Supporting Urban Aboriginal Social Justice in Education: A Case Study of the Educational Leaders' Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships as Care Providers

by

Jenny Kay Dupuis

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Supporting Urban Aboriginal Social Justice in Education: A Case Study of the Educational Leaders' Roles, Relationships, and Responsibilities as Care Providers" submitted by Jenny Kay Dupuis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of the Doctor of Education.

Supervisor, Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann, Graduate Departme of Educational Resear
Dr. Janet Elizabeth Groen, Graduate Department Educational Resear
Dr. Pamela Winsome Bishop, Graduate Department Educational Resear
Dr. Avery J. Calhoun, Social Wo
External Examiner, Dr. Sheila C. Carr-Stewart, Univers of Saskatchew
March 12, 20

Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to examine the educational leaders' perceived role as they become caregivers (i.e. mentors and role models) in response to meeting the individualized needs of urban Aboriginal youth in the Canadian public and separate school systems. The qualitative study explored an ethic of care and sought to understand the leadership models in place that guide the decision-making processes to identify how the caregivers recognize and address issues that target social justice in terms of not just academics and culture, but also social and economic issues at the school level. The proposed study looked at how educational leaders perceived their role as caregivers; the challenges in becoming a caregiver to a marginalized community; the limits or conditions that educational leaders put on themselves in providing an ethic of care; as well as, the approaches to caring that unite or divide people at the provincial, board, school, and community levels. More specifically, the study aimed to understand the perceived caregiving roles, responsibilities, and relationships that educational leaders need to realize before leading successful school-community change in an urban city centre. In so doing, the study analyzed transcripts from interviews, field notes from interviews, and notes from documents. The data collected helped to achieve a deeper understanding of the existing issues from historical and contemporary viewpoints that further took into account the existence of a double understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies. A case study approach was taken whereby a social constructionist stance was used that takes into account the models of an ethic of care as a conceptual framework, and looked at social justice (harmony and balance) as the lens. Data was collected from one educational program with programming being delivered at

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The premise of my research study is about exploring the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the caregiver, and I wish to express thanks to the many caring individuals who supported me on this journey.

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Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my father, Charles (Chuck) Dupuis in hopes that the subject matter will begin to raise awareness and transform the way educational leaders genuinely support urban Aboriginal children and youth in the school systems.

three different educational settings in a Canadian city centre. It also involved members of various community-based Aboriginal service delivery organizations. The participants included educational leaders (i.e. administrators, teachers, program coordinators, classroom teachers, resource teachers, community-based volunteers, and mentors) who were responsible for the design and delivery aspects of the urban Aboriginal school programming. The results of the study examined and compared similarities and differences in the responses to formulate a culturally relevant educational leadership framework that defines caring relationships, as well as aimed to provide guidance and support to educational leaders who are faced with the challenges of reforming and/or enhancing programming to inspire and motivate urban Aboriginal learners to increase rates of student participation, engagement, and success. Through the distribution of results, this study will provide educators and organizations focused on advancing Aboriginal education in urban communities with an opportunity to initiate meaningful conversations and thoughtful planning with regard to the needs and future implications for the direction of urban Aboriginal education programming models and future research initiatives.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This research study presents an intended area of study concerning the perceived educational leader's role as a caregiver in delivering school programming that addresses the unique needs of urban Aboriginal students and that looks to build a culturally relevant community of care model that involves the participation of educational leaders. The study highlights the introduction of the research problem, the context of the study, the rationale for the study, the conceptual framework, the relevant literature, methodology, and final presentation of data. The purpose of the research study was to seek insight into how educational leaders' support and provide educational opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth in terms of meeting their academic, cultural, social, and economic needs. The study explored the perspectives of educational leaders who directly contribute to the design and delivery of the programming while addressing the issues and challenges through an ethic of care to promote social justice (balance and harmony in respect to supporting and providing a caregiving relationship) for Aboriginal people. As a result, the study looked to construct social reality through the lens of using historical, social, and/or cultural perspectives to understand the roles, responsibilities, and relationships with the Aboriginal learners and community stakeholders. More specifically, the educational leaders shared their perceptions of the needs of the urban Aboriginal learners as well as shared the approaches they followed to address the issues and challenges through their role as a caregiver.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

1.1.1 Historical Context

In years past, Aboriginal children acquired knowledge and life skills from their family and community members, including local Elders through oral teachings and practical, hands-on experiences. The intent, based on the Aboriginal worldview, was that learning was life-long and it was used to develop all aspects of the whole-person (i.e. intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions). The vision of the community was that Aboriginal children would be raised in a caring environment that shared values extending from the family and community members, and in this regard, the children would realize how to be inspired through a traditional worldview to discover and hone their own unique gifts and discover their places in society. Cajete (1994) described the elements of traditional education as follows:

By watching, listening, experiencing, and participating everyone learned what it was to be one of the People, and how to survive in community with others.

Learning how to care for one's self and others, learning relationship between people and other things, learning customs, traditions, and values of a community: all of these understandings and more were the daily course of Indigenous education. (p. 176)

In 1876, Canada's federal government assumed responsibility for education under the *Indian Act*. With the influence of colonization, this Act eradicated the way Aboriginal students learn. The government [and churches] administered the education system and required many Aboriginal children to attend residential schools where they were forced to leave not only their families and communities behind, but were not

permitted to practice their culture, language, and traditions (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996). Residential schools were underfunded and provided only the most basic education to the Aboriginal students to qualify for low skilled jobs (RCAP). The residential school curriculum was limited to a half day of educational instruction and half day of learning a trade and/or working for the school. Further, many children experienced serious levels of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse that left them and their families with negative sentiments of distrust and apprehension about the education system. Taken as a whole, the main objective of the residential school system was to establish power structures and policies of oppression and to assimilate Aboriginal people into the dominant, mainstream society by altering their beliefs and values (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Ultimately, the church and government were unsuccessful in fulfilling their mandate to assimilate the Aboriginal people (RCAP).

In the 1960's, residential schools were beginning to close, leaving Aboriginal students to attend band-run or public school systems in the 1970s with no consideration for teacher preparation or curriculum renewal (Gallagher-Hayashi, 2005; Kirkness, 1999) or other issues that would follow shortly thereafter. Likewise, time has passed and only modest accomplishments have been achieved to support the improvements of Aboriginal education within the public sector (Kanu, 2002). The progress is thought to be too slow and incremental (RCAP, 1996) as educators still find themselves unprepared and they struggle with the notion of how to address the issues and challenges including, but not limited to, teacher preparation and curriculum renewal. With the existing low academic achievement rates in the areas of literacy and numeracy and effects of low rates of success and poverty on the urban Aboriginal population in its entirety, it is important that

all stakeholders demonstrate a sincere, authentic willingness to pursue innovative and meaningful courses of action in a manner that justly supports the lifelong needs of the students rather than their own organizational and immediate funding and programming interests. The argument from educational leaders should be for a return to the notion of care as the central focus for the foundation of urban Aboriginal education.

1.1.2 Contemporary Context

Provincial ministry of education offices across Canada are committed to identifying educational priorities in order to close the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Education Office identified priorities in the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework to improve the quality of Aboriginal education and increase the rates of Aboriginal academic success (i.e. literacy and numeracy, retention of students in schools, graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies). Recommendations noted in the framework advocated for schools to improve the conditions for learning, and put into practice program activities that improve rates of achievement, build core academic skills, raise awareness, recruit Aboriginal staff members, prepare teachers to integrate Aboriginal issues into the classroom, and build home-school relationships. At present, there has been little measurable rates of academic success in the Ontario education system, apart from drawing attention to several skill areas (ranging from literacy to numeracy), that appear to be guided by pilot projects or initiatives that are dependent on short-term funding or short-lived (time-limited) programs.

While the recommendations put forward by Ontario Ministry of Education's Aboriginal Education Office are essential to raise awareness and full understanding, the central predicament is whether educational leaders are prepared to develop and lead successful programming models that include understanding what processes and strategies need to be followed to implement their vision effectively. There exists widespread concern by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community stakeholders that the programs being established for Aboriginal students are being designed with little to no defined, long-term planning that makes considerations for sustainability. Since Aboriginal and mainstream educational leaders (who are part of the school system) typically have varied education and other related experiences, it is important to identify innovate pathways for educational leaders; program pathways that require collaboration for the purpose of improving urban Aboriginal education.

Recent data shows that a vast number of Aboriginal youth are leaving the public and separate education system before completing high school; this leaves students without the qualifications to enter post-secondary programs or the skills needed to participate in a modern, knowledge-based economic life (Richards, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2006). A closer look at the data reveals lower educational outcomes for Aboriginal students compared to non-Aboriginal students. Data from Statistics Canada (2006) showed that 33 per cent of Aboriginal people between the ages of 24 to 54 had not attained a high school diploma compared to 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal people. Furthermore, 43.7 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15 and over had not attained a diploma or degree compared to 23.1 per cent for non-Aboriginal people. Even though the public and separate school systems have their successes, there is clear evidence that

Aboriginal people are experiencing higher rates of failure and disengagement at the elementary and secondary levels. Because such significant lower achievement outcomes continue to be reported, it remains an ongoing challenge for schools, Aboriginal groups, and for government to discover ways to best support urban Aboriginal students with the purpose of improving rates of student engagement and student success.

The current reality is that many school systems continue to base programming on Westernized standards that focus on meeting academic benchmarks (Kohn, 2000). At one time, it was believed by educators that integrating Aboriginal culture and language into the school curriculum would be the means to increase success rates and alleviate social problems (Kohn). However, with limited continuing funds and resources, in addition to limited understanding of Indigenous knowledge among educators, there is a need for greater understanding on how to approach educational reform for urban Aboriginal people. Some literature has suggested the main issues extend beyond that of culture and are rooted in socioeconomics, and more so the far-fetching effects of poverty (Hermes, 2005; Longfield & Godfrey, 2003; Maxim & White, 2006). Potentially, a greater understanding of socioeconomics and how it influences education may also be derived from studies that explore an ethic of care.

Aboriginal poverty exceeds that of any other non-Aboriginal group, including immigrants, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities (Lee, 2000). Research indicates that urban Aboriginal people are twice as likely to live in poverty compared to non-Aboriginal people and they are four times more likely to experience hunger, have higher rates of poor health conditions; live in lone parent families or without a family, and relocate more frequently than other non-Aboriginal groups. Urban Aboriginal youth

are less likely to meet academic expectations due to the extent of the social and economic pressures they face; as a result, they will require additional supports by educational leaders (Lee, 2000). When urban Aboriginal students are unable to meet the schools expectations, they are more likely not to fit in or leave school early. Instead of giving up hope on the at-risk Aboriginal student population, some educational leaders have made a firm, enduring commitment to demonstrate elements of an ethic of care in their daily practices to develop a caring community. This means extending their role beyond being an academic service provider (MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006). These educational leaders have become engaged in various approaches that provide urban Aboriginal students with opportunities to participate in public and separate school education, regardless of the social and economic inequities that may influence student success (Hermes, 2005).

Despite mixed outlooks on the best approach to follow, educational leaders are becoming more likely to be involved in satisfying the role as a primary caregiver to urban Aboriginal students from high-poverty communities. To be effective educational leaders, they must consider balancing the concept of care with their own beliefs and values, which suggests they need to re-evaluate the Western-based school policies and program models that are generally not inclusive of the needs of urban Aboriginal students. This means that educational leaders must begin not only with a clear understanding of how to address their own beliefs concerning morality, justice, and equity, but they also need to understand the complexities of Aboriginal culture and society, and more so the barriers associated with socioeconomics and poverty. This is a challenging task since legislation and policies targeted at social reform are not always clearly defined or implemented. As

well, educational programming is not typically designed to accommodate the social needs of urban Aboriginal students. Wortherspoon (2006) noted that, "public school teachers, regardless of where they work, face ongoing challenges to balance the sensitivity to the social and learning needs of the communities they serve with pressures to meet broader labour market, social, and political objectives" (p. 672). Furthermore, educational leaders do not typically learn in their professional education and preparation (particularly in Bachelor of Education programs) how to identify and restructure programs to address social justice issues (such as poverty) in a mainstream educational setting (Wortherspoon). Conversely, if they do receive training, it is delivered in isolation from other training experiences which makes it difficult to comprehend how to integrate the training into the regular classroom experience.

Educational leaders need to understand how to integrate flexible, sustainable approaches that address social justice through the conceptual framework of an ethic of care in urban public and separate school settings. To understand the conceptual framework of an ethic of care, it is important that educational leaders take the time to explore how others have attempted to incorporate an ethic of care into the regular school setting, so that it improves the way educational leaders interact with students in a school system, a school system that also has made efforts to achieve a double understanding between two worlds that include Aboriginal and Western ways of knowing. Policymakers, school systems, and Aboriginal organizations need to understand how educational leaders are currently extending their regular education responsibilities to make accommodations for the effects of socioeconomics and to create a community of care with limited support, training, and resources (Ward, 2001).

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The Human Development Index (HDI) is an indicator of the well-being of the population that looks at the socioeconomic factors like health, educational attainment, and income. Canada ranks as fourth in the world on the United Nation's Human Development Index (UNDP, 2009). However, at 78th on the Human Development Index, Canada's Aboriginal people rank significantly lower and are among the poorest members of Canadian society. What is more concerning is that besides Canada's Aboriginal population being twice as likely to live in poverty compared to non-Aboriginal people (Lee, 2000), Aboriginal people are also one of the fastest growing segments in Canadian society with about half of the total Aboriginal population residing in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2006). Many Aboriginal people are choosing to live in urban areas (particularly downtown core areas) seeking improved standards of living (Brown, Hissert, Winger, Miller, & Morrisette, 2005). Those who reside in such areas tend to encounter several added challenges in areas like, but not limited to, education, employment, housing, and healthcare (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan, 2009). The 2007 Senate report stated,

Aboriginal children are disproportionately living in poverty and involved in youth criminal justice and child protection systems. Aboriginal children also face significant health problems in comparison with other children in Canada, such as higher rates of malnutrition, disabilities, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide. (Adreychuck & Fraser, 2007, p. 171)

Significant education and social and economic gaps also exist for Aboriginal children in terms of higher drop-out rates, higher grade failures, and significantly lower test scores

that are perceived by researchers to also contribute to lower educational attainment and higher levels of unemployment and poverty (Brown, Higgit, Wingert, Miller, & Morrissette, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Maxim & White, 2006; Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan, 2009). At a very young age, the impact is that Aboriginal students are often forced to deal with family stresses such as the lack of affordable housing and transportation, poor rates of nutrition coupled with high rates of hunger, as well as numerous other challenges (Canadian Council on Social Development [CCSD], 2003). Although these challenges are diverse, Brown et al. (2005) pointed out that they are all interconnected. Based on this information, educational leaders need to realize the underlying issues that include poverty and socioeconomics and their impact on urban Aboriginal youth and their families.

In 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended the implementation of supports to provide equitable protection for the rights of Canada's most vulnerable groups of at-risk children. In one section, the report called for efforts to address the inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, and highlighted several recommendations put forward by other United Nation governmental bodies. A review of the recommendations by the Senate Committee, in a report titled *Children: The Silenced Citizens*, demonstrated that only modest social and economic improvements were noticeable in the Aboriginal communities (Adreychuk & Fraser, 2007). This reality is a serious concern for Canada's urban Aboriginal youth and the communities at large since they make up one of the largest populations living in major city centres.

Consequently, Canada's Aboriginal population is in crisis and requires immediate responses that focus on increasing educational attainment (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe,

& Cowan, 2009). Previous reports like the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report (1996) suggest this not a new area of concern, but is one that has been ongoing for decades. Formal government recommendations and research studies exist that have supported the need for systematic educational change because of the significant education-related gaps and social and economic inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Maxim & White, 2006; Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2006). It is essential that Canada's public and separate school systems that are publically funded take on the responsibility to adopt meaningful ways to restructure programming to prepare for the long-term impact that education can have on improving the social and economic conditions for individuals and for a community (Maxim & White; Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan). Programming will need to go beyond meeting the basic academic needs of urban Aboriginal students and take into account the social and economic needs of the community as a whole. For this to occur, the support of individual Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who are authentically and intrinsically committed to caring is required.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians are destined to co-exist together.

Therefore, if Canadians choose not to invest in urban Aboriginal education, it is likely that socioeconomic conditions will not improve and significant gaps will continue to exist and result in continued labour shortages, unemployment as well as pressures on healthcare, social programs, housing, government spending, and government revenues (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, & Cowan, 2009). It is essential that all stakeholders do their part to alleviate the potential stress on the community. Literature (Sharpe, Arsenault, Lapointe, and Cowan, 2009; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, and Levin, 2004;

Stonechild, 2006) indicated that the attainment of post-secondary education has longterm benefits that includes improved standards of living and overall improved rates of success for urban Aboriginal peoples.

1.3 Significance of the Study

According to Yates (2004), good quality educational research seeks to contribute to improvements in learning, and is research that educational leaders can apply to their own practice. This study aims to contribute to the functional, transformative knowledge of practitioners (i.e. policy-makers, educators, and organizations) that will go beyond looking at the learning, achievement, and cultural gaps that are often addressed in other Aboriginal-specific studies (Bell, 2004; Kanu, 2006). The results of the study are expected to provide educators and relevant organizations with examples of caring relationships through program development that is sustainable as well as considers professional development. In addition, the study's results will provide stakeholders with an opportunity to examine other practical approaches, and develop understanding about how an ethic of care can be used as a reference to support change ranging from staff development, instructional feedback, evaluation, to educational policymaking (Cohen & Manion, 1989) in high-poverty settings where students are experiencing educational challenges.

This research study looked at an urban Aboriginal stay-in-school program that is delivered in three urban school settings in both the public and separate school boards.

The study also involved the participation of several members of the Aboriginal community-based agencies that provided support. The case study explored how

educational leaders pilot a program that address social justice through an ethic of care, and examined the ways these educational leaders responded to the daily social and economic challenges that Aboriginal students experience. The results are intended to inform Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders who experience different levels of commitment and knowledge about building caregiving relationships and to promote respectful partnerships that encourage educational research, policies, and programming models whose aim is to improve practice, policy, and social issues of urban Aboriginal students.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Aboriginal is a broad term that encompasses all First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people as defined by the Canadian Constitution Act, 1982, sections 25 and 35.

Care refers to how human beings interact and respond to the individual needs of others in society based on their ethics and morality as well as their acceptance for justice and equity.

Caregiver refers to the individual in an educational support network who reaches beyond their regular day-to-day duties, as well as roles and responsibilities to identify and support the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal students.

Educational leader refers to an individual who is responsible for overseeing the design and delivery of an educational program. This includes school administrators (i.e. principals and vice-principals), program coordinators, classroom teachers, resource teachers, youth advisors, community partners, among others.

Social justice is the philosophical basis for educational leaders to advocate for positive social change within the urban Aboriginal community. Although the term 'social justice' in education is based primarily on the principles of equity taken from Friere (1970); in this study, the term 'social justice' refers exclusively to the manner in which one seeks to develop the full potential (i.e. academic, cultural, social, and economic needs) of the Aboriginal student in way that demonstrates not only the conditions required for unity (balance and harmony in respect to supporting and providing a caregiving relationship), but shows respect for Aboriginal and western ways of knowing.

Urban Aboriginal refers to Aboriginal people who reside in Canada's urban centres.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Educational leaders are faced with new challenges, and the pressure to understand how to address these issues in ways that promote full participation and engagement of urban Aboriginal students and their communities. In this challenging situation and to demonstrate ethical leadership, educational leaders need to explore mainstream leadership models and reflect on existing school structures. Educational leaders need to ask, "Does my school adequately support students from all socioeconomic levels, and does my school deliver an integrated understanding of Western and Aboriginal philosophies?" Given the significant educational gaps that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, perhaps mainstream education systems need to implement policies, strategies, as well as teaching and learning practices that embrace an ethic of care to increase the rates of student success for Aboriginal people. The sources of literature discussed below include the topics of educational leadership, ethic of care, social justice and diversity, Aboriginal education, Aboriginal student success and educational attainment, caring as inspiration and motivation factors in education, Aboriginal school-community partnerships, and organizational leadership.

In reviewing the literature that focuses on ethic of care in the education sector, Waterhouse's (2007) study of at-risk youth affirmed there are limited research studies that examine care relationships in regular education settings. In addition, an extensive literature search for Aboriginal-specific literature concluded limited studies examine care relationships in an urban Aboriginal education context concerning the role of educational leaders responsible for program delivery, as well as explore how an ethic of care is perceived in their daily roles and responsibilities. It appeared that no urban Aboriginal-

specific studies currently focus exclusively on how educational leaders in the public and separate school systems perceive their responsibility to address issues concerning their extended role as a care provider to all urban Aboriginal students. However, Hogg's (2008) study comes close by raising awareness about the role of the leader as a rescuer.

For the most part, the Aboriginal studies appeared to focus on identifying specific social problems and exploring how the schools resolved these issues. Much of this research aimed to explore the socio-cultural variables that impact Aboriginal students attending public school. For example, Aman's (2006) study highlighted in one section the reasons why many Aboriginal students (and those from other minority groups and the poor) were forced to withdraw from school. Other studies focused exclusively on rural First Nation and Inuit education or provided a limited overview of the various elements of urban Aboriginal education that may or may not have included care as a subtheme (Danyluk and da Costa, 1999; Friedel, 1996; Hogg, 2008).

Although no existing literature refers to care with Aboriginal students specifically, some work does provide insight on the connection between caring and leadership, and how these leaders have used the relationship of "care" to increase rates of success in the mainstream student populations. As such, the main issues reviewed include understanding the educational leaders' extended role as a caregiver, the relationship of caring as an inspirational and motivational factor, and how the challenges and limitations either unite or divide groups when deciding what is best for urban Aboriginal students. Overall, the situation concerning urban Aboriginal education is complex and requires a clear understanding of the perceived roles and relationships at the school level that influence student success.

2.1 Defining the Role of the Educational Leader as the Caregiver

Several articles and studies concerning Aboriginal education have highlighted the elements needed to improve the conditions for students enrolled in the public school system (Aman, 2006; Danyluk and da Costa 1999; Hogg, 2008; Pearson, 2008). Many of these studies focus primarily on the benefits of incorporating culture and the need to involve Aboriginal parents, families, and the community to articulate and share the education system they desire. However, it appears that deeper issues, like social and economic challenges that impact the everyday role of those educational leaders who provide support have been underexplored.

Goodman (2003), Lavall (2003), and Makokis (2000) all sought to identify possible reasons why so many Aboriginal students in various parts of North America were not successful. It has been suggested that this lack of success is related to the impact of cultural resistance and colonialism. However, it is fundamental to recognize that the initial introduction of culture-based education was put into practice early on in response to the residential school era and the assimilation policy put into place. Although culture-based curriculum attempted to open the door for educational institutions to acknowledge the differences between the two worldviews, it did little to recognize the extent of the current social inequities that are interwoven between the cultures and the impact it had on school success (Hermes, 2005; RCAP, 1996).

Some studies have suggested that improvement in the area of Aboriginal student achievement is possible if socioeconomic constructs exist (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Hermes, 2005). Hermes (2005) stressed the need for educators to go beyond focusing on culture as a means to target the underlying issues so that systematic change can occur.

Although Hermes's study intended to focus on culture, it was the teachers who raised the concerns about more pressing issues they witnessed like absenteeism and the low socioeconomic status of families (i.e. extreme rates of poverty that was related to significant academic, social, and economic gaps in education, occupation, and income). These teachers felt that these challenges were having a direct impact on their ability to deliver any programming – Western or culturally specific. In addition, the students themselves, in the subsection of another study further supported this observation (Silver, Mallet, Greene, & Simard, 2002). The students indicated that, although educators did want to assist, they really did not understand or relate to the fundamental issues Aboriginal students face, especially issues concerning poverty. The study showed that Aboriginal students felt educators appeared to be involved only at the surface level because their efforts did not appear genuine. The students felt there was a demographic divide in terms of culture and class that was having a direct influence on the way the teachers responded.

Gordin (2003) looked at a charter school program delivered in the United States that sought to address the various needs of the Native American students (ranging from academic to cultural to social concerns). What made this study significant is that it considered social problems like, but not limited to, drug abuse, suicide, teenage pregnancy, gang-related violence, and health problems as issues that need attention.

Although Gordin's (2003) results were unable to validate the program's success because the study took place over a relatively short duration, it was concluded that more information was required to draw any substantial conclusions about what types of supports are required for students to be successful. Other literature demonstrates that

educational leaders who are not familiar with Aboriginal issues are not prepared to deal with the specific issues that often extend beyond the needs of the mainstream students.

Avery's study (1997) that took place in the United States examined the high rates of Native American student absenteeism. This study found that parents and community members felt there was a difference in opinion between school policy and family values as per the differences in excused and unexcused absences. The parents and community members felt the issues should be dealt with on an individual basis instead of school-wide policy. These participants believed that educational leaders needed to take the time to understand the absences so they might learn that many of the absences are impacted by,

having to take care of younger siblings at home; having no money and needing work; having problems with parents, foster parents, or guardians; having legal issues (e.g., incarceration to juvenile centers; attendance at juvenile court); and returning to the reservation for a funeral, a wedding, or just to be with family. (Kanu, 2006, p. 130)

Avery's and Kanu's study demonstrate the ongoing need for educational leaders to be better prepared to address the unique social and economic issues as part of the solution that would potentially alter the way educational leaders provide personal support.

Educational leaders need to identify the underlying issues rather than only attempt to address the surface issues (Silver, Mallet, Greene, & Simard, 2002). Cassidy and Bates (2005) suggested through the theory of an ethic of care, educational leaders need to realize that it is not their responsibility to resolve the problem, but simply to provide a respectful and caring environment. Waterhouse (2004) supported Cassidy and Bates findings in their study of school-based care experiences of at-risk youth in the Canadian

public school system. Waterhouse (2004) explored the perceptions of students who shared experiences with educators who demonstrated an ethic of care towards them. Waterhouse's (2004; 2007) studies, as well as Cassidy and Bates's (2005) study, followed a theoretical framework from Noddings's (1984;1992) concept of caring-for and caring-about, to identify categories to guide the investigation. Cassidy and Bates provided an example of a narrative study that focused on mainstream teachers and at-risk students enrolled in a caring school environment. The study explored how the participants perceived care and concluded with an overview of how one group of educators extended their traditional role to involve understanding and care. To accomplish this objective, the group established a community vision that included the components of care to ensure consistency among all stakeholders. The educators also agreed it was not their responsibility to fix what was wrong with the students, but to provide a caring and respectful environment.

The educators supported the students through various personal issues with the hopes that once issues were resolved, the students could refocus their efforts on academics. The educators also encouraged the involvement of parents and turned to the community for support concerning issues beyond their expertise. What appeared to make the program a success is that it did not place judgment on the students or make them feel badly about their differences or the personal issues they faced; instead, the educators incorporated personalized learning opportunities and supported the students through issues ranging from teen pregnancy to homelessness. The ideology of the program appears to support Noddings's (1992) statement, "Caring cannot be achieved by formula. It requires address and response; it requires different behaviours from situation to

situation and person to person" (p. xi). Certainly, this research places emphasis on the unique relationships that educators experience.

Although there are no written rules as to the level of care required, it has been recommended that caregivers find a balance between the extent of care they are willing to offer, ranging between levels of intimate care to humanitarian care (Slote, 2001).

Overall, the literature seems to acknowledge that an ethic of care requires the caregiver to be receptive and engrossed and demonstrate a selfless commitment in their attitude and actions while they work through a process that considers the relations of engrossment, commitment, and motivational displacement (Katz, 2007; Noddings, 1984; 2002; Palmer, Cooper, & Bresler, 2001). It is through these processes that the caregiver is willing to extend their role to establish a caring relationship, make a commitment to the person, and follow through with a plan to meet their needs. For educational leaders who choose to follow an ethic of care, it is likely their students will not only experience levels of fulfillment, but will also experience a sense of gratification (Noddings, 2004).

2.2 The Relationship of Caring as an Inspirational and Motivational Factor

The term 'leadership' applied within the educational context for the most part refers to helping others and building meaningful and sustainable relationships where educational leaders continually search for ways to motivate students. Understanding and addressing student motivation is of interest to individuals working in the field (Rinne, 1998). The challenge is that many educational leaders choose to stand at the front of the classroom and lecture and at times offer extrinsic awards instead of trying other meaningful pathways to engage students. The difficulty is that any attempts to motivate

students whereby leaders direct, delegate, and control the outcome is often short-lived when the extrinsic reward is no longer offered (Kerryfoot, 2001; Secretan, 2006; 2004). Based on the works of Secretan, it is apparent that external motivation does not work in isolation.

The challenge is to deliver programming that has a long-lasting effect on the student learner, and refocus the intervention strategies to include inspiring students. The main objectives for the educational leader should include first, to inspire and, second, to motivate students to become independent, well-motivated life-long learners that are committed to making the world a better place (Fallows & Ahmet, 1999; Kerfoot, 2001; Kryza, Stephens, & Duncan, 2007). The finding that inspiration exists at the first stage of the framework when building caregiving relationships prior to motivation is based primarily on the belief that people need to discover what inspires them before they can be motivated to work toward setting and achieving their goals. As well, there is concern that focusing on motivation without a consideration for inspiration seeks to meet the needs of the leader rather than the individual (Cardona, 2000) being cared for.

In further understanding the connection between the terms 'care', 'inspiration', and 'motivation' it is understood that inspiring organizations (or relationships) 'just do not happen', but are the result of building caring relationships (Kerfoot, 2001). Inspiring learners is part of the initial process of understanding what is required for the development of caregiving relationships. In so doing, it is the educational leaders' responsibility to understand the issues as well as seek to meet the needs of the learners (Kerfoot). St. Denis (2010) noted that, while working with students, it is important to understand the whole child. When educational leaders have trouble inspiring students, it

is important that they take the time to understand how the students learn and what inspires them. Educational leaders need to be empathetic and help the students to realize their strengths, challenges, and gifts (St. Denis, 2010). One study participant summarized the relationship by saying, "In order to move forward, one must become a part of our student's lives, where they are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually" (St. Denis, p. 25). Through these very important discussions the educational leader may discover the student's lack of motivation is sometimes rooted in their underlying personal circumstances. Research shows that good teaching involves being loving and caring toward the students, and being an active listener, one who is approachable regardless of the issue put forward (St. Denis). These traits are especially important when working with urban Aboriginal students since their needs are at times more unique and diverse than non-Aboriginal students because of the existing academic, cultural, social, and economic gaps.

The context of caring as a motivational factor is based on Maslow's (1954) model of hierarchy of needs theory and model of transcendental leadership. Maslow's model of hierarchy of needs theory focuses on human motivation and personal development. The challenge with following this theory in its entirety and applying it to a framework that promotes building a caregiving relationship is that it looks strictly at the notion of how individuals are motivated to achieve their own success in a manner that includes fulfilling their own needs, while at the same time meeting all levels of the hierarchy of needs from the upmost basic to advanced (ranging from physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization). Through this model the student's level of motivation is often determined by factors like, but not limited to, the learner's desire to satisfy the teacher,

perceived need for the material, subject interest, personal and philosophical values and beliefs, attitude toward learning, academic and career aspirations, and available incentives and awards (Fallows & Ahmet, 1999). For Aboriginal students it is likely to involve other additional factors besides school-related issues like, but not limited to, specific connections to their heritage and culture, in addition to ensuring their basic social and economic needs are met.

Maslow's revised hierarchy of needs theory incorporates the level of transcendence to put into perspective how leaders can work with other individuals to help them to realize and fulfill their potential by building caring relationships (Sanders, Hopkins, & Geroy, 2003). This process is also known as transcendental motivation (Cardona, 2000; Sanders, Hopkins, Geroy, 2003) and involves the motivation of doing things for others. Transcendental leadership is a contribution-based model that focuses on the leader contributing to the personal development of others with considerations for consciousness, moral character, and spirituality. Through this framework the educational leader may help to guide the urban Aboriginal learner to achieve self-actualization. Once the educational leader demonstrates a genuine commitment to ensuring the student's individual needs are met and trust has been established then it is likely that a caregiving relationship will be achievable.

