

CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA?

by

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Abstract

This dissertation tells the story of partnership between myself, a doctoral student at UBC Okanagan, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation (TRTFN) and School District 87 (Stikine). Although the research is a partial fulfillment for my doctoral degree, I have attempted to emphasize the partnership aspects of the process throughout the writing of this document. I have been challenged to find ways to word sentences without using the phrase, *my research*. This was important to me because the first goal of this research is to decolonize research about Indigenous peoples by partnering with the Indigenous people.

With regards to the second goal, Indigenous peoples worldwide and Aboriginal peoples in Canada advocate for changes to education for Indigenous students that will nurture Indigenous identity while preparing students and Indigenous communities for a prosperous future. This research supports initiatives to change education for Indigenous students by sharing information from Indigenous students, parents, and community members about the ways in which Indigenous culture and language in schools can enhance sense of belonging and achievement. The aim of this research is to bridge the gap between European and Indigenous approaches to education through these two goals. To accomplish this, the research follows a Métis methodology based upon principles from Indigenous methodologies, appreciative inquiry, and grounded theory.

The results of our research indicate that the children of TRTFN enjoy school, but have challenges to overcome for attendance in school and for access to secondary education. Students in Atlin have a strong sense of belonging to the land, to ancestors, to family, and to community. Students and their families and teachers believe that learning Tlingit culture and language is important to pass knowledge on to future generations. Students enjoy making choices about what they will learn and having opportunities for leadership. Finally, learning Indigenous culture and knowledge benefits all students.

This is, of course, *my* dissertation. However, the learning that I acquired and the story of the research process are a shared journey with my partners in the research, TRTFN and SD87. It is *my* research for *my* dissertation, but *our* research for the community.

Preface

In Chapter 1, the introductions to the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine) were co-authored. Spokesperson Louise Gordon, TRTFN, co-authored Introduction to Taku River Tlingit First Nation. Superintendent, Mike Gordon, co-authored Introduction to School District 87 (Stikine).

Ethics approval for this research was granted by signed approval from two elected spokespersons (chiefs) for Taku River Tlingit First Nation, Spokesperson John Ward (2012-2015 term) and Spokesperson Louise Gordon (2015-2018 term). As well, two superintendents for School District 87 (Stikine), Superintendent Bryan Ennis and Superintendent Mike Gordon, gave signatures of permission for the research. All research partners and participants signed consent forms. University of British Columbia Okanagan Behaviour Research Ethics Board approved the project (H12-01490).

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Dedication

To my ancestors and to future generations, especially...

My grandmother, Edith Maisie Pruden Pudwill

My mother, Patricia Edith Pudwill Larson

My children, Adam and Annika Bovenkerk

Prologue

Within Indigenous writing, a prologue structures space for introductions while serving a bridging function for non-Indigenous readers. It is a precursory signal to the careful reader that woven throughout the varied forms of our writing—analytical, reflective, expository—there will be a story, for our story is who we are. (Kovach 2009, 4)

My own story of identity and sense of belonging began in my early childhood when I recognized that my mother did not want to speak about her ancestry. Every September when teachers sent home registration forms to update for my three siblings and myself, my mother would become flustered and agitated at the last question, which asked about nationality. As the oldest child in a family of four children, I was expected to help my mother to fill out the forms. I remember wondering from year to year if she would answer truthfully by naming our Swedish, English, German, Métis heritage. So I would wait and watch as she hummed and hawed and then blurted out each year, “oh, just write English.” I recognized my mother’s discomfort at the time but did not understand why this seemingly easy question would cause her such anxiety.

In my twenties, my cousin, Carla, came for a visit from California and asked if we knew that we had “Indian”¹ heritage. My mother denied my cousin’s comments, but I began to wonder if perhaps Carla’s comments explained my mother’s resistance to speak about ancestry. By then, my siblings and I knew to avoid the topic of heritage on my mother’s side of the family.

In 1990, when I was in my 30’s, my mother’s mother, Edith Maisie Pruden Pudwill, was honoured by the Saskatchewan government, as the oldest descendent of the Pruden family. When the Government of Saskatchewan presented my grandmother with a plaque to honor her as the oldest living descendent of Hudson Bay factor, John Peter Pruden and his *nêhiyawak* (Cree)²

¹ The federal government and most citizens in the United States of America use the terms, “Indian Tribes”, “Indian Nations”, and “Indian Bands” for the Indigenous peoples in the USA.

² The Plains Cree people use the word, *nêhiyawak*, as the name for their nation.

wife, *Patasegawisk*, also known as Nancy, my mother decided to inform her children about our family history (Pruden 1990). Sharing our history was difficult for my mother because she had been taught by her parents to hide her German and Métis heritage. My mother did not take my grandmother, who was then eighty years of age, to the ceremony in Saskatchewan because she said, “there might have been too many natives there” (Patricia Larson, July 1900, personal conversation). However, because my grandmother was being honored, my mother decided to do some research and when she found our ancestors’ contribution to Canadian history at the local library, my mother told my siblings and I about our heritage. My mother did not use the term Métis and she was still uncomfortable speaking about the topic, but she did hang the honorary plaque from Saskatchewan in my Grandmother’s residence.

When I read Cora Weber-Pillwax’s unexplained statement, “At my first visit to the community, I had met my grandmother, a woman I had not known existed prior to that point,” (2004, 87) I was able to connect to a similar story in my own family. In my family, soon after my parents had married, my grandfather moved with his wife and younger children to the United States. When my grandparents divorced a few years later, my grandmother was deported from the United States back to Canada. My aunt, who was only three at the time did not know that her mother, my grandmother, was alive until she was a married woman with children. For some reason, my mother and uncle kept the secret until one summer when my aunt came for a visit to Canada. My aunt overheard my sister speaking to our grandmother on the telephone, asked who she was speaking to, and discovered that she had a mother (Darlene Pudwill Donnelly Heidt, April 20, 2015, personal conversation). This is one example of the many ways that my parents and grandparents did everything in their power to obliterate Métis heritage and culture from our family.

For many years, the loss of identity in my family lay dormant in the back of my mind. Over time, I began to wonder if denying our heritage might have affected my siblings and I in our developmental years. I questioned this because although we seemed like the perfect family when we were growing up, not all of my siblings thrived in adulthood. When, as a teacher, I began to hear about initiatives to enhance sense of belonging for Indigenous³ students, I reflected upon my personal experiences in our family and wondered if my insights might guide my pursuit of a doctoral degree. Unlike Cora Weber-Pillwax, I cannot determine a particular incident that ignited my interest to pursue research about identity and belonging for Aboriginal students, but I can say that I feel a connection to Cora Weber-Pillwax's words, "now I had the responsibility to do something about it. I carried that sense of responsibility away with me... and it is still with me" (2001, 167). My hope for the future is that every child will live in a world where they can acknowledge their heritage with pride.

This dissertation is a report of the partnership research, which occurred between Taku River Tlingit First Nation, School District 87 (Stikine), and myself.⁴ However woven throughout the presentation of the research I have included my reflections about the decolonization of my thinking that occurred during the research process.⁵ This, too, is part of the story

³ In the Constitution Act, 1982 of Canada, the term, *Aboriginal*, is used to refer to Indigenous peoples who are "Indian, Inuit, and Métis" (Canada 1982, Section 35(2)). However, not all Indigenous peoples in Canada have the documentation required to acquire status as members of these three groups. In this dissertation, I use the term, *Indigenous*, to be all inclusive of all Indigenous peoples in Canada, such as Indigenous peoples who have not been able to attain status as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. Cardinal suggests that Indigenous means, "born of that environment, from the land in which it sits" (2001, 180). Cardinal states:

Indigenous peoples with their traditions and customs are shaped by the environment, by the land. They have a spiritual, emotional, and physical relationship to that land. It speaks to them; it gives them their responsibility for stewardship; and it sets out a relationship. (2001, 180)

The term, *Aboriginal*, will be used when I refer to B.C. Ministry of Education documents, Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, because that is the name used in the title.

⁴ Throughout this document, I use the abbreviations TRTFN for Taku River Tlingit First Nation and SD87 for School District 87 (Stikine).

⁵ My interpretations of colonization and decolonization are as follows. Colonization is the dominance of one peoples or nation over another, including the appropriation of lands and the destruction of the culture and language of the

colonized peoples. Decolonization is the process that dominated peoples undergo, individually and/or collectively, to recover from the feelings of oppression that were imposed by the colonizers.

Chapter 1 Introduction

“Because qualitative research is interpretive, the stories of both the researcher and the research participants are reflected in the meanings being made” (Kovach 2009, 26).

In 2007, most nations who make up the United Nations signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirming, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories, and aspirations, which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (UNDRIP 2007, Article 15).⁶ For Indigenous peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is without a doubt the most important and influential agreement to give recognition to Indigenous peoples worldwide and to support decolonization and self-determination. The declaration was in negotiation for more than two decades and the signing in 2007 gave cause for international celebration. However, for many non-Indigenous peoples, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has had little impact. Some Canadians will have heard of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, but others are unaware of its existence and the years of negotiations that occurred for nations to sign the declaration. I was an uninformed Canadian prior to my graduate school journey.

Until commencing studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO), I had not heard of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I would hear about issues for Indigenous peoples in Canada on CBC radio and feel confused since I did not understand what was being said. In fact one of my reasons for applying to graduate studies was

⁶ Canada, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand were at first reluctant to sign the declaration, but by late 2010 all four nations who were originally colonies of the United Kingdom had formally endorsed the declaration. Shanley (2015) suggests that the reluctance of the four nations above was due to “the most controversial aspect of the UNDRIP” (16), the fact that the UNDRIP recognizes rights to self-determination and self-government, and honours that treaties and agreements with Indigenous peoples must be upheld.

to improve my understanding of treaty negotiations and conflicts between Indigenous peoples and governments in Canada. I felt that I was naïve and believed that as a Canadian I ought to have a better understanding of the issues for Indigenous peoples. I was not yet familiar with the term, *Indigenous*, and was in fact quite confused about the names, First Nations, First Peoples, and Aboriginal. I had no understanding of the history of colonization and the persistence of issues related to colonization for Indigenous peoples today. I had no idea of the learning that I was about to acquire. I had not yet found the documentation to apply for my citizenship in the Métis Nation British Columbia and did not think of myself as a person with Aboriginal status.

What is shocking to me now about my reflections on my previous lack of knowledge and understanding is that I was a teacher in public schools responsible for the education of all students in my classes, some of whom were Indigenous. To fully support all students, I am surprised that I was not more aware of the issues for Indigenous students in my classrooms. How is it that I was not more informed about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples? I believe that my lack of knowledge and understanding was not unique. Although I am now retired from the public education system, I am still involved in contract work in schools as a consultant for ways to enhance learning for Indigenous students and as a faculty mentor for student teachers. From my continuing conversations with educators in public schools, I believe that my own lack of understanding of ongoing colonization and assimilation for Indigenous peoples was fairly typical for most teachers in our public school system.

I would have remained uninformed about education for Indigenous students had it not been for the British Columbia Ministry of Education initiative to ensure that school districts work in partnership with First Nations to establish Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements

(British Columbia Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education 2016a).⁷ During the past decade, the sixty school districts in British Columbia have created Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in consultation with local Indigenous peoples to address the concern that achievement data for Indigenous students is below achievement data for non-Indigenous students.⁸ Some statistics about the discrepancies between achievement data for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are provided later in this chapter in the sections entitled, The Canadian Context and The Context in British Columbia. Many enhancement agreements emphasize the importance of including local Indigenous culture and language to improve sense of belonging and achievement for Indigenous students (see Appendix B for a sampling of AEEA goals). Upon hearing about goals for sense of belonging, I became intrigued about the relationships between cultural and language activities in classrooms, students' sense of belonging, and student achievement.

My research question, “*How* do Indigenous cultural and language activities in public schools in British Columbia influence sense of belonging and student achievement for Indigenous learners?” was formulated for my graduate school application and, really, my question has not changed since those early stages of my studies. However, my understanding about the context for education for Indigenous students nationally and internationally, my

⁷ I was introduced to Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements when I attended the B.C. Principals' and Vice Principals' Summer Institute 2009 at UBC Vancouver. That fall, I attended the signing ceremony for the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement in Chilliwack, B.C. where I was employed with the school district to learn more about the process and the goals for education for Indigenous students.

⁸ An enhancement agreement is defined by the B.C. Ministry of Education as, “a working agreement between a school district, all local Aboriginal communities, and the Ministry of Education designed to enhance the educational achievement of Aboriginal students” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education 2016a). An enhancement agreement is described as a “collaborative partnership between Aboriginal communities and school districts” established to share decision-making and design specific goals for Aboriginal students' educational needs.

learning about Indigenous worldviews vs. European worldviews, and my approach to the question have changed dramatically.⁹

When I began my doctoral program in Summer 2011, I was approaching my research as a person with substantial teaching experience who thought she had something to contribute to making a difference for Indigenous students. I was unaware of my own colonized thinking. In my first courses in the Summer Institute for Indigenous Studies, I was surprised and confused by words that were not in my vocabulary; terms like *Indigenous* and *indigeneity*, *indigenize*, *colonization* and *decolonization*, *worldview*, and *Eurocentrism*. I began my studies with the belief that I had many years of experience as an educator in a variety of roles and that I might have something to offer to make changes to assist Indigenous students to have success in school. I had signed up for the Summer Institute upon the advice of my supervisor because I thought at that time that I would learn important background information about Indigenous peoples. I did not yet know how life changing my experiences would be that summer and in subsequent years in graduate school with respect to understanding colonization and the effect that it has on all Canadians. By the end of the UBC Okanagan Summer Institute in Indigenous Studies I had formulated the idea that my research had to be completed in a way that did not perpetuate colonization.

