Reflection on the Usefulness of the Methodology

This study was an ethnographic exploration of a school in a particular community context. It used activity settings theory and a particular activity settings model to underpin the data collection and analysis. Ethnographic methodology allowed an up close examination of particular behaviours set within the context that they occur. By spending six months in residence in the community, the candidate was able to engage in significant participant observation and essentially become such a taken for granted part of the environment that behaviours and practices were not 'put on' for the researcher. Instead, observations were undertaken of activities and interactions that occurred in a natural way. This was particularly important because, for example, in the early focus groups, young people showed an almost false sense of optimism; they mentioned having outdoor ice skating rinks and a curling hall in Behchokō. After spending time in the setting, the candidate determined that these resources were either derelict or not used. If the candidate had only done focus groups or interviews without personal experience of the setting, these well-meaning discrepancies may not have come out. Also, as an interested outsider, the candidate was able to see things that may not have been obvious to people in the setting and committed to it. The school assembly area, for example, was seen very differently by the candidate than it was by people from the school. In the past, a number of other scholars have used pen and paper techniques (i.e. surveys and questionnaires) to learn more about school engagement and students'

perceptions of school, but the current study is an important example of ethnographic and activity settings approaches applied to similar questions with northern Aboriginal youth.

One of the distinct benefits of activity settings theory is that it allows for the observation and integration of both objective and subjective features of target settings. In this study such duality was key. The findings indicate that there are aspects of both the physical as well as the social environment that act in a particular dynamic to influence engagement behaviours. The activity settings model underpinning this research allowed for examination of both of these kinds of features.

The approach to this study also allowed the candidate to examine both, “the degree to which students persist in educational pursuits as well as the degree to which schools are successful in retaining students” (Barnaby, Shimpo, & Struthers 1991, p.17). It helped focus attention on the environmental factors that influence school engagement, not just the within child factors. In this sense it confirms that: “Education must pay more attention to the economic, political, historical and organizational factors that profoundly influence individuals” (Shapiro 1983, p.93).

#### 12.1.10 Unique Contributions of the Study

The study has made a number of unique contributions. This section will review the contributions associated with the school engagement literature and this will be followed by a discussion and presentation of contributions in relation to theory and methodology.

First, the literature reviews conducted for this study are in themselves useful, most specifically the summary tables of school disengagement and dropout theories and of Aboriginal and northern dropout and disengagement studies. These reviews helped highlight particular gaps, and the contributions of this study are presented in light of these omissions in the previous literature.

The study itself focuses on a northern Aboriginal group, of which there are few examples, and it is the only known study specifically focusing on Tłìchǫ youth. This research includes an exploration of factors that *create* school engagement along with those that erode it and, through activity settings, the research maintains both objective as well as subjective perspectives. In focusing on school engagement (both its creation and erosion), it differentiates itself from much of the existing literature-base that is characterised by examinations of school dropout. The current work considers all types of educational pathways rather than just conventional ones. The research supports a multifactoral model for influence on students' school engagement and describes influences related to physical resources and funds, people and roles, time and symbols as well as the relationship between the school and authority, and parallel and constituent activity settings in the wider community. This frames school engagement as not just an issue of individual strengths or deficits but rather, a phenomenon linked to features of settings and contexts. In this sense, the point of intervention is thus at the settings or context level, rather than attempting to change the individual student. A significant majority of previous work reflects a “within-child-deficit model” and uses a negative frame in which school disengagement and dropout are problems that exist due to deficits in young people and their families. This work does not ascribe to this negative frame and focuses on the environment and child-environment interaction with the aim of understanding engagement patterns. The study also takes into consideration community and macro-structural influences. This responds to the research recommendation of Gilbert and colleagues (1993).

The research helped build a model of Tlıcho student engagement that differs from the conceptualisation of engagement most often found in the literature. While most other studies use participation and an alignment of values as markers of school engagement among young people, this work links engagement with attendance, a positive trajectory, resilience, engagement in others aspects of life and the ability to graduate. This is a unique conceptualisation.

The research helps highlight the differences between students' home or community activity settings and those of the school. These differences have an impact on students' relationship to school. Although not the first finding of its kind, it complements, and adds a unique perspective to, work that has already been done examining educational outcomes as a function of the ties between home and school as well as the work around cultural discontinuity and school engagement.

The current study provides insight into how the availability or lack of resources for young people, as well as the matching of these resources to young people's stressors, impact their school ties. This contributes to work around the matching theory of social support and adds a unique application of this theory to the issue of school engagement. It also helps explain one way in which macro-environmental influences come to act on a micro level. The research also describes the distinct challenge that CJBS has of focusing on the student majority yet not doing so at the expense of the students most at risk. In addition, it highlights the important influence of community narratives and social scripts on the behaviours of Tłı̄ch̄ youth in relation to school.

One of the key gaps in the literature around activity settings is the relative lack of theoretical development associated with activity settings and their relationship to larger contextual factors, or the dynamics of the interaction between the inside and outside spheres of this model. Trueba, Spindler, and Spindler (1989) note that

“The macro level calls attention to social, political and economic forces that affect the conditions of individual's lives and school functions. The micro level approach focuses on interaction between actors in specific social context and upon the cultural patterns that mediate influences on individual behaviour. Most anthropologists...shift back and forth between these two approaches during the course of their research and interpretations of research results” (p.2).

These scholars do not go on to explain how the links between macro and micro might best be conceived of. In this regard, the present ethnographic work has shed some light on one way to conceptualise the relationship. The dynamic between resources and

stressors came forward as a way of thinking about how components of the inside sphere of the model relate to components of the outside sphere.

### Limitations of the Study

The results of this study must be interpreted in the light of a few limitations. First, is a limitation related to the activity setting framework that was used to guide data collection, analysis and reporting. Using an ecological, activity setting model inherently privileged data that fit within the categories of the model. For example, the candidate spent a significant amount of time examining school routines and schedules or thinking about the geographic location of the school and theorizing how these particular features or situations influenced the engagement of students at school. These focal points were chosen because of the activity setting approach. Although the candidate remained flexible and was open to insights that might extend beyond preset categories, data collection, analysis and reporting was inherently linked to the model set at the beginning of the study and this may have limited insights outside of this framework to some degree.

Second, the candidate was limited in the data she was able to collect from youth below the age of 19 years. Consent was obtained directly from all participants 19 years and older, but at the outset of the study it was stated that the candidate would obtain parental consent to interview any minors. The University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine's Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board gave support for this approach. In the field however, when the candidate attempted to obtain parental consent, the students did not want to obtain the signature required and none of the consent forms were returned. This was after the candidate had already gotten to know the students and they were aware of the study and appeared to be supportive of it. Those under the age of 19 communicated that they did not want to involve their parents or guardians and after getting to know the candidate already, they did not feel the consent form was necessary. The candidate did not choose to make an appeal to the Ethics Board at the University of Calgary for a change to the process nor did she choose to push the issue with the

students. For these reasons, interview data from those under the age of 19 was not obtained. Instead the candidate interviewed students 19 years and older and collected other data, that was available publically, from those under the age of 19 (i.e. public presentations, public writing, artwork, reports from other research and school improvement projects). The school also took responsibility for organising a student focus group for the candidate and ensured that parents were aware their son or daughter was participating in the discussion for research purposes. These were considered appropriate compromises and ethical alternatives to interviewing minors without parental consent. In the future, however, when undertaking research with high school students in a similar setting, researchers might consider an opt-out form of consent in schools or allocating more resources for obtaining parental consent. There has also been some precedent set for reducing the age of self-consent for research with adolescent populations to 15 years, and it may be possible to appeal to ethics boards for this cut off point instead of 19 years. Further challenges with respect to obtaining consent for this study are outlined in a paper co-authored by the candidate entitled: Students Negotiating Consent in Northern Aboriginal Research (appendix 13).

As an ethnographic study, the work is limited in that it is not largely generalisable beyond the immediate setting. Instead, the data should be taken as specific to Behchokō but used to inform and advance similar work in other places. The key findings have relevance to other Aboriginal communities, specifically those in the north and/or in natural resource rich areas, but they should not be taken as wholly true for other places and contexts.

The candidate herself took a specific role within the school and community and although this allowed the collection of certain types of data, it limits the collection of other types. The candidate is a former teacher with experience in the north and so many of the school staff were comfortable talking with her about student and classroom experiences. The candidate became a professional colleague of sorts, which allowed for many forthcoming discussions about schooling in the north. The candidate spent a significant amount of time at the school and it is likely that many students viewed her

as a member of the school staff, even though it was explained otherwise. Although her integration and understanding of the school was high, the candidate was not well integrated only into other aspects of the community. She made attempts to become involved in activities in Rae (e.g. language classes at the Adult Education Centre, shopping in Rae, attending church, volunteering at bingo, spending time at the Sportsplex, meeting people at the Band Office, the Wellness Centre, the Health Clinic and the Community Services Agency and visiting the homes of some students). Nevertheless, spending more time in the homes of young people and in places where young people spent their free time would have been beneficial. In addition, although it is felt that adequate data was collected from young people in school at some point during the six months of fieldwork, there was only limited input from young people already disengaged and who did not come to school at all during the 2004-2005 school year. The candidate made attempts to set up a focus group and/or interviews with some of these young people but each time the attempts failed. Some of the young people from whom data was collected had been, or went on to be, disengaged from school, but further input from disengaged youth may have been beneficial.

From the outset of the study, the candidate was committed to doing research that was respectful and in collaboration with local community members. Initially a participatory action research (PAR) study was considered. PAR ideals speak to ensuring that community members have meaningful input into the research topic and questions, that the research remains responsive to local concerns, that the community owns the data and that the research elicits action for positive social change. Although it first appeared to be an ideal fit for this study, it became obvious that sufficient resources did not exist to undertake a PAR study well within the temporal and procedural confines of a doctoral study. Instead, the candidate decided that a critical ethnography was a more appropriate and feasible approach. The candidate made many and varied attempts to include local community members in the research process and was committed to providing as complete and unbiased description of the situation as possible. The study may have been limited to a small degree, however, because local community members

did not have the opportunity to direct it as much as might have been possible if it had been a PAR study.

The data collected for the grade ten cohort study was limited due to the fact that cumulative files were not available for every student, those files that were available were not always complete. Although verification interviews were conducted and the candidate was reasonably sure of the accuracy of the interview verifications, there may also have been some errors in the data, specifically in relationship to parental status, due to errors in reporting. In addition, data was collected about the grade ten cohort students at the outset of the study and then at time #2, the beginning of year four. Further cross-sections may have provided additional insight.

Finally, it should be mentioned that because of particular interests and timeliness, there was a more detailed exploration of diamond mining, as a feature of the macro environment, over other potential features. If further time was spent in the community and further engagement and interviews undertaken with other Behchok̄ community members and employers, more in-depth information about other aspects of the macro-environment could have been collected in more detail. A team or multi-stage approach to an exploration of the macro environmental may have worked well, considering the research question and the amount of data available to be collected and analysed.

