FOUR LHEIDLI T'ENNEH FAMILIES' EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

Initiatives designed to understand the discrepancy in graduation rates and investigate educational possibilities for First Peoples across Canada recognize it is vital to consider the local contexts of Indigenous peoples’ experiences with educational systems and their perspectives on learning. No recent studies have explored the local Lheidli T’enneh First Nations’ (LTFN) context relative to their member’s educational needs and expectations. This study engaged four multi-generational LTFN families’ lived experiences of public education including their expectations of the system. Their stories reflected three topic areas fundamental to this research: (1) relationships within the school, (2) pedagogy, and (3) curriculum. From a decolonizing Indigenous lens and using a qualitative methodology within an Indigenous research paradigm, common themes were identified from the participant narratives and are presented alongside existing literature. The findings reveal that Lheidli T’enneh families hold education in high regard and have hope for greater school communication, student support, consistency, and cultural inclusivity within school environments. Most importantly along with learning the basics, these families expect the education system to support students in developing their identity, strengthening their confidence and preparing them for life beyond school.

Keywords: Education, First Nations Education, Indigenous Perspectives, Lheidli T’enneh
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It is my privilege to have you all in my life. Snachailhuya¹!

¹ Dakelh for ‘I am thankful to all of you for what you have done’
Dedication

For my late mom who inspired me,

my family and the Lheidli Whut’en\(^2\) who guide me,

all our precious Settler and Indigenous youth

of our past, our present and our future.

\(^2\) The people of where the two rivers converge.
Preamble

As an “insider” (Ganga & Scott, 2006; Smith, 1999) Indigenous researcher I considered many things as I planned and developed the focus of my research, created the proposal, recruited and engaged with participants, interpreted their contributions and developed a thesis that attempts to combine and communicate the information presented to me. My position matters: “By ‘insider’ research, we mean social interviews conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage” (Ganga & Scott, 2006, para 3). As an “insider” I have to consider my motivations and intentions and the intention and motivation of the community I engage with in the study. I have to ensure I recognize and declare any biases (prejudices, partialities, preconceptions, expectations, and impartialities).

I am introducing this at the onset because the first bias I acknowledge is my intention to engage the reader, keep them interested, and write so readers can understand the content. Quite often, the language of academia (school) is full of jargon (a vocabulary specific to that context) and may not be understood beyond that field. As I write, I aim to keep this in mind and use a basic vocabulary wherever possible. Where I find words needing elaboration I explain or at times use parentheses for clarification.

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3 Within Canada’s Indigenous population are many distinct groups that have their own names including the Inuit and Métis. When appropriate within a quotation or referential context, these various names may appear. For the purpose of this proposal, I use the various generally accepted terms as appropriate within their contexts such as Dakelh, Dene, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, First Peoples, Indian and Native interchangeably throughout this thesis to represent the Indigenous demographic population of Canada.
During my research into methodology (the how of my research), I encountered a new word, ‘positionality.’ Positionality is concerned with the perspective one has and how that perspective influences the research. As David Takacs (2003) explains:

Few things are more difficult than to see outside the bounds of your own perspective—to be able to identify assumptions that you take as universal truths but which, instead, have been crafted by your own unique identity and experiences in the world. We live much of our lives in our own heads, in a reconfirming dialogue with ourselves. Even when we discuss crucial issues with others, much of the dialogue is not dialogue: it is monologue where we work to convince others to understand us or to adopt our view. (p. 27)

In order to understand my positionality, which influences this research, I have to explore it in depth and find ways to communicate it to the reader. Having experienced and researched the topic of education as well as Indigenous pedagogy (ways of teaching and learning), I realize that what I am doing with my thesis is telling a story and weaving it with the stories of participants and the related literature.

Every one of us comes to the table with knowledge and experiences, be it personal or second-hand, which shapes our ability to understand the world and other inhabitants around us. As we read the news, engage in conversations, read narrative books and poetry, listen to music and through countless other ways, storytelling and the act of telling stories occur daily and this informs and develops our understanding of the world. We base our understanding of the world and our perspectives and interpretations on this foundation. Our experience helps us develop a vocabulary of knowledge, which is where our individual epistemology (how we come to know or understand in and of the world) emerges (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2013; Meyer, 2001, 2011). As mentioned, in the process of conducting this research, I recognise
that my epistemology influences and creates certain biases in my work. I intend to identify, expose and confront bias as it surfaces throughout this thesis. So, within this study, or “storywork” (Archibald, 2008), it is important for me to follow protocol by introducing myself and reflecting on my (hi)story, considering my origins, influences, experience and biases which have led me to explore the local stories around the topic of public education.

**My Position as Researcher**

Let us begin this story in the traditional Dakelh manner of self-introduction via relation to ancestral ties, which evolves into a short autobiography to help myself and readers understand my background and how it has lead us into this study.

I was born and raised in Prince George and have mixed ancestry. On my mother’s side, my late mother was born in Smithers, BC. She was named after her late mother, Mary Pete; I never had a chance to meet my grandmother as she passed around the time I was born. My grandfather on my mother’s side was the late Charlie Pete; I met him on two to three occasions by chance. From what I know, the assimilationist government policies of Canada such as the Indian Act and Residential School system affected multiple generations of my mother’s side of the family. The government broke familial ties by removing children from their homes, cultural customs were banned, languages were beaten out of children in Residential Schools and children were reared by the church and state leaving them

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4 Dakelh (the people who travel by boat), commonly known as “Carrier” are a cultural and linguistic group of First Nations people from the interior regions of British Columbia. The LTFN and the Witsuwit’en are a part of the Dakelh people whose language falls under the Dene, commonly known as the Northern Athabaskan language group. Various dialects exist among the Dakelh speaking nations; Dakelh culture is diverse amongst the nations.
unprepared to cope with modern society and take on their roles as parents and community members. These circumstances are often referenced and discussed within the media and academic writing on the history and education of the First Peoples of Canada (e.g. Assembly of First Nations, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Battiste, 2000, 2013; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2015; Smith, 1999; White Peters, Beavon and Spence, 2009).

My mother’s family is Witsuwit’en, meaning the “people of the Wa Dzun Kwuh River” (Morin, 2011) who are a part of the Dakelh Nation, which translates to the people who travel by water (aka Carrier). We belong to the Gitdumden (Bear/Wolf) clan in the house of Insggisgí (Where it Lies Blocking the Trail) with our house Chief Midiik (Grizzly Bear) (Morin, 2011). I came by this knowledge following the loss of my mother in 2011. My mom was removed from her family who were living on reserve at a young age (three) during a time often referred to as the ‘60’s Scoop.’

The term Sixties Scoop… refers to the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or band. The Sixties Scoop refers to a particular phase of a larger history, and not to an explicit government policy. Although the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families and into state care existed before the 1960s (with the residential school system, for example), the drastic overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system accelerated in the 1960s, when Aboriginal children were seized and taken from their homes and placed, in most cases, into middle-class Euro-Canadian families. This overrepresentation continues today. (Hanson, 2009c)
In the 60’s, my mother was fostered with three of her sisters to a non-Indigenous couple and their last names were legally changed. They grew up in this foster home in Smithers, which was about a thirty-minute drive from their family home and community. They often saw family around town but were not allowed to visit them. I do not know why the social workers only took these four girls from the family and not the others but I am grateful that most of my mother’s side of the family was able to stay together.

My biological grandparents on my mother’s side had a large family; however, the removal of four siblings from the family severed the familial and cultural connections causing further hardship. Compounding the issue, they felt that they were ostracised by their other siblings for their ‘privilege’ of being fostered into a well-off family. After graduating from high school my mom fell in love and moved to Prince George with my father. When they married, she welcomed the change to her last name; she was eager to leave her past behind having endured many hardships throughout her childhood due to her displacement and subsequent abuses while she was in foster care.

On my fathers’ side, I have French Canadian and Italian ancestry. My father was born in Port Alberni but has lived in, or near, Prince George most of his life. He still lives where my sisters and I were raised during our early childhood just outside city limits near the boundary of the one of the outlying reserves belonging to the Lheidli T’enneh.

My paternal grandmother was born in Prud’homme, Saskatchewan, and, according to research, her bloodline includes Métis ancestry. Her family previously lived in Quebec for seven or more generations and likely emigrated from France.

My grandfather on my father’s side was born in Udine Italy and immigrated with his family as a child in 1937 to Rossland, BC. After meeting and marrying my grandmother, they
raised a large family in Port Alberni. They eventually moved to Prince George to settle down and work in the family business on my grandmothers side as electricians.

I myself am a registered ‘Indian’ as defined in the Indian Act (1876) and have been registered with the Lheidli T’enneh (the people from the confluence of two rivers), who are also Dakelh. My mother made the decision to transfer herself and register my sisters and I into the Lheidli T’enneh band registry instead of the Moricetown Band (known as Witsuwit’en or Wet’suwet’en, also a Dakelh nation). She intended to stay in Prince George and not return to her home community where she was plagued with childhood trauma.

I identify myself as Dene and Nedo, a person of First Nations heritage and settler Canadian ancestry. In Dakelh (a Dene language), Dene means people and Nedo refers to settlers. All of my Dene and Nedo grandparents experienced various levels of cultural alienation and assimilation here in Canada. My familial background influences my worldview and helps me to draw inferences from both Western and Indigenous perspectives which is a valuable viewpoint for this thesis.

I was born in Prince George as the eldest of three girls. My mother had had a baby boy prior to meeting my dad but her foster parents made her give up the child. Later on, with our mother, we sought out the records for this sibling and discovered he had perished from crib death. Where my sisters and I grew up and the lifestyle we lived was different from how the average family of the day lived, however, it is not far from the upbringing many First Nations on reserve experience. My dad built a small single room trailer on the Nechako riverbank, distant from the luxury of paved and plowed roads, electricity, plumbing, sewage or central gas heating not to mention absence of cable television, a local store or telephone access. To some, it may sound like an impoverished condition to grow up in however, it was quite the opposite. What I experienced in my early years growing up off the grid, or ‘in the
woods’ as some would say, were the most influential experiences of my life. It shaped who I am and what I believe.

While living out on the Nechako, as well as in town, I was blessed with developing long-standing relationships with many Lheidli T’enneh members. Over the years, my family and I have been blessed with their knowledge, humour, the welcome into their Nation, their cultural knowledge sharing, language lessons, participation in community events, and the experiences of fishing and hunting. My family was lucky to have our home away from home, our family beyond our family here on Lheidli keyoh (land/territory) amongst the Lheidli whut’en (people). I am grateful and indebted to them.

I attended an elementary school within SD57 in an affluent area of town from Kindergarten through grade four. We had to drive about three kilometres down a logging road where part of the road skirted along the edge of the river and alongside some cut banks to wait at the last bus stop on the route for the school bus to pick us up. At times we found ourselves waiting for the bus in the dim morning light or walking home past sundown. Other times we might be stuck on one side of the cut banks or the other because of a mudslide or avalanche. It was always an adventure and we enjoyed that aspect of our lives.

School was exciting. It was our opportunity to meet and play with other kids outside of our family. Because we had little social interaction, due to our isolated location, we were often shy and rarely had friends over or opportunities to visit with our friends from school. Racism was not part of our vocabulary back then, but we did sense that we were looked upon and treated differently from time to time. I assumed it was because of where and how we lived or maybe it was discrimination. The neighbourhood within the school catchment area consisted of mostly affluent families who owned property and nice riverside houses, however, most of our close friends lived in the trailer court beside the school.
Our childhood summers were filled with adventure as we spent a lot of time getting firewood, hunting, salmon fishing and processing salmon (which my mom learned from Lheidli T’enneh members) who used to fish out on the Nichakoh (Nechako) or “strong undercurrent” River. We explored the great outdoors, swam in the river and used our imagination to create games of our own.

My parents split up when I was 10 years old. My mom moved us into Prince George. We changed schools and attended an inner-city school, missed our friends and had to adjust to living in a different setting. My mom wanted to work in the schools so she applied and obtained a position as an Aboriginal Education Worker. Those were tough times; we struggled financially, socially and emotionally. We were witness to and subject to abuse, bullying at school, as well as the shock of a close friend being murdered in our home. On the other hand, we had the unconditional love of our mother, who was amazing with children and who lived for us. We were everything to her and she did everything she could for us even though she was broken, unstable, confused and traumatized by her past. Our mother struggled with alcohol addiction her entire life and was not sober until her final few years. During this time, our father also encouraged us to do well in school and to stand up for ourselves. What I learned from him was persistence and to appreciate the beauty in nature. My parents helped me believe I could do anything I put my mind to if I really wanted it.

Elementary school was a blur as so many other things were going on at that time. It was hard making new friends and keeping old friends when we changed schools. Once we settled into our new lives, we found friendship with other students, mostly other First Nations students. We grew accustomed to the inner-city lifestyle and fell subject to the influences of drugs and alcohol; after all, it was all around us. Luckily, we had our parent’s high expectations and encouragement to keep us interested in school.
In high school it was interesting to reunite with peers from both of the elementary schools we attended. People had changed and developed their peer cliques so our relationships were not as they used to be before we changed elementary schools. I developed a strong passion for art as I was inspired by the teaching style of one of my art teachers. I remember he was very approachable, always smiling and allowed students to take what he taught them and explore beyond our instruction, giving us space to think, explore and create outside of the box. We were never given too much trouble for being late, missing classes or not doing the assignment exactly as he instructed. He offered a safe place in the school for any student to spend their time. He left our success in our hands and made us responsible for our choices by allowing us to make them and learn from them.

I also remember there were no First Nations teachers or administrators in the school. There was a part-time Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) whose office was beside the staff room. I did not find this AEW to be approachable and the room they had did not have much space. I believe it was in grade 10 when I acknowledged the absence of Indigenous role models in the school. I remember thinking “We (First Nations People) can do more than this. We can be teachers. We can be principals. We do not have to be regulated to support positions within the schools. We need more role models who can help us get through school.” That was when I decided I wanted to make a difference. Inspired by my mom’s efforts to make a difference for the kids at her school and motivated by what I believed was a deficiency in the system, I decided to take a career path in the education system as a teacher or administrator.

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5 I use singular non-binary pronouns to refer to individuals to respect that my judgement of their gender may not be accurate and as an effort to maintain participants’ confidentiality.
In my final high school years, I worked hard to achieve high academic standing. I managed to graduate with honours and received several scholarships and bursaries. I took a year off after graduation to move away to work and prepare for applying to art school. My plan was to obtain a degree in art then in education to follow my path. I was successful with my application to the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. After completing my arts degree, I moved forward in my journey to attend the UBC Bachelor of Education program specializing in Art Education. There was not a lot of education provided for teacher candidates to learn about First Nations, Métis or Inuit culture or history, not to mention how to integrate Indigenous concepts or content into the curriculum. I did not realize what was missing from the program at the time as I was just trying to get through the program. Within months of completing my education degree I applied to work within School District #57 in Prince George (SD57) as a teacher on call, and soon after got my first limited duration contract and within a few years got my first continuing contract.

Being a teacher on call was a huge learning experience. Moving from school to school, subject to subject and even teaching different languages and age groups with no previous experience led me to question my chosen field of work. The most difficult situations were arriving at new schools and not feeling welcomed at the office or in the staff room. Often times, staff would not even say hi and would just carry on their conversations and give awkward stares. When they would say “hi”, they would often assume or ask if I was a lost parent, the Aboriginal Education Worker or a teaching assistant. Not once was I asked who I was in (subbing/teaching) for. Even in the classrooms while I was teaching, and to this day still, if someone who does not know who I am enters my classroom, they will often not see me or they will ask me where the teacher is. These are just some examples of how stereotyping and intergenerational or covert racism exists within the teaching profession and
public school system. I do not blame people for their misguided perceptions or take these instances personally although they have created moments of frustration and discontent. I can understand and appreciate that history has created an ignorance within the population not the people themselves. I feel we are amidst a societal revolution of sorts where the old norms and the current situation are in dramatic flux. The underlying reality is that it will take time for people to acknowledge, realize and join this paradigm shift of fundamental changes in how society thinks, operates, understands, experiences and contributes to a more equitable future for everyone where Indigenous contributions are acknowledged, embraced and appreciated.

One thing I noticed over the years is the difference between those living in poverty and those considered as working or middle class. Sometimes teachers would talk about their next destination get-away, or their previous travels and where they take their kids for sports and vacations. Meanwhile, I thought I had it good but I still struggled with a tight budget. Like many low income families, I lived in cheap rental properties in a less favourable area of town and had yet to experience a family vacation. What I realized is that many of those teachers had little experience with living in low income or impoverished situations and could never fully understand what it is like to experience or live it. Their conversations bothered me, made me feel weak, underprivileged and even more aware of our difference. Even though they were not bragging and were not living exuberant lifestyles, it still made me feel smaller, and somehow I felt belittled. I know their conversation was just small talk and had no intention to make me feel how I was feeling but it did. I realized that different people interpret conversations or comments in different ways and at different times in their lives based on their situation and experience.

Since I have been teaching, in several schools and district settings, I have seen many changes. Due to the efforts of Indigenous peoples, government, school boards, staff and
allies, there have been dramatic changes in the school culture, including growing awareness and inclusion of Indigenous histories and perspectives in school curriculum. School District #57 was even the first to open an Aboriginal Choice School in BC; it is called Nusdeh Yoh (House of the Future). However, I have witnessed a gap in the ability of the education system to forge stronger relationships and connections with local First Nations as well as bring more of a local focus into mainstream classrooms. Locally focused resources, programs and teaching methods rooted in the local context are needed to help support teachers who do not have information and experience to draw upon.

As a teacher, I have focused my teaching career on being a positive role model. I have involved myself in areas where I can have an impact on policy and advance knowledge on First Nations history, language and culture within the Prince George community. In 2015 I was elected as the Prince George District Teachers Association Local Aboriginal Contact, where I have been working with teachers to bring forward opportunities and resources for teachers to learn about and teach about Indigenous histories and perspectives. This position has been effective as a venue to reach out to and build relationships within the entire teaching community within SD57.

I have also assisted with the development of three experiential learning courses at the University of Northern British Columbia. Developed in collaboration with local Aboriginal Elders, leaders and organizations, each of these courses focused on local Dakelh culture. Local Elders, with me as a teaching assistant, instructed the three projects. The courses included FNST 284 Dakelh Studies: Art and Material Culture with the carving of a traditional story on a dugout canoe, FNST 298/301 Dakelh Studies: The Dugout Canoe with the carving of a dugout cottonwood canoe, and FNST 161 Dakelh Studies: The Pit House with the creation of a pit house. Culture, language, history, Indigenous teaching styles and
contemporary perspectives were woven into each these collaborative experiential learning projects.

During that experience, I witnessed university students coming to realizations that learning did not have to come in the standard format of studying and writing. Many of them experienced and expressed their anxiety, feeling as if they were not learning or contributing enough in the class. Many were used to being driven by marks and grades so they had difficulty adjusting to the new teaching and learning style of the Elders. As they progressed through the courses they realized how their preconceptions of how and what they were going to learn through the courses were causing the anxiety and that what they were learning was individual for each of them. They had the opportunity to participate in a project and develop a community of learners who, similar to hearing a good story, would each walk away with a variety of knowledges and experiences that were not necessarily the same as their peers. In these courses students came to appreciate the experiential aspect of learning. This is documented in the short YouTubes for the Cottonwood canoe course and the Pit House course. I considered writing my thesis on the experiences of these students but I felt there was another story that would have greater impact within our community.

Instead, I chose a topic near and dear to my heart because I want to be fully invested in my research and want it to have an impact within our community. As my own children, nine-year-old twins, have begun their journey through the public education system, I have come to realize that youth today spend more time at school than any other place. Education is

6 See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDRa_QRhgFE for the 4 minute 37 second Cottonwood Canoe course film and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6gbm8Z2xfw for the Pit House course on YouTube.
a large part of a person’s youth and is important to their development and transition into adult life. What they experience here influences and affects not only their personal future but also the futures of those they came into contact with. I noticed that the voices of Indigenous families, including my own, are often not voiced or heard. Looking back at my history, I wondered what other Lheidli T’enneh members would say about their experiences within the school system and what they expected the school system to provide for their children, what their hopes are for our present and our future and what role they see the education system playing in the development of our future. In principle, because I could not find research specific to the LTFN concerning their experiences and expectations of the public education system, I chose to focus on the voices of LTFN families. I believe, as David Takacs (2003) does, that “everyone’s perspective is valued” and by providing space for individuals to tell their stories, ‘bias’ can be “seen as a resource that can help us each understand our positions in society, can help us gain some perspective on the assumptions we may blindly hold about each other” (p. 33).

My experiences as a Lheidli T’enneh member and experiences with the public education system as a student, parent, and teacher within SD57 and Teaching Assistant of the three First Nations Studies experiential learning courses at UNBC provide supplemental layers of understanding and interpretation reaching beyond my role as a student studying this topic. As an insider researcher, my experiences, values, assumptions, and passions influence and enhance my understanding and interpretation of the study and findings. The bias I present can warrant credibility and create a space of greater understanding of the findings as much as it can cause me to misunderstand and overlook aspects within this study. My hopes are that through this study I can unveil enough information to expand our knowledge base,
consider new perspectives and make space for new understandings and actions for the benefit of our youth, our communities, and our future.
Chapter 1: Overview

Promising practices\(^7\) for Aboriginal Education\(^8\) call for the inclusion of authentic Indigenous voices and perspectives with an emphasis on respecting and supporting local Aboriginal community involvement. This study provides a venue for families of the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation, located near Prince George, BC, to express their experiences, concerns and hopes for the public education system.

Over the past few decades, research in the field of Aboriginal Education has received a lot of attention yet limited action by the state. In Canada the efforts of scholars, individuals and communities have raised concerns while providing efforts towards improving the quality and conditions of public education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Numerous studies and reports (Assembly of First Nations, 2012a, & 2012b, 2013; Auditor General, 2015; Delorse, Al Mufti, Amagi, Carneiro, & Chung & Geremek, 1996; Graham & Ireland, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Kovacs, 2009; Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, 2015b) identify concerns and barriers to student success within education. These documents expose considerations and recommendations to the public and associated governing bodies in an attempt to inspire

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\(^7\) I prefer to use the term ‘promising practices’ over ‘best practices’ because although they have proven beneficial to our aims they may actually not be the best practices.

\(^8\) In this thesis, the term Aboriginal Education includes the education of and about Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Over the course of history, this topic has taken on several terms including Indian Education, First Nations Education, Aboriginal Education and Indigenous Education. These terms are synonymous, however the term Aboriginal and Indigenous are inclusive of the Métis and Inuit people, whereas First Nations and Indian are not.
positive change. These reports have influenced and sparked some important modifications to policy and procedures nationwide. Efforts have focused on development of inclusive governing processes along with new programs, curriculum and resources. The most recent developments in British Columbia have brought about the restructuring of the provincial curriculum to focus on the individual growth of students in a culturally competent manner. The new curriculum aims to allow districts and teachers the flexibility to create new learning environments and processes; to develop critical thinkers who can communicate effectively and find their way in society by understanding the various perspectives and interrelationships within and beyond their community and knowledge base.