Kryza, Stephens, and Duncan (2007) remarked, "After loving and being loved, the second greatest human need is to inspire and be inspired. Should this not be the most important need of education?" (p. x). It is essential for educational leaders who seek to inspire and motivate urban Aboriginal learners to understand the theory of an ethic of care as well as the connections between inspiration and motivation. The effect is that

"Leaders who inspire their people and build self-sustainable communities of energizing, caring people leave a legacy that continues beyond their tenure" (Kerfoot, 2002, p. 126). Kryza, Stephens, and Duncan (2007) summarized the relationship between inspiration and motivation in stating the following statement:

In understanding the distinct differences between motivation and inspiration, it seems more appropriate to use the term inspiration first and then motivation, since people need to find out what inspires them first and before they can be motivated to achieve their goals. Motivation attempts to change a person through external forces; it treats the symptoms. (As we already know, motivation is NOT working.) If we truly want to reach our students, what they need from us is INSPIRATION! Inspiration is a stirring of something deep within us all that longs to be fulfilled. It is the tapping into the innate curiosity and wonder within all of our students. Only when we inspire our students do they become driven by their own internal desire to learn, not by our external 'motivating'. (p. 4)

Although some educational leaders may strive to meet the needs of the students, their level of motivation and commitment varies. Even though legal frameworks exist under the Constitution Act 1982, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Code affirms Canada's commitment to protect Aboriginal people and encourage social reform, there is still uncertainty as to whether or not educational leaders choose to implement policies (i.e. the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2007), and if so, how they choose to go about it. The difficulty with policy is that, "there is resistance or a lack of commitment to implementing the policy" (Joshee & Johnson, 2007, p. 6) from some

educational leaders who are not committed. As well, education-related policy is not always clear and can be open to interpretation, meaning that not everyone chooses to address the issues in the same manner, making it difficult to know the best way to respond (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004). To address these concerns, educational leaders must accept responsibility by placing higher value on meeting the actual need of the students, setting goals to eradicate bias by broadening or challenging their existing belief systems, and taking the time to motivate themselves and others (Coker-Kolo, 2002).

Some literature showed teachers enter their profession with preconceived views about society (Clarke & Drudy, 2006). For instance, Stephan and Stephan (2004) stated educators enter the profession with preconceived "stereotypes, misconceptions, and negative attitudes towards outside racial, ethnic, and social-class groups" (p. 607). It is assumed that these beliefs can influence the educational leader's level of commitment to diverse groups (like Aboriginal youth); their involvement in the delivery of programming; their assurance to carry out the school's mission and vision; and how they interpret and implement the school's policies, curriculum reform, and school culture (Dimmock & Walker, 2007). Educational leaders who let their own biases interfere with program improvements may have limited ability to act respectfully as a caregiver; so, it is up to that individual person to resolve their indifferences and determine their level of commitment. Cassidy and Bates (2005) suggested that educators are often motivated to support program improvements based firstly on their desire to develop successful programming, and second on the educator's existing knowledge of low rates of success. As a result, Noddings's (2003) notions of engrossment and motivational displacement as well as Noddings's statement that caring is the motivational factor for justice makes the

importance of getting past feelings of bias and caring about the needs of others seem viable since leaders are working to assist the students realize their goals. In summary, it is the people they know and care for that motivates educators (Bubeck, 1995).

To deliver appropriate programs and supports requires a framework that addresses the immediate needs of the urban Aboriginal students and their families by considering the existing issues and challenges and how the school system (i.e. school leadership and educators) contribute to them. St. Denis (2010) pointed out that children who deserve the chance to achieve success often sell themselves short. In using an approach that teaches students to reflect on why they are here, what they stand for, and how they will participate in the world using their own unique gifts, it is possible to inspire them to move forward (Kryza, Stephens, & Duncan, 2007). Kerfoot (2001) stated that, "When people are inspired, they feel the fire of passion that will drive them intrinsically and independently to achieve the right thing" (p. 531). Ridnover (2006) suggested that the role of the school leader includes identifying the student needs and targeting the issues of the heart. Accordingly, a shift from educational leaders asking the question, "why are my students so unmotivated?" needs to be replaced with the phrase, "how can I inspire my students?"

The process of inspiring and motivating urban Aboriginal students should be led by a group of educational leaders who collectively share a common vision and strive to follow ethical leadership practices that include being caring and committed to bettering the lives of others. Consequently, it is essential that educational leaders take the time from the outset to understand the wide range of issues so that they can demonstrate a

willingness to be firmly committed to the advancement of relevant programs and supports that seek to inspire and motivate urban Aboriginal learners through the caregiver role.

2.3 Challenges and Limitations

There are numerous challenges and limitations that exist when delivering targeted programming for urban Aboriginal students. These challenges involve considerations for organizational structures and organizational preparedness. First, Noddings (1992) stated the organizational structure of schools does not typically support the notion of care. Educational leaders who chose to follow a cultural approach may accomplish little in terms of raising awareness and understanding of the underlying issues of the group. These issues rarely become a part of the regular curriculum (Banks, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; 1993). In some cases, schools initially try to address the inequities between certain groups by offering time-limited activities like add-on lessons, workshops, or special events that focus exclusively on the culture. Nonetheless, educators who do not extend programming beyond delivering individualized professional development workshops or add-on program options often choose this pathway mainly because they find it difficult to incorporate new, ongoing programming because of limited time availability, limited access to resources, or lack of educational experiences (Dimmock & Walker, 2007). Joshee and Johnson's (2007) article revealed that educators who do not extend their role beyond the norm risk the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes by failing to provide an environment that promotes an adequate understanding of the full extent of the issues to the students and its communities. This is especially true for Aboriginal students who are often misrepresented in the school system with little

understanding by staff and Aboriginal students of the historic and contemporary issues that contribute to the existing educational attainment gaps.

Several other challenges face educational leaders experience when trying to attempt to deliver targeted programming. Danyluk and da Costa (1999) explored the difficulty that school educators experience when teaching urban Aboriginal students. They suggested challenges are generally associated with the lack of preparedness for supporting diverse students, cultural conflicts, and district disrespect for the school needs. The study's results were limited since it only identified strategies to address the challenges and did not explore cause and effect relationships. Comparable results were depicted in an earlier study by Tompkins (1998) that focused on a rural Inuit school that was also experiencing significantly low academic success. In addressing the major issues like high staff turnover, lack of clear vision, a vision defined by the Department of Education, ill-defined roles, and few Inuit educators in leadership roles, it was determined that better planning was required across the school's organization. Similarly, Banks (1995, p. 163, as cited in Coker-Kolo, 2002) stated that, "we cannot produce multicultural education simply by infusing bits and pieces of ethnic content into the curriculum. Not so, multiethnic education requires reform of the total school" (p. 39).

Public and separate schools need to restructure themselves to accommodate the exemplary efforts made by educational leaders to provide levels of care. Educational leaders have difficulty identifying the actual needs of the urban Aboriginal learner due to the leaders' level of commitment and the lack of education and training as well as experience working in the sector. It is also complicated for educational leaders because the public and separate school programming is typically based on Eurocentric standards

that define academic standard benchmarks (Kohn, 2000). One of many challenges that educational leaders experience is assisting urban Aboriginal students to manage the pressures of walking in two worlds. In this case, the metaphor 'walking in two worlds' is used to illustrate how people embrace the beliefs and values of two worlds that at times may be contradictory to each other.

Henze and Vanett (1993) acknowledged that it may be unrealistic from the outset to expect students to understand their traditional world while at the same time balance the expectations of the Western world. This is especially true if urban Aboriginal students are only just beginning to discover their heritage for the first time. It may take time for students to find their own balance between the two worlds, especially since the context of urban Aboriginal culture has evolved due to the influences of the historic and contemporary issues. The recommendation is for educational leaders to guide respectfully the urban Aboriginal learners to discover their perception of what it means to grow up as an urban Aboriginal youth and try to establish a sense of balance and harmony between the two cultures and ways of knowing. In so doing, it is meaningful to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing across the curriculum since there would be less likelihood for it to be considered or treated an add-on responsibility (St. Denis, 2010). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students as well as other educational leaders could build understanding together.

Recent attempts by school systems across Canada in provinces like, but not limited to, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario indicate that educational leaders have started to expand their curriculum beyond the scope of academics to include social, emotional, and moral dimensions (St. Denis, 2010). St. Denis acknowledged that some Aboriginal

teachers within the public school system have made efforts to broaden their experiences by incorporating their own personal knowledge of Aboriginal issues into the curriculum for all students. The curriculum focused on meaningful, hands-on experiences that related to the real world like making star blankets or hosting cultural camps (St. Denis, 2010). The teachers invited traditional Elders to participate in the delivery of programming to make it more culturally relevant. The Elders were also available to support the Aboriginal students in regards to day-to-day issues and help them to discover their gifts and place in this world.

St. Denis (2010) pointed out that some educators felt they were successful in delivering a culturally relevant curriculum while others experienced challenges due to mainstream educators placing little priority on Aboriginal issues and having limited to no culturally relevant resources and supports available. St. Denis summarized that there are:

a variety of concerns with existing curriculum, including: that Aboriginal content and perspectives are not valued by the larger system of education; that the standard curriculum still portrays Aboriginal people through historic negative stereotypes; and in general, little is understood about what Aboriginal content and perspectives are, and how they can be effectively integrated, made even worse by a lack of funding and administrative support for such integration. (p. 35)

In reflecting on these issues there is some concern from educators that conditions create the potential for negative stereotypes to persist. Most definitely, there is a risk that negative attitudes may affect the educational leader's level of commitment to incorporate Aboriginal issues into the curriculum (Dimmock & Walker, 2007; Joshee & Johnson, 2007). Accordingly, it is recommended that educational leaders need to look for

meaningful ways to put into practice culturally relevant programming and supports that will inspire and motivate students while at the same time meet the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal learners enrolled in the public and separate school systems.

Leaders need to explore advanced educational philosophies that promote opportunities for urban Aboriginal social justice in the public and separate education systems. In so doing, it is essential that educational leaders seek ways to support the conditions for unity (balance and harmony) for students in the school community. Since the concept of teaching for social justice in an urban Aboriginal school environment is relatively new and has not really been explored in-depth, there is limited literature to draw upon. The literature that does exist (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Gay, 1993; and, Sleeter, 1996) provides some insight into a process for how educational leaders can work together to advocate for positive change. For instance, the literature suggests that educational leaders need to continually reflect on their own experiences; seek out adequate time and supports, reflect on existing organizational structures (i.e. educational, political, social, and economic), and how they shape the experiences of the students and the educational leaders, and continue to listen to the voices of the students so that their needs beyond academics are included. Additional suggestions include: to focus on opportunities for looking at other belief systems; identity building; collaboration; and partnerships. In this research study, teaching for Aboriginal social justice is an approach to prepare all educational leaders to acknowledge that issues and challenges exist and need to be addressed to narrow the existing educational, social, and economic gaps through culturally responsive educational practices that build positive identity by integrating academic, cultural, social, and economic programs, resources, and supports.

Greene (1997) suggested educators need to stop duplicating existing programs and start focusing on democratic organization (social equity) within the community.

Greene recommended leaders need to start by being prepared to educate students about self-awareness; in other words, Aboriginal students be taught to discover ways to better understand themselves and be provided with opportunities to demonstrate respect for others. The attribute of self-awareness and more so respect is already shared by Aboriginal people through their traditional beliefs and values. For this to occur, school leaders must be prepared to broaden their existing personal beliefs and prepare themselves to look deeper at the issues through processes that involve working together with students and other school leaders to construct a shared meaning. Greene suggests that this will involve engaging in meaningful conversations and striving to build authentic collaboration.

2.4 Caring Leaders United or Divided?

Studies of the impact of involving building school-community networks (Danyluk & da Costa, 1999; Friedel, 1996; Laramee, 2006) identified the types of relationships individuals experience when trying to enhance Aboriginal education. The results appeared to vary depending on the target group surveyed. Lavall (2003) looked at the perspectives of the students and suggested that organizational structures themselves are the main problem due to issues concerning hierarchy, authority and control, and customary beliefs, which are frequently in conflict with Aboriginal beliefs and culture. All the studies reviewed involving building school-community networks showed that what is needed to build united, caring relationships, is a shift in pedagogical foundation to

be in line with the Aboriginal beliefs and culture. These studies also showed that involving a network of people (ranging from students to parents to the community) helps educational leaders to refocus programming to suit individual needs since they have a better understanding of the issues and resources available to address the key challenges. However, without a sustained effort by educational leaders, it is possible that the programs will fall short in all areas.

Educational leaders are under continuous pressure from the Aboriginal community and government departments to explore ways to close the existing student achievement, success, and engagement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Since the federal government's circulation of the 1969 White Paper entitled, "Statements of Government of Canada on Indian Policy", several additional governments and national government organizations (NGO's) research and policy reports have been completed that acknowledge the academic, cultural, social, political, and economic challenges that exist for Aboriginal students and their families. Regardless of the fact that there is no national urban Aboriginal education strategy that supports improved education standards, provincial and territorial education departments are working toward implementing urban Aboriginal education strategies that attempt to address the historic, social, economic, and cultural concerns while targeting student achievement, recruitment of Aboriginal staff, literacy and numeracy skills, professional development, and homeschool relationships. The intention is to engage stakeholders to establish clear program direction to inspire and motivate urban Aboriginal students and to develop new learning options that build respectful relationships and partnerships. However, significant challenges exist and need to be addressed.

The Ontario Ministry of Education's provincial strategy (First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework introduced in 2007) is an example of how provinces are working towards impacting the manner school boards, educators, and the Aboriginal communities are engaged to make improvements in areas of recruitment, teacher training, learning, achievement, culture, support, and self-identification. However, Cherubini and Hodson (2008) conducted an analysis of the Ministry of Education framework and concluded that, although the provincial government has invested funding and established several working partnerships with educational institutions and leading Aboriginal communities and organizations, the framework does little to define for educational leaders' ways to address the variables of socioeconomics in the public education sector. Cherubini and Hodson's critique suggested that the document assumes a Eurocentric ideology. The issues of concern raised include an overreliance on standardized testing which at times can have a negative impact on the Aboriginal community; educators are mainly non-Aboriginal and not yet prepared to take on the additional responsibilities; educators enter the profession with preconceived views, and there is lack of parental involvement in the decision-making processes. Cherubini and Hodson suggested a meaningful mandate and vision are required for change.

Other program initiatives are emerging in the Province of Ontario that focus on social and economic issues by poverty reduction campaigns like Ontario's *Poverty*Reduction Act 2009, but again, there is little direction as how to implement the programming successfully. Apart from alternative programming that exists in certain cities, no policies exist that define how communities, agencies, or others who support Aboriginal youth and their families could participate in the process apart from taking on a

consultative role. The process will inevitably continue to be challenging at all stages (i.e. planning, development, and delivery) since there exists no specific group who advocates or oversees issues relevant to urban Aboriginal youth enrolled in the mainstream school system. The growing concern within Aboriginal communities and those who advocate for change is that the process will remain slow and continue to put urban Aboriginal youth at-risk.

The social and economic pressures faced by urban Aboriginal students and their families mean they have less probability for success without appropriate programs and supports in place that meet the unique needs of the community. Given that poverty rates directly correspond with poor rates of educational attainment (Lemstra, 2008), and there are so few ongoing, urban Aboriginal-specific programs that target socioeconomics in the education system, it is even more likely that it will continue to be a challenge for the Aboriginal community organizations, governments, and school systems to make concessions for these issues. No matter what educational framework is put into practice at the local, district, and provincial levels, educational leaders must be aware of the impact that competing forces can have on its implementation.

It has been reported that there is a regular disconnect among government and school board mission and vision statements and that goals do not always target the most pressing issues (McCaskell, 1995). Mulford (2008) found that external and contextual pressures challenge leadership and organizational practices. These pressures range from pairs of competing forces like continuity and/or constant change; dependence and/or independence; individualism and/or community; homogeneity and/or heterogeneity and challenge leadership and organizational practices. These pairs of competing forces

influence how stakeholders are involved in the design and delivery of the programs.

According to Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004), educational leaders must recognize these pressures, look for areas of improvement, make assumptions about how to proceed, and project future implications. In order to advance change on important issues, many stakeholders must be involved (rather than depend on certain individuals) so they can learn to trust each other and agree to collaborate on determining a shared vision to support sustainable change. This means that educational leaders will need to find a common balance between the pairs of competing forces to promote the success of sustainable program initiatives and work together to develop and deliver relevant programming.

One of the competing forces that educational leaders experience when working within organizational structures is constant change. There is a genuine concern that Aboriginal education and community programs experience constant change in leadership since funding is often not sustained over time due to an overreliance on short-term grants, time-limited projects, and block funding agreements. Mulford (2008) showed that constant change risks low levels of reliability and increased instability for the organization. The recommendation is that educational leaders determine who is accountable for shaping the identity, knowledge, and values of the urban Aboriginal learner and determine how they will work in partnership with other organizations to share their resources and expertise.

As Hallinger (2007) pointed out there is no one specific organizational leadership model to follow. However, the benefits of Mulford's (2008) framework for developing communities of professional learners may help organizations to reach independence,

community, and heterogeneity. Following Mulford's (2008) organizational leadership approach, the 'school's' responsibility becomes a shared responsibility where collaborative and sustainable partnerships are promoted. Since Mulford's framework incorporates transformational and distributed leadership approaches, it is likely suitable for building organizational structures. The framework promotes collaboration among stakeholders willing to work towards the values of establishing caregiving relationships so that trust and commitment are affirmed.

The stakeholders need to be prepared from the outset to identify the strengths among the group members and distribute tasks and responsibilities accordingly (Mulford, 2008). Providing adequate time to shape the organizational structures and develop leadership potential among the stakeholders helps establish a sense of cohesiveness. If successful, the educational leaders will likely go on to create the conditions for stability, independence, community, and heterogeneity to be achieved through innovative learning opportunities that support the betterment of the communities involved (Mulford).

Programming developed by Alberta's Advanced Education (2006) is an excellent example of a provincial framework that began with a shared vision to inspire Aboriginal learners by building caring partnerships among several stakeholders from all sectors. Although this is a framework for post-secondary education and training, what makes this structure unique compared to other provinces is that it is based on the values of trust, openness, respect, and quality. More specifically, it is based on a simple, uncomplicated vision that sought to inspire Aboriginal learners and their families in a caring and respectful environment that did not look to distinguish the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, or promote oppressive relationships. The model

looked at: (1) building partnerships with universities to increase understanding of Aboriginal issues; (2) establishing community-based instruction; (3) developing Indigenous curriculum that supported teacher preparation and development of curriculum and resources; and, (4) integrating a family literacy initiative that focused on culture and language. Alberta Advanced Education's (2006) shared vision is phrased as, "An Alberta that leads the world in inspiring and supporting lifelong learning for all its people" (p. 1). Its intention could easily be interpreted as a vision that looks to bring a feeling of hope and sense of pride to the Aboriginal community as a whole.

Alberta Advanced Education's (2006) culturally relevant framework was initiated through consultations with stakeholders from across all sectors (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, governments, learning providers, communities, industry, and the public). What followed was the formation of the Aboriginal Learning Subcommittee, which is a network of committed individuals responsible for: (1) putting forward recommendations for Aboriginal policies and supports to advancing working partnerships and relationships between Aboriginal and mainstream stakeholders; and, (2) developing quality programs and supports that did not let jurisdictional differences interfere with the success of the organizational structure (Alberta Advanced Education).

By involving stakeholders from across all sectors, the stakeholders were encouraged to take on advisory roles, to collaborate, provide and support the recommendations, promote understanding, and reinforce commitments. Programs and supports were put forward to inspire Aboriginal learners through public awareness campaigns that promoted learning options, created partnerships with secondary schools and post-secondary systems, and prepared Aboriginal students for advanced learning and

the workforce. In preparing Aboriginal students for the future, Alberta Advanced Education (2006) included supports for life-long learning as well as fostering the development of the whole-person (i.e. intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical) through approaches like cultural development and traditional language preservation. Mulford (2008) pointed out that "there is good evidence that young people learn better when they experience a broad curriculum as against one which is limited by the backwash effect of narrow measures" (p. vi). The result is that programming must look beyond cognitive learning outcomes and make considerations for equity, cognitive and non-cognitive, and social issues (Mulford).

Although this framework does not make reference to care theories, it does provide a look into the processes recommended for addressing socioeconomic gaps by building sustainable partnerships to support opportunities for Aboriginal youth to make informed decisions about their future. The Alberta Advanced Education approach (2006) demonstrated, through the success of their programming, that there needs to be an Aboriginal coordinator available to support programming, offer one-on-one support to learners and staff, incorporate cultural and traditional programming, and maintain communication with Aboriginal and mainstream communities. Although more familiar at the post-secondary level, the Aboriginal coordinator position is becoming more commonplace at school boards nationwide where the coordinator's role is to administer and support the delivery of culturally relevant programming.

A review of Aboriginal youth educational programming that extended beyond the regular classroom experience indicate that several of the programs supported the implementation of public awareness campaigns, including education and career role

model programs. Public awareness campaigns are also becoming a common, viable approach used by government, educational systems, industry, as well as private and corporate sectors to address existing disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The benefit of public awareness campaigns include that they aim to provide Aboriginal learners with the chance to explore the opportunities with the guidance from professionals, mentors, and roles models in the field. For instance, public awareness campaigns are intended to motivate Aboriginal people to realize the importance of education and ease the transition from school to post-secondary education and training to the workforce (National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, 2010).

Similar to public awareness campaigns is the concept of personalized learning since it "aims to promote personal development through self-realisation, self-enhancement, and self-development" (Leadbeater, 2004, p. 6). Personalized learning seeks to engage the whole-learner and is delivered in collaboration with other community stakeholders through experimental learning initiatives, including learning from the land, Elders, tradition and ceremonies, community and parental supports, as well as the workplace (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). This model also encourages educational leaders to provide opportunities like mentorships, apprenticeships, ambassador programs, and industry training programs to prepare students for the transition to the labour market. The benefits of personalized learning programs are first and foremost to encourage students to become active, engaged learners while at the same time encourage them to develop the skills required to be responsible, resourceful, resilient, and reflective learners (Leadbeater, 2005). Second, students have the support and commitment of community stakeholders, ranging from traditional Elders to corporate

leaders, and community stakeholders who are specialists in their field and responsible for sharing knowledge and life-skills through oral teachings and practical experiences.

Third, community-based partnerships encourage the sharing of resources and expertise that is especially valuable to schools who have limited resources.

The Edmonton Catholic School District's (2010) Department of Aboriginal

Learning Services is an example of a collaborative network at the district level. This
department is responsible for coordinating services aimed at inspiring and motivating

Aboriginal students and their families. The Edmonton Catholic School District provides
services that are very diverse and range from counselling, cultural programming,
curricular support, professional development, leadership development, career
development, transition planning, community development, Aboriginal education
research, and product development. One example of a responsive system delivered by
the Edmonton Catholic School District is the student and family crisis response program
that seeks to assess the situation through mediation services involving staff members and
families. The team works together to build an action plan and provide ongoing followup, if needed. The organizational structure aims to share its best practices concerning
urban Aboriginal education with other school districts across the province.

Innovative programming models need to explore ways for sharing information as part of reflective practice. For instance, the Alberta Advanced Education (2006) put forward recommendations for the implementation of a provincial centre of excellence that would, "address issues in and promote awareness of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learning, culture, and language that could leverage knowledge, experience and wisdom from existing programs and initiatives and provide an invaluable focus for research,

innovation and sharing of best practices" (p. 4). The centre would make efforts to meet the needs of Aboriginal educators, researchers, and schools who require advice on how to manage the social issues that impact learning like housing, nutrition, community supports, wisdom, spirituality, and traditional ways of learning and teaching.

Overall, the literature showed that by following an ethic of care, there are multiple ways that a leader can move an organization from being an institution governed by bureaucratic structures to one that responds to the individual. In particular, the literature showed evidence there is a need for educators to respond to students who often do not feel cared for and have no continuity of care (Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991; Waterhouse, 2007). Cuilla (2001) noted leaders who choose not to look out for the best interests of all students are not only acting unethically in their day-to-day practices, but also proving themselves as ineffective leaders. For that reason, the following issues need to be further investigated: the extended roles of the educational leaders and the motivational factors of educational leaders who are employed in an urban Aboriginal program in the midst of regular programming as well as the types of limitations that restrict the educational leaders from fulfilling their desire to follow an ethic of care at the school level.

2.5 Background Philosophy of Inclusion and Caring in the World Around Us

Paul Barton (1995, as cited in Coker-Kolo, 2002) recommended that, "all teachers no matter what their race and culture ought to become more knowledgeable about diversity so they can be better equipped to work with the changing student population in their classrooms" (p.35). Maxine Greene (1995; 1997) explored the complexities of

multiple realties and she also encouraged people to broaden their understanding of the world around them. Increasingly, educational leaders are confronted with student diversity challenges and many are seeking meaningful and sustainable solutions.

In some situations, educational leaders respond to problematic situations by implementing new polices without taking the necessary time to understand the reality of the existing, underlying problems. Greene (1995; 1997) suggests that instead of responding hastily, educators should target school-related problems with new, updated programs that foster not only strong values, but also look to address issues like freedom, justice, equality, and empathy. This requires a strategic process that involves gathering information, finding evidence, engaging in dialogue, and enforcing the plan that is respectful to the community it serves (Lambert et. al., 2002). Consequently, educators need to value diversity and social justice by demonstrating change in their own practices and by questioning discrepancies, pushing for accountability, and enforcing standards, policies or legislation (Lambert et. al.).

Educational leaders can begin the process of exploring systemic issues by acknowledging and evaluating the differences in Aboriginal and Western worldviews. Little Bear (2000) defined the Aboriginal worldview as one that is in constant motion whereby all of the elements are interrelated, equally important, and over time, renew themselves. In contrast, in the Eurocentric worldview time is linear and the elements are viewed as separate entities. Differences are apparent when the two worldviews interact or, in some cases, collide. When this happens people from the two distinct groups are left to make inferences that could potentially lead to misunderstandings, indifference, or discrimination (Little Bear). These "collision" of Aboriginal and Eurocentric worldviews

are apparent in many public and separate school systems where the school community is determining future programming for Aboriginal children.

Aboriginal educational reform requires social justice and related anti-oppressive systems. According to Blackmore and Sachs (2007) they support inclusive programming and approaches in school systems, and they believe that there needs to be a shift in organizational structures to encourage historically underrepresented groups to participate in education at all levels, and enhance programming. Blackmore and Sachs acknowledged that, historically, organizational systems were being criticized for gender-blindness. School systems were traditionally masculine and hierarchical. However, because of the introduction of interventionist policies that promoted equal opportunity for women in the 1970 s and early 1980 s, organizations began to shift their focus and there were more efforts for equitable change (Blackmore & Sachs). In essence leadership needed to be sensitive to diversity and all forms of social injustice, like oppression and poverty needed to be challenged. Today, the educational community needs to be willing to demonstrate their commitment to Aboriginal education, so the oppression that is felt by many Aboriginal people can be lifted, to be replaced by a relationship built on trust.

In moving forward, educational leaders need to prepare "in advance, for some of the difficult ethical problems that they will face in the future, enabling them to work on these challenging situations in the relatively safe spaces of the classroom" (Shapiro & Gross, 2008, p. 53). More specifically, educational leaders need to be prepared to address ethical dilemmas like accountability versus responsibility. Shapiro and Gross stated, "Responsibility, while similar to accountability, can be perceived of as more inclusive by placing the onus for success or failure of students' achievement on society as

a whole and not just the schools (p. 88). The dilemma is that decisions are being made that impacts all educational leaders while at the same time "expects everyone to share in and care about educating the next generation" (Shapiro & Gross, 2008, p. 89).

Care theorists like Noddings (1984; 1992; 1993; 2003) and Starratt (1991; 1994) focused on the process of how people accept differences and genuinely care for others by establishing reciprocal relationships that provide conditions for justice (Noddings & Slote, 2003). Although some theorists focus exclusively on an ethic of care, Starratt (1994) intersected several concepts that include an ethic of critique, justice, and caring. For the purpose of this discussion, the focus of the literature will center exclusively on an ethic of care as means to understand how social justice can be achieved.

Overall, there is a need for educational organizations to reach beyond a focus on academic levels of attainment and begin to form meaningful care relationships that value diversity and social justice. It is acknowledged that people yearn for others to care intrinsically for them; however, to have a true effect on a person, the caregiver must start out by knowing the person (Slote, 2001). Next, the caregiver must be willing to go beyond the general notion of caring to develop sustainable relationships that meet the individual needs rather than the virtues of the individual (Noddings, 2003; Katz, 2007). Noddings's assumptions and beliefs concerning an ethic of care are relevant to the proposed research framework since Noddings aims to explain what is needed to establish and maintain a caring relationship between the "one caring" and the "cared for" (Katz, 2007; Noddings, 1992). Noddings's theory on care seeks to understand how others make ethical judgements in caring relationships and how they are affected by the processes of establishing, maintaining, enhancing, or damaging caring relationships (Paul, 2005).

Noddings (1984; 2002) followed a process founded on natural caring instead of a philosophy formulated using a utilitarian or deontological approach to ethics (Palmer, Cooper, & Bresler, 2001).

Noddings (1984; 2002) acknowledges that to care for an individual means more than caring about and saying, "I care". According to Noddings, to care requires the caregiver to be the one who accepts full responsibility for empowering the cared-for by aiming to not only fulfill the human needs, but also be directly engrossed in the delivery of their own actions as the caregiver. This means that caregivers must act in the best interest of the cared-for and provide an enduring commitment to human integrity and social change. Consequently, it is anticipated the caregiver will be willing to respond in a way that will put aside their personal beliefs and values and aim to understand and accept another person's feelings, needs, and wants (Bubeck, 1995; Noddings, 1984). In this regard, the educational leader is responsible to build a caring relationship through Noddings's (1988) four components of nurturing: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Accordingly, Noddings (2002) summarized an ethic of care as follows:

Caring-about (or perhaps sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared for, caring about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs.

Caring about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations. (pp. 23-24)

It is important to realize that a caring relationship at any stage may be challenging (Noddings ,1993). A caring relationship may not be achievable or require sustained

effort if either stakeholder is not able to put aside their own differences, make rationalobjective decisions, or devote the time necessary to carry out the actions (Noddings,
1993). More so, Starratt (1994) highlighted that it is complicated for people from other
cultural backgrounds to agree on what is the most suitable approach to respond to ethical
situations. For instance, motives or cultural values that are in conflict (i.e. Western
versus Aboriginal) make it difficult for people to overcome their own beliefs and values
and accept another way of thinking. Further, some people have never been involved in a
caring relationship and are only familiar with uncaring relationships involving neglect or
abuse; consequently, it may take time to build trust and reciprocate. If these issues
cannot be resolved then it will likely lead to unsupportive relationships between students
and educational leaders whose worldviews continue to be in conflict (Starratt). There are
no set guidelines to resolve conflicts related to the clashing of worldviews; however,
what is known is that once balance a resolution has been reached people can begin to be
concerned about social justice (Slote, 2001).

Building sustainable caring relationships will mean that educational leaders will need to set aside their own individualistic desires and shifting from a bureaucratic style of leadership to one that focuses on building relationships and one that values the uniqueness of the individual student. This means that educational leaders must be prepared to not only care about the student, but also seek to demonstrate respect and forgiveness. Accepting criticism and alternative points of view is also part of this process. Some educators may be clearly unwilling to support the notion of building an ethical school (a school that involves caring) since they feel there is little to no time or resources to support its implementation, especially when students are clearly falling

behind in academic areas. Other educators are simply not aware or are willing to rationalize their morals against another set of morals, or challenge existing school structures.

Starratt (1994) questions how people implement an ethic of care within the limits of existing policies and programs. Since education practitioners often do not take background courses in ethics, it may be difficult for them to realize the benefits of the ethic of care practices and have difficulty implementing an ethic of care so that it respects two distinct worldviews. Educators need to be aware that all students are impacted by their individual issues, and without an opportunity to manage these challenges, it is likely that problems will negatively influence all aspects of their life. Thus, it is recommended that school staff take on the additional responsibility of educating themselves in the area of ethics and it is encouraged that educators pay attention to the positive changes that can be made in their planning of school programs and classroom activities. The overall goals should be to develop the quality of student-teacher interactions and to build trusting relationships.