## Chapter 13: CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

The overall aim of the study was to gain an understanding of how factors of the school setting, and the larger context in which the school setting is located, influence the engagement of young people in school. It was hoped that this study would inform further research as well as community practice and intervention to support the ultimate, long-term improvement of the health and well-being of northern Aboriginal people. The main research question for the study was - *How do features of the school's setting, and the school's larger context, create or erode the engagement of students?* This was made more specific for the community in which the study became focused by asking – How does Chief Jimmy Bruneau School, as an activity setting in a particular context, create or erode school engagement among Tłı̄ch̄Q youth in Behchok̄ō, NWT? Sub-questions included:

1. What are the key features of the activity setting and larger context of Chief Jimmy Bruneau School?
2. What is school engagement in this context?
3. Using the activity setting in context model, what can we learn about factors that are associated with the school engagement of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth?

The data made one point very clear: school-based education is both valued and important in this setting. This was expressed in the interviews and focus groups and was also made evident in the education patterns that were noted in the community. Many students in the grade 10 cohort exhibited a tenacious desire to be in school, to continue to attempt to achieve their high school diploma. Many unsuccessful students return to school again and again at the beginning of each semester hoping to succeed. This reflects a strong value in education. High school is considered a panacea; the high school diploma opens many doors for graduates. College and University are considered even higher levels of achievement. One elder reflected this idea when he said, if they get their education, they could do everything. This was a common sentiment.

The study supports a multifactoral model of influence on school engagement with influences among all aspects of the activity settings model: physical resources and funds, people and the roles played in the setting, the way time and symbols are used in the setting and how the school related to constituent, parallel, resource and authority activity settings in the larger context. The school is faced with the difficulty of providing an environment that is conducive of success for the majority of students, without compromising the chances for success among a minority group of students at greatest need. Educational engagement is closely linked with the resources and stressors students have and experience, with the similarities and differences between home and school activity settings, and with the stories and scripts that exist within the school and community.

### Reflection on Study Objectives

In order to work towards the study aim and answer these research questions, six objectives were set.

1. To spend a prolonged period of time within a northern Aboriginal community and school.

The candidate made contact with representatives from the Tłı̄ch̄Q Community Services Agency and Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Behchok̄, NWT in May 2004. She visited the school and community for three days of planning meetings in June 2004. She lived in Behchok̄ from August 2004 until February 2005 (six months). The candidate returned to the community for two weeks in October 2005 to feed back interim reports. She remains in contact with the community and will return to the school and community in the Fall 2007 to present a copy of the completed dissertation and related reports. She hopes to remain in contact with school and community representatives into the future.

2. To examine the school as an activity setting as well as examining the larger context in which the school lies.

During the six months of fieldwork, the candidate lived in the school residence and had an office at the school. She participated in the school's daily events and was able to be involved in many school related and extra curricular activities as well. The candidate helped supervise a high school field trip to Yellowknife, videotaped a Dene Games tournament, volunteered at fundraising bingos, tended the school canteen, watched school sports teams, sat on a temporary school committee, and participated in teacher training seminars, staff meetings and a barrenlands cultural orientation etc. The candidate also spent time in the community and interviewed members of the community who were not directly part of the school. The candidate took Dogrib language classes at the adult education centre in Rae, attended the Catholic church weekly, shopped in Rae, participated in community events like the walk for sobriety and community feasts, spent time observing kids at play in the community and so on. In addition to these participant observation activities, the candidate undertook interviews and focus groups as well as collected local documents, undertook a student cohort study and a grade ten class 'Zine.

3. To gain an understanding of what school engagement means in a northern Aboriginal community context.

The candidate used the data collected over the time of the study to build a model for Tłı̄ch̄Q student engagement. The model helps highlight the unique aspects of engagement in this context. Among the Tłı̄ch̄Q, engagement is closely linked to school attendance, appropriate behaviour, a positive trajectory and/or resilience in the individual student. Students are motivated most strongly by the desire to get a job and potentially also to go on to post secondary education for the purpose of employment. The educational pathway of Tłı̄ch̄Q youth is often longer than three-years in high school and may include periods of time away from school and then returning.

4. Using the activity setting model, to gain an understanding of what factors are associated with school engagement.

There are influences on school engagement from all aspects of the school setting: physical resources, people, roles, time, funds and symbols. School engagement is also influenced by features of resource, parallel and constituent activity settings in the school's larger context. This study strongly affirms a multifactor model of influence on school disengagement; a table detailing the influences from each component of the activity settings model is provided.

5. To involve Aboriginal youth and people from the local community in the research process.

The candidate engaged with Tłı̨ch̨ youth and other community members on a daily basis while in the field. She took any opportunity to discuss the project. The candidate collaborated with a member of the school staff on a class 'Zine photovoice project and a Tłı̨ch̨ student was hired as a research assistant. A local Tłı̨ch̨ woman was contracted to translate the consent forms into the Dogrib language. The candidate worked with the school Principal and CEO of the Tłı̨ch̨ Community Services Agency and they provided advice throughout the project. Aboriginal youth, school staff and other local people provided ideas and opinions that helped advance the work as well. It was felt that insufficient time and financial and human resources existed to undertake a PAR study. Community members themselves communicated that they wished to be informed and to advise the work but they did not feel it necessary at this time to be leading it.

6. To widely disseminate the knowledge gained from this study, in order to assist in the development of effective future research, practice guidelines, interventions and/or public policy.

The candidate returned to the community in October 2005 to bring back, present and discuss interim findings. A number of conference presentations, abstracts and papers have already been completed. The candidate will return to the community in the Fall of 2007 to bring back copies of the completed dissertation as well as

condensed and targeted reports for the school and school board. The hope is that the year following the completion of this dissertation will be used to write academic papers and reports from the work as well as to present the work in conference venues and for grassroots community based audiences as well. While in the field, the candidate produced a Dene Games DVD for the school (for more information about this DVD, please contact the candidate). It is hoped that this kind of output will also be made available for the results of the study.

### How this Study May Help to Inform Practice

The issue of northern Aboriginal students' engagement in school is one that has been thought and theorized about locally for many decades. Clearly, a simple answer or silver bullet is not available, nor was it sought. Instead, the study, with its focus on both the objective and subjective features of a school environment, highlights varied points of intervention to improve school engagement. Table 12.1 lists an overview of specific features of the school's environment and how each feature is linked to school engagement. Each of these observations could be examined and, where engagement is created, have these features supported and celebrated. Where engagement is eroded, look to make adjustments. Fortunately, with the signing of the Tłı̄ch̄Q Agreement, the community of Behchok̄Q is at an important crossroads with significant freedom to make changes to education in order to better suit local needs and to hopefully, improve educational outcomes for all students in the community. The results as presented in Table 12.1 can help organise thought and potential action around school engagement efforts at the community level. This table will be used to feed back study findings to the study community and it will be used with follow-up focus groups in Behchok̄Q to gauge the validity of these findings from the local perspective.

There are significant differences between Tłı̄ch̄Q home and community activity settings and the activity setting of the school. Aligning the school and home more effectively would mean having more Tłı̄ch̄Q staff, better integration of parents and other community members in the school and more Dogrib to be spoken, for example. These

findings are likely not new to local people who have been experiencing these issues for many years. But instead, they confirm the past activities and understandings of the community and school board, they add support to, and highlight the importance of, aligning the school with Tłı̄ch̄Q cultural beliefs, experiences and practices.

Harper and colleagues (2004) point out, "the possibility of new community narratives serves as a potential point of intervention for those who are willing to work collaboratively with the people of concern" (p.200). The current air of optimism is a significant resource. The school could do even more to support, celebrate and build upon this narrative. Although currently quite successful, the school should maintain its focus on supporting social scripts of empowerment and of possibility among its students.

It is hoped that this piece of research may be used as an advocacy tool for people of the local community to appeal for more, and for specific types of resources, for students. The resource-stress dynamic is an important influence on student engagement. For years, for example, the school has been advocating for additional counselling services at the school. This research supports this claim and encourages further study into how the school can better match its resources to the specific stressors faced by Tłı̄ch̄Q youth.

Topics for Further Research.

Virologist Mervyn Gordon once said:

No research is ever quite complete. It is the glory of a good bit of work that it opens the way for something still better, and thus rapidly leads to its own eclipse. The object of research is the advancement, not of the investigator, but of knowledge (c.1946).

This ethnographic study provides much fodder for further investigation. The following are suggestions for future research:

- Continued ethnographic investigation focusing on “walkabouts” or on elementary-aged students in Behchok̄. Particular attention should be paid to, and time spent in, the students’ homes and other settings they frequent outside of school.
- Continued follow-up of the members of the grade ten cohort over time. Further data could be collected in relation to employment and educational paths, longer-term educational outcomes, health status, and family situations. School attendance records, discipline referrals and standardized test scores could be more comprehensively cross-referenced to cohort members and the possible association of these factors with indicators of student engagement explored.
- A similar cohort study could be done prospectively starting with a current junior high school or elementary grade class at CJBS. Beginning with a younger grade would help ensure that students who left school prior to grade ten were not lost in the data collection. A prospective cohort study would allow for questionnaires and standardized tests to be undertaken at the outset of the study to establish a better and more comprehensive baseline. It would be useful to keep records of all in-school and out-of-school periods and grade repetitions for members of the cohort as well.
- The current study took the school’s and student’s perspectives on the issue of school engagement. Further research examining the perspective of employers or representatives from post secondary institutions in the region would provide useful comparison.
- The transience of people, particularly school staff in and out of the setting is a significant threat to school engagement supports for students at CJBS. Further study into why teachers stay, or do not stay, and what could be done to provide more continuity and sustainability in the setting would be useful.
- Similar studies in other communities could provide insight into what is unique, and what is not unique, about how environmental factors influence northern youth.

- Similar studies set in different locales would serve to confirm or negate the key findings for application to other populations and settings. Research in northern Aboriginal communities outside the diamond mining industry would be a useful contribution. It would be interesting to follow the changes and impacts associated with the proposed MacKenzie Valley pipeline in the Northwest Territories, for example.
- This research could inform any number of intervention studies but, the community should be engaged in discussions around how this might best be accomplished.

### A Final Word

Beatrice Quitte, the valedictorian from the first graduating high school class at CJBS said of her and her classmates to the rest of the students and community:

*“We have left a trail for you students to travel on. Take the trail and do not be afraid” (CJBS Yearbook Staff 1994, p.44).*

This is an appropriate sentiment to finish on. The first Tłı̄ch̄Q graduates made the way for others to come afterward. The challenge of being “Strong Like Two People” is significant, but the goal is essential. Many have a role to play in making this a reality for more young people. We are left with an exciting sense of possibility.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Disengagement Literature Search Strategy

In order to gain insight into the current state of knowledge around the concept of educational disengagement, a comprehensive literature search was conducted in eight prominent academic databases: Academic Search Premier; Bibliography of Native North Americans; Comprehensive International Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL); Child Development and Adolescent Studies; ERIC (Education); Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection and Sociological Collection.