Aboriginal Education within the structure of the new curriculum puts the onus on teachers and districts to consider and include Aboriginal perspectives throughout every grade and subject. It tasks our educators to involve the local Aboriginal communities to provide local contexts. Some districts have developed strong ties with their Aboriginal communities to develop Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), Aboriginal Educational Enhancement Agreements (AEEAs) and Local Educational Agreements (LEAs) along with curriculum and resources to help support their educators. In other districts, these relationships have yet to be developed or supported. School District #57 (SD57) is a district that is lacking local resources and agreements to aide in the implementation of the new curriculum.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2015c) has developed an *Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives in the classroom: Moving forward* document to help guide educators on how to include Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives within their classrooms. The implications highlighted within their document reflect the same implications found throughout the literature. Key themes include: the importance of creating welcoming and safe learning environments, developing a sense of belonging and identity within youth, providing
supports for youth and families to succeed, acknowledging and including the history and lasting impacts of colonization, embracing locally developed learning resources and, most importantly, co-operative control over the education of youth to achieve these goals. The significance of including worldviews and perspectives of local Aboriginal populations builds authenticity into the learning and is integral to meeting the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners and communities.

The local Indigenous context of Prince George is poorly understood. The greater community of Prince George has just begun to learn about the history of the First Nations within the region. Furthermore, the voices of members of the local First Nation have not been included in development or assessment of SD57 policies, programs and resources.

Through this study, I engage in dialogues with families of the local Lheidli T’enneh First Nation to present their context through their own voices and experience. It is important to consider their expectations for the education of their youth, which bring to light specific areas of concern and commendation, which can in turn influence educators to consider the local perspectives and worldviews. This study does not claim to represent the views and experiences of all the families or Lheidli T’enneh as a whole but it gives us a glimpse into the perspectives some Lheidli T’enneh families have of the public education system in BC.

**Background**

In Western societies, there is an increasing emphasis on educational degree/diploma attainment; education has become vitally important for the socioeconomic survival of current and future generations. Grade 12 has become a minimum requirement for most occupations
with post-secondary education being a preferred asset. Indigenous\(^9\) youth, who are the fastest growing demographic of the Canadian population (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010b), had an approximate graduation rate of 36% compared to 72% for the Canadian population during 2010-2011 (Assembly of First Nations, 2012a). Further to that, “61% of First Nation young adults (20-24) have not completed high school, compared to 13% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada” (ibid.). According to the recent *Audit of the Education of Aboriginal Students in the B.C. Public School System* (Auditor General of British Columbia [Auditor General], 2015) the Aboriginal graduation rate in BC improved from 49% to 62% (p. 7). The Auditor General, Carol Bellringer, acknowledges (in her comments in the audit) that “the gap is narrowing, but more can be done” (p. 3). She also highlights that “the ministry can do more to support non-racist learning environments: every child should feel safe; Aboriginal history, language and culture need to be valued; and educators need to expect that all Aboriginal students will graduate” (p. 3-4). The challenging factors that cause such staggering statistics are abundant. However, the literature on Indigenous education suggests there are achievable remedies available to improve the educational success rates and positive personal outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. As Vernon R. Douglas (1987) states “Relevant education both for and about Native people is possible” (p.181).

Many studies and initiatives aim to understand and address the issues faced by Indigenous populations across Canada. The literature (reviewed more fully in Chapter 2)\(^9\)

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\(^9\) I use the terms Indigenous, First Nations and Aboriginal interchangeably throughout this document to be inclusive of the many First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations in Canada. Additionally, the terms Indian and Native may appear in direct quotes.
clearly illustrates that it is vital to consider the context of colonial and counter-colonial experiences as well as Indigenous perspectives on education. This includes defining at the local level what education is, the purpose of education, what cultural and societal values are immersed within the experience of education, educational structures and pedagogy, and the specific educational needs of the Indigenous population. As such, school districts need to consider local contexts, which have significant regional variance.

Locally, SD57 operates on the traditional territories of not only the LTFN but also two others. The Simpcw First Nation (SFN), from the Secwepemc Nation from the North Thompson River in BC, share territories with the Lheidli T’enneh. They have a band-operated school and, because of their location, generally do not have students attending schools within SD57. The Tse’khene, also known as the McLeod Lake Indian Band (MLIB), are also served by SD57. They do not have a band-operated school so their children attend school in Mackenzie, which is part of SD57 but is not in Prince George. LTFN also does not have a band-operated school; however, the local Prince George Native Friendship Centre has an Aboriginal Head Start pre-school program featuring holistic programming including two streams of Indigenous language: Carrier and Cree/ Métis language (Prince George Native Friendship Centre, 2015). The waitlist for this program is long. The Indigenous student population in SD57 also contains many students from a number of different Indigenous communities including many from the neighbouring Dakelh, Sekani, Witsuwit’en, Gitxsan and Cree nations.

According to the 2015 British Columbia Ministry of Education Estimated Operating Grant form for SD57, the estimated current self-identified Aboriginal enrolment is greater than 27% of the total enrolment (2015f). The Aboriginal Report 2010/2011 – 2014/15 How Are We Doing? (HAWD) for School District 57 reports that last year 3,726 students self-
identified as Aboriginal comprising 28.9% of the total student population (BC Ministry, 2015b, p.3). This includes a large and diverse population of 3,694 off-reserve Aboriginal students and 32 Aboriginal students living on-reserve (ibid, p. 5). The Lheidli T’enneh have an overall membership of just over 400 and are situated on two reserves served by SD57. The LTFN student population currently attending schools in SD57 is relatively small in comparison to the entire self-identified Aboriginal student population of SD57 but do represent a significant portion of the on-reserve student population (ibid, p. 5).

It is important to note that even though the Aboriginal six-year completion rate for SD57 is 61% (ibid. p. 29), just below the provincial Aboriginal six-year completion rate of 63% (BC Ministry, 2015a, p. 29), it is far below the 79% of non-Aboriginals in SD57 (BC Ministry, 2015b) and that of non-Aboriginal students (86%) province wide (BC Ministry, 2015a, p. 29). Even more noteworthy is the fact that according to unpublished Ministry data, the six-year graduation rate of on-reserve status First Nations within SD57 is only 27% (J. Morgan, personal communication, June 1, 2016). The HAWD report on SD57 reveals that far fewer Aboriginal students are meeting or exceeding expectations in all of the academic categories compared to non-Aboriginal students at the grade 4 level (BC Ministry, 2015b). In addition, far fewer Aboriginal students are participating in courses commonly required for university entrance: English 12 has 42% as compared to 65% of non-Aboriginal students and Math 10 Foundations has 30% as compared to 60% of non-Aboriginal students (ibid). These results are staggering and have significant implications for Aboriginal students’ abilities to acquire employment and further their education. The information reported within the HAWD documents aim to provide “a mechanism for the Ministry of Education, Aboriginal communities and school districts to open dialogue and make recommendations for improving the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students” (BC Ministry, n.d.-c). The
reports include provincial public school statistics and results of student satisfaction surveys for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Student satisfaction surveys from participants in grades 3/4, 7, 10, and 12 highlight (when compared to non-Aboriginal students) that on average, Aboriginal students: like school less, feel that they’re treated less fairly than others, receive less support from teachers, may feel less safe at school, are bullied, teased or picked on more and in the elementary grades are more likely to want to go to a different school. On closer examination student responses to being bullied, teased or picked on at school declined at the high school level for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The data also shows that Aboriginal students feel cared about by at least two or more adults in their school, which is similar to non-Aboriginal student responses averaging between 70-90% of students. Lastly, when grade 10 and 12 students were surveyed about satisfaction of how their school is preparing them for post-secondary education the results were generally even between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups but the percentage who were satisfied were low (48-62%) and even lower for the grade 12 students (31-51%) (BC Ministry, 2015b).

The British Columbia Ministry of Education (the Ministry) also encourages the development of local Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEAs or EAs) between local Indigenous communities, school districts and the Ministry of Education to improve the educational achievement of students (BC Ministry, n.d.-a). Following the Ministry’s 1999 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that committed them to improve the state of Aboriginal learners, specifically the Ministry “expectation of boards was that they develop an EA, establish an Aboriginal Education committee, and involve Aboriginal communities in the implementation of their E.A” (Auditor General, 2015, p. 35). Enhancement agreements are “five-year plans focused on improving Aboriginal student
outcomes” and viewed as “a strategy to develop collaborative partnerships between boards and local Aboriginal communities” (Auditor General, 2015, p.34).

According to the audit, four districts across the province have not developed EAs. School District No. 57 (SD57) Prince George is one of them. SD57 is working towards the signing of an EA in the near future. They conducted information sessions and community meetings at each school in 2013 and 2014, inviting participation from the community to have input towards the development of the EA. The EA was expected to be complete earlier this year but has been delayed. The office of the Lheidli T’enneh has expressed concern that the Lheidli T’enneh community was not sufficiently included or represented in the consultation and development process of the EA. The Lheidli T’enneh Band Council and administration have also expressed great concern about their lack of agency within the public education system both for and about Aboriginal Peoples despite the various efforts towards Indigenous control over Indigenous education (J. Morgan, personal communication, June 1, 2016). Indigenous control over Indigenous education is a topic explored in Chapter 2, the Literature Review.

Each school district that has developed an Aboriginal Education committee has enacted their committees in various ways. Within SD57, Policy 1230 on Aboriginal Education indicates the use of an Aboriginal Education Board. According to the document, the

‘Aboriginal Education Board’ is an advisory council to the Board of Education on any matter relating to Aboriginal education, including the design of programs and services to enhance the success of Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal Education Board is responsible for collaborating with the Board of Education on the allocation of
targeted Aboriginal education funding received from the Ministry of Education (School District 57, 2011, p. 1).

The subsequent Policy 1231 regarding the Aboriginal Education Board outlines the Policy and Regulations of the Aboriginal Education Board (School District 57, 2014c). I was unable to locate the terms of reference and composition for the Aboriginal Education Board on the SD57 website. When I started teaching, there was an Aboriginal Education Board for the district but currently there is not. Allocation of targeted funding is, instead, managed by the Aboriginal Education Department. The cause of situations such as these is reflected in the audit where they found “the Ministry did not clearly define or monitor its expectations for what successful district collaboration with Aboriginal communities should be” (Auditor General, 2015, p. 35).

Despite not having a current EA, it is worthy to note SD57 has an Aboriginal Education Department with many programs geared towards the enhancement of Aboriginal education. Over recent years, this department has grown to include cultural programs, extracurricular activities and provision of Aboriginal Education Workers for every school to service the student population. As mentioned earlier SD57 also has an Aboriginal choice school called Nusdeh Yoh (the House of the Future) for elementary students. Nusdeh Yoh was conceptualized and developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community, welcomes all nations, and is centred on core values and practices of Indigenous education.

Statement of the Problem

There have not been any recent academic studies exploring the specific educational experiences, needs and expectations held by members of the local LTFN, SFN or MLIB. Research into this topic is essential to understanding the local context of the hosting First
Nations in order to seek opportunities for enhancement with the goal of improving students’ academic achievement and cultural awareness at the local level.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the educational experiences and expectations of some LTFN members in order to understand what they need and what they expect from the education system. In the process of participating, the LTFN members become engaged in discussions regarding their education and the education of their children and families. The findings recognize and acknowledge the lived experiences and expectations of LTFN students and families, which can inform the development of future programs, curriculum, policies, strategic plans, EAs and LEAs. These findings present a starting point for conversation, generate dialogue and inform people working within the education system on the perspectives of some of the LTFN families.

This study also explores opportunities for the integration of local cultural knowledge and ways of knowing, learning and being into the public education system. Research into the literature on Aboriginal Education helps to build an understanding of what Aboriginal Education is or could be, where we have come from, where we are and helps provide visions for the future. Accumulating information on promising practices for Aboriginal Education can bring together strategies to consider as we aim to continually improve the education system for the benefit of children, families and our communities as a whole.

**Research Questions**

Engaging four Lheidli T’enneh families in dialogues around the topic of education, I sought answers to the following questions in relation to curricular content, pedagogy, relationships and expectations:
1. What are Lheidli T’enneh families’ lived experiences within the public education system with respect to relationships, curriculum and pedagogy?

2. What are Lheidli T’enneh families’ expectations of the public education system with respect to relationships, curriculum and pedagogy?

3. How would Lheidli T’enneh families like to see the current education system change to serve them better?

To obtain answers to these questions, family dialogues were guided by a specific set of questions (listed in Appendix A), asking participants to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences and expectations regarding public schools with which they have engaged.

**Thesis Roadmap**

Chapter 1 provides a generalized overview of this study. Chapter 2 situates the study by exploring the social and political context of Aboriginal education in Canada. What has led to the current state of lower quality education for Indigenous people and the subsequent gaps that have developed between the success rates of Indigenous populations compared to non-Indigenous populations is discussed along with definitions and efforts towards incorporating Aboriginal or Indigenous concepts into mainstream education. This chapter also explores promising practices for Indigenous education, information regarding the development of the new curriculum in BC, and the perspectives on and implications of varying levels of parental and familial\(^\text{10}\) involvement.

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\(^{10}\) I use the term parent and guardian synonymously recognizing that there are often multiple people involved in the parenting of youth, such as blended families, multi-generational families and grandparents and other caregivers who raise Lheidli T’enneh’s school aged children.
In Chapter 3, I outline the research methodology by explaining my research design and process. I explain how I understand and use Indigenous Narrative Research, how I engage with my participants and how I explore and present their contributions. Chapter 4 starts by introducing participants’ positionality along with a summary of participants which includes presentation of their words derived from the topics explored during their individual and collective interviews. Following the findings, common themes form the dialogues form the basis for the final chapter. Chapter 5 offers conclusions based on where common themes in the family dialogues align with common themes of the literature. Considerations for future programs and practices conclude this chapter.

The findings of this study help us understand the common concerns and expectations held by the families who have participated. The findings can inform educational practice as well as influence and guide other educators and policy makers in the education system leading to greater cultural competency and student success within the public education system.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores publications on culturally effective delivery approaches for education and the most effective methods for addressing the educational needs of Indigenous people at the K-12 level. By researching articles, reports and studies from journals, books and online sources I knit together key themes related to Canadian Indigenous experiences with education of the past and present for the future. This review seeks a greater understanding of how to address the educational needs of Indigenous families. Topics include: the definition and role of education, the role of parental involvement, the Indigenous worldview, the exploration of Indigenous education through promising practices, the movement towards cross-curricular competencies and, finally the discussion surrounding promising practices for Indigenous education.

Social and Political Context

“In every educational circumstance, much of what is learned depends on the context in which it is learned” (Battiste, 2000b, p.196).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, education is “systematic instruction” for “development of character or mental powers” (Oxford, 1993). Education is a method of transferring knowledge rooted within culture from one generation to the next. Through education one transfers the cultural perspective of their knowledge. This is consistently expressed within literature about education. The content and structure of education is rooted in cultural values and epistemologies inherited from generation to generation. The Assembly of First Nations (2012b) states in their Cultural Competency Report that “Education is culture based no matter where it is located” (p. 83). In Leon’s discussion he had with a Cherokee Elder and scholar, Dr. Lee Brown said
The role of culture is that it teaches us how to be related, related first to ourselves, related to the spiritual realm, related to the family, the community and the world around us, and the environment. So, culture teaches. It holds our values, and it holds our knowledge. It holds the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors. (as cited in Leon, 2012, p. 55)

In Canada, various vital forms of Indigenous education or knowledge transference have historically been discouraged, dismissed, made unattainable or legally banned. The *Indian Act* and Residential School System are two examples of how this was done.

The *Indian Act* is a Canadian federal law that governs in matters pertaining to Indian status, bands, and Indian reserves. Throughout history it has been highly invasive and paternalistic, as it authorizes the Canadian federal government to regulate and administer in the affairs and day-to-day lives of registered Indians and reserve communities [including their education]. This authority has ranged from overarching political control, such as imposing governing structures on Aboriginal communities in the form of band councils, to control over the rights of Indians to practice their culture and traditions (Hanson, 2009b, web, para. 1).

The Indian Residential School System was initiated by the Canadian government in the mid-1800s and continued for over 150 years with the intent to forcefully assimilate First Nations, Inuit and Métis children. Under this system:

Aboriginal children in Canada were taken from their homes and communities, and were placed in institutions called residential schools. These schools were run by religious orders in collaboration with the federal government and were attended by children as young as four years of age. Separated from their families and prohibited from speaking their native languages and practicing their culture the vast majority of
the 150,000 children who attended these schools experienced neglect and suffering.

(Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2015, web)

The Indian Act and the Residential School System are responsible for the banning of the potlatch, traditional food harvesting techniques, traditional ceremonies and rituals, and the transmission of Indigenous languages which contain Indigenous worldviews and culture (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Henderson, 2000b & 2009; White, Peters, Beavon & Spence, 2009). As Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared in Canada’s official apology on June 11, 2008: “two primary objectives of the residential school system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada11 [AANDC], 2010c, web, para. 1). The Residential School System created a lasting legacy of intergenerational trauma through its attempted genocide.

The Indian Act and the Residential School System have prevented the transmission of Indigenous culture across several generations. First Nations from the local region, the Dakelh

11 Over the years the Canadian federal department responsible for policies in relation to the Indigenous peoples of Canada has operated under various titles including the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Development Canada (AANDC) and most recently Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Regardless of title, each of these terms and the documents thereof are in reference to the same federal department.
territories, attended Lejac Residential School on Fraser Lake which was operated by the Catholic Church. Students were forced to travel hundreds of miles at young ages in order to attend, often not returning home for long periods of time from months to years. The education they received was not what we envision education as today. Elders’ testimonies at the regional Truth and Reconciliation meetings, locally held in Prince George on May 13th and 14th, 2013, described their experiences as learning how to work, farming and sewing with many of them enduring loneliness and mental, physical and sexual abuses. Their Indigenous identities were denied and they lost the ability to function appropriately within their families and communities. A lot of information and resources exist and more are being developed to educate people about the impacts of the residential school era and its impacts on subsequent generations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) produced 15 documents reporting on the experiences and effects of the Residential School System including 94 calls to action “in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (TRC, 2015a). The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation carries on the work through activities towards truth and reconciliation while hosting the ongoing documentation of this legacy.

Although the Indian Act has been amended so it no longer bans Indigenous practices and the Residential School System has been abandoned, Indigenous knowledges have already been lost and significant damage done. Traditional and/or adapted institutional methods of Indigenous education are generally not recognized by Canadian society as legitimate pedagogy in themselves and are not valued or regarded as equal to status quo Eurocentric ideals of education, as noted by Battiste & Barman (1995), Henderson (1995, 2009), and Kanu (2011). These imposed Western systems of education are entrenched in hegemonic doctrine through the “pedagogy of oppression” (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal
Studies (CAAS), 2002; Freire, 2006, Henderson, 2000a). This forced cultural assimilation through education over many generations, and the severe intergenerational trauma that has come with it has caused innumerable mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health issues which have significant, lasting and negative effects on past, present and future generations (AFN, 2010; AFN 2012b; CAAS, 2002). As we move forward we can keep these powerful words in mind: “We cannot change the mistakes of the past. But we can honour the stories as we learn from the past to create a shared future” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 61).

**Indigenous Control of Indigenous Education: Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and Perspectives**

Canada’s former assimilationist policy of residential schooling has not only harmed those individuals who were required to attend; it has profoundly damaged communities, weakened traditional languages and cultures, and engendered a deep distrust of formal education among many Aboriginal people. At the same time, the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples, traditions, and cultures in “mainstream” education has given rise to diverse negative stereotypes and attitudes among non-Aboriginal Canadians. (British Columbia Ministry of Education [BC Ministry], 2015c, p. 4)

The Canadian government has begun to acknowledge its role and responsibility towards the Canadian Indigenous population and now seeks inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge within the education system. This is a complex contemporary terrain informed by an equally complex history. This inclusion is exemplified in Canada’s support of the Assembly of First Nations documents “First Nations Control of First Nations Education” (AFN, 2010) and “Gathering Strength” (Minister of Public Works and Government, 1997), the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] (1996), and efforts put forth through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)
within the BC Aboriginal Education Partners Group founded in 1998 (INAC, 2011) and the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC, n.d.). The Canadian government also considered *Bill-C33: An Act to establish a framework to enable First Nations control of elementary and secondary education and to provide for related funding and to make related amendments to the Indian Act and consequential amendments to other Acts* (2013); however, this bill faced unanimous opposition by the AFN in 2014. The AFN’s opposition serves as a lesson on the importance of inclusivity while drafting legislation intended to assist with fulfilling Canada’s treaty obligations and the diverse needs of individual Indigenous communities (AFN, 2014). It is worthy to note while Canada’s *Constitution Act* (1982) gives the federal government the power to enact laws in relation to “Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians,” it gives the provinces the power to make laws in relation to education. Many provinces have worked with Indigenous groups to varying extents to develop resources and curricula.

As previously mentioned, the British Columbia Ministry of Education has promoted the development of Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements and First Nations resources at the local levels but these initiatives lack structure and funding (AFN, 2012a; AFN, 2013). BC school districts without an EA, LEA, or an Aboriginal Education committee, like SD57, have no formal strategy “to facilitate district collaboration with Aboriginal communities on priorities for Aboriginal students” (Auditor General, 2015, p. 34).

Despite the efforts of Indigenous organizations and federal and provincial governments, Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are rarely included within the classroom setting even though provisional resources and structures exist to enable Indigenous peoples to exercise control or influence within the education system. Some of the structural opportunities for districts to include input by Aboriginal communities are the process to develop Learning Enhancement Agreements and Aboriginal advisory committees. The BC
Ministry of Education also collaborated with Aboriginal people to develop a series of First Nations focused courses and resources such as the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* (Appendix C) (BC Ministry, n.d.-b), *Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10* (BC Ministry, 2006), *In Our Own Words: Bringing Authentic First Peoples Content to the K-3 Classroom* (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2012) and recently *Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward* (BC Ministry, 2015c). However, it remains up to individual districts, schools, communities and educators to choose whether to take advantage of these resources and opportunities.

The Indigenous population continues to be subject to multiple assimilationist policies and governmental controls over the education of Indigenous peoples (Paquette, Fallon & Mangan, 2009). For instance, the *Indian Act* declares in Sections 122 and 116 that school attendance is compulsory, between the ages of 6 and 16 (*Indian Act*, 1985). The *Indian Act* further grants “the Minister” ability to require an “Indian” to attend school up to the age of 18 (ibid.). In addition, teacher qualification and required curricula for graduation are regulated by the respective provincial or territorial departments or ministries of education. These measures limit the ability for the Indigenous populations to participate and have control over the education of their populations. Paquette, Fallon & Mangan (2009) state

> unless, and only to the degree that, individual First Nations are willing, and empowered fiscally and in law and policy to collaborate in deep functional integration of key educational infrastructure services such as curriculum development, administration, supervision, program support and so forth, *First Nations control of First Nations education will remain an illusion*. If First Nations control is the objective, *deep and comprehensive functional integration* will be necessary. (p. 287)
Regardless, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Canada have worked diligently towards redefining and asserting Indigenous rights, namely the right to self-governance which is recognized by AANDC (2010d). This includes the right of First Nations to have control over Indigenous education which thus far has been limited to fitting within the scope and expectations of the existing education systems (Archibald, 1995; AFN, 2010; Battiste, 2000a, 2002, 2013; CAAS, 2002; Douglas, 1987; Henderson, 1995, 2000b, 2009). In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations presented a policy paper to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE) “to be used as a basis for future common action in the area of education” (p. iii). It is “a statement of the: philosophy, goals, principles, and directions which must form the foundation of any school program for Indian children” (ibid) and touches on many important topics identified throughout this study. Specifically it stresses the expectations for local control and that any jurisdictional revisions, decisions and transfers occur through contracts jointly negotiated between the Federal, Provincial and First Nations Bands (ibid., p. 5).