Goals for the Research

As I learned to recognize the colonization that permeates our daily lives in Canada and in particular, my own colonized thinking, new dimensions for my dissertation began to surface. In

⁹ In current literature about Indigenous education and Indigenous research scholars use the terms, *Western* and *European*, to describe worldviews that are not Indigenous. For this dissertation, I have chosen to use the word, *European*, because I believe that education systems in Canada have been and are still influenced by European worldviews.

addition to finding answers to my research question, I wanted to find a way to include the story of my own decolonization in my writing. As well, upon learning about the long history of research *about* Indigenous peoples in Canada rather than research *with* Indigenous peoples as partners, I wanted to participate in a project that modeled how to partner with Indigenous peoples in research. Hence, my research took on two goals: (1) to collaborate with Indigenous peoples as research partners and (2) to investigate if, and how, participation in Indigenous language and cultural activities influences Indigenous students' sense of belonging and achievement.

To achieve these two goals I partnered with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and Atlin School, School District 87 (Stikine) in two phases: Phase I (Establishing Partnerships) and Phase II (Learning from TRTFN and SD87). During Phase I, I focused upon participant observation activities to establish relationships with my research partners and consulted with my research partners about the research methods for Phase II. In Phase II, I interviewed students, parents, school staff, and hosted focus group meetings with community members to ask them about school experiences in general, opportunities to learn Indigenous language and culture, and relationships with others in the school and community. As well in Phase II, I continued to consult with my research partners about the research processes and the results of the interviews and focus group sessions. In this dissertation I describe my experiences of partnership research with community partners and attempt to answer the research question by sharing the perceptions of the community members with whom I worked. As for my own journey of decolonization, my intention is to weave my personal reflections throughout my dissertation in hope that others will learn from the insights I have gained.

Before continuing with the introduction to this dissertation, I wish to follow the Indigenous protocol of introducing Taku River Tlingit First Nation, School District 87 (Stikine), and myself.

Introduction to Myself

Onowa McIvor (2010) suggests that as researchers we must introduce who we are, who our ancestors are, and why we are doing our chosen work. In keeping with Indigenous protocols before I begin my dissertation, I first wish to introduce myself to share a bit of my life experience, since my life experiences have indeed influenced my worldview, which in turn has affected my research with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine).

Who am I?

I grew up in Surrey, British Columbia, now a bustling suburb of Vancouver, in a White middleclass family in the 1950's and 60's. In those days, Surrey was quite rural, and I was excited to move away to the University of British Columbia Vancouver to attain my teaching degree in the areas of Mathematics and Library Science.

I moved to Quesnel and then Prince George, British Columbia to begin my teaching career and ended up staying in the Central Interior of the province, although we called it "the north", from 1976 until 2002 when I moved to teach in Vernon, British Columbia. During my thirty-year career as a teacher, I taught many Indigenous students in elementary and secondary schools, however, I do not recall attending professional development training to assist me to know how to better support the Indigenous students in my classes.¹⁰ In 2008, I moved to Chilliwack, B.C. where I became interested in the ways that schools meet the needs of Indigenous students because of the disconnect that I was feeling between meeting the physical and emotional needs

¹⁰ Since January 2013, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, Teacher Regulation Branch has made coursework in Indigenous Studies mandatory for all new teachers to acquire a teaching license in B.C. However, for practicing teachers in B.C. professional development about teaching Indigenous learners is still a personal choice.

of Indigenous students and meeting the district and provincial Ministry of Education goals for achievement in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics.

In Prince George, I became a mom, of two beautiful children, who have been my primary mentors from the day they were born. My children did not learn to speak with words due to the severe cerebral palsy they developed as infants, however, my greatest learning has come from the way that my son, Adam Bovenkerk, and my daughter, Annika Bovenkerk, communicate without words. Sadly, my son passed away on Earth Day, April 22, 2014 at the age of thirty-two years. When I read Indigenous scholars, who describe the importance of learning from oral traditions and oral stories even though they are not recorded in the written tradition of European knowledge, I am reminded of my children, who have taught me not through written language or even spoken words, but through another non-verbal dimension that is certainly not recognized in academic settings. I wonder if this ability to communicate and teach in another dimension is connected to the spiritual aspect of knowledge referred to by Indigenous scholars (Cardinal 2001; McIvor 2010; Weber-Pillwax 2001; Wilson 2003; Wilson 1995). I say this because I am new to understanding the connections between spirit and research. My first step towards understanding spirit is the close connection I have with my daughter through our spirits. My daughter and I communicate through the tone of her sounds and through touch. Applying this idea to my research means that I must be mindful of the spirits of the individuals and communities with whom I am working by paying close attention to little nuances in every conversation.

To summarize, “Who am I?” I am a person who has loved teaching and learning for my lifetime and who enjoys sharing her learning with others. I will also add that my children have taught me to read the non-verbal signs in interactions with others and to look for positives in

every situation that life brings. These two traits have guided my decisions about the design of my doctoral research.

Who are My Ancestors?

My father's ancestors came to Canada from Sweden (Larson) and England (Brydon) in the late 1800's. My mother is descended from German/Russian immigrants (Pudwill) who came to the USA in the late 1800's and Métis people (Pruden) from Manitoba. My parents did not like to acknowledge my mother's heritage because they felt it was unsafe to recognize German ancestry after World War II and Métis ancestry because of the racism in Canada towards Indigenous peoples. When I was growing up, Canada seemed to have a stronger connection to the United Kingdom and having a grandmother born in England seemed prestigious. We said we were of English ancestry, as I noted earlier.

However, I have always been intrigued to know more about my Métis heritage and in 2011, coinciding with the year I began my doctoral degree, I acquired my Aboriginal status. I am a new member of the Métis Nation British Columbia, who is learning about my Métis family culture. My time as a Métis is short, however, my family history as Métis people is lengthy. My ancestor, John Peter Pruden, came to Canada from Edmonton, Middlesex, England, in 1791 as an apprentice with the Hudson Bay Company (Pruden 1990). In 1800, he married his *nêhiyawak* (Cree) wife, *Patasegawisk* (Nancy) who is believed to be from Norway House, now Oxford House in Manitoba, and together they had six children (Pruden 1990). My grandmother, Edith Maisie Pruden, was the great granddaughter of John and Nancy's son, James. I come from a Métis family who made a major contribution to the development of our country, and yet my parents and grandparents did not speak of our heritage and contributions. My grandmother never

spoke of her ancestry to me and even though my mother spoke about her Pruden ancestor later in life, she was still very reluctant and uncomfortable.

When I read about the initiatives of early governments in our country to marginalize and extinguish Métis people from the land and the Canadian cultural landscape (Belanger 2014; Episkenew 2009, Kennedy 2009), I believe that for my family the initiatives were successful. In fact, the devastation for Métis people, and my own family, was more than marginalization. In my family, a confused identity caused racism against our own family members instead of pride in the contributions of our ancestors. This experience is not un-common in the lives of many assimilated Métis. Métis scholar Maria Campbell explains the intensity of the effects of assimilation in her influential book, *Half-breed*, quoting her grandmother, who warned “they will divide us against one another” (1973, 90).

I knew my maternal grandmother for fifty years, but during those years, she never spoke of her ancestry or her childhood. Later in her life I sometimes tried to talk to my grandmother about the Pruden family. I recall mentioning to her once that I had met some people named Pruden, who must be relatives. Grandma replied, “Were they light or dark?” I did not understand the racism in her comment until reading Maria Campbell’s explanation of how Métis mothers and grandmothers would deny their heritage in order to protect their children from racism.

Although I cannot say that I have experienced the racism that many Indigenous people in Canada experience on a daily basis, I have at least on a cursory level, a bit of an understanding of the debilitating effects of racism. I am surprised at the reactions I witness when I tell friends and family about acquiring my status as an Aboriginal person and now understand the fears of my mother and grandmother. I have on many occasions had to summon moral courage (Kidder

2005) to acknowledge my Métis status. At the same time, I am excited about my new journey in life to learn more about my Métis routes by participating in Métis meetings and events.

I include these memories of my grandmother and personal reflections about my heritage for a purpose. Indigenous scholars write about the importance of knowing and introducing oneself in written, as well as oral expression, as a way of giving readers a glimpse of the author's worldview (Absolon and Willett 2005; McIvor 2010; Steinhauer 2002; Styres 2008; Wilson 2003). Honore France explains the connections between worldview and research by explaining that, "our worldviews affect our belief systems, decision making, assumptions, and modes of problem solving" (1997, 7). My reflections about my Métis ancestry and status has influenced not only the research project that I undertook with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine), but every aspect of my doctoral experience leading up to the actual fieldwork experience from my interpretations of the readings, to the relationships I established with my research partners, to every aspect of the planning process for data collection, through to the interpretation and publication of findings.

Why am I Doing This Chosen Work?

Late in my teaching career, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia began an initiative to encourage school districts to collaborate with local Indigenous peoples to develop Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements to enhance learning for Indigenous students in British Columbia. I became intrigued with the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, in particular the goals and strategies which suggested that improving sense of belonging for Aboriginal students through increasing opportunities to learn about Aboriginal culture and language would enhance students' academic success. As I mentioned earlier, I saw many incongruencies between my daily interactions with the children and the mandates from the

Ministry of Education. As a member of the school administration team, I was expected to raise achievement rates for Aboriginal students in reading, writing, and numeracy when my students and their parents were asking me for assistance with food, clothing, care, behaviour interventions, and mental health supports. These discrepancies had me wondering, “why are things the way they are for Aboriginal people in Canada?”¹¹

My journey in graduate school has been an unpacking of the effects of colonization in my own family and in the school system, which I have been a part of for most of my lifetime. My worldview has been influenced by my fifty years of participation in the B.C. public school system as a child and adult, student and teacher, and my experiences in graduate school have changed my worldview. Now, I am sensitive to European dominance over Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and to ongoing colonization in Canada. Now, I am aware of the rights of Indigenous peoples as described in the United Nations Rights on Indigenous Peoples, including rights to education about Indigenous cultures and in Indigenous languages. Now, I understand (although, I will continue to learn more) the humbling experience of research with Indigenous people (Smith 2012), the importance of pursuing research with Indigenous people as research partners (Battiste 2008; Kovach 2009; Weber-Pillwax 2004), the need for researchers to acquire a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous methodologies before beginning research projects with Indigenous peoples, and the importance of developing a research paradigm that is congruent with an Indigenous worldview (Wilson 2003). My research question has not changed. I am still curious to know how sense of belonging for Indigenous

¹¹ As I write and edit this paper, my mind and heart are decolonizing. In the education community in British Columbia, it is common to use phrases such as, “our students” and “our Aboriginal students” and as a teacher and administrator I used these phrases often. I believe that educators use the words “my students” and “our students” because they care about their students. However, in my graduate program, my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer pointed out that these words could sound quite patronizing particularly if educators say, “our Aboriginal students.” I am becoming more aware of language that marginalizes Aboriginal peoples in Canada. I am aware, but the phrases are ingrained and I am finding that I still must make a conscious effort to take care with the language I use.

students will improve students' academic success, however my understanding of the context for the question has been expanded. I wonder, "Will Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements benefit Indigenous students in the way they are intended to do or will enhancement agreements join the long list of unsuccessful and often devastating interventions designed to assist Indigenous peoples in Canada (Episkenew, 2009)?"

When writing about what motivates her work, Onawa McIvor writes, "I seek to break the cycle of loss of language and culture in my family" (2010, 137). For my family and me, I sometimes feel that revitalization of language and culture comes too late. However, perhaps by creating and sharing a model for research with Indigenous peoples and sharing what Indigenous peoples say about sense of belonging, Indigenous culture and language, and student achievement, this research might help to prevent the assimilation and loss of identity, which occurred for my family, from happening to others. At the very least, I hope that including my reflections about decolonizing my thinking might inspire others to recognize the colonization of their own thoughts. On a personal level, there are so many conversations I wish I could have had with my grandmother, Edith Maisie Pruden Pudwill. This research has provided me with, in the words of Onawa McIvor, "the opportunity to approach the work in a cultural and spiritual way, with my ancestors walking beside me..." (2010, 138).

Introduction to Taku River Tlingit First Nation co-authored by Louise Gordon and Colleen Larson

Who is the Taku River Tlingit First Nation?