#### Medline

(school\$ or education\$) and (engagement or disengagement or dropout or drop-out or school leaving or school-leaving) not (medical or dental or University or College)

#### Limits:

Human

1980 –2006

English, French or Spanish

Adolescents (aged 13-18 years)

#### Results:

380 articles identified in initial search

140 selected by title

79 selected by abstract

All imported to Reference Manager IDs #457 to #535

Key references expanded to “similar citations” and “cited in”

10 additional articles identified

Imported into Reference Manager #536 to #545

#### CINAHL

(school\$ or education\$) and (engagement or disengagement or dropout or drop-out or school leaving or school-leaving) not (medical or dental or University or College)

#### Limits:

1980 –2006

English, French or Spanish

Adolescents (aged 13-18 years)

#### Results:

140 articles identified in initial search

13 relevant non-duplicates selected from titles

9 selected from abstracts  
All imported to Reference Manager #546 to ##554  
Key references expanded to “similar citations” and “cited in”  
0 additional references found

EBSCO Host

Eric

(school\* or education\*) and (engagement or disengagement or dropout or drop-out or school leaving or school-leaving) not (medical or dental or University or College)

Limits:

1980 –2006  
High School

Results:

1442 articles identified in original search  
Narrow 1442 by EBSCO Subject “Dropout Research”  
215 identified and reviewed by title and abstract  
Narrow 1442 by EBSCO Subject “Dropouts”  
467 identified and reviewed by title and abstract

Search duplicated for Bibliography of Native North Americans

46 articles identified in initial search  
Narrow 46 by EBSCO Subject “Dropouts”  
25 identified and reviewed by title and abstract  
Narrow 46 by EBSCO Subject “Canada”  
3 identified and reviewed by title and abstract

Search duplicated for Academic Search Premier

3258 articles identified in original search  
Narrow 3258 by EBSCO Subject “Dropouts” (529) and then “High Schools”  
26 identified and reviewed by title and abstract  
Narrowed 3258 by EBSCO Subject “Dropouts” (529) and then “School Attendance”  
29 identified and reviewed by title and abstract

Search duplicated for SocINDEX

1485 articles identified in original search  
Narrow 1485 by EBSCO Subject “Dropouts”  
332 identified and reviewed by title and abstract  
Narrowed 1485 by EBSCO Subject “Research”  
22 identified and reviewed by title and abstract

345 new articles identified and placed in EBSCO folder  
Inputted into Reference Manager #555 to #900.

The search resulted in a list of 482 articles. The full-text of each article from 1990 to the present was collected and reviewed. Additional articles were identified and added to the search list based on a review of existing reference lists and the existing literature base held by the researcher. Articles dating prior to 1990 were included only if they were review articles or if they were referred to in other sources and were felt to be key sources. In total 354 articles were reviewed using the matrix method for literature reviews in the health sciences (Garrard 1999). In addition to a critical appraisal of the literature for type and quality of evidence, the following questions also acted as a guide:

1. How is educational disengagement or its related terms conceptualised? (i.e. descriptors used, assumptions, examples)
2. What theory or theories are used in relation to school disengagement (or its related terms)?
3. What factors are associated with school disengagement?
4. Does the article discuss context or environmental factors in relation to school disengagement? If so, what is discussed and what are the findings?
5. Does the article specifically pertain to Aboriginal disengagement (or its related terms?) and what are the findings?

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval from the University of Calgary, Faculty of Medicine's Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board



FACULTY OF MEDICINE | UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

2004-10-25

Dr. P. Hawe  
Department of Community Health Sciences  
University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta

**OFFICE OF MEDICAL BIOETHICS**

Room 93, Heritage Medical Research Bldg  
3330 Hospital Drive NW  
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 4N1  
Telephone: (403) 220-7990  
Fax: (403) 283-8524  
Email: omb@ucalgary.ca

Dear Dr. Hawe:

**RE: The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth**

**Grant-ID: 18034**

**Student:** C. Davidson (PhD Student)

The above-noted thesis proposal including Participant Observation Guide, Focus Group and Interview Guide, Interview Guide for Key Informants, Participant Information Form, Participant Consent Form, and Consent form for Parent or Guardian have been submitted for Committee review and found to be ethically acceptable.

Please note that this approval is subject to the following conditions:

- (1) access to personal identifiable health information was not requested in this submission;
- (2) a copy of the informed consent form must have been given to each research subject, if required for this study;
- (3) a Progress Report must be submitted by 2005-10-25, containing the following information:
  - i. the number of subjects recruited;
  - ii. a description of any protocol modification;
  - iii. any unusual and/or severe complications, adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, withdrawal of subjects from the research, or complaints about the research;
  - iv. a summary of any recent literature, finding, or other relevant information, especially information about risks associated with the research;
  - v. a copy of the current informed consent form;
  - vi. the expected date of termination of this project.
- (4) a Final Report must be submitted at the termination of the project.

Please note that you have been named as a principal collaborator on this study because students are not permitted to serve as principal investigators. Please accept the Board's best wishes for success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher J. Doig, MD, MSc, FRCPC

Chair, Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board

CJD/km

c.c. Dr. T. Noseworthy (information) Research Services C. Davidson (PhD Student)

Appendix 3: Aurora Research Institute Northern Research License

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH LICENCE**

**Licence # 13744N**

**File # 12 410 643**

**ISSUED BY:** Aurora Research Institute - Aurora College  
Inuvik, Northwest Territories

**ISSUED TO:** Ms. Colleen Davison  
c/o Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School, Bag#1  
Rae-Edzo, NT X0E 0Y0  
Tel: (867) 371-4521

**ON:** 14-Feb-05

**TEAM MEMBERS:** Dr. Nancy Gibson  
Canadian Circumpolar Institute  
University of Alberta

**AFFILIATION:** University of Calgary

**FUNDING:** Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

**TITLE:** The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth

**OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:**

Less than half of all aboriginal students presently finish high school in Canada. Because schooling is strongly correlated with health, the objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to gain an understanding of the role school plays in the lives of northern aboriginal youth; 2) to gain an understanding of the meaning of schooling and education to aboriginal youth in a resource-rich area of Canada's north; 3) to build capacity by involving aboriginal youth and local communities in the research process; and 4) to widely disseminate the knowledge gained from this study, in order to assist in the development of future research, practice guidelines, interventions, and/or public policy.

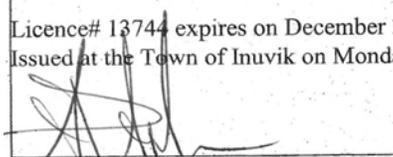
**DATA COLLECTION IN THE NWT:**

**DATE(S):** February through December

**LOCATION:** Rae-Edzo, NWT,

Licence# 13744 expires on December 31, 2005.

Issued at the Town of Inuvik on Monday, February 14, 2005.

  
Andrew Applejohn  
Director, Aurora Research Institute



Appendix 4: Letters of Support for the Project



Dogrib Community  
Services Board  
Bag 5, Rae-Edzo NT  
X0E 0Y0  
Phone: 867-392-3000  
Fax: 867-392-3001  
E-mail: dcsb@dogrib.net

*Child and Family  
Services*  
Phone: 867-392-3005

*Education Programs*  
Phone: 867-392-3006

*Health Programs*  
Phone: 867-392-3007

*Human Resources and  
Financial Services*  
Phone: 867-392-3008

DŌ NĀKE LANI NĀTS'ETSO  
Strong Like Two People



October 22, 2004.

Aurora Research Institute  
P.O. Box 1450,  
Inuvik, NT X0E 0T0

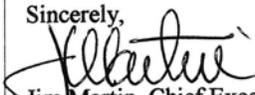
**Re: Support for Research Project/ The Role of School in the Lives of  
Northern Aboriginal Youth**

The Dogrib Community Services Board is a regional organization that delivers pre-school through grade 12 education, primary healthcare and social programs and services to the Tlicho communities of Gameti, Rae-Edzo, Wekweti and Wha Ti in the NWT. The Board has a long history of active collaboration with university researchers and other scientists who have had an interest in working on projects that could be of use to our leaders and decision-makers. Currently the Board is working with the Canadian Circumpolar Institute and the University of Alberta in an attempt to increase this research collaboration for the benefit of our communities.

Colleen Davison is the principal investigator for a research project entitled "The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth". This project is a qualitative, ethnographic study of the attitudes of young people towards school and the role of schooling in their lives. We believe this work has the potential to provide our Board staff and community leaders with insights into critical beliefs, attitudes and interests of our young people. Further, we believe these insights will be beneficial for the development of future educational programming.

We strongly support Ms. Davison and this research project and look forward to a successful collaboration during the coming year.

Sincerely,

  
Jim Martin, Chief Executive Officer  
Dogrib Community Services Board

c.c. Colleen Davison, Principal Investigator  
c.c. Lucy Lafferty, Director of Education, DCSB  
c.c. Rita Mueller, Principal, Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School



**Dogrib Community  
Services Board**

Bag 5, Rae-Edzo NT  
X0E 0Y0  
Phone: 867-392-3000  
Fax: 867-392-3001  
E-mail: dcsb@dogrib.net

*Child and Family  
Services*

Phone: 867-392-3005

*Education Programs*

Phone: 867-392-3006

*Health Programs*

Phone: 867-392-3007

DŁ NĀKE LANĪ NĀTS'ETSO  
Strong Like Two People



October 22, 2004

AURORA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Re: SUPPORT LETTER FOR RESEARCH LICENSE/ The Role of  
School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth

The Dogrib Community Services Board of Education is in support  
for the University of Calgary's research " The Role of School in the  
Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth".

The research, to be conducted by Colleen M. Davison on the "Role  
of School in the Lives of Northern Aboriginal Youth", is important in  
that by knowing the role of school in the lives of Aboriginal Youth,  
especially the Dogrib youth, would enable the schools to find ways of  
better serving the students.

I hope that you would take DCSB support into consideration for the  
insurance of a license for scientific research for this project.

Masi cho,

Lucy Lafferty, Director  
Dogrib Community Services Board of Education

c.c Alphonse Nitsiza, DCSB Chairperson

c.c Jim Martin, CEO Dogrib Community Services Board



## Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School

Rae-Edzo, NWT X0E 0Y0

Telephone: 1-867-371-4511 • Fax: 1-867-371-3083

Friday September 3, 2004

It is with pleasure that I write a letter of support for the University of Calgary's research project "The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Youth" as administered by Colleen Davison and Dr. Penny Howe.

Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School is a willing participant in this project. I understand that funding has been secured from the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation. The school is firmly committed to provide full support to this project. This support includes providing an on site office and work area, a welcoming atmosphere and access to all student and staff activities and any other assistance we are able to provide.

The staff at CJBRHS, along with the Dogrib Community Services Board personnel, have been kept abreast of this potential project throughout the various stages.

CJBRHS staff and students look forward to this project proceeding.

Sincerely,

Rita Mueller, Principal  
Chief Jimmy Bruneau Regional High School

c.c. Lucy Lafferty, DCSB Director of Education  
Kyle Kelly, DCSB Manager of Education Programs  
Jim Martin, DCSB Chief Executive Officer

*Strong Like Two People*

T ̐EHDA/DETTAH • BEHCHOK/RAE-EDZO • GAM̐TI/RAE LAKES • WEKWETI/SNARE LAKE • WHA TI

## Appendix 5: Interview Guides

### Interview #1: Elder, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do in the community?
2. How would you describe the school?
3. What do you think is the relationship between the community and the school?  
Where are the links or partnerships? (*probe- what are the strengths and weaknesses here*)
4. How do you think the school's physical location influences its relationship to the community and to youth?
5. In what places outside of school do youth interact?
6. What do you see as the current education and work pathways of youth in this community? (*probe- are students leaving school to work?*)
7. How have pathways changed over time?
8. Can you tell me the history of the physical layout of the school? (*probe – from the open concept, through the retrofit*)
9. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines are/might impact youth here?
10. Can you tell me about the evolution of the Dogrib language and cultural program at the school?
11. What pressures do you think the school has on it?
12. Tell me about Chief Jimmy Bruneau. What was he like? What do you think he represents today?
13. What have you seen to be the impact of self-governance thus far? What do you think will happen in the future because of self-governance?
14. Can you tell me about the concept of time and whether you think there are different approaches to the concept between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this community. How do you think perceptions and approaches to time might influence those at school?
15. That was all my formal questions, was there anything else you wanted to talk about in relation to these topics?