Over 30 years later, in 2006, the federal government passed the *Bill C-34: First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act* (2006, c. 10) in which a framework agreement is outlined to allow and assist Indigenous Nations in obtaining control over education in their communities including teacher certification, school certification and establishment of Curriculum and Examination standards. Unfortunately, these individual agreements are only available to ‘Indian Bands’ in relation to education on reserve. Reserves are small tracts of land set apart by Canada under the *Indian Act* (1985) for the use and benefit of an Indian Band. Many reserves are remote and located a significant distance from major populated areas. Reserves are not to be confused with “traditional territories.”
Traditional territories are larger tracts of land where First Nations people have survived since long before the first settlers arrived in Canada. Many Indigenous people reside and attend schools within their traditional territories. The LTFN’s traditional territory spans 4.3 million hectares from the Rocky Mountains to the interior region towards Vanderhoof, BC (Lheidli T’enneh, 2015). There are four LTFN reserves totalling 675 hectares in and around the city of Prince George, three of which are located outside of city limits and one small area, which is what is left of the historical burial grounds, located within a central park in the city. In passing the *First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act* (2006), the federal government failed to acknowledge the traditional territories of First Nations and their right to self-governance within their traditional territories.

In 2010, with reservation, the Government of Canada produced a statement of support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010a). Canada’s reservations focused on implementation and contrary to the spirit of the declaration, identified the UNDRIP as ‘aspirational’ and indicated that the declaration will not override existing Canadian law (Hanson, 2009a). The recently elected Liberal government has expressed more interest in UNDRIP than the previous Conservative government. Canada has now changed their position on the document by removing their objector status and on May 10th 2016, at the United Nations, Canada’s Minister of Indigenous and Northern affairs Carolyn Bennett announced that Canada is “now a full supporter of the declaration without qualification” (CBC News, 2016a). The UNDRIP is a product of over two decades of work by the United Nations, an international organization of nearly 200 nation states, towards the development of an international document to define and protect Indigenous rights (United Nations,
One significant challenge to enacting the rights of Indigenous people as identified in the UNDRIP is that of interpretation; the UNDRIP does not provide a clear definition of the term Indigenous which leaves it up to the nation states to determine. Nevertheless, Article 14 of the UNDRIP addresses the topic of education and identifies the Indigenous right “to establish control of their education and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to cultural methods of teaching and learning” (United Nations, 2008). It also declares,

[quote]
States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (United Nations, 2008)
[/quote]

The fact that the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act only provides agreements applicable to First Nations on reserve is contradictory to the educational intentions within the UNDRIP and the goals of the ICIE policy paper.

Furthermore, the School Act, which governs the issuance of graduation certificates in British Columbia, states that

[quote]
the Minister may issue a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation or a British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma to a person who is engaged in a program of studies at an educational institution operated on First Nation land by a participating First Nation or a Community Education Authority established by one or more
[/quote]

12 Chief Edward John, Akile Cho, of the neighbouring Nak’azdli First Nation, which is also one of the Dakelh nations, was highly influential as a member of the UN group that wrote the UNDRIP and worked on getting the declaration passed.
participating First Nations under the *First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act* (Canada), *if* [emphasis added] the Minister is satisfied that the person… has achieved learning outcomes *substantially similar* [emphasis added] to the learning outcomes necessary to meet the general requirements for graduation established by the order of the minister. (School Act, 1996, c. 412, s.168(6)(c). Since the learning outcomes must be “substantially similar” to that of the province for a student to graduate it greatly limits the ability for First Nations to truly exercise control. Students are expected to meet guidelines set out within an imposed structure entrenched in Western ideologies\(^\text{13}\) that may conflict with Indigenous ideologies. The *First Nations Jurisdiction Over Education in British Columbia Act* and the *School Act* are in conflict with indigenous views on the validation and acknowledgment of education and knowledge. Cajete (2000) identifies teaching as a way of life and healing, and notes “Indigenous knowledge is an internally consistent system. It validates itself. *It does not need external validation*" (p. 189). The statutory and legislative requirements limit the opportunities for First Nations control over education. While the federal and provincial governments encourage the integration of Indigenous content into the education system they remain in control of education.

**Recent Developments in BC**

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), founded in BC in 1992, has been instrumental in the development of the First Peoples curriculum in BC. FNESC developed and worked together with the First Nations School Association (FNSA)

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\(^{13}\) Western ideologies are a system of ideas that reflect the beliefs held by a group of people forming the basis of their communal understandings and worldview.
established in 1996, and the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association for years to ensure implementation of the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education. FNESC has an executive as well as a board of directors composed of representatives of BC First Nations bands. FNESC “is an independent society that advocates for First Nations’ education interest in BC” (Auditor General, 2015, p. 23). Exemplifying their diligent work, together in 1998, these three organizations have helped found the BC Aboriginal Education Partners Group, partnered with the BC Ministry of Education as well as with a wide array of stakeholders concerned with K-12 education (INAC, 2011). As they meet quarterly, their priorities are to create, promote and implement the use of First Nations curricula, maintain the established Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement position and promote the requirement for all teacher certification applicants to have training in Indigenous education (FNESC & FNSA, 2014).

Following the development of the partners group, in 1999, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Chiefs Action Committee, B.C. Minister of Education, Canadian Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs and the President of the BC Teachers Association. In the Memorandum of Understanding, it states, “We the undersigned, acknowledge that Aboriginal learners are not experiencing school success in British Columbia. We state our intention to work together within the mandates of our respective organizations to improve school success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia” (BC Ministry, n.d.-a).

Furthermore, as a result of the 2006 First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act, the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Education developed the First Nations Education Act (2007) again reinforcing their responsibility to First Nations via consultation with the First Nations Education Authority (FNEA). The FNEA was developed
as a separate entity from FNESC and the FNSA to represent BC First Nations. According to the *BC First Nations Education Authority (FNESC) Draft Terms of Reference*,

Section 18 of the *Federal Act* provides:

‘The purpose of the Authority is to assist participating First Nations in developing the capacity to provide education *on First Nation land* [emphasis added] and to provide for any other matters related to education that may be agreed to by the Authority and a participating First Nation in accordance with an individual agreement.’ (FNESC, n.d., p. 2)

In 2012, a Tripartite Education Framework Agreement between the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the BC Minister of Education and FNESC was developed. This Tripartite agreement includes “a commitment for the ministry to consult with FNESC about proposed changes to provincial education policy” (Auditor General, p. 23) and “outlines the roles, responsibilities and commitments of the parties relating to the improvement of outcomes for students in *First Nations Schools* [emphasis added]” (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada [INAC], “Purpose”, 2012).

There is a familiar theme across many of the documents signed by the federal government, that while specifying their commitment to First Nations-run schools, they do not equally support Aboriginal students, both on and off-reserve, who attend public schools. The jurisdiction on education off reserve is the responsibility of provincial governments. This has developed a divide and inconsistency concerning provisions of quality education for *all* Aboriginal students. This is not to say provisions for First Nations operated schools are any better or worse off than public schools but it highlights the fact that a lot of efforts have gone
into creating documents that further set apart sectors of Indigenous populations in regard to educational supports.

Although the many efforts of First Nations bands, organizations and both the provincial and federal government are commendable, the need to operationalize Indigenous inclusion and control in the education system is critical. This action demands adequate funding, opportunity and acknowledgment of Indigenous rights, providing authority to enable Indigenous populations to participate in the development of new and effective policies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students both on and off-reserve (Paquette, Fallon & Mangan, 2009).

In Prince George the targeted funding to support the 3,394 self-identified Aboriginal students (27.7% of the total population) is filtered through the SD57 Aboriginal Education Department. Up until two years ago, when the Aboriginal Education Board was dismissed, the Aboriginal Education Department worked with the Aboriginal Education Board who played an advisory role on programs, services and the administration of targeted Aboriginal funding (School District 57, 2011, p. 1). SD57 does not have an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement or Learning Enhancement Agreement with any local Aboriginal entities; however, they are currently in the process of developing one as discussed earlier in the overview.

**Coming to Know: The Importance of Indigenous Education**

Indigenous education is as complex and diverse as Indigenous people are. Understanding Indigenous education causes us to examine the nature of education itself. Generally, education is a process of learning or coming to know. How one comes to know the world for example directly affects one’s understanding as well as how people function within the world. It is a matter of perspective; an individual’s perspective consists of their
ontology and epistemology. Epistemology, what and how people come to know things (Wilson, 2008), is a key element of education (Ermine, 1995). Ontology looks at what one believes to be reality. Wilson (2008) writes that “Reality is relationships or sets of relationships”; “an object or thing is not as important as one’s relationship to it”, “thus there is no one definite reality but different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous Ontology”, and this is a part of an Indigenous perspective (p. 73). In other words, the world, being one’s reality, is viewed, understood and created by relational experiences; therefore, ontology is intertwined with epistemology. Relationality, including its individual and collective experience is transmitted across generations. Philosophically, everything has a chain link connection through time and space, underlying a belief that nothing exists in complete isolation and everything is part of an everlasting cycle of cause and effect. What one does today is affected by past experiences and in turn effects the future. This relationship is reflected in common Indigenous sayings like All My Relations, and En Cha Ghuna in Dakelh which means ‘s/he too lives’. Both are animistic expressions of connection and respect for all. Traditional methods of coming to know are also experiential, for example, through storytelling, orality, ceremony, spirit, relationships, reciprocity, respect and community values (Armstrong, 2013; Brown & Strega, 2005; Eigenbrod & Hulan, 2008; Leon, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This way of passing on knowledge and experiencing and understanding can and will continue for generations to come and can be passed on through relationships (Archibald, 1995, 2008; Battiste 2000a, 2000b, 2013; Battiste & Barman 1995; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; CAAS, 2002; Freire, 2006; Graham & Ireland, 2008c; Henderson, 2000a, 2000b, 2009; Manitoba Education, 2003; McLeod, 2012; etc.). Also, Takacs (2003) notes,
When the teacher lectures at his students, his students can only see themselves as passive recipients of knowledge. Students are not empowered to make knowledge themselves, and they are not encouraged to see their fellow students as respected sources of knowledge. Nor are they empowered to use knowledge they’ve created to change the world. (p. 35)

In Canada today, Indigenous people struggle to live within two general worldviews: the Western American settler’s worldview and the Indigenous worldview (Little Bear, 2000). Indigenous worldviews have been condemned, misunderstood and undervalued but they are resilient within Indigenous people (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 2003; Little Bear, 2000; Assembly of First Nations, 2012b). Meanwhile, Western American worldviews are widely imposed, dominating the psyche of every citizen within Canada. Without labeling one worldview better or more correct than the other, the fact remains that for the Indigenous people of Canada, it is only fair and right for there to be adequate opportunities to maintain, share and continue to develop their ways of knowing and being in the world. The system in which people are educated contributes greatly to their lived experience, and is integral to the development of their worldview. Thus, it is clear, in order to break down the cognitive imperialism\(^\text{14}\) and assimilationist\(^\text{15}\) agenda dominating the current system, the structure and delivery of education has to be relative to and inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and ways of learning. This must be done in ways that reach beyond the limited inclusion of Indigenous worldviews.

\(^\text{14}\) Cognitive Imperialism is an individual, group or institutionalized assumption and attempts to maintain its thought as dominant over another’s thoughts.

\(^\text{15}\) Assimilation is the practice of absorbing people of one culture into another with effort to change their perspectives and ways of being into that of the dominant society.
peoples in policy making and control, beyond the token notions of Indigeneity and the fragmented use of Indigenous knowledge and history (AFN, 2012b; Archibald 2008; Battiste, 2000a, 2002, 2013; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; RCAP, 1996; CAAS, 2002; Delors, et. al., 1996; Donald, 2009; among others). The Creative Partnerships: Changing Young Lives in England is an example of how students, parents and communities can come together to resolve identified issues within their schools having significant positive impact on the pupils, schools and teachers (Creativity, Culture & Education, 2009, 2012). In order for this to occur Indigenous communities and families must endeavour to find ways to be involved with developing policies and frameworks for the education system to meet their needs in both structure and practice (Wilson-Raybould & Raybould, 2011). This is not an easy task for a generation of people who are seeking reclamation of culture and identity after such significant times of loss and trauma. One avenue for the reclamation of culture and identity is through revival of Indigenous education.

According to McLeod’s study, there is an art to navigating through “two learning systems – First Nations and non-First Nations”, both of which have a significant influence on shaping current and future worldviews (2012, p. 18). McLeod’s concept of seeing through two lenses, two worldviews, is common amongst Indigenous scholars who navigate through the present towards reclaiming their inherent right to an Indigenous worldview while adapting and uniting it with the dominant Western American worldview with which Canada itself functions (Archibald, 1995; Anderson, 2011; Kanu 2011; Little Bear, 2000). Henderson (2009) explains the navigation and methods of functioning within these opposing worldviews as “the split-head syndrome or becoming cognitively ambidextrous” and “divided” (p. 59). The general understanding is that existing within two different worldviews can be disorienting. However, there is hope seen in discussion about the ‘in-between space’ being a
possible space of construct and development where the best of both worlds can begin to
develop a collaborative space to cultivate a hybrid worldview where cultural awareness,
cultural renewal, promising practices and policies can be imagined and shaped (Ermine,
1995).

**Indigenous Education**

“Our native knowledge processes need to inform our involvement in (and the design
of) systems and structures within education institutions” (Yunkaporta, 2013b, p. 43).

The emerging principles of best practice identified within Kovach’s 2009 review of
the literature involve focusing on the spirit, balance, place, language, Elder participation in
classes, mentorship, parental engagement, partnership agreements and integration of
Indigenous knowledge (local, regional and national) into the curriculum. The examples and
recommendations included in her report coincide with recommendations put forth by
numerous other Indigenous scholars and agencies on the topic of Indigenous pedagogy. For
example, Ledoux (2006) defines curricula as reaching beyond paper to the entire
environment of the learner(s) and stresses that communities need to determine the direction
of appropriate curriculum delivery and development to address their needs. Kanu (2011) also
recognizes “the functioning power of the curriculum in shaping identity, representation, and
social and economic circumstances lies behind the drive by Aboriginal peoples to have their
perspectives integrated not only into school curricula but also the organization and delivery
of formal schooling as a whole” (p. 19).

The importance of identity within Indigenous education should not be undervalued.
As stated in the ICIE policy paper, “We want education to give our children the knowledge to
understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around
them” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1). Archibald notes that the ICIE “included the
principle that Indian culture and language was foundational to successful education and that teachers who were culturally sensitive had an important role to fulfill” (Pidgeon, Muñoz, Kirkness & Archibald, 2013, p. 10).

The ICIE document outlined four areas of Canada's educational system requiring attention for Indigenous values to be integrated into education: (1) responsibility (e.g., local control; parental responsibility; school board representation; transfer of jurisdiction; and Indian control); (2) programs (e.g., curriculum and Indian values; language of instruction; and cultural education centres); (3) teachers (e.g., training programs for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and counsellors; and Indian paraprofessionals); and (4) facilities (e.g., improved and new educational facilities; educational institutions; staff; and research). (ibid., pp. 14-15)

Yunkaporta (2013b) reports “that culturally responsive lessons can indeed be built on Aboriginal pedagogy alone, without Aboriginal content” (p. 37). “Aboriginal perspectives are not found in Aboriginal content, but Aboriginal processes” (Yunkaporta, 2013a). He concludes that the way to use Indigenous knowledge within education is to:

1. Build learning around deep understandings of Indigenous pedagogy
2. Design learning through intercultural collaboration
3. Allow quality cultural content to emerge through Indigenous pedagogy and intercultural collaboration. (2013b, p.37)

However, I question how one can identify and develop an Indigenous pedagogy without the content. Both content and structure contain understandings of worldview, histories and process that may or may not align. In an Indigenous way, many lessons of cultural importance are learned on the fly during participation in cultural activities when the subject arises and when the time is right for that individual. Knowledge differs amongst Indigenous
Nations and individuals within those nations, so awareness of cultural diversity amongst Indigenous teachings is essential. It would be difficult to build a structure with the flexibility and adaptability required to meet the pedagogical needs of diverse Nations, so a one size fits all approach doesn’t work. With that in mind, a content free framework could be created and used effectively if developed at local levels in collaboration with the local First Nation. I strongly believe that the content is essential in order to initiate and inform the structure and provide greater understandings within the structure especially for teachers who are unfamiliar with the knowledge and teachings.

We can consider looking at the recent and in-progress redesign of the BC Curriculum that has been taking steps in that direction by creating expectations and recommendations for inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. The structure developed makes room and encourages the inclusion of local Aboriginal perspectives and worldviews but the content and concrete processes are missing. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2015c) created the *Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward* document which is a 77 page document to supplement the new curriculum. It creates a contextual picture on the topic of Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives while providing guidance for teachers on how to integrate Aboriginal content in the classroom. It provides quotes and testimony from a diverse array of participants (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who attended focus sessions at five BC School Districts which is the basis of the document. Within each section they provide “Implications for Educational Practice.” Many of the implications include strategies that recommend that teachers “give learners a chance to work with locally developed resources (including local knowledge keepers) wherever possible” (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c, p. 22). This is a valuable strategy for districts that have a collection of locally developed resources but not all school districts have these.
Aikenhead (2009) identifies through his “Rekindling Traditions project” that “respect for local knowledge is foundational, not a token add on” (p. 233). Funding to develop resources of this nature and to compensate community members for their time are lacking. Furthermore, it is taxing on local knowledge holders to be called upon to regularly participate at many schools in many classrooms. The pedagogical process they identify is to include content through locally developed resources and human resources; procedures and funding for development of these resources is not integrated into the structure. Another important consideration is that access to the local knowledge must also follow proper protocol. Fundamentally, teachers in districts who do not have local content resources available will have difficulty applying this pedagogical strategy. Within Indigenous education, process and content are symbiotic, each requiring development and attention. The new curriculum design and supporting materials are also discussed further in the upcoming section on Transforming Curriculum.

A number of other projects across Canada have prepared a variety of frameworks and resources for integrating Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in education through cultural based curriculum. Partnerships within the community are vital in order to discover and develop processes and resources for integrating IK in education. In “Acting across boundaries in Aboriginal curriculum development: Examples from Northern British Columbia” Evans, McDonald and Nyce (1999) explain how UNBC is “developing partnerships of various types within rural and urban Aboriginal communities” (p. 190). They “suggest that successful participatory partnerships must begin with a process of communication where all parties outline their assumptions, limitations, and objectives… through a participatory process” (ibid., p.190). Evans, McDonald and Nyce explain that the
product and the process of research must benefit the community. Researchers attempt to involve the community in all phases of the research process: from the conception of what is urgent, to how a problem is defined and the results. Such methods are intended to move the power inherent in the production of knowledge into the hands of the community. A number of potential benefits result from this, not the least of which is an informed and empowered community. (ibid. p. 191)

UNBC achieves their partnerships by recognizing Aboriginal communities’ autonomy by acknowledging “Aboriginal people as individuals and as members of communities” (ibid, pp. 192-193). UNBC ensures that they involve Aboriginal communities within each of their six steps of collaborative curriculum development that are subject to continual revision with all of the partners involved (ibid. p. 199 & 201). The three First Nations Studies Dakelh Culture Courses as well as the development of the Lheidli T’enneh Research Ethics document that were created in partnership with UNBC are examples of how this type of work has developed locally.

Through participatory research, in many locations across Canada, researchers argue that using the circle, or medicine wheel, as a teaching tool is vitally important. For example, in Learning About Walking in Beauty, the circle is identified as “a traditional paradigm that serves as a pedagogical tool for presenting and understanding Aboriginal Peoples’ perspectives and worldviews” (CAAS, 2002, p. 31). Further examples that utilize the circle or similar culturally based frameworks as a structural format for teaching include:

- “Locally Developed Native Studies Curriculum: An Historical and Philosophical Rationale” (Archibald, 1995),
- *Dene Kede* (Northwest Territories Education Culture and Employment (NTECE) 1996a),
- *Inuuqatigiit* (NTECE, 1996b),
- “The Education of Urban Native Children: The Sacred Circle Project” (Douglas, 1987),
- the lifelong learning models created by the Canada Council on Learning (CCL, 2007),
- “The Sacred Circle: An Aboriginal Approach to Healing Education at an Urban High School” (Regnier, 1995),
- Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula (Manitoba Education, 2003),
- *Full Circle* (Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation/Féderation des enseignantes-enseignants de écoles secondaires de l’Ontario, 2012),
- use of the Anishnabek “Seven Living Principles” used in Ontario (Toulouse, 2008),
- the *Power of place (pop): Integrating St’at’imic knowledge systems into Lilooet area k-12 school curricula & pedagogy* (Graham & Ireland, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c),
- Committee *In Our Own Words* (First Nations Education Steering, 2012), and
The concept of using the circle as a pedagogical\textsuperscript{16} tool is not only prevalent across scholarly literature on Canadian education. Current and past Elders in the Prince George area use it (Crocker, 2005; Elders, personal communication, 2013). The circle suggests concepts of wholism, balance, interconnectivity between all of creation and the cycles of life while functioning as a symbolic system to express and represent meaning much like the alphabet and numerical systems do in western systems. In most of these frameworks, the circle helps to explain and manage relationships.

In 2013, while on a secondment from teaching I consulted with local Elders and educators for the SD57 Aboriginal Education Department to explore their expectations on what a local curriculum would look like for our children. Over several meetings the groups discussed many topics of concern and reviewed the First Nations Lifelong Learning Model, the Inuit Lifelong Learning Model, and the Métis Lifelong Learning Model developed by the Canadian Council on Learning’s Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (2007). For the participants it was important to develop a values-based Dakelh Wholistic Learning Model for our children. The participants wanted to construct their own pedagogical tool, versus using the medicine wheel used by many First Nations across Canada and the United States. Although many of them were familiar with the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and believed that the circle is a valuable teaching tool they did not feel that the Medicine Wheel itself reflected the local culture and perspective. What they favored instead was their own version where the circle became a series of rings that are interconnected and based on Dakelh’ values and philosophy. The participants were very clear with what they wanted and that they wanted

\textsuperscript{16} Pedagogy is the study of teaching methods, how one teaches. A pedagogical tool would be a tool or resource that aids in a specific way of teaching.
their time and efforts committed to the meetings to be productive in the development of something of use for the district. Unfortunately, due to staffing changes the Dakelh Wholistic Learning Model has not been further or fully developed beyond the basic framework (see Figures 1 and 2) however, it does inform my understanding of the Indigenous theory and approach used for this research. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

*Figure 1: A Dakelh Holistic Lifelong Learning Model: Dakelh Ways of Knowing and Enduring Understandings. From personal conversations with Elders and community*
members engaged in Community Curriculum Consultation meetings held on February 21st and March 7th, 2013. SD#57 Aboriginal Education Department. Prince George, BC.

Figure 2: A Dakelh Wholistic Lifelong Learning Model: Dakelh Way of Knowing and Enduring Understandings showing the elaboration of the values encompassed in the overreaching and overlapping thematic categories.
In searching for effective integration and local development of Indigenous Education there is an essential need for the process to develop in a participatory nature by engaging educators, policy makers, parents, family members and students. Including as much participation as possible by all parties coincides with the reoccurring philosophy that places emphasis on including the values of the society in which it is rooted into the structure and delivery of education. Yunkaporta acknowledges that in Canada “only a few educational frameworks have been produced by Aboriginal educators acting from a place of local integrity and equal dialogue” (2013b, p. 9). It is imperative that educators and policy makers develop, discover and re-discover ways of delivering education that align Western and Indigenous methods of teaching and learning and that are conducive to culturally competent lifelong learning (Aikenhead, 2006, AFN, 2012a, 2012b; Ball & Pense, 2002; Henderson, 2009). “Teaching materials developed in one community are not necessarily transferrable to another community. Teaching materials must fit into the meaningful cultural context of the local community” (Aikenhead, 2009, p. 227). Within BC there are a number of examples of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA) where local partnerships have resulted in development of programs and learning resources to support education for and about Indigenous peoples. As educators and developers of curriculum begin to understand the need and value in shifting from a factory model of education, the one size fits all approach, to a more flexible and locally rooted curriculum, some new frameworks have been and are currently under development across Canada.