On the homepage of the official website for the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, the TRTFN introduce themselves with these words:

We, the Taku River Tlingit, are moving forward as the responsible decision makers of our land and waters within our Territory. Our Territory covers over 40,000 sq/km and includes

what is now known as British Columbia, Yukon and Alaska/US. Our Territory contains high mountains, expansive forests rich with wildlife and salmon filled wild rivers. As responsible decision makers we are embarking on a course necessary to ensure the preservation of our wildlife and fisheries. This will assist us in ensuring the preservation of what is Tlingit. (TRTFN 2016b)

The Taku River Tlingit people are stewards of the territory which spans much of the drainage basin of the Taku River and adjoining lakes in what is now the northwest corner of British Columbia, the southwest corner of the Yukon Territory, and a small corner of Alaska (Schreyer et al. 2014). Many of the members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation live in or near the small town of Atlin, two hundred kilometres south of Whitehorse, on Atlin Lake, named by the Taku River Tlingit as *Áa Tlein* (meaning Big Lake), but others live north in the Yukon Territory and away from the community. The TRTFN has not signed a treaty with the federal or provincial governments and have never surrendered their Aboriginal title to their lands, however, during the 1915 McKenna-McBride Commission, the TRTFN were provided with some reserve lands.¹² Many members of the TRTFN live in the town-site reserve in Atlin, known as, *Wéinaa*, meaning alkali, or at the reserve that is located five miles south of town, known in English as Five Mile Point, but in Tlingit as *Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei*, meaning 'like the crook of an arm' (see Figure 1.1 *Streets of Atlin with Five Mile Point, Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei, to the South*).

Connection to land plays a major role in all aspects of daily living for the Taku River Tlingit people. This philosophy for living is clearly stated in the constitution of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and on the welcome sign to the territory (see Figure 1.2 *Taku River Tlingit First Nation Welcome Sign on Atlin Road*), "It is the land from which we come that connects all

¹² In Canada, a reservation or reserve was specified in *The Indian Act, 1876* (Canada. 1876) as land titled to the Crown but set aside by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of Indian bands. Indian reserves are determined by the Canadian state ("the Crown") and should not be confused with First Nations' traditional lands, which are larger than reserves.

life. Our land is our lifeblood. Our land looks after us and we look after our land. Anything that happens to Tlingit land affects us and our culture” (TRTFN 1993, 3).

The Taku River Tlingit have an expression, *Haa Kusteeyí*, which means “Tlingit way of living” (Williams 2015, 4). When I visit in Atlin, I often hear members of the TRTFN use the words, *Haa Kusteeyí*, to describe a lifestyle which respects, sustains, and learns from the land. The TRTFN refers to *Haa Kusteeyí* in the *Wóoshtin wudidaa: Atlin Taku Land Use Plan*:

The natural environment is productive and supports diverse and abundant animal, fish and plant species as well as sustainable opportunities for harvesting, gathering and other activities on the land, including the Tlingit land based way of life, *Haa Kusteeyí*, and the lifestyle of the local community. (TRTFN 2011, 12)



Figure 1.1 *Streets of Atlin with Five Mile Point, Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei, to the South* (Mike Johnson, 2016, *Discover Atlin*)



Figure 1.2 *Taku River Tlingit First Nation Welcome Sign on Atlin Road* (Larson, 2015)

Haa Kusteeyí guides Tlingit stewardship over their territory in many ways including the development of land plans, participation in court cases and government to government negotiations, as well as throughout the British Columbia Treaty process.¹³ As well, Tlingit language and cultural revitalization projects within the community are linked to the stewardship practices of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation (Schreyer 2011). For example, in the TRTFN Vision and Management Document the Taku River Tlingit community members state that, “land use planning and management shall be grounded in Tlingit concepts, values, and understandings, and should be infused with Tlingit language” (TRTFN 2003, 16).

TRTFN has been actively involved in bringing Tlingit language back to the community to reverse the language shift, which occurred across their territory because of colonization. A recent

¹³ For more on the stewardship and land management of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation see Schreyer et al. (2014) or visit the website of the TRTFN at www.trtfn.com.

language needs assessment for the Taku River Tlingit language (First Peoples' Language Map of British Columbia 2016) concluded that within the four hundred forty eight members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation only six individuals are fluent speakers, ten individuals speak or understand Tlingit somewhat, and forty individuals are learning the language. As no children are learning Tlingit as their first language, the language of the Taku River Tlingit people is endangered.

The TRTFN can access support with language revitalization¹⁴ through the Sealaska Heritage Institute in Alaska and the Yukon Native Language Centre in Whitehorse because Tlingit is spoken in Alaska and the Yukon (Andre Bourcier, Yukon Native Language Centre, February 2, 2017, telephone conversation). The Taku River Tlingit dialect is closer to the coastal dialect in Alaska than it is to the interior Tlingit dialects spoken in Teslin and Carcross in the Yukon Territory due to the fact that the ancestors of the Taku River Tlingit peoples travelled up the Taku River from the ocean (Andre Bourcier, Yukon Native Language Centre, February 2, 2017, telephone conversation). Also, the TRTFN uses the spelling system from Sealaska Heritage Institute, which is different from the spelling system used at the Yukon Native Language Centre. However, Tlingit peoples from Atlin, Teslin, and Carcross understand each other's dialects. In fact, when I spoke with Elder Jackie Williams in May 2015 he indicated that he enjoys going to Teslin so that he can speak Tlingit with some of the Elders there.

Several successful projects have been completed for Taku River Tlingit language documentation. The TRTFN has created the *Tlingit Language Curriculum Guide* (TRTFN n.d.) for use at the Atlin School and in the Tlingit Family Learning Centre (TFLC), which offers

¹⁴ *Language revitalization* is a term applied to situations where Indigenous peoples are working to increase the number of language speakers, change attitudes about the Indigenous language, increase the number of domains [places] of usage for the language, or improve the fluency of the speakers (Crystal 2000, Krauss 1992, Nettle and Romaine 2000).

family programs particularly for pre-school and school age children. As well, through a joint project with the TRTFN departments for Health and Social and for Lands and Resources, the TRTFN and Dr. Christine Schreyer created a game to teach Tlingit, “*Haa shagóon ítx̄ yaa ntoo.aat*” (Schreyer and Gordon 2007). Individuals, who play the game, learn the Tlingit words for resources found on the land, such as fish, berries, and animals, while at the same time learning the Tlingit place names for the areas where those resources are collected.¹⁵ Another joint project between UBC Okanagan and the TRTFN departments for Health and Social and for Lands and Resources was the creation of an interactive online map, *Learning to Talk to the Land; (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names*, (Schreyer et al. 2014). This project emerged from the community’s desire to reclaim the Tlingit place names on government maps. The Tlingit Place Names Map includes information about places in Taku River Tlingit territory, how to say the place names in Tlingit, traditional stories about the land, an interactive forum for community members to connect about the land, and lesson plans which match the B.C. Ministry of Education Curriculum for Grades K to 9 (Taku River Tlingit Place Names 2014). Dr. Schreyer has also worked on a project with the TRTFN departments for Health and Social and for Lands and Lands and Resources to create new signs with Tlingit place names to post in the Atlin area and Tlingit territory (see Figure 4.10 *Painting Signs to (Re)claim Tlingit Place Names*). A new project hopes to convince the B.C. government to change maps of the area to include Tlingit place names rather than English names. These joint projects demonstrate the importance of language and land to the TRTFN and some of the ways that the TRTFN include connections to the land in all their actions.

¹⁵ For more information on the board game, see Schreyer and Gordon (2007) and Schreyer (2011).

Who are the Ancestors of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation?

The Taku River Tlingit First Nation are Tlingit peoples. For thousands of years, Tlingit nations have lived all over the north western tip of North America in what is now Alaska, Yukon Territory, and British Columbia. Many years ago, Taku River Tlingit peoples travelled up the Taku River from Juneau, Alaska and settled permanently in what were originally summer fishing camps in the Taku River system. The history of the TRTFN has been passed on orally from generation to generation and more recently TRTFN history has been recorded in books such as those by Elizabeth Nyman and Jeff Leer (1993) and Jackie Williams (2015). In *Gágiwdul.àt: Brought Forth to Reconfirm: the Legacy of a Taku River Tlingit Clan* (Nyman and Leer 1993), locally known as Mrs. Nyman's Book, Elizabeth Nyman tells creation stories from the ancestors that she heard as a child. As well, Mrs. Nyman tells stories of her life growing up as the Taku River territory began to be populated with more and more non-Indigenous peoples. The stories in Mrs. Nyman's Book are filled with descriptions of relationships and interactions between the land and the Tlingit people throughout the drainage system of the Taku River. In *Lingit Kusteeyí: What my Grandfather Taught Me*, Jackie Williams tells the story of the borderline between the Tlingit and the Tahltan peoples. These stories continue to be passed down from generation to generation by family members, who tell the stories to their children.¹⁶

Today, the government offices for the TRTFN are located in Atlin and include departments for Administration, Economic Development, Education, Fisheries, Land and Resources, Operations and Maintenance, and Social and Health.¹⁷ Ten kilometres to the north of Atlin, on Atlin Rd, the Economic Development Department is also involved in a corporation, Atlin Tlingit

¹⁶ Parents and students whom I interviewed spoke about learning the stories as children.

¹⁷ I feel it important to include these details in this introduction to TRTFN because I believe that most Canadians do not realize that First Nations are nations with government departments like any other government in Canada.

Economic Limited Partnership (ATELP), which has a mandate “to empower TRT citizens to develop sustainable careers while upholding Tlingit values that maintain the physical and spiritual values of the TRT Traditional Territory” (TRTFN 2016a). ATELP includes the Skills, Training, Employment Program (STEP), an education and employment program for members of TRTFN, and Taku Wild, a commercial company, which produces and sells smoked salmon products from the Taku River.

The TRTFN governance system follows a traditional clan based system of government. In the early 1990’s the members of TRTFN made the decision to change their government system from “the foreign Chief & Council system of government” to a traditional “Tlingit Clan System of government” (TRTFN 1993, 1). According to the TRTFN constitution, a clan “includes the primary social structure of TRTFN which is based upon the two clans (Crow and Wolf) consisting of one or more Houses” (TRTFN 1993, 2). Members of the TRTFN elect a Spokesperson and Clan Directors following the Taku River Tlingit First Nation Custom Election Rules and Regulations. The current Spokesperson Louise Gordon, was elected in June 2015.

I first met Spokesperson Louise Gordon in January 2012 at a luncheon with my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer. Linda McGill, Manager for Education, Health, and Social for TRTFN at the time joined us as well. Louise and Linda were attending the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) workshops in Kamloops, B.C. to support the renewal of the Local Education Agreement¹⁸ between the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87. Christine Schreyer invited me along to the luncheon to give me the opportunity to present my research idea for a partnership project about education for Indigenous students. Louise and Linda

¹⁸ A Local Education Agreement is a tuition agreement between a First Nation and a school district or private school to give First Nations, “a stronger voice in the education of their children and help to improve educational outcomes for First Nations learners” (FNESC 2014, 3).

were enthusiastic about the idea and we began to put the steps in place to begin our partnership research.

Beginning in March 2013 through to March 2015 I made several trips to Atlin during all seasons to build connections with my research partners before the actual start of interviews with participants: students, parents, and staff at the school.¹⁹ Members of TRTFN invited me to meals and cups of tea in their homes, to community events in Atlin, and to Tlingit Celebration 2016 in Juneau, Alaska. I think it is important to say that I have learned from every experience and have observed *Haa Kusteeyí* in action every day that I have spent with members of TRTFN. In everything they do, members of TRTFN demonstrate that language and land are closely tied. The interconnections between language and land guide all aspects of living in the community and current projects to plan for future generations.

Why is Taku River Tlingit First Nation Partnering in This Research?

To understand why Taku River Tlingit First Nation would want to partner in research, I asked Spokesperson Louise Gordon about the benefits of doing research with a university.

Louise Gordon explained:

For myself, we learn, a mutual benefit. For example, with Christine (Dr. Christine Schreyer), we needed some work completed when she came in. We knew the language was linked to our territory. It's like an identity. There is a language that comes from that territory. How does language support the land claims process? The way language supports it is your dialect. She [Christine] was bringing in the scientific part and I was bringing in the traditional part. It was a learning opportunity for both sides. For your project, you need to learn, but it helps me to get a higher level of understanding and that is really important. It is kind of like reinforcing your natural instincts. (Louise Gordon, January 15, 2016, telephone conversation)

¹⁹ For this research, I distinguished between research partners, who were community members who consented to be my advisors, and research participants, who consented to interviews and focus group sessions for the project. Some members of the community consented to both roles.

Louise Gordon relied on her previous research with Dr. Schreyer to give an example of the ways in which partnership research can benefit the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. She explained with the following example:

Christine did interviews with some of the Elders and I learned. Auntie Mrs. Nyman told the story, *My Grandfather's Trail*. That's a project we need to finish. We need to find the time to do it. The story needs to be put on the [Taku River Tlingit Place Names] geolive map. The story and the dialect she uses show that she belongs to that territory. Another person tells the grandfather story, because they all tell similar stories. That person is from Teslin. Because of the way they tell the story. I took it to a higher level...you don't have to fight about land boundaries. All they have to do is listen to the dialect. Dialect tells that is where you belong, like an accent. (Louise Gordon, January 15, 2016, telephone conversation)

In this example, Louise Gordon has provided the details of how working in partnership allows both partners to bring their strengths to the relationship for a positive outcome.

As our conversation continued Louise Gordon suggested that I needed to link our research to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She commented, "You need to ask questions about residential schools. In your next surveys, you need questions that get to that topic" (Louise Gordon, January 15, 2016, telephone conversation). At this stage in our research process, interviews with students and parents in Atlin were completed and transcribed. However, Louise Gordon's comments prompted me to reread *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Canada. TRC 2015) to look for more connections between our research and the recommendations for Calls to Action from the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These connections will be reported in later chapters of this dissertation. This is just one example of how our partnership benefited my decisions for this research.