Finally, Maslow's (1954) model of hierarchy of needs theory puts into perspective the notion of care and the model depicts human motivation to fulfill needs and to attain success. Maslow's description of the theory shows that individuals must arrive at several levels (physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization) before they have their higher needs met. With the addition of transcendence to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the conceptual model becomes even more significant for educational leaders as they determine how to implement a humanistic approach where programming shifts to first meeting the student's basic needs (ranging from social to economic) before students can

experience success at other levels – this including academic success. In consideration of Maslow's adapted hierarchy of needs theory, educational leaders can use components of this model as a part of their management or leadership strategy to understand how to set targets and motivate reluctant students and other school leaders to increase rates of success for Aboriginal students.

Chapter Three: Methodology

A case study approach was selected to examine the educational leaders' perceived role as they become caregivers (i.e. mentors and role models) with the intent of meeting the individualized needs of urban Aboriginal youth in the Canadian public and separate school systems. The 26 participants of this study were educational leaders who were directly involved in the design and delivery of the Aboriginal programming and who were recognized as caregivers. To gain understanding about the educational leaders' roles, responsibilities, and relationships in relation to Aboriginal education and the ethic of care, the participants were interviewed and relevant district and school documentation such as policy statements, annual program activity reports, brochures, and newspaper clippings were examined. Next, the participants' interviews were analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns. The overall research design and methods used are described in this chapter.

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Framework

Philosophical worldviews are the "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17) and are implicit in research. However, it is essential to make them explicit since they impact the way researched is conducted (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, philosophical stance informed the methodology and methods while at the same time provided a comprehensive understanding of interconnected concepts that guided the research and what relationships need to be explored. Anfara and Mertz (2006) pointed out that identifying a theoretical approach, understanding how it is used, and knowing its effects on the process of conducting research is needed. The result is that the researcher

must connect theory to the methodology and methods by selecting from several research paradigms that qualitative researchers use to interpret the world. This process will guide the direction of their research actions like the methods ranging from the research questions, data analysis, to interpretation of findings (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Yin, 1994). Crotty (1998) suggested that researchers should ask themselves: "First what methodologies and methods will be employed in the research we propose to do? Second, how do we justify this choice and use methodologies and methods?" (p. 2). Following a strategic approach will support 'good education research' that is measured by its contribution to learning; ability to make sense of and be useable by others; and come across as methodologically sound (Yates, 2005). The following is a description of how the framework affects and determines the methodological approach and methods.

The research philosophy was conceptualized using the research paradigm (epistemology) of social constructionism and followed the perspective of an ethic of care to explore (using case study methodology) the educational leaders' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and relationships as caregivers using interviews and document analysis as data collection strategies. The following provides a synopsis of the framework that was used to interpret the educational leaders' role, their motivation to participate as a caregiver, the challenges and limitations they experience, and how their experiences unite or divide them with other leaders at various levels. In understanding the participation of urban Aboriginal people in the public and separate education sectors, it is important to recognize that a double understanding between the Western and Aboriginal world can be realized.

The research paradigm of social constructionism was selected apart from social constructivism. Social constructionism was selected instead of social constructivism because it acknowledged that objective fact does not always exist since the world appears to each of us in different ways (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998; Hacking, 2001). Social constructionism also offers a voice for marginalized groups (Paul, 2005) that is created from the collective social construct itself rather than attempting to describe how individuals engage with the world and make sense of it (Crotty, 1998; Vgotsky, 1978). Crotty (1998) affirmed that we construct meaning, we do not create it by stating the following: "What constructionism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). Bettis and Gregson (1998) acknowledged that, "Constructivists identify the myriad of mental constructions of the world, try to understand them, to locate some consensus among them, and to reconstruct the world based on these understandings" (p. 10). For the purpose of this study, social constructionism was informed by the contemporary works of Berger and Luckman (1996); Burr (1995); Crotty (1998); Hacking (2001); Harris (2008); and Searle (1995). Berger and Luckman (1966) were among the first to introduce the perspective that highlighted how people shape reality through social interactions. This theory of knowledge suggests certain characteristics need to be present for social constructionism to exist that involves exploring other worldviews, understanding historical and cultural contexts, and establishing meaning of the contexts by communicating with group members (Burr, 1995). Although the term 'social constructionism' does not share one universal definition, they share several similarities (Burr, 1995).

From the social constructionist perspective objective fact does not exist (Burr, 1995) rather the world appears to each of us differently. Social constructionists, according to Marshall (1994), "emphasize the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings, social worlds being interpretative nets woven by individuals and groups" (p. 484). According to some social constructionists, the approach highlights that nothing in the world is fixed or inevitable (Hacking, 2001), so there is more than one way for groups to socially construct the meaning of knowledge and envision reality (Burr, 1995). For that reason, people are encouraged to be active participants in their own lives and question the issues that most concern them. To do so, individuals must be prepared to adopt a critical stance concerning their existing assumptions and accept that more than one truth exists (Burr, 1995; Harris, 2008; Searle, 1995).

Several viewpoints exist as to what variable social factors influence the success rates of urban Aboriginal students; however, over the years many of these outlooks have not adequately addressed the root of the problem. The decision to follow a social constructionist approach was based on the need to attain a deeper understanding of an alternative viewpoint that highlights the positive efforts that educational leaders put forth to carry out the day-to-day operations of their school programs, and to explore what they are doing at the grassroots level to address the socioeconomic issues first-hand. Social constructionism ultimately refers to the way in which the educational leaders' perceptions are influenced by all educational leaders and how they are influenced by social and interpersonal approaches. For instance, the educational leader can benefit from social constructionism by changing their approach to be seen as a caregiver by the urban Aboriginal learner.

Social constructionism encourages people to analyze the world around them by taking into consideration the historical and cultural contexts that reflect past and present issues (Burr, 1995). What is essential to realize is that over time historical and cultural contexts evolve based on the advancement of society and the changes that derive from it (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) stated:

What is said to be 'the way things are' is really just 'the sense we make of them'.

Once this standpoint is embraced, we will obviously hold our understandings
much more lightly and tentatively and far less dogmatically, seeing them as
historically and cultural effected interpretations rather than eternal truths of some
kind. (p. 64)

Hence, the research study followed a social constructionist approach to provide insight into how educational leaders supported urban Aboriginal educational programming. The study examined how educational leaders supported and provided educational opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth in response to meeting the students' individualized academic, cultural, social, and economic needs. The study also identified how educational leaders have reformed their professional duties and sought new ways of knowing; ways of knowing that balanced Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Third, relative to social constructionism people must decide through self-interpretation, language (Denzin, 2000), and everyday social interactions how they intend to construct the collective group meaning of social reality (Burr, 1995; Harris, 2008; Searle, 1995). Burr (1995) pointed out:

It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated....therefore what we regard as 'truth' (which of course varies historically and cross-culturally), i.e. our current accepted ways of understanding the world, is a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. (p. 4)

Accordingly, this study created meaning by exploring how the viewpoints of educational leaders who are directly involved in the design and delivery of urban Aboriginal programs act together as part of group to create positive social change. In doing so, the influence of their opinions among the group culture (and not their individual efforts) encourages the conditions for understanding and social change. Crotty (1998) noted that, "When we describe something, we are, in the normal course of events, reporting how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community or set of communities" (p. 64).

It is likely when following a social constructionist approach that not all group members have the same initial assumptions of social reality or the same social action response on how to address the situation (Burr, 1995). Regardless of the differences that may exist among the group members, it is important to work toward the end goal of achieving social harmony by first examining the various points of view before reaching an understanding about the social facts of reality (Burr, 1995; Searle, 1995). In taking the time to achieve social harmony, it is also important to work through the existing differences so that discrimination or other assumptions do not interfere with future advancements. Social harmony is significant because it encourages individuals to work

together to fully understand the group issues and concerns while at the same identify a shared mission (Burr; 1995; Searle, 1995).

It is recommended by Burr (1995), Harris (2008), and Searle (1995) that researchers need to adopt a critical stance to construct social reality by asking questions that look at understanding the participants' assumptions and other ways of knowing. The process should explore different ways of knowing; understand historical, cultural, and social contexts; and, seek to construct social reality by listening to the voices of others (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998). The result is that social constructionism encourages the researcher to construct social facts and a reality through the lens of using historical, social, and/or cultural perspectives. This approach is especially important if the social response could potentially lead to improving human conditions which social constructionists suggest is achievable through social constructionism (Denzin, 2000). As such, Searle (1995) recommended that such assumptions must involve three fundamental components: collection intentionality, assignment of functions, and constitutive rules.

Besides a social constructionist research paradigm, an ethic of care provided a conceptual framework for this research. The theory of an ethic of care was selected for several reasons. It was chosen since it is the foundation for ethical decision-making for times when people are concerned about the individual needs of others. It was also chosen because the process of caring in a way that seeks to understand the emotions and motivational factors that people in the situations that they find themselves. It also was chosen because it looks at the progression of selfless and genuine acts of caring towards marginalized groups. Overall, the theory focuses on the actions and processes needed to

build caring relationships toward others through 'receptivity' and 'relatedness' (Noddings, 2002).

Primarily considering Noddings's (2002) theories, the literature could be used to infer that the caregiver must keep an open mind and listen to the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal learner while at the same time making sure not to place judgement on the situation, shifting their personal motivational interests through the process of motivational placement toward reflecting on and seeking out unbiased solutions with the best interests of the students in mind. Finally, Noddings's theories provides a clear pathway that details how educational leaders ideally should make considerations to extend their roles and responsibilities to address the needs of the learner that is non-judgemental and respectful of more than one way of knowing.

Carol Gilligan (1982) first introduced the theory of an ethic of care that proceeded to revolutionize the way professionals understood human relationships and the way that people resolved moral dilemmas. This theory was unlike other existing ethical and moral assumptions because it sought to look at how people viewed the world as one in a way that is harmonious and balanced between more than one worldview or way of knowing. Other theories, like Kohlberg's ethic of justice (1981; 1984), viewed the world as individualistic and believed the rights of different groups would remain in conflict (Arvizu, 1983). The present day foundational works discussed in this section highlight the various contemporary theories of caring and the viewpoints and some of the processes that are recommended to establish and sustain caring relationships between educational leaders and at-risk students. Consequently, it is believed that care, balance, and harmony

can be achieved by developing sustainable caring relationships that address the social and economic needs of the individual (Bergman, 2004; Noddings, 1984; 2002).

Although several definitions of the term 'care' exist, there is no single definition that is agreed on by educators (Houston, 1989). For example, Mayeroff (1971) defined care as a means to help other persons to care for themselves. Fisher and Tronto (1990) described caring as, "everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it, as well as possible" (p. 40). Gordon, Benner, and Noddings (1996) classified the term 'care' as a "set of relational empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility" (xii). The varying definitions, they all have something in common that involves relationship building and a desire to help others work toward improving conditions for the betterment of society. The conceptual models relevant to the foundation of the study's research philosophy include an amalgamation of works from Nel Noddings (1984; 1992; 1993; 2003) and Robert J. Starratt (1991; 1994). In addition, the works of Abraham Maslow (1954), Leroy Little Bear (2000), and Maxine Greene (1995; 1997) are noted as a means to understand the impact that more than one worldview has on one's decision to support the needs of the Aboriginal student population.

It should be noted the discussion of care in this study is not aimed to reinforce feminist viewpoints that are often highlighted with reference to an ethic of care; instead, its focus is on the importance of relationship building and care-based ethics.

3.2 Guiding Assumptions and Beliefs

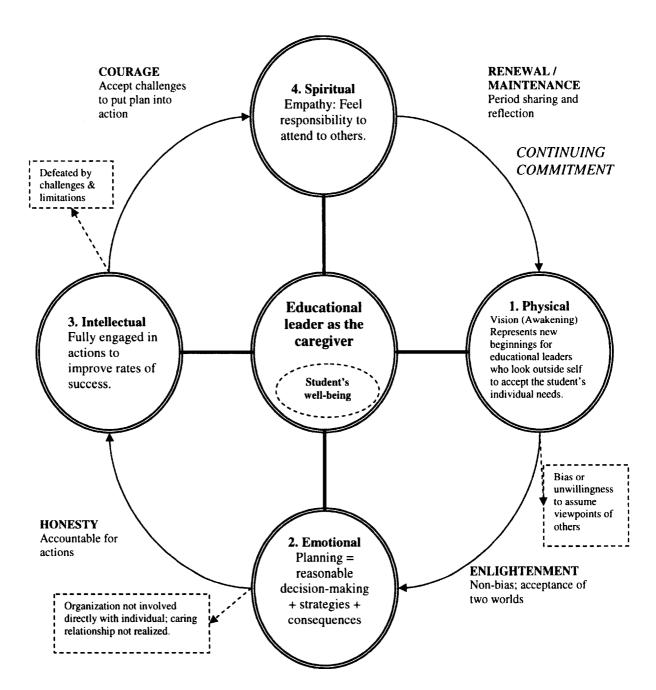
The study followed a conceptual framework derived from social constructionism, and the contemporary views of theories of an ethic of care with considerations for Aboriginal social justice organizational and leadership models, in addition to elements taken from the researcher's personal understanding of Indigenous philosophy. The researcher's underlying assumptions and beliefs from the outset of the study were as follows: (1) educational leaders who care, aim to go beyond their own worldview and basic academic responsibilities to address the social and economic needs of urban Aboriginal students to improve rates of success; (2) educational leaders are motivated by their desire to act in the best interests of all urban Aboriginal students they are familiar with; (3) challenges and limitations that are placed on educational leaders by those who are not directly involved make it difficult to sustain their participation; and (4) caring for urban Aboriginal students unites the caregiver with all stakeholders when their vision, goals, and objectives are understood and incorporated into frameworks, policies, and funding agreements.

In view of the fact there are no specific Indigenous paradigms that the researcher is aware of that explore the role of the educational leader as a caregiver while at the same time take into account more than one way of knowing, a culturally relevant framework was developed that is representative of Indigenous and Eurocentric approaches. The conceptual framework, "Quest for Social Justice (Balance and Harmony) in Education: "Circle of Caring Criterion" for Educational Leaders in an Urban Aboriginal School (Preliminary Working Draft Model)", depicted in Figure 1, was initially designed as a working draft summary derived from Aboriginal philosophy like the Medicine Wheel and

Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers combined with a review of findings from Western literature that focuses on the notion of an ethic of care and how it can be applied effectively for sustainable change for improving rates of Aboriginal student success.

The culturally relevant preliminary working draft model acknowledged that all processes are interconnected and require educational leaders to pass through each stage before a genuine caregiving relationship is established. The goal was to transfer the teachings and develop a culturally relevant framework that would be used initially by the researcher to create the basis for the research study which would serve also as a means to develop the research questions and provide a framework for the analysis and discussion of results. Following the research interviews and document analysis, the model was updated to include the data findings of the research study so educators working in the field of urban Aboriginal education could be provided with a holistic model that would encourage them to reflect on their own pathways in delivering educational programming and services.

Figure 1: Quest for Social Justice (Balance and Harmony) in Education: "Circle of Caring Criterion" for Educational Leaders in an Urban Aboriginal School (Preliminary Working Draft Model)



A draft description of the preliminary working model began at the centre of the wheel with the educational leader acting as the caregiver to improve the student's overall well-

being. The centre represents the neutral, holistic vision that everything needs to work together to create a sense of balance and harmony.

Stage 1 (physical): The eastern direction represents a new beginning. The educational leader seeks to develop their vision by looking to broaden their beliefs and values by taking the time to listen to the individual student's needs and general way of thinking. In so doing, the leader becomes better informed and demonstrates respect and a commitment to be fair in their judgment of others and accepts there exists many ways of knowing. However, for those who are unwilling to assume the viewpoint of another person it is likely that they will not participate in the actions required for establishing a caring relationship or achieving social justice.

Stage 2 (emotional): The educational leader aims to provide a level of care so that balance and harmony can be realized by means of developing a logical plan with the best interests of the students in mind by employing reasonable decision-making skills, identifying key strategies, and forecasting the potential consequences of putting the student-centred plan into action. At this stage, it is important for the leader to be accountable for their actions and ensure they remain as the primary caregiver in the delivery of the program. As for the leaders who pass the responsibility of carrying out the plan to another person and fail to remain directly involved, a caring relationship cannot be realized and the process ceases to move forward.

Stage 3 (intellectual): The educational leader seeks to achieve balance and harmony (social justice) by directly engaging in the delivery of the plan. In doing so, the leader must demonstrate the courage to look for ways to overcome the challenges and limitations to proceed. The education leader's success is dependent on their ability to

accept full responsibility and do their best to carry out the plan accordingly. This includes collaborating with equally committed community stakeholders.

Stage 4 (spiritual): At the concluding stage of process, if the educational leader has successfully passed through each of the phases of the model then a caregiving relationship that promotes balance and harmony between two worldviews has likely been achieved. Consequently, if the educational leaders reach this stage it is likely they will have accepted full responsibility to promote change and more so, demonstrated a willingness to make a continuing commitment to the student's social and economic needs by looking for ways to always renew and maintain the caring relationship. At this point of reference, it is essential for the leader to take the time to reflect on and share their experiences with others.

3.3 General Research Design/Methodology

Crotty (1998) described the term methodology as, "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). The worldview of the researcher is often what determines whether to follow a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed approach of inquiry. Since the researcher embraced social constructionism as the basis for their worldview, and needed to answer broad 'how' and/or 'why' research questions it seemed natural to follow a qualitative (interpretative) approach (Crotty). The study ended up being exploratory and descriptive in nature and used qualitative (interpretative) research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) to explain, explore, describe, and

interpret the perceived roles of the educational leader as a caregiver in their natural workplace setting.

A qualitative research methodology is ideal whenever the researcher is solely responsible for gathering information, collecting multiple sources of data, making sense of it, organizing it into themes, conducting a data analysis, looking to understand the problem; exploring the issue through a theoretical lens, making interpretations based on multiple views, and, reporting the newfound phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Denzin (2000) suggested that a qualitative research approach should be followed when researchers need to document, "the processes by which social reality is constructed, managed, and sustained" (p. 173). Qualitative research is further defined as,

a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, p. 4)

In determining the research methodology to use, it was important to understand the differences between the terms qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Bailey, 1997). For instance, a quantitative research methodology was not selected because the study did not require an external perspective or call for large amounts of statistical or measurable data to test a theory or fact, or need to discover relationships among several variables (Bailey, 1997; Creswell, 2009). The researcher also did not select a quantitative methodology because it would likely take away from giving the participants the chance to share their own experiences (Bailey, 1997; Paul, 2005). In order to ensure a holistic understanding

of the perceived caregiver's role in supporting Aboriginal learners' environment, it was necessary to speak with the participants in their natural setting. Considering the quantitative research methodology was not selected, it can be assumed that a mixed methodology approach was not considered.

The decision to follow a qualitative research methodology was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research was necessary to explore the topic by following a pathway whereby qualitative researchers must document "the processes by which social reality is constructed, managed, and sustained" (Denzin, 2000, p. 483). Second, the information collected in the research study looked to understand the multiple realities of the participants in a naturalistic setting where limited knowledge exists (Bailey, 1997). Third, the researcher looked to develop an in-depth explanation of the topic by explaining, exploring, describing, and interpreting common characteristics from the perspectives of small groups of participants to make sense of the social phenomenon (Flick, 2006; Shutt, 2008). Qualitative research methodology generally provides more in-depth, non-mathematical information across a small group at a point in time when only verbal answers to imperative questions are needed. It should also be followed when the researcher needs to explore further understanding about social and human behaviour to attain a deeper understanding of human activities (Creswell, 2009). Like other qualitative studies, the study was interested in investigating new knowledge; the complexities that exist within socially constructed segments of daily life; as well as, how the participants perceive the issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Yin, 1984). The qualitative research study sought to contribute new knowledge (Flick) in the area of urban Aboriginal education by producing contextual information that aims to explore and explain real-life events while understanding each of the individual participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2009, Flick, 2006; Gillham, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

3.4 Case Study Method

Crotty (2006) described research methods as, "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis" (p. 3).

According to Yin (1984), a case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when, the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which, multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Similarly, Creswell (2009) further defined the case study approach as,

a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (p. 13)

The case study method was selected since the researcher intended to investigate a real-life context (i.e., an Aboriginal stay-in-school program initiative) where they had little or no control over the events. The method was also selected because the scope of the research intended to use exploratory 'how' and/or 'why' type questions to produce results that improved the practices for educational leaders and created links between the various stakeholders (Yin, 2003). The result was that a single, holistic case study method was followed for data collection as an urban Aboriginal community-driven initiative was explored. Although the study was defined as following a single case

research method, it did collect data from the three individual programs delivered under the umbrella of the Aboriginal stay-in-school program initiative. Since it is to some extent, but not entirely similar to a multiple case study method, the researcher used the data collected at the three school settings to first identify if comparable themes exist and secondly present the overall data. The reason for selecting a holistic unit of analysis (as opposed to an embedded unit of analysis) was because the researcher wanted to explore a single level of the school issue by examining the educational leaders and their role as a caregiver.

The following sections detail the main activities in the research design, analysis, and final write-up processes that helped to ensure the quality of the design in terms of the construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2003). The study collected multiple sources of evidence to link the data to the conclusions that included interviews and document analysis that are characteristic of case study research methods (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 1984; 2003) and helped to inform the direction of the research approach. In following the case study approach, the researcher was able to comprehend the complexity of the programs and their delivery approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.5 Research Questions

Creswell (2009) indicated that a qualitative research study uses broad-based research questions rather than a hypothesis. Creswell suggests that research questions are designed around a central research question followed by several related sub-questions.

The central question of the qualitative case study research study was to explore the single

phenomenon of the study as well to acquire an in-depth understanding of the participants multiple realities, in addition to the themes that emerge (Creswell, 2009). For example, this research study used open-ended, exploratory type "how" or "why" questions that were indicative of the case study method (Yin, 2003). The sub-questions narrowed the focus of the study and directed the case study protocol (Creswell). The following questions for this study have been developed based on the existing paucity in literature that explores the role of the caregiver and how they provide care to the urban Aboriginal student population.

The primary research questions for this study were as follows:

- 1. a) How do educational leaders perceive, modify, and implement their role and responsibility as caregivers within an urban Aboriginal school program?
 - b) What are the methods that educational leaders follow to carry out assessments that would identify the needs?
- 2. What are educational leaders doing to inspire and motivate Aboriginal learners to ensure that they are prepared for a modern, knowledge-based society?
- 3. a) How can educational leaders be motivated to follow an ethic of care?
 - b) How can educational leaders be motivated to go beyond addressing academics and culture to address broader issues such as social and economic issues?
- 4. a) How and why do educational leaders first identify and secondly prioritize the inherent challenges and limitations before they can provide an ethic of care for urban Aboriginal students within the context of the schools' policies and practices.
 - b) How do educational leaders address those challenges and limitations, or should they disregard them altogether?

5. How and why can the challenges, limitations, and approaches used by educational leaders adversely impact the goals and rationales at the provincial, board, school, and Aboriginal community levels, or should they?

In addition, the interview questions were developed to acquire a thorough understanding of the educational leaders' perceived role as they became caregivers (i.e. mentors and role models) in response to meeting the individualized needs of urban Aboriginal youth in the Canadian public and separate school systems. The interview questions expanded upon the primary research questions. The research questions were developed to assist the participants focus on their responses during the interview process. The interview questions were primarily used to inform the overall research agenda as well as to help generate detailed descriptive information about understanding a phenomenon. The interview questions were as follows:

- 1. Describe your education and related experience working in the field of providing support to urban Aboriginal students?
- 2. How do you perceive your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program? (The term 'caregiver' refers to the individual in an educational support network who reaches beyond their regular day-to-day duties to identify and support the individual needs of students.)
- 3. How do you *modify* your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program?
- 4. How do you *implement* your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program?

- 5. What are you doing to inspire and motivate Aboriginal learners to ensure they are prepared for a modern, knowledge-based society?
- 6. What are some methods that you follow to carry out assessments to identify the unique needs of the urban Aboriginal students?
- 7. How are you motivated to follow an 'ethic of care'? (The term 'ethic of care' details the process of being receptive, engrossed, and selflessly committed in attitude and actions while at the same time responding to the individual needs of others in society based on their ethics and morality as well as their acceptance for justice and equity.)
- 8. How can you be motivated to go beyond addressing academics and culture to address broader issues such as social and economic issues?
- 9. How and why do you first identify and secondly prioritize the inherent challenges and limitations before you can provide an ethic of care for urban Aboriginal students within the context of the schools' policies and practices?
- 10. How do you address these challenges and limitations, or should you (or do you) disregard them altogether?
- 11. In your opinion, how and why can the challenges, limitations, and approaches used adversely impact the goals and rationales at the provincial, board, school, and/or Aboriginal community levels, or should they?
- 12. Is there anything concerning your roles, responsibilities, and relationships as a care provider to urban Aboriginal students that I have not asked that you would like to provide additional information on?

3.6 The Setting and Study Participants

Creswell (2009) suggested the case study approach is "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 13). The research study took place in the three inner-city stay-in-school programs within the same city located in a south central province of Canada. It also involved some of the participants of a community-based council and community agencies comprised of Aboriginal and mainstream stakeholders who provided support to the design and delivery of the program.

Purposive sampling was used with qualitative research studies to ensure that the research topic was well-matched to the specifics of the study, and to acquire in-depth information from the participants in their natural workplace setting (Creswell, 2009). The research sites were purposefully selected based on the enduring commitment of educational leaders for providing a caring environment in which they supported the high needs of the Aboriginal students and their ability to deliver a stay-in-school initiative that not only supported the academic and cultural needs of the students, but also their social and economic needs. More specifically, it was easy to select the site locations because the unique school program design took into account the diverse needs of the urban Aboriginal learners and recognized that a high percentage of the Aboriginal community members live in poverty and generally do not graduate from high school, and through an ethic of care and a commitment to social justice these issues may be addressed. Further, the programs took into account the Western and traditional methods that are perceived to be beneficial in preparing urban Aboriginal students for success in the mainstream society. Since implementing this program, the school community has seen significant

improvements in their rates of success in several areas. The results demonstrate that educational leaders can be influential in changing the lives of urban Aboriginal youth who are faced with poverty, as well as other social and economic issues through an ethic of care.

The participants included educational and community leaders who were involved in the design and delivery of the programs. The study involved educational leaders (i.e. principals, vice-principals, classroom teachers, resource teachers, youth advisors, and Aboriginal community service workers) of grades 9-12 at each of the three sites who may or may not have been of Aboriginal descent, and were active participants in the delivery of these programs. Approximately, 30 participants were anticipated to take part in the interview process. In the end, 26 participants agreed to be involved in the research interview process. The participants included 17 educators (i.e. principals, vice-principals classroom teachers, resource teachers, Aboriginal youth advisors) and 9 Aboriginal community service workers from among 5 different organizations. Four proposed participants did not respond to the requests to participate in the research study due to time constraints affiliated with their job placements and unknown reasons not specified.

Out of 26 participants, 14 were Aboriginal and 12 were non-Aboriginal. The majority of the Aboriginal participants were young female parents and from Aboriginal community agencies. For the most part, it was certified Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers whose areas of knowledge and expertise were spread across several disciplines and subject areas that were engaged in the programming. Almost all of the 11 teachers who were active in the design and delivery of the stay-in-school initiative were experienced, non-Aboriginal educators who taught across various subject disciplines at

the secondary level. There was only one experienced classroom teacher that chose to voluntarily self-identify being of Aboriginal descent. A couple of the participants were relatively new teachers who had entered the profession to pursue a second career in education. It was anticipated that the information gathered through interviews would not only provide authentic, rich feedback (Shutt, 2008), but it would also help to guide the research methodology and its approach.

3.7 Selection Procedures

Yin (2009) suggests sufficient access to data in the field for case study research. Since access to data is an issue that affects urban Aboriginal communities across Canada, it was assumed that those who were successful in addressing specific Aboriginal education issues would be prepared to share their own story. Since the participants were anticipated to be of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent, considerations were made to apply both Eurocentric and Indigenous decision-making processes to the protocols for recruitment and participation. Purposeful sampling was used to select the select participants that would help in achieving an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Merriam, 2009). A review of the purpose of the study and the research methods affirmed that it was beneficial to target a small, purposeful, representative group since it increased the likelihood of an in-depth, information-rich look into the research questions (Creswell, 2009; Erlandson, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002).

A formal application was submitted to the public and separate school boards ethics supervisors, as well as a letter was submitted to the Aboriginal education committee to apply for approval to gain access to the sites. Once permission was granted

from the ethics committees and the Aboriginal education council, the researcher informed the school principals of the purpose of the study and gained their permission to commence the research study. From this point, the study focused on the three school programs where the administration, Aboriginal youth advisors, and other people assisted in identifying key participants from among the individuals who were directly involved in the program and who had the direct knowledge and expertise in the area to provide sufficient insight into the design and delivery of the programming. The school principals and Aboriginal youth advisors were involved in identifying a key list of individuals that went above and beyond their regular workplace duties to support the delivery of the programming. An introduction letter and consent form was distributed via email to all of the proposed participants. All other experts of the research study were asked for additional suggestions for names of potential participants.

The researcher relied on reputational sampling, also known as the chain referral method to identify the participants based on the feedback from the school administration and the Aboriginal youth advisors at the outset. The selection criteria included the educational leaders' level of involvement and ongoing commitment to being a caregiver to urban Aboriginal students. Reputational sampling is much like a referral network and is ideal to follow when the researcher is unfamiliar with the group participants and can benefit from the recommendations of experts who are familiar with the participants and the program (Williamson, Karp, & Dolphin, 2007). Overall, this approach had the best potential for collecting good data since it concentrated on a population that was distributed over several locations in the city and needed to involve individuals who were familiar with the organizational structure to identify the participants. Further,

Williamson, Karp, and Dolphin (2007) suggested that reputational sampling is ideal for groups that only get together on occasion for consultation or who are not always involved with one another.

Consequently, this approach was successful at revealing in-depth results since it looked at the whole, diverse group which otherwise may be complex for an outsider (the researcher) to identify in comparison to those who are familiar with the established group (Williamson, Karp, & Dolphin, 2007). Prior to each of the participant's involvement in the research process it was imperative to acquire their consent to participate in written form.

3.8 Data Collection

The researcher used several sub-methods familiar to case study researchers when gathering data by including interviews and documentation (Yin, 2003) collected over a five-month period to ensure validity and trustworthiness. More specifically, data collected includes transcripts from interviews, field notes from interviews, and notes from documents. By selecting more than one method by the means of the process of triangulation it reduced bias and increased the reliability of the data by making it more conceivable to identify the differences between what people reported they knew compared to what they actually did in practice (Yin, 2003). For the purpose of this study the researcher used interviews and document collection. Time was allotted during field visits to collect all data.

The one-on-one interviews followed an unstructured interview process drawn initially from the main (open-ended) research questions that directed the case study. An

interview guide was designed to direct the conversation between the researcher and the interviewees (see Appendix A: Interview Guide for Proposed Participants). The benefits for following one-on-one interviews is that it can be helpful when the researcher does not have the opportunity to observe the participants, yet they still require the historical information about the background issues and want control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2009). In this case, the researcher had specific questions about the perceived roles and responsibilities of the educational leader as a caregiver that was better understood through the interview process and document collection.

The unstructured interview process was ideal as it looked at the participant as the informant and allowed them the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences using open-ended questions (Yin, 1994). The interviews engaged participants who were active in an educational leadership role (i.e. principals, vice-principals classroom teachers, resource teachers, Aboriginal youth advisors, and Aboriginal community service workers who were involved in the delivery of the program). The researcher initiated the dialogue by asking predetermined, broad-based questions to direct the initial interview process. Additional, unstructured questions followed based on the specific issues that were raised to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions. Conversely, it was important for the researcher to try to limit the potential for bias by asking strong, well-thought-out questions, listening intently to the participant responses, and keeping an open mind to understand the issues while at the same recognizing that bias may exist (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2003) pointed out that the interview process is essential because, "Well-informed interviewees can provide important insight into such affairs or events. The

interviewees, also can provide shortcuts to the prior history of such situations, helping you to identify the relevant sources of evidence" (p. 108). In all, the interviews took place face-to-face and lasted for a period of approximately 45 to 90 minutes each depending on the educational leaders overall involvement in the delivery of the program. At times, the researcher probed for clarification on certain issues if needed to improve the validity of the information (Merriam, 1988). The interviews were digitally recorded (with permission from the participants) and transcribed. A database was created to store and retrieve all the original transcriptions, interview notes, and documents submitted by participants. Finally, all the data was organized and categorized by themes for straightforward retrieval (Yin, 1984).