**Transforming Curriculum and Assessment**

The BC Ministry of Education launched a BC Education Plan in 2013, which aimed to change curriculum and assessment methods. Their plan is to develop a more flexible curriculum that meets the needs of BC students in a rapidly changing, technology centered
world; to produce educated citizens where “every learner will realize their full potential and contribute to the well-being of our province” (Province of BC, 2013a). The goal is to personalize learning for students in order to achieve an inquiry based learning approach where students are actively involved in developing problem solving skills through individual and group investigation with regressive facilitation (BC Ministry, 2015g). A large part of the re-structured curriculum focuses on new curriculum frameworks centered around core or key competencies and higher level learning outcomes aiming towards “Big Ideas” using “cross-curricular competencies” and “enduring understandings” (Province of BC. 2013b).

According to the BC Ministry of Education:

- the cross-curricular competencies are the set of intellectual, personal, and social skills that all students need to develop in order to engage in deeper learning—learning that encourages students to look at things from different perspectives, to see the relationships between their learning in different subjects, and to make connections to their previous learning and to their own experiences, as members of their families, communities, and the larger society.

- The conceptual framework described here envisions three broad cross-curricular competencies: thinking competency; personal and social competency; and communication competency (BC Ministry, 2013).

Since then, the BC Ministry of Education has worked with teachers across the province to realize their redevelopment of the curriculum (BC Ministry, 2012). Half of the curriculum, grades K – 9, is currently being implemented, while the other half, grades 10 to 12, is in draft form and is scheduled for implementation in September 2016. Under BC’s new curriculum “Building Student Success”, the terms of ‘cross-curricular competencies’ and ‘enduring understandings’ are combined to redefine the new term ‘Core Competencies’ which now
focuses on the Communication, Thinking, and Personal and Social competencies (BC Ministry, 2015e).

The use of core competencies can be traced back to the “four pillars of education” defined in the Delors Report: “learning to know, to do, to be and to live together” (Delors et al., 1996). The definitions and descriptions of the four pillars include key competencies of Indigenous education (or Indigenous Knowledge systems). Key competencies are ingrained in the ‘four pillars’ framework, purpose and concepts such as the concept of learning throughout life, experiential learning, moving from skills to competence, adaptation, personal responsibility and learning to live together by learning to understand others. The Delors Report has had a significant impact on educational policy and practice, curriculum development and measuring education worldwide since its release (Tawil & Cougoureux, 2013).

British Columbia’s Ministry of Education is among many provincial ministries making the shift towards a more flexible curricular framework. Looking at how various provinces and several other countries have interpreted, developed and presented their curricular competencies reveals how vastly differently they can be developed to meet particular agendas set out by their developers. For example, Quebec’s competencies focus on producing workers for their society whereas Saskatchewan’s agenda has a greater focus on social responsibility and Alberta’s has more to do with collaboration (Government of Alberta, 2010, Government du Quebec, 2002, n.d., Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010) Conversely, in Australia there are three cross-curriculum priorities focused on content areas:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia; and Sustainability. The cross curriculum priorities are
embedded in the curriculum and will have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to each of the learning areas. (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, n.d.).

Australia’s education system gives relationships, culture, accurate history and sustainability high regard. Each of the frameworks have the similarities of developing critical thinkers who can communicate, cooperate with others, function independently and achieve their fullest potential within society and within themselves (ibid).

Within the BC curriculum framework, each subject hosts the core competencies, big ideas and learning standards for each grade. The learning standards contain two categories: curricular competencies and content. Schools and teachers have the flexibility to decide how to deliver the curricular competencies and content in a way that keeps education centered on the learner and the curriculum more focused on ensuring students achieve the big ideas through core competencies. In addition, “the province is attempting to embed Aboriginal perspectives into all parts of the curriculum in a meaningful and authentic manner” (BC Ministry, 2015d). The BC Ministry of Education created Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward (BC Ministry, 2015c) in consultation with five districts and their communities to address some of the many questions of educators within the BC school system as they seek guidance with this integration. It notes early on that due to the “wide variation in the roles, interests, and backgrounds of participants and the significant geographic, demographic, cultural, and logistical differences that exist among the participating districts, there were many divergent and sometimes contradictory opinions expressed” (ibid, p. 8). They also caution,

when considering the import of any particular comment reproduced… users of this document are consequently encouraged to keep in mind that it represents a sampling
of opinions... does not purport to capture all voices... the comments shared in this document reflect an interactive, “brainstorming” approach to the identification of “appropriate practice” rather than a rigorous research approach... [and] the comments contributed represent both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal voices (ibid.)

The participants’ comments articulate their perspectives and worldviews. Key words drawn from the blogging records at the gatherings show the most commonly mentioned words were local, learners and connectedness followed by community, history, identity, relationship and many more (ibid., p. 14) (see Appendix B). As mentioned earlier, the document provides ‘Implications for Practice’; consistent themes throughout the implications tout local resources as key to the integration process.

With all of the flexibility required for this restructuring of education and integration of diverse Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives, the assessment aspect needs significant consideration. In BC, a redesign of assessment is also under initial stages of development. The BC Ministry of Education has already moved from a motto of “Assessment for Learning” to “communicating student learning” which leaves room to account for unintended learning outcomes and alternative methods of learning and communication (BC Ministry, 2015d). This shift in curriculum towards inquiry-based learning could provide the space for teachers and students to explore new methods of integrating Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy as long as the process is adequately understood, supported, applied, articulated and assessed.

**Promising Practices of Indigenous Education**

Promising practices of Indigenous education offer a structural place to realize mutual respect. For years, promising practices in education have called for more personally connected and integrative approaches that develop critical “thinking and problem solving
skills through integration and active learning” (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2006).

Promising practices identified in this literature review offer some common themes related to Indigenous education. These themes include:

- respect and include relevant, accurate and diverse Indigenous curriculum and resources inclusive of local, regional and national content and perspectives
- create community based partnerships and inclusion of local Elders and Indigenous communities
- develop student-centered experiential learning opportunities where students can learn through observation and emulation
- provide a variety of learning scaffolds and differentiated instructional strategies
- use of Indigenous languages for instruction
- nurture every individual’s positive self-concept
- build strong personal relationships through a supportive environment
- foster the connections and relationships with the world beyond self
- energize learners motivation for and understanding of lifelong learning
- use a holistic values based approach with inclusion of spirituality

As Marie Battiste reports, “the first principle of Aboriginal learning is a preference for experiential knowledge” with opportunities “to learn independently.” (2002, p. 15). She also states:

Teachers need to recognize that they must use a variety of styles of participation and information exchanges, adapt their teaching methods to the Indigenous styles of learning that exist, and avoid over-generalizing Aboriginal student’s capabilities based on generalized and perceived cultural differences… teachers need to
experiment with teaching opportunities to connect with the multiple ways of knowing these students have and multiple intelligences (ibid.).

In “Our Own Liberation,” Manulani Meyer challenges us to practice, experience and live our cultures, not just study them (2001). She explores and paints a picture of Hawaiian ways of knowing and knowledge transmission, championing experiential learning. In Meyer’s 2011 paper “Holographic Epistemology” she classifies the world into three main ways of viewing and experiencing knowledge: the Body, the Mind and the Spirit, which is similar to many Indigenous epistemologies. Her understanding is that knowledge comes from experiencing the world simultaneously from multiple perspectives whether we are aware of it or not. Everything is not only interconnected but also interdependent. Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and intelligence are inclusive in addressing these aspects of life. Knowledge relies on experience and experience is influenced by “practice, relevance, context, consciousness, and shared common sense” [emphasis in original] (Meyer, 2011, p. 6).

This call for a multifaceted approach to education has existed for some time outside the realm of Indigenous education and epistemologies. The work of Eisner (2002), Freire (2006), Dewey (1963), as well as Knowles, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, Erikson and Goleman, scholars frequently referenced in education (see Palmer and Cooper, 2001), have each given significant attention to theorizing and studying the diversity of how people learn at various stages in life and how active involvement and experience influence learning (cf. Auger, Langford & Rich, 2007). Takacs (2003) also states that “When we develop the skill of understanding how we know what we know, we acquire a key to lifelong learning” (p. 28). Work such as theirs has spurred the awareness that learning occurs at different rates, in different ways, and at different stages for each individual, which in effect calls for educators to utilize differentiated instruction and assessment to address the various learning styles and
stages found in diverse classrooms (Clark, 2010). For example, some students may find reading difficult but can understand the content when it is read to them, demonstrated and/or attempted. Most notably, they outline the benefits of experiential learning opportunities and strategies that draw upon learners’ experience (Aikenhead, 2006; Palmer & Cooper, 2001).

Experiential place-based approaches to education, where students engage in local heritage, culture, landscapes, opportunities and experiences through site visits, physical activity, parental, and familial involvement, hands-on activities, and guest presentations are similarly championed as best practices for Indigenous education. These activities can address various learning styles providing individual centered learning opportunities while including local Indigenous history, experiences and knowledge. Experiences of this nature become difficult to realize in the public school system because of numerous factors, such as educators’ fear or lack of familiarity and engagement with local Indigenous communities, comfort with flexibility, financial limitations, school policies, regulations, curriculum expectations, class size and composition. The financial cost of teacher coverage, student admission, guest honoraria and transportation are often limited or not available for educators and departments. There is also the onerous paperwork, from permission forms to criminal record checks, and booking of transportation and teachers’ coverage which can often deter teachers and parents from taking the extra time and effort needed to make these things happen. Furthermore, in most secondary schools, curriculum is divided into subjects often taught within a block rotation of set class times within a tightly structured and enclosed environment limiting the cross-curricular possibilities, experiential and project-based learning opportunities. In regards to large class sizes, the more students there are the harder it becomes to match lessons to each students learning styles and rate of learning as there is less opportunity for relationship building.
Although teachers independently think outside of the box when it comes to the
delivery of their lessons, policy changes are required to allow for increased creativity,
flexibility and collaborations with varied methods of curriculum instruction to benefit all
learners. Education that includes Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies can bring
significant benefits to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike\textsuperscript{17}. The Center for Social
Justice Website on Aboriginal Issues states that

in order to truly address the education issue for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, there is
also a need for improved education of non-Aboriginal children on Canadian history
and issues affecting Aboriginal people. Non-Aboriginal people cannot fulfill their
treaty responsibilities, work for justice or interact respectfully with Aboriginal people
if they do not understand the history of relations between their peoples or the basics
of Aboriginal cultures. (2014)

Furthermore, as Vernon Douglas (1987) puts it, “Native Education is not only for Native
people. It is designed to promote mutual respect and understanding between the Native and
non-Native segments of Canadian Society” (p. 183). Even Canada’s document “Gathering
Strength” acknowledges this need for Canada wide initiatives for Indigenous education
(Minister of Public Works and Government, 1997). The Canadian public education system
would benefit from a dynamic and unified framework, which is flexible and incorporates

\textsuperscript{17} Anderson, 2011; Archibald, 2008; AFN, 2010; Barman, et al., 1987; Battiste 2000a, 2002, 2013;
Battiste & Barman 1995; CAAS, 2002; Cajete, 2000; Delors, et. al.,1996; Dudgeon & Berkes, 2003; Duran &
Duran, 2000; Ermine, 1995; FNESC, 2012; Freire, 2006; Graham & Ireland 2008a, 2008c; Henderson, 1995,
successfully proven aspects of both Western and Indigenous pedagogies free of hegemonic control. Furthermore, recognition of Indigenous history, knowledge, pedagogies, culture and systems need to be recognized as valid and as resources accredited on par with current Western knowledge and systems. Canada needs to find a unified vision for the effective delivery of Indigenous education with accurate and adequate supporting content, funding, freedom and flexibility. Within the educational context, we must remember, “the medium is the message” (Marshall McLuhan, 1964) and content is process.

**Teacher Preparedness**

In *Role Shock in Local Community Control of Indian Education*, King (1987) explored a case from the 1970’s where a First Nations community was given control over a school on reserve. He found a cumulative set of frustrations and escalating stress stemming from lack of structural preparation, malfunction in the management and maintenance of roles, and disagreement with decision-making. These issues caused communication breakdowns and divisions resulting in many resignations and dismissals of staff. His study exposes the complexities and challenges schools face with enacting institutional change and highlights the importance of a well-planned approach where communities can come together to develop a curriculum and structure that will have positive results for all stakeholders. In addition to the organizational malfunction, teacher familiarity with the change to a different set of programs and content compounded the issue.

To most of the teachers, it was a sobering realization that their teacher training, the educational research, and the glib criticisms of current school practices with which they were so familiar, all provided them with practically nothing other than conventional school structure as an operating premise… Role shock for the teachers began with the realization that they were unable to respond to community
expectations for a new, rational school pattern because the teachers were so dependent on being told what to do…” (King, p. 53)

As we are now facing the implementation of the new curriculum in BC, some teachers are uncertain of how they are going to enact the changes within their classes especially with regards to the structural changes and reporting. Within SD57, Nusdeh Yoh has more say in the development of their curriculum and programs to change how and what students are taught but their general structure remains tied to the Ministry of Education and SD57 policies and procedures.

The path to restructuring education in schools is one that takes much time, resources and long-term commitment by all parties. Yunkaporta (2013b) points out that one of the aspects not adequately addressed within this body of work is how to prepare teachers with adequate training to incorporate Indigenous education. When exploring new ways of teaching or teaching in traditionally indigenous ways, teachers must adapt to a vastly different method of instruction and inclusion of foreign Indigenous knowledge and likely have had little direction or understanding of Indigenous history, lives, worldviews, ways of life, values and teaching practices. When Ottmann and Pritchard (2010) explored this topic, they found that many teachers have not had the appropriate educational background to prepare them for diverse classrooms, and specifically they were not prepared to integrate Aboriginal culture and perspectives (Gilchrist, 2005); therefore, school leaders need to make sure that most importantly ‘educators of all racial and cultural groups develop new competencies and pedagogies to successfully engage our changing populations’ (Howard, 2007, p. 17). (p. 32)
The literature values the presence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in schools who have experienced and been trained to teach through Indigenous ways or how to teach cultural content. Ottmann and Pritchard (2010) express that

How Aboriginal perspectives is taught and delivered in the classroom should matter to all educators because the ‘how’ of teaching influences student belief systems and consequently relationships. The ‘how’ of teaching is largely determined by a teacher’s level of knowledge, skill, attitude and belief of Aboriginal perspectives, of Aboriginal people. (p.31)

There are certified Indigenous teachers in the BC public education system, but they do not exist in an equitable ratio to the ratio of Aboriginal students in the population. Furthermore, they generally undergo training in the same manner as non-Indigenous teachers with the exception of those who have attended the University of British Columbia’s Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) or similar programs that base their teachings in both contemporary and traditional values and practice.

NITEP began as an elementary teacher education program in September of 1974 in response to needs expressed by Aboriginal people throughout BC for a more effective and relevant teacher education program. As of September 2004, a secondary option for those who want to teach Grades 8 to 12 was established. (University of British Columbia, n.d.)

Students who attend NITEP generally complete the program within five years depending on their level of education upon entry. The program is advised by a board which includes Aboriginal educators, BCTF, a coordinator and student representatives. NITEP with its main office, based at the UBC Vancouver campus, also has field centres in lower BC at Duncan, Lillooet and the Fraser Valley. The program offers the same qualifications as the mainstream
Bachelor of Education but through a cohort of students who go through training based on traditional values, historical and contemporary cultural awareness and competency, Indigenous traditions and philosophies (University of British Columbia, 2015, pp. 28-29). As Jo-ann Archibald explains:

NITEP students examine the impact of colonization through educational policies and curricula; learn about ways that Indigenous community members and educators develop Indigenous knowledge (IK) learning resources, strategic plans, and local policies; and begin to develop their own IK educational philosophies and responses to Indigenous education. They also take the required teacher education courses and practica of the basic teacher education program. (Pidgeon, et al., 2013, p. 11)

The program helps its students succeed by offering them a culturally inclusive transitional setting and program that “contribute[s] to the improvement of Aboriginal education” in BC (Archibald, 2014).

Regardless of the stream one takes in a teacher education program, Beatrice Medicine (1987) suggests that it would be effective to transmit the Elders’ knowledge by having Elders train teachers. Most importantly, she uses the words of Elders to bring forth the fact that it is now, more than ever, that we need to let our Elders speak. Elders have a learned knowledge, a way of being and doing things that goes beyond what can be developed through curriculum. This knowledge can only be passed down by spending time with Elders and as time passes there will be fewer and fewer opportunities to do so (Medicine, 1987). The importance of community and Elder inclusion is a common recommendation throughout the literature, albeit with some cautionary considerations when it comes to identifying who constitutes a reputable Elder, what Indigenous knowledge is and how Indigenous Knowledge should be shared (Anderson, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Medicine, 1987).
Beyond that, I strongly believe that many Elders have successfully been passing on their knowledge to their families and communities so the resource of community members of all ages should be valued for their knowledges and experiences both of the past and the present. As Verna Kirkness states,

I think we have to do more to be in touch with the community and not leave it to the Band Council and School Board. We need to educate and involve our total community. They have to know about our oppression and how we are dealing with this in our schools. We have to work with parents, grandparents, foster parents, everyone. (Kirkness in Pidgeon, et al., 2013, p. 8)

Promising practices within BC: Are we ready?

Aligned with the promising practices for Indigenous education considered so far, DeDe DeRose, a NITEP graduate, former teacher, principal, and BC’s first Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement, identifies the following practices to improve Aboriginal student success within BC schools:

- work together with Aboriginal communities;
- track students and use local and provincial data to drive decisions;
- have an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (EA) with Aboriginal communities that includes measurable, attainable goals;
- embed local Aboriginal knowledge throughout their curriculum;
- offer provincially developed courses such as the English First Peoples 10, 11, & 12 and First Nations Studies 12;
- seek to employ Aboriginal educators and support staff; and
• offer ongoing professional development for all educators. (DeRose, 2014, “Making a difference”)

Many of these practices align with the BC Ministry of Education’s *First Peoples Principles of Learning* (Appendix C) (BC Ministry, n.d.-b) which reflect common elements of First Peoples Pedagogy. DeRose also asserts that
district staff must also commit to providing educators with strategies to address barriers where students do not feel safe at school and do not have a sense of belonging, [5] with a belief that until students feel safe and welcome in schools, they will not achieve to their fullest potential. My observation, therefore, is that schools are successful where students, their families and communities, teachers, principals and senior administration take responsibility, understand their roles, are engaged, and work cooperatively and respectfully together. (DeRose, 2014, “Making a difference”)

In that light it is recognized that,
being singled out by a teacher or having teachers perpetuate stereotypes are direct examples, further supported by the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), that create unsafe learning environments for Aboriginal students. The relationship between the instructor and student is key to success and also key to creating systemic change across the Canadian education system. (Pidgeon, et al., 2013, p. 19)

Let’s consider how BC is doing with implementing the practices identified by DeRose.

First, districts across BC have been working in collaboration with their local Aboriginal communities to various extents, however there is no mandated framework or clear expectations around how collaboration is to occur and to what extent. The recent audit of BC public schools “found that 21 of 60 school boards had not complied with [the] requirement to
set local goals for Aboriginal education” (Auditor General, 2015, p.29). The audit also identifies data tracking, interpreting and sharing of data and promising practices has not been sufficient and adds that the processes should include Indigenous communities as they “have knowledge of local conditions that affect learning, and have their own priorities for Aboriginal learners. They can improve the quality of data on self-identification, and contribute to evaluation” (ibid, p. 44). Nevertheless, in 2014, Archibald recognised “B.C. is the only province that collects and reports annually on student achievement and student satisfaction data.”

Considering the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA’s), the audit identifies that as of January 2015, of the 56 AEEA’s half are out-of-date and a third of the districts do not have Aboriginal Education committees in place. The committees are where involvement from Indigenous communities is ensured during the development and annual assessment of the AEEA goals (Auditor General, 2015, p. 35). In “Educator’s perspectives about a public school district’s education enhancement agreement in British Columbia,” White, Budai, Mathew, Deighan & Gill, (2012) state,

When asked if the AEEA has changed the awareness and understanding of the history of Aboriginal peoples (Question Eight), Respondent Two replied, "limited. The general teaching population needs more professional development opportunities."

This also seems to point to the lack of a widespread awareness of Aboriginal issues according to some of our respondents. (p. 54)

In their concluding statement they found

With respect to the AEEA's ability to provide more culturally relevant curriculum for Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal youth… there was greater awareness of Aboriginal culture being spread throughout parts of school communities and that the AEEA is
allowing Aboriginal students to feel greater pride in their cultural heritage and a stronger sense of belonging. (ibid., p. 55)

On this topic, the fourth recommendation of the recent Audit of Aboriginal education in BC also calls for an evaluation of the effectiveness of AEEA’s (Auditor General, 2015) and according to the response by the Ministry of Education there is a research study under way “expected to be complete by April 2016” (p. 13).

Next, although there are provincially developed courses, and in SD57 there is even a locally developed First Nations Studies Course with a focus on Dakelh People, students lack of awareness or interest and selection in the courses hinder their implementation within SD57. In addition, there is the issue of teacher willingness and preparedness for teaching the provincially and locally developed courses along with the integration of Indigenous perspectives across all subjects within the new BC curriculum. With the strong push for inclusion of local First Nations perspectives and content there is a lack of structures, procedures and funding to ensure teachers have access to material and human support resources. Within SD57, even amongst teachers who embrace Aboriginal education, I have observed expressions of trepidation while others are resistant to include Indigenous perspectives. Many teachers, including Indigenous teachers, are ill prepared and uncomfortable with teaching Indigenous perspectives without supports from local communities. Most of our teachers, including myself, were trained in the mainstream education system, which has greatly lacked inclusion of Indigenous histories, content, pedagogies and perspectives. A measure taken to begin raising awareness of Indigenous perspectives happened in 2012 when

the teacher qualification body (now the Teacher Regulation Branch and formerly the BC College of Teachers) introduced the requirement to complete a three-credit
Aboriginal Education course in order to be certified to teach in BC. This type of course is an important step to increasing mainly non-Indigenous students' educational awareness and knowledge about Aboriginal education (Pidgeon, et al., 2013, p. 13). In addition, ongoing professional development around Indigenous education in conjunction with local Indigenous communities and the hiring of more Indigenous Educators is crucial. The BC Ministry of Education dedicated one of the 2015/2016 province wide non-instructional days to focus on Aboriginal Education and the ministry notes that “teacher training programs in BC have already included Aboriginal content as a requirement for graduation”. The Ministry developed a document, Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom – Moving Forward (2015), to “help educators embed culturally relevant learning into each students’ experience” (Auditor General, 2015. p. 15). The Ministry also commits to consider how it might promote other tools available to boards of education. For example, the hiring of teachers is within the exclusive jurisdictional authority of each board and many but not all have taken advantage of Human Rights Tribunal exemptions to hire Aboriginal teachers and other professionals with Aboriginal ancestry (ibid.).