### Interview #2: School staff, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do in the school/community?  
(*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. What do you see as the current education and work pathways of youth in this community? (*probe- are students leaving school to work?*)
4. What reasons do you see for students not succeeding in school in this community?
5. Can you tell me about patterns of attendance you might see throughout the year at this school?
6. Can you tell me about older students and the school? (*probe – do they come back or attend without problem?*)
7. Do people in the community use the Adult Education Centre?

8. I have a list of projects and partnerships that I have heard that the school has had over time, could you tell me a little bit more about these activities? (*probe – go through each point on the list*)
9. Can you tell me about the Friendship Centre in the community?
10. Can you tell me about the school daycare?
11. Can you tell me about the specific programs the school has set up for students with children?
12. Do you see active participation of the health centre staff at the school? How?
13. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines might impact youth here?
14. Do you see any other changes in the community that are affecting youth and school?
15. What have you seen to be the impact of self-governance thus far? What do you think will happen in the future because of self-governance?
16. What is your perception of the current state of the Dogrib language?
17. That was all my formal questions, was there anything else you wanted to talk about in relation to these topics?

#### Interview #3: Band Council Staff, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do in the school/community? (*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. What do you see as the current education and work pathways of youth in this community? (*probe- are students leaving school to work?*)
4. What reasons do you see for youth not finishing school here?
5. What do you think the school is doing about this?
6. What have you seen to be the impact of self-governance thus far? What do you think will happen in the future because of self-governance?
7. I have a list of names of the grade 10 students from a pervious year. If I go through the list could you let me know if you know what the person is doing now, i.e. where they are living, where they may be studying or working, whether they graduated from high school and if they are parents? (*probe – each name on the list*)

#### Interview #4: School Administrator, non-Aboriginal

1. I would like to understand how the school is regulated. How much freedom or how much limitation do they have in making decisions?
2. What is the role of the Community Services Authority (CSA)?
3. What exerts pressure on the school and what does the school exert pressure on?
4. What is your view of the relationship between the school and the family or parents of students?
5. What have you seen to be the impact of self-governance thus far? What do you think will happen in the future because of self-governance?
6. How would you describe the school (*probe- oasis, safe house?*)
7. How are programs at the school funded? How big a role does third party funding play?
8. Can you tell me about the recent wellness initiative?

9. Can you tell me about the evolution of the physical layout of the school (*probe – open concept through the retrofit*)
10. I have noticed there are few student led activities at the school. Can you tell me about student leadership over the years?

Interview 5: School Administrator, non-Aboriginal

I have a list of names of the grade 10 students from a pervious year. If I go through the list could you let me know if you know what the person is doing now, i.e. where they are living, where they may be studying or working, whether they graduated from high school and if they are parents? (*probe – each name on the list*)

Interview #6: School Staff, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do, and have done, in the school/community? (*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. What types of extra-curricular activities are available right now for the students in the community (at school and in the community)? (*probe – swimming pool, skating rink, recreational sports, school sports, curling rink, basketball court, baseball diamond*)
4. Can you tell me about the school trapping program?
5. Can you tell me about the youth centre in the community?
6. Can you tell me about the Sportsplex? How well used is it? What kind of programs do they have? How successful are the programs? Who gets involved?
7. Do you think extra-curricular activities influence students involvement and success at school? How?
8. What do you think about students who have their extra-curricular privileges suspended?
9. Can you tell me about any student led activities? What has student leadership been like over time at the school?
10. Do you think there are social cliques at this school, and if so, can you tell me about them?
11. Are there any extra-curricular activities that you think are really needed now? Which ones and why?
12. What do youth do in the community in their free time?
13. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #7: School Staff, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do, and have done, in the school/community? (*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. Could you tell me about the support services students have at this school? (*probe – program support, counselling, reading*)

4. Do you think these programs are supported students to be able to stay in school?
5. What do you see as the current education and work pathways of youth in this community? (*probe- are students leaving school to work?*)
6. What reasons do you see for students not succeeding at school?
7. Can you tell me about any volunteers that may work at or with the school?
8. What is the Success Class?
9. What do you see as the goal of the school?
10. Do you think the school is successfully at supporting students?
11. How are student support programs funded? What is the role of third party funding?
12. What is Inclusive Schooling?
13. Can you tell me about the extra-curricular activities you are involved in here in the school and the community? (*probe – sports, drama, summer recreation*)
14. Can you tell me about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in this community?
15. Can you tell me about the Youth Centre here in town? What is its history? What has been your involvement? Is it successful, why or why not?
16. Can you talk about student run activities at this school, and perhaps comment on student leadership opportunities?
17. What do you think the school does to encourage all students to come, to be involved, to attend?
18. What are your perceptions about the standards set at this school?
19. Do you think there are student cliques and distinct social groups at this school?
20. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #8: School Administrator, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do, and have done, in the school/community? (*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. What do you think the goals of the school are?
4. Can you tell me about the cultural program? (*probe – history, current state, challenges, strengths*)
5. What kind of physical infrastructure does the school have for cultural programming?
6. How are these kinds of activities funded? What is the role of third party funding?
7. What is the role of the CSA in relation to the school, especially as it relates to specialized programming?
8. How does communication occur between the school and the school board and groups like the CSA?
9. How are the parents involved in the school?
10. What is your perception of the state of the Dogrib language among youth in this community? How is the language taught at school? (*probe – for different grades*)
11. Does the GNWT have an imposed curriculum? How does this interact with the specialized programming?
12. Can you tell me about the school trapping program?
13. What are the roles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal instructors in the cultural program?

14. Do you think there is a need for more Aboriginal staff at the school (what kinds, and why)?
15. Do you think the cultural program encourages some students to stay in school? Who and how?
16. What have you seen to be the impact of self-governance thus far? What do you think will happen in the future because of self-governance?
17. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #9: Government of the NWT Official, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do?
2. Can you tell me about the recent report your office released about the NWT Skills Development Program? (*probe – have report there to refer to*)
3. Are there other similar kinds of programs that you know about relating to youth development, training and employment in the NWT?
4. How are these programs funded?
5. How are these programs (and their potentially benefits) distributed around the Territory? (*probe – Behchok̄?*)
6. What do you see as the current education and work pathways of youth in the NWT, particularly in communities like Behchok̄?
7. What do you think the influence of the diamond mines might be on youth in the region?
8. Is the government doing anything to mitigate the potential negative impacts and encourage the potential positive impacts of diamond mining?
9. Are there other documents or data sources that you could refer me to relating to skills and training for youth in the NWT?
10. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #10: School Staff, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do, and have done, in the school/community? (*probe – how does your job at school differ from others?*)
2. How would you describe the school?
3. How would you describe the students?
4. What do you think the goals of the school are?
5. What challenges do you face in your job?
6. What are the high points of your work?
7. Can you tell me about the support services that are available for students at this school?
8. Are they successful in supporting students? Why do you think that is?
9. What reasons do you see for students not succeeding in school?
10. Can you tell me about the Success Program?
11. How are support services funded? What is the role of third party funding in the school?

12. Can you tell me about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in this community?
13. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #11: School Administrator, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do, and have done, in the school/community?
2. How would you describe the school?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of the school? (*probe – dates, governance over time*). Do you have any documents that I could get copies of about this?
4. What are the goals of the school? Where do these come from?
5. What do you think you are most proud of in relation to the school?
6. How would you describe the students at the school?
7. What would you say are the most pressing issues for youth in this community? (*probe – education, health, family, work*)
8. How have these changed over time?
9. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines are/might impact youth here?
10. What role or roles does the school play in the lives of youth here?
11. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #12: School Administrator, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you begin by telling me a little bit about the history of the school and the school board? Do you have any documents related to this that I could get copies of?
2. Have there been any key staff members that have made a significant impact on the school and students throughout the school's history?
3. How does staff turnover affect the school and the youth?
4. What reasons do you see for students in this community to not be succeeding in school?
5. What is the school and school board doing to try and support students having difficulties staying in school?
6. Can you tell me about the proposed alternative program?
7. What entities (groups, organisations, departments of governments etc) does the school relate to/interact with in its everyday functioning? Could you briefly explain these entities and relationships?
8. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines are/might impact youth here?
9. Can you put the recent economic boom into historical perspective?
10. Can you suggest other potential sources of information/documents about these topics that I might be able to access?
11. In your perspective, what kind of research / evidence would be useful to inform or support your work?
12. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #13: Band Council Staff, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do community?
2. What stage is the Tłı̄ch̄ Agreement in right now?
3. How do you think the passing of the Agreement will affect life in the community?
4. How do you foresee it affecting youth specifically?
5. What would you like to see come about as a result of the Agreement in 5, 10, 25 years time (or more)?
6. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines are/might impact youth here?
7. What is the community doing to try and optimize the positive, and minimize the negative impacts?
8. Can you tell me about your involvement in Trails of Our Ancestors? (probe – *what is the program history, what does it represent, how are the trips? Who goes and what are their experiences like?*)
9. How did the DVD feature about the community’s historic canoe trips get put together? (probe – *who was involved, how did the project originate*)
10. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #14: Adult Educator, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do community?
2. How has way of life and language use changed for the Tłı̄ch̄ people over time?
3. What were the major influences on this change? (probe – *residential school*)
4. What do you think is the current state of the Dogrib language in this community and among the youth?
5. What do you see as the major factors related to whether a young person speaks the language or not?
6. What is the state of Dogrib language instruction at the school? Why do you think the program is not stronger, say for example immersion?
7. What do you think the future is going to be like for Tłı̄ch̄ youth today?
8. How do you think the opening of the diamond mines are/might impact youth here?
9. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #15: School Administrator, non-Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me about the discipline policies or practices at the school?
2. Can you tell me more about student suspensions? What dictates if a student is suspended? What do you think they do on home suspension? Did you ever have in-school suspension?
3. Do you notice any educational patterns between students from this community versus students from the outlying communities that go to school here?
4. How are standards set at the school?
5. How much freedom or limitation does the school have in making decisions? (probe – *regulations, rules, school board, government*)

6. How much judgement is there in your job?
7. What would you say is the primary goal of the school?
8. Do you think there are students that are more at-risk of leaving school than others, and if so, does the school deal with these students in a specific way?
9. What attendance patterns do you see throughout the year at this school? Does the school have different approaches to students at different times of the year because of this?
10. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #16: Adult Educator, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do in your community?
2. Can you tell about your experience at residential school?
3. Would you say most people who attended residential school from your community would have had a similar experience? (*probe – men and women*)
4. How has way of life changed for the Tłı̄ch̄ǭ people over time?
5. What were the major influences on this change?
6. What do you think is the current state of the Dogrib language and culture in this community and among the youth?
7. What do you see as the major factors related to whether a young person speaks the language or not?
8. What do you think the future is going to be like for Tłı̄ch̄ǭ youth today?
9. That is the last of my formal questions; did you have anything else that you wanted to add?