The researcher collected and analyzed nine available program documents.

"Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problems" (Merriam, 1988, p. 118). The documents collected were limited to information pertaining to the background and philosophy of the program, policy statements, several annual program activity summary reports, brochures, and newspaper clippings. The participants indicated that there was not a lot of documentation available with regard to the Aboriginal stay-inschool program. As a result, there were no complete organizational records or existing survey data available except one preliminary report that was limited in its scope. In research this is normally a concern when accessing documentation as the materials might not be readily available or incomplete (Creswell, 2009).

The documentation that was collected helped in understanding not only the familiar terminology and issues that existed among the participants, but it also provided

the researcher with a more in-depth examination of the background information that has been thoughtfully created to support the program in its entirety (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2003). More so, it also helped to identify and interpret the factors and patterns that affected educational policy and influenced policy-making powers and the need for evolution of partnerships and programs that follow.

To increase construct validity when corroborating data, the researcher used data collected from multiple sources and member checking (Creswell; Yin, 1984; 2003). The researcher reviewed the raw field data prior to the data analysis to ensure all the material was complete. The researcher made every attempt to incorporate an element of Indigenous research methods by allowing for some flexibility in the research process for emerging methods to be identified as the research process progressed (Stevenson, 2001) it was not necessary.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data from the documents and interviews were sorted, analyzed, and interpreted to provide a detailed understanding of the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2009). Since there was no fixed way to interpret the data, it was dependent on the researcher's way of thinking to determine how to analyze and present the data. Several of the themes were identified from the outset based on the research hypothesis and the research questions (Stake, 1995). However, the approach allowed for the identification of new theory that provided detailed explanations of a new phenomenon using the responses of the participants and the retrieved documents (Yin, 2003). The data was sorted and organized using a layered case study approach so that it initially looked at

each of the individual participant's responses who were located at various locations around the city, and then used a constant comparative method to identify how the issues related by looking at how cross-case patterns emerged (Patton, 2002); thus, the process of pattern-matching was utilized (Merriam, 2009).

Consequently, the data was organized by using an inductive and deductive process (working back and forth) to explain and code new, comparable themes (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The inductive and deductive process ensured that all data from the interviews and document collection was critically examined and defined so that new meaning from the data could be identified. The data analysis consisted of the following process: the interview notes and documents were read through from beginning to end; notes were made in the margins; a large sheet of paper was taped onto the wall for record keeping; the interview notes and documents were cut and paste onto index cards. Each card was marked with the case number and a card number; finally, the cards were categorized under various recurring themes while new themes emerged from across the cases. Care was taken to ensure that each of the cards were placed under the theme that best aligned with the data. The data was compared in order to identify the similarities and/or differences. Throughout this process a reflective journal was used to assist with the data analysis. The journal contained a collection of notes pertaining to ideas for titles, themes, follow-up questions, and existing problems and strategies for moving forward. Data collected from the interviews and documents were stored in an electronic database and organized under categories from the emergent themes.

The data analysis process provided a deeper understanding of the issues under examination mainly because common themes were able to be coded and clearly identified

(Creswell, 2009). According to Yin (2003), following this process will help to build new explanations, provide the basis to compare and evaluate viewpoints from other research studies, and develop logic models. Some of the themes included the following: perceived roles as a caregiver within the urban Aboriginal school context; extended roles and responsibilities of the educational leader as a caregiver; modifications and implementation of the roles and responsibilities; relationship of caring as an inspirational and motivational factor; inspiration/motivation to reach beyond academics and culture to address social and economic issues; and, identifying, prioritizing, and addressing the inherent challenges and limitations in providing an ethic of care. Other themes were identified as they emerged including: preparedness and readiness of the educational leader; processes for intake; and, assessment for identifying the unique needs of the urban Aboriginal students.

The study's theoretical framework drew upon components of an Indigenous worldview with consideration for the Medicine Wheel and Seven Grandfather Teachings to guide the direction of the data analysis using the collected data (transcripts from interview, field notes from interviews, and notes from documents) to identify and match patterns. The integration of the Indigenous approaches not only helped the researcher to visually organize and ground the analysis of the study, but it also provided a familiar Aboriginal framework that took into consideration several issues that were aligned with both Aboriginal and Western ways of knowing. The holistic model promoted the values of individualism and communitism, as well as wholeness, unity, balance, and harmony, growth, healing, and healthy living (Hart, 2009). The model examined the notion of understanding all aspects of life relationships, with a focus on helping, strengthening, and

healing relationships (Hart). It also recognized that all things in life are interconnected and constantly in motion (Littlebear, 2000). The result is the model acknowledged that all elements of the whole system need to be given equal attention so that all aspects are attended to and fully nurtured.

The results of adopting the Aboriginal and Western methods of analysis were that the process helped to produce a descriptive report of findings that demonstrated the educational leaders' perceived role as a caregiver. The final report was written up following a linear-analytic structure: "the issue or problem being studied, the methods used, findings from the data collected and analyzed, and the conclusions and implications from the findings" (Yin, 1984, p. 132). By integrating Indigenous approaches, it encouraged the researcher to separate herself somewhat from the Western approaches by taking Western research design approaches and incorporating them with a holistic Indigenous model, the Medicine Wheel and Seven Grandfather Teachings.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

As with any research study there existed some limitations in terms of the study's design and conceptual framework (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Marshall and Rossman (1999) pointed out that qualitative research studies are limited in terms of the number of participants and research sites, and are typically context related so they do not produce scientific generalizations that can be transferred to other settings. More specifically, for this study, the researcher used two selected methods of inquiry: interviews and document analysis that have their own individual limitations. In terms of the interview process, the limitations suggested the study only look at the perspectives of a select group of

individuals. In this instance, the participants of the study were limited to the educational leaders who have been selected to participate from a particular area of Canada who may or may not provide a limited or bias viewpoint (Creswell, 2009) based on their direct involvement in the program or their ability to articulate their voice (Yin, 1984). It could not be assumed that all participants responded in the same manner or shared similar experiences (Shutt, 2008). Even though the results cannot be used to draw generalizations for all educational leaders across Canada due to the limited number participants involved in this study, the results could be used as information rich data and be extended to offer practical insights for other education systems or groups who advocate for the advancement of urban Aboriginal youth to update their program initiatives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The limitation for document analysis was dependent on the researcher's experiences and opinions that impacted how the data was collected and interpreted.

3.11 Delimitations of the Study

There are two delimitating factors for this study. First, the perspectives from the family were not included in this study unless the participants suggested it due in part to the families' limited involvement as an educational leader in the design and delivery of the programming. Second, in analyzing public documentation it is possible that not all information is accessible or easy to locate, or the documents themselves are incomplete or inaccurate (Creswell, 2009). For instance, public concerns exist that Aboriginal-specific data may not represent the true population if the method of data collection relies solely on self-identification, and how Aboriginal people define themselves (Saku, 1999).

Regardless of these delimitations, the intention is that using multiple sources of data will increase the validity and credibility of the study.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues addressed during the research study includes matters concerning site access, informed consent, right to privacy, risk for marginalization of Aboriginal people, and storage and security of data. First, the researcher obtained ethical approval from Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary and permission from the school board to commence research at the desired sites and gain access to the participants (Creswell, 2009). At the university level, the application aligned itself with the procedures under the university, school board, and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. At the school board level, the researcher first sought advice from the school level administrators as to the organizational structure and the application process, and then proceeded with the application.

In this instance, the researcher needed to establish a collegial, trusting relationship with the people responsible for providing access. Second, the researcher acquired informed consent from the participants prior to their participation by having them complete a consent form that acknowledged their rights, as well as detailed the potential risks to being a participant of the study (Creswell, 2009; Shutt, 2008). Third, the researcher assured confidentiality to the participants since they represented a relatively small sample who could otherwise be identified; thus, providing for their right to privacy was essential (Shutt, 2008). To protect the identity of the participants and its setting, the researcher used pseudonyms in place of real names. According to a survey completed in

the United States by Noe, Manson, Croy, McGrough, Henderson, and Buchwald (2006), the results showed that Native American's participated more often when they are guaranteed anonymity and they understand what the data could potentially mean for their community in terms of the potential for updated programs and services and/or funding. As a result, the participants were guaranteed anonymity and the answers to the questions kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants and the settings.

Fourth, the research study examined an Aboriginal specific program delivered through the regular public and separate education systems. According to Stevenson (2001), it is recommended that researchers involved in Aboriginal-specific studies needed to expand the limits of their research to include Indigenous worldviews. Since the research study intended to look at an initiative targeted at Aboriginal youth, yet involved research participants who may or may not necessarily be a part of the Aboriginal community, it was important for the researcher to remain conscious and respectful of Aboriginal ways, and be mindful of some of the components of Indigenous research philosophy, methodology, and methods since it differed from Western approaches. According to Stevenson (2001), this meant that the researcher needed to enter a relationship that demonstrated respect for the Aboriginal community and the structure of the program. Literature written by Wilson (2009) and Smith (2006) were some of the works reviewed in order to acquire an initial understanding of Indigenous research philosophy, methodology, and methods. For the purpose of this research study, the researcher incorporated some components of their understanding of the Aboriginal worldview, with the intent to reduce risk of the study that may otherwise marginalize

Aboriginal people if it portrayed stereotypes or other (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000). In reflecting on the Indigenous methodological approach used by Friedel (1999), the participants were provided with ongoing feedback, consultation, and debriefing to ensure they felt part of the process and respect for their contribution to the process was demonstrated.

3.13 The Researcher

The methods of qualitative research typically encourage the researcher to evaluate their own values, assumptions, biases, and personal background early in the research phase (Creswell, 2009). In this case, the researcher's assumptions regarding urban Aboriginal education and the role of the educational leaders as a caregiver were initially formed by her personal and professional experiences as an Aboriginal youth (who grew up living both on-reserve and off-reserve), student, program coordinator, and educator in the public and post-secondary education systems, in addition to her experiences working as an advocate focusing on the rights of Aboriginal children, and youth issues at all community levels (local, provincial, national, and international). In these capacities the researcher has been involved in the design, implementation, and support of several Aboriginal community-based program initiatives that sought to address the issues and challenges encountered (ranging from education to justice to healthcare reform).

In having examined several approaches to increase opportunities to support community success and achievement, the researcher encountered several obstacles and barriers to programming that were (for the most part) often understood to be directly related to limitations in the way programs were funded, delivered, and/or designed.

Although several of the programs were delivered in isolation from one another, a closer examination by the researcher showed that the challenges that each group faced (regardless of the discipline) were most often interconnected and similarly rooted in issues like socioeconomics, including poverty. It was further noted that many of the programs were not addressing the root causes of the problems in her design and delivery.

The researcher's time spent growing up in the Aboriginal community, as well as being fully engrossed working at the grassroots levels has clearly extended the scope of her worldview. First, throughout the researcher's life she has encountered several challenges and obstacles; yet, due to caring and committed individuals being actively engrossed in her development at various stages of her life, the researcher felt they were able to overcome situations that statistics otherwise suggest that should have not achieved. Second, the researcher's time spent trying to address the issues at the grassroots level has extended her worldview of the academic, cultural, social, and economic issues that exist and its impact on the Aboriginal and mainstream communities throughout various periods of history from past to present. The result is that it had instilled within the researcher the belief that for positive, sustainable change to occur that it will not only require the commitment from caring individuals, but also strong leadership, collaboration, in addition to a shared vision that recognizes the importance to support the individual needs of the community across all sectors. The outcome is that a greater understanding of the theory of an ethic of care and social justice is needed for sustainable change to be foreseeable. It was through these meaningful experiences that have helped to shape her personal and professional beliefs and values while at the same

time discover a balance between more than one worldview that includes, but is not limited, to both Aboriginal and Western philosophies.

In reflecting on her own pathways, the researcher has come to appreciate that her philosophy of education has matured due in part to working with a diverse audience that extends outside the traditional, mainstream classroom and also seeks to find a balance between her own beliefs and those of others. Consequently, the researcher's background has shaped her as an educator and advocate to go beyond looking at academics, and also look at addressing the everyday issues that students experience as a result of the obstacles they face that mainly deal with poverty, oppression, and lack of opportunity.

For this case study, the researcher decided to commence her research at a specific community-based location, primarily because the programs themselves were developed in conjunction with community partners to target anti-poverty reduction that included addressing social and economic issues, and focused its efforts to incorporate elements of an ethic of care. In examining other programs like it, the researcher found this specific program to be unique in their methods of delivery and most well-matched with the rationale for the research study. At the time of the data collection, the researcher had no personal connections with the physical site or its participants. Since the research did not take place in a location that was initially familiar to the researcher it was expected there would be less opportunity to report information in a manner that might otherwise come across as bias or incomplete due to the potential for pre-established boundaries or pre-existing relationships (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). For this research study, the researcher was not involved in the delivery of the programs, but participated as an individual who listened to the stories of the participants. Hence, to negotiate access to the settings, it was

important for the researcher as an outsider to demonstrate a sincere willingness to collect data, show respect for the norm, and build a trusting relationship between the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The researcher had some apprehension that it might be challenging to devote the time required to develop a trusting relationship between the participants and not to appear intrusive. The researcher developed a positive relationship by being upfront and truthful with the participants about the purpose of the research study by: provided the participants with the option to participate; and, offered a plan in advance that informed the administration team and the participants of the researcher's activities while on-site. Marshall and Rossman (1999) shared similar views that researchers, "should describe their likely activities while in the setting, what they are interested learning about, the possible uses of the information, and how the participants can engage in the research" (p. 85). The result was the researcher viewed the social phenomenon holistically, and reflected on how her personal experiences shaped the study. More specifically, the researcher took the time to be sensitive to the perspectives of the participants; understand how the personal experiences or interests shaped the study; and, employed complex reasoning skills and periods of reflection to better understand the issues (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Chapter Four: The Context - Description of the Program

4.1 Description of the Background and Philosophy of the Program Setting

Case Study: ASISP* (Pseudonym for actual case study)

School Settings: School *A; School B*; School C* (Pseudonym for each of the school settings).

The Aboriginal Stay-in-School Initiative Program (ASISP*) is a program located in a south central province of Canada. The city has a population exceeding 500,000. The initiative was first identified when Aboriginal parents expressed concern about the future of their children. First, the city statistics and demographics showed that the Aboriginal population have continued to experience substantial growth with a higher than average Aboriginal youth population. Additional social planning reports indicated that Aboriginal people were experiencing unemployment rates that were two to three times higher than average unemployment rates; as well as poverty rates that were two times higher than the overall population. Secondly, the parents shared their own life stories about being forced to leave school early, which led them to face a cycle of poverty, and experience ongoing feelings of hopelessness. The Aboriginal families clearly did not want similar outcomes for their children. As a result, it was recommended that culturally relevant educational pathways (i.e. programming and personal support services) for Aboriginal children beyond the ages of 0-6 were required to move the community and its Aboriginal children forward so that they can prepare themselves to make better life choices.

In response to the community-based concerns an anonymous donor affiliate with a local foundation sponsored a study to identify the implementation and service gaps and look at solutions how to address those challenges in a manner that respectfully targeted the issues that urban Aboriginal young people experience. A collection of community reports and surveys revealed that the drop-out rates for Aboriginal youth were significantly higher than the non-Aboriginal youth population within the city limits. More concerning was the acknowledgement throughout the majority of the documents that low rates of Aboriginal success were attributed to not only to lack of academic success, but also low rates of health and socioeconomic status. The results of the study also showed that surveys completed by Aboriginal youth confirmed that they were typically not engaged in school (and more so learning) because they felt there was no culturally relevant curriculum and supports available. Based on the results of the study, it was clear that more efforts were needed to work together to meet the needs of the Aboriginal youth in order to build a healthier, stronger community.

In response to the implementation and service gaps, a group of Aboriginal leaders along with two anonymous donors affiliated with a local community foundation supported a three-year pilot project to address the issues facing Aboriginal youth. The vision was to establish a culturally relevant education model that would help to guide Aboriginal youth at-risk to embrace the values of traditional and Western education styles of learning and understand the ways of their ancestors while at the same time assisting the students to improve rates of attrition and retention plus attain a secondary school diploma. The program was later adopted by the two schools boards as well as supported by a coalition of community-based Aboriginal leaders and council on Aboriginal

education. A third school adopted the Aboriginal stay-in school initiative shortly after. It was anticipated that over time improved rates of student success would also mean improved rates of socioeconomic status and significantly lower rates of poor health within the city limits.

Three schools participated in providing educational and personal support services for urban Aboriginal youth enrolled in high school. All three of the Aboriginal stay-in-school programs were overseen by the school's administration. The school principal and/or vice-principal role provided ongoing support to the Aboriginal youth advisors as well as others who supported the delivery of the programming. In addition, community-based partnerships were established amongst all of the schools to provide specialized supports. In so doing, the program initiative engaged educators and community partners to provide supports in areas including, but not limited to, academic assistance, culturally sensitive resources, social and personal consultation, access to tutors, computer and internet services, young men's and women's drumming, social activities, and student advocacy. At the same time issues like nutrition (breakfast and lunch programs), employment services, peer leadership, and cultural supports were fully supported.

Aboriginal students were given the opportunity to access a resource room at each of the school locations where they could get assistance with classroom assignments and complete homework that was supported by Aboriginal youth advisors who were also available for consultation and advocacy to all students and staff members. The room was a safe place for students since it was a private space where students felt safe to interact with others. In providing a safe zone for students to retreat it was important to have enough space to allow students the chance to do laundry, access internet connection, as

well as have a place for them to smudge and drum. (Sometimes it was difficult to find a location that would accommodate the smoke from the smudge so that it would not interfere with other activities in the school). Lastly, several events were regularly hosted to build a variety of essential skills for students to become better prepared to walk in both worlds through traditional teachings, team building exercises, among other activities. A cultural worker was also shared amongst all of the three school programs.

The first secondary school program (School A*) was initiated in September 2003. The inner city school had a total population of approximately 1250 students. The school was recognized for having one of the most diverse, multicultural student populations from across the school board with a relatively large urban Aboriginal population, as well as an ESL student population from approximately 80 different countries and speak in excess of 50 different languages. The program started with 6 Aboriginal students and it had grown to support over 120 students annually.

In the same school year, the second secondary school (School B*) also located in the inner city adopted the urban Aboriginal education model. The program structure was somewhat similar to the first school-based program in terms of their method of delivery. The only difference was that since it was a part of the Catholic school system the programming needed to adopt components of the Catholic faith model. Regardless, the educators have successfully adapted the programming to be inclusive of Aboriginal culture and traditions.

In February 2009, the initiative expanded to include School C* located in the north-east end of the city which is located in one of the city's poorest neighbourhoods.

The school's mission was to prepare students for independent living by supporting all of

its approximately 330 students through individualized programming and comprehensive course options in the areas of building literacy, numeracy, as well as life and vocational skills. A leadership program was also available to all students where they were given the opportunity to participate in leadership conferences, team build initiatives, restorative justice circles, media studies, social planning events, and literature reviews.

All of the secondary schools pride themselves as being a professional learning community with staff, students, and community agencies working together to deliver effective programming that promoted student success and excellence. The mission and values of the schools were indicative of working collaboratively to sustain an environment that values program innovation, social justice, as well as equity and diversity. The philosophy of the school programs were reflected in the diverse program offerings for all students that ranged from a nutrition program (students were provided with breakfast and lunch who need assistance), to an Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative, Aboriginal alternative program, to a walk-in closet for students. There were also several Native Studies and Native Arts course options that were open to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to better understand Native historical and contemporary issues, culture, and arts. For instance, School A* had courses in Native literature and food and regalia offered. School A* also supported an alternative program at the local Native Friendship Centre and after school literacy credit recovery program.

Although the programs have been in existence for nearly nine years the participants noted that little qualitative data had been collected on the Aboriginal student population. The information collected was mainly limited to facts about the entire student population partly because voluntary, confidential self-identification for First

Nations, Métis, and Inuit students had not been carried out in all of the schools which made it difficult to track student successes and aggregate the results, as well as identify additional unmet needs and service gaps. The tracking of data was mainly limited to (informal) self-identification, referrals, and enrolments within the urban Aboriginal school program settings. As well, program reports were limited to descriptions of the programs and activities throughout the school year with some references to the challenges encountered.

Reports indicated that more than 400 Aboriginal students have participated in the programs. In 2009, a school report indicated that there was a 30 per cent increase in credit accumulation, in addition to reduced rates of poor attendance, suspensions, and student-teacher conflicts. The report also indicated that through this initiative more Aboriginal students were going on to pursue post-secondary education and training opportunities than previously indicated. The accomplishments witnessed by the educational and community leaders have shown that success is achievable.

Chapter Five: Presentation of Research Findings

The purpose of this research study was to examine the educational leaders' perceived role as they become caregivers in meeting the individualized needs of urban Aboriginal youth. This study aimed to align itself with the social constructionist approach by acknowledging that there is more than one way of constructing meaning to fully understand the educational leaders' role as caregiver. A total of 26 participants who were educational leaders shared their understanding of the social agents that contributed to their decision to follow a caring approach. The educational leaders were also asked to identify the needs of the urban Aboriginal learners based on their experience as well as to identify the approaches they followed to address the issues and challenges through an ethic of care. The social construct was defined by the educational leader's role as a caregiver and recognized as a caregiving role by the group of school leaders. The outcome was the human trait of 'caring' was based on the influences of academic, cultural, social, and economic issues as they emerged and how reality was socially constructed by human perceptions.

The research findings summarized in this chapter provided an in-depth understanding of the perceived educational leaders' roles, responsibilities, and relationships. A total of seven main themes were described. These main themes included: preparedness and readiness of the educational leader; perceived role as a caregiver within the urban Aboriginal school context; extended roles and responsibilities of the educational leader as a caregiver; modifications and implementation of the roles and responsibilities; relationship of caregiving as an inspirational and motivational factor; processes for intake and assessment for identifying the unique needs of the urban

Aboriginal students; inspiration and motivation to reach beyond academics and culture to address social and economic issues; and identifying, prioritizing, and addressing inherent challenges and limitations in providing an ethic of care.

5.1 Preparedness and Readiness of the Educational Leader

Lack of Preparedness, Knowledge, and Skills

All of the educators expressed the importance of teaching for diversity and social justice. The educators articulated their understanding of the social theories and that willingness to support issues (ranging from race, to class, to ability) was dependent on their own personal experiences rather than knowledge acquired in the education system. Although the educators felt prepared to deliver the expectations of the curriculum to the entire student population, they often questioned the effectiveness of the mainstream educational paradigms they studied while enrolled in the Bachelor of Education degree program, especially while delivering highly targeted programming and supports for urban Aboriginal learners. The educational leaders felt that they could move forward by taking the time to increase their pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and examine ways to shift their understanding of the mainstream educational paradigms to embrace different Aboriginal-specific approaches that were holistic, inclusive, ethical, and collaborative.

Most of the educational leaders reported that prior to their participation in the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative, they had little to no specialized or formal training in how to deliver programming and supports that met the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal students; as well as, little to no prior knowledge of Aboriginal historical, contemporary, and cultural issues that impacted educational systems today. Prior to

being assigned to the program initiative most of the educational leaders indicated that they had never been actively involved in delivering urban Aboriginal educational programming, or mandated to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal students even though there was a relatively high percentage of at-risk Aboriginal youth who were struggling in their learning community. One educational leader stated, "I don't really have any [related education and experience] but I have an interest in Aboriginal education because of the clients that we have at our school" (Interview #2, p. 1).

Although the educational leaders who were employed full-time with the school boards initially envisioned their role to support the needs of all students, initially they made the ineffective, common decision to group Aboriginal students with other ethnically diverse students or students at risk. At the outset, the educational leaders mixed Aboriginal students together with all other at-risk and diverse groups (including immigrants and refugees) without realizing the differences between Aboriginal students and other students in terms of academic, cultural, social, and economic perspectives; as well as, not realizing the significant impact of the residential school system and the intergenerational effects of assimilation over the generations. There were also instances where the educators did not know how Aboriginal learning preferences differed from non-Aboriginal students. The educational leaders indicated that Aboriginal learning preferences typically promoted holistic learning mixed with concrete and spontaneous real-life learning experiences. To experience success, Aboriginal students often needed to be provided with a safe environment that promoted the values of collaboration and group consensus while being provided with time to reflect on making connections to the past, present, and future. This research has found that it was not initially on the

educational leaders' radar that urban Aboriginal students needed to be supported in many ways. Subsequently, the educational leaders felt they were not adequately prepared at the outset to accommodate for Aboriginal students' needs, and understand how to connect effectively with urban Aboriginal students and their families in a meaningful, respectful manner.

The educators acknowledged that although they made genuine efforts to reach out to the urban Aboriginal learners in their own way, they knew it was not entirely effective due in part to the Western models of education that promoted linear and/or non-inclusive approaches. It was the educational leaders who had to individually accept that they needed something more relevant to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and character values into the school-community to increase rates of student achievement, engagement, and success. One educational leader stated, "the principal when I got here impressed upon me how life is difficult in[the] urban Aboriginal community like education and health care, so I don't [think] there has been an Aboriginal kid that I have turned away regardless of their age since I have been here" (Interview #22, p. 1). Since the two school boards typically assigned the administrators and teachers to the different schools regardless of their awareness and understanding about Aboriginal educational issues, the effect was that the educational leaders felt they had to rely on on-the-job learning experiences more so than anything else. One educational leader shared, "The difference in other schools is that Aboriginal kids would not even by on your radar that Aboriginal kids are at-risk, and you know the cultural things around residential schools and the intergenerational effects...I have done a bit of reading and talking with people to appreciate that a little better" (Interview #22, p. 1).

Acquiring Indigenous Knowledge in Education

Since working alongside the Aboriginal community and taking the time to gain knowledge of and reflect on other educational paradigms and Indigenous knowledge, the educators came to realize the significance of being able to shift their way of knowing to accept that there needs to be more than one approach for delivering educational programs and supports. The educational leaders took it on themselves to begin with reading Aboriginal-specific literature (both fiction and non-fiction) and seeking practical advice from the Aboriginal youth advisors, as well as other community stakeholders like community Elders to better understand how to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their own educational philosophies. They embarked on building a solid knowledge base about the complex day-to-day issues that urban Aboriginal students' and their families' experienced and discovered ways how to best provide culturally relevant programs and supports. By incorporating Aboriginal perspectives like circular logic concepts mixed with other traditional teachings, the majority of the educational leaders identified a total transformation of their workplace practices. For example, the educational leaders who successfully adopted Aboriginal perspectives into their practices have grown to appreciate the importance of what the symbolism of the circle and the Medicine Wheel teachings have taught them. These symbols not only promoted the values of respect, equality, interconnectedness, and continuity in their practices, but it also provided the framework for culturally responsive approaches so that all school-community stakeholders could begin to work together in balance and harmony while at the same time start to build capacity in schools. The educational leaders acknowledged that for the first time in their career, the experience made them stop and take the time to inform their

mind, body, spirit, and emotion in order to make connections with Aboriginal ways of knowing. The educational leaders realized that there were many ways to educate urban Aboriginal students. All of the educational leaders felt humbled by the overall experiences.

It was important to recognize that not all the educational leaders have been as successful in making connections to Aboriginal learning approaches. Some individuals admittedly struggled with applying the Aboriginal learning concepts for several reasons, mainly because of a lack of human and financial resources, as well as time. In these cases, it was recommended that additional education and training needed to be provided in Bachelor of Education degree programs and school board professional development days that directly related to the subject of teaching and supporting students 'in the Native way'. For example, educational leaders could benefit from learning not only about Aboriginal arts and culture, but also use the time to learn about Aboriginal political and social justice issues like the 1867 *Indian Act*, segregation, and assimilation. Several of the educational leaders indicated there were advantages to acquiring knowledge and understanding in the area of Aboriginal education since it helped them to look at educational issues through a holistic lens while using value-based and character-based models.

Involvement of School and Community Stakeholders

Although many of the educational leaders reflected on their own personal experiences in facing similar social or economic situations during their youth, they described feeling more at ease in responding to the needs of the Aboriginal students by reaching out to other Aboriginal educators and community leaders including, but not

limited to, the Aboriginal support workers, cultural workers, Elders, and other agencies/organizations for advice and support. As their programming continued to evolve, the educational leaders reported that they became more engaged in supporting urban Aboriginal education and felt more secure in seeking out additional ways to provide innovative, culturally relevant learning experiences within their school system. In this context, the schools and community members willingly extended their support services to help prepare staff members and community participants to support the program initiatives. For instance, one educational leader who was new to supporting the urban Aboriginal learner described how their school was provided with initial educator support. The educational leader shared:

When I first started teaching Aboriginal students I went to the [Aboriginal youth advisor] and said, "Okay, can you give me some information about the Aboriginal learner?" So I received a PowerPoint presentation that talked about the fact that they like a calm, non-confrontational learning environment and they like it when you ask them information about their Aboriginal group; what do you do in your Aboriginal group; what happens in your family; how are things done differently? (Interview #2, p.1)

Through their involvement, all educational leaders were able to learn about the value of building positive relationships with Aboriginal students; to achieve this they took the time to learn about their learning preferences and ways to communicate more effectively. More specifically, becoming involved encouraged the educational leaders to take the time to listen to other people's voices, as well as to work together to discover ways to honour and value the unique differences of Aboriginal people. For example,

instead of following a confrontational approach if an Aboriginal student expressed that things were done differently in their culture, the majority of the educational leaders were able to experience first-hand that it was important to work in collaboration with the students to identify another pathway to achieve the same type of outcomes for the assignment, so that it was inclusive to other ways of knowing.

Several Aboriginal community agencies as well as traditional and community Elders were (informal) partners in supporting the delivery of the programs in the areas of health promotion, employment and training initiatives, cultural teachings, and drum groups (for young women and men). A total of nine Aboriginal frontline workers (who were of Aboriginal descent and varied in terms of age and experiences) made strong efforts to link community-based programming with the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative. Many Aboriginal frontline workers expressed they felt compelled to link community-based programming with the at-risk Aboriginal student initiatives based on their past and present life and professional experiences. The Aboriginal frontline workers identified ways to integrate authentic experiences for the students, so the students could begin to discover their identity and recognize their strengths and challenges.

Even though several of the educational leaders were unprepared from the outset to support urban Aboriginal education in the public and separate school systems, it was the educational leaders (as a collective) who acknowledged that their interest level in Aboriginal issues was something that needed to be extended more from whom they were (or had become) and not necessarily, always how they were educated. Their willingness to be open-minded, accepting of other educational paradigms, and readiness to work in collaboration with other school community members is perhaps what has inspired these

educational leaders to be successful in starting their journey to support urban Aboriginal educational leadership and student success.

5.2 Perceived Role as a Caregiver within the Urban Aboriginal School Context Defining the Role of the Caregiver

The majority of the educational leaders who were actively involved in the delivery of the program thought that the term 'caregiver' referred to being a role model and mentor in the truest sense of the word. In discussing the relevance of the term 'caregiver' a small number of people were initially concerned that the term might be confused with the negativity associated with the hurt and suffering experienced by thousands of Aboriginal children involved in child protection services both past and present. Conversely, several of the participants shared that the term 'caregiver' in the education sector and Aboriginal community today has evolved to focussing on providing support and instilling pride within the students. It was stated by one participant:

I feel I am a caregiver. Home away from home. I know the level in which you support the kids on a daily basis. You are dealing with so much...Any other word does not seem as caring. It does not have the connection that we really have. It needs to go above and beyond that in order to not offend anyone...We are changing history and the role. We are the guide and let them take ownership what they want and what their future is. The thing is the ones who have experienced residential school, it is important to see the difference of what the caregivers are today. If they can see in that sense and feel that sense of pride knowing that you

know huge steps have been taken to change what has happened and provide caring people, and replace that negativity and put that positive turn on things so that now school is not a negative thing". (Interview #14, p. 11)

All educational leaders perceived themselves as caring individuals to whom the students could seek out daily support in the areas of academics, culture, social, and economic issues. Their relationship was often described amongst themselves and by others in the school-community as 'dynamic' in the sense that educational leaders would normally not picture this type of relationship taking place in the regular school system since (1) the educators are more often than not so focused on delivering the Ministry's curriculum, and (2) the local community agencies are usually focused on their own organizational interests. In understanding the perceived role of the caregiver, all the educational leaders looked to understand Aboriginal ways of knowing and how humanity can work together in the natural world. One educational leader stated the importance of the perceived role of the caregiver as follows:

I think that a caregiver is always somebody who is going to be there that is going to be responsible that is going to meet those needs. And you know that is not a bad thing but our students are very needy and you know they need somebody to have or push them or be there to walk them through and show them the way.