In my experience, as the Prince George District Teachers Association (PGDTA) Local Contact for Aboriginal Education, pursuing the development of an Employment Equity Program through the Human Rights Tribunal exemption, the process is well prepared through the Employment Equity toolkit. However, the recruitment of personnel (teachers, community members and school district staff) to help do the work required to obtain support, develop, apply and implement it is extremely difficult. Within SD57 there was not a single applicant to join the proposed ad hoc committee for Aboriginal employment equity. The Auditor
General of BC (2015) described the process as inefficient, “each board needs to apply individually to the Human Rights Tribunal for a human rights exemption” (p.37). Only about a dozen BC school districts currently have special program approvals with exemptions in place for preferential hiring of teachers with Aboriginal ancestry. Some districts, including SD57 have special programs under the Human Rights Tribunal for preferential hiring for Aboriginal persons within targeted funding or specific support staff positions.

Are we ready? I believe as educators working towards changes within the education system, led by Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations, we have started on the right path towards improving education for future generations. The road is long and it may have its curves and bumps but as long as we persevere, work together and keep our future destination in mind, we will find our way.

Parental Involvement

Student success is not all in the hands of the educators. Julie Kaomea writes that “Educational researchers and policy makers alike contend that children learn more and schools improve when parents are involved in their children’s schooling (Barnard, 2004; Demmert, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; National Parent Teacher Association, 2009)” (Kaomea, 2012, p. 1). Similarly, the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy reports, “Children have better success in school when their parents regularly display interest in their school program and discuss their day at school”, help with homework, have adequate communication from the school and opportunities to make decisions (University of New Brunswick [UNB], 2005). Other reports have similar findings (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007, p. 361). The intent of the ICIE document was for “First Nations to reclaim the right to define the content, the curricula, the pedagogy, and the
logical support in their local schools” where parents are “the best judges of the kind of school programs which contribute to these goals” (Pidgeon, et al., 2013, p. 30).

Families face assumptions and barriers to their involvement in their child’s education. A study by Yoder & Lopez (2013) on parents’ perceptions of involvement in education supports these findings and sheds light upon various barriers and possible remedies. The information within these studies illustrate how “successful schools foster greater communication with parents” (UNB, 2005, CRISP facts sheet), provide opportunities to contribute to decision making and encourage parents to show interest and participate in their child’s education.

Barriers to parental involvement in children’s education also include the generational and intergenerational effects of colonization and the residential school era.

On a parental level, a parent’s own negative school experiences may impact positive relationships with teachers, or parents may simply not understand how to effectively interact with the educational system. These barriers can become particularly problematic when such a parent is faced with concerns regarding their child’s behavior or academic progress. (Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010, p. 125)

In addition, Jessica Ball’s study on the parental involvement of Indigenous fathers with their children reveals the difficulty some parents face even with parenting their children.

Twenty-two fathers (27 percent) reported that engaging with their children evoked painful memories of childhoods that had been punctuated by abuse or family violence; death of a parent; or abruptly changing circumstances, such as being taken away to residential school or apprehension by child protection services. Eighteen fathers (22 percent) referred explicitly to “growing up” in the context of caring for
their children. Some fathers reported that playing with their children helped them to work through the loss of their own childhood. (Ball, 2009, p. 38)

As some parents are in the midst of learning how to parent we can also consider other factors that influence parental engagement with schools such as tangible barriers, availability of resources, for example, time, transportation, supports and opportunity. Additional factors include racial considerations, marginalization, youth age, lack of childcare, school policies, involvement opportunities, incentives, communication, access to technology and ability to make choices regarding school, classes or teachers, among other variables (Williams & Sánchez, 2011, pp. 62 - 67; Yoder & Lopez, 2013, p. 424). Marginalization was a particular barrier encountered by parents.

The impact of marginalization was so strong as it truly paralyzed those parents who sought to be involved. As defined by the literature, marginalization refers to the context in which people ‘routinely experience injustice, inequality and exploitation’ (Brown & Strega, 2005). The parents had a sense that they lacked power and control when making changes in their child’s education. The participants frequently used the words ‘minimal’ and ‘dismissed,’ and offered reports of feeling frustrated, feeling as though things were unfair or feelings, or stories related to feeling helpless or unable to make changes… Parents often made attempts to be involved in their child’s education, and marginalization was frequently an unfortunate outcome. (Yoder & Lopez, 2013, p. 426)

Yoder and Lopez (2013) also explore the question of determining what parental involvement is and what it looks like. They stress that it varies from family to family; each family has distinct circumstances in regards to their abilities to support their children. Their results suggest parents “are hopeful about engaging in education, but often fail to become
actively involved because they feel marginalized. Furthermore, tangible barriers, a hurdle they were previously able to combat, was more challenging for them to overcome in the face of oppression.” (p. 415). Within their study, they found “the greatest barrier to parents’ ability to engage in their child’s education [was] marginalization” (ibid. p. 429). Yoder & Lopez said, “to overcome these barriers, it is essential that parents and educators find ways to work together” (ibid, p. 418). A study on parental outreach provided evidence “that school initiated parent outreach programs are associated with higher levels of parent involvement in school events” (Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok & Benz, 2013, p. 33). DePlanty et al. (2007) also recognize that often parents are interested in participating but are “not encouraged or do not have the open communication or support from the school to do so” (p. 362). Similarly, Walker, Shenker & Hoover-Dempsey (2010) write that communication is paramount and “effective communication is essential to create strong school-home partnerships and to increase parental involvement. Just as teachers are skilled in the art of teaching, they also require knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with their parent community” (p. 126). They also explain that communication starts at the door including visual, interactive, one-way and two-way communication, through various technologies, reporting and parent to staff interactions.

As indicated in these studies, parental involvement should not be limited to instances where parents participate within the school environment; it includes the importance of parents to support their children at home. Simply showing interest in their accomplishments, supporting them with homework and having high expectations of their children can be helpful. Communication amongst parents/guardians, students, teachers and staff is critical and can come in various forms. Communicating a welcoming environment every step of the way, providing information about school events and facilitating opportunities for exercising
choices within school and or district can help ensure all invested parties are on the same page and feel included and empowered. In turn, this lessens the effects of marginalization, and better enables the parties to work together to help students achieve best results.

Summary

Education is vitally important to current and future generations. The content and structure of it is entrenched in cultural values and epistemologies through existing structures and attitudes that pass on to current and future generations. We cannot change the past or escape its intergenerational effects upon Indigenous families. However, we can improve these factors for the future by enlightening society and ourselves to an awareness of Indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories as we work together towards improving the learning conditions, strategies and structures to become more inclusive of Indigenous history, knowledge, pedagogies and culture to enact promising practices in education for all students.

Promising practices in education are highly dependent on the culture and context of the people seeking them. Involving communities with the development of educational structures and practices can help break down the cognitive imperialism and assimilationist agenda dominating the current system. Communities and parents must put in their effort to find ways to be involved. Teachers and school districts need to build relationships with communities and seek adequate training, experience, time and funding to explore and develop teaching methods and interpersonal skills. This leads to greater inclusion of diverse learners and communities, which in turn improves learners’ success rates with education and the collective well-being of our communities.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This is a qualitative research project. As a Dakelh/Italian/French Canadian person, I also rely on Indigenous research approaches that include Indigenous and settler contexts, ontology, epistemology and axiology along with specific related methods (Hart, 2010; Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Lichtman, 2013, pp 7-28; Smith, 1999; Strega, 2005; Wilson, 2008, pp 33-35). This study examines narratives of Lheidli T’enneh families for common themes taking into consideration existing literature using a decolonizing Indigenous lens. Positioning my research as occurring “from, by and with the Margins” following an Indigenous wholistic theory legitimizes “what we have to say about our own lives and the lives of others, and how the conditions of those might be transformed” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 6-7). My research questions aim to help us understand participant’s perspectives and expectations with the intent that the process and results will be of benefit to the community. My research theory, approach and design acknowledges that “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology” (Smith, 1999 p. 15).

Positionality

The position one takes is intricately entwined with the approach and methods used. Considerations of positionality arise throughout this study in relation to the participants as

18 Axiology looks at the values and judgements one holds. Within research this involves considering the associated biases based on ones axiology (Lichtman, 2013, p. 321).

19 Methods are activities conducted within the research.

20 Brown and Strega use the term “Margins” in reference to people and places of marginalization, as well as the marginalization of knowledge validation.
well as myself as the researcher. Due to my mixed ancestry and Western dominated upbringing, I acknowledge as I pursue Indigenous ways of being, knowing and an Indigenous research methodology, that my Western-Indigenous knowledge derives from simultaneously living in both Western/Canadian and Indigenous ontologies. My approach is to use a mixed and interconnected methodology so each aspect of my research methodology and its presentation includes and occurs within blended narrative and Indigenous research methods. In “What is Indigenous research?” Weber-Pillwax (2001) explains how “Indigenous research methodologies are those that enable and permit Indigenous researchers to be who they are while engaged actively as participants in research processes that create new knowledge and transform who they are and where they are” (p 174).

Throughout this process, “I need to be clear (with myself and participants) about my motivations for collecting the data. Are there motives (true or assumed) that relate to my positionality?” (Bourke, 2014, p. 8). My motivation for this research stems from observations that Lheidli T’enneh families, including my own family have had few opportunities to have their perspectives and voices of their experience heard or included with decision making on elements that effect the education of our youth. I assume participants have interest in having their voices heard and confirm this by reviewing participant consent forms and transcript verification with participants.

By focusing my research on not only the “research products but also on the research process, it challenges existing relations of dominance and subordination and offers a basis for political action” leading to a sense of “empowerment that is tied to an analysis of power relations and recognition of systemic oppressions” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 10). Smith (1999) identifies these spaces of marginalization as “space[s] of resistance and hope” (p. 4). Thus, the information presented through my research of the literature, combined with the
experiences and expectations shared through the families dialogues, can help guide policy makers, parents, and educators including myself in finding ways to enhance the education system and outcomes for students.

**Research Questions**

Focusing on families of Lheidli T’enneh youth who have attended the public education system (grades K-12) between 2005 and 2015, I have engaged participants in dialogues through a casual talking circle format similar to the process of a focus group, as described by Archibald (2008), Battiste (2000b), and Wilbur, Wilbur, Garrett & Yuhas (2001). I offered opportunities for additional one-on-one dialogues but none of the participants felt they were necessary. As mentioned in Chapter 1, during the dialogues, I sought answers to the following questions based on the topics of curricular content, pedagogy, relationships and expectations:

1. What are Lheidli T’enneh families’ lived experiences within the public education system with respect to relationships, curriculum and pedagogy?
2. What are Lheidli T’enneh families’ expectations of the public education system with respect to relationships, curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How would Lheidli T’enneh families like to see the current education system change to serve Lheidli T’enneh families better?

**Indigenous Approaches**

I work within an Indigenous research paradigm, where my context and positionality informs each aspect of my research, as described by Ermine (1995: 101-112). An Indigenous theoretical approach takes into account personal experience. Living in relation to one’s experience is where every person comes from be it firsthand experience or second-hand experience through story.
As a Dakelh/Italian/French Canadian person living on Lheidli T’enneh Territory my influences include the following interrelated beliefs, values and principles passed on through experience with family members, friends, spirits and Elders.

- **Respect**: respect for all of life as all things are living; a belief in animism
- **Honesty**: living honestly to one’s self and others
- **Truth**: telling the truth to the best of my knowledge, knowing my truth is not the only truth
- **Responsibility**: exercising care towards the land, environment, family and others
- **Community**: contributing to community wherever possible with great generosity
- **Protocol**: taking protocols seriously for safety, preparations and reciprocity
- **Self-Identity**: maintaining pride, identification and acknowledgement of what shapes who I am and aspiring to understand why and how I do things
- **Wholism**: belief that we are all connected with everything and everyone around us
- **Spirituality**: belief in the existence and relationships with the spiritual realms
- **Unconditional Love**: to be non-judgemental, accepting, forgiving, loving, caring
- **Experiential and Land Based Learning**: to provide opportunities for learning that engage the learner on multiple levels seeking to appeal to and foster the learners interests in a way that suits their learning style
- **Language**: value and promote the use of traditional languages as they reflect deep cultural meanings, values and shared cultural understandings (Elders, personal communication, February 21st and March 7th 2013)
These beliefs, values and principles coincide with many indigenous research paradigms as seen in Battiste & Henderson (2000), Eigenbrod & Hulan (2008), Hart (2010), Keewatin (2002), Kovach (2005, 2009), Smith, L. (1999), Smith, G. (2000), Takano (2005), among others. Within my Indigenous research paradigm these beliefs, values and principles also form and guide my ontology\(^{21}\) or ways of being and epistemology\(^{22}\) or ways of knowing within the context where I exist. These values create and inform the approach and theoretical principals I use to conduct, interpret and analyze this study. The theoretical principles and lived experiences guiding this work are similar to Kathy Absolon’s (2010) description of Indigenous theory, which is rooted in “Indigenous wholism” where “the dynamics of our realities are created because of the relationships and experiences of these interrelationships and interconnections” (p76). Understanding these experiences is likewise relational to a series of connections with previous experiences reaching as far back as birth and according to some Dakelh beliefs can reach beyond through previous lives and the relational experiences of and with ancestors. The purpose of qualitative research is to “understand and interpret social interactions” studying “the whole rather than specific variables” acknowledging “multiple realities” where the researcher is central and subjective “Interpretations are based on researcher’s experience and background” (Lichtman, 2013, pp. 14-15). In Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods (2008), Wilson shares how research is truly all

\(^{21}\) Ontology considers the nature of one’s reality based on what and how people understand ‘being’

\(^{22}\) Epistemology is about what and how someone comes to know something. It is “A branch of philosophy dealing with the theory of knowledge, the nature of knowledge, or how we know what we know” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 322).
about relationships, which aligns with the Dakelh Wholistic Lifelong Learning Model, my personal beliefs, values and principles that I use as my theoretical foundation (see figure 3). These relational experiences reach us through the generations within our culture, language, individual upbringing, and our innate relative relationships within the world. Culture includes songs, stories, traditional and spiritual practices, customs, techniques, medicines and governance structures. One’s epistemology is interconnected with one’s ontology. This is of key importance in my research, as I not only explore epistemology in relation to conducting research but also within my topic and within the context of the education system through both Lheidli T’enneh members’ and my own experiences with learning and teaching. As Weber-Pillwax (2001) declares, “we have to maintain consistently a sense of relationality and accountability to our communities in order to maintain our own integrity as researchers. This relationality and accountability means we cannot limit our involvement or participation in discourse” (p. 170).

As I engaged in dialogues with the participants I listen to their stories with more than my ears, I use a holistic multi-sensory approach to observe and listen physically as well as with my spirit (Ermine, 1995; Kovach, 2009; Sefa Dei & Doyle-Wood, 2006; Wilson, 2008) while adhering to the values mentioned earlier. Indigenous Wholistic theory is “earth based and derived from the teachings of the land, sun, water, sky and all of creation”; it is “whole, ecological, cyclical and relational” (Absolon, 2010, p. 76). Where Absolon and others use frameworks such as “the Medicine Wheel as a tool to depict Indigenous Wholistic theory” (ibid, p. 76) I use the value-laden Dakelh Wholistic Lifelong Learning Model (see Figures 1 & 2) developed in consultation with local Dakelh Elders (Pighin, 2013) which forms my Indigenous research paradigm.
Figure 3: A visual representation of my Indigenous research paradigm blending Western qualitative research with the Dakelh Wholistic Lifelong Learning Model containing a summary of my beliefs, values and principles.

A Narrative Approach. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach used in both Western and Indigenous research inquiry. Narrative is vital as a historical method of coming to know through Western and Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous ways of knowing (Brown & Strega, 2005; Creswell, 2008, 2013; Lichtman, 2013; Kovach, 2009; Wilson 2008). As Eigenbrod and Hulan (2008) state, “Oral traditions are distinct ways of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation” (p. 7). By engaging the participants in sharing their narrative, telling their stories, through journaling and dialogues with their family members and myself, a new
narrative and new understandings from those narratives develop, something appreciated and expressed by Archibald (2008), Battiste (2000b), Brown & Strega (2005), Henderson (2000b), Kovacs (2009), Lichtman (2013), Stringer (2007), and Wilson (2008). As Foy (2009) states, the process of using storytelling through a talking circle “is an Indigenous teaching methodology that utilizes informal circle discussion to integrate individual contributions into collective thought and memory for learners involved” (p. 25). This allows all participants to not only have the space to share their perspectives but also learn from and see the situation from various perspectives so it broadens their own understanding of the topics discussed. By drawing from the narrative lived experiences of research participants, authenticity is built into this research. Both qualitative and Indigenous methodologies lend themselves to narrative processes of presentation as well.

Who are the Participants?

I cannot assume to know or even attempt to understand fully the unique and diverse positions of each of the participants. However, I can present some background information based on their words, community profile and my working knowledge and experience as a Lheidli T’enneh member.

Participants as Lheidli T’enneh. Lheidli is a Dakelh word that identifies “where the two rivers flow into each other,” and T’enneh means “the people”. The Lheidli T’enneh are the people of where the Nichakoh (Nechako) and Lthakoh (Fraser) rivers flow into one another at what is now called Prince George (PG) (Lheidli T’enneh, 2015). The Lheidli T’enneh Historical Timeline (2014) dates artifacts showing evidence of occupation in this area up to 9000 years ago, around 5487 BC (p. 1). Colonization, the forced removal from Prince George over 100 years ago, the impacts of contact with new populations, government control and the residential school system contributed to the loss of traditional systems of
governance and culture such as the *balhats* (potlatch system). Nevertheless, the Lheidli T’enneh community continues to work towards finding and reclaiming their culture, traditions and identity. The LTFN also encountered multiple epidemics dropping the population to around 50 people at one point resulting in the fragmentation of history, language and culture. The population now includes 407 members: 69 are between 0 and 15 years old, 218 are between 16 and 49 years old, and 120 are above the age of 50 (correspondence, Lheidli T’enneh staff, March 23, 2016). Also worth considering is that the calculation of band membership is based on laws set out by the Canadian government through the *Indian Act* (1985) where historically community members were disenfranchised based on marriage to non-Aboriginal men among other things.

**Physical location of the Lheidli T’enneh.** The LTFN have a territory of 4.3 million hectares with four reserves (Lheidli T’enneh, n.d., web). There is a long history of events leading up to the development of the four reserves and the incorporation of the City of Prince George. The full history of this place is a huge topic. The first reserve, Lheidli, has been reduced to the burial grounds in Lheidli T’enneh Memorial Park. The second, Khast’an Lhugel, is approximately 25 km from downtown near the Shelly town site along the Fraser River. A third reserve, Lhezbaeoonichék, is located about 16 km from downtown PG along the Nechako River. The last reserve, Tsalakoh, is located where Mud River flows into the Nechako River. There is no road access to this location, however the train does run through the site.

Most LTFN members live off reserve and many live beyond the City of Prince George. The LTFN do not have a band-operated school so any members of the nation who live in the Prince George area either attend schools within SD57 or attend Catholic schools.
Participants as SD57 students/parents. The public education of this region is operated by SD57, including the City of PG, Mackenzie, McBride and Valemount. For the 2014/2015 school year SD57 reported a total student population of 12,915 students enrolled in regular schooling and an Aboriginal self-identified population of 3,726 students, 28.9% of the total population (BCMinistry, 2015b). In PG, SD57 has 26 elementary schools, 5 secondary schools and the 1 centre for learning alternatives. There are several choice programs parents can enroll their students in such as the French Immersion program, Montessori program and Nusdeh Yoh (the Aboriginal Choice elementary school).

Most of the participants in the study attended the mainstream public school program however, several attend or attended Nusdeh Yoh, the Aboriginal Choice School in Prince George, during their elementary school years. In 2007, before its inception, Rheanna Robinson (2007) wrote a thesis highlighting the challenges and benefits of implementation of an Aboriginal Choice School in Prince George. Challenges were both concrete and philosophical but the surplus of benefits seemed to overshadow the concerns.

Nusdeh Yoh is now in its sixth year of operation:

In the context of Nusdeh Yoh, student success is a holistic measure. We know that the emotional health and wellbeing of our students is fundamental to their ability to access instruction and fully participate in their learning. Our focus on Restorative Practice is more than a philosophy of student discipline. It is an acknowledgement of the need for respectful relationships between all members of our school community and forms the foundation for a positive, welcoming school environment for all learners and participants. (School District 57, 2014a, web)

I have engaged with teachers, support staff, parents and students coming from the school and know that even though it has gone through some initial growing pains it has
contributed greatly to the success of many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. As their website states,

Our school is a welcoming home for all children from all backgrounds… We value our culture and language, quality education, and our children and families… Much has changed over the years and we've overcome many challenges but this spirit in the land and this place is still alive and well… We practice our living cultures and foster pride in where we come from. (School District 57, 2014b, web)

Parents, teachers and students alike are taking full advantage of the opportunities the school presents as a holistic learning atmosphere.

**Participation.** This study included four families totalling 12 participants reflecting 3% of the total population of the Lheidli T’enneh including families living both on and off reserve. The caregivers also provided information regarding the education of an additional five Lheidli T’enneh youth who did not attend the dialogues in person but parts of their stories are included from the perspective of their families. As an insider researcher, I can also consider my family as a fifth family perspective as I write about my relational experiences and through my interpretive lens of their words. As a qualitative study, the aim was not to seek a broad spectrum of information representing the majority of Lheidli T’enneh members’ experiences but to allow me to delve deeper into the lived experiences of those Lheidli T’enneh families who chose to participate and consider the implications of the findings as I also draw from existing literature on the topic.

The families who participated in this study had students that shared experiences from attending 11 different K-12 schools within PG, approximately 42% of the schools in PG: seven elementary schools including Nusdeh Yoh, one middle school, and three high schools. In addition, two participants were attending local post-secondary institutions. If I were to
include my own family in the numbers, I could add three more participants and one more elementary school to the list. Figure 4 is a visual representation of composition of the four participating families.

*Figure 4:* A visual representation displaying the composition of participating families.

The perspectives represented by the families were diverse. Within the four families interviewed, there were six guardians (parents/grandparents), two student graduates from different high schools, two students currently attending different high schools, and two students attending elementary school in the primary years (kindergarten to grade three).

Family members included additional information regarding two students who graduated with completion certificates, one student attending high school, two students attending elementary school and one student transitioning into attending elementary school. Two of the families included the participation of a non-Indigenous parent. One dialogue occurred with a Lheidli Elder who closely assists with caring for their four grandchildren who have lived in her home.
as an extended family unit for much of their childhood. This grandparent was also able to provide an additional perspective as a new teacher at the Aboriginal choice school. Even the caregivers had attended public school within Prince George. None of the participants attended residential school but they all acknowledge the effects it has had upon them. The students represent very diverse perspectives while the parents added a perspective that gave context to the continuum of time within the same school district. Overall, the participants’ collective intergenerational and multifaceted perspectives created a space of dialogue for families to reflect on their experiences and better understand the perspectives, experiences and expectations of their family members.