Interview #17: Elder, Aboriginal

1. Can you tell me about your experience at residential school? (*probe – how did you first go, how old were you, how long, were there positive and negative aspects, how did you end up leaving?*)
2. What would you do during the holiday times?
3. Could you speak your own language?
4. What advice might you give the youth of today?
5. What do you think the future will be like for Tłı̄ch̄ǭ youth?
6. Was there anything else you wanted to add?

## Appendix 6: Focus Group Guides

### Focus Group #1: School Staff (6 members, 1 Aboriginal)

1. Can you all please introduce yourself and share what your job and other involvements might be at school and in the community?
2. What do you think is really great about the school and the youth in this community?
3. What are some of the major challenges faced by youth here?
4. What are some of the major challenges faced by the school?
5. What supports are in place for youth in the community? At the school?
6. What is needed to better support students?
7. What kind of research / evidence would best inform this work?
8. Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

### Focus Group #2: Students (9 members, all Aboriginal)

1. Can you all please introduce yourself? (*probe – grade, age, home community*)
2. What do you think is really great about living in this community?
3. What is great about this school?
4. What are some of the major challenges faced by youth here? (*probe – tough parts about living here*)
5. What do you think are the most serious health problems among youth in the community?
6. What do young people do in their free time here?
7. When would young people here start having boyfriends or girlfriends?
8. What will you do in the summer? (*probe – summer jobs?*)
9. What are your goals?
10. Would any of you think about working instead of going to school?
11. Have any of you dropped out before? Can you tell us about that?
12. For those who stay in the school residence, what is it like for you?
13. What activities are you involved in at school or in the community? (*probe – sports, recreation, church, travel, music, hobbies, arts?*)
14. Who do you think are the leaders in your community?
15. Do you know of artists or musicians from your community?
16. Have you noticed any changes in the community since the diamond mines opened? (*probe – negative/positive*).
17. What do you think will happen when the diamond mines close in the future?
18. Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

### Focus Group #3: Health Care personnel (7 members, 2 Aboriginal)

1. Can you all please introduce yourself and share what your job and other involvements might be in the community? (*probe – if not local, years in the community*)
2. What are the most pressing health issues facing the community as a whole?

3. What are the most pressing health issues facing the youth of the community?
4. In what ways do health care staff / health services interact with the school?
5. From your perspectives, how are the opening of the diamond mines affecting / going to affect the community as a whole?
6. And the youth more specifically?
7. Is there anything else anyone wants to add?

## Appendix 7: The First Order Code List

1. Dogrib Language and Traditional Culture
2. Aboriginal / Non-Aboriginal Relationships
3. Perceptions, Descriptors & Characteristics of Youth
4. Relationship to Past / Change
5. Relationship to Work
6. Physical Characteristics of the Community
7. Physical Characteristics of the School
8. Resources (Cultural, Financial, Human...)
9. Perceptions of Education, Intelligence, Success
10. Resilience Stories
12. Good Quote
13. Metaphor Use
14. Community Messages / Symbols
15. School Messages / Symbols
16. Roles / Goals of School
17. Relationship of School as Institution to Students
18. Experiences / Opinions of Youth
19. Ways of Communicating in the Interview
20. Student Typologies
21. School / Community Dynamic (Links)
22. School Standards & Relationship Between School and Authority
23. Relationship to Time
24. People in the School and Positions Available
25. Examples that Differentiate Between What Youth Say and Do
26. Examples of What Youth Leave Behind
27. These Things Impact Engagement - But How?
28. Factors That Seem to Contribute to Engagement
29. Factors That Seem to be Barriers to Education / Schooling
30. Threats to the System
31. Evidence of Capacity Building (reflection, creativity, pro-activity)
32. Other Settings
33. Gender Roles Issues
34. Events
35. School Staff Related
36. Field Notes – Related to the Entry Process
37. Field Notes - Something to Think About
38. Field Notes - Giving Back

## Appendix 8: Introduction of the Candidate at the School

### **Who Am I?**

Colleen Davison  
PhD student at the University of Calgary  
Department of Community Health Sciences  
Originally from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

### **Where Am I?**

My office is in the old reading room in the counselling wing at CJBS. The telephone extension #134. I live in the school residence.

### **What Am I Doing?**

I am working on my PhD at the University of Calgary. I am a former teacher in the north and have a real interest in health and education issues among northern adolescents. The working title of my project is: The Role of School in the Lives of Northern Youth and I am asking questions like – *What role does school play in the lives of Tłı̄chǫ youth in Rae-Edzo?*

I'll be here at CJBS until after the start of the second semester and will be spending a lot of time observing activities and events at the school, and talking to teachers, students and community members. I'll be doing lots of writing and thinking and I'll be bringing back some of my ideas to have discussions with you about them too. I hope I can also do some volunteer work for CJBS as well.

I am looking forward to getting to know you and I am happy to talk to you in more detail about my project anytime as the year progresses!

## Appendix 9: Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North

### *Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS)*

Revised document approved by ACUNS Council, 28 November 1997

#### Introduction

Since the publication of the Ethical Principles in 1982, they have proven their worth by becoming the most widely cited and adopted among northern researchers in Canada. Since then, however, the situation in the North has changed significantly. Many First Nations, the Inuvialuit, and the Inuit have settled land claims and, in many cases, related Self-Government Agreements. Land and other regimes have altered. Researchers now find the research context shifting, often unpredictably. Communities have sometimes found themselves and their concerns disregarded by researchers. A renewed research relationship has been called for and is emerging.

A new spirit of partnership between northerners and researchers is emerging in northern research. Of course, the nature of any particular partnership will depend on the specific project. The new partnership ethic, however, emphasizes the need to create meaningful relationships with the people and communities affected by research.

Another change is the increasing involvement of northerners not only as subjects or passive observers of research but in all aspects of the research process. Northerners are actively involved in research from conception to reporting, from funding to licensing.

For all parties to benefit fully from research partnerships, mutual understanding is critical. High quality research depends both on communities understanding the needs and concerns of researchers and on researchers understanding the needs and concerns of communities.

Guidelines, or principles, are needed to provide a foundation for and to foster a mutual understanding of community and researcher needs and goals and to ensure that research is carried out with the least friction and social disruption and the most co-operation and support. The 20 principles presented here are intended to encourage the development of co-operation and mutual respect between researchers and the people of the North. They are also intended to encourage partnership between northern peoples and researchers that, in turn, will promote and enhance northern scholarship.

Northerners are involved with research in many different ways:

1. As researchers;
2. As members of a research team;
3. As partners in a research collaboration;
4. As research subjects;
5. As sources of information;
6. As users of completed research;

7. As clients;
8. As funders;
9. As licensors; or
10. As individuals experiencing and living with the impact of research.

If research is to be a positive component of the northern social and physical environment, it must respect and involve, where practical, northern residents in appropriate ways. To do so, the research must not only be explained clearly, conducted ethically, and used constructively, it must be guided by principles that consider all of the above-mentioned ways in which northerners may be involved in research activities.

Researchers must be aware that good intentions are not always sufficient for avoiding adverse reactions or effects of research. Mutual respect will develop from meaningful consultation and partnerships, and will work to advance northern scholarship of all sorts.

### Principles

1. Researchers should abide by any local laws, regulations or protocols that may be in place in the region(s) in which they work.
2. There should be appropriate community consultation at all stages of research, including its design and practice. In determining the extent of “appropriate” consultation, researchers and communities should consider the relevant cross-cultural contexts, if any, and the type of research involved. However, incorporation of local research needs into research projects is encouraged.
3. Mutual respect is important for successful partnerships. In the case of northern research, there should be respect for the language, traditions, and standards of the community and respect for the highest standards of scholarly research.
4. The research must respect the privacy and dignity of the people. Researchers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the cultures and traditions of local communities.
5. The research should take into account the knowledge and experience of the people, and respect that knowledge and experience in the research process. The incorporation of relevant traditional knowledge into all stages of research is encouraged.
6. For all parties to benefit fully from research, efforts should be made, where practical, to enhance local benefits that could result from research.
7. The person in charge of the research is accountable for all decisions on the project, including the decisions of subordinates.
8. No research involving living people or extant environments should begin before obtaining the informed consent of those who might be unreasonably affected or of their legal guardian.

9. In seeking informed consent, researchers should clearly identify sponsors, purposes of the research, sources of financial support, and investigators responsible for the research.
10. In seeking informed consent, researchers should explain the potential beneficial and harmful effects of the research on individuals, on the community and/or on the environment.
11. The informed consent of participants in research involving human subjects should be obtained for any information-gathering techniques to be used (tape and video recordings, photographs, physiological measures, etc.), for the uses of information gathered from participants, and for the format in which that information will be displayed or made accessible.
12. The informed consent of participants should be obtained if they are going to be identified; if confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the subject must be informed of the possible consequences of this before becoming involved in the research.
13. No undue pressure should be applied to obtain consent for participation in a research project.
14. A community or an individual has the right to withdraw from the research at any point.
15. On-going explanations of research objectives, methods, findings and their interpretation should be made available to the community.
16. Subject to the requirements for confidentiality, descriptions of the data should be left on file in the communities from which it was gathered, along with descriptions of the methods used and the place of data storage. Local data storage is encouraged.
17. Research summaries in the local language and research reports should be made available to the communities involved. Consideration also should be given to providing reports in the language of the community and to otherwise enhance access.
18. All research publications should refer to informed consent and community participation, where applicable.
19. Subject to requirements for confidentiality, publications should give appropriate credit to everyone who contributes to the research.
20. Greater consideration should be placed on the risks to physical, psychological, humane, proprietary, and cultural values than to potential contribution of the research to knowledge.

## Definitions

The principles refer to research in its broadest sense, including fundamental or applied research in the physical, biological, or social sciences. Surveys or monitoring studies would also be included. In general, “research” includes all technological activities in the North. Even mineral and petroleum exploration surveys would be expected to honour the general principles. However, the more detailed principles on informed consent are meant specifically for researchers whose work involves human subjects and might not apply to purely technological activities. The principles, however, hold that, where such activities might affect individuals or communities, there be consultation because the principles focus on the practical aspects of science that can affect local people, communities and the environment. Even where research does not involve local people in an obvious way, it may still have effects on the land, water or wildlife of the region, and may thus affect the people indirectly.

The word “community” is not restricted to a limited area of settlement. The surrounding land that supplies resources for the settlement and the people who live there are viewed as part of the community. In addition, there are communities of interest within geographical communities. These, too, should be considered where research activities might affect them. The geographic area of concern includes the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories and its successors, Nunavut and the currently unnamed Western Territory, Northern Québec, Labrador, and the northern parts of the provinces from Ontario to British Columbia (the Extreme North, Far North and Middle North as defined by Louis-Edmond Hamelin (1975)). Although the emphasis is on isolated northern communities, the general principles are not unique to the North and most of them could be applied elsewhere.

## Applying the Principles

In applying these principles to actual research, it is important to understand what they are not intended to do. They are not intended to regulate northern research--that is the responsibility of sponsoring organizations, northern governments or communities whose laws, guidelines and protocols will compel certain behaviour. And they are certainly not intended to be the last word on this matter. They are, instead, intended to guide the conduct of research in the North in general ways. They are conceived as general principles that will encourage research that is fair, honest, open and, where necessary, conducted with the consent and cooperation of whatever people or communities will be involved or affected or who might benefit or suffer harm from the research.