(Interview #5, p. 1)

Certainly, the willingness of educational leaders to extend their roles beyond regular academic duties were essential in moving forward to provide academic, cultural, social, and economic supports to urban Aboriginal students.

Sharing Knowledge and Resources

It was highlighted mainly by the Aboriginal community leaders that there is a push for resources to be shared between all sectors, so educational leaders need to make ongoing efforts to work through the processes of understanding the existing issues and negotiating the challenges. The notion of engaging in collaborative work (or building new partnerships) was relevant for all educational leaders regardless of their area of expertise for the purpose of learning since they could learn a lot from Aboriginal perspectives. For example, teachers of environmental science can learn how to protect Mother Earth, as well as about traditional herbal medicines and how to grow and care for them by working in collaboration with a traditional Elder mentorship program. Since caring cannot be mandated, there will always be leaders who are more (or less) caring than others, so we just need to hope that educational leaders will be drawn to this caregiving role especially if they saw the value and results that sharing knowledge and building partnerships could produce.

5.3 Extended Roles and Responsibilities of the Educational Leader as a Caregiver Supporting Aboriginal Student Success

All educational leaders came to realize the importance of going above and beyond their regular workplace duties to ensure their participation in supporting at-risk urban Aboriginal youth. Although the role of the school administrators was to support the overall needs of the school system by ensuring that appropriate programming was available, it was in having all the educational leaders working together that made the programs and experiences achievable. At first, many educational leaders thought that

delivering Aboriginal programs and supports was beyond the scope of their expertise and training. A couple of the participants were also apprehensive about what others would think about supporting programs targeted exclusively at Aboriginal youth, and wondered how they would justify it to others who might not fully comprehend the background and objectives of the program. Despite the concerns all the educational leaders provided ongoing support to the programs based on their level of knowledge and expertise.

Although there were no evident formal processes of Aboriginal student support at the beginning of their leadership, all the educational leaders who worked full-time within the school sector chose to adopt several roles. Firstly, several educational leaders turned to relevant literature and took the time to speak with others to discover ways to honour the diversity of Aboriginal students and their families. Secondly, while each of the educational leaders defined their individual involvement in the program differently, there were common threads that involved monitoring student progress; assisting with meeting the basic day-to-day needs of the students; and, participating in career counselling (both formally and informally) by encouraging the students to look at different options for identifying career pathways that involved post-secondary education, as well as other employment and training opportunities. The extent of a leader's role was described by one participant in a way that demonstrated the extent of their responsibilities to help guide the students, in whatever way possible, so that they developed skills for student success:

[W]e do a lot of caregiving in terms of the clothing closet...they can receive certificates for food, so we try to take care of their food and we feed them twice a day. So I do a lot of work trying to bring in fundraising and donations and stuff

like that. I also do a lot of trips and what not to leadership conferences...We do leadership workshops...and stuff like social justice getting the kids to understand their value in their community. (Interview #23, p. 1)

For the most part, the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative was targeted toward atrisk urban Aboriginal students from low socioeconomic areas of the city with little to no available supports for Aboriginal students from other socioeconomic levels. A few educational leaders indicated that it often made it uncomfortable for Aboriginal students from other socioeconomic levels. Even though these students required culturally relevant and other support services, they indicated they did not want to take anything away from students who might need it more. A more balanced approach in terms of the delivery of Aboriginal education was recommended by a few of the educational leaders so all Aboriginal students are offered different levels of support.

Lack of Commitment from Other Colleagues

Almost half the educational leaders sensed that it was all our responsibility as human beings to support Aboriginal students; they indicated that not all their colleagues in the school system were willing or prepared to participate in delivering the program unless it was mandated. Since they made significant efforts to provide a good, balanced approach and bring forth some of the Aboriginal knowledge in a respectful way, one educational leader worried about those students that transferred to different schools, and about those that had educational leaders who did not take the time to support the needs of urban Aboriginal students (Interview #11, p. 2). The question that was asked by most of the leaders was, "Considering the background and history of our country, how could the education system not mandate that Aboriginal issues be addressed at all school board

levels?" One educational leader pointed out the importance of their personal decision to teach about Native issues to all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by stating,

I have an opinion piece on my exams and ask their favourite unit of study, and why? Eighty percent say Aboriginal spirituality. They see the hands-on, deep seeded messages throughout. They see this is inherently something good and try to pass on something good. (Interview #11, p. 2).

Without doubt, it was the students who clearly benefited from cultural programming since they got to learn about Canada's policies relating to Aboriginal historical and contemporary issues. In learning about these policies it is assumed that students will get a clearer understanding what needs to be changed. This knowledge will better prepare them to become our future leaders. More than half of the educational leaders reported that without further Indigenous knowledge and understanding being taught in our classrooms, the existing academic, cultural, social, and economic gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people may continue to grow.

Engaging School-Community Partnerships for Aboriginal Student Success

The recognition that many of the issues were interconnected was apparent as educational leaders continued to seek new ways to provide innovative opportunities for the students. One educational leader pointed out that, "As you start to unravel more and more, there are more and more layers" (Interview #11, p. 1). Guest speakers were invited into the school classrooms to speak about Aboriginal contemporary and historical issues like the Sixties Scoop and the residential school system. The knowledge shared by guest speakers was integrated into the regular curriculum and to help students to realize the devastating impact that events like residential schooling had on Aboriginal people.

At the same time, guest speakers were invited into the regular school classrooms to set the tone and to teach about Aboriginal values and beliefs like harmony and oneness through traditional teachings and discussions. In total, 11 out of 17 school-based leaders felt that it was important to be authentic in their methods of delivery so they would (at times) engage members of the Aboriginal community to share traditional knowledge, especially when discussing issues like the sacred medicines, because they wanted to maintain a level of respect and honour for the Aboriginal culture and traditions.

Regardless of their level of involvement, the educational leaders made obvious attempts to link the students with the Aboriginal youth advisors and other community stakeholders (ranging from Aboriginal court workers to tutors) in order to provide ongoing support. For instance, the four Aboriginal youth advisors provided support to the students in several ways. Although their overall responsibility was indicated by one educational leader as, "just to be there" (Interview #5, p. 1), this study found that the educational leaders were many different hats and that they, at times, just needed to make themselves available to talk with the students, or act as an advocate on the student's behalf. Another participant stated that the "job doesn't go above and beyond, but ...knowing that kids need that, (they) go above and beyond" (Interview #8, p. 1). As one participant explained, the role of the educational leader sometimes, "goes beyond 8:30 to 4:30, sometimes it is 6 o'clock" (Interview #5, p. 1) which at times meant following "a model that goes by any means necessary" (Interview #8, p. 1). For instance, the Aboriginal youth advisors not only attended orientation meetings to familiarize a new student to the school, but they also helped to mediate situations where the student's high school credits may be at-risk; assisted in arranging their class schedule to accommodate

certain issues; connected them with community agencies and services; checked-in with a student at a court date; and, assisted them in making arrangements to relocate them to a new place of residence. Although not all the students would necessarily access the supports, it was always readily accessible.

Embracing Culture and Tradition

Apart from providing school-related supports, it was also important for all the educational leaders to encourage the Aboriginal students to embrace their heritage and culture by doing after school activities that included taking the students on trips to powwows, award shows, and other extracurricular activities. Whenever possible, the leaders would also introduce students to role models and leaders from the local Aboriginal community and across the nation. Several educational leaders also believed that attending Aboriginal ceremonies in the community was particularly essential for students so they could begin to discover who they were as young Aboriginal people. From the leaders perspective, it was particularly important to support students in finding a balance between both worlds by integrating ceremonial practices for the purpose of assisting the students to develop self-advocacy skills for personal growth and development, and so they could learn to better prepare themselves for the realities (and stresses) of the world.

One participant stated:

When it comes to academics I am pretty much here to support them with anything I can help them with. I do have a lot of students that I can help one-on-one...For example, there is one student that I sit with (they are allowed to come here during class), but the way that works is they have to receive permission from their

teacher. My expectation is that they stay for the lesson. If they are doing seatwork for the remainder of the period they can come, but must be disciplined. So, even though, as you can see, they get lunches and stuff like that you need to make sure they stay focused. I work with them one-on-one. I try to access tutoring. When it comes to academia, you name it I am helping them. We are working on assignments and providing pencil crayons and markers and providing resources for the students where they might not otherwise have them. (Interview #14, pp. 2-3)

The majority of the educational leaders, especially the Aboriginal youth advisors have clearly let the students know that if they had any concerns or required additional supports they could always speak with them regardless of the circumstances. The following example was shared by participant that,

If a kid was not showing up on a Monday (because who knows why) it was important to the [educational leaders] to find out why they were not showing up to school. In one case it was because they didn't have a washer/dryer and their clothes weren't done". (Interview #1, p. 3)

Regardless of the issues they experienced, one participant shared:

When we look at these students anything can prevent them from getting their education from completing things. They don't seem connected because of problems at home. They are busy at home dealing with those problems. They are not caring about getting their English credit. So, it is finding out what is going on at home and how I can connect with them with the proper community service if there is anything I can do whether giving them a safe place to go to vent or

provide any cultural supports. I know a lot of students in the school have really embraced the smudging ceremony and constantly smudge in here every day. They will come and say I really need to smudge and sometimes they will tell me why and other times they won't...Right down to sitting here and working helping them get through coursework...or helping them decide on different project ideas and giving them a place they identify with. A lot of students that I met when I first started here didn't know much about their Aboriginal background. They knew who they were, but I don't know how much what that means. When I started to show them the cultural aspects and rich heritage they do have, they embrace it a lot and I have noticed a change in them. They had found leadership roles within themselves...They have identified me as more than just another educator in the building. I feel they think of me as their friend and somebody they trust and confide in. (Interview #21, p. 1)

For some of the urban Aboriginal students, "being able to offer them that service it does hit home with them. They realize because now they have someone they care about and respect telling them [to] listen...I give them scenarios and I tell them you can go to college or university and when you get it done you will still be young. Do it the easy way" (Interview #14, p. 2). For many of the students who do not have family members to provide support at home, it is significant moments like that described above that make a world of a difference, as it gives them a sense of security and hope for the future.

Curriculum design and/implementation

The educational leaders who were involved in the full-time school-based programming were also responsible for the curriculum design and/or implementation. They took it upon themselves to work together with other educational leaders from the schools to go through Ministry-related documents for the purpose of locating existing Native studies course codes, as well as aligning other Aboriginal content with the regular curriculum expectations. It was noted by some of the educational leaders at the school-level that developing a curriculum that reflected Aboriginal perspectives was challenging because the participants needed to take into account several Aboriginal groups whose culture and traditions often differed from nation to nation. Other times, the educational leaders made attempts to connect with specific school departments to plan the development of culturally relevant courses and apply for external funding grants to support program extensions (ranging from Elders participation, acquiring culturally relevant resource material, and hosting community social events).

Overall, the work has been challenging because some of the educational leaders who provided support in the development of the curriculum were not certified teachers so they did not always have a comprehensive understanding of how to integrate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational paradigms, or a clear understanding of the Ministry of Education's expectations to integrate key learning strategies, like literacy and numeracy strategies within the regular curriculum to improve rates of success. Therefore, it was somewhat of a challenge when creating new courses and implementing new programming to ensure that Ministry expectations were reflected in all school-related activities while at the same time ensuring that programming respected the culture and heritage of all Aboriginal groups.

It was recommended that issues of preparedness and readiness needed to be addressed among all educational leaders regardless of their positions, or level of involvement especially when they are directly involved in planning future programming and supports. The programming needs to not only reflect the cultural needs of the students, but also help to prepare them with the core academic skills required to improve rates of engagement and school success. One educational leader suggested that,

While the outlines from the Ministry are fairly holistic, I think it is really dependent on the individual instructor to craft the course. It's dependent on so many things: the skill level and experience of the teacher and what First Nation [Aboriginal] individuals are involved. (Interview #18, p. 1)

It was further noted that the process can be especially challenging for Aboriginal people who at times "still bring with them their educational biases and concerns about entering a world that is very rigid in some ways" (Interview #18, p. 1). As this study has found, without a doubt there is still work that needs to be done to restore relationships and to build trust so that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders move forward in a good way.

Building School-Community Relationships

Several community agencies have collaborated with the stay-in-school initiatives to provide culturally and socially relevant support to staff and students. Since the school leaders often found themselves involved in several different roles, they took it on themselves to be prepared to deal with a wide range of issues which at times meant being able to seek out community agencies for support and guidance. Several of the

community partners have been involved in delivering promotion and awareness programs that many described as 'intermittent' and 'not fixed'.

Many benefits emerged from the partnerships with outside agencies. For instance, many of the Aboriginal students did not always grow up with a family network, so they could look to the community agencies to learn life skills like cooking, managing a bank account, writing a resume, and other essential skills. One educational leader pointed out that, "We are here to offer those supports as a means of just having balance in their life in which we feel will just improve their ability to achieve academically" (Interview 19. p. 1). This meant that support programs supported academic programming by providing practical skills that complement the school curriculum, as well as to provide the student with the skills needed so they can apply it to the 21st century world. For example, programs like summer camps existed in partnership with a local culinary arts college; in this context Aboriginal students were taught how to make inexpensive meals and learn the particulars of the restaurant and marketing industries.

There were also other programs that looked at addressing other pertinent issues that educational leaders experienced in terms of self-esteem and nutrition. In the first example, several educational leaders were finding that there were a high percentage of young Aboriginal women who were getting themselves involved in situations that put them at-risk for all sorts of life challenges like entering abusive relationships to teen pregnancy; these instances oftentimes impacted their overall self-esteem and motivation to learn. In collaborating with a community-based agency that provided support to Aboriginal mothers, schools were able to explore the development of an early intervention school leadership program for young women. The program's intent was to

give young women enrolled in the high school system the tools to make positive, healthy lifestyle choices.

In another example of building school-community partnerships, one of the community partners was initially involved in delivering health promotion and prevention programs focusing on smoking cessation, smoking prevention, and nutrition that was aligned with the school curriculum. Every effort was made to ensure the urban Aboriginal students' needs were met during the lunch hour and afterschool workshops. Frequently, a healthy snack was provided to engage the students in learning about topics like, but not limited to, healthy eating habits, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), smoking cessation and prevention, diabetes prevention, and physical activity. It was important for the facilitator to provide students with their own time and space to talk about the issues, but also make available hands-on, visual aids for the students to connect with.

All the community stakeholders, including the Elders put forward efforts to involve themselves in all school-based activities; therefore, the community stakeholders and Elders have been an integral part of the delivery of the programming and supports. They attended school events like feasts, singing and drumming circles, as well as field trips to show their support to the students and staff. They have also been available to share traditional Aboriginal teachings and offer a connection with nature that helped the students to explore their own place in society. Through cultural teachings from the Elders and the support of educational leaders and cultural workers who honour culture and tradition, the students continued to learn about the importance of the medicines (sage, cedar, sweetgrass, and tobacco), the feather, along with other sacred items in the regular

classroom. For example, one educational leader talked about how they would go to school early in the morning to smudge the classroom and sections of the school to bring that calmness as the students entered. Other educational leaders discussed how they provided students with free time to smudge if they needed. The significance of these experiences was shared among the educational leaders and students so that it was part of their regular school day activities.

The majority of the educational leaders who participated in this study recognized that in order to move forward they must reflect on the Aboriginal educational worldview and philosophies such as the interconnectedness of all things – All My Relations. The majority of the educational leaders felt it was their responsibility and privilege to be available to the Aboriginal community; to teach and prepare Aboriginal youth to grow up to become responsible young adults. The educational leaders who voluntarily self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent talked with great passion about having an appreciation of the issues that impacted Aboriginal youth, mainly because they were at one time in a similar position. One of the Aboriginal participants explained that they envisioned the role of the educational leader was to support the students' basic needs by acting as a caregiver and helping others to discover their own potential and sense of purpose, as well as to help others reconnect with creation and what they were put in this world to do (Interview #4, p. 2).

All the educational leaders further defined their roles and responsibilities by acknowledging the importance of honouring the students talents and gifts of knowledge by caring for the learners whenever possible through various means like, but not limited to, "linking people to create more opportunities for education which cares for students

and provide systems of care to ensure students have the potential to have opportunities to thrive and reach their potential" (Interview #1, p. 1). In so doing, it was recommended by most of the educational leaders that there needed to be interconnectedness among everything that educators did in a way that reached out to all stakeholders (ranging from students, families, and community organizations) and interconnectedness that genuinely aimed to build sustainable programs and relationships. One participant summarized that the role of the educational leader was simply to,

help children to understand where they came from, to forgive where they came from if it was not such a good journey, or to give compassion to those if they have come, or to give compassion to those who haven't. And whatever they do they will be successful. (Interview #5, p. 1).

Another educational leader stated:

I think that a caregiver is always somebody who is going to be there, [one] that is going to be responsible ...to meet those needs. And you know that is not a bad thing but our students are very needy and you know they need somebody to have or push them or be there to walk them through and show them the way. (Interview #5, p. 1)

Whatever the case, almost all the educational leaders took it on themselves to participate in several different capacities to support the process of developing new, innovative Aboriginal programming. The educational leaders were evidently committed to seeking out strategies to meet the needs of the urban Aboriginal learners while at the same time share their newfound knowledge with other students, staff, and community members. Likewise, educational leaders were able to understand and informally validate

significant academic, cultural, social, and economic gaps that existed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by involving themselves in the delivery of the programs. In recognizing the disparities firsthand it was easier for the educational leaders to decide for themselves to become engaged in supporting programs targeted at at-risk urban Aboriginal youth. Being part of the delivery of the programs also meant that regardless of the educational leader's level of involvement, it was important for educational leaders who remained committed to continue to advocate for change at the school and/or board level(s), monitor the successes and challenges of the programs, and participate in collaborative working groups and committees devoted to positive, ongoing advancement of programming in order to address the overall needs of the Aboriginal youth and their families in the school-community.

5.4 Modifications and Implementation of the Roles and Responsibilities: Understanding the Past, Present, and Anticipated Future

The majority of the school-based educational leaders pointed out that their roles and responsibilities at the school level were to look after all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students regardless of their ancestry to create an equitable and inclusive school environment. The urban Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives were initially developed to follow the Aboriginal philosophy of the Seven Generations which meant in the early planning phases that information was collected and projected from three generations preceding us, present generations, as well as three generations after us. As such, the overall goal of the program was to establish long-term, sustainable programming and supports that improved rates of success and engagement for urban

Aboriginal learners. In so doing, the educational leaders felt like they had to modify their roles and responsibilities as well as character and values in order to target the existing needs of the urban Aboriginal youth. For example, the educational leaders felt like they needed to first and foremost become familiar with the diversity and background experiences of all Aboriginal students. One educational leader sensed that it was part of all the educational leaders' duty to understand the impact of diversity, equality, and social justice in the school system. It was suggested that educational leaders needed to "understand what they [Aboriginal students and their families] have been through (without really being able to) because their experiences are very different" (Interview #7, p. 1). This statement suggested that not all Aboriginal students shared the same life experiences. For some Aboriginal students, their family difficulties and lack of trust in the education system were often significantly impacted by the intergenerational effects of the residential school system; in other cases, families experienced trauma from social and/or economic pressures. Aboriginal students have different experiences and also do not share the same heritage and/or cultural teachings. It was pointed out that not all students of First Nation ancestry participated in smudging ceremonies, and hosting drum circles and powwows may not relate to culture and traditions of students of Métis ancestry. It was also stated that educational leaders continued to seek ways to address the unique and diverse differences of the Aboriginal students, and over time it has become more rewarding to link Aboriginal students with the individual supports they required.

Although some of the educational leaders felt that they were not the most highly qualified or experienced educators to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum as well as build sustainable school-family-community partnerships, the

educational leaders felt what set them apart from all other educational leaders was their passion mixed with the values of honesty, humility, and integrity. In these instances whenever something was beyond the educational leaders' area of expertise, or level of comfort they simply turned to the school-community for supports that may include seeking advice from the Aboriginal youth advisors, guidance counsellors, student success teams, or Aboriginal community members. If there was no one available who understood Aboriginal issues, the educational leaders would seek to expand their inner circle by engaging others who were experts in the field of Aboriginal education to link with the appropriate resources and supports.

All the community-based leaders and some of the school-based educational leaders indicated that they often took direction from the Aboriginal youth advisors. The Aboriginal youth advisors were mainly employed full-time at each of the school locations to support the delivery of the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives. The benefits of connecting with one of the three Aboriginal youth advisors was they not only had a first-hand understanding of the challenges and basic needs of the Aboriginal students, but the youth advisors also were considered role models in their school-based placements due mainly to their commitment to having completed college and/or university-level education and at times their understanding of Aboriginal heritage and culture. More specifically, it was the Aboriginal youth advisors who had education and expertise regarding Native community issues. Social services organizations felt they were better prepared to provide one-on-one support since not only did they understand the values and importance of balancing ethics with their own workplace practices, but they were able to

connect theory with practice while addressing the social and economic situations that so many Aboriginal youth experienced.

The consensus among all the educational leaders was that it was a good choice to put the Aboriginal support positions into place to get the program operational, so the youth advisors would be available to provide daily supports for students. There were some educational leaders who stated that identifying additional steps to meet the growing needs of all Aboriginal students across the systems was overdue. For instance, many of the educational leaders shared that a high number of Aboriginal students still continued to experience low rates of student success that included low rates of literacy and numeracy. Several educational leaders also expressed an increased number of Aboriginal students not only struggled with their understanding their heritage and cultural identity, but they also did not fully understand health and social service options available to them. Many students were on long community waitlists for undiagnosed disabilities and mental health and wellness issues with no interim supports. As a result, more work needed to be done to prepare and educate all educational leaders to help improve rates of Aboriginal student success, in addition to assist educational leaders to become advocates for socialemotional prevention and intervention programs. It was noted that educational leaders need to consider implementing regular activity programming like lunch and learns, and sharing circles supported by school staff, paraprofessionals, and community agencies. Additionally, it was suggested by some community-based educational leaders there needed to be considerations for involving a balance of female and male Aboriginal role models at each of the school locations. This point was especially important since,

depending on the situation, female and male Aboriginal students sought out genderspecific role models for advice and support.

Conversely, the majority of educational leaders thought that they had to work hard to engage other school-based stakeholders in taking part in the stay-in-school initiative. Several of the participants acknowledged that although the perception of the delivery of the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives was relatively straightforward, the educational leaders often had to take the time to convince other educators about the importance of showing support to the educational leaders who delivered the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative, as well as to the Aboriginal students, families, and community members. To encourage participation from other school administrators and educators, the educational leaders continually communicated with the school administration and other senior-level school board representatives about the importance of building and sustaining meaningful relationships that needed to be founded on the values of trust, understanding, and engagement. A few of the educational leaders invited the school and board administrators as well as other educators to attend Aboriginal school-community socials and other events, so they could begin to conceptualize the needs of the Aboriginal community with the family situations of the children. For instance, the educational leaders sometimes encouraged the administrators and other educators who had been extended invitations to take the additional time to speak individually with Aboriginal family members who might not be willing, or have the confidence to speak on their own with their child's teachers, administrators, school board representatives, or community agencies. It was certainly important for all educational leaders to make a sustained effort to establish school-family-community relationship engagement opportunities in order to

create conditions for understanding and awareness of the individual needs of the Aboriginal students and their families, in addition to gaining the confidence and trust of the Aboriginal community members.

5.5 Relationship of Caregiving as an Inspirational and Motivational Factor Building Caring Relationships

All the educational leaders expressed a genuine interest for Aboriginal education mainly due to the high percentage of urban Aboriginal students that they were struggling to support. At first, there was a general consensus that educational leaders were initially motivated by their passion to care for and support the students especially when so many at-risk urban Aboriginal learners were not successful in meeting the expectations of the school curriculum. Since most of the educational leaders did not want the students to risk getting trapped in the cycle of despair, or involved in other high-risk activities, the educational leaders wanted to be part of delivering meaningful solutions that meant building sustainable education programming while at the same time provide culturally relevant school-community experiences. Consequently, all the educational leaders felt that it was part of their duty as a leader to be kind, as well as selflessly committed to educating the academic, cultural, social, and economic needs of the Aboriginal youth (i.e. the whole-child); in so doing, it was important that all the educational leaders looked for innovative ways to take care of their own school-community which involved creating meaningful pathways for at-risk Aboriginal youth.

In reflecting on how the educational leaders established a caregiving relationship between the educational leaders and the urban Aboriginal students, it was important for all the educational leaders to take the time to acknowledge first, there were many ways of knowing; and second that there were several different ways to implement culturally appropriate solutions to address the existing issues and challenges. It was acknowledged by one participant that in order for educational leaders in this study to be successful they all needed to start out with the belief that everyone shared "different perspectives, different languages, and different worlds" (Interview #12, p. 1). It was indicated that, "what makes a good [educational leader] a better one is being able to see them [the Aboriginal students] as individuals and [recognize] that they learn differently, and they take on responsibility differently, and they react to their persons situations differently (Interview #12, p. 1). One educational leader affirmed, "I have always been taught about the two different ways and how they can work together" (Interview #15, p. 3). Accordingly, it was assumed that educational leaders who were willing to act as a caregiver must have been willing to understand (from the outset) that there were different ways of looking at the world around them. In following this notion of thinking, one educational leader discussed the following:

I think it is simple as an educator that we have to meet our students where they are, and recognize where they are from....we have to help our students adapt, and in the case of Aboriginal students, it's let's use the term 'cold world', that they lack trust with and trying to build that trust and trying to show them that education is a way to improve life; yet, how do we also respect and value their backgrounds as well. So, it's finding that balance there...I see that as my role as an educator is to value all students. And of course that means knowing where they

came from as much as possible, and how do we meet their needs going forward?

(Interview #7, p. 2)

Apart from accepting other points of view exist, it was also assumed that,

It's gotta be more than knowledge. You can't just give a taste of it; that does not mean they are going to keep it. The connection has to become part of your worldview and it has to become a part of the whole structure. (Interview #4, p. 7) It was also important for the caregivers to take the time to listen and truly understand the Aboriginal students and their families to build caring, respectful relationships that aimed to support individual student needs. While it was clear the educational leaders were committed in their efforts, it was one leader who stressed the importance of taking the time for school-family relationship-building by getting to know the Aboriginal students and their families in order to build trust and respect from the outset. It was important for the educational leaders to get to know their students and the families on a personal level to honour their way of life. Certainly, it was important for all educational leaders to know another person's background and/or lineage, as well as to ask questions to understand the student's and family's way of thinking before moving forward to more academic subjects. Additionally, it was also important to involve the participation of the Aboriginal youth advisors, "so it could be a more comfortable and trusting atmosphere for the students [to share information]" (Interview #22, p.1). In order to make the transition less complicated, most of the educational leaders pointed out that sometimes it was easier for the students to connect with someone who they could identify with rather than someone who may not understand them. The educational leaders who chose to follow this pathway, in essence discovered that individuals responded to these gestures

quite well. As a result, the educational leaders showed in this study that it was not only necessary to listen to the students, but it was essential to develop a respectful relationship with the Aboriginal students and families.

The suggested pathway shared by one of the educational leaders for building rapport with the Aboriginal students and the families was simple, "Interacting with the kids and getting to know them at a personal level. Don't be scared of them. Honour their stories. Validate what they are saying. And let them know you believe in what they are saying" (Interview #3, p. 7). The educational leader stated, "I probably made more of an effort to develop a relationship with them [Aboriginal students and their families] to find out what they did, what their history was, or what other activities were going on in their life" (Interview #15, p. 2). For instance, when trying to affirm relationships, the educational leaders noticed that it was helpful to be on a first name basis with the families, since it demonstrated respect that everyone was equal and levels of hierarchy did not exist. As such, equality and non-hierarchical relationships were both values reminiscent of Aboriginal ways of knowing.

By establishing relationships early on, it was essential for most of the educational leaders to share with the Aboriginal students (and occasionally the student's families) their own background experiences in terms of the challenges and successes the educational leaders experienced. Although some of the educational leaders were unsure whether or not sharing their own stories inspired or motivated the Aboriginal students, the educational leaders were certain that it helped to break down the barriers, so they could begin to move forward with creating the environment for an open and honest dialogue. Consequently, sharing stories was a definite requirement to support Aboriginal

students to be able to understand themselves and discover how to live a harmonious and balanced life.

In this manner, a few of the educational leaders noted that it was beneficial to look at developing caring relationships from the perspectives of the Seven Grandfather teachings and the Medicine Wheel, so that the role of the caregiver took into account the social and emotional issues like identity and self-esteem issues. It was further pointed out by several of the educational leaders the values taken from the Seven Grandfather teachings and the Medicine Wheel also formed the awareness for developing caring relationships. In this instance, the traditional teachings focused on the Aboriginal code of responsibility and explored issues like courage and understanding, patience, respect, and self-respect for the community and environment, which was also integrated into the processes of affirming caring relationships. One educational leader highlighted the overall benefits of integrating Indigenous knowledge into building caring relationships by stating:

I am definitely convinced that introducing the spiritual component teachings early on is part of what grounds everybody. We smudge. We have circle rules. We pray for well-being and friends and relationships. We examine. We pray for Mother Earth and the water and the air and the animals and the plant life. And I think even just starting with that reframes their perception of their environment...Over the course of the teachings a lot of the kids start to learn about taking care of their environment and more importantly each other...I just see them quietly helping each other. (Interview #18, p. #2)

On the contrary, it was noted by one educational leader that Aboriginal students needed to understand that if they chose not to follow the traditional teachings that it was acceptable. One educational leader indicated that they regularly reminded Aboriginal youth that, "if you are not following the teachings, that is why the Creator gave us that sunshine. We have all day to practice that, and He will give us another day to start that again. There is never punishing ourselves for not doing it...We are just human beings...It is okay to make a mistake, you are not going to get swallowed" (Interview #17, p. 5). The traditional teachings acknowledged that individuals are sometimes not in a time and/or place in their lives to follow the right path; so that is why second chances exist. *Practices for Inclusive Engagement*

Although the school programs were supported by strong equity policies that sought to respect the values of inclusive education, it was still essential for Aboriginal families to see for themselves that inclusive practices were reflected in the school-community programs and supports. Conversely, for those individuals who chose to take no notice of the Aboriginal students and their family members as well as failed to engage in the stay-in-school programming, unnecessary barriers were created and this generated the perception of an oppressive system. It was stated by several educational leaders that Aboriginal families would not only come out to school events because a policy was being changed in their favour. These leaders also stated that the Aboriginal families also needed to know their children were welcomed and respected while at the same time provided with a safe and caring environment.

It was pointed out by a couple of the educational leaders that for the families who chose not to engage in the education system, it was often because they had difficulty

trusting in the system, so they would often give up early on (especially if they felt their child was not being respected or welcomed in a culturally appropriate manner). In some cases, the families chose not to engage in the school-community because they simply felt their voices had not been heard. In other instances, the families felt intimidated, or were unable to attend scheduled events due to overwhelming demands of life. It was important for all educational leaders to take the time to understand the issues and look for ways to response to the issues early on. One educational leader recommended that if all school systems (outside this study) wanted to engage Aboriginal students and families, they needed to make time to listen to and accommodate their individual needs from the outset of the start of the school year. For example, the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives in this study have at times provided childcare and offered transportation supports so that Aboriginal students and their families could fully participate in various school and community events.