**Research Design: Undertaking the Research**

I set out to recruit three to six Lheidli T’enneh families with students who attended public schools between 2005 and 2015. I asked them to participate in group dialogues or talking circles (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilbur et al., 2001) also known in some instances as focus groups (Lichtman, 2013). Families participated as a group to gather information pertaining to their lived experiences with the public school system. Participants had the opportunity to partake in two dialogues, each approximately 45 to 90 minutes in duration. I offered the additional opportunity for one-on-one interviews to add to discussions on topics if desired. Participants received a small journal for the duration of the study to visually and textually aid in their thought process. Offering a second family dialogue as part of the research alleviates the participants’ feeling of being a studied subject and shows respect for the participants by offering them another opportunity to continue the meaningful dialogue and verify their transcripts. By interviewing participants in family groupings, the intent is to ensure they feel the support of their family and are comfortable with the process. The process aims to develop a collective story and follow traditional practices of inclusivity.
It is important to acknowledge “the diversity of multiple voices to arrive at the whole story” (Leon, 2012). The added perspectives from the family are also important because families should always have say and control of how their youth are educated in order to meet the cultural considerations of their family. Furthermore, engaging families in dialogue on this topic lends itself to becoming a starting point to spark conversation amongst family members that may continue beyond the interviews. The additional one-on-one interviews were offered to provide the participant and researcher opportunities for further discussion and verification of specific topics arising from the group dialogues, however, no additional one-on-one one dialogues occurred during the study. Family dialogues occurred during February and March of 2016.

**Location.** The location of the dialogues was open to suggestions by the families. One family of the three chose to have the interview in their own home whereas the two other families chose to use a community space during a time when the dialogue could occur in privacy. The spaces of dialogue were prepared for the circle with adequate seating and refreshments.

**Participation.** Under recommendation of the Lheidli T’enneh band council and Executive Director, I worked collaboratively with the Lheidli T’enneh Family Development Worker throughout the recruitment process. Recruitment was conducted through posting and distribution of a poster. Eligible participants identified included Lheidli T’enneh students who have attended public school between 2005 and 2015. Adhering to UNBC research ethics, policies and procedures and the Tri-Council Policy Statement for the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and the Lheidli T’enneh Research Ethics guide, participants were informed of the purpose and process of the research, data collection and protection from potential risks associated with the research, as well as the expected benefits of the study.
They were presented with the opportunity to agree to participate knowing that their participation and consent is voluntary and they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. Participants who choose to remain anonymous were offered to choose a pseudonym and were informed that their identity would remain confidential throughout the research while omitting any personally identifiable information from the report; however, they were also informed that their confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to the narrow scope of the study. In presenting the information, most participants felt it would be appropriate to exclude personal identifiers in favor of objectivity to present the information without distraction.

A variety of methods of obtaining the consent of the participants were offered following adequate explanation of the research project purpose, process, potential risks and benefits, planned use of gathered data, contact information and open voluntary withdrawal process. Participants were offered the option of participating fully or in whichever capacity they felt comfortable with participating. For example, participants were not required to submit their journals or schedule a one-on-one interview but they were offered those options as part of the process. Participants were permitted to also choose to remain anonymous or use pseudonyms in the reporting of the study. Upon completion of the study, the majority of participants were ok with having their names attributed to their work but did not mind either way. Several participants chose to remain anonymous so in order to maintain their confidentiality it was decided that all names would be omitted in the thesis.

For participants that were not of legal age I obtained consent from both the child and their parent(s)/guardian(s) who also participated in the study. Following the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS), considering chapters on “Fairness and Equity in Research Participation” and “The Consent Process”, I
gave equal opportunity to include all interested qualifying participants. All participants were regularly reminded that they could withdraw or refuse consent at any time.

Prior to obtaining consent of any participant, I received approval to conduct the study by the UNBC Ethics Committee and the Lheidli T’enneh Band Office.

**Dialogue.** I actively participated in the dialogues as a facilitator and recorder of discussions while ensuring the participants felt as physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally comfortable as possible. At the beginning of each interview, I offered space and time to do a prayer or smudge before starting the dialogue as customary protocol for clearing the air, blessing the space and the discussions during these gatherings.

Following the offering of an opening prayer or smudge, I would clarify the purpose and process of the study reminding them that they can use a pseudonym in documentation to remain anonymous, and all information pertaining to them would be approved by them through a process of review and verification before any publishing. They were reminded that they could withdraw their information and conversations at any time they choose. I requested permission to record the sessions and each of the individuals within the families agreed that audio recording could be used. When desired, introductions followed, ensuring correct spelling of names and indicating relationships to situate the participants. I used guiding prompts (listed in Appendix A) for dialogue within the circle following the formalities and introductions. The prompts focused on the students but family participants were encouraged to engage in the dialogue from their relative perspectives. At times, prompts were rephrased to age/cognitively appropriate language, and in some cases, the parents assisted with guiding the dialogue.

In conjunction with the dialogues, participants received a small journal to record their own thoughts, feelings and reflections both during and between dialogues. Within the
journeys, participants recorded their own memories, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Having the journal helped encourage participants to document their thoughts, jogged their memories and continued the discussions. Similarly, the journals also gave the participants a location to record thoughts, ideas, memories, feelings and reflections on their own time. People can come to new realizations regarding a subject during peaceful moments and after having time to reflect on the questions and discussions.

In closing the first dialogue, I explained how participants could use their journals between dialogues. They could write, draw or document items in their journals at any time. We also discussed and considered scheduling a time and location to conduct the follow-up dialogue.

During the follow-up dialogue with the participants, we followed the same opening protocol as the first session. The guiding topic for discussion was to either continue the dialogue where we left off and/or to share our reflections coming from the journals. I also used this time for participants to review and verify their transcripts. At the end of the second dialogue, participants were offered the option of scheduling another follow-up group or a one-on-one dialogue. Each of the three families who participated expressed their satisfaction that they had contributed all they could to the study at that point. Participants had the option of submitting their journals for additional analysis; only one participant chose to submit their journal, the rest expressed that there was nothing in their journals that was not spoken during the dialogues.

**Documentation/observation.** During and following the dialogues, I paid close attention to my thoughts, feelings and observations on the physical, emotional and spiritual atmosphere. Each of the families agreed to having their dialogues digitally audio recorded
from which I created transcriptions of the dialogues. For the participant who submitted a journal it was transcribed and added to the body of data for interpretation and analysis.

**Reflection.** As I participated in the dialogues, and while transcribing them, I took time to reflect on the experiences shared within the dialogue and the information presented within the literature review. I also reflected on my own feelings, thoughts, and observations to consider what may have been happening for others during the dialogues. I have found that reflecting after some time has passed can bring about new insights and different interpretations and perspectives into the experience. I could not help but notice as I engaged and reflected on the participants’ stories through the dialogues, writing and additional discussions around this research, that I felt my positionality shift. I started to see and feel the situations from various perspectives, that of the student, parent, teacher and academic exploring the topic. I could no longer remain within a particular stance but started to see the situation as an intricate web with many positions from which to view and influence education.

**Participants’ review of information.** After the completion of the dialogues, I presented participants with copies of the transcribed interviews for their review, additional input and verification. I gave them time to review their transcripts and offered to meet with the participants or seek their oral or written response to ensure the accuracy of the information recorded. During verification of the transcripts I asked the participants the following questions.

1. Having reviewed your transcript, are there any corrections needed?

2. Is there anything further that you would like to add to the transcript?

3. Do you have any other questions or comments?
The corrections and clarifications requested were provided before starting any analysis. Following present Indigenous and Western research protocols, the participants, the Lheidli T’enneh Research Ethics committee and band council had opportunities to review the findings of the research and contribute their input and additional information, which was of great value and added to this thesis where appropriate.

All documentation including notes, journals and recordings have been securely stored in password-protected digital files and/or within a locked file box of which only I have access to at my home address. The one journal that was submitted was returned to the participant.

**Data Analysis**

I begin this section by first discussing elements of interpreting the data gathered followed by how I analyzed the data.

Margaret Kovach (2009) “argues for the integration of a decolonizing theoretical lens that positions Indigenous inquiry as resistance research” (p 18). She further engages the writing of Graham Smith to argue that attempting to move forward with Indigenous research frameworks without acknowledging the colonial residue inherent in Western educative and research processes will not bring the substantive change required. The means by which knowledge is garnered, valued, and legitimized from a traditional Western perspective contrasts with tribal ways, and exemplifies how the different worlds chafe in the presence of each other. (Kovach, 2009, p. 18)

I filter my interpretation of the information through a decolonizing Indigenous lens by taking into consideration the colonial history of Canada, my internal insider knowledge and understanding of the history and experiences of the LTFC, my own personal experiences and shared Western and Indigenous values, as do Battiste, 2000b; Kovach, 2005, 2009; Smith,
Specifically I drew upon my mixed Western-Indigenous heritage, my experience as a student and parent of grade school students within SD57, as a high school teacher within SD57, as a current First Nations Studies UNBC graduate student and as a Lheidli T’enneh member. This unique position offers dynamic insights into interpreting the participants’ experiences from multiple viewpoints (Archibald, 2008; Friere, 2006; Little Bear, 2000). However, I also recognize that

in a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying (Smith, 1999, p. 3)

The intent of my analysis is to ensure that the voices of the participants relative to their experiences and expectations of public education do not go unnoticed or underestimated.

My first steps in analysing the information gathered in this study occurred as I transcribed the audio recordings. As I listened to the conversations several times, I paid close attention to the content and mood of the dialogues. After receiving verification from participants I re-read the transcripts and began coding by identifying reoccurring themes. I categorized them in order of importance according to the number of recurrences during dialogues along with the sense of urgency and weight expressed by the participants during dialogues. As I analyzed, cross-referenced and compared emerging themes and information with results found within the literature I developed a clearer understanding of key themes and outliers relative to the participants narratives and the comparative literature.

The thematic results were compiled into a PowerPoint containing the main ideas and concepts in text with visual aids and quotes to present to participants for feedback, revision
and approval. I provided opportunities for participants to review and discuss their transcripts. I also provided the Lheidli T’enneh Ethics Committee and Band Council an opportunity to review and discuss drafts of the thesis and presentations which is where they provided additional contextual information to include in the final copy.

Validity

I consider validity as the preservation of authenticity, credibility and integrity of the work presented (Lichtman, 2013, p. 322; Whitmore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 245). To ensure validity of the study I have consulted with participants to ensure that the representation of their experiences and findings are accurate. I also consulted with the participants and Lheidli T’enneh ethics committee to ensure they agreed with how I conducted the study and present the findings.

I worked through this research project with the guidance of my supervisor, supervisory committee, the UNBC Ethics Committee, the Lheidli T’enneh Family Development Coordinator, the Lheidli T’enneh Band Council and administration as well as participating community members. I submitted progress reports on my work to my supervisor and committee as well as the Lheidli T’enneh Band Council and assisting staff periodically for review.

Ethical considerations. When conducting research, a researcher must disclose possible conflicts of interest. As mentioned, I am a teacher within SD57 and even though none of the participants were students of mine one or more of them could be in the future which some may consider a conflict of interest. Participants may feel that their participation may positively or negatively affect their educational outcomes in relation to being taught by me in a course. To mitigate any conflicts of interest I ensured that the consent letter and process I undertook with participants contained no penalties or unfair advantage as a result of
declining or consenting to participation in the research. Within this process, I followed the
ethics processes of the Lheidli T’enneh, the University of Northern British Columbia and the
Tri Council Policy Statement.

The probability of harm resulting from this study was minimal. Participant’s names
are omitted from public documents to maintain participants confidentiality. Emotional
discomfort may have occurred during interviews as participants recounted memories of
emotionally difficult experiences. A list of possible resources was provided within the
consent form for any members who may wish to seek counselling if emotionally triggered
during the dialogues. There was no physical, psychological, economic, or social harm
resulting from participating in this study.

One of the benefits to participating in the study was to showcase lived experiences,
perspectives and expectations of local Lheidli T’enneh families and their aspirations for the
education of their children in an effort to lead to greater understanding for others. The study
also reveals participants’ perceptions of how teachers could integrate local Dakelh culture,
history and pedagogies into the education system for the benefit of all students.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the number of participants; availability,
willingness and level of participation; time; and educational climate. The greatest limitation
of this study is the number of participants sampled. I have interviewed a sample of four
family groupings with a representation totalling 12 Lheidli T’enneh members. The findings
represent approximately 10% of Lheidli T’enneh students. Although the sample is limited in
size, the research findings provide a research narrative of experience for others to access.

Time is often a factor during interviews, and this study was no exception. It takes
time to recount stories, and in this case adults and children needed time to consider and
reflect on the questions. Seeking a youth’s experience within the education system involves recalling experiences that can span up to 12 or more years. These memories may be vague, misunderstood, and difficult to communicate in general. They may be harder to express to a researcher within the presence of family who may or may not have awareness of these instances. The journals were offered as a platform so they could share additional information that may have been difficult to communicate in the group setting. Only one participant chose to submit their journal, which did include additional information not shared within the family setting.

Lastly, the study is dependent on the current context in which the broader education system is situated. These experiences are influenced by external factors such as the change in the climate of education. The study spans a timeframe that includes two BC teachers’ strikes in British Columbia and occurs amidst the restructuring of the BC curriculum. Education in BC and across Canada has been under a lot of critique for a few decades now, which has created tension amongst parents, educators and provincial governing bodies responsible for education. As the sampling focuses on recent experiences and the expectations of education through the eyes of Lheidli T’enneh members, the current situation is both indirectly and directly reflected in this study.

Presentation and reciprocity. Reciprocity is an integral part of Indigenous custom and research practice. This research creates a platform for community voices to be heard beyond the community while the actual results serve to engage this greater community in a dialogue that includes community voice and vision for the future. Upon successful completion of the study and writing of the thesis, I will arrange for a presentation of the findings with the participating families and the greater Lheidli T’enneh community to
celebrate the completion of the research and continue to advance the conversations around public education.

I intend to present this work to the SD57 Aboriginal Education Department, at the principals’ administration meeting, and to the Board of Trustees. Further to that, I may consider presenting the findings for staff within SD57 during professional development days in hopes of inspiring them to consider the findings and approach their teaching and interaction with students in culturally respectful ways to improve and enhance student experiences and learning.

In the spirit of reciprocity, which is integral to Indigenous values, I hope to bring the knowledge and experience I have gathered back into the community through these presentations and in doing so I hope the work inspires and produces positive changes to the educational environment and policies within the public school system. These presentations offer opportunities for dialogue where each of these communities can express their thoughts through question and answer periods and/or feedback circle when time permits. These opportunities will continue the dialogue and provide additional understandings for people to consider within their positions.
Chapter 4: Results of Conversations with Four Lheidli Families

Lheidli T’enneh Experiences and Expectations

This section focuses on sharing information about the collective experiences and expectations of Lheidli T’enneh participants in the areas of relationships, curriculum and pedagogy within education. The Lheidli T’enneh participants identified their expectations of the education system, including suggestions for improvement. Not all topics discussed during the family dialogues are included, and much of the information is summarised to reflect concurring experiences and viewpoints across the dialogues held with the 12 participants. There were instances when responses to some questions were more relevant to other issues, and in those cases the information is presented within the most relevant category for the response.

About your school. Half of the parents had little to say on the subject of their children’s schools, indicating that they were not very involved aside from dropping off or picking up their children. Events like “brag days” and “Christmas Concerts” where parents were invited into schools gave parents a positive impression of the schools. Discussions regarding school satisfaction arose at times, where parents and students both expressed that they liked and disliked various teachers and administrators based on their teaching styles and interactions with them.

The youngest participants reported that they enjoy school because it is a place where they have time on computers, in the gym, with extracurricular programs, and with their friends. The graduated and secondary school students expressed general satisfaction with

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23 The quotes from the participants do not have dates in order to maintain the flow of perspectives. The family dialogues occurred between February 7th and March 31st 2016.
their schools; however, one participant from one school described their school as “below average” although another student described their school as a “welcoming” place where it is “pretty hard not to have friends.” However, another high school participant stated that their elementary school experience was “quite depressing,” that they “hated it,” and were “bullied quite extensively, almost to the point [they] wanted to die” and that the “teachers saw and did nothing.” As a way to cope with this environment, this student explained that they hated going to class and felt that this is where their “habits on being late originated” because they just “didn’t want to deal with other kids.” Luckily, this student found “life got significantly better” when they moved on to middle school and secondary school. These results echo the results of the HAWD satisfaction survey for SD57 (BC Ministry, 2015b).

Some of the parent and student participants identified the former middle school as “a good stepping stone between elementary and high school” and were sad to see it close. One of the parents reflecting on the difficulties their child experienced commented, “You would think that in a smaller school things would get caught faster but I think people in a smaller school have a tendency to gloss things over.” The older post-graduate students expressed that they felt each of their schools were “more segregated and racial” than they are now. The parents also felt the same way considering comparisons to when they were students.

Participants also shared concerns about providing stability, consistency and structural organization at home as well as with within the classroom environment, with staffing (principals, teachers and Aboriginal Education workers) and with school day-to-day operations and routines. Disruptions, inconsistency and disorganization in the students’ lives were perceived by participants as having negative impact on the student’s ability to be successful in their studies and relationships. One of the grandparents reflected on their children’s experience of moving from school to school and emphasized that for students,
“continuity, sticking to one school is very important and is one of those intergenerational cycles that [their son] and daughter-in-law have broken.” As another example, one student provided the following perspective:

Elementary school I wasn’t a very big fan of, I felt like [in this school] things were really disorganized. I remember when my first principal retired we had one year with one principal then the next year she left then we got a new one for one or two years then she left the we had to get another one and it was similar with the Ab Ed (Aboriginal Education) workers. Along with the principals, the Ab Ed workers were in and out of the school. They would be there for a year then they would leave and then we would get a new one.

Despite concerns with staffing inconsistencies, both parents and students valued the Aboriginal Education workers in their schools. One of the parents who was not available to attend parent teacher nights found their Aboriginal Education Worker to be invaluable as they were the only one who kept them “updated… if anything is happening” with one of their children/grandchildren “She tends to call… whenever there is a problem or falling behind in work or attitudes.” The students appreciated cultural guidance, care and supports provided by Aboriginal Education workers within the schools, especially during times of financial difficulty.

The grandparent of Nusdeh Yoh students described the school as having a “phenomenal” atmosphere where “everybody works together” as a team. In particular, it was expressed that the school “really helped them and grounded them ‘cause there was so much Aboriginal content and it started within [the student]… the knowledge of their identity.”

**Feelings about school.** All of the participants held school in high regard finding it “very important to get further in life.” A couple of the families struggled with deciding
whether to enroll their children in public schools or consider alternatives. One concern was that their children would either pick up bad habits from other kids or be subject to discrimination in public school. In the end, they chose public school feeling “it is important to socialize [their] children and introduce them to different people” to give them the opportunity to learn how to “make [their] own choices whether that’s good or bad” and that they could mitigate any exposure to negative behaviours through active parenting.

Most parents held the view that they need more extracurricular activities in schools to give youth, (who would otherwise not have the chance) opportunities to try various sports and activities. Sports were valued as important to maintaining life balance through physical growth and health, social development and learning how to work as a team. Extracurricular opportunities were seen as a way to enhance learning through active participation in real life scenarios. As Auger, Langford and Rich (2007) explain, “play can be a powerful force that enhances children’s motivation and ability to learn” (p. 66).

There were some concerns expressed regarding workloads and academic work of students. One parent felt their child had “too much homework” and was missing out in other areas of life. Another family felt their children were not being challenged enough in some of their classes; they wanted more enrichment opportunities for students who were ahead as well as additional support for struggling students. They acknowledged that both boredom and confusion often result in children’s behavioural problems.

Parents from two different family groupings felt the system was exploiting their children for statistical purposes. One parent’s experience raised concern that the “school will try to exploit certain things just to get more funding in their school… whether it is Aboriginal ancestry or if somebody has a lot of energy.” This parent also believed that the school was motivated to designate their child with autism to “get extra funding every year [their child] is
there” and “more support in the classrooms.” Their child has only been able to attend school for one hour per day as they transition him into the system.

Similarly, a grandparent stated that young people are “graduating with green cards, green cards are not recognized at the college level or university level you know, our children should be graduating with the Dogwood Certificate.” This grandparent was frustrated that two of their grandchildren received school completion certificates and are now struggling at home without the necessary skills and certifications to further their education when in their opinion the youth were completely capable. They went on to say that the transition to high school from the inner-city school back then, (which is now Nusdeh Yoh) was “just like a child getting off the rez to go to school… [Today] Nusdeh Yoh [provides] lots of things for the children but when you get into high school it kind of peters out,” as they no longer have all the supports or cultural content. This participant’s words and expressions displayed concern that this could reoccur with their younger grandchildren and students of Nusdeh Yoh.

**Relationships with school staff.** Youth expressed varying degrees of satisfaction with their teachers. Teachers who were favored were ones that were respectful and accommodating to parents and students. If a student felt a teacher did not particularly like them (based on the teachers’ attitudes and tone) it greatly affected the students’ willingness to participate. One student shared an experience in a class where a teacher lacked sensitivity to their feelings and the related parental involvement was also dismissed. The student was forced to watch videos with graphic content that “made [them] and a couple of [their] friends feel uncomfortable.” When the student asked if they could leave the room, they were denied. It was to the point where the student would “go home crying.” Even when the parent made phone calls to the school to request accommodation by excusing their child in such
circumstances the situation repeated itself. This student found that “a lot of [their] elementary teachers weren’t as accommodating” as their high school teachers where they have teachers “they could tell that they really cared about how [they] were doing.” In a related experience, another participant from the same family shared that they felt that one of their school councillors “doesn’t particularly care about the actual people so long as they are all in a class.” Within this family, during elementary school, a youth was particularly disappointed when their teacher witnessed bullying and did nothing about it; in another class, the teacher again did not do anything other than place the victim of bullying near the teachers desk in an attempt to deter the bullying in the classroom.

Students and parents shared several other instances of teachers being disrespectful or dismissive in the classroom while one parent’s words similarly expressed that

[this teacher] was not the only one, there were others. They would either dismiss your concerns outright or they would just accept what you said as it stood but there wasn’t any middle ground. [They] seemed to want to just… say what [they] could to make you happy with what [they] had to say as opposed to actually changing a behaviour or something. On the other hand, there was the teacher [this student] had in grade 4… and when she noticed something off or different or unusual happening… I would always get a phone call and it was always a conversation with her… and when the option of [this student] repeating grade four came up it was a conversation between all involved including [the student].

In this case, the family encountered both positive and negative experiences with teachers regarding their children’s education. In the latter example, the teacher “made a point of following some requests [the family] had made.” The parent said that the teacher was
“willing to work with the whole family not just the student but the whole family [and this]
makes a big difference as opposed to the teacher that just pays lip service to it.”

More examples of positive relationships were provided by students who identified
that they found it easy to build relationships with teachers who were more approachable,
accommodating and culturally considerate. One student’s history teacher was described as
having

a good relationship with all his students. He is very upfront and makes a lot of jokes
and stuff. He is very friendly and approachable. He also talks about how the
textbooks we use don’t talk much about Aboriginal history and [he says things like]
‘it says here that this happens but they kind of forgot about this and all the Nations
that that person had to go through’. He is a very interesting person…

They also found this teacher to be

accommodating, like if you have to miss school you just have to go to him and say I
missed school yesterday and I need the notes and he’ll give you the notes and stuff.
He is very friendly and approachable which I think is a very important thing to have a
relationship with the teacher because if they’re like intimidating or not approachable
then… if you’re more introverted… you’re probably not going to go up to them… I
had a couple teachers who got mad at me for missing school.