Introduction to School District 87 (Stikine) co-authored by Mike Gordon and Colleen Larson

Who is School District 87 (Stikine)?

School District 87 is, geographically, one of the largest school districts in the province and by student population, one of the smallest. The school district is located in the northwest corner of the province in the unceded territories of the Tahltan First Nation, the Kaska First Nation, and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. School registration records for 2014 indicated that approximately 163 Aboriginal students and 24 non-Aboriginal students were enrolled in four schools: 105 students in Dease Lake School in Dease Lake in Kindergarten through to Grade 12, 32 students in Tahltan School in Telegraph Creek in Kindergarten through to Grade 9, 16 students in Denetia School in Lower Post in Kindergarten through to Grade 7, and 34 students in Atlin School in Atlin in Kindergarten through to Grade 9 (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a).²⁰ The four schools are located in a geographic area of 188 034 square kilometres (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a) with a school board office in Dease Lake. Travel between schools and to the school board office is one day's journey on remote roads (see Figure 1.3 *Map of School District 87 (Stikine)*).

²⁰ As of February 12, 2017, the most recent information about these statistics on the School District 87 (Stikine) website is the Achievement Contract 2014-15.



Figure 1.3 Map of School District 87 (Stikine) (SD87, 2016)

Because of the remoteness and the distances between communities, School District 87 has obvious challenges. The school district continues to look for ways to support teachers and students with technology for communication and collaboration to “shorten” the distances between schools—Atlin is 670 km from Dease Lake (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a). When I met with Superintendent Mike Gordon at Atlin School, March 5, 2015, he talked about the challenges of supporting students to complete Grade 12. Most students from Atlin and others in

School District 87 relocate to complete high school graduation programs in Whitehorse and other communities. School District 87 currently purchases educational services for students from Atlin for Grades 10-12 from Yukon Schools in Whitehorse, Yukon.²¹

Despite the geographic challenges, there are many positive aspects in the small school settings in SD87. For example, class sizes in SD87 are smaller than average with a district pupil to teacher ratio of ten students for every one teacher (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a). Evidence of the above statement is obvious whenever I visit at Atlin School. When I visited in Spring 2015, Principal Michael Basran was out on the field playing soccer with the entire school population everyday. Whenever Superintendent Mike Gordon was in Atlin during my visits there, he too could be seen on the soccer field playing soccer with students. Superintendent Mike Gordon knows all students in SD87 and many of their family members by name, a situation which must be unique in the province. Over the past four years, comments in my conversations with the teachers, principals, and the superintendent show the dedication of the members of School District 87 towards students and families.

For this doctoral research, I partnered with the superintendent for SD87, three principals²² at Atlin School (2012-2016), and the staff at Atlin School. Of the thirty students who attend Atlin School, approximately two thirds belong to the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and one third have European ancestry (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a). The school motto is, “Yaan

²¹ Plans are in place for students in Grade 10 to remain at Atlin School in September 2016.

²² The principals I worked with were Mr. Ron Bentley (September 2012-December 2013), Mr. Rod Lamirand, (January-June 2014), and Mr. Michael Basran (September 2014-June 2015). During the 2015/2016 school year, Superintendent Mike Gordon acted as principal of the school with four teachers sharing the Head Teacher role for equal timelines throughout the school year.

toosakwéin kusti, kustiteen yaa at natoosakwéin,” meaning Learn to Live, Live to Learn (School District 87 (Stikine) 2010, n.p.).²³

The Atlin School building was constructed when the school population was much larger. The school building is a modern facility, which includes a gymnasium, four classrooms (one is currently a spare room), a computer lab, a home economics/science lab, a workshop, a library, a playground, a soccer field, and an outdoor skating rink. Enrolment numbers change somewhat each year, but there are three classes of approximately ten students each: K-Grade 3, Grades 4-6, and Grades 7-9. Four teachers teach at the school, one for each class and one support/music teacher. Until 2015, there has been a principal at Atlin School, who takes on the role of support teacher as well, but in the 2015-2016 school year, the superintendent was the acting principal and teaching staff rotated the role of Head Teacher for ten-week terms. The Atlin School staff also includes a part time school secretary, a teacher assistant, a culture support assistant, a custodian, and teachers on call.

What is the History of Education Services for Students in Atlin?

The current school in Atlin, B.C. was built in 1983, although the first school building in Atlin was established in 1902, just a few years after the discovery of gold (The Atlin School, 2013/2014). Many parents of current students attended the school as children. Prior to 2010, Atlin School had a larger population with more non-Indigenous students whose families had come to Atlin to work in the mining industry.²⁴

²³ The school motto was created with collaboration between Atlin School staff and TRTFN to blend TRTFN traditional teachings and language with school goals (Nita Connelly, July 7, 2016, telephone conversation). Gail Jackson helped the staff with the Tlingit words. Clayton Carlick designed the logo.

²⁴ The population of Atlin School reached as many as 120 students in the 1990's (Nita Connelly, July 7, 2016, telephone conversation) when gold mines, such as Redfern Corporation and Adanac Moly were operating and exploring in the region. With downturns in the economy and closures of mining operations (McCarthy Tétrault Mining Practice Group 2013), after 2009 the population in Atlin School dwindled to the current population of approximately thirty students.

Although children of Taku River Tlingit First Nation attend school in Atlin from Kindergarten through to Grade 9, this was not always the case. From 1940 until 1975, the Roman Catholic Church operated a residential school in Lower Post. Children from the Kaska, Tahltan, and Tlingit Nations in British Columbia and Yukon Territory came to Lower Post Residential School, including children from the TRTFN (Social University 2015).²⁵ Many of the grandparents of current students in Atlin School attended residential school in Lower Post or elsewhere. Memories of the residential school experience are still with the members of the TRTFN.²⁶ These memories surface when parents and grandparents are planning for their children today.

Why is School District 87 (Stikine) Partnering in This Research?

In January 2016, I asked Superintendent Mike Gordon to explain the benefits of partnership research for School District 87 (Stikine). Mike Gordon clarified:

A role of the school district is to meet the current needs wherever possible of our students and to partner in preparing them for the rest of their lives. As such we need to be asking our partners how are we doing, what should we be doing and ask how best might we do it. The research is based on interviews with students, parents, and school staff and focused upon three topics: experiences at school, opportunities for Aboriginal culture and language at school and in the community, and relationships with others with respect to learning. The information coming from this research is a significant contribution to the strategic planning efforts of the Board of Education as it begins community consultation regarding the future of SD 87 and what it needs to do in order to best meet the needs of its families.

²⁵ Survivors of the Lower Post Residential School attended a Gathering around the Fire at Lower Post in August 2012 to heal from residential school trauma. Eight hundred survivors and family members attended four days of celebrations, workshops, speakers, and activities to wrap up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process in the region (Forsberg, 2012). In May 2016 I travelled to Lower Post. I cannot express the confusion and sorrow I felt for people in my generation who went to school there in such an isolated location.

²⁶ This research did not focus upon residential school experiences because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the trauma that such discussions might bring to survivors of residential schools. However as background knowledge, it is important to acknowledge that members of Taku River Tlingit First Nation did attend residential schools outside of Atlin. TRTFN is working with members with respect to healing from the experiences in residential schools and the intergenerational trauma to the community.

To ensure that the information collected in interviews was useful to the school district, the teachers and principal had opportunities to read and edit the interview questions prior to the interviews with participants. More description of this process is described in Chapter 3.

This dissertation is the report of the partnership research between the TRTFN, SD87, and myself to query the relationships between Indigenous culture and language, sense of belonging, and student achievement. Although it is my dissertation, I feel a responsibility to my research partners to acknowledge their contributions and include them in the retelling. To that end, whenever possible, I include my partners in the following chapters as I have in this introduction. For example, I use the pronoun *our* rather than the singular pronoun *my* to describe the results of our project.

The chapters in this dissertation explain the theories and methodologies for our research (Chapter 2), methods (Chapter 3), participants' perceptions of students' experiences at school (Chapters 4) participants' perceptions of students' opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language (Chapter 5), participants' perceptions of students' relationships with others (Chapter 6), and conclusions (Chapter 7). However, first it is important and necessary to describe the context for this research internationally, nationally, and provincially.

The International Context for this Partnership Research

Indigenous peoples worldwide are concerned about the effects of colonization, ongoing attempts by governments to use education to assimilate Indigenous peoples into dominant societies (Antone 2000; Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1987; Battiste 2002, 2005, 2009; Castellano 2000; Jacob, Cheng, and Porter 2015), and the resulting loss of language, culture, and identity for Indigenous peoples (Antone 2000; Assembly of First Nations 2011; Battiste 2002, 2005; Castellano 2000; Jacob, Cheng, and Porter 2015; Matilipi 2012; Schreyer 2009, 2011;

Sleeter 2011; Smith 2005). Decades of negotiations between nation states and Indigenous peoples (United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner 2013) have resulted in the creation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007).

The articles in the United Nations declaration are interrelated and work together to describe the rights of Indigenous peoples, however, two articles in the declaration specifically address rights to Indigenous language revitalization and education for Indigenous peoples. Article 13 refers to Indigenous languages and states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means. (UNDRIP 2007)

Article 14 of the declaration addresses the inclusion of Indigenous language and culture in education for Indigenous peoples:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. 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. (UNDRIP 2007)

Clearly, the rights described in these two articles are interconnected and must be addressed by governments who are responsible for the education of their citizens. Most importantly, educators must realize the responsibility they hold to maintain these rights for the Indigenous children in their classrooms. This research aims to assist educators, scholars, and community members to

understand the role they might play in assisting Indigenous peoples to achieve and maintain their rights.

Internationally, many Indigenous scholars write about the need for improvement to education for Indigenous students (Battiste 2005, 2009; Cherubini et al. 2010; Sleeter 2011). My review of current concerns and recommendations about education for Indigenous students from an Indigenous perspective revealed five common themes. First, there is a need for decolonization in educational institutions (Battiste 2009; Bishop 2011; Hynds and Sleeter 2011; Matilipi 2012; May and Aikman 2003; Savage and Hindle 2011; Shanley 2015; Sleeter 2011). This leads to the second theme, the need to recognize and eliminate the dominance of European knowledge and de-legitimization of Indigenous knowledge in education (Battiste 2002, 2005; Berryman 2011; Bishop 2011; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2000; Hynds and Sleeter 2011; May and Aikman 2003; Sleeter 2011). Third, colonization and dominance of European knowledge has caused the loss of and need to revitalize Indigenous language and culture in school systems (Antone 2000); Battiste 2002, 2005; Bishop 2011; Castellano 2000; Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2000; Matilipi 2012; May and Aikman 2003; Savage and Hindle 2011; Sleeter 2011; Smith 2005). Fourth, Indigenous students must be prepared for self-determination (Bishop 2011; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Fife 2005; Ngai, Karlsen Baek, and Paulgaard 2015; Hynds and Sleeter 2011; May and Aikman 2003; Shanley 2015). Bishop (2011) and Hynds and Sleeter (2011) extend this notion to include that students must have opportunities to practice self-determination in the classroom. Finally, there is a need to develop sense of belonging and relationships of trust within schools for Indigenous students (Antone 2000; Beck and Malley 1998; Kagan 1990; Kunc 1992; Stairs 1994). This research will contribute to the literature by sharing the perceptions of students, parents and teachers in one community in

northern British Columbia about students' current experiences in school, opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language, and relationships with others.

The ultimate result of assimilative practices in education, dominance of European knowledge, and marginalization of Indigenous knowledge has been the loss of Indigenous language and culture for Indigenous peoples (Antone 2000; Battiste 2002, 2005; Bishop 2011; Castellano 2000; Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2000; Matilipi 2012; May and Aikman 2003; Savage and Hindle 2011; Sleeter 2011; Smith 2005). A resurgence in Indigenous language revitalization and Indigenous language usage, often linked to rights to land and resources, is occurring worldwide: 1) to assert Indigenous rights (Antone 2000; Assembly of First Nations 2011; Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1987; Battiste 2000, 2002, 2005, 2009; Castellano 2000; Ivanic 2005; Matilipi 2012; Norton 2000) and 2) to maintain Indigenous identity (Antone 2000; Assembly of First Nations 2011; Battiste 2005; Castellano 2000; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Matilipi 2012; Schreyer 2009, 2011; Shanley 2015). For the purposes of this research the term, *Indigenous identity*, refers not only to the connections that Indigenous peoples have to their cultures, ancestry, and language, but also to the rights that Indigenous peoples have to land, resources, and self-determination as a result of their identity. Indigenous languages are seen as strong indicators of identity (Antone 2000; Crystal 2010; Dorais 1995; Ivanic 2005; Norton 2000; Stairs 1994), important for both linking to cultural knowledge from the past and protecting the unique cultural aspects of Indigenous peoples in the present and for the future.