Awakening the Spirit

Another challenge for educational leaders is that many Aboriginal youth and their families may not be fully aware what it means to be Aboriginal due to their lack of exposure to the life and culture while growing up in an urban environment. In working alongside the Aboriginal students, most of the educational leaders realized that not all Aboriginal students truly understood what happened over the years within Aboriginal communities across Canada, which included the impact that it had on other generations, including members of their own immediate family. In view of this the educational leaders discovered that some students found it difficult to see the positive of being Aboriginal due to the way the past and present issues have been portrayed in the regular

school curriculum and society. In these instances, the educational leaders started by having the Aboriginal students look at Indigenous creation stories and compared it with other mainstream creation stories to achieve a sense of understanding. One of the educational leaders showed that these teachings were necessary for the reason: "[In order] to form that foundation is to show that we are sacred beings and always connected" (Interview #4, p. 4). From this point, the educational leaders were able to move forward to assist students to understand what life was like at the time of the original structures while guiding them to reflect on how they have chosen to live their lives in a good way. Several educational leaders acknowledged through these processes they were able to explore the traditional teachings that corresponded with each stage of life (ranging from birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, to Elder years). A few of the educational leaders felt that if Aboriginal students could learn to understand themselves then success would follow. An activity that was used by one of the three programs to show the life connections was described by one educational leader as follows:

Try to get them to do a collage and pull out some things and experiences in life and then you can map out, or even put your pictures of what you want in your future and then you can connect that back to education. It gives education a purpose to fit into your future and then you can connect that back to education. It gives education a purpose to fit into your life and who you are, and where you want to go. (Interview #4, p. 4)

What was often the most difficult for the educational leaders was trying to change the mindset of the Aboriginal youth who appeared not to care about school mainly because they had difficultly envisioning a bright future for themselves and/or were fearful to

surpass their family members and friends level of education. Many at-risk Aboriginal students also expressed to some educational leaders that they never could see themselves attending higher education because of the high costs and/or lack of family and community support.

Some educational leaders shared that they were deeply concerned about the many at-risk young Aboriginal students that felt that finishing high school was not a priority since they could earn 'fast money' becoming involved in illicit activities or receiving government assistance without really understanding the short- and long-term consequences. At the same time, there was a perception among many educational leaders that it was difficult for all educators to realize the possibilities, or the potential for success for at-risk urban Aboriginal students since the students faced so many real-world obstacles and barriers at home and school. A lot of the educational leaders did not always realize the vast array of opportunities available to Aboriginal youth in terms of local, provincial, and national programs and supports. Thus, more work needed to be done to share that information so that students could be linked with culturally relevant programs in areas ranging from local employment to international internship experiences. Regardless of the perceptions expressed by the educational leaders, one educational leader stated the following about their perceived responsibilities:

It is my job to show them that it does not matter where you come from, or not matter what challenges you are given at a young age that everything has to work with and not against these things...it is important to teach the kids how to work not against it, but with it. (Interview #20, p.1)

Although additional efforts must take place to understand the challenges of the Aboriginal youth and the obstacles the students face, it was recommended by all the educational leaders that Aboriginal students needed to be provided with the opportunities to understand and appreciate that there is hope and their lives are full of possibilities. A few of the educational leaders indicated that Aboriginal students and their families need to know that there are more Aboriginal people than ever before that are going on to pursue post-secondary education and training as well who participate in the workforce at levels. One educational leader stated:

A lot of young Aboriginals in Canada are really coming up through academia and getting into positions of decisive power, not typically abusing that power...so to refer to those people, to point to those people as examples to say this is possible, this is doable; really minimizing the hindrances. And I think a lot of the Aboriginal kids that I have spoken with who think there are barriers in front of them, that's sort of like when I think trauma is passed down to generations. Feelings of hopelessness as well get passed down so trying to overcome that and telling them we can all feel that way, we can all feel hopeless, but to turn that around. (Interview #8, p. 2)

To resolve feelings of hopelessness and lack of vision, it has been beneficial for the educational leaders to go the extra mile to assist students with goal setting and linking them with existing possibilities. It was beneficial in one particular case to encourage Aboriginal youth to use mindfulness techniques (i.e. affirmations, meditation, or guided imagery) to distance themselves from the existing negative thoughts. It was essential by

this means to find "a hook, something that is of interest to them or some aspect of themselves we are not aware of" (Interview #18, p. 2).

Pathways to Success

Although there existed several ways for educational leaders to develop pathways to success, there needed to be an authentic willingness among all educational leaders to be better prepared. The educational leaders took the extra time to assist the Aboriginal students to explore their identity and heritage, as well as assist the students to unearth pride within themselves so they could make good life choices while at the same time become self-advocates for their own life journey. As one of the educational leaders pointed out the reality was that Aboriginal youth should not be growing up living on the edge, "worrying about where they are going to sleep...Safety is another one. Concerns about getting beat up or robbed; concerns about always having to look over their shoulder; concerns about fighting within the house" (Interview #3, p. 8). Students needed to be given some degree of hope for their future by communicating and linking with all relevant stakeholders, policymakers, administrators, families, and community-based leaders. More so, it was pointed out by several of the educational leaders that young Aboriginal people needed to be raised to grow up and be fully aware of all existing issues, so that they become empowered to make positive change in the urban Aboriginal community. It was stated, "We can only recover so much. They have the ability to actually transform. And you have to empower them so that they are capable of a transformative process" (Interview #1, p. 5).

The subject of student readiness for transition was further extended to address the point that urban Aboriginal students needed to understand, "that you can never have too

much knowledge" (Interview #5, p. 3) and that attaining even a secondary education is not enough these days. Most of the educational leaders in this study indicated that people today need to live by the notion of 'lifelong learning' by seeking ways to continuously advance their essential skills and abilities so that they could succeed in the 21st century. Some community-based educational leaders vocalized that what the Aboriginal students needed most was not always academic knowledge, but cultural, social/emotional, and economic supports. Several other school-based educational leaders working in the classroom environment thought that although such cultural, social/emotional, and economic supports were essential, significant educational gaps needed to be addressed before at-risk Aboriginal students could truly move forward. For instance, several of the educational leaders were overwhelmed by the low reading level of at-risk Aboriginal students, and the roadblocks that it created for student success in most subject areas. At one of the schools, programs like reading recovery that incorporated Aboriginal-specific literacy materials so that Aboriginal students could identify with themselves was important. Regardless of the scope, it was clear that the individuals providing supports needed to be flexible in their own practices and recognized that the issues were much broader than initially assumed at times. There needed to exist a balance among schoolfamily-community services and supports in the areas of academic, cultural, social/emotional, and economic supports in order to effectively support the urban Aboriginal students. Additional work is necessary in the areas of academic, cultural, social, and economic programming in order to see further rates of success.

Cultural Accommodation

Before the program's implementation phase, all educational leaders were poorly impacted by the lack of services and supports that they could offer to at-risk Aboriginal youth. Initially, the Aboriginal students and their families time and again reported that they felt that the mainstream organizational structures did not reflect their unique needs or respect their way of life. One of the educational leaders noted:

We recognized a real need before we were connected to the program. Before there was a lot of discontent with the population and we wanted to help give them an outlet to recognize that we recognize that they have a voice here...I remember being touched by our kids and their responses, their sense of frustration that they were not having their needs met. Their cultural expression was not being recognized. Cultural expression could be defined...in communication with one another and us and in a lot of times when I was done my (work) we had someone come in from the Aboriginal community, come in and talk about facial expression and things I never thought about that kind of opened my eyes to it and I was more sensitive to the kids...It started the ball rolling in myself. It just sort of got to me those kids feeling discontent; we needed to do something for sure. (Interview #9, pp. 2-3)

Since the initiative focused on delivering urban-based programming, it was important to begin to incorporate cultural teachings, as well as an element that involved a connection to the land. One educational leader stated:

The destruction of our environment and relationship is the disconnect from the land, so that relationship is not there anymore, so they don't know how to have

respect. There's a lot of that disconnect. If you want society to respond in a healthy way, there needs to be a connection to the land. (Interview #4, p. 7)

It was recommended that as a school-community everyone needed to become familiar with the cultural teachings and appreciation for the land (and more so the community) and recognize that we are all connected to the natural elements. At the same time, the school-community needed to have the same level of appreciation for the family and society as a whole.

Although Aboriginal culture and traditions were gradually becoming part of the school activities, it was expressed that some educational leaders continued to struggle with understanding how to make cultural and traditional accommodations in the urban-based education settings since the methods of delivery were somewhat different than on-reserve or mainstream educational practices. In time, most educational leaders realized that the culturally appropriate programming could easily be supported. It was recommended that,

if they [educational leaders] incorporate it naturally into their activities and help people to think about their connections through their own worldview, and how they understand that is how we do it in our groups. We bring the teachings in, but then they [Aboriginal students] are encouraged to think back to their own to make those positive connections themselves. (Interview #4, p. 7)

In this manner, the implementation of cultural and traditional programming needed to be mentored by those individuals who were considered 'whole' and 'healthy' and who had successfully made that transition to understand the concept of living between two-worlds for the educational practices to be successful.

Social/Emotional Engagement

All the educational leaders were responsible to provide encouragement and support to the urban Aboriginal youth and their families. The educational leaders raised the issue that several of the students had significant educational gaps; as a result, their self-esteem and self-confidence were relatively low. These particular challenges often made Aboriginal students feel out of place in the regular classroom, especially when they were among other groups of mainstream students who the students felt did not experience the same type of issues. In order to address these concerns, the educational leaders looked at several strategies including, but not limited to, ways to reduce the stresses of the academic workload; how to build leadership and mentorship skills; and, methods for encouraging the participation of family and Aboriginal community members.

Some of the main challenges that were identified in this study for the Aboriginal students were significantly low rates of attendance and task completion that were at times correlated with educational gaps. In two of the stay-in-school initiatives, the educational leaders offered their support by encouraging the Aboriginal students to opt for a reduced workload and/or modified their timetable so that it was aligned with certain subject areas or courses required. The educational leaders focused on closing the educational gaps through certain subjects and class work that supported the students individual learning needs. The intent was that the Aboriginal students would return to their regular, full-time course load when the students became better prepared to overcome the challenges that they experienced in each of the subject areas. One educational leader noted that another strategy focused more so on improving rates of attendance rather than academics in order to engage the students in school. It was stated:

Attendance is huge with our at-risk students. We have some excessive absences. We are working on those. What we have developed is an attendance initiative and award system...I will give an award for best attendance, and we do most improved, and we try to encourage the ones that are not doing so well. I look at the ones that really struggle and I will say you know can win those great awards for next semester...Attendance and academics is what we are trying to improve upon...We had a feast for the first time last year. That was an award ceremony for the kids and acknowledging everybody. Most improved, good attendance, perfect attendance, good academics, things like that. We had at least 50 students come out and get an award. It was huge...This was our first community feast and we had almost 200 people there. It was a huge success it was exciting for that part. (Interview #14, p. 3)

The notion of student leadership and mentorship was also an area of focus for improving rates of student success because it encouraged Aboriginal students to develop effective communication skills. Additionally, it also provided the opportunity for Aboriginal students to work alongside other positive role models as well as individuals who experienced similar life challenges (i.e. Aboriginal community members and student peers). In one instance, the Aboriginal students participated in a peer development program that sought to extend student leadership skills. As part of the initial training, the students attended a 3-day camp in partnership with a local youth employment and training agency. The camp involved the participation of Aboriginal role models and engaged students in various team-building exercises. At the same time, the students were provided with cultural teachings. The students were encouraged to share the cultural

teachings and leaderships skills through the development of a culturally relevant presentation that could be shared with other feeder schools.

In another school program, there was a leadership course in place that encouraged restorative justice (leadership) circle discussions on a regular basis for all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The group sessions encouraged the students to share with their peers the positive and negative experiences in a respectful, inclusive environment. The students were encouraged to listen to one another and act as a peer support system. In turn, the educational leaders who participated in this model were motivated because the students were given the opportunity to explore their own issues amongst other peers who were experiencing similar issues. The students demonstrated that they were able to begin to build trust within the group culture by opening up and expressing themselves. It was noted that many of the discussions were based on personal loss of an immediate family member (i.e. a parent or sibling) due to health-related causes (ranging from heart disease to stroke) to other socially-related causes. What made this ongoing group-based activity so effective and meaningful was that many of the students never had anyone to share their feelings about the complex life issues that the students often internally struggled with. One educational leader noted, "A lot of times a student will hold back and another student will say something that they identity with and then they let it out 'cause they see they are not the only one" (Interview #23, p. 3). Consequently, the advantages of circle discussions motivated the students to discover things within themselves and identify conditions for positive change and student leadership. It was noted the circles were used to the give the students, "a pathway to follow so they really can understand that their not trapped; that there are opportunities (Interview #23, p. 2). The expectation was that

school teachers and administrators would fully adopt the concept of restorative justice circles not just in the classroom, but an alternative to dispute resolutions to reduce rates of recidivism and increase understanding.

Several Aboriginal students experienced and/or were from families that faced difficulties of their own (ranging from mental health concerns to poverty to homelessness), so it was important to make significant efforts to link with school and community services and supports. One of the educational leaders noted that the stay-inschool initiative provided the students with the culturally appropriate connections that were exclusive to meeting the needs of Aboriginal youth to "make them aware of it [the services and supports]; know where to go, what to do" (Interview #9. p, 2). In recognizing that it was important for others to participate in the school-related community-based activities, moving forward meant looking at alternative ways to engage students, families, and community members. It was a challenge to involve parents beyond the point of meet and greets, or community feasts. It was noted that parents were seldom involved in the programming; however, inviting them to a school feast somewhat engaged families to break down the communication barriers. Due to success of the school-community feasts and the number of families that attended, it was forecasted that this approach will likely continue.

All of the educational leaders of the urban Aboriginal programs believed there was an existing disconnect between the parents and school since it was not always possible to keep the families engaged over time. Although the parents were frequently invited to attend ongoing social networking events (online and in-person), as well as invited to volunteer with student leadership events like drum workshops, leadership

camps, among other activities they often chose not to participate for several reasons (ranging from personal illnesses to lack of time). Regardless of the efforts that the educational leaders put forward, it was understood that the concept of parental and community engagement was a key area that needed to be explored in order to sustain the existing programming and levels of enrolment. Concepts like offering continuing education programs like family literacy, in addition to the development of materials for home-school relationships were being considered for future implementation.

Intellectual Engagement

Some of the educational leaders made significant efforts to generate accessible pathways to prepare Aboriginal students for higher levels of educational attainment. By ensuring Aboriginal students had the opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge and were engaged in different, innovate learning activities, it was predicted they would be more likely to extend their skills to the workplace and beyond. In so doing, the educational leaders were able to identify a series of relevant programs and supports that related to the Aboriginal student's cultural background while at the same time ascertained balance and harmony within the context of the modern world. The urban Aboriginal educational philosophy resonated among the educational leaders by recognizing that for urban Aboriginal students to fit into today's modern world they must not only understand their own culture, but also seek out ways to understand how it fits into the world today, and how they can adapt and live in harmony by familiarizing themselves with other cultures as the world evolves.

Several of the educational leaders discovered that it was not meaningful to teach directly to the Aboriginal students; however, what most educational leaders did find

useful was following an approach that integrated Aboriginal culture and teachings (ranging from drumming to storytelling to Medicine Wheel teachings to hosting feasts) into the regular curriculum as a means of providing students with the opportunity to reflect on the teachings, and with the goal of trying to accommodate Aboriginal students in terms of their personal and academic situations. In leaving the door open (metaphorically) and having those key individuals in place to deliver the programs and model the positive behaviours, it allowed the Aboriginal students the opportunity to turn to the educational leaders if/when they needed extra advice and supports. As such, Elders and traditional teachers were invited to facilitate the learning processes to reinforce that certain things were sacred; so it was important to be able to uphold those teachings through their behaviours by modeling them.

Programs ranging from the occasional leadership lunch series to random promotion and awareness workshops were organized and delivered as informal events to encourage Aboriginal students. As well, co-op placements were strongly encouraged so the Aboriginal students would gain real-world experiences in the community. Most of the educational leaders noted that the most effective workshops, ones that showed good rates of attendance and student engagement were class-based workshops compared to the workshops delivered after school. It was indicated by most of the educational leaders that many students were not able to attend after school activities due to responsibilities at home like, but not limited to, caring for younger siblings or other family members.

Most of the educational leaders preferred that the stay-in-school programs were delivered in partnership with community stakeholders, so they addressed the most recent issues and strengthened ongoing, sustainable collaborative relationships. Community

members were at times invited to facilitate discussions based on their specific areas of expertise or 'gifts'. As such, the community members typically had various levels of education and related proficiencies in areas ranging from Native services, behavioural science, human development, social services, community counselling, health promotion, to traditional teachings. Although the community stakeholders were not privy to obtaining personal information about the Aboriginal students' individual needs, the community agencies were highly involved in aligning the services they offered with school programming. In one particular case, the stay-in-school initiative collaborated with community stakeholders to teach young Aboriginal women about their roles and responsibilities by inviting the young Aboriginal girls to participate in several activities (ranging from full moon ceremonies to engaging in discussions about how to care for the water). Activities like the women's teachings were important since the Aboriginal students could take with them the knowledge to carry forward, and begin to build on their self-esteem while at the same time learn about historical and contemporary Aboriginal issues.

Apart from the workshops, Aboriginal students were provided with the opportunity to enrol in academic-level courses where they learned about Aboriginal history, Native studies, Native arts and literature, land claim issues, among other subject areas. Since the program's inception the number of Native studies courses made available has increased by more than two-fold. Although the course offerings differed for each of three schools, the overall benefit was that it brought understanding in terms of breaking down biases and prejudices, which is a good thing, as one of the participant's pointed out "we all know that is based on lack of knowledge, so it has been encouraging

to see other students wanting to take these courses and listen to the Elders when they come in" (Interview#7, p. 4). Certainly, the benefits of class enrolments from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students constructed understanding and awareness within the contexts of the modern-day world. One educational leader further stated that,

I had people enrolled who were of Asian, Croatian, and Middle Eastern descent and I would say we are talking about a particular ceremony in the Aboriginal community, how do you celebrate in your country? And how do you deal with that situation in your country? So, everybody learns something in that lesson because we learned about all cultures and ways. (Interview #2, p. 3).

Apart from the Native studies course offerings, there were several other compulsory courses that had successfully integrated Aboriginal issues into the core curriculum with success. The educational leaders made additional efforts to incorporate Aboriginal issues and recognize the need to be conscious of Aboriginal learning preferences into their curriculum planning. For example, one educational discussed their experience in planning new curriculum for Aboriginal programming as follow:

I have identified some issues that were in the Aboriginal community and had the students do research on various things like drug use, teenage pregnancy, fetal alcohol effects, those sort of things. So I gave them a list and I said anything else you want to research you can do. I have allowed them to have some breadth of what they are interested in...Let them do some of thinking. We give them a specific task that they are going to do and ask, how would you like to solve this problem? What would like to do for an assignment that was their cumulating task with presentation on a topic they have picked. Some did PowerPoint, some did

posters, some did various ways of presenting the information...But you kind of in the scope of what you are teaching there are some situations where you can allow the students to pick what they would like to do as an assignment rather than say everybody is going to make a poster or everybody is going to do that. And even when they were going to do their moccasins some people wanted to do something different like add beads and more than that and you let them do it. And they want to do that. (Interview # 2, p. 3)

The magnitude of integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum was summarized by one educational leader by means of the following statement, "as important as it is for students to know about their own, it is equally important for others to know about their cultures as well (Interview #22, p. 4). The main concern by the educational leaders was that without further knowledge and understanding as well as buyin from all stakeholders, the educational leaders reported that they (and their students) worried that nothing was ever going to be settled with regards to Aboriginal relations.

In delivering the key components of the overall academic program it was also essential for all the educational leaders to connect with support persons who had traditional knowledge in the areas of Native language and traditional teachings. As such, the youth advisors, cultural workers, and Elders were invited to work with the classroom teachers and students. It was imperative that Aboriginal culture and traditions were integrated into the classroom experiences so that it was recognized and valued as a part of academia and not seen as a disconnected activity. For instance, the Elders were encouraged to visit with the students while at the same time share their knowledge and understanding of the traditional values that Aboriginal students may embrace. Since a

number of the Aboriginal students did not have a stable home life, it was worthwhile to involve Aboriginal community stakeholders to allow the students that chance to identify with other Aboriginal role models and mentors. It also helped for the students to be able to reach out to the community members through opportunities like the school's drum group to perform and build their status in the school-community (Interview #22). One of the educational leaders noted:

I made focused efforts on finding Aboriginal people with traditional knowledge such as language and teachings to return to post-secondary and get their qualifications and credentials so that they can be teachers and educators. I had sought out support workers that the children would see and the youth see themselves reflected and I advocated strongly for those workers to continue with their education and continue with their teachings. To me that's an inspiration and the motivation because Aboriginal learners see themselves in those people that they trust and have a relationship with. (Interview #1, p. 2)

Besides the differentiated course offerings and the involvement of cultural advisors, it was the educational leaders who also sought to incorporate contemporary, modern resources like media studies (ranging from using computer technology for creating presentation to using online websites and podcasts). For example, online websites like *Four Directions Teachings* allowed students to interact through learning modules delivered by the Elders from across several Aboriginal nations. Other times, the educational leaders used podcasts from CBC Aboriginal radio shows and other music sites, in addition to online video clips taken from documentaries to add a sense of

authenticity to the delivery of the existing course curriculum while creating enthusiasm among the students.

Although the educational leaders intended to provide Aboriginal students with increased understanding of Aboriginal issues and culture with the intent that it would mean greater access to advanced education and training, the reality was that Aboriginal students were being held back due to low levels in literacy and numeracy, and they were being enrolled in courses that were not always preparing them for entrance into higher education. The result was that educational leaders needed to give hope to the individuals that might had not otherwise considered post-secondary education and advanced training as an option. One way to promote advanced education and training that was recommended by a couple of the educational leaders was to develop, in collaboration with the Aboriginal students, a culturally relevant transition plan that seeks to address not just academic requirements, but one that also looks to identify key barriers and obstacles that may prohibit the Aboriginal students from completing their education. In reviewing the post-secondary education trends, several of the educational leaders noted there was a real concern that once the Aboriginal students left high school many of them were not prepared for post-secondary studies and dropped-out early on.

Consequently, it was realized that there was no formalized transition planning process in place for Aboriginal students. The students for the most part were connected with next steps only if they requested information. For the students who had expressed interest in attending advanced education through informal discussions with the educational leaders, the suggested institutions were often the ones that the educational leaders had previously attended themselves, or were personally familiar with. To make

attempts to broaden the scope of available post-secondary opportunities to Aboriginal students, the schools hosted information sessions where recruitment officers from various higher levels of education were invited to speak with the Aboriginal students to identify the various options as well as what is achievable.

Additionally, the Aboriginal students were invited to attend an annual motivational gathering for all Aboriginal high school students. At these gatherings were industry-based professionals in attendance who shared their experiences with the students. The main purpose of the event was to encourage Aboriginal students to stay-inschool while exploring options for career planning. The community agency went one step further; they were involved in delivering a culturally relevant career assessment tool, Guiding Circles. The assessment tool involved a series of workbooks supported by a facilitator to guide Aboriginal youth to build self-esteem and self-awareness in order to look at potential career paths. The career-based program initiative looked to explore "the kind of things they are good at; the kind of things they enjoy, and how they can apply those things to their career decision-making" (Interview #19, p. 2). In this case, it was ideal to work alongside another career and training organization; the school programs aligned with a community agency provided they followed the most recent labour market trends and program directions in the next coming years. As a result, using relevant information the community agency made efforts to direct the students toward several different career pathways.

Since it was reported that there were no formal transitional planning at the secondary level, it was strongly recommended that perhaps the stay-in-school initiatives needed to address why the students were typically not successful in their educational

journey. In moving forward, it might be important to include students in the processes and at times treat the students like young adults in order to prepare them for success in the real-world. A backwards planning approach that seeks to identify several different issues like lack of post-secondary funding, housing, transportation, culinary skills, child care, budgeting and financial management, and learning skills needs to be part of the main components of the program planning. Several of the educational leaders felt that aligning Aboriginal students with the appropriate advanced education experience and preparing students with the skills needed for success required additional attention.

Regardless of their level of involvement, the educational leaders thought that in order to be an effective leader, it was important to always continue to pursue a combination of formal education and traditional teachings. Several participants believed that they could not be a good caregiver or helper if they were not learning for themselves and bettering themselves. The educational leaders found value in attending advanced post-secondary education and workshops that talked specifically about Aboriginal perspectives in education, and provided opportunity for hands-on learning experiences that gave them the opportunity to further understand how to put into practice the knowledge and skills. Several educational leaders also found value in reaching out to role models in the community so they could help guide the school's pursuit for understanding of successful delivery of sustainable educational programming.

5.6 Processes for Intake and Assessment for Identifying the Unique Needs of the Urban Aboriginal Students

Many urban Aboriginal youth have experienced a transient lifestyle for several reasons (ranging from moving on- and off reserve, to being part of custody disputes, to being involved with the child welfare system, to not having access to stable housing) which has made it not easy to understand fully their needs, as well as put into place individualized plans for continuums of learning. In addition, sometimes it was difficult for the government, as well as school boards to understand that looking solely at standardized testing results was not the answer because the issues are buried much deeper. Since board-wide literacy and numeracy assessments were primarily used to determine the rates of success and identify areas of concern for all students, regardless of their ancestry, it was not always clear how to implement Aboriginal-specific program supports based exclusively on the data taken from (mainstream) standardized test results. Although all the educational leaders felt they were not doing anything differently to carry out standardized assessments for urban Aboriginal students, they quickly realized the importance of taking the time to assess and further understand their unique needs. It was presumed that until this point that perhaps the focus was placed mostly on school-wide needs because it was thought that most of the Aboriginal learners enrolled at these particular schools were all highly at-risk.

The educational leaders who were directly involved in the everyday operations of the Aboriginal programming reported that although there was no standardized testing, success within the Aboriginal programs was measured differently in comparison to other school programs. The assessment focus was on informal conversations about issues like

rates of attendance, credit accumulation, student engagement, and satisfaction. The outcome was that the educational leaders in this study did not look at all Aboriginal learners in the same way. For instance, if there was an Aboriginal student who was not attending school, it was considered an issue, so the educational leaders would engage the Aboriginal youth advisors, or social workers, or someone from the community to help speak with the family to find out what was going on to encourage that individual student to return to school.

For those educational leaders who also had access to the student's school records, they were able to get a quick overview of the student's school and personal experiences. It not only provided a scope regarding academic performance, but also provided information as to whether the student had moved to several schools and if there had been the involvement with children protection services at any time. In these instances, the educational leaders used this information to informally network with other caregivers (mainly starting with the Aboriginal youth advisors as their first point of contact) when they were having further difficulties identifying strategies like how to engage Aboriginal students within the regular classroom; how to encourage Aboriginal students to attend class; and, how to make certain issues were addressed accordingly. Most times, the educational leaders' response was to identify culturally relevant activities that the Aboriginal students might connect with. By discovering ways to engage Aboriginal learners, it was sometimes easier to connect students with familiar issues so that other existing concerns could be approached. In working together with other educational leaders and the Aboriginal students, the educational leaders learned that it was important not to judge the learners, but to take the time to listen to their stories in their entirety.

Some educational leaders who had been working in the school system with numerous ethnicities and cultures for some time said that, because of this experience, they could begin to sense whenever issues of concern existed by interpreting the body language and actions of students. However, it was stressed that sometimes educational leaders could not equate issues as being related to the students' Aboriginal identity, or assume that they might necessarily want Aboriginal-specific programs and supports. It was stated by one educational leader that, "Some people have the wrong idea that every Aboriginal kid needs this specific program and environment, but again I see cultural learning as a way to get students engaged, but not necessarily a means forcing them to understand academics and everything else within the context" (Interview #19, p. 5). If Aboriginal students do not want those supports for whatever reason, it should be acceptable and understood.

Methods of intake and assessment for urban Aboriginal learners were limited since there was a lack of expertise among the educational leaders regarding the course of action of how to proceed. The educational leaders recognized that schools needed culturally relevant processes to identify the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal students. One school had implemented a 'caring adult' checklist for all students; however, not all educational leaders felt prepared to use the template since students were not always prepared to talk about the issues listed. In this case, the information collected involved looking at emotional patterns, sleep time, and nutrition. The checklist also included the student's learning strategies. Although this type of checklist was purposely directed at all students of the school, regardless of their Aboriginal ancestry, it at least provided a foundation for those working with Aboriginal students. Aboriginal program

strategies also included the collaboration of teachers, parents, youth advisors, and other community members with the goal of 'keeping the circle' strong. The Aboriginal youth advisors typically acted as a mediator by ensuring they worked with the stakeholders to identify approaches and ways to maintain ongoing contact to keep the circle, the lines of communication and relationship, strong. The youth advisors also upheld a direct line of communication with the Aboriginal students and parents depending on the significance of the situation.

The research also revealed that educational leaders should design comprehensive models, like the ones used with the ESL/ELL learners that seek to understand the overall situation of the student. If they were experiencing difficulty, most students in the programs studied were simply referred to the special education department where they were assessed for academic reading comprehension, decoding skills, reading fluency, calculation skills, problem solving, among other areas. An individual education plan was put into place if it was warranted. Although the intent of some of the assessment practices was to determine grade equivalency so students can be connected with the supports they required, it failed to recognize all of their underlying issues and needs (i.e. transportation, nutrition, etc.). Certainly, more insight was needed to support at-risk Aboriginal students all around. The certainty was that without full knowledge and understanding about the needs of the students, it was likely that the Aboriginal students would not receive adequate guidance as well as the benefits of the supports and services available to reach their full potential.

5.7 Inspiration/Motivation to Reach Beyond Academics and Culture to Address Social and Economic Issues

Apart from focusing on delivering the school curriculum (i.e. academics and culture), the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives aimed to address social and economic issues. It was important that educators understood that dealing exclusively with academics and culture was often not enough. It was noted:

You can't have one without the other. Academic, culture, social, etc. go together. I don't know how I would separate them. They influence each other; they're dependent on each other. It's a fluid moment. It's broader; they are all succinct with each other. I am motivated to go beyond if going beyond meant social and economic, I am scared. I think it's the foundation. Look at the social determinants of health, and our people that are entrenched in poverty, and tell me that isn't foundational. If anything I'd be looking at the later, but you must look at them all. They're reciprocal. (Interview #1, p. 4)

Members of the Aboriginal community reported to several of the educational leaders that they felt the school systems continue to fail the community by not addressing the underlying issues; as a result, schooling has continues to be interpreted as a negative experience for many Aboriginal students and their families regardless of the fact that programming is being developed to address Aboriginal student needs. Aboriginal students who were enrolled in the program were made to feel part of the school community. The school staff also made sure their needs were met. It was stated, "When you see the needs of these students, you need to go beyond... You are providing necessities of life to these students" (Interview #14, p. 11).

It was important for the educational leaders to know that many of the Aboriginal students enrolled in the stay-in-school initiatives were raised in single-parent homes, or were in and out of the child protection system, and were faced with a great deal of responsibilities at a very early age. In addressing the academic, cultural, social, and economic domains, a holistic worldview (academic, cultural, social, and economic) was incorporated into the program. One of the educational leaders identified that,

You find yourself in a position as a counsellor [be]cause these are inner city kids always dealing with poverty and the implications of that. A lot of these kids are divorced from one or both of their parents so you do a lot of parenting, role modeling, problem solving around issues like student welfare (i.e. Where are you living? Are you safe? How can I help you get a coat?). All of those things are part of being in an inner city school. But it is significant with our First Nation [Aboriginal] kids because they are displaced from the get go. (Interview #18, p. 2)

Therefore, socioeconomic issues were identified as paramount, particularly poverty.

Since these programs are situated in areas of the city that typically have some of the highest rates of poverty, the educational leaders thought that it was their responsibility to assist students and their families to gain access to the available school and community-based supports.

Many educational leaders' expressed that it was initially difficult to connect with the needs of the Aboriginal students. However, many educational leaders discussed that they had encountered personal experiences while growing up (ranging from poverty, dealing with drug and alcohol addictions, to abuse) that inspired them to want to help guide urban Aboriginal youth to make better life choices. One educational leader shared their prior life experiences as follows:

I remember being a youth homeless on the streets living with an alcoholic, drug addict (relative) and trying to be in with them. I used to steal for my living — booze, food, you name it. So I was the breadwinner again back then in that sense. So, one day I was lying on the couch watching a TV program and it said, "Are you tired of wishing for a soap opera life? Then you need to get off that couch and start living life." So I went home and went home back to the bush and went trapping for a couple of weeks. And I felt like I don't want to socialize anymore, that I just want to get serious with my life. I wanna make a difference. Whatever was offered I was there cause I wanted it, and it fulfilled me...If you sit and settle you don't grow. (Interview #17, p. 1)

Another educational leader affirmed that they were merely inspired from their own experiences by stating,

Personally, and with my own kids, and in my community they are just in your face. You know you live with them and day in and day out you breathe them, live them, you feel the pain and it is just obvious. You have to be blind if you can't see it. (Interview #4, p. 5)

Many of the educational leaders were inspired to participate in the delivery of the programming based on their own life experiences, besides wanting the best for all urban Aboriginal learners. All of the educational leaders were for the most part motivated by the urgency to build and/or deliver programs and supports that would affect the current and future generations of Aboriginal youth.