Some types of physical science or exploratory research might not appear to require the researcher to consider all the principles included here. This is a particularly important point. Research on physical phenomena at a distance from communities, trap lines, hunting territories or traditional lands, might need nothing beyond the applicable permits. In other areas, the situation might require discussion of a project with a community. A researcher might not need to secure, for example, the informed consent of an individual as a participant or a subject in the research project. Nevertheless, the researcher might have to consider securing informed consent of an individual who might be a partner, a collaborator, or an

informant, or of an individual or a community that might have to live with the effects of the research results or of its actual conduct (on community relations, game, land, water, etc.).

The situation in the North has changed considerably in the fifteen years since these Principles were first articulated and published. Both those who ask questions and those who help to supply the answers have new needs. Respect is vital in all aspects of the research enterprise. Respect for knowledge, expertise, world views, ways of life must flow in all directions. Genuine respect will enhance the research enterprise in the North and benefit all who live and work there.

#### Document History

These principles are based on “Ethical Principles for the Conduct of Research in the North” prepared by the Working Group on Canada/MAB Sub-Program 4 (Science for the North), March 1977. The ACUNS Committee on Relations with Northern Peoples studied the MAB document as well as ethical guidelines prepared by other groups, and presented its recommendations to the Association’s Annual General Meeting in May 1981. The Committee’s document was accepted by the ACUNS Council, subject to some amendment, responsibility for which was delegated to the Board of Directors. At a meeting on September 22, 1981, the ACUNS Board of Directors gave approval to the 1982 document. In November 1995, the newly elected Board of ACUNS undertook to review the principles and to make recommendations for its change to the ACUNS Council. In November 1996, a two-person Board committee presented a discussion document to the Council at the Annual General Meeting. Comments on the document and, later, on a series of draft principles by researchers, academics, government officials, Aboriginal organizations, and research bodies as well as research into a variety of ethical guidelines produced by a host of other groups, associations, regulatory and research agencies, led to a draft of the revised document. It was presented to and accepted, with minor amendments, by the ACUNS Council at its November 1997 Annual General Meeting.

Appendix 10: Relative Risk Calculations from the Grade 10 Cohort Data

**Relative Risk Calculation  
Gender by Graduation Status  
Stata 7 Output  
November 25, 2006**

	Female	Male	Total
Graduate	9	3	12
Non-graduate	26	38	64
Total	35	41	76
Risk	.2571429	.0731707	.1578947

	Point estimate	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Risk difference	.1839721	.0186855	.3492587
<b>Risk ratio</b>	<b>3.514286</b>	<b>1.030985</b>	<b>11.97903</b>
Attr. frac. ex.	.7154472	.0300537	.9165208
Attr. frac. pop	.5365854		

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 chi2(1) = 4.81 Pr>chi2 = 0.0284

Relative Risk:  $(9/35) / (3/41) = 0.257 / 0.073 = 3.52$  (95% CI 1.03 – 11.98)

Interpretation: A female student has three and a half times the chance of graduating than a male student.

**Relative Risk Calculation  
Parental Status by Graduation Status  
Stata 7 Output  
November 25, 2006**

	Parent	Non-parent	Total
Graduates	6	6	12
Non-graduates	17	47	64
Total	23	53	76
Risk	.2608696	.1132075	.1578947

	Point estimate	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Risk difference	.147662	-.0510353	.3463594
<b>Risk ratio</b>	<b>2.304348</b>	<b>.8306976</b>	<b>6.392241</b>
Attr. frac. ex.	.5660377	-.2038076	.8435603
Attr. frac. pop	.2830189		

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chi2(1) = 2.63 Pr>chi2 = 0.1048  
Relative Risk:  $(6/23) / (6/53) = 0.261 / 0.113 = 2.31$  (95% CI 0.83 – 6.39)

Interpretation: A parent has 2.3 times the chance of graduating than a non-parent.

**Relative Risk Calculation**  
**Among Non-Graduates, Parental Status by Not in School**  
**Stata 7 Output**  
**November 25, 2006**

	Parents	Non-parents	Total
Not in School	14	27	41
In School	3	20	23
Total	17	47	64
Risk	.8235294	.5744681	.640625
	Point estimate	[95% Conf. Interval]	
	-----+-----		
Risk difference	.2490613	.0192359	.4788867
<b>Risk ratio</b>	<b>1.433551</b>	<b>1.030513</b>	<b>1.99422</b>
Attr. frac. ex.	.3024316	.0296093	.4985508
Attr. frac. pop	.1032693		
	-----+-----		
chi2(1) =	3.36	Pr>chi2 = 0.0666	

Relative Risk:  $(14/17) / (26/47) = 0.824 / 0.553 = 1.49$  (95% CI 1.03 – 1.99)

Interpretation: Among the non-graduates, the parents have 1.4 times the risk of not being in school than the non-parents.

## Appendix 11: Logistic Regression Analysis from the Grade 10 Cohort Data

### Question

*Does being a parent impact the odds of graduating from high school, and is this possible relationship also dependent on the gender or age of the student in some way?*

### Variables

The outcome/dependent variable of interest is graduation as of November 1, year 4 of the cohort study. The primary exposure/independent variable is parental status as of November 1, year 4 of the cohort study. Potential confounding or effect modifying variables include student sex and student age as of November 1, year 4 of the cohort study. The age variable was examined as both a continuous and a categorical variable. (Rosner, 2000, p.627) discusses grouped and ungrouped data and how standard error operates in each. In order for a continuous variable approach to show effect modification or confounding (if it is present) there needs to be sufficient data for graduates and non-graduates at each year of age. The data from the cohort study did not have this sufficient collection of data points as the sample was small and the ages were not evenly distributed (there are two significant outliers at 37 years and then a large number of data points between 17-21 years). For these reasons, it was decided that the age variable would be dichotomized and that the results would be interpreted with extreme caution. Students were considered either adults (over the age of 18) or youths (18 and under). In addition to gender, age and parental status, there were also three interaction variables in the initial model.

Y = grad (0=no, 1=yes)  
X<sub>1</sub> = parent (0=no, 1=yes)  
X<sub>2</sub> = gender (0=male, 1=female)  
X<sub>3</sub> = adult (0=no, 1=yes)  
X<sub>4</sub> = (X<sub>2</sub>) (X<sub>3</sub>) [two-way interaction]  
X<sub>5</sub> = (X<sub>1</sub>) (X<sub>3</sub>) [two-way interaction]  
X<sub>6</sub> = (X<sub>1</sub>) (X<sub>2</sub>) [two-way interaction]  
X<sub>7</sub> = (X<sub>1</sub>) (X<sub>2</sub>) (X<sub>3</sub>) [three-way interaction]

### Models

We model the log of the odds of graduation as a function of parental status, gender and age. This is not a linear function as we do not have a continuous variable. The initial general logistical model is as follows:

$$\log p / 1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_7 X_7$$

The specialized models are as follows:

*Non-parent, male, youth (X<sub>1</sub>=0, X<sub>2</sub>=0, X<sub>3</sub>=0):*

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0$$

*Non-parent, male, adult* ( $X_1=0, X_2=0, X_3=1$ ):

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_3$$

*Non-parent, female, youth* ( $X_1=0, X_2=1, X_3=0$ ):

$$\text{Log } p / 1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_2$$

*Non-parent, female, adult* ( $X_1=0, X_2=1, X_3=1$ ):

$$\text{Log } p / 1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 + \beta_4$$

*Parent, male, youth* ( $X_1=1, X_2=0, X_3=0$ ):

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_1$$

*Parent, male, adult* ( $X_1=1, X_2=0, X_3=1$ ):

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_3 + \beta_5$$

*Parent, female, youth* ( $X_1=1, X_2=1, X_3=0$ ):

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_6$$

*Parent, female, adult* ( $X_1=1, X_2=1, X_3=1$ ):

$$\text{Log } p/1-p = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 + \beta_4 + \beta_5 + \beta_6 + \beta_7$$

*Where:*

$\beta_0$  is the log of the odds of graduation for non-parent, male youth.

$(\beta_0 + \beta_3)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for non-parent, male adults.

Therefore,  $\beta_3$  is the difference between the log of the odds of graduation between youth and adult, non-parent males.

$(\beta_0 + \beta_2)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for non-parent, female youth.

Therefore  $\beta_2$  is the difference in the log of the odds of graduation between female and male, non-parent youth.

$(\beta_0 + \beta_1)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for parent, male youth.

Therefore  $\beta_1$  is the difference in the log of the odds of graduation between parent and non-parent, male youth.

$(\beta_0+\beta_2+\beta_3+\beta_4)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for non-parent, female adults.

$(\beta_0+\beta_1+\beta_3+\beta_5)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for parent, male adults.

$(\beta_0+\beta_1+\beta_2+\beta_6)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for parent, female youth.

$(\beta_0+\beta_1+\beta_2+\beta_3+\beta_4+\beta_5+\beta_6+\beta_7)$  is the log of the odds of graduation for parent, female adults.

$(\beta_3+\beta_4)$  is the difference in the log of the odds of graduation between non-parent female youth and adults.

Therefore,  $\beta_4$  is the difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between non-parent female youth and adults and non-parent male youth and adults.

$(\beta_3+\beta_5)$  is the difference in the log of the odds of graduation between parent male youth and adults.

Therefore,  $\beta_5$  is the difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between parent male youth and adults and non-parent male youth and adults.

$(\beta_2+\beta_6)$  is the difference in the log of the odds of graduation between female and male parent youth.

Therefore,  $\beta_6$  is the difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between female and male parent youth and female and male, non-parent youth.

$\beta_7$  is the coefficient for the three-way interaction term and represents a ratio of the difference of differences from  $\beta_4$ ,  $\beta_5$ , and  $\beta_6$ .

### Hypotheses

The relationship between graduation status and parental status does not depend on age or gender. So that:

$\beta_1 = 0$ . Among the young males, there is no difference between the log of the odds of graduation between the parents and non-parents.

$\beta_2 = 0$ . Among the non-parent youth, there is no difference in the log of the odds of graduation between females and males.

$\beta_3 = 0$ . Among non-parent males, there is no difference in the log of the odds of graduation between the youth and the adults.

$\beta_4 = 0$ . There is no difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between non-parent female youth and adults and non-parent male youth and adults.

$\beta_5 = 0$ . There is no difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between the parent male youth and adults and non-parent male youth and adults.

$\beta_6 = 0$ . There is no difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between the female and male parent youth and female and male, non-parent youth.

$\beta_7 = 0$ . There is no difference in the difference or differences associated with coefficients  $\beta_4$ ,  $\beta_5$  and  $\beta_6$ .

### Assessing Assumptions about the Data

In addressing the primary hypothesis the following assumptions were made:

- a) Existence- for any fixed value for x, y is a random variable with a certain probability distribution with finite mean and variance.
- b) Independence- the y values are statistically independent of one another.
- c) Homoscedasticity- the variance of y is the same for all values of x.
- d) Normality- for any fixed value of x, y has a normal distribution.
- e) Non-multicollinearity- none of the x variables are linear functions of the others.
- f) Accuracy- that the variables have been measured without error.