Internationally, Indigenous peoples are utilizing many strategies to revitalize Indigenous languages (Assembly of First Nations 2011; Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1987; Battiste 2000, 2002, 2005, 2009; First Peoples Cultural Council 2010, 2014; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001a; Walsh 2006). In *Language Vitality and Endangerment*, (UNESCO 2003) the

UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages provides a summary of strategies by defining nine interconnecting factors to consider in language revitalization:

- 1) Intergenerational language transmission, 2) Absolute number of speakers, 3) proportion of speakers within the total population, 4) Trends in existing language domains, 5) Response to new domains and media, 6) Materials for language education and literacy 7) Governmental and institutional language policies, including official status and use, 8) community members' attitudes towards their own language, and 9) Amount and quality of documentation. (UNESCO 2003, 17)

This list is comprehensive and many of the factors described by UNESCO are included in descriptions of language revitalization strategies by scholars with expertise in this field (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton and Hale 2001; Walsh 2006). Some Indigenous peoples and scholars (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001a) provide more detailed descriptions of language revitalization strategies such as, 1) immersion programs including language nests (Cohen 2010; First Peoples Cultural Council 2010, 2014; First Peoples Cultural Council & Chief Atahm School 2014; Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Hale 2001; King 2001; Smith n.d.; McIvor 2005, 2006),²⁷ 2) language immersion houses (Dolphin 2015, Ellwand 2016, Johnson 2014, McCue 2015, Onaman Collective 2016, Rivers 2014),²⁸ 3) partial immersion or bi-lingual programs (Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001a; Perley 2011), 4) Indigenous language instruction as a “second ‘foreign’ language” (Grenoble & Whaley 2006, 56; Hinton 2001a), and 5) mentor-apprentice programs (First Peoples Cultural Council 2010, 2014; Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001b). More recently, scholars (Ager 2005; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Haarmann 1990; O hlfearnain 2013; Perley 2011; Schreyer 2011) have suggested that planning for Indigenous language revitalization must include strategies to alter attitudes and build prestige

²⁷ Language nests are programs for young children where adults, often Elders, speak only the Indigenous language to the children.

²⁸ In language immersion houses, room mates live together, with a mentor as a guide, speak only the Indigenous language to one another in order to learn the language at a proficiency level that is beyond beginner.

for the language. Descriptions of these strategies are numerous and diverse, which scholars (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001a) contend is necessary for the variety of language endangerment situations in communities. However, language revitalization is most successful when “the language is used as a language of everyday communication” (Hinton 2001a, 10) and when the number of children who speak the language increases (Krauss 1992).

Despite the connections between Indigenous language revitalization and education for Indigenous children, internationally public schools have not been very involved in language and cultural revitalization for Indigenous students (Ball and McIvor 2013; Jacob, Liu, and Lee 2015). Studies from New Zealand about improvements in education for Maori students have gained international recognition for their attention to integrating Maori culture and philosophy into classrooms (Bishop et al. 2003; Bishop et al. 2009; Sleeter 2011). A main recommendation from New Zealand is to raise achievement of Maori students by building strong teacher-student relationships and by including Maori language and culture in classrooms to improve sense of belonging for Maori students (Bishop 2011). Concerns about sense of belonging for students who were at risk to graduate, recently raised by Morin (2004) and Bishop (2011) for Indigenous students, were first raised for all students in the 1990’s and articulated concisely by Beck and Malley (1998), Kunc (1992), and Kagan (1990). In reports of the Te Kotahitanga Project in New Zealand, a longitudinal study of Maori student achievement, Bishop (2011) and Penetito et al. (2011) report the importance of positive relationships with teachers for student achievement, however, the importance of relationships with others, such as peers, parents, and community members, for Indigenous students’ achievement has not been reported in the literature. This research will provide information from Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and their parents and teachers about relationships with others at school within a Canadian context.

To summarize the international literature about improvements to education for Indigenous peoples and planning for Indigenous language, culture, and identity revitalization, Indigenous perceptions tend to focus upon building the capacity of Indigenous communities to enhance the future for Indigenous peoples. This can be achieved by including Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies in schools, by incorporating Indigenous languages and cultures in classrooms to nurture sense of belonging and Indigenous identity, and by preparing young people for self-determination to lead their communities into the future. Nettle and Romaine, whose book, *Vanishing Voices; Extinction of the World's Languages*, is often mentioned in the literature about Indigenous language revitalization, write, “The first step in the solution to any problem is to acknowledge its existence and understand its origins” (2000, 23). Hence in the next section of this chapter, I will briefly discuss the Canadian context for this research.

The Canadian Context

Indigenous peoples in Canada have negotiated for improvements to educational policy and programs for Indigenous students (Battiste 2009) since the first days of the *British North America Act (1867)* (Canada 1867),²⁹ which described the roles of provincial and federal governments and established federal responsibility for “Indians, and Lands reserved for Indians” (Canada 1867, Section 91(24)). Indigenous peoples in Canada have also been repeatedly disappointed by the failure of new policies for change over past decades (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996a). Episkenew uses the term, “policies of devastation” (2009, 20), to refer to failed attempts by governments to improve conditions for Indigenous

²⁹ *The British North America Act (1867)* is also referred to as *The Constitution Act, 1867*. In 1876, *The Indian Act, 1876* (Canada. 1876), was created to further describe who was Indian and who was not, as well, as all aspects of life for Indigenous peoples in Canada. *The Indian Act, 1876*, is still in place today, although there have been amendments since 1876.

peoples in Canada which exacerbate issues rather than resolving them. With respect to education, changes have occurred over the years, for example, putting an end to the residential school system in the 1990's (Canada. TRC 2014). In 1996, the commissioners for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported, "education is seen [by Aboriginal peoples] as the vehicle for both enhancing the life of the individual and enhancing collective goals" (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996a, Vol. 3, 440). Ultimately, for Indigenous peoples the goals for the education of their children—to prepare their children for the future while retaining their Indigenous identity—have been constant for many decades (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations 1972, Assembly of First Nations 2011). Education has been viewed in the past and is perceived by Indigenous peoples today as important for a promising future (Barman, Hébert and McCaskill 1987; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache 2000). In the following paragraphs, I briefly discuss government initiatives of the last two decades to make improvements to education for Indigenous students in Canada.

In 1991 the Canadian federal government established the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to change the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. The commissioners for the RCAP wrote:

From the commission's first days, we have been reminded repeatedly of the limited understanding of Aboriginal issues among non-Aboriginal Canadians and of the obstacles this presents to achieving reconciliation and a new relationship. As one intervener described it, there is a "vacuum of consciousness" among non-Aboriginal people. We would go further to suggest a pervasive lack of knowledge and perhaps even of interest. (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996b, Vol. 5, 82)

I believe that while some changes in public education have occurred in the twenty years to benefit Indigenous students since the report of the RCAP, these changes have not been substantial enough to make a difference for many Indigenous students. I do believe, however, that changes in education for Indigenous students will occur through collaboration between

Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that examines the similarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews rather than differences. Partnership research such as this collaboration with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, School District 87 (Stikine), and UBC (Okanagan), which attempts to build upon positive comments from community members, have the potential to make changes to education for Indigenous students.

In the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 3, Gathering Strength* the commissioners emphasized the importance of changes in education to prepare Indigenous children and youth to participate in community economic life and in Canadian society (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996a). This vision for education as expressed by Indigenous peoples included developing linguistic and cultural competence, a positive identity, and, most importantly, the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical development of the child using a wholistic³⁰, Indigenous approach (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996a, Vol 3, 404). In their report, the commissioners of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples described the failure of education for Aboriginal³¹ students. Battiste summarized their descriptions with the statement, “seventy-three percent of First Nations students do not graduate from high school, only 9 percent of those who do graduate attend postsecondary institutions, and only 3 percent of these students graduate from institutions of higher learning” (2009, 195). Currently in Canada, while the statistics for Indigenous student achievement show improvement, Indigenous students’ graduation rates still fall behind their non-Indigenous peers. Statistics from the 2011 Statistics Canada National Household Survey (NHS)

³⁰ I have chosen to use the term, *wholistic* rather than *holistic*. *Wholistic* is becoming a more popular term in current literature about education for Indigenous students. *Wholistic* means considering mind, body, and spirit, whereas, *holistic* tends to refer to the whole being a sum of the parts (Canadian College of Homeopathic Medicine 2014).

³¹ When I am reporting statistics from the provincial and federal government, I will use the term, *Aboriginal students*, as is reported in the documents and I will assume that the information is collected from students who are Indian, Métis, or Inuit. This will eliminate any errors in reporting information.

(Canada. Statistics Canada. NHS 2011)³² report that the percentages of non-Aboriginal people in Canada with at least a high school diploma were 88.7% for adults aged 35 to 44 and 79.5% for adults aged 55-64. For Aboriginal people the percentages were 68.0% for adults aged 35 to 44 and 58.7% for adults aged 55-64. The percentages for Aboriginal adults aged 25 to 64 with at least a high school diploma are grouped for Métis at 73.6%, First Nations at 60.2%, and Inuit at 41.0% for an average of 58.3%. Furthermore, the percentage of First Nations with post secondary qualifications was 52.1% for persons without registered Indian status compared to 42.3% for persons with registered Indian status and the percentage of persons with registered Indian status with college and university qualifications living off reserve was 32.1% compared to 19.5% for those living on reserve. These statistics show little change from the 2006 census, five years previous. As we approach the twenty-year anniversary of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, it is clear that improvements in education for Indigenous peoples have occurred since 1996, however, there are still gaps between statistics for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Decreasing the gaps by improving education for Indigenous students ought to be a primary focus for all levels of government.

The most recent and influential document in Canada to support changes to education for Indigenous peoples is *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Canada. TRC 2015). In 2008 the Canadian government created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in response to the

³² As of February 13, 2017, the most recent statistics on the Statistics Canada National Household Survey (NHS) website, which report education achievement for Indigenous peoples who live on-reserve and off-reserve is the report from 2011 entitled, *The Educational Attainment of Indigenous Peoples in Canada*. The available reports from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2016 pertain to health for Indigenous peoples. More recent reports about education compare mobility and education attainment or education and employment. The 2011 report gave the information I wanted to report for this portion of dissertation and for comparison to 2006.

abundance of legal cases against the government from survivors of the residential school system (Canada. TRC 2015). In their report, the commissioners explain the legacy of residential school:

Residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. It is reflected too in the critically endangered status of most Aboriginal languages. (Canada. TRC 2015, 183)

Cultural genocide, is the term used by the commissioners to describe the practices and policies that the federal government implemented to destroy the social and political institutions, seize land, transfer and restrict movement of populations, ban languages, prohibit spiritual practices, and disrupt families "to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next" (Canada. TRC 2015, 1). The commissioners of the TRC open the summary of the final report with the words:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. (Canada. TRC 2015, 1)

The commissioners emphasize that all Canadians must understand the legacy of residential schools and the responsibility of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to work together for reconciliation. At the same time the commissioners write, "We are not there yet. The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is not a mutually respectful one" (Canada. TRC 2015, 7). The commissioners explain that reconciliation is about building and sustaining a mutually respectful relationship with one another by becoming aware of the past, acknowledging the harms that have been done, atoning for the causes, and taking action to change behaviours (Canada. TRC 2015). They emphasize that healing from this tragic part of our history is not only

for Aboriginal peoples, but for all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada and that it is “not about ‘closing a sad chapter of Canada’s past’, but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice” (12).

In *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* the commissioners acknowledge that this is not the first time that an attempt has been made by Canada to reconcile relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. With respect to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* the commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission write, “Much of what the Royal Commission had to say has been ignored by government; a majority of its recommendations were never implemented” (Canada. TRC 2015, 7). Suggesting that Canada’s reputation as a “prosperous, just, and inclusive democracy” in the global world is at stake, the commissioners refer to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as a “rare second chance to seize a lost opportunity for reconciliation” (7). To be successful at reconciliation in this attempt, the summary of the final report of the TRC includes ninety-four “Calls to Action” which clearly articulate action plans for governments and citizens of Canada.

The Calls to Action for education, language and culture, and education for reconciliation, listed in Appendix A, are action plans to implement the rights for language revitalization and education described in the UNDRIP (2007). In the following three paragraphs, I summarize the Calls to Action for each of the three topics.

In the summary of the final report of the TRC, Calls to Action numbers 13 through 17 for language and culture revitalization include acknowledging that Aboriginal rights includes language rights, enacting an Aboriginal Languages Act in Canada, appointing an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner, creating Aboriginal language degrees and diploma programs at

universities and colleges, and enabling residential school survivors to reclaim names which were taken away in the residential school system (Canada 2015) .

Calls to Action numbers 6 through 10 for education summon the federal government to provide for education programs administered by both First Nations and by provincial and territorial governments. The Calls to Action recommend that the government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada which describes punishments for students, to eliminate the educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, to eliminate discrepancies between funding for education on and off reserves, to publish reports (annually) which compare education funding, educational achievement, and income attainments of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, to “end the backlog of First Nations” (Canada. TRC 2015, 151) seeking post secondary education, and to draft new legislation for Aboriginal education. New legislation would address provision of sufficient funding to close gaps in educational achievement within one generation, improvements in educational attainment and success rates, development of “culturally appropriate curricula” (Canada. TRC 2015, 149), protection of the rights to Aboriginal language instruction, increase in parental and community involvement commiserate with what parents experience in the public school system to enable parents to participate fully in their children’s education, and respect for Treaty relationships. Finally, Calls to Action for education call upon all levels of government (federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal) to develop early childhood programs with culturally appropriate programs.