Most of the educational leaders wanted to provide culturally appropriate opportunities like, but not limited to, talking circles and Native Studies courses as well as keeping equity at the top of the agenda. The educational leaders wanted to ensure there was always an equal playing field while discovering respectful ways to honour the traditional teachings in midst of the process of assisting urban Aboriginal students to discover their own journey, ceremonies, and/or stages of life. Regardless, the program motivated educational leaders to help the students be healthy, to feel worthy, and a sense of belonging. One educational leader stated:

My motivation comes from the fact that as a citizen the more you know about the world you are in that is provincial or national or whatever, the more you know about the world that you exist in, and the world that existed before you, the more well-rounded of a person you are going to be. You learn empathy, you learn about cross-cultural understanding, and not only do you learn it but you get a sense that it is good to apply it. So it makes you that kind of good person, that person that you desire to be. (Interview #20, p. 3)

In the midst of adversity students were encouraged to embrace their heritage and culture, especially when the students seemed lost in terms of their identity and were frustrated with life circumstances. One educational leader described their reason for becoming involved in this type of work that included,

working at schools that tend to be on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale.

You see that the main thing missing from a lot our students is hope or the understanding that education can get them somewhere. And not having role

models in their lives or examples you can say wow I can go to school and end up with a good life, and that's a big motivator for me. (Interview #22, p. 3)

All the educational leaders felt it was more difficult for those individuals who had not experienced first-hand life experiences (i.e. direct or personal experiences) to connect with the students, especially during times of crisis. In some cases, the students were from low income and/or lone parent families with several forced to be self-sufficient and make real-life decisions at a very young age. For example, several of the students struggled with high rates of absenteeism. In some instances the students were responsible for caring for family members, or in charge of taking their younger siblings to school.

Sometimes the students suffered from undiagnosed mental health issues, social phobias, or got themselves into predicaments with issues like pregnancy or drug and alcohol addictions that made it challenging for them to attend school regularly. Homelessness and domestic abuse was also a reality for many of the at-risk Aboriginal students.

Several of the Aboriginal students had experienced things that no young person should ever have to face in their lifetime. There were some concerns that some of the other educators did not want to recognize or take the time to understand the mitigating circumstances that were behind behaviours like excessive absenteeism or addictions. At times, some of these educational leaders even went as far to express that the at-risk Aboriginal students should be asked to leave the school rather than align the students with intervention supports. Nevertheless, the educational leaders who acted as perceived caregivers tried to work with all educators and to help them realize that these Aboriginal students were still young and struggling, and therefore needed adult assistance and guidance. Regardless of their efforts, there still existed a feeling that more could be done

number of kids (to me a large number would be one) that I am not reaching. I don't know how. The problems are in their home life...I just don't know how to reach them yet" (Interview #3, p. 8). In knowing this, many of the educational leaders often struggled to understand how the students would be able to achieve their school credits without an accommodation plan or additional supports in place. It was acknowledged that the Aboriginal students basically needed caring and supportive people on their side, people who would not judge them for their actions.

The notion of their role as a caregiver was put clearly into perspective with the statement, "if you have a kid in your face that comes in and doesn't have a lunch, it's going to force you to take a look at those issues" (Interview #15, p. 3). Several of the students would come to eat before going to class because they are hungry, or seek out clothes or hygienic products. In other cases, students needed to make the difficult choice at a young age to stop attending school to work so they could help support their family or pay for their own expenses.

If they were able to have clothing on their back and warm water for the morning, or food in the fridge then I would think (academically) a lot of at-risk youth would have a greater chance of being successful if just certain issues were addressed. (Interview # 5, p. 5)

It was indicated by one educational leader that it was not always easy for

Aboriginal students to accept that social and economic issues were not being addressed in
their own school community, especially when they learned about organizations that were
diligently assisting underprivileged populations in other parts of the world. What

troubled the students and community members is when Canada focuses on issues in other countries (Interview #23, p, 1), yet dire situations close to home were not being discussed, or being acknowledged to the degree that it should be. The urban Aboriginal students have become somewhat discouraged considering they see first-hand the poverty that so many Aboriginal people across Canada live in, which is comparable to living in third-world conditions. One educational leader discussed a classroom experience where the following situations occurred, "The kids asked about Haiti, and why are people giving money when we have problems here at home" (Interview 23, p. 1). As a result, the Aboriginal students struggled to connect their own personal stories to those experiencing similar struggles from other countries and they often asked why Canadian's did not first help those in need in their own country. Considering the high number of Aboriginal families that worried about shelter, food, and basic protection on a daily basis, it was understandable for the students to feel this way.

Since the academic and cultural needs of the students were not always understood, all the educational leaders needed to advocate for the extra supports. For instance, there was a request to relocate a classroom so that a sink would be accessible for the students. When questioned with reference to the rationale for another having access to another room, the response given was the students needed food. Since it was unclear how to accommodate the request for the allocation of new resources, the educational leaders were required to provide empirical evidence to explain the connection of food to academic performance and culture. In the end students were provided with a stove, fridge, washer and dryer, and washroom.

Due to the high rates of poverty, as well as the high number of urban Aboriginal students coming to school hungry, the school programs expanded to offer complimentary breakfast and lunch to make certain that the students were provided with nutritious meals.

One educational leader stated:

You have to understand it's going back to knowing your learner and understanding it's like the hierarchy of needs. It's an old thing that people talk about where students aren't fed or happy on a basic level that they are not going to be able to learn. So, I think that's what our program really encapsulates is you have to look at the whole learner (all areas) in order for them to be successful" (Interview #22, p. 3).

The educational leaders supported a breakfast and lunch program because a very high number of students were coming to school hungry. In addressing nutritional needs it was noted:

You see more kids attending classes. You see less discipline issues being sent down to the office because the kids now have some food in their stomach first thing in the morning. We have no discipline issues in terms of teachers sending kids out of the classroom for disruptive behaviours Period One anymore. Period One was huge. It was just constant kids ...getting into arguments, irritable, and more easily frustrated. All of the signs of not being physically content. Teachers report now they get instead of 75 minutes of fighting with kids, they get 60 minutes of the best work and productivity. (Interview #3, p. 7)

The significance of the nutrition programs became necessary when educational leaders noticed that students were facing the effects of poverty by coming to school hungry,

disengaged, and also looking malnourished. As a result, all the educational leaders felt compelled to go beyond their regular workplace duties.

Since funding was not typically allocated for non-education budget items, many leaders took it on themselves to raise funds and collect donations by building partnerships with local community agencies. Aside from the nutritional meal programs there were also other supports like clothing centres and bus tickets that were made available to the students. Several boards and school programs aimed to support the cost of transportation and classroom supplies. First, since several of the students travelled from across the city to attend the program, complimentary bus passes were available. Given that the programs often had limited budgets for transportation, the community agencies sometimes were able to support the transportation costs of attending community-based events that connected with the school curriculum. In addition, classroom supplies for Aboriginal-specific credit classes that focused on making ceremonial and traditional items like drum bags and moccasins were also provided by community agencies.

It was further stated: "One of the reasons they have not been successful is social instability and all those factors that get in the way of learning and until we start addressing those other factors, the kids don't believe they can learn...Having always worked with at-risk youth I knew how important it was to broaden the issues and include social and economic issues in the school" (Interview #3, pp. 5-6). So, unless things changed it is was likely that students were not going to be successful or engaged. The reality was that sometimes educational leaders struggled because not all educators believed that the supports apart from academics would be beneficial.

Another key barrier for students in terms of social instability was the lack of access to identification. Some educational leaders indicated that several Aboriginal students did not have Indian status cards, Métis cards, social insurance cards, or birth certificates. For Aboriginal students, having identification could make a real difference in their lives, especially when they have financial support limitations at home. Having no identification were barriers to gain access to health care benefits or educational supports, and as one leader noted, "It is an impairment re: job seeking without ID for all the kids, and it is I think sometimes they get so frustrated with it and all the hoops they have to jump through they just kind of give up. It is a huge problem" (Interview #9, p. 3).

Several of the educational leaders brought forward the idea that it would be helpful for families to have someone on-site available to help students and their families through the process of applying for identification and be available to follow up with them to ensure they have completed the application. Many families felt going to another office is just another barrier in terms of gaining access to transportation. Once at the government building, many did not have the confidence to go in. In addition, many families do not have the funds to pay for the costs of ordering the required documents to support their application (i.e. long form birth certificate), or the expense to photocopy the documents or mail-in the application. It was stated, "I have no clue how they survive paying rent and food, and a lot of them don't and it is a real challenge. Why do they not waive the fee for those things?...Process with lots of barriers in the way is unfortunate" (Interview #9, p. 5).

A couple of the educational leaders recognized their educational philosophy was based on attempts to meet the basic needs associated with Maslow Hierarchy of Needs

Theory; they felt this model was necessary for addressing the needs of the whole-child. In order to respond to the actual needs of the students, it required a thorough, in-depth understanding of the diverse needs of the urban Aboriginal students and their families, as well as the needs of the community. In so doing, it has required time and adequate planning to reach that level of understanding in a respectful way.

Overall, the educational leaders have faced complex situations. They often discovered that individuals they collaborated with lacked understanding or lost sight of the importance of addressing social and economic issues in education. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational leaders who participated in these programs were able to identify with the academic and cultural pressures, and the social and economic pressures that urban Aboriginal students struggled with based on their own personal experiences such as living in poverty or facing struggles that made it difficult to understand where they fit in the world. It was important to help Aboriginal students to realize their full potential and how they could contribute to society. The educational leaders were able to provide new supports that reflected the needs of the community. Many of the educational leaders worried that if they were not there to advocate and support the urban Aboriginal students, who would be present?

Although it has taken time for organizational structures to evolve, for the most part, the educational leaders learned by reflecting on their successes and failures.

Whenever a student withdrew from the program they wanted to hear their students' and their families' stories. At times, it meant dealing with situations that were intense, such as learning of the unfavourable conditions that students lived. From time to time, parents were not willing to be involved in the process because they were concerned that it would

raise red flags. Regardless of the circumstances, it was always important to make considerations for the safety and security of the students by putting into place safety and educational plans, in addition to following up with other community supports. It was noted that, "the reality is that it's not always what we think it should be" (Interview #1, p. 4) based on our own experiences; thus, being prepared for the unexpected and how to respond accordingly is necessary. Since schools are increasingly becoming the hub for community services, it may be worthwhile for them to establish collaborative partnerships so students have a direct, immediate access to services without the barriers in terms of access to affordable transportation, among other issues.

It was acknowledged that, "learning about different groups and making sure everyone's needs are met that is the bottom line in education right now is to know your learner and to understand their needs" (Interview #22, p. 2). In going above and beyond to provide academics, culture, social, and economics supports, it was believed that rates of absenteeism (which was one main area of concern) was improving to some extent. However, with the extent of the socioeconomic barriers facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada, it is important to identify and address the issues using a community-based model that involves all stakeholders.

5.8 Identifying, Prioritizing, and Addressing Inherent Challenges and Limitations in Providing an Ethic of Care

The program was founded nine years ago with five Aboriginal students, and a lot was learned from these first students. The program continued to grow because the students told their friends about the program. The educational leaders thought that any

successes were primarily based on the values of trust, and willingness to work in partnership with the staff, students, and community. Everyone did what they could to contribute because they felt what they were doing was for the students, and nothing else. Nevertheless, there remained challenges and limitations in providing an ethic of care within the context of all the schools policies and practices. A significant challenge was the lack of existing organizational structures; individuals had a lack of willingness to work collaboratively with one another while being able to make a firm, enduring commitment to carrying out the activities as part of a group culture, especially when faced with obstacles and barriers.

Accountability for Working Collaboratively Through a Shared Vision

Since many of the educational leaders were spread out across several departments and school locations, it was difficult for educational leaders to stay up-to-date in reviewing the needs of the urban Aboriginal school-community. One main challenge arose when trying to ensure all stakeholders were able to make the time to work collaboratively through a shared vision. The educational leaders often felt that they were left on their own to identify the needs and investigate possible solutions since there was no Aboriginal advisor or collaborative working group to discuss and work through concerns. Certainly, the impact of having no Aboriginal advisor or collaborative working group was evident through the different stages of implementation and delivery of the programs. For example, the educational leaders felt that they worked on a day-to-day basis in isolation with little opportunity for sharing resource ideas and cross-curriculum planning for programs and supports. At times, the educational leaders struggled to know what appropriate resources were available to select from, this including novels, to

manipulatives, to guest speakers. Other times, the educational leaders struggled with connecting students to culturally relevant community resources to deal with issues like, but not limited to health care, employment and training, housing, and Elder supports.

Several educational leaders pointed out that there needs to be more collaborative work with all stakeholders and experts in the field. This is especially true when it comes to working with Aboriginal students and their families since there is such a diverse range of Aboriginal and mainstream knowledge that needs to be fully understood. There is a great deal of concern that there is no stability, consistency, and standardizations among the programs, so it was proposed by most of the educational leaders that the notion of sustainability must be explored further through school-community consultations that involved all stakeholders, including members of the Aboriginal community. In following an Aboriginal notion of understanding, one educational leader suggested:

Community collaboration means come to the table and let's talk about what is the needs of these students and how can we develop the program to meet those needs as opposed to them saying this is the need we have identified then we are going away coming up with someone and we are going to implement the way we want it to run. It does not work that way for our families. (Interview #16, p. 5)

The issue was raised that sometimes we miss the power of 'talking around the kitchen table' when developing respective and transparent collaborative partnerships.

Considerations for the collaborative process were highlighted by one educational leader as follows:

There needs to be cooperation between all the schools and whether that be community or school board-wide or some sort of even like policies and

procedures or some sort of guiding vision so you know what to expect. How much do the parents know what the kids are doing or the relationships they have...and what they are being provided. Some sort of that linked with getting the community involved or support about what the kids need. And bring that more into community healing. Getting to the root of the problem. We can tell them you can do everything, but they have come from families that don't have money or these kids were bullied. These kids are fragile. You see how they are fragile, and a lot of them they are clinging to the their Aboriginal youth worker or another caregiver because that person is giving them the time of day, I guess you can say...Sometimes you just see how fragile they are ...You see how fragile they are and how much is stacked against them...some things are not talked about. So many say we need to help them, but they also need to learn to help themselves.

It's a celebration I guess that needs to be done. (Interview #15, p. 4)

Concerns about the Long-term Sustainability of the Program Initiatives

There was a sense of uneasiness about the long-term sustainability of the Aboriginal stay-in-school educational programs. At the board level there was clear support for the programming because of the positive things that it was doing for the students; however, many of the educational leaders wondered whether or not school-based individuals who were given the task to make change really wanted to take the risk of addressing the underlying issues; or, if they were at times choosing to ignore the issues rather than acknowledge them in order to advance their own interests by putting their own needs first rather than the needs of the Aboriginal community. On a positive note, there has been a strong push to recruit Aboriginal educators at all levels. These

Aboriginal educators become visible role models and mentors for Aboriginal students and their families.

Many funding challenges were identified by the educational leaders. For instance, there was limited financial resources to maintain ongoing activities like purchasing culturally relevant resources and delivering activities, like Elder mentorship, workshops, socials, and feasts. Often, educators, community members, students, and families saw the need for a certain programs, but due to the lack of available financial resources it was it difficult to carry out and plan the activities. It was a struggle to understand how to build sustainable programs and services since the school programs primarily relied on yearly grants. Annual grants for Aboriginal-specific programs were available; however, the schools had to be willing to consider one of the following pathways: (1) apply for one-time grants available in certain categories, and oversee the delivery of programming, which is in addition to their regular duties; (2) fund the programming upfront and wait for possible reimbursement at the commencement of the program; and/or, (3) collaborate with local Aboriginal organizations to apply for grants to supplement the costs of the events.

Although the grants have been essential, there have been some challenges with the processes. First, several of the calls for funding proposals advocated for establishing relationships with Aboriginal community agencies; however, some of the community agencies often relied on those same grants to meet their own organizational needs, including at times operational costs. As a result, there was often competition for program funding among the organizations, and depending on the leadership from the different organizations and/or agencies, the community was sometimes concerned about the

distribution of the funds, or the manner that information was communicated, or how relationships were affirmed. Nevertheless, it was thought that without the involvement of specific Aboriginal organizations that likely authentic programming (ranging from cultural field trips to feasts) would not be possible.

Second, the funding guidelines sometimes stated that they would not fund the same project the second time around, so programs needed to be designed so that they were sustainable and worked within the whole system rather than exclusively at the local school level; this was a challenge for many educational leaders who had little experience in organizational development and program planning. As a result, to ensure the stability of their programming the educational leaders worked closely with school board's and community partners to get their programs recognized.

Third, it was acknowledged that it was difficult when everyone (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people) had a voice in the decision-making processes because it took a long time for all of the voices to be heard. It was especially challenging for those who were non-Aboriginal to know for certain the right approaches to follow. Although the voices needed to be respectfully heard, it should be recognized that for many individuals sitting around the table (especially non-Aboriginal people) it was difficult to determine if they were going down the right path, or are they not. As a result, it was often hard to reach consensus or build that level of understanding among all groups of people.

Another challenge and limitation was directly related to the total number of Aboriginal students enrolled in the programs. There were some concerns about whether or not the programs can be replicated in other schools, or if the needs of the students were better served by keeping them all together rather than dispersed across the city. The main

concern was that the services delivered were dependent on the number of students enrolled, so there was some uneasiness around how it would impact the overall organizational structure of the programming. Since there was no Aboriginal self-identification policy in place, it has been difficult to lead in the direction that needed to be taken, especially not knowing for certain the number of Aboriginal students, including their location, and the overall targets that need to be reached. At present time, the schools must rely on the demographic data shared by their feeder schools in terms of academic and social needs. One of the educational leaders discussed the challenges by stating:

Obviously, before you can actually look at some of the broader issues you have to have a pool of students that you are going to be dealing with. You need to have a grasp on that. How are you supposed to advocate for policy change without having an idea of who are these people that you are talking about? (Interview #19, p. 3)

Without doubt the self-identification process was an issue that needed to be further explored as there was differing opinions surrounding the implementation process. Some of the issues that have already been raised are with regards to the different classifications. For example, some people preferred to use the term Aboriginal first and foremost rather than the individual terms, defined as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit. The term Non-Status is also a grey area that was often not spoken about, but exists in its entirety. The following was noted by one of the Aboriginal educational leaders:

For us, it is not just about self-identification, but an understanding of where you are coming from...It doesn't matter where you look you see different

interpretations of how one perceives self-identification...I think it is something that you need to keep working towards. It's not an easy policy to deal with...There is a lot of talk that has to go into it. (Interview #19, p. 3)

Overall, the educational leaders shared that it was a slow process. The main challenge might be that each of the school board's across the province have been given the chance to develop their self-identification process. It also takes time to consult with the Aboriginal and mainstream groups across the city to ensure that it is truly reflective of their opinions. In the meantime, the program administrators encourage educational leaders and students to simply embrace Aboriginal culture and traditions rather than making them prove their ancestry since historically that is the way it was done.

The main question that needs to be asked is, "At what point do the discussions need to shift to involve sustainable planning with the best interests of the students in mind?" Recommendations suggested by the participants that more work needs to be done at the school board to look at how to effectively implement traditional on-the-land experiences into the regular programming in a manner that is authentic, yet at the same time is in alignment with school policies and practices. In certain instances, there was some concern that it took too long to get approval for an activity, so it would be helpful to have a formalized process in place to fast track the process to meet the short turnaround time that is often required. Some educational leaders have felt pressured to discover ways to be creative in their approach. Typically, the schools were flexible as long as the programming was within the jurisdiction of the board's policies and practices. However, there were instances where they felt they had to look for ways to attempt to work around policies in order to provide culturally relevant programs to the students.

This meant encouraging some educational leaders to be flexible and to work outside typical school approaches. As a result, the program administrators were sometimes hesitant to move forward with a plan, especially if they were not certain how they would be reimbursed for resource materials like textbooks, Aboriginal craft supplies, among other items which were substantial.

Most of the educational leaders would ideally like to move away from relying on time-limited grants, but they required additional time and leadership development support to identify how to implement the strategic work plan and identify what is available in terms of resources for Aboriginal students and their families. The educational leaders felt they were just beginning to build transparent relationships with the school boards to ensure that adequate funding that has been earmarked for the programs are allocated accordingly; however, the leaders felt that more communication and collaborative efforts needed to formalize any existing unwritten arrangements for them to feel at ease with investing their efforts and time into programming.

It was important to have the right individuals in place, especially since their approach may adversely impact the goals of the organization and the direction of the programming. Some individuals indicated that from time to time others did not want to involve themselves in equity issues because based on organizational development theories people are typically promoted based on their willingness to simply comply; so, people did not want to speak up if it meant compromising their integrity. Consequently, for a program like this to be effective, it is important to have the right people in those positions. It was also acknowledged that, "If you have a principal or people at the board who don't see Aboriginal education as a priority and don't see that the students perhaps

need to be taught in different ways, it is a problem" (Interview #2, p. 3). One of the educational leaders noted that certainly, "We can't legislate caring, but we hope that people who care will be feel drawn to this type of work" (Interview #18, p. 2). In moving forward, one of the educational leaders reported that they would like more support, especially "For those people who really want to be there and really want to do it and do a good job at it" (Interview #2, p. 6). It was explained:

It's a big challenge getting everyone on board and connected because you can only do so much. Without having additional support (kind of) on board (and that even goes back to what I am saying with school or even just one teacher), all you need is one passionate person and it makes all the difference...It's not important to them even though you see the priority. It's just getting others on board.

(Interview #15, p. 3)

Program Assessments to Understand the Issues and Needs

In moving forward, the main recommendation was there needs to be more comprehensive school program evaluations before all educational leaders can begin to understand why things are or are not working, and why the academic, cultural, social, and economic gaps exist. When the program initially started, informal assessments that examined the effectiveness of the programming were ongoing. For instance, once or twice a year there was select few of the educational leaders who visited with the Aboriginal students while offering them an opportunity to participate in a confidential evaluation process. Without any administrators or program coordinators in attendance, the students were asked to respond to a list of questions regarding what was working, what was not working, what they could change, and what they could do more of.

Students were given the choice to respond in person or in writing. Overall, the feedback received was practical since it identified what the students liked about the program. The process also demonstrated how the students were willing to take ownership in reporting what was not effective. Additional data was taken from other research studies and surveys prepared by several government departments to inform issues like poverty and literacy rates. The student interviews and the statistical data was used to identify and support the growing list of deliverables and it was used to advocate for additional funding that ultimately could be used to close the existing academic, cultural, social, and economic gaps. As time passed this method of evaluation was abandoned in favour of an informal model.

Based on efforts not to disregard anything that has been put forward by the educational leaders the issues ranging from poverty to nutrition have since been addressed. It was pointed out by several of the educational leaders that the issues of concern are basically categorized on whether or not it is a crisis, manageable, or an exaggeration of the reality. From this point on, the educational leaders functioned mostly on intuition rather than using any formal evaluation process. Although this method has been used with some degree of success, most of the educational leaders have indicated that a further need to return to using a standardized process in order to understand the Aboriginal student needs and look at methods to involve the group participation of staff, students, families, and community members.

Since the issue was raised by most of the educational leaders that there exists inconsistencies between the three school programs in terms of what they are doing or not doing, it was suggested that a standardized process must be developed that looks to

address issues like setting program benchmarks as well as identifies how funding and resources are distributed. Although the individuals that have been supporting the program have held their positions for several years, there is a valid concern expressed by several educational leaders wondering about succession, or future availability of funding. There is some apprehension as some leaders wonder what would happen if they had to go back to the drawing board, since there were limited to no organizational records or strategic plans (short-term or long-term) that have been effectively developed or carried out to-date.

One of the educational leaders pointed out what was significant for the success of the program was that there needed to be "a structure and hierarchy rather than the person" (Interview #1, p. 4) in place from the outset. For example, one of the programs has had a Native Studies program in place for some time, but it was still something that they were getting off of the ground. Part of moving forward needed to be related to the support being offered from the school boards. Without a full-time administrator in Aboriginal education, several of the educational leaders felt that it has made the direction of Aboriginal programming difficult to have clear focus. Part of the concern was that each time administration changed, the educational leaders had to re-establish an understanding of the program and its direction. Furthermore, some people were more dedicated to the program than others depending on their availability and commitment to the program. It was further suggested by most of the educational leaders that what was needed was to develop a shared guiding vision statement, one that aligned itself with the existing policies and procedures within the school boards, while at the same time created a vision that was truly representative of the needs of the Aboriginal community. Some of the

educational leaders felt that although the school policies and practices shared a perceived message with the Aboriginal students and their families (that they were inclusive and respected the community voices), they felt it was not always the case since the existing policies were not aligned in a culturally congruent way that demonstrated diversity in its entirety. The result was that the school programs needed to be better prepared in terms of their short-term and long-term planning.

As for considerations for delivering an updated culturally responsive program assessment model, it was understood that the assessment criteria must reflect the needs of the urban Aboriginal students and their families, as well as the educational leaders. Although culturally relevant assessment models are readily available, there was some apprehension that some schools would not be entirely comfortable with applying them mainly because the experts who were familiar with them were not always accessible to provide ongoing support. In addition, although ongoing program evaluations were necessary there has been some concern expressed by the Aboriginal community that yearly assessments, reports, or evaluations might do injustice to the program if the method for data collection somehow excluded culturally relevant criterion to meet the standards approved by the school board's ethics department, or risk the results being used against the advancement of the program before the program was in actuality given an opportunity to demonstrate its successes. There was also added concern that there was the same type of assessment required from year-to-year; yet, the reports were being defined by different people (from different backgrounds) in several different ways; hence, this process made it challenging to inform best practices and appropriate future recommendations.

Next Steps: Recommendations for Period of Renewal

It was summarized by one educational leader that,

I think that the program is a good bridge to a starting point, but certainly it is not everything that we can do and I think that is going to take time in its process in understanding just because Aboriginal students are now in urban settings and they do have to fit into that structure of what school looks like. (Interview #16, p. 2)

To address the main areas of concerns it was indicated that most at-risk individuals, they will likely require the collective participation of those individuals who are caring, empathetic and who have strong organizational leadership skills. It will also require individuals who have achieved some level of 21st century success to assist the urban Aboriginal students and their families to envision the possibilities while at the same time empower Aboriginal youth at the grassroots level. More specifically, additional support from individuals will also need to involve those who are in a leadership position to advocate on behalf of at-risk Aboriginal youth and their families at all levels. In so doing, it is clear that there are a number of political hurdles that must be overcome first and foremost so that all stakeholders are aligned in their approach in order to move forward in a positive manner.

The process of understanding how to reflect on ways to support Aboriginal students as a caregiver is important since it has the potential for seeing better outcomes. Many of the educational leaders who acted as a caregiver in this study reported improved rates of attendance and levels of engagement. In these particular instances, it was beneficial for the youth advisors to work alongside the students and family members to guide and support them to follow through with the recommendations. It was noted, "It is

a challenge for teenagers. It is an exposure for all kind of things so you hope they can find their niche within that" (Interview #9, p. 2). Consequently, based on the experiences of the educational leaders who were involved in this research study, it was acknowledged that if the time was taken to understand the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal students, they are better prepared to understand their ways of knowing.

In moving forward questions need to be asked that explore deep-rooted issues like, but limited to: why things are not working; why are there educational and socioeconomic gaps; what supports are being provided in the school community; why do so many Aboriginal students leave school early; and, why are all classroom teachers not supporting the students? This means that the educational leaders who are often faced with time-limited schedules and other school-related responsibilities must be willing to not give up early on. As pointed out by one of the educational leaders:

If you truly believe in what you are doing, they say this is your vocation. It's a calling rather than a job. If you believe in what you do, and truly want to have an impact, then you do these things. If we let them go and they're not prepared it weeds out the kids that will be reliant on the system. These are the kids that will end up on the street you know. They will end up-being abused or abusing. So there is really kind of a sense of responsibility for them. And I still got students of mine that are coming back and they are not working and they are just around at home and I still even three, four years later look back and am going what could I have done differently? Ya know what I mean? What happens to these kids afterwards? (Interview, 10, p. 5)

Although the process appears to be straightforward, there are many hurdles that educational leaders must overcome. One obstacle is simply accepting that the process may take time before the right solution is found with each one of the program initiatives. Since not all students respond in the same manner, it is likely that the educational leaders will have to return to trying different approaches and opportunities before the student truly becomes inspired, motivated, and engaged. Although there are plenty of opportunities available, it is difficult to get youth to buy-in to supports outside school hours, especially when the students are expected to attend meetings and be accountable for their actions. Although there exists several challenges and limitations, it was stated by one of the educational leaders that, "There is nothing that can't be overcome. If you are patient and willing to be creative and innovative and work with others problems it can be solved" (Interview #3, p. 7). It was suggested that for the success of the overall programs:

The priority has to be educating the whole-child and ethic of care. What the province is looking for in terms of their student success indicators of successful programming can't be accomplished unless you have an ethic of care. They want credit accumulation; they want teaching of standardized courses. If students are not engaged in school, if they aren't coming to school, or if they are coming but they aren't engaged in their work then you are not going to see any success. (Interview #3, p. 7)

In the future, programming initiatives needs to expand the focus to engage students who are not accessing the programs. Several of the educational leaders indicated that the program was only targeting certain areas of the city where poverty rates were

elevated. Students who wanted to attend the program but who did not reside in the immediate school area, may have to travel across the city, outside their residential community. Several of the participants noted that it is time that the program be made available to Aboriginal students across the city since students and their families are spread out across the city.

There is some concern that the programs at this point engage the most extreme atrisk Aboriginal students; however, the students who were academically successful or who were raised in middle-class or upper class families are not being served. There is some apprehension that this may be viewed as a reverse discrimination affect, so it is important that the program begins to shift its focus to engaging all Aboriginal students regardless of their place of residence. It was noted that sometimes Aboriginal people have a tendency to live in extremes: extreme poverty and lack of success; or extreme success or perceived success; stability and families that support education to high-risk situation. The problems become apparent when students from stable homes and who had families that supported their education expressed to some of the educational leaders that they did not feel comfortable and had difficulty being with other at-risk students because they did not want to take away from the supports that were built-in to the activities being offered, or take away a student's spot in the program who might truly need it. For students who transferred to the school program from a distance, it was also sometimes difficult for them since there were really no Aboriginal student success teachers or academic advisors dedicated to helping them to plan their journey. Although there are youth advisors, more support is required to help Aboriginal students to select the right academic courses for the transition to post-secondary education and training, as well as to assist with acquiring the learning skills and social/emotional competencies necessary to increase rates of success.

Although it was believed that the lack of city-wide program offerings was directly related to limited funding or interest demonstrated by school staff, and not a criticism of the process itself, it was suggested that there needed to be a shift for programs to be more inclusive, as well as accountable to meeting the needs of all district-wide Aboriginal students and their families. In one instance, it was summarized by a participant:

I think it needs to be kind of more in the way of Aboriginal education. I mean, the programs offer in my opinion more social services. It provides food and bus tickets and those types of things. I think there needs to be more education from an Aboriginal perspective. For example, Aboriginal language classes, Aboriginal history, and I know they have things, but again, it just needs to be more broad for kids going to school where there is a small Aboriginal population too to access these types of programs. Cause it is just really, in my opinion it just pockets students in certain areas. I know that there are students that might transfer from one school to another just so they can attend that specific program. It's good that they can go there and access, but it is bad if they have to travel further. I don't think moving from school to school is necessarily a good thing. It's just ya know, if you are establishing relationships in one school why should you have to travel to access certain programs. (Interview #19, p. 4)

There is always room for the program concept to grow and advance. Regardless of the issues and challenges that currently exist, it is important to keep the momentum

going by having ongoing conversations to establish more effective models. There is no doubt that it will still require in-depth understanding, additional time for planning and reflection, and collaborative partnerships in order to support the organizational structures. In order to move things forward all stakeholders will need to collaboratively work together rather than leave the responsibility up to the certain individuals to oversee the progress. It was noted:

How many years has the program existed, and how many years have the

community programs existed and it's only one person coming to us to ask to work collaboratively...there needs to be some sort of common goals, and look at how it is all connected...I think that the boards and the community needs to have more of a common goal or a mission with the services. It's easier. (Interview #15, p. 4)

It will also be essential to provide opportunities for the educational leaders who are committed to Aboriginal education to grow professionally. It is important to make the circle not only stronger by inviting others to join. Certainly, the role of the educational leaders as caregivers needs to be valued and fully supported by providing them with plenty of opportunities to use their voice. It is believed that if this program did not exist a lot of students would fall through the cracks, so there is hope that the programs will be fully adopted by the school boards and that Aboriginal departments will be created.