### Regression Output

#### Model #1 with three-way and two-way interaction terms:

```
regress grad parent gender adult x4 x5 x6 x7
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	60
Model	4.14102564	7	7.591575092	F(7, 52)	=	6.35
Residual	4.84230769	52	0.93121302	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.4610
				Adj R-squared	=	0.3884
Total	8.98333333	59	152259887	Root MSE	=	.30516

grad	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t	[95% Conf. Interval]
parent	6.28e-16	.2785697	0.00	1.000	-.558991 .558991
gender	.1	.2363742	0.42	0.674	-.3743196 .5743196
adult	.125	.2288684	0.55	0.587	-.334258 .584258
x4	-.0711538	.2624043	-0.27	0.787	-.5977067 .455399
x5	-.125	.3062156	-0.41	0.685	-.7394665 .4894665
x6	.4	.3653408	1.09	0.279	-.3331098 1.13311
x7	.5711538	.4188415	1.36	0.179	-.2693131 1.411621
_cons	-8.33e-16	.2157792	-0.00	1.000	-.4329926 .4329926

Interpretation- this model helps us determine if there is effect modification by gender. It appears that there is also effect modification by age, but due to missing values and small sample size, it is impossible to accurately make this conclusion. We first assess the coefficient associated with the hypothesis  $\beta_7=0$  (as the three-way interaction). The  $b_7$  coefficient (0.5711538) and corresponding t test (1.36) and p-value (0.179) indicate that at the 0.05 level of significance, we have little evidence against the null hypothesis and it is likely that  $\beta_7=0$ . We omit the three-way interaction term and re-run the logistic regression.

Model #2 with two-way interaction terms:

regress grad parent gender adult x4 x5 x6						
Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs	=	60
Model	3.96786234	6	6.66131039	F( 6, 53)	=	6.99
Residual	5.01547099	53	0.94631528	Prob > F	=	0.0000
				R-squared	=	0.4417
				Adj R-squared	=	0.3785
Total	8.98333333	59	1.52259887	Root MSE	=	.30762

grad	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>t	[95% Conf. Interval]
parent	-.2526513	.2097042	-1.20	0.234	-.6732647 .1679622
gender	-.0819089	.1967109	-0.42	0.679	-.4764611 .3126432
adult	-.0455396	.1932261	-0.24	0.815	-.4331021 .3420229
x4	.1530256	.2061753	0.74	0.461	-.2605097 .5665608
x5	.180287	.2106087	0.86	0.396	-.2421405 .6027145
x6	.8345602	.1801068	4.63	0.000	.4733116 1.195809
_cons	.1515908	.186434	0.81	0.420	-.2223484 .5255299

Interpretation- this model helps us determine if there is effect modification (interaction) by gender. We assess the coefficient associated with the hypotheses  $\beta_4=0$ ,  $\beta_5=0$  and  $\beta_6=0$  (as the two-way interactions). The  $b_4$  coefficient (0.1530256) and corresponding t test (0.74) and p-value (0.461) and the  $b_5$  coefficient (0.2106087) and corresponding t test (0.86) and p-value (0.396) indicate that at the 0.05 level of significance, we have little evidence against the null hypotheses of  $\beta_4=0$  and  $\beta_5=0$ . It is likely that  $\beta_4$  and  $\beta_5$  are both equal to zero, meaning there is no difference in the differences of their associated groups (see definitions). However, the  $b_6$  coefficient (0.8345602) and corresponding t test (4.63) and p-value (<0.001) indicate that at the 0.05 level of significance, there is evidence against the null hypothesis and it is likely that  $\beta_6$  is not equal to zero. Since  $\beta_6$  is the difference in the differences in the log of the odds of graduation between the female and male parent youth and female and male, non-parent youth, the result indicates that among the youth, the relationship between graduation status and parental status depends on gender. This is evidence of effect modification or interaction.

Limitations

There were 16 missing values for age because the student's cumulative file was either not located after significant searches, or the file did not contain a date of birth. There may also have been some inaccuracy in the data around parental status, particularly for male students.

## Appendix 12: Consent Forms in English and Dogrib

Department of Community Health Sciences  
University of Calgary  
3330 Hospital Drive NW Calgary, AB T2N 4N1  
Tel: 867-371-4521 ext 134 Fax: 403-210-3818 cmdaviso@ucalgary.ca

### Participant Consent Form

#### INFORMATION REGARDING PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

RESEARCH TITLE: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN THE LIVES OF NORTHERN ABORIGINAL YOUTH

SPONSOR: Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

INVESTIGATORS: Penny Hawe, **Colleen Davison**

This research is about what school means to local communities, especially the youth and staff connected with schools. It is Colleen Davison's PhD project, supervised by Dr Penny Hawe. It has been developed in consultation with Dr. Nancy Gibson from the Canadian Circumpolar Institute who has worked with us to ensure that our project is consistent with the appropriate way of doing research in northern Aboriginal communities.

This form will give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve.

The research involves you talking to Colleen about your community, about youth and education. Questions will be about your own experiences and opinions.

Conversations will be tape recorded, if you agree. This simply makes it easier to collect information. You can ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time. You can refuse to answer any questions. Later, if you decide that you want to be removed from the study, we can arrange this. But we hope you agree to take part. This is because we think the research may provide useful information to strengthen the way the school and community work.

All information you give, including your name, will be treated as *confidential*. The information we gather in this project may be used in reports, research papers, or other publications in the future. We will make all attempts possible to ensure that the information we gather will be used in a way so that you are not identifiable. This means that we may remove place names, names of people or other identifying details from your account if we use it in a report. The community will be consulted if we wish to name Rae-Edzo as the study site in any public document. The results of this project will be returned to the local community.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact Colleen Davison at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School 867-371-4521 ext 134 or the supervisor Penny Hawe at the University of Calgary Tel: 403-210-9383, Fax: 403-210-3818, [phawe@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phawe@ucalgary.ca).

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact Pat Evans, Associate Director, Internal Awards, Research Services, University of Calgary, at (403) 220-3782.

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Tel: 867-371-4521 ext 134 Fax: 403-210-3818 cmdaviso@ucalgary.ca

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood what the project is about and that you agree to participate.

---

Signature of Investigator	Date	Signature of Participant*	Date
---------------------------	------	---------------------------	------

\*Participants may choose to offer oral consent and this will be tape-recorded.

\*\* This form has also been translated into Dogrib and will be given and read to the participant in English and/or Dogrib if requested.

Dọ Goxè At'ɔ Edizi Dek'enèetf'è Njhtf'è

T'asii Xàetaa Gha Dàni Dọ Xè Wek'e Eghàlats'eeda ha

T'asii Xàetaa Wizi: **EDZANÈ K'E DONE TS'Q CHEEKO NJHTL'ÈKQ  
AGET'ɔ TS'IH?Q DÀNÌ GIXÈ HÒ?Q**

Sọpmba T'à Dii Njhtf'è Ts'adi: Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

T'asii Xàetaa dọ: Penny Hawe eyits'q **Colleen Davison**

Dii t'asii wexàetaa sii kọta dọ nàgedèe sii njhtf'èkọ ghọ dàgɔwọ, cheeko eyits'q dọ njhtf'èkọ eghalageedaa sii ededɔ denahk'e dàgɔwọq sii ghọ họt'e. Colleen Davison dii njhtf'è yeetf'èe sii njhtf'èkọ godeè gots'q njhtf'è weqchi gha eetf'è at'ɔ. Dr. Penny Hawe yets'q k'àowo họt'e. Canadian Circumpolar Institute ginjhtf'èkọ gots'q Dr. Nancy Gibson goxè eghàlajdà jì. Edzanè k'e dani done xè t'asii xàts'etaa gha nàowo whe?q sii wek'èè ehkw'ɔ eghàlats'eeda ha goxè eghàlajdà họt'e.

Dii njhtf'è k'e ayii wexàetaa eyits'q dani goxè eghàlaahdaa sii wek'e dek'eèhtf'è họt'e.

Dii t'asii xàetaa sii wet'à Colleen Davison xè goahdo ha. Kọta, cheeko, t'eekea, eyits'q dani njhtf'èkọ nàowo xè hò?q ghọ wexè goahdo ha. Dani njhtf'èkọ aah't'ɔ eyits'q njhtf'èkọ ghọ dàahwhọq sii ghọ danaxeehke ha.

Naxiɣha t'asani-le dè naxiyatiì ichi ha, wet'à nàhoti-le naxigodiì ts'ihchi họt'e. Wet'à yatiichii wedats'ehge ha dahwhọ nɔdè hayele ha. T'asii danaxehkee sii ghọ wets'q goahde ha dahwhọ-le dè t'asani-le. Nqodeè nɔdè eyi t'asii xàetaa sii naxigodiì weta whe?q ha-le dahwhọ nɔdè wedq ayele ha. Hani kò naxixè welè niwọ. Dii t'asii wexàetaa sii edahxọ wet'à njhtf'èkọ eyits'q kọta efexè denahk'e nezɔ eghàlagedaà agede ha ts'ɔwọ.

Ayii t'à goxè goahdo, eyits'q naxizii, dọ wiizii yek'èezq ha-le. Dii godi nàts'ehtsɔ k'e eghàlats'eedaa sii jdaà dè godi njhtf'èe, t'asii xàetaa njhtf'èe, eyits'q godi njhtf'è eyii-le xàraa k'e adle ha. Naxigodiì nàts'ehtsɔ sii dọ gɔt'á at'ɔ nɔdè naxizii k'èhodzq-le k'èè dek'eèhtf'è ats'ele ha. Hani-dè edɔ gots'q godi adlää sii

dek'eèht'è ha-le, dọ gızı dek'eèht'è ha-le, eyits'ọ ayii t'à naxik'èhodzọọ ha sii wede ats'ele ha. Rae-Edzo ekọ t'asii xàetaa gha wizi gọdi njht'è k'e dek'eèht'è ha ts'ijwọ njdè kọta dọ dagits'ehke gà zọ hats'ele ha. Dii t'asii xàetaa k'e eghàlats'eadaa sii wegodi nàts'ijhtsj t'axọdè dè naxikọta ts'ọ anats'ele ha.

Dii t'asii wexàetaa ghọ daraahke ha dahwhọ dè Colleen Davison wets'ọ goahde. Kw'ahideè Bijnọ Enjht'èkọ 867-371-4521 ext 134, hani-le dè yets'ọ k'àowo elj Penny Hawe ts'ọ goahde, University of Calgary 403-210-9383, Fax: 403-210-3818, [phawe@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phawe@ucalgary.ca).

Dii t'asii wexàetaa naxixè agot'j njdè ayii ts'ọ k'ahoahdèe sii ghọ daraahke ha dahwhọ njdè Pat Evans ts'ọ goahde. University of Calgary, Internal Awards, Research Services, gha K'àowo xè eghàladaa elj. (403) 220-3782, ekọ wets'ọ goahde ha dii-le.

Dii njht'è k'e njzi dek'enijà njdè ayii wexàetaa sii wek'èhojzọ, eyits'ọ nexè t'asii xàeta ha njdi họt'e.

---

T'asii Xàetaa Dọd Wizi	Diidzẹ	Dọ Goxè At'ij Wizi	Diidzẹ
------------------------	--------	--------------------	--------

\*Dọ goxè at'ij sii edewà t'à "hẹ?e" di njdè t'asanile, wèt'à yatichii k'e adle ha.

\*\*Dii njht'è Kwet'ij yatii si k'èè etaei họt'e. Dọ goxè at'ij sii weghàts'era xè wets'ọ wek'eyati ha, eyits'ọ dagoehke njdè Tjchọ yatii si k'èè hats'ele ha.