Calls to Action numbers 62 through 65 for education for reconciliation are addressed to federal, provincial, and territorial governments. In consultation with Aboriginal peoples, survivors, and educators, all levels of government are called to: 1) create mandatory curriculum

for all grades to teach about residential schools, treaties, and the historical and current contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada, 2) provide funding to teacher training programs to educate teachers in Indigenous knowledge and in ways to integrate Indigenous teaching methods into classrooms, 3) provide funding for schools to integrate Indigenous knowledge and ways of teaching, and 4) establish positions in government for senior administrators who are responsible for Aboriginal content in curriculum. As well, all levels of government are asked to ensure that public funds are available to denominational schools to teach comparative religious studies which are developed in consultation with Elders and include teachings about spiritual beliefs and practices. In addition to creating Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and resources, the Council of Ministers of Education is called upon to share information and best practices as they develop curriculum, to build empathy, mutual respect, and understanding of all cultures with all students, and to identify teacher training needs with respect to the above Calls to Action. Finally, the summary of the final report of the TRC calls upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, to establish a national research program to increase understanding of reconciliation.

Whether or not governments implement the Calls to Action described in the summary of the final report of the TRC remains to be seen. What is apparent from the list above, however, is that appropriate suggestions are in place for collaborations between governments and Aboriginal peoples and administrative structures to support improvements to education for Indigenous students in Canada.

Whenever change is implemented, evidence of the success of the change must lie with the people who are affected most. In the case of education, evidence of change will be improvements in educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

For language revitalization, one would expect to see improvements to programs for language instruction and increases in the numbers of speakers of Indigenous languages. There is a long chain of changes which need to occur from federal policies to provincial and territorial policies, to district policies and practices, to school policies and practice, to classroom policies and practices, before students and parents might witness changes in education for Indigenous students. As we move forward in the journey to reconciliation, the descriptions of what is currently in place in one province for one First Nation, i.e. the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, presented in this research can serve as a reference point for measuring progress towards reconciliation. Before presenting our research, the next paragraphs provide more context by describing the current focus for education for Indigenous students in British Columbia.

The Context in British Columbia

In British Columbia, the Ministry of Education publishes an annual report called the *How are We Doing Report?* to compare demographic and assessment statistics for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education, 2016c). In 2015, the website for the How Are We Doing Report? stated that the report, “provides 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” (B.C. Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education, 2015, n.p.). In the most recent report, the six-year completion rate for secondary school programs (graduation rate) for Indigenous students is listed as 63% compared to 86% completion rates for non-Indigenous peers (B.C. Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education, 2016b). There has been an increase in achievement for both groups of students in the past five years with Indigenous students’ graduation rates increasing from 52% to 63% and rates for non-Indigenous students changing

from 83% to 86%. In 1999, to address the achievement statistics for Indigenous students, which were much lower at the time, the B.C. Ministry of Education signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs and the President of the BC Teachers' Federation. Soon after, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia recommended that all school districts in the province create Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education, 2016a). Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements are agreements that are created collaboratively with school districts and the local Aboriginal communities they serve to establish goals and action plans to enhance education for Indigenous students. The agreements are reviewed annually and renewed every five years. Aboriginal Education Enhancement agreements include components that look promising to effect changes in education for Indigenous students.³³

During the past five years, I have read a sampling of ten enhancement agreements at least annually and have noted changes, which I would call improvements in the goals and indicators of success. In 2011, my first sample of ten agreements showed a heavy emphasis upon goals for academic achievement measured by scores on district and provincial assessments. Many districts had goals to improve sense of belonging for Indigenous students, but often there were no indicators of success named or the indicators were stated as improved attendance and/or number of suspensions from the principal's office. I have observed an increase in the number of goals for improving sense of identity and belonging where now in a sampling of ten enhancement agreements, all school districts have a goal of that nature. The indicators of success for these goals are usually stated as comments from students on district or provincial satisfaction surveys,

³³ The British Columbia Ministry of Education regularly updates websites. As recently as February 11, 2017, I checked all citations and bibliographic entries to ensure that the statistics reported in this document are as up to date as possible.

numbers of students who successfully complete B.C. First Nations 12 and English First Peoples 10, and attendance records for Aboriginal students. However, I still see Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, for example the AEEA for School District 33 (Chilliwack), which list the number of suspensions from the principal's office as an indicator of Indigenous students' sense of belonging (British Columbia Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education 2016a). School districts and their Indigenous partners are challenged to find measurable indicators of success for this goal.³⁴ Some districts have named more wholistic measures of success, such as increased recognition of Indigenous students' leadership and participation in all experiences of school; however, it is obvious to me that European thinking about education still has influence over the goals and measures of success in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements.

White et al. write "Though most districts with an AEEA have engaged in local inquiry projects regarding different aspects of the agreements, our research team was unable to find any published academic studies on the subject" (2012, 43). In the past decade, studies have been commissioned by the British Columbia Ministry of Education to review achievement scores for Indigenous students in British Columbia (Morin 2004) and policies and practices in schools with respect to progress in achievement for Indigenous students (Bell et al. 2004). While the recommendations by Bell et al. for achievement measurements rely heavily upon European methods, such as, standardized testing, Bell et al. do advise that performance measurements ought to include the development of "holistic measures appropriate to Aboriginal programs" (2004, 324). As well, Bell et al. recommend fostering environments that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal students, help families to feel welcome, and create partnerships and

³⁴ In 2014/2015, I worked as vice-chairperson of the School District 22 Aboriginal Education Working Group. I am familiar with the process of community engagement for creating the agreements. Our working group reviewed many enhancement agreements from other districts to find appropriate, wholistic measures of success.

ownership with community members (Bell et al. 2004). Morin claims that a specific concern to be addressed is, “school barriers that prevent Aboriginal students from developing a sense of belonging in the school setting” (2004, 197). She concludes her report with the comment, “We cannot be satisfied with the results as they are now, as there is still much work to be done. These initiatives and attention to research issues must continue in order for Aboriginal students to have sustained, successful achievement in British Columbia’s education system” (Morin 2004, 205). Bell et al. (2004), Morin (2004), and White et al. (2012) support the need for research such as this study which demonstrates partnership with Indigenous peoples to understand the importance of Indigenous language and culture in classrooms and the meaning of sense of belonging for Indigenous students.

The mandate that the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements be created in consultation with local Indigenous peoples creates hope that the agreements will be successful in improving education for Indigenous students. As indicated in the discussion of changes above, I believe that the consultative process is making a difference, i.e. there is evidence of less emphasis upon academic achievement and more emphasis on wholistic approaches for goal statements in more recent enhancement agreements. However, in my reading of many agreements, I have noticed that few enhancement agreements include Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous epistemologies, and Indigenous knowledge as foundations for the goal statements, strategies, and assessments. While some goals include opportunities to learn about Indigenous languages, cultures, traditions, and histories, the recommended actions and indicators of successful goal attainment in the agreements often rely upon European worldviews and frameworks for implementation. For example, many enhancement agreements have goals to improve academic success, which list students’ scores on standardized tests for reading and

writing as indicators of success. Battiste provides a reason for the inclusion of goals to improve English proficiency. She states, “many Aboriginal people have been led to believe that learning English to the exclusion of their Aboriginal languages and other assimilative practices will be their only path to success” (2009, 202). Many Indigenous scholars (Archibald 1995; Battiste 2002, 2005; Cajete, 1994; Castellano 2000; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Deloria 1999a) advocate that educational goals be derived from Indigenous worldviews and be more holistic to address learning that occurs over a lifetime. Our research hopes to bridge the gap between European and Indigenous approaches to education by: 1) working in partnership with Indigenous peoples throughout the research process and 2) by asking participants open ended questions about students’ experiences at school, opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language, and relationships with others.

I believe that the absence of reference to Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous epistemologies, and Indigenous knowledge is a critical flaw in the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. An underlying question for my research is “will the strategies in the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements promote change for Indigenous students or will this new initiative join the list of ‘policies of devastation’ (Episkenew 2009, 20) that have failed Canada’s Indigenous peoples?” For decades, provincial and federal governments have introduced measures to improve education for Indigenous students, often unknowingly perpetuating colonization in the process. Notable scholars, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Marie Battiste claim that in order to decolonize education, theories of knowing and difference must be explained not only from a European perspective but from an Indigenous worldview, as well. A key to the success of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements will be the inclusion of Indigenous worldview, epistemologies, knowledge, and values in the goal statements, strategies,

and assessments of learning that are proposed. School districts and their Aboriginal partners must be vigilant about recognizing colonized thinking in the enhancement agreements. This will likely require that district employees and Indigenous people partner to increase opportunities for cross cultural training for educators and community members.

More recent Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements include more goals to increase opportunities to learn Indigenous language and culture and to improve sense of belonging and are more in line with Indigenous peoples' goals for education for their children. Making improvements to education for Indigenous students is not only about raising achievement statistics, it is also about transforming the experiences of Indigenous students in schools from one of assimilation to opportunities to practice Indigenous language and culture in environments that are not dominated by European philosophies and pedagogies. Raising achievement scores for Indigenous students is not only about improving graduation rates; it is about assisting students to have a strong identity and skills for self-determination to build capacity in Indigenous communities (Battiste 2005, 2009; May and Aiken 2003).

Summary of the Introduction

When I began a research partnership with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine), I thought that our study would provide useful information for school districts and the British Columbia Ministry of Education with respect to Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. As I worked with the TRTFN and SD87, I began to recognize how our research was connected to the articles in the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). During most of our partnership the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was gathering information across Canada and the results of the TRC had not yet been published. As I was writing this dissertation, the commissioners released *Honouring the*

Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Canada. TRC 2015). I see connections between the Calls to Action in the report and the goals of this research, to partner to improve education for Indigenous students. When I read statements in the summary of the final report of the TRC about the lack of knowledge and empathy of many non-Indigenous citizens for Indigenous citizens of Canada, I feel that my comments at the beginning of this chapter regarding lack of knowledge among educators are affirmed. Educators need more understanding of the needs of Indigenous students. This research aims to increase educators, scholars, and community members understanding of the ways in which Indigenous language and culture and sense of belonging assist Indigenous students to be successful in school and ultimately in life. With increased understanding, educators, scholars, and community members can assist Indigenous peoples to attain the rights of Indigenous peoples for education and language revitalization described in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In this introductory chapter, I have described the topic for this research, who was involved, and why the research is important. In the next two chapters I explain how the research was conducted and where and when it occurred.

Chapter 2 The Evolution of a Métis Methodology

“Respectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community development” (Smith 2012, 125).

“The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them” (Wilson 2008, 74).

My journey in graduate school has been a process of personal and professional growth, which has influenced the formation of a methodology for partnership research. First, I learned, and am still learning, to recognize, acknowledge, and transform colonized thinking in my professional practice and in many aspects of my life. Second, in order to indigenize my research, I wanted to learn more about the interconnections between Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous methodologies. This new learning about Indigenous ways caused some consternation when I understood what I needed to do, but was uncertain about how I could accomplish the work. An epiphany occurred for me when I read about designing and implementing research “in a good way” (Kovach 2009, 141; Lavallee 2009, 27; Restoule et al. 2010, 3) and “with a good heart” (Wilson 1995, 69). My epiphany led me to a third stage for my research design, which was to follow an Indigenous paradigm for the research, a methodology that would be true to “all my relations” (Wilson 2001, 177). I wanted my research methodology to be one that attended to “all my relations”, i.e. one that honoured my Métis ancestors and the people I would be working with during the research. Not only had I read the phrase, “all my relations” in academic writing by Belanger (2014), Deloria (1999a), and Wilson (2001) but also at every Métis meeting I have attended, the meetings begin and end by joining hands and saying the words, “all my relations.” Finally, as I learned more about my Métis ancestry, I wanted to ensure that I was conducting the research “with my ancestors walking beside me” (McIvor 2010, 138). I felt that if I attended to “all my relations” during the research,

the teachings of my Métis ancestors would be coming back to me. I would be learning through the spirit of my Métis grandmother. Eventually this led to the notion of creating a Métis methodology for partnership research. In this chapter I describe this evolution of a Métis methodology in more detail.

I have chosen the word, evolution, to describe the Métis methodology used in this research, because the idea for a Métis methodology did not come to me all at once. Rather, the development of a Métis methodology was created through the process of the research as I reflected upon the unique ways that the research methodologies were following principles from Indigenous methodologies. In this chapter I describe the stages of development that occurred to create a methodology, which I would attribute to Métis epistemologies and worldview and would now call, a Métis methodology.

Decolonizing My Thinking about Education

Throughout my graduate school experience, I became more and more sensitized to recognizing colonized thinking and practice in the public and post secondary education systems and, really, in many aspects of Canadian lifestyle. In 2015, at a guest presentation at UBC Okanagan, I listened to Shawn Wilson speak about the difference between decolonizing and indigenizing. Wilson clarified that decolonizing is reaction to colonization whereas indigenizing is empowering Indigenous peoples to revive their philosophies (Dr. Shawn Wilson, October 15, 2015, guest lecture). Shawn Wilson stated that he preferred the term, *indigenizing*, however he did admit that in some cases decolonizing is necessary and in my case I believe this to be true. First, I needed to decolonize my thinking about education and then, I could begin to indigenize my research by creating a methodology that would not perpetuate colonization.

In Chapter 1, I included discussions of the need to decolonize education systems. However, before continuing, I would like to share an example from my personal experience of the subtle ways that the public education system remains colonized and perpetuates colonization. Early in my graduate studies, with the help of my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer, and my committee members, Dr. Tamez and Dr. Cherkowski, I began to notice that my vocabulary included colonized language. For example, as noted in Chapter 1, as a teacher and administrator in the public education system, it is common to say, “my students” because educators care about the children they teach. However, Dr. Schreyer pointed out to me that the phrases, “our students”, and particularly, “our Aboriginal students” can sound very patronizing, alerting me to the paternalistic nature of our education systems. My graduate school journey has taught me to be watchful for hidden examples of colonized “talk” in conversations, particularly in the field of education.