Accordingly, it was put forward by most educational leaders that the programming needed to begin at the elementary level and work its way up. To achieve these goals,

everyone needs to remain committed and united.

Chapter Six: Summary Discussion of the Research Findings and Conclusions

This chapter is a summary of the research findings, lessons learned from the research findings, as well as key recommendations to support caring school-community-family relationships for urban Aboriginal students. Culturally relevant educational framework models are also detailed. This section also includes key questions for educational leaders to consider and pathways for educational leaders to reflect on when creating sustainable, caring relationships and respectful school, family, and community partnerships.

6.1 Summary Discussion of the Lessons Learned

In relation to this study, it was apparent the public and separate school systems are relatively complex and are continually under reform to reflect the needs of the Aboriginal community. Many Aboriginal people have continued to view education models from a holistic viewpoint with the idea that education is a lifelong process that begins at birth and continues to the end of life. Based on traditional worldviews many Aboriginal people continue to be raised to respond to experiences by ensuring that their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual issues are addressed. However, with the situation as it stands, there is a shared concern by educational leaders that urban Aboriginal students face several barriers that hinder their ability to reach their full potential and hence their holistic well-being. An additional concern suggested by the educational leaders were that educational policies and practices being carried out today do not always reflect the immediate needs of the educational leaders in addition to the urban Aboriginal communities they support.

More conscious efforts by educational leaders across Canada are needed for the advocacy for change that leads to Aboriginal student success in schools systems; specifically, for educational leaders at the system level to address the most current community issues (ranging from educational attainment, to self-esteem, to mental wellness, to poverty), so educational leaders at the local level are empowered to address the academic, cultural, social, and economic needs of the Aboriginal students in a caring manner, in a manner that ultimately establishes relationships and school-family-community partnerships. The result is that educational leader's need adequate time and support to provide up-to-date programming for Aboriginal students and at every step of this process, they need to work together with all committed stakeholders to build respectful, innovative partnerships that are sustainable.

Several of the educational leaders noted that they were still not always clear about the extent of their roles and responsibilities, and they were sometimes not clear of the delivery methods of the existing Aboriginal programs since their time was so limited for building information sharing networks. Regardless, the educational leaders were committed to work through the challenges to ensure the barriers were being removed for Aboriginal students. Literature written by Clarke and Drudy (2006); Dimmock and Walker (2007); Joshee and Johson (2007), and Stephen and Stephen (2004) supported the notion that regardless of the existing issues and challenges, it is essential for educational leaders to continue to make efforts for educational reform. In reflecting on the work of Lavall's (2003), organizations need to re-evaluate how they deliver programming so they move away from structures associated with hierarchy, authority, and control and seek to identify what they need to do to shift their organizational practices to be accepting of

Aboriginal ways of knowing. As discussed in this study, frameworks for Aboriginal education are evolving to reflect Aboriginal beliefs and value systems and their holistic practices. These changes are being made to inspire, motivate, and support Aboriginal student success.

It was important to understand and acknowledge the genuine efforts made by caring educational leaders who chose to go beyond their regular workplace duties to address the challenges and limitations that urban Aboriginal students experience. The vision for urban Aboriginal stay-in-school initiatives should not only aim to improve the achievement gap among Aboriginal youth, but seek to remove a whole host of barriers so Aboriginal youth can reach success. This idea is supported by the work of Silver, Mallet, Greene, and Simard (2002) who indicated that educational leaders need to look at the underlying issues rather than seek to address the surface issues. This concept is also supported by the works for Kanu (2006) who suggested that educational leaders need to take the time to understand their students so they can comprehend what issues and challenges might impact student success. What is certain is that there is an ongoing need to further understand and address the underlying issues (ranging from poverty to mental well-being) that extend beyond academics and culture between urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. For example, many educational leaders were committed to assisting Aboriginal youth to ensure they had bus tickets to get to school on time, or had access to laundry services, or were provided with opportunities to enroll in courses that reflected Aboriginal heritage and culture. The benefit of understanding the underlying issues was noted in the works of Cassidy and Bates (2005) and Noddings (2003) where it was pointed out that educators will likely be inspired by the lower rates of student

success and therefore seek to establish effective programs and supports through the processes of engrossment and motivational displacement.

Through the study of an Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative, a more in-depth understanding about the perceived roles of the educational leader as a caregiver and their attempts to balance Aboriginal and mainstream ethic of care theories in various school system sectors was required. Since the main objective of the Aboriginal stay-in-school initiative was to provide support and advocate for the overall success of the learners, this study affirmed that the participation of educational leaders as caregivers was one of the essential contributing factors for addressing the barriers that at-risk urban Aboriginal students faced. Consequently, this research study revealed that the main advantage of the Aboriginal stay-in-school program was that it brought the students together and made them feel comfortable and at ease with their identity. Educational leaders were also encouraged by the numerous benefits that emerged as a result of the Aboriginal stay-inschool program, such as the human, financial, and cultural resources that enabled the school curriculum changes and supports to move forward so that they could begin to start integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and begin providing the necessary supports to implement the revised curriculum into the whole school-community. The recommendation for school-wide reform was in line with the works of Banks (1995) and Coker-Bolo (2002).

Educational leaders need to continue to build on their own educational pedagogies to include knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal peoples (i.e. traditions, practices, and philosophies), their varied realities, as well as their existing issues and challenges, so they can work to generate a purpose that is meaningful, and a vision that is generated in

collaboration with all the key stakeholders. Due in part to the limited time allotted for planning, besides not knowing for sure what the most ideal approaches to implement, or know where to find quality resources and support materials, educational leaders are challenged. It is especially difficult for the leaders to interpret (on their own and sometimes in isolation) what materials and school-community supports (i.e. counselling, laundry services, etc.) would be beneficial to the Aboriginal learners and what materials and approaches would be aligned with the Ministry of Education requirements. More so, strategic planning, professional development, and authentic resource materials need to be further developed to align with the actual needs and philosophies of the urban Aboriginal communities. In summary, educational leaders need to work together towards improving the school systems' vision, goals, and objectives of the stay-in-school initiative. The concept of improving the school systems' vision, goals, and objectives as well as developing communities of professional learners is aligned with the works of Mulford (2008) who defined a process that took into account several transformational and distributed leadership approaches so that trust and commitment were affirmed among all school, family, and community stakeholders. More specifically, Mulford's framework showed the importance of building collaborative and sustainable partnerships by taking into account the strengths of the individual leaders and distributing responsibilities to create the conditions for stability, independence, community, and heterogeneity.

It was recommended by a number of participants that for the Aboriginal stay-inschool initiative to continue to evolve professional development activities, as well as professional development networking opportunities, needed to be improved to support the whole community. Since there were little ongoing Aboriginal-specific professional development activities or collaborative networks in place, it was recommended by the participants in this study that educational leaders (at all levels) need to take the time to get to know their student population, in addition they need to identify the community stakeholders that could sufficiently support them with the change process. In order to become more proficient in delivering the stay-in-school initiative, recommendations were also put forward by most of the participants for regular formal, collaborative knowledgebuilding opportunities that explore how to strategically increase Aboriginal student achievement and success with emphasis on ways to address the educational gaps and what supports are available for curriculum development. Many educational leaders of this study stated that there needs to be a strong push for locally-designed professional development experiences and the development of resources that address the unique challenges of the Aboriginal community resources that meets the needs of the various groups of Aboriginal students. Although educational leaders reported they have made several attempts in the past to attend professional development opportunities to learn about best practices, they found it sometimes difficult to know how to authentically integrate the new concepts into their own practices since the context and situations (e.g. people group) were somewhat different.

The educational leaders identified that they needed additional planning time and more one-on-one support concerning how to implement culturally relevant resources into their curriculum in a respectful way, and in a manner that engages both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, and in a way that will perhaps positively affect the families and community as a whole. Further, the participants recommended that more authentic, culturally relevant curriculum resource supports such as textbooks, videos, teacher guide

books, etc. needed to be made available by the local school boards perhaps through an integrated collaborative network either in-person or online. In this instance, more organization and consistency of efforts from the school, family, and community would assist all educational leaders to identify the main issues and which can lead to continued positive changes in the delivery of urban Aboriginal education.

6.2 Recommendations to Support Caring School-Family-Community Relationships for Urban Aboriginal Students

The summary of the results taken from this research study have been used to develop a framework model to inform educational leaders how to develop a caregiving relationship by addressing the individual needs of the urban Aboriginal students. This framework was further informed by the review of literature, including the theories of an ethic of care with special consideration for Noddings (1992) statement, "Caring cannot be achieved by formula. It requires address and response; it requires different behaviours from situation to situation and person to person" (p. xi). The educational leaders who continue to seek relevant pathways for urban Aboriginal education in the public and separate education systems may find the framework helpful in the planning processes given that school districts are being challenged by the Aboriginal community and government education departments. Programming models as well as leadership and teaching practices are shifting to demonstrate characteristics of inclusive urban Aboriginal education. As a result, the educational pathways for this model were for the most part informed by relevant literature as well as listening to the voices of the educational leaders involved in this research study.

The results of this research study strongly supported Avery's (1995) work that suggests all issues related to Aboriginal students and their communities need to be dealt with based on an individual basis rather than school-wide. In addition, the literature from, but not limited to, Cassidy and Bates, 2005; Katz, 2007; Noddings, 1984; 2002; Palmer, Cooper, and Bresler, 2001; and, Waterhouse, 2004 supported the view that it is not our responsibility to resolve the issues, but it is our responsibility to provide a respectful, caring school-community environment. Accordingly, the results of research study strongly supported the literature by affirming the notion that it is important that educational leaders not place judgement on the Aboriginal students and their families, but set goals to support their personal issues and challenges through a process of receptivity, engrossment, and selfless commitment in order to discover ways to inspire and motivate Aboriginal learners. The literature from, but not limited to Buback, (1995); Greene (1997); and Kryza, Stephens, and Duncan (2007) supported the results of the research study by suggesting that leaders need to support Aboriginal learners to reach selfactualization by following a process that seeks to identify the student needs, targets what exists, and looks for ways to inspire and motivate students. It also affirmed the importance of assisting democratic organization (social equity) to better understand themselves as educational leaders while at the same time participate in a collaborative process. The teachings of the Medicine Wheel and ethic of care theories were also used in the development of this model as they provided insight into how to effectively create ways for building caring, collaborative relationships. A brief summary of the overall recommendations for supporting the process of building caring school, family, and community relationships for urban Aboriginal students are listed as follow:

- Aim to build holistic, caring, and collaborative school-family-community
 relationships and networks to improve the urban Aboriginal learners' well-being
 that identify with Aboriginal beliefs and values to inspire, motivate, and support
 Aboriginal student success.
- 2. Take the time to observe and actively listen to the Aboriginal students and their families. Ask essential questions to understand their individual needs, appreciate their way of thinking, and honour their stories and experiences.
- Demonstrate a genuine willingness to provide a high level of care and support so
 the concepts of harmony, balance, and interconnectedness within the collaborative
 relationship will be realized.
- 4. Develop a well-thought out 'individualized care and support plan' that involves the participation of a collaborative network of school-family-community partners who are willing to selflessly commit themselves throughout the duration of the program experience.
- 5. The plan needs to look at identifying the following: (a) the individual needs of Aboriginal students and their families; (b) the existing barriers and challenges; (c) goals, strategies, and programming that addresses academic, cultural, social, and economic needs; (d) authentic ways to explore Aboriginal student identity, heritage and culture (i.e. including methods of communication, diverse traditions, practices, belief and value systems); (e) roles and responsibilities of the caregivers based on area of expertise; and (f) next steps for student success and/or student transitions.

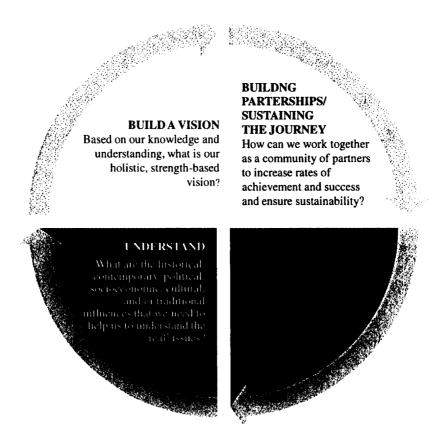
- 6. Take time to identify approaches to implement quality professional development activities and professional development networking opportunities, and identification of culturally relevant curriculum resource and support materials that are aligned with the Ministry of Education requirements and the needs of the Aboriginal communities.
- 7. Monitor Aboriginal student success by establishing benchmark goals with measurables and assessing the effectiveness of the supports in place.
- 8. It is likely that a caregiving relationship that promotes harmony, balance, and interconnectedness among the worldviews has likely been achieved by following the recommended approaches.
- Take time to honour and share the success stories of the school-familycommunity partners involved.
- 10. Provide encouragement for educational leaders to continue to build on their own educational pedagogies to include knowledge and understanding of urban Aboriginal peoples (i.e. traditions, practices, and philosophies), varied realities, as well as their existing issues and challenges, so they can work to generate a shared purpose.

Pathways for Building Caring Relationships

The first part of the recommended framework demonstrates to educational leaders that it is imperative to follow the principles of empathetic listening, a process used to build understanding, resolve conflict, and gain trust in order to improve cross-cultural communication. The process of empathetic listening can be used in this instance to acknowledge the voices of all stakeholders by asking key questions at different stages of

the process in order to (1) understand the issues, (2) work together to build a vision, (3) build partnerships, and (4) sustain the journey.

Figure 2: Pathway for Building Caring Relationships



It is important to keep the description of the framework in mind since it highlights the importance that educational leaders need to take the time to actively listen and seek ways to understand, at a deeper level, more than one way of knowing, so that they can implement sustainable solutions. This model suggests that educational leaders first must be willing to observe and listen to the community while at the same time ask, "What do you need from us?" Second, educational leaders must look to understand, "What are the historical, political, socioeconomic, and cultural and traditional influences that we need to

understand to help us to understand 'real' issues?" Third, educational leaders must develop a shared vision and establish a collaborative network of community leaders who are committed experts in their field. Additionally, educational leaders should ask, "Based on our knowledge and understanding, what is our holistic vision?" Educational leaders must understand that it is their collective responsibility to reflect on the issues and identify (and carry out) meaningful and sustainable solutions that will provide well-being and establish balance, harmony, and interconnectedness among Aboriginal community members and their schools especially at times when disharmony exists. To overcome periods of dissonance and misunderstanding educational leaders need to ask the question, "How can we work together as a community of partners to increase Aboriginal student success and achievement and ensure sustainability?". By working through the series of questions, the initial part of the framework provides educational leaders with an essential pathway of guiding questions that should encourage school-community stakeholders to put aside general organizational interests for the purpose of remaining focused on the individual needs of urban Aboriginal students and their families.

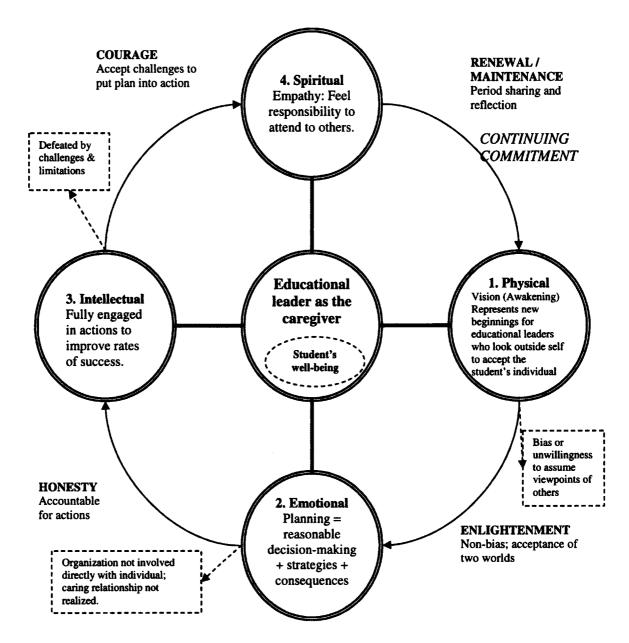
'Circle of Caring Criterion' for Educational Leaders to Support Urban Aboriginal
Students and their Families

An in-depth framework for educational leaders could be followed to develop and support a caring school-family-community environment for at-risk urban Aboriginal students using background information taken from the proposed preliminary model (see Figure 1) combined with the results of this research study. The updated framework proposes that it is critical for all educational leaders to utilize traditional ways of understanding how to support community-based issues (see Figure 3). It also speaks to

the fact that all Aboriginal students and their families do not share the same issues and challenges. By following this approach, it will honour the traditional ways and experiences, as well as seek to provide opportunities to affirm school-family-community relationships.

As such, the framework starts out at the centre of the circle with the educational leaders and the student's well-being as the central focus. In this position, the educational leader is willing to take the time to understand and appreciate the importance of going above and beyond (over-extending themselves) their regular workplace duties to act as a caregiver and recognize there are many ways to create meaningful pathways for urban Aboriginal youth. All educational leaders must aspire selflessly to commit themselves throughout the duration of their involvement with the program and to be willing to provide a safe and inclusive environment that aims to improve the urban Aboriginal learners' well-being by meeting their academic, cultural, social, and economic needs. Here, the leader must be open-minded and accepting of other educational paradigms. They must also be willing to work in collaboration with other school-family-community members ranging from teachers, to paraprofessionals, to community Elders. The following model is a suggested approach that integrates teachings from the Medicine Wheel that educational leaders can utilize to educate at-risk urban Aboriginal students. The intent behind the approach is to assist Aboriginal students find their sense of purpose and to help create hope for future generations.

Figure 3: Quest for Social Justice (Balance and Harmony) in Education: "Circle of Caring Criterion" for Educational Leaders to Support Urban Aboriginal Students



Stage 1 (physical): The eastern direction represents a phase of new awakening and new beginnings. It is a period of time where educational leaders need to be prepared to look outside themselves for the purpose of understanding and acknowledging the individual needs of their students. Cardona (2000) and Sanders, Hopkins, and Geroy

(2003) supported the notion that leaders need to be prepared to follow Maslow's revised hierarchy of needs theory. This theory acknowledges the value of transcendental motivation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders for the purpose of assisting individuals to realize their full potential by building caring relationships in order to reach self-actualization. In preparing to support urban Aboriginal youth, it is the responsibility of each educational leader, acting as a caregiver, to introduce themselves and share their own personal history with the Aboriginal students and their families to initiate an open and honest dialogue. The work of St. Denis (2010) is aligned with supporting the notion to affirm a relationship with Aboriginal students and their families, educational leaders must take the time to listen closely to the Aboriginal students' day-to-day needs, understand their way of thinking, and honour their stories and experiences. It is also important to make efforts to engage the family members to give honour to their voices.

Although it sometimes takes a substantial amount of time to listen intently to the voices of others while gathering background information, it is expected that in actively or empathetically listening, educational leaders will become better informed and prepared to demonstrate respect, a firm commitment, and to be fair in their judgment of others. The process of listening will also demonstrate an acceptance for the values that the Aboriginal students and their families possess that includes an appreciation for multiple ways of knowing. Kerfoot's (2001) and St. Denis (2010) supported the framework model by stating that if educational leaders are able to understand the individual needs of the students and their families and furthermore accept there are other ways of knowing, then it is likely they will be willing to accommodate the needs of diverse groups. Whatever the case, educational leaders must seek to develop a shared vision. This process will

inevitably expand their own beliefs and values, and hopefully will inspire them to embrace Aboriginal culture and historical and contemporary perspectives.

For those who are bias and/or unwilling to assume the viewpoint of others for whatever reason, it is likely that they will not participate in the actions required to establish a caring relationship. Cardona (2000) supported this framework model by indicating that leaders need to focus on the needs of the individuals being cared for rather than their own personal or professional needs as leaders. Additional efforts are sometimes needed to convince other individuals to see the value of being part of delivering supports to diverse groups by inviting them to become involved in taking small steps like attending school-community events and speaking with the students, families, educators, and community members. By learning about the culture, or the impact of the historical and contemporary issues on Aboriginal people, it helps educators to build understanding, awareness, and quality relationships. Coker-Kolo (2002) affirmed the importance of eliminating bias to inspire and motivate others to expand their belief systems by providing essential individualized supports to individuals. Stage 2 (social/emotional): Since the intent of following this process is primarily to offer support and instil pride within the Aboriginal student population, the educational leader must be willing to provide a high level of care and support, so that the result of balance and harmony within the relationship can be realized by developing a well-thought-out plan with the best interests of the students in mind. Fallows and Ahmet, 1999; Kerryfoot, 2001; Kryza, Stephens, and Duncan, 2007 supported the notion that intervention strategies that seek to inspire and motivate students, and those that involve other stakeholders have longer lasting effects as they build awareness and understanding. In

this instance, the care and support will need to involve inspiring and motivating others to reach their full potential, making reasonable decision-making plans, identifying key strategies, and forecasting the potential consequences of the student-centred plan in action. Thus, educational leaders should be encouraged to look at each situation separately since Aboriginal youth not only have different internal desires and levels of abilities, but also methods of communication, and diverse traditions, practices, as well as belief and value systems.

Some urban Aboriginal youth also have different understandings of what it really means to be Aboriginal based on their connection to the community and what has been shared with them. Discussions about the seven generations philosophy (i.e. past, present, and future) will help the students to reflect on and identify how they want to choose to live their lives. Hence, it is necessary to look at identifying the individual needs of Aboriginal students and their families (i.e. academic, cultural, social, and economic), as well as identify the barriers and challenges that might prevent them from achieving their hopes and dreams. With these findings, a coordinated student action plan can be developed. Educational leaders might help Aboriginal students and their families to go through the process of general prioritization of school-related issues and assess where these new, inter-related items like clothing, transportation, healthcare, nutrition, cultural supports, and other issues fall on the list. The plan may also need to look for authentic ways to explore Aboriginal student identity, as well as heritage and culture, which reflects the urban Aboriginal community. St. Denis (2010) supported the importance of taking the time to understand the whole-child (i.e. physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually). Since most of the issues are interconnected, programming pathways must

also incorporate authentic delivery methods like circular logic concepts mixed with traditional teachings. For example, symbolism like the circle and Medicine Wheel are important to include since it focuses on the values of respect, equality, interconnectedness, and continuity. It also highlights the importance of working together to find balance and harmony in building capacity for culturally relevant programs and supports.

For educational leaders, learning about Aboriginal-specific learning perspectives, character virtues, pedagogical content knowledge, among other issues, through a variety of methods like, but not limited to, literature, professional development workshops, and mentorship supports (i.e. Elders/Traditional teachers, researchers, teachers, youth advisors, and community members) will provide educational leaders with the opportunity to reflect on and merge other ways of knowing in order to expand their educational worldview. In particular, it is important to make certain the educational leaders have an authentic learning experience by implementing the knowledge and expertise of the Aboriginal community. This can be done by inviting Elders and other Aboriginal community experts to share their 'gifts'. Certainly, it is helpful for educational leaders to learn about the vast array of issues that affect Aboriginal people from their learning and communication styles, Native arts and culture, healthcare, political, justice, and housing, to poverty issues.

At this stage, it is imperative for the leader to be accountable for their actions by ensuring they remain the primary caregiver in the delivery of the program. As such, the individual caregiver may need to take on several roles. For example, educational leaders might be responsible for helping the students discover who they are as an Aboriginal

person while helping them to find that balance and sense of pride as they straddle two worlds. As for the leaders who pass the responsibility of carrying out the plan to another person and fail to remain directly and actively involved, a caring relationship cannot be realized and the process ceases to move forward.

Stage 3 (intellectual): The educational leader seeks to achieve balance and harmony as related to social justice by directly engaging in the delivery of the framework. As a result, the leader must demonstrate the courage and wisdom to look for ways to overcome the challenges and limitations posed by the Aboriginal students and their families to proceed. The education leader's success is dependent on their ability to work collaboratively with the student, family, and other school-community stakeholders as well as to accept full responsibility to carry out the plan accordingly. This includes collaborating with other school and community stakeholders who are equally committed to provide ongoing support to urban Aboriginal students. It is important for the educational leaders to clearly identify their roles and responsibilities based on their own knowledge and expertise, and to be prepared to be true to themselves, and to identify other key individuals that can help to fill the gaps where deficits exist.

Within the student action plan it is essential also to make considerations for the next steps for student success while aiming to enhance students' self-esteem and develop self-advocacy skills. For example, the educational leaders may work with at-risk students to assist with course credit recovery, or they may also work with the students and their families to access ongoing Aboriginal-specific supports and guidance in the areas of life skills, nutrition, health promotion, role model programs, employment and training, community counselling, heritage and cultural teachings, among other areas, that may not

be available within the regular school system. In addition, the educational leaders may also work with the students to establish transition plans that include career education pathways with a focus on options for post-secondary education and other employment and training experiences. The transition plan should look to address other issues that might negatively impact their chance at success like access to reasonably priced housing and transportation.

Throughout this process, it is important to monitor student success to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the Aboriginal students by establishing benchmark goals with measurables and assessing the effectiveness of the supports in place. It is also important to start to work with students to develop strong communication and leadership skills so that they could become self-advocates and be better prepared for the 21st century. It is essential for the educational leaders to have courage and not be discouraged by the challenges and limitations they may experience. For example, Henze and Vanett (1993) stated that not all Aboriginal students understand their unique heritage and culture, so it might take additional time for students to find their own balance between the two worlds. In addition, if the culturally and socially relevant programs and supports are not accessible, it may mean working in collaboration with others to put into place those key deliverables. Sometimes, the students can simply start to build understanding of the issues by enrolling in Native Studies courses, or find a safe space like a resource room supported by full-time Aboriginal youth and cultural workers, or participate in Aboriginal student leadership activities. Other times applying for external grants to cover the costs of extended programming like regular Elder mentorship visits or acquiring appropriate resources for the classroom is helpful. According to St. Denis (2010) a number of best

practices examples exist across Canada where educational leaders have made sincere efforts to expand the curriculum to include meaningful, hands-on experiences that not only relate to the 'real world', but also promote academic, social, emotional and moral growth and development for Aboriginal students.

Stage 4 (spiritual): At the final stage of the process, if the educational leader has successfully passed through each of the phases of the model and engaged the Aboriginal learner and their family members, then likely a caregiving relationship that promotes balance between two worldviews has been achieved. Consequently, if the educational leaders reach this stage, it is likely they would have been engaged and accepted full responsibility in promoting change and, demonstrating a willingness to make a continuing commitment to the student's social and economic needs by looking for ways to renew and maintain the caring relationship. At this stage, it is essential for the leader to take the time to reflect on and share their experiences with all school-family-community stakeholders. In addition, it is important that they act as advocates for Aboriginal education by participating in committees that are strongly dedicated to improving Aboriginal educational programming and supports.

The framework demonstrates to educational leaders that a holistic, inclusive, ethical, and collaborative approach is beneficial for increasing rates of urban Aboriginal student achievement, engagement, and success. If educational leaders choose to continue to ignore the voices of the Aboriginal community and their needs, it is likely that a caregiving relationship will not be realized. In addition, without successes for this marginalized group in the educational context, devastating effects on the society as a

whole will continue to be experienced. Kerfoot (2002) posits that leaders who make the effort to inspire others offer hope for self-sustainable, caring communities to exist.

6.3 Final Comments

Like any other school program there are still areas for growth and improvement. It is necessary that individuals committed to supporting urban Aboriginal students achieve their full potential and continue to work in collaboration with each other on addressing the issues and challenges. In order to turn the school education systems around, the educational leaders needed to realize that it was important to reach beyond themselves by seeking out experts who can support and implement a shared vision; a vision that includes the notion of caring for the academic, cultural, social, and economic needs of urban Aboriginal students and their families. It was also imperative that all stakeholders needed to be not only morally responsible, but also committed to taking their time to implement new and respectful programming so that caring relationships are affirmed and rates of success for urban Aboriginal youth continue to improve.

At times, people's lack of theoretical and practical knowledge to meet the unique needs of Aboriginal people has had a negative impact on urban Aboriginal peoples and to some degree accounted for the current challenging circumstances for Aboriginal students. For this reason, educational leaders need to make stronger efforts to learn from history and make changes so mistakes are not repeated. Educational leaders need to make a concerned, maximum effort to turn things around. Educational leaders also need to learn from cultural experiences and through formal and informal educational experiences with the goal of acquiring theoretical and practical knowledge that can help close the

significant gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives. By continuing to share best practices and ensuring the most suitable conditions exist for urban Aboriginal students to complete their education, it is believed that Aboriginal students will experience more success to meet 21st century demands.

As a result of this study, resulted in recommendations and a framework for school, family, and community stakeholders to begin to work together to reform existing policies and practices so that the conditions to support a holistic, culturally appropriate educational framework that makes an investment into academic, cultural, social, and economic innovations are focused. The findings revealed that it is essential for educational leaders to take the time to develop trust because of the oppressive history of Aboriginal people. As such, educational leaders who support urban Aboriginal students need to be committed to building trust and recognizing that this process takes time.

Overall, by learning to respect, care, trust, and share an authentic community spirit, one seeks to help ourselves and others.

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Proposed Participants

Interview Guide for Educational Leaders

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview process. The purpose of this study is explore the educational leaders' roles, responsibilities, and relationships as care providers in response to meeting the socioeconomic needs of urban Aboriginal children and youth in the Canadian public school system. The information that you will contribute will help to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges that exist, as well as to provide information to policy makers, school systems, government, and Aboriginal organizations to fulfill their understanding of existing best practices. The aim of the study is to create a culturally-relevant leadership framework that defines perceived caring relationships so that educational leaders who are faced with the challenges of restructuring programs, can identify key priorities and/or strategies that will inspire learners and increase rates of participation and success among urban Aboriginal students. In participating in this research study, it can be assumed that confidentiality and anonymity of the data will be maintained, within the limitations of the law.

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- 13. Describe your education and related experience working in the field of providing support to urban Aboriginal students?
- 14. How do you perceive your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program? (The term 'care giver' refers to the individual in an educational support network who reaches beyond their regular day-to-day duties to identify and support the individual needs of students.)
- 15. How do you *modify* your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program?
- 16. How do you *implement* your roles and responsibilities as a 'caregiver' within the urban Aboriginal school program?
- 17. What are you doing to inspire and motivate Aboriginal learners to ensure they are prepared for a modern, knowledge-based society?
- 18. What are some methods that you follow to carry out assessments to identify the unique needs of the urban Aboriginal students?
- 19. How are you motivated to follow an 'ethic of care'? (The term 'ethic of care' details the process of being receptive, engrossed, and selflessly committed in attitude and actions while at the same time responding to the individual needs of others in society based on their ethics and morality as well as their acceptance for justice and equity.)
- 20. How can you be motivated to go beyond addressing academics and culture to address broader issues such as social and economic issues?
- 21. How and why do you first identify and secondly prioritize the inherent challenges and limitations before you can provide an ethic of care for urban Aboriginal students within the context of the schools' policies and practices?
- 22. How do you address these challenges and limitations, or should you (or do you) disregard them altogether?
- 23. In your opinion, how and why can the challenges, limitations, and approaches used adversely impact the goals and rationales at the provincial, board, school, and/or Aboriginal community levels, or should they?
- 24. Is there anything concerning your roles, responsibilities, and relationships as a care provider to urban Aboriginal students that I have not asked that you would like to provide additional information on?

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