Students’ responses also indicated that simple gestures such as: allowing and trusting
them to meet in the classroom over lunch, re-teaching and re-testing students when they
struggled with concepts, acknowledging good behaviour and simply respecting the students
space to speak and voice their opinions. These gestures seemed to go a long way towards
fostering positive teacher-student relationships and subsequently enabling greater student
success.
Several adult respondents expressed that they were not directly involved with staff due to work schedules. To mitigate this, one parent developed a strong connection with the Aboriginal Education worker at their school. At another school, a parent who was able to be more involved described their relationship:

The administration all know who I am. I like that most of [my children’s] teachers will actually feel free to either phone me at home just to check up and see how she is feeling about their class, they send me emails if there is something in particular they have a question about or want to talk to me about or just let me know some information. So the communication I have found [with high school] has been very free flowing. At [elementary school], it wasn’t like that at all… knowing I could go to whichever teacher or area that I have a question or concern about for me makes a difference.

Parental relationships with teachers and administrators were not always this positive as indicated by one parent’s comment that they were not happy with their new principal because they “don’t see her very often, [the principal is] not a very active face within the school. She kind of spends a lot of time in her office.” This parent believes that “as a principal you need to be out mingling with the children and the parents [to] make sure you’re having the correct connections.”

Frequent changes in school staff was another concern for parents. At least two of the families brought up the fact that their schools have gone through a series of Aboriginal Education workers, “one every year, so it is kind of hard for the students to feel any bit of connection with them if they’re changing every year.” One of these families enjoyed their current Aboriginal Education Worker because they were “very active with the kids, involved in the field trips” including having morning and lunch programs with the kids.
In situations where some of the parents had children who struggled with adapting to the norms of public school, they reported that their children endured some traumatic times. In one of these cases “the school in turn recognized that and set up counselling services for [this student] and because they did that, it helped him. He is learning how to curb his anger.” In another situation, where a parent is trying to advocate for their child’s right to adequate education, the parent said:

I think they think that I am ignorant in that area of rights and responsibilities and policies and procedures and that’s what irks me is when they think that I don’t understand it and they try to use it to their advantage and say ‘you can’t do that, you can’t do that.’ I’d say it is pressured, I have a pressured relationship with the school staff.

This is the single parent who also expressed concerns regarding exploitation of the students for funding purposes, reported earlier in this chapter. Their child was in the 7th month of their first year in the system and was still only attending for a small fraction of the day. This parent was greatly concerned about their child’s future within the education system and felt that they themselves and their child were not receiving equitable treatment.

The most unique perspective provided on the topic of relationships with school staff came from one of the grandparents who was also a teacher in the same school as their grandchildren. They believed that “being in that classroom really sets a tone because [they are] an Elder.” They get “hugs every day and the relationships with the kids are really good but it took a while to earn trust and [they are] still earning [the] trust [of] some of [the students]. It takes time to build trust with kids.”

**Peer relationships.** All students shared their pleasure with having built strong close relationships with some of their peers. Outside of their close friends, the high school students
shared a similar sentiment to this student who states that, “I don’t really talk to them much but a lot of them are…. but there are a few that are very sexist or racist…. I usually just stick to a small group of people.” Similarly, a student in another school, when talking about their friends, said they “don’t experience much outside of [their] bubble because [they] just have [their] group of friends.” When asked about bullying one student said they “don’t think [they’ve] every really experienced a ton of bullying from peers but [they] do know that other people do.” The student who had experienced extensive bullying mostly stuck with their friends but when their friends moved on from that school they were left to their own devices and ended up spending time in solitude avoiding peer interactions; they developed a hatred for the rest of their peers during that timeframe.

Of the younger primary students, one stated, “I like my friends. I think sometimes this one kid doesn’t like me very well” and another said, “I have a few kids in my class that don’t treat me very nicely and I am not very happy with that…. but other than that I have lots of friends at least. I really like the friends that I have; I am glad that I have those friends.”

When parents were asked about bullying, parents of the elementary students did not “feel like the bullying that those few students do is being dealt with very well” wishing “there was more engagement from the principal and more support for the people that are being victimized. At least being heard.” When challenged by the behaviours of their own child, parents worked with the school to seek a solution.

Another family commented on their involvement with sports teams. Parents had both experienced and witnessed how team-oriented involvement fosters comradery, relationship building and develops peer support networks which would otherwise not exist beyond school cliques. Even when some forms of disagreement or differences are present, a student explained, “for the most part [they] find everyone can forget their quarrels with each other
enough to be a team.” In addition, observations by one parent who participates in school planning with a group of students described the student group dynamics as team oriented where each person was unique and a natural leader within the group were respected regardless of his disruptive behaviour.

**Parental engagement within the schools.** Parents also discussed their engagement with the school. Most of the responses, especially from the male parents, indicated that they were not involved at schools aside from attending the odd parent teacher meeting, Christmas concert or some special evening events held by the schools. Of the four families, three had parents who had attempted participation in the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and volunteered in the schools. These experiences varied; one was successful and others unsuccessful in participating in PAC. In one case, a non-Indigenous parent who has been a PAC member for a few years, spoke of their involvement with the PAC, explaining that they get their impression of the school from their child as well as “conversations [they] have with other members of the PAC.” Based on these interactions they relayed that “for the most part…. the environment at [this school] is fairly inclusive.” Conversely, three other parents of Lheidli ancestry shared their experiences of attempting to participate in their school’s PAC but encountered deep feelings of discomfort, enough so that none of the other three parents continued their involvement with the PAC.

I was one year involved with the PAC, not very long though because I kind of felt like an outsider within the parents. Certain parents were more, they wanted to do everything and they did things their way and it just made me feel really uncomfortable. So uncomfortable that I only went to three or four meetings and I didn’t ever go back to the PAC again but I did volunteer. I did a lot of volunteering that year and then that was pretty much well it because what carried on from the PAC
were the same people that you were doing the volunteering with or for. So, it, I know it’s just like fake friends, they look at you and talk nice to you but you know that, you get this feeling that they really didn’t like you and that they were better than you.

Later, one of these parents expressed that when they started to work they were limited in their ability to contribute to PAC and volunteering. Another parent described their involvement, saying

My involvement with PAC is that they’re extremely cliquey… I think as a First Nations person, they’re not used to seeing that on their PACs so when you do join and you do want to help out they almost, they unknowingly patronize you and have low expectations of you… a lot of the parents that are on the PAC [were] ‘soccer moms’, they live for PAC.

The fourth parent’s experience echoed the previous two.

As for the PAC, I did go to the one PAC meeting and had some suggestions that were shot down instantly so I didn’t go back ‘cause I just felt like, I wasn’t welcome there and they kind of have their own way of doing things and don’t really want other people’s opinions or ideas. I just went to the one and they put volunteer forms out for fun nights and fundraisers and stuff like that and they don’t get a lot of support from a lot of parents from school so it is unfortunate that way, that there’s not a lot of engagement and they are doing their best. They just came up with a program that if you volunteer for an hour at any of their events you get a $5 voucher for their hot lunch days which is kind of cool. So hopefully it will improve the amount of people that will volunteer. I don’t need the incentive to volunteer. I don’t work full time so I have the time to help out.
Several factors influenced or affected participants’ ability to contribute to the PAC. One important factor was time constrained by work and other commitments. Another major factor was the atmosphere and composition of the PAC. Three Indigenous parents all shared similar expressions of discomfort and frustration of not being taken seriously when trying to contribute. They all felt unwelcome, like outsiders. Whether this is due to cultural differences, real or perceived discrimination, previous experience and traumas, assumptions or personal insecurities we do not know. They nonetheless point to the need for further exploration to identify root causes and possible remedies for creating more welcoming PAC environments.

As noted in the Literature Review in Chapter 2, “parent involvement at school was considered less important to a child's academic achievement than parent involvement in academics at home” (DePlanty 2007, p. 361). One participant recalled that when attending school “the only time I got help or support from family members was from my aunty. … if it wasn’t for that I would have had a really hard time with math so… family support is very important.” They also explained that as a grandparent living with the family they were all able to bond and “whatever struggles parents were going through it kind of helped because we are there. We served as an anchor, a good role model.” This illustrates how family support, even at home, does not necessarily mean it has to come only from the parents. Grandparents and other family members can help too.

**Positive experiences.** Most of the positive experiences relayed by participants were celebratory instances where the students had shown academic success such as achieving an award, being on the principal’s list or honor roll, acceptance into honours classes, kindergarten graduation ceremonies, high school completion and graduation. Another positive experience participants shared was when their children were moving on to post-
secondary school after graduation. This was another cause for celebration as well as providing inspiration for the aspirations of younger siblings. Even simply seeing their youth trying their best, sticking with it through difficult times or attending regularly were positive experiences. Parents and guardians were proud to see youth succeed and youth were proud to see their accomplishments recognized, from kindergarten to high school graduation.

Along with the academic successes, participants were also happy to see and participate in the extracurricular activities, for example, sporting events, Christmas concerts, family fun nights, sports days and opportunities like “brag night” where families are invited in to the school and their children get to “show off the kind of work [they] do throughout the year.” As one parent articulated, parents “have lots of fun with the kids going to those kind of events” and enjoy seeing “the whole school work together.” These events were positive for the youth and parents.

One parent highlighted situations where parent-teacher communication was particularly successful as a positive memory. This parent was impressed by the reassurance the teacher gave about their child’s progress even though the child was having difficulty. In another situation, the same parent was again especially pleased when the teacher engaged the family including the youth in the decision making process about their child’s educational path. The youth involved echoed the same sentiment on both occasions.

A unique highlight for one parent was their experience contributing to a special project where parents “made homework kits for the students out on Lheidli T’enneh [that] had everything they needed to do their homework. It came in a little tub… just [seeing the kids’ excitement] when they each got their own little container was very heart warming, knowing that they had something that was theirs. Something that they could look forward to when they do their homework.” Taken together these academic and extracurricular
experiences were viewed as valuable and memorable by parents and their children. This example shows how this parent was able to participate and contribute to their children’s education as well as to that of other children in the Lheidli T’enneh community.

**Negative experiences.** Involvement with the PAC, loss of extracurricular sports programs and lack of academic support for their children were identified as negative experiences by parents. One student recalled a time when they experienced a lack of support from their teacher who said that “if they thought that you didn’t try this year” and “you come to them for help” that they “were not going to help.” Condemning remarks by teachers towards the students were of particular concern. This student also recalled an instance when a teacher told a student “that they were failing the course, that they wouldn’t go anywhere in life and that they’d just work at McDonalds.” Another student shared their teacher’s words, “if you can’t do simple math you’d better learn how to say ‘would you like fries with that?’”.

Students also struggled with situations of discrimination from their teachers. For example, one student felt discriminated against when their teacher was “a little ignorant to the culture” and made some culturally inappropriate jokes. Another student who did not want to study Shakespeare for an extra week shared that they were pulled aside by their teacher and told that they “were not trying”, that they “were acting like a stereotype.”

These discriminatory experiences extended to bullying and covert racism as described by parents and students in their interactions with teachers and peers within and beyond the school environment. For example, a student shared that “someone tried to tell me that Native people should just try to stop wallowing in their pity because [residential schools] happened forever ago” not realizing that they were speaking to a First Nations person and clearly misguided about the facts around the Residential school system and its impacts on current generations. A parent voiced, “even nowadays we are still stereotyped because [of what] their
parents taught them and [so forth].” In another case, a participant was attending a meeting with teachers throughout the province where one non-Indigenous teacher stood up and told the rest of the non-Indigenous teachers “you don’t have to teach [about residential schools] if you don’t want to.”

Along with these bullying and racism concerns, participants also expressed frustration with classes and school situations that were disorganized. For instance, the greatest concern and disappointment for one family was school start-up when their children were being “scattered around” amongst the classes and there were “kindergarten to grade four [students] randomly [placed] in classes for the first five days of school” who were not set up with regular teachers and classes until after the first week. It was a very confusing and stressful way to start the year and it felt like “a waste of time” as students were “stuck in a classroom doing nothing other than sitting on a carpet and listening to stories every day for the first five days.” Further, the children in this family came home saying “they were bored just listening to stories, not knowing who their teacher was.” Participants concern for structure extended to the system itself where students were not being academically challenged or supported enough in their classes or being prepared for life after public schooling. As mentioned earlier, one participant had two grandchildren receive school completion certificates (the Evergreen Certificate) when they were capable of achieving the Dogwood Certificate if they had the support they needed to get through school. This participant also observed that there are “groups of students who are the underdogs who are always overlooked, some of them have emotional problems and yet they can’t find adequate ways to help them because of the system.” In this participant’s opinion, the youth were quite capable of achieving the Dogwood certificate if they had the support they needed to get through school. In their minds, these two youth were unprepared for life after completing public school.
Existing curriculum and instruction. During the latter half of the family dialogues, through a series of closely related questions (in Appendix A), participants were asked to reflect on what they believed students, or they themselves, should learn at school, what knowledge they actually gained in school and how they acquired that knowledge.

Perceived school expectations. Participants felt that they, or their youth, were expected to learn core academic course along with social skills. Some students expressed that they

  don’t really feel like [they] are expected to learn anything cause [they] feel like a lot of the teachers are like, ‘you just get through the school year, get through the class, I don’t really care if you retain any of this information as long as you do well on the compulsory tests and on your provincial exams.’

They felt that the school system “in general is just about compulsory tests and less about students actually learning, which is pretty upsetting.” Another recent graduate said, “it’s not even intelligence, it’s just preparing for a test.”

What was learned and how. Each of the participants reported to have learned “the basics,” such as spelling, reading, writing, science and math, through note taking, classwork, homework, experiments and field studies. Random facts presented by teachers and friends were items that seemed to stick in the students memories.

School was the primary place where students learned social aspects like how to speak up and interact with people, how to deal with conflict, how to do their best, how to exercise patience and appropriate social behaviours, how to be accountable through consequences, and the importance of punctuality and regular attendance. School is also where students learned and experienced for the first time the less favorable aspects of a diverse society such as discrimination, racism, classism and sexism, each finding their own ways of dealing with
these instances from confronting it or ignoring it to resentful isolation. With regard to these types of social problems, most students acquire their behaviours and levels of understanding through firsthand experience, and direct or observed interactions.

Students reported that they learned very little about Aboriginal people within their classrooms. Younger participants reported learning about First Nations people through the Girls Club, their Aboriginal Education worker, videos, movies, and in-class or schoolwide guest presenters. At the higher grades, bits and pieces of information were presented or available to students and most of the information was more about “the situation [Aboriginal people] were put in” rather than about their cultures and current presence. The information they did acquire was usually a small amount of generalized information provided in the social studies textbooks and as one participant described, “based loosely on Nations that are away from where we are… What [students] wanted to see was more of a local First Nations view because it would be something [they] would understand and be more passionate about.” However, one student had a teacher they said “would talk about [First Nations] a lot” because he had previous experience working with First Nations on-reserve.

Awareness and appropriateness of curriculum offerings were of concern to students and parents alike. Of the four participants who had recent experience with secondary school, three of them were aware of some of the First Peoples courses in BC schools but the majority of family members were completely unaware. One student had taken the BC First Nations Studies 12 course and “failed it”, while the other was planning to take it the following year. Participants as a whole were not aware of the English 10 and 11 First Peoples, the English 12 First Peoples or that there is a locally developed curriculum for First Nations Studies 12 with a Dakelh Focus, with the exception of one student who had just recently heard about the
English First Peoples course from a teacher promoting it in class. A participant who had taken one of the courses explained their experience by saying:

_We weren’t seen as human beings, we were seen as things that were in the way, like a tree or a shrub that were just here with the rest of the animals and we didn’t count. That’s the kind of content and that’s how I felt about these books that I read… that’s what angered me, agitated me, but if I was seen as a person and if these books touched on First Nations people as people and human beings with faces…._

Sharing thoughts on why they believe they were unsuccessful in passing the class this participant said, “I actually failed… only because I kept questioning it, saying ‘this isn’t right and that isn’t right.’ They discussed racism but in the paragraphs themselves it was racist the way they put it out but they didn’t understand that.” Speaking about the curriculum, they explained, “they brush lightly, they skim on the top of the subjects without being able to get right deep into it because it would be too heartbreaking.” They recognized that part of this could come from lack of familiarity with the topics but one participant also believed that feelings of guilt were a factor saying, “a lot of people come from a place of guilt rather than responsibility… until we come from a place of responsibility we’re never going to heal.” In response to the experience just shared, this participant’s sibling felt:

_Like it’s kind of changed a bit since [their sibling] has been in school because [their] English teacher recognizes the guilt and tells the [non-Aboriginal] students that there is a bunch of guilt that they do feel but it wasn’t their doing… even though they are part of European culture they shouldn’t just feel guilt. They should just try to understand what happened… learning about the culture is going to help heal._

Overall, students “learned more about First Nation cultures outside of school than [they] ever had in school.” They sought out opportunities such as after school programs,
books and through participating in activities and conversations with Aboriginal communities and families to learn about First Nations cultures. Through taking college history courses, participating in school and community led language classes and drumming groups, participants have built their knowledge base around First Nations history, culture, protocols, language and worldviews. As one of the participants reflected, “in the language class, the nature of the Dakelh language is you can’t help but learn culture when you’re learning the language because they are intimately involved.”

_What participants need and desire to learn._ Every participant identified the basics, the current core subjects, as being important for functioning in today’s society. They also expressed the importance of learning social skills, self-discipline, mental, physical and social work/life balance, awareness of social issues, respect for others, local, national and international history, economies and current events as well as national issues. They valued life skills and topics that can help later in life such as knowing human rights and laws, as well as how to manage relationships, create a resume and know about the poverty cycle. Other learning they considered as important was how to work as a team, how to problem solve, how to learn based on an individual’s learning style and how they can study effectively. Learning how one learns best was identified by one family as essential to individual students’ success. They acknowledged that it is important for teachers to also recognize and foster learning in various ways.

What participants wanted to learn more about in schools included many other items but they desired, above all else, to learn more about First Nations, their own culture, as well as the cultures of other places. As one participant put it,

I don’t think I ever learned a single Carrier (Dakelh) thing in school, it’s always Cree.

I don’t even remember learning anything about Coast Salish or the Haida or anything
and if I did I didn’t know it. Like totem poles, I thought that was a Cree thing… They never taught us about pit houses… they’d always talk about teepees and stuff.

This was supported by another participant who explained how their teacher did a base coverage on what I suppose would be the really big [First Nations] groups. A bunch of the ones from around the Great Lakes back east, a bit about the coast here and mostly Cree. There wasn’t a whole lot about the interior.

Another remark on learning about cultures was that

We don’t learn anything Eastern culture… Asian cultures, Middle Eastern cultures, or South African cultures… South American cultures or any of their history… We should be learning about other things as opposed to just the stereotypes we hear about on the internet.

In a similar sense, one youth expressed the following,

I would like to learn more about my culture and where people have been, like where we have come from. Not only for myself but for non-Aboriginals too so they can know… why there’s so many people on the streets that are First Nations… that’s kind of what I think needs to be taught.

The participants understand that what they have learned is not everything and that there is always more to learn especially when it comes to understanding others and the world around them. Seeing the diversity of cultures in the world and learning that other cultures have had similar experiences to one’s own helps to understand ones place in the world.

Numerous times, participants mentioned the desire to learn more about the local history and the impacts of residential schools. The underlying motivations for learning about their own culture, history and other cultures were to develop their identity in relationship to the world as a whole while learning “how to understand things” with a more open lens, in
order to accept and understand different points of view and perspectives. Overall, it is evident that participants want the youth to learn about their identity “because,” as an adult participant said, “they say, once you know who you are and where you come from, your confidence is instilled within you. Once you have that, it seems like those kids… excel more than the kids that don’t.” Participants want the education system to help students explore their identity and to build their self-esteem and confidence that will enable their success and ability to learn how to work as a team and contribute to the community.

**Envisioning inclusion of Indigenous content and perspectives.** None of the participants felt like First Nations perspectives were being included in classrooms, however, they acknowledged that some perspectives were included to varying degrees through the site based Aboriginal education centres and services but that they were generally not Dakelh perspectives. One student described the inclusion of content in mainstream curriculum as “Pan-Indigenous” and not reflective of the local perspective.

Participants offered suggestions for how to include Indigenous content and perspectives within the school environment. Many of their ideas align with recommendations from the literature. The participant’s suggestions include:

- Start Indigenous education early to build a desire to learn more about it
- Include everyone, eliminating situations of segregation
- Make education around residential schools and First Peoples mandatory for teachers and students
- Teach the language and history of the local First Nation(s) on whose territory the school resides
• Begin learning about First Peoples locally and expand from there throughout the world

• Use the model of the ambassador training program developed by the Lheidli T’enneh during the 2015 Canada Winter Games

• Use the model Nusdeh Yoh has embraced, where Elders and knowledge holders come in to the classroom to teach the students and teachers at the same time

• Break stigma by educating people about what ‘status’ is, what the benefits are and why

• Teach about the origins and types of discrimination and marginalization

• Include more assemblies with guest speakers with Aboriginal ancestry

• Share stories through storytellers, books, art, presentations and digital media

• Use technology to bring Elders digitally into the classrooms from their homes

• Provide more opportunities for active, hands-on learning about Aboriginal cultures, for example, have learning feasts to help teach about value of traditional governance

• Teach through comparisons and modern day analogies relative to pop culture

One participant advised: “bring in the people, right into the classrooms” and make it so “the teacher is also a student” so they too can learn rather than the teacher leaving the room during guest presentations which has happened while this Elder taught classes before. Bringing in the words of Elders and other knowledge holders is valued as a method to build authenticity into the structure of education. In the words of one participant:
What I wanted to see was more of a local First Nations view because it would be something I would understand and be more passionate about. … We need to have more of an emphasis on First Nations culture that is near where they’re learning… bring somebody from that Nation who knows their history so they can talk to their class, or things like that, [things] that are real, because when you read it from a book it’s not the same you know, there’s no interaction, cause if you don’t understand how this person used this word it’s hard to get a full grasp on this.

Bringing Elders into the classroom brings the curriculum to life, learning becomes a place of interactions where memories are made, knowledge built and experience and opportunities to have questions answered from various perspectives as opposed to relying on what the history books say. Caution was expressed by another participant:

The people that go into the classroom, they got to be good role models. Some of these people that went to residential school, they have a lot of good knowledge, but on the other hand, there are some of them that put a mask on. When they get chosen there’s got to be a really good process to choose those people… to pick the healthy Elders to go in there.

Creating a process endorsed by the community can ensure the accuracy and validity of the collective knowledge offered.

Participants also expressed hope for the new curriculum. One Elder participant commented about how the new curriculum has shifted from the usual spoon-feeding of information to students to a student centered, hands-on, personalized learning approach. Their comment is a reminder:

when you implement something, it takes years and years for it to be perfect… so they just gotta keep working at it and working on it… if only they did that when I was
going to school, how much further ahead I would be now, you know. I think [the new
direction they are taking with the new the curriculum is] just awesome… I’m in a
state of awe.

This Elder reminds us that change takes time and effort and that the system has not been
favorable to people whose perspectives and worldviews lend their learning to nurturing and
experiential learning styles. Misunderstanding of these worldviews and related ways of
learning has often been a barrier to student success where students who do not feel like they
belong end up not being able to reach their full potential, neither understanding their own
value and identity or exercising their own agency over their lives until later in life.

Summary

For these Lheidli T’enneh families, school is valued and important. Their individual
experiences lend themselves to interpretation and to identification of opportunities for
educational enhancement.

Specifically, participants see public school as playing a vital role in the development
of students’ identity and their social development, which in turn helps them succeed in the
school environment as well as prepare them for their future. This is true of all students. In
order to develop a strong sense of identity and confidence, participants stressed the value of
including more content about the local First Nation as well as other First Nations and non-
Indigenous cultures to help students situate themselves in the world. Language is also
identified and valued as an ancient carrier and transmitter of culture, and Indigenous
knowledge and worldviews.