## Consent Form for Parent or Guardian

### INFORMATION REGARDING PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

RESEARCH TITLE: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN THE LIVES OF NORTHERN ABORIGINAL YOUTH.

SPONSOR: Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

INVESTIGATORS: Penny Hawe, Colleen Davison

We would like to ask your permission for your child to be involved in a research project about what school means to them and their community. It is Colleen Davison's PhD project, supervised by Dr Penny Hawe. It has been developed in consultation with Dr. Nancy Gibson from the Canadian Circumpolar Institute who has worked with us to ensure that our project is consistent with the appropriate way of doing research in northern Aboriginal communities.

This form will give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your child's participation will involve.

The research involves your child talking to Colleen about your community, about youth and education. Questions will be about their experiences and opinions.

Conversations will be tape recorded, if you agree. This simply makes it easier to collect information. Participants can ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time. Participants can also refuse to answer any questions. Later, if you, or your child, decide to be removed from the study, we can arrange this. But we hope you agree to take part. This is because we think the research may provide useful information to strengthen the way the school and community work.

All information your child gives, including their name, will be treated as *confidential*. The information we gather in this project may be used in reports, research papers, or other publications in the future. The information we gather will be used in a way that will ensure participants are not identifiable. This means that we will remove place names, names of people or other identifying details from the account if we use it in a report. The results of this project will be returned to the local community.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact Colleen Davison at Chief Jimmy Bruneau School 867-371-4521 ext 134 or the supervisor Penny Hawe at the University of Calgary Tel: 403-210-9383, Fax: 403-210-3818, [phawe@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phawe@ucalgary.ca).

If you have any questions concerning your child's rights as a possible participant in this research, please contact Pat Evans, Associate Director, Internal Awards, Research Services, University of Calgary, at (403) 220-3782.

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Tel: 867-371-4521 ext 134 Fax: 403-210-3818 cmdaviso@ucalgary.ca

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood what the project is about and that you agree to allow your child to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant Date

\* This form has also been translated into Dogrib and will be given to the parents or guardians in English and Dogrib.

Chekoa Wèot'j Edizi Dèk'enèetf'èe Njhtf'è

T'asii Xàetaa Gha Dàni Dọ Xè Wek'e Eghàlats'eeda ha

T'asii Xàetaa Wizi: **EDZANÈ K'E DONE TS'Q CHEEKO NJHTL'ÈKÒ  
AGET'JJ TS'IH?Ò DÀNÌ GIXÈ HÒ?Q**

Sọmmba T'à Dii Njhtf'è Ts'adi: Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

T'asii Xàetaa dọq: Penny Hawe eyits'q **Colleen Davison**

T'asii wexàetaa wek'e eghàlats'eeda sii neza goxè at'j gha danaxets'eehke. Ayii gha njhtf'èkò agèt'j eyits'q asjj dọ kòta nàgedèe sii njhtf'èkò gigha wet'aa?à. Colleen Davison, njhtf'èkò godeè ts'q njhtf'è wepochi gha yek'e eghàladaa at'j. Dr. Penny Hawe yets'q k'òowo họt'e. Canadian Circumpolar Institute ginjhtf'èkò gots'q Dr. Nancy Gibson, gogha k'eyaeti t'à Edzanè k'e dani done xè t'asii xàetaa gha nàowo whe?oq sii wek'èè eghalats'eda gha gots'ajdi jlè.

Dii njhtf'è k'e ayii wexàetaa eyits'q dani neza goxè eghàladaa sii wek'èahzq ha dek'eèhtf'è họt'e.

Dii t'asii wexàetaa sii naxizaa, naxikòta ghq, cheeko eyits'q dani njhtf'èkò nàowòo xè hò?q ghq Colleen Davison xè gogedo ha. Dani njhtf'èkò agèt'jj eyits'q njhtf'èkò ghq dàgjjwq ghq dagoehke ha.

Naxigha t'asanile dè naxiyatiì ichi ha. Wet'à hàhoti-le naxigodiì ts'ihchi họt'e. Dọ goxè eghàlageedaa sii giyatiì 'à ts'ihchi niits'q wedats'ehge ha gògedi njdè hats'ele ha. Eyits'q t'asii dagits'eehkee sii gots'q hagedi ha-le gjjwq njdè t'asanile. Nqode njdè nj, naxiza t'asii xàetaa weta naxigodiì whe?q ha-le niwq njdè wede ats'ele ha. Hanikò goxè aah't'j naxets'jjhwhq họt'e. Dii t'asii wexàetaa sii edahxq wet'à njhtf'èkq eyits'q kòta denahk'e efexè nezjj eghàlageedaà agede ha ts'jjwq.

Naxizaa goxè gogedoo sii hazqò, eyits'q gizi xè hazqò dọ yek'èezq ch'à wexots'iihdi ha họt'e. Jdaà njdè godi hazqò nàts'ehtsjj sii t'asii k'e eghàlats'eda njhtf'èe, t'asii xàetaa njhtf'èe eyits'q njhtf'è eyii-le xà?aa k'e dek'eèhtf'è adle ha sọni. Godi nàts'ehtsjj sii dọ goxè eghàlageedaa sii

yek'èhodzq ha-le k'èè dek'eèht'è ats'ele ha. Hanì dè godì n̄ht'è k'e ats'j̄l̄à n̄jdè kòta wizì, d̄q wizì eyits'q ayì dek'eèht'èe weghà amèè wegodiì ne k'èhodzq s̄iì wed̄e ats'ele ha. D̄iì t'asìì wexàetaa k'e eghàlats' eedaa s̄iì wegodiì nàts'j̄hts̄j̄ s̄iì naxikòta ts'q anats'ele ha.

D̄iì t'asìì wexàetaa ghq dazaahe ha dahwhq dè Colleen Davis on wets'q goahde. Kw'ahideè B̄jn̄ En̄ht'èkq 867-371-4521 ext 134, hanì-le dè yets'q k'òowo el̄ Penny Hawe ts'q goahde, University of Calgary 403-210-9383, Fax: 403-210-3818, [phawe@ucalgary.ca](mailto:phawe@ucalgary.ca).

D̄iì t'asìì wexàetaa naxiza gixè agot'j̄ n̄jdè ayì ts'q k'ahogedèe s̄iì ghq dazaahe ha dahwhq n̄jdè Pat Evans ts'q goahde. University of Calgary, Internal Awards, Research Services, gha K'òowo xè eghàladaa el̄. (403) 220-3782, ekq wets'q goahde ha d̄iì-le.

D̄iì n̄ht'è k'e n̄zì dek'enìq'à n̄jdè ayì wexàetaa s̄iì wek'èhojzq, eyits'q nexè t'asìì xàeta ha n̄jdì hq't'e.

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T'asìì Xàetaa Dq'q Wizì

D̄idzèè

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Chekoa Wèot'j̄ Wizì

D̄idzèè

---

Dq Goxè At'j̄ Wizì

D̄idzèè

\*D̄iì n̄ht'è Kwet'j̄ yatì s̄iì k'èè etaeti hq't'e. Chekoa giot'j̄ ghàts'era xè Kwet'j̄ eyits'q T̄j̄chq yatì k'èè gits'q wek'eyati ha.

## Student Researchers Negotiating Consent in Northern Aboriginal Communities

Colleen M. Davison, Micaela Brown, and Pertice Moffitt

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*Abstract:* In this article, the authors discuss what students are doing to reconcile the differences between institutional ethical review standards and the reality of community-based, qualitative research, particularly in northern Canada. They examine the experiences of 12 students who are currently undertaking or have recently completed qualitative research in the North. Students raised concerns about what informed consent really mean; the contentiousness of obtaining written consent, and modified consent forms and the flexibility of research ethics board (REB) standards. The authors demonstrate that significant judgment is required in the introduction of ethics procedures in northern Canadian research. More work is needed to guide novice researchers and help build their agency for making ethical judgments in the field.

*Keywords:* students, ethics, vulnerable populations, northern research, Aboriginal

### Citation

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### Authors' note

We acknowledge Dr. Daryl Pullman, Medical Ethics, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Dr. Penny Hawe, Markin Chair in Health and Society, University of Calgary, for reviewing previous drafts of this article and providing valuable feedback.

Appendix 14: Dogrib Students Receiving Grants from the Tłı̨chǫ Scholarship Committee to Attend Higher Education

School	Students	Academic Programs
Academy of Learning (Yellowknife, NWT)	6 (all female)	Computerized Office Procedures Administrative Assistant PC Support Specialist Computerized Accounting Office Administration
Aurora College  <i>Thebacha Campus (Fort Smith, NWT)</i>  <i>Yellowknife Campus</i>  <i>Aurora Campus (Inuvik, NWT)</i>	25 (17 female, 8 male)  9 (8 females, 1 male)  3 (2 females, 1 male)	Management Studies Nursing Access Program Social Work Access Program Bachelor of Education Heavy Equipment Operator Teacher Education Access Program Pre-Technology Program Pre-Employment Carpentry Introductory Cooking Office Administration  Bachelor of Science (Nursing) Diamond Cutting and Polishing Management Studies Nursing Access Program Office Administration  Recreation Leaders Program Traditional Arts Program
Capilano College	1 female	Musical Theatre
Carleton University	2 females	Bachelor of Arts (General) Bachelor of Arts (Linguistics)
Concordia University	1 female	University and College Entrance Program for Aboriginal Students
Fanshawe College	1 male	Bachelor of Arts (General)
First Nations University of Canada	1 female	Bachelor of Science (Nursing)
Grande Prairie Regional College (Grand Prairie, Alberta)	9 (7 female, 2 male)	Bachelor of Science (Engineering) Administrative Technology Business Administration Teacher Assistant Program Disability and Community Support
Institute of Indigenous	1 female	Indigenous Governance

Government		
International Academy of Design and Technology	1 female	Fashion Design
Mount Royal College	1 male	Business Administration
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)		
<i>Fairview Campus</i>	1 female	Transitional Vocational Program
<i>Edmonton Campus</i>	2(1 female, 1 male)	Business Administration Instrumentation Technology
Ontario Institute of Applied Radio and Technology	1 male	Audio Technology
Prairie Bible Institute	1 female	Bachelor of Arts (Ministry)
Red Deer College	1 female	Bachelor of Arts (General)
Red River College	1 male	Science and Technology Access Program
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)	1 male	Automotive Technician
University of Alberta	3 females	BA/BSc Combined Program Bachelor of Arts (Native Studies) Bachelor of Science (Psychology)
University of British Columbia	1 male	Masters of Architecture
University of Calgary	1 male	Bachelor of Arts (urban Studies)
University of Lethbridge	1 female	Bachelor of Management (General)
University of New Brunswick	1 female	Bachelor of Science
University of Northern British Columbia	1 female	Bachelor of Science (Environmental Science)
University of Toronto	1 female	Bachelor of Arts (Communication)
University of Victoria	2 male	Law
Wilfred Laurier University	1 female	Bachelor of Arts (Anthropology)
Yvonne Yuen School of Design	1 female	Fashion Merchandising