Decolonization of my thinking began in my first coursework in Indigenous studies and continued throughout my graduate school journey as I learned about Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous methodologies in preparation for my fieldwork.

Indigenous Worldview, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Indigenous Methodologies

In virtually every book or article I have read, Indigenous scholars emphasize the importance of understanding Indigenous methodologies within the context of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous epistemologies, and/or Indigenous worldview. Some Indigenous scholars (Bishop et al. 2002, France 1997) use the term, *Indigenous worldview*, some (Botha 2011; Chilisa 2012; Kovach 2009; Lavallee 2009; Wilson 2001) use *Indigenous epistemologies*, others

(Battiste 2008; Styres 2008; Weber-Pillwax 1999, 2004; Wilson 2001) prefer *Indigenous knowledge*, and others use all three terms (Absolon and Willett 2005; Deloria 1999a, 1999b; Cardinal 2001; Hart 2010; Smith 2012; Wilson 2003). Although many scholars write about the connections between Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous worldview, Indigenous knowledge, or Indigenous epistemology, nowhere in the literature have I found an explanation of the interrelationships between all four of these concepts. To make sense of the terminology, both for myself and other researchers who utilize Indigenous methodologies, I believe it is important to sort through the meanings and relationships between Indigenous worldview, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous epistemology, and Indigenous methodologies. Shawn Wilson provides a starting point for this discussion.

In *Research is Ceremony* (2008), Shawn Wilson describes the many relationships a researcher will establish during the research process, including not only relations with people, but also relations with the environment/land, relations with the cosmos, and relations with ideas. Wilson clarifies this concept with the example that the translation for couch in Cree is “someplace where you sit” (2001, 177), i.e. the object is named by how one is related to it. He offers that this relational thinking extends to ideas and concepts and emphasizes that it is important for researchers to think about and explain the interrelationships between ideas, including our own relationships with the ideas and concepts we share. Wilson’s elaboration about interconnected abstract concepts in research inspired me to describe Indigenous methodologies in relation to Indigenous worldview, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous epistemologies. In the next section I will attempt to explain each of these topics and then provide a model to describe the relationships between the four.

Indigenous Worldview

Hart explains the concept of worldview very succinctly in the following quote:

Worldviews are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek. They are developed throughout a person's lifetime through socialization and social interaction. They are encompassing and pervasive in adherence and influence. Yet they are usually unconsciously and uncritically taken for granted as the way things are. (2010, 2)

Battiste (2008), France (1997), and Kovach (2009) remind us that among Indigenous peoples there are diverse nations (France 1997, Kovach 2009) with unique worldviews. However, there are commonalities in the perspectives of Indigenous peoples (Battiste 2008, Hart 2010), hence, we can attempt to define Indigenous worldview.

My review of the literature about Indigenous worldview revealed five common themes or principles of Indigenous worldview: relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal.

Indigenous scholars write that an Indigenous worldview is influenced by the central principle that human beings have a close relationship with the earth and with all entities on the earth (Armstrong 2007, Cardinal 2001, Deloria 1999a, France 1997, Steinhauer 2002, Weber-Pillwax 1999, Wilson 2003). Land is a part of each human being (Armstrong 2007, France 1997). The essence of this relationship leads to a second principle of Indigenous worldview, that all entities on earth must respect one another (Armstrong 2007, Deloria 1999a, France 1997, Steinhauer 2002, Weber-Pillwax 1999, Wilson 2003). Honore France describes relationships and respect as:

...the most fundamental belief of all First Nations people of North America. The idea that all living things are related—brothers and sisters. The philosophical essence of this idea can be expressed in one word—respect. Respect for the land, respect for the animals, respect for the plants, respect for other people and finally, respect for the self. This is the essential ingredient for living life. (1997, 4)

A third principle of Indigenous worldview is sense of community (Deloria 1999a, France 1997, Hart 2010). Since every entity on earth is related, all are kin, and all must live together in

harmony. Fourth, in an Indigenous worldview, every entity on earth has a spirit, which in the case of human beings influences the health of individuals and the community (France 1997, McIvor 2010). The fifth and final principle of Indigenous worldview is renewal. When all the entities on earth engage in the process of renewal, sustainability is achieved (Armstrong 2007, Chilisa 2012, Kovach 2009, Styres 2008). This summary of common themes in the literature is brief, however my extensive review of literature about Indigenous worldviews reveals that these are the principles mentioned most often. I call these five themes the principles of Indigenous worldview.

Researchers who wish to be successful in their research with Indigenous peoples must not only acknowledge these principles of Indigenous worldview, but also act with these principles in mind as they plan their research design (France 1997). Thus, the principles of an Indigenous worldview become the principles of Indigenous methodologies. This is a crucial point. If we assume that research is conducted to attain new knowledge, then it makes sense that research that is created to benefit Indigenous peoples ought to attend to Indigenous worldviews. Conversely, new knowledge to benefit Indigenous peoples that is generated without attending to Indigenous worldviews ought to be considered illegitimate. The principles of an Indigenous worldview will be described in more detail and in relation to this partnership research in the section of this chapter entitled, Principles of Indigenous Methodologies. For now, I wish to describe Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous epistemologies to proceed with my explanation of the relationships between worldviews, epistemologies, and the creation of new knowledge through Indigenous methodologies.

Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Epistemologies

From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge and the ways that the knowledge is acquired cannot be separated (Battiste 2008; Kovach 2009). As well, Battiste explains that Indigenous knowledge systems must be understood from an Indigenous perspective:

Indigenous knowledge needs to be learned and understood and interpreted based on form and manifestation as understood by Indigenous peoples. Indigenous Knowledge must be understood from an Indigenous perspective using Indigenous language; it cannot be understood from the perspective of Eurocentric knowledge and discourse (2008, 505).

Rather than defining Indigenous knowledge with European terminology, Indigenous scholars describe Indigenous knowledge in terms of the ways in which knowledge is shared (Battiste 2008, Castellano 2000, Hart 2010). Hart (2010) claims that Indigenous knowledge is closely related to Indigenous worldview, however, Indigenous knowledge tends to refer more to the ways that Indigenous people transmit their worldviews, through oral stories, experiential learning, and going out on the land. Castellano clarifies that Indigenous knowledge is derived from traditional teachings handed down by Elders, empirical observations through the senses, and revelations such as “dreams, visions, and intuitions that are understood to be spiritual in origin” (2000, 24). Battiste (2008) explains that Indigenous knowledge is passed on from generation to generation through oral language, ceremonies, and traditions emphasizing that Indigenous knowledge is a collective knowledge with no single author and no single mode of knowledge production. Learning through wholistic ways, such as oral stories, experiential learning, empirical observations through the senses, and attending to dreams and intuitions to my mind distinguishes Indigenous knowledge production from European knowledge production.

Indigenous peoples’ epistemologies or “how they think, and how this affects how things are in their world” (Wilson 2001, 175) are also closely connected to Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous worldview. Battiste writes:

Indigenous people's epistemology is derived from the immediate ecology; from peoples' experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and memory, including experiences shared with others; and from the spiritual world discovered in dreams, visions, inspirations, and signs interpreted with the guidance of healers or elders. (2008, 499)

Indigenous scholars (Belanger 2014, Deloria 1999a, Wilson 2001) explain Indigenous epistemologies using the phrase “all my relations”, which provides “the methodological basis for the gathering of information about the world” (Deloria 1999a, 53). Battiste (2008) clarifies that Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous epistemologies are acquired through maintaining kinship relationships with all entities in the environment and in the spirit world. When I was first learning about Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies in preparation for my fieldwork, I was beginning to recognize the importance of the phrase, “all my relations.” I had not yet thought of the idea of a Métis methodology. However as I continued my journey through graduate school and my journey of learning more about my Métis heritage, the phrase, “all my relations” began to take on new significance for me. “All my relations” was becoming a mantra to guide my research.

The Interconnections between Indigenous Worldview, Indigenous Methodologies, Indigenous Knowledge, and Indigenous Epistemologies

Indigenous scholars write that Indigenous methodologies must be connected to Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous knowledge, or Indigenous epistemologies. Indigenous methodologies are linked to Indigenous worldview (Absolon and Willett 2005, Bishop et al.2002, Cardinal 2001, France 1997, Hart 2010, Smith 2012, Wilson 2003), to Indigenous knowledge (Absolon and Willett 2005; Cardinal 2001; Hart 2010; Smith 2012; Styres 2008; Weber-Pillwax 1999, 2004; Wilson 2001, 2003) and to Indigenous epistemologies (Botha 2011, Chilisa 2012; Kovach 2009; Wilson 2001). In order to make sense of the interconnections between Indigenous worldview, Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous methodologies, I

expanded upon the work of Hart (2010) to fashion a model for Indigenous knowledge production, (see Figure 2.1 *Indigenous Knowledge Production*). Figure 2.1 illustrates my theoretical framework for the interconnectedness between these four concepts.

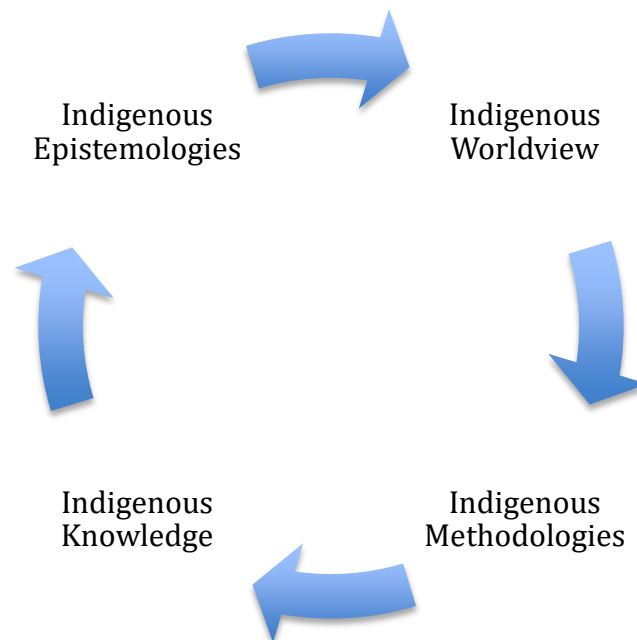


Figure 2.1 *Indigenous Knowledge Production*

In this theoretical framework, Indigenous worldviews influence decisions about Indigenous research methodologies. Indigenous methodologies produce legitimate Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous ways of knowing or epistemologies about Indigenous knowledge in turn influence Indigenous worldviews. The model is cyclical to reflect the ongoing production of Indigenous knowledge. When Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous methodologies, and Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies are synchronized Indigenous people are honored and treated in a respectful way. Then, and only then, will research with Indigenous people be conducted “in a good way” (Kovach 2009, 141; Lavallee 2009, 27; Restoule et al.2010, 3), “with a good heart” (Wilson 1995, 61), while attending to “all my relations” (Wilson 2001, 177). When European worldviews, European methodologies, or European knowledge/epistemologies infiltrate into the

cycle, connections are interrupted or even broken, jeopardizing the production of Indigenous knowledge and even the Indigenous people.

My theoretical framework for Indigenous Knowledge Production guided decisions about a methodology for partnership research with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, School District 87 (Stikine) and myself. A methodology that attended to principles of relationships with others and respect for one another would create new knowledge that was consistent with Indigenous worldviews. My belief was that knowledge, created authentically with emphasis upon relationships, would produce new Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies that were valid for Indigenous communities. I hoped that focusing upon building and maintaining relationships throughout the research process would create a model for future working relationships between TRTFN and SD87 long after my partnership work with them was completed.

Understanding the relationships between Indigenous worldview, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Epistemologies helped me to make decisions about the importance of relationships in my methodology. I was not confident about coming into a community as an outsider to partner for research. I had read that research in an Indigenous community ought to be conducted by Indigenous peoples (Absolon and Willett 2005, Battiste and Henderson 2000, Smith 1999) and by researchers who are from that community so that they have an understanding of the specific worldviews of the people (Absolon and Willett 2005).³⁵ Attending to building relationships with my research partners with a focus of learning

³⁵ This discovery was disconcerting to me and in 2013 I wrote the following reflection in my first comprehensive paper:

Am I an Indigenous or a non-Indigenous researcher? Yes, I have Aboriginal status in Canada as Métis; however, I was not raised within a Métis community or within a traditional Métis culture. On the other hand, scholars who write about cellular memory (Wilson 1995, Wilson 2003) or blood memory, “meaning that the experiences of those that have gone before us is embedded in our physical and psychological being” (Younging, 2009), give me reason to believe that I have credibility as an Indigenous researcher. As well, Cardinal gives me comfort when he asserts, “I think as human beings we have a deep connection to our Indigenous roots” (2001, 182). Even though, I did not grow up with a strong connection to my Métis roots,

about their worldviews gave me a tool to conduct research “in a good way.” If the research partners focused upon maintaining positive relationships and respected one another’s worldviews, then the research project would be successful. Reflecting back, at the time when I was making connections between Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous epistemologies, I had not yet thought of the idea of a Métis methodology. However, I did feel a connection to my Métis ancestors, who formed relationships through marriage partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples many years ago, and I wanted to create a methodology that honoured my ancestor’s ways. I began to believe that I was on the right track to forming an appropriate methodology and my confidence in my methodology was growing.