Extracurricular activities, team oriented sports, recognition of accomplishments and
opportunities for building positive social interactions with others help build parents’ and
students’ confidence for realizing success within the school setting. Families rely on the
support of peers, teachers and staff, but expect programs, staff and structures to be consistent, stable, accessible and organized. Participants expect interactions to be respectful and culturally considerate to develop positive relationships where they can be included in decision-making about the education of the youth involved.

Various instances and levels of racism and bullying were experienced by participants. To mitigate these issues at the school level they call for more inclusion of Aboriginal histories and issues, as well as specific training on discrimination, racism and cultural sensitivity for teachers and students. Participants also feel that ensuring teachers and students are educated about Aboriginal people and the history based on their perspectives can help people better understand how they can help break the cycle of discrimination upon others.

The families identify the school system as a key player in reconciliation and counteracting the effects of the historical wrongdoings. The discussions became a venue for both parents and students to think critically about their role in their education and, in the case of the parents, the education of their children.
Chapter 5: Reflections and Considerations

In this study, I sought out the lived experiences of Lheidli T’enneh families with youth who attended public school between 2005 and 2015. With the help of the Lheidli T’enneh Family Development department, between January and March 2016, we distributed and posted calls for participants open to any Lheidli T’enneh member. Several families responded expressing interest and four families scheduled time to participate in the family dialogues. We followed a talking circle format to address questions aimed at understanding what Lheidli T’enneh families’ lived experiences, expectations and hopes for change within the public education system are with respect to relationships, curriculum and pedagogy. During the dialogues, several major themes emerged. These themes are **communication, consistency, support, curricular expectations, cultural inclusivity, relevance and preference for experiential learning**. Each of these categories and themes also surfaced in the literature research; they interact and connect with each other in multiple ways. Taken together it is clear that the common threads tying all of the themes together are the importance of **relationships and identity**.

As I listened to the stories, I found that all of the topics discussed hinged on relationships within the schools reflecting both positive and negative experiences. In particular, students and parents valued school as a place where they had the opportunity to develop their social skills and relationships with peers and staff. Participants acknowledged that within these relationships they expect schools to help guide the youth in development of healthy social behaviours and individual identity. The participants also recognize that relationships are a large part of the school environment, which has a significant impact on student learning.
When people have a strong sense of who they are and what they stand for, they will have strong expectations not only for themselves, but also for what they will tolerate from others. This becomes a prerequisite for having a healthy respect of others as a base in any effective relationship (Auger, Langford & Rich, 2007, p.93).

There are increased expectations by parents that the education system should aid students in the development of their identity, whereas in the past it was at home where one would learn about and develop one’s identity. This causes us to consider who, where and how identity should be taught or developed. The home environment is where the foundations of identity exploration originate, however, the multigenerational impacts of the residential school system and efforts towards assimilation have created generations of First Nations people who, in many cases, have lost touch with their culture, their identity, and the ability to nurture development of identity in youth. Students spend a large portion of their time in classrooms, often more than at home, which restricts parents’ abilities to pass on social knowledge. When possible, it would be beneficial to strengthen individual notions of identity within the school environment through nurturing relationships and diverse cultural inclusivity. Specifically, this could occur by: 1) allowing students, families and staff more flexibility with their time to support more personal interactions with their students and families, 2) including regular visitations from guests form diverse backgrounds into classrooms and 3) using resources from various perspectives and in particular, the local and regional First Nations perspectives. The participants provided many specific suggestions to help with this area, which appear near the end of Chapter 4.

Looking at relationships from a pedagogical perspective, the literature supports that in the traditional fashion, experiential learning and orality are Indigenous ways of passing on knowledge. In these ways, through relationships, people develop their knowledge base and
come to understand their reality as discussed by Archibald (1995, 2008), Battiste (2000a, 2000b, 2013), Battiste and Barman (1995), Battiste and Henderson (2000), the CAAS (2002), Freire (2006), Graham and Ireland (2008c), Henderson (2000b, 2009), Manitoba Education (2003), McLeod (2012), and Wilson (2008). As Takacs (2003) reports, “only by listening to others can I become aware of the conceptual shackles imposed by my own identity and experiences… Recognizing this, we are more willing, eager, or obliged to talk with others, as we realize we make assumptions based on our own positionality, and that this must bias how we view the world” (pp. 29-30). Authentic inclusion of local Indigenous perspectives through local Indigenous voices within the school structures allow Indigenous populations to exercise influence within the education system and help students develop their identity in relation to their environment (Kanu, 2002, 2011; Yoder & Lopez, 2013; Yunkaporta, 2013b). Greater inclusion of the Indigenous voice also provides opportunity for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, including the teachers, to develop cultural awareness and sensitivity. Participants also cautioned that it is equally important to have a process to ensure that participating Elders and/or community members meet expectations as reputable, reliable and respectful knowledge holders.

Making sure that learning is practical and relevant to the learner (including teachers and all people as lifelong learners) through experiential learning opportunities has lasting effect on the development of knowledge. I have seen and experienced the lasting effect of experiential learning firsthand while participating as a teaching assistant with the experiential dugout canoe and pit house courses at the University of Northern BC. I also see its effectiveness every day as I teach in my classroom. Experiential learning opportunities become sites of community development and social connectivity, planting lasting memories, contributing to lifelong learning.
Developing social and emotional connectivity with students is a topic that teachers are cautioned against yet it is interesting that at the same time the provincial HAWD satisfaction surveys ask students if they feel they are cared about by staff in their schools. Generally, social and emotional connectivity is relegated to counselling staff. This understanding triggered my recollection of a discussion I had with a participant about their connection with children at school that included hugs. As a high school teacher, I was trained that any physical exchange between a teacher and student is frowned upon by colleagues and society in general and may have severe legal implications if a student or parent considered the interaction inappropriate. I know the expectation is the same in the elementary schools, however, at that level of school there seems to be more acceptance and awareness that appropriate use of the human touch and relationship building at any age can go an extremely long way. This is where western values and pedagogy do not coincide with many Indigenous teachings. At Nusdeh Yoh it is impossible not to notice the nurturing going on within the classrooms and hallways. Even when Nusdeh Yoh students visit the high school I work at, it is always a shock to me when a student runs up to give me a hug. The transition from such a nurturing environment at Nusdeh Yoh to a segregated and controlled environment of high school is likely to be a difficult and confusing transition for many students. I did not do research specifically looking at effects of physical touch or relationship building within the school environment. This is an area of study that would be interesting to explore given the fears that have been instilled in us all with regard to appropriate student-teacher relationships.

The theme of communication between home and school is where families expressed additional expectations. Communication was seen as an avenue for participants to exercise their own agency to make choices and enable change within the system but when the communication was one sided or disregarded it left participants feeling disempowered,
similar to the experiences reported in the studies by Yunkaporta (2013a, 2013b). Reflecting on my experience as a high school teacher, I often encounter barriers to maintaining regular communication with families. These barriers include lack of available time and or supports to communicate with families, specifically with those students who live in poverty or under the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Nonetheless, the teachers who put in the extra effort to show the students and parents respect by ‘meeting them where they are at’ created positive relationships leading to positive outcomes. As mentioned in the literature, successful schools foster communication with the student and their family; a strong contributing factor to student success is parental/familial engagement with the youth’s education. Research shows that schools that put in the extra effort through outreach, creating inviting school opportunities, welcoming environments, and developing partnerships have greater returns in parental involvement (Ball, 2009; DePlany, et al., 2007; Frew et al., 2013; University of NB, 2005; Walker, et al., 2010; Williams & Sánchez, 2011; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). The discussions with participants also suggests that allowing students, teachers, staff and families additional opportunities to build relationships and engage face-to-face through fun and positive extracurricular activities and community events could go a long way toward achieving parental involvement.

Factors that affect a family’s ability to engage directly with schools include work schedules and tangible barriers, as mentioned in Chapter 2 under Parental Involvement; however, feelings of marginalization have been the greatest hindrance (Ball, 2009; Ball & Pence 2002; Williams & Sánchez, 2011; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Parents who attempted to participate in school Parent Advisory Committees were met with situations that created discomfort resulting in feelings of bitterness and a reluctance to continue participation. Luckily, parental/familial engagement with the youth’s education did not necessarily need to
take the form of presence within the school structure. It also took the role of support of their youth at home as well, which is identified within the literature as having significant value and impact on the students’ successes with school (DePlany, et al., 2007; Kaomea, 2012; University of NB, 2005).

Additional supports for students and families were found in many other areas. Some were through provisions of tangible supports such as food and supplies when needed, whereas other areas included the academic and emotional support and encouragement from teachers, administrators, Aboriginal Education workers, tutors, family, friends, and peer groups including participation in sports teams and clubs. Positive encouragement by individual teachers or recognition though awards and incentives go a long way to help students feel recognized and celebrated for the work they do. This also helps build self-esteem and confidence.

On the other hand, bullying, ignorance and various types of discrimination are issues parents felt should be taken seriously. Families feel that these issues can be mitigated through education and additional professional development for teachers on these topics, including how to manage and better deal with those situations. Participants also expressed that they fared better in situations where there was consistency in structure, staffing and discipline. They valued having a stable environment where the students and parents could develop and rely on relationships with staff to work together with the family for the best interest of the youth’s education.

In addition to instilling confidence through development of social skills and identity, the families also had high expectations of the education system: to provide the support required for their youth to succeed in the core courses and acquire the necessary skills and qualifications for entering a diverse and rapidly changing world. Families expect the system
to prepare youth for post-secondary education and work force entry following graduation. However, it was discovered that in some cases students are still falling through the cracks and do not receive the supports they require to meet the expectations of completing a Dogwood Diploma upon graduation. Reflecting the concerns of the participants on this matter, within SD57 during the 2014/15 school year, 51% of Aboriginal students received a Dogwood Diploma, 8% received Evergreen Certificates and 11% received Adult Dogwood Diplomas. The non-Aboriginal population has 76% receive Dogwood Diplomas, 3% got Evergreen Certificates and 10% received Adult Dogwood Diplomas (BC Ministry 2015b). The gap and concerns are real. Recently there was promising news on February 5th 2016 from the Education Minister Mike Bernier who announced new rules and restrictions to limit the issuance of Evergreen certificates and ensure they are used appropriately. According to the CBC News report

B.C. schools will no longer be able to award Evergreen completion certificates to high school students who do not have a special needs designation and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in place… It is not equivalent to a Dogwood Diploma and is not generally sufficient for post-secondary direct entry programs. (CBC News, 2016b)

There was additional concern by participants that students are being exploited for funding purposes, through self-identification of Aboriginal ancestry and special needs designations, and that they are being pushed through the system to receive Evergreen certificates without receiving the support they require to meet expected criteria. There is little research regarding the prevalence and intricacies of these situations; this would be an area worth exploring further in future studies along with the phenomena of overrepresentation of Aboriginal students who receive the Evergreen and Adult Dogwood certificates.
Knowing the importance of including local knowledge and perspectives in academia, I set out to create a venue and opportunity for Lheidli T’enneh families to share their experiences and engage in discussions around public education and Aboriginal education with their family members. In this process, I was surprised to find that most participants were previously unaware of the selection of First Peoples courses offered throughout the district and province. This fact points to the need for better promotion and encouragement of students to select these courses for their programs. The student who did take a First Peoples course emphasized the need for inclusion of local specific content versus a pan-Indigenous representation from a Western perspective. Nonetheless, at least one First Peoples course ought to be mandatory for High School graduation. Further to that, an effective method of including Indigenous perspectives would be to require Indigenous and First Nations studies as part of teacher education programs.

The participants provided numerous insightful suggestions for how to include Indigenous content and perspectives; their recommendations appear near the end of chapter 4. My interpretations and presentation of the work and conclusions are not as important as the perspectives and experiences of the people who participated. It is through sharing their words that the dialogue continues which may have influence on where we go from here. The lived experiences of these participants can lead to new understandings and considerations for applying new knowledge and strategies for the education of our youth. As lifelong learners, these results can be used to identify successful strategies for relationship building, teaching (pedagogy), and curriculum provisions in my practice.

It is important that these results influence decisions for development of curriculum, professional development or other efforts towards the enhancement the educational experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth. Consequently, these findings provide
the readers an opportunity to explore strategies to address and resolve some of the issues and topics raised for students within SD57 and the Lheidli T’enneh participants. As Armstrong states:

our stories, all our stories, can create a pathway for a stronger, validating education, but we do have to listen. For the stories will teach each of us — if we are willing and can learn to listen to them—how we might serve as an agent for change. That is the power of the story. We are and always have been in the story, in negative and in positive ways. As we move forward, how we write our individual and collective storied autobiographies as change agents may yet create a powerful move toward a humanizing education that embraces the ways of knowing of Aboriginal peoples. We can, thus, also be of the story. (Armstrong, 2013, p. 61)

Specific Considerations for Change

Based on the literature review, results of the HAWD reports, results from the dialogues including the validation processes, some specific areas of change regarding public education should be considered. With that, building strong relationships between the First Nation bands, Aboriginal organizations, families and school staff is paramount. This involves school trustees, school board office staff, school administrators, teachers, and support staff putting effort towards building and maintaining relationships with the members of the Aboriginal communities. To do this, creating a welcoming environment through visible and regular recognition of the traditional territory is a good start and signifies a new relationship to work together towards reconciliation. Creating opportunities to involve the communities, parents and their youth in the youth’s education and extending personal invitations to parents to celebrate student successes, no matter how big or small, will provide opportunities for those relationships and comfort levels with families to grow. For teachers, making regular
contact with the parents and family members at home as often as possible ensures that the family feels informed and opens up avenues for two-way communication.

Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with the First Nation(s) whose territory the school district resides on is of utmost importance. That relationship must recognize the First Nation as a self-determining body with governing powers akin to that of the Federal and Provincial governments and similar respect should be paid through inclusion within the policy-making and decision-making processes. In fact, strong relationships between the school district and service providers within the Aboriginal community, such as neighbouring First Nations, Native Friendship Centres and Métis associations, should also be maintained and included. Inclusion should be ongoing and occur at the onset of any developments pertaining to the education of their youth and about their peoples.

All staff and parent advisory committees should regularly expose themselves to professional development opportunities that build cultural awareness and sensibility around Indigenous issues of the past and present so they can enter into and develop relationships coming from a place of greater understanding for the future. Understanding how the past influences the present and continues into the future while acknowledging that there are many diverse Indigenous cultures and experiences to explore is a lifelong learning journey for everyone to partake in. Professional development opportunities should be developed and include local knowledge holders from the various Indigenous communities and most importantly the local First Nation whose traditional territory the district resides on. Learning directly from and collaborating with local Indigenous knowledge holders is the most authentic and respectful way to bring about positive change and new understandings while building relationships and improving student success. Acknowledgement of the past needs to be recognized and accepted by presenting it in its fullest version and from multiple
perspectives. One consideration is for School Districts to collaborate with local First Nations to develop required training about the local First Nations culture and history for teachers and staff to take.

Districts need to work with their local Indigenous communities and staff to develop employment equity policies and apply for Human Rights Exemptions to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff and educators, especially from local and regional First Nations. When students see themselves reflected in the system they feel more comfortable and are inspired by these role models. Recruitment could start with early encouragement of youth and their families to consider how they can contribute in positive ways through employment within the education system. Planting seeds of inspiration early can yield future crops of well-nourished staff, which in turn feed back into the cycle as long as they feel welcomed, confident and supported in their roles.

The local Aboriginal communities, including the First Nations bands and community members, have a significant role to play as well. Acknowledging that the history of education within Canada has certainly not been favorable for Aboriginal groups in the past it is important to take the appropriate steps that will be mutually beneficial to our collective futures. Our reality is that we live on these lands and that we must learn how to work together. True reconciliation would see the federal and provincial governments provide additional funding to First Nations to collaborate with School Districts to develop their own programs, curriculum and resources (digital and print) on language, culture and history. Since there is such a diverse population attending any public school, locally developed resources from all nations should be developed and accessible to students, teachers and parents through a province or nation-wide network where students, parents and teachers can begin to explore their diverse cultures and develop their identity with resources developed by their own
people. Since Indigenous languages contain Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, the languages and corresponding cultural knowledge taken away from families through the residential school system could and should be returned to families through accredited courses.

Additional supports for students are required so that no student is left behind or pushed through school without receiving a complete educational experience that prepares them for moving beyond public school. Mature students who have not succeeded with completing a Dogwood certificate should have opportunities to complete their education without additional expense. Tutoring programs and peer support networks both in person and online should be available for all students. Credit should also be given for lived experience and Indigenous language proficiency.

Experiential learning and team building need to be a strong focus for schools. Getting students out of the classroom and into the world to obtain first-hand experience is important. Team building can develop through project-based learning, an area that not all teachers are comfortable with so training for teachers and students on how to engage in experiential or project-based learning would benefit both. Considering the changes to curriculum, both students and teachers need to learn new ways of facilitating learning and engaging with school subjects. Experiential learning can occur through the development of and encouragement for students to join school sports, clubs and academic teams, with financial supports provided, to foster healthy living and positive peer relationships.

There are many other considerations but the last and possibly most important consideration is that of restructuring policy. Policy, at all levels, needs revision in collaboration with First Nations and Aboriginal stakeholders to allow educators to have increased flexibility and accessibility of community resources. In addition, to create safe
environments, policies on bullying and various levels of racism need to be made enforceable and strategically acted upon in a timely manner, regardless of who the offender or victim is.

Reflecting on this study, the research has had the most impact on me in a few ways. Firstly, I realize that in my role as a teacher I need to work hard and ensure that I build a relationship with each and every student by getting to know them and their families to help them reach their goals. I did not realize how important it was to develop these relationships. Even though I am not an overly social person, since I have started increasing interactions with all of my students and their families both inside and outside of the classroom (e.g. in the hallways or at events within the community) I have seen an increase in student participation and positive behaviour within my classes. The parents have also expressed that they appreciate the additional correspondence and so far it has benefited all parties. Providing additional opportunities for the students and their families to exercise their agency and feel welcome and involved within education is an empowering and rewarding experience that strengthens a community.

The dialogues with the participating families have also helped me realize the importance of education as not just being about what the students learn in each subject but also how they learn social behaviours and the development of their individual identities. I see education as holistic, student centered, meaningful and practical learning which occurs both within and beyond the classroom.

Considering the far-reaching effects of the Residential school system, I realize that inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge, culture and history is crucial to the development of identity whether the student has Aboriginal ancestry or not. Building cross-cultural competency can help decrease racism and reclaim cultural identity to build students confidence and self-esteem leading to higher levels of achievement. Most families trust in the
education system to provide students with the opportunities, knowledge and tools to develop their child’s individual identity, especially families who have had the continuity of their culture and language interrupted through various attempts at cultural genocide. Therefore, as an employee within a district with few locally developed resources it is important for me to continue to pursue and advocate for the acquisition and development of new local and regional Aboriginal resources and opportunities for cultural exchanges with guests and experiential learning opportunities in partnership with the community as a whole. For instance, inviting family members into classrooms to share their knowledge, advice and experiences as well as collaborating with local organizations to develop experiential learning opportunities or tangible resources to familiarize and educate all parties could be fruitful endeavours for community knowledge building. These learning opportunities are important not only for the students but also for the teacher’s professional development and as a possible avenue to pursue familial and community inclusion.

For the families of students, this research should provide some insight into the history and current state of education for and about Aboriginal peoples. Most importantly, it should reassure parents that the best way they can ensure their student’s success is by providing positive encouragement and support at home and whenever possible keeping involved and in contact with the staff and support staff at their child’s school.

For Indigenous researchers, this study also presents opportunities to consider development of individual Indigenous research theories and approaches by epistemologically positioning oneself in relation to the study while considering individual and communal ontologies and axiologies within an Indigenous research paradigm. As I experienced within the process of this study, the basis of Indigenous methodologies emerge through the researcher’s context in relation to the participants. In this case, my beliefs and knowledge
understood through previous experiences engaging with my family, Elders and community was of specific value in determining the methods and methodologies I used. The methods and Indigenous ways of knowing that I used\(^{24}\) are supported by scholars such as Archibald (2008), Battiste (2000b), Brown & Strega (2005), Creswell (2008, 2013), Eigenbrod and Hulan (2008), Henderson (2000b), Lichtman (2013), Kovach (2009), Kovacs (2009), Lichtman (2013), Stringer (2007), and Wilson (2008). The results are also indicative of an Indigenous worldview that holds specific expectations of the education system, which directly relate to expectations of academic researchers who should consider this type of approach in the development of their own theoretical framework.

When conducting the family dialogues there were pros and cons to having the group dialogues with multigenerational family members present. Having family members present made it possible for the participants to share and learn from each other’s experience. On the other hand, participants may not have been comfortable sharing some information in the group setting. In this case, the journals proved to be a suitable avenue for communicating additional information. In closing, I have gained a greater understanding of the historical and contemporary contexts of Aboriginal education within British Columbia and have a better grasp of the issues, promising practices, strategies and opportunities for ensuring students have a welcoming and supportive school environment where they can safely learn about themselves and others in a respectful manner. For myself, as an insider/outsider, researching

\(^{24}\) For example, valuing Indigenous experience, spirituality and perspectives, conducting insider community research, using a process of oral experiential engagement, maintaining a sense of relational wholism throughout the process and ensuring reciprocity occurs are some of the methods and Indigenous ways of knowing that I used.
a topic that is central to my career, personal and social life, it was an experience that I can draw from to better support the various communities I am involved in. Moving ahead, I will continue to build on my knowledge base and support my fellow teachers and community members with understanding why and how we can infuse Aboriginal education into the education system.
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FOUR LHEILD T’ENNEH FAMILIES’ EXPERIENCES


Appendix A

Dialogue Questions and Prompts

1. Tell me about your school.

2. How do you feel about school?

3. What are your relationships like with school staff?

4. (Student) Describe your relationships with students in your school. (Family Member) Describe your engagement within the school (for example involvement with PAC, coaching, volunteering, presenting).

5. Think of a school memory that was particularly successful for you and/or your family. Please share that experience.

6. Think of an experience where you may have felt disappointed by or within the school environment. Please share that experience.

7. Using your journal, consider the following:
   a. What lasting knowledge and experience would you say you have gained from attending public school?
   b. Describe how that knowledge was acquired?
   c. What do you think you need to learn at school?
   d. What do you think you are expected to learn at school?
   e. Please explain what you would like to learn at school?

8. Describe any opportunities you have encountered to learn about First Nations People within and beyond the school environment.

9. What do you know about the BC First Nations Studies 12, English 10 & 11 First Peoples, English 12 First Peoples and Math 8 & 9 First Peoples courses?)
10. Do you feel that First Nations perspectives are included in the school? Please explain.

11. How would you envision Indigenous culture, values, languages, approaches, knowledges being respectfully included in public schooling/education?

12. Do you have any further questions, comments, suggestions, ideas or reflections?
Appendix B

From Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Forward

(BC Ministry, 2015c)

A graphic compilation of 153 words (Wordle) drawn from the facilitated “blogging” record gives an impressionistic indication of how frequently particular themes and concepts were raised in discussion. While not capturing the relative “importance” of the themes or concepts in any substantive sense, it indicates what participants in the gathering felt most compelled to mention.
Appendix C

First Peoples Principles of Learning (BC Ministry, n.d.-b)

First Peoples Principles of Learning

First identified in relation to English 12 First Peoples, the following First Peoples Principles of Learning generally reflect First Peoples pedagogy.

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Because these principles of learning represent an attempt to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Peoples societies, it must be recognized that they do not capture the full reality of the approach used in any single First Peoples society.