My second epiphany came when I read Indigenous scholars (Hart 2010; Kovach 2009; Wilson 2007), particularly Shawn Wilson, who claimed that researchers using Indigenous methodologies must follow an Indigenist research paradigm.

Indigenist Research Paradigm

Indigenous scholars discuss the importance of using a research paradigm (Wilson 2007) or conceptual framework (Hart 2010, Kovach 2009), which is congruent with Indigenous rather than European thought processes to frame how a research question will be investigated. Wilson (2001) gives an initial explanation of a paradigm as a set of beliefs that guide the research. He

the experiences of mental health issues in my assimilated Métis family mirror the story of many Métis families in Canada. I am confident that my own memories and experiences of assimilation within my family give me an understanding of the importance of identity formation for children. As well, as a mother of two severely disabled children with cerebral palsy and developmental delays, I understand the sting of exclusion and marginalization. I believe that my ancestry and my life experiences, together with my new understanding about Indigenous methodologies bring me the credibility I seek to investigate sense of belonging for Aboriginal students.

and Kovach (2009) elaborate that the researcher's belief about the world and gaining knowledge will, and must, guide his or her actions during the research. Wilson states, "Paradigms shape our view of the world around us and how we walk through that world. All research reflects the paradigm used by the researcher whether that researcher is conscious of the usage or not" (2003, 161). Wilson asserts:

It is not sufficient for researchers just to say they are Aboriginal and therefore using an Indigenist paradigm. We must explain the paradigm clearly so that we can make sure that good work is being done. For me it is a part of my relational accountability to ensure that research conducted in the name of an Indigenist paradigm lives up to the title. (2007, 194)

Wilson distinguishes between the words Indigenist and Indigenous to label the paradigm. He explains that an Indigenist paradigm can and ought to be used by anyone who wishes to follow Indigenous principles for research. He contends that an Indigenist paradigm "cannot and should not be claimed to belong only to people with 'Aboriginal' heritage" (2007,194) and suggests that non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars can choose to use European or Indigenist paradigms, but "it is the use of an Indigenist paradigm that creates Indigenous knowledge" (2007, 194).

My understanding of an Indigenist research paradigm was enlightened further by Kovach (2009) who states that methodology encompasses both Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous methodology and that the purpose of an "Indigenous conceptual framework" (39) is to provide a model, which unifies the two together. The conceptual framework is a tool, which gives researchers a way of showing how their methods are in sync with particular Indigenous epistemologies (Kovach 2009). Kovach stresses that, "Researchers have the task of applying conceptual frameworks that demonstrate the theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research, and if successful, these frameworks illustrate 'the thinking' behind 'the doing'"(2009, 39). In fact, Potts and Brown (2005) contend that revealing one's conceptual framework

minimizes the power dynamics between researchers and research participants that occur when researchers analyze findings.

Wilson asserts that a major difference between an Indigenist research paradigm and other paradigms is that other paradigms originate from a belief that knowledge belongs to an individual, generated and therefore owned by the researcher, whereas, Indigenous paradigms are built upon the belief that knowledge is relational, shared with all entities on the earth. Wilson explains:

Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. (2001, 177)

Wilson stresses that researchers do not have ownership of a theory or concept because knowledge belongs to a collective, i.e., is shared by the community whose ancestors passed down the knowledge through stories and visions, or who created the new knowledge through interactions with the environment.

Scholars who write about Indigenous methodologies (Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley 2015; Chilisa 2012; Hart 2010, Kovach 2009; and Lambert 2014) often refer to Shawn Wilson's explanations of an Indigenist research paradigm and the questions researchers ought to reflect upon before conducting research. According to Wilson, the four critical questions researchers must ask as they pursue research, correspond to four important aspects of an Indigenous paradigm:

...What is real? [ontology]...How do I know what is real? [epistemology]...How do I find out more about this reality [methodology]...What part of reality is worth finding out more about, and what is it ethical for me to do in order to gain this information? [axiology]. (Wilson 2003, 175)

These four questions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology have guided my decisions about the creation of a methodology for this research.

In fact, Shawn Wilson's (2001, 2003,) writings unlocked for me the mystery of how I might partner in research with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine) "in a good way", which attends "to all my relations" (2001, 177). Until I read his questions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology, I had been concerned that it was inappropriate for me as an outsider to entertain the idea of initiating research with TRTFN and SD87. After reflecting upon the questions and the mantra, "Am I being true to my relations?" (Wilson 2003), I understood that I could create my Indigenist research paradigm by reflecting upon and answering the four questions above. I made the decision to synthesize ideas from an Indigenous worldview and the teachings of Shawn Wilson to design a research methodology that focused upon establishing and maintaining relationships.

My answers to Wilson's four questions were as follows. First, the reality is that all things including ideas are interconnected and connected to the earth's cycles therefore all the ideas we have throughout the research process and the new learning that we acquire through our project is interconnected and will be ongoing (ontology). Second, I know this from my life experiences, from the teachings of ancestors and Elders, from Indigenous peoples ways of knowing, and from my initial interactions with my research partners (epistemology). Third, establishing and maintaining relationships with my research partners, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation Education Committee and the principal and staff of Atlin School in School District 87 (Stikine), and with community members who are potential research participants is important for the creation of legitimate new knowledge about education for Indigenous students (methodology). Fourth, to learn more about ways to improve the educational experiences for Indigenous students

I must ask Indigenous students as well as their parents and teachers about students' current experiences in school and about ways to enhance learning opportunities for the future. As I work in partnership with TRTFN and SD87, ethical conduct will mean looking for positives rather than negatives and similarities rather than differences between Indigenous and Eurocentric ways of knowing (axiology). Finally, to conduct the research "in a good way" (Kovach 2009, 141; Lavallee 2009, 27; Restoule 2010, 3) I must ask myself throughout the process, "Am I being true to my relations?" (Wilson 2003).

When I was developing my Indigenist research paradigm, I had still not thought of developing a Métis methodology. However, the phrase, *being true to all my relations* was beginning to guide all my decisions about a methodology for partnership research. I decided that, first, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine) would have to be partners in all steps of the research process. If I did not strive to involve my research partners in every aspect of the process, then I would run the risk of conducting research *about* TRTFN and SD87 instead of *with* TRTFN and SD87. To involve members of the TRTFN and SD87 from early discussions about the project through to the consideration of the information gathered from the Atlin community, I created two phases to the research process: Phase I (Establishing Partnerships) and Phase II (Learning from TRTFN and SD87). Originally, I had named Phase II as "Data Collection and Analysis", however this subtitle began to sound inappropriate to me for partnership research. I did not want to sound as if I would be analyzing anyone. I changed the subtitle for Phase II to "Learning from TRTFN and SD87." Second, I hoped that by attending to the principles from an Indigenous worldview mentioned above—relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal—relationships with my research partners would be sustained

throughout the research process and beyond. Hence I made the decision to use these five principles to develop my Indigenist research paradigm.

Applying Principles of Indigenous Methodologies to Support an Indigenist Research Paradigm

Earlier, I explained my belief that principles from Indigenous worldviews are the principles of Indigenous methodologies. In this section, I present an Indigenist research paradigm; specifically a Métis paradigm linked to the phrase “all my relations”, by describing the relationships between the five principles of Indigenous methodologies—relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal.

Relationships

In the above discussions of an Indigenist research paradigm, I have described how the principle of relationships from Indigenous worldviews is crucial for any research with Indigenous peoples. I think of this as the first principle of Indigenous methodologies. The other principles from Indigenous worldview described earlier: respect, community, spirit, and renewal are principles, which support the first principle. Although I had not yet named my methodology, a Métis methodology, at this stage in the development of my methodology for partnership research, I knew that relationships were key. I also knew that relationships were an important aspect of Métis culture. I relied upon this idea to build a model for my Indigenist research paradigm.

As I was creating my model for an Indigenist research paradigm I looked for tools to assist with the design. In one of my graduate classes at the Summer Institute for Indigenous Studies, Dr. Margo Tamez advised participants in the course to find pillars to hold up our research (Tamez 2011). As I was developing my methodologies for research, Dr. Tamez’s advice from

2011 prompted me now to think of the principles of Indigenous methodologies as a home or dwelling, which provides security and safety (see Figure 2.2 *Principles of Indigenous Methodologies*). If the principle of relationships is the protective roof of the home, then the four principles of respect, community, spirit, and renewal become the four pillars that support relationships.

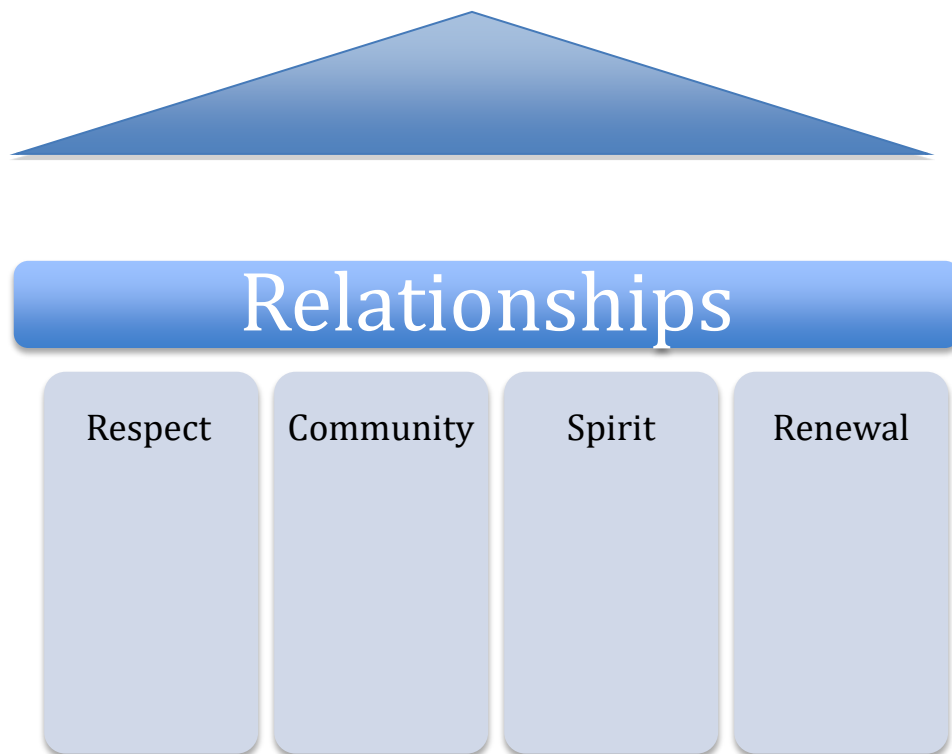


Figure 2.2 *Principles of Indigenous Methodologies*

As well, because the principles of Indigenous methodologies are all in themselves interconnected, adhering to the following principles of Indigenous methodologies ensures that relationships remain in tact. To explain this in another way, if the pillars are like the corner posts of a house, which holds up relationships, then all four corner posts are interrelated and must remain in tact to be supportive. The descriptions below provide theoretical foundations about ways in which these four pillars—respect, community, spirit, and renewal—guide my research methodology.

Respect

Indigenous scholars write about the Indigenous worldview of respect for all (Armstrong 2007, Belcourte, Swaney, and Kelley, 2015, Deloria 1999a, Kovach 2009; Louis 2007, Steinhauer 2002, Weber-Pillwax 1999, 2001; Wilson 2003) and how this principle transfers to a research methodology that respects all partners and participants in the research project. Cora Weber-Pillwax elaborates:

Respect does not simply mean knowing and following basic rituals and practices as part of the protocols of interactions with indigenous people. It means believing and living that relationship with all forms of life, and conducting all interactions in a spirit of kindness and honesty. (1999, 9)

From the early stages of our research project, I attempted to show my respect for members of the TRTFN, staff of SD87, and members of the Atlin community at large by accepting every invitation extended to me in my visits to the Atlin community and by engaging as an active listener and participant at each event, which included meetings, celebrations, and informal gatherings. The details of these events are shared in Chapter 3 Methods. In Phase I, I wanted my actions to demonstrate respect at all times to establish authentic relationships with my research partners and participants before the actual interviews began. In addition, I wanted to sustain relationships throughout the interviews and focus group sessions, the transcribing and summarizing of the comments from community members, and the sharing of the information gathered back to the Atlin community in Phase II.

One way to ensure that the methodology included the principle of respect was to incorporate an element from an appreciative inquiry approach to research (Bushe 2011), specifically a focus on the positives or what is currently going well for students in Atlin School. I learned about appreciative inquiry many years ago from my children, who taught me to look for

the positives in challenging situations. Of course, back then I did not know the term, *appreciative inquiry*, but through their laughter and smiles, my children taught me to celebrate small successes instead of dwelling upon problems. The idea to use an appreciative inquiry approach came to me as I was reading *Policies of Devastation*, which describes the myriad of policies created by governments since the 1800s to deal with “the Indian problem” (Episkenew 2009, 22). I was searching for ways to ensure that our research methodology did not perpetuate labeling and colonization of Indigenous peoples. Because the achievement data for Indigenous students in B.C. is lower than data for non-Indigenous students, I often worry that educators in the province may begin to think of the Indigenous students as the problem. This may sound like an assumption, but my many years experience as a teacher of children with special needs has taught me to be cautious and on guard for wording that implies that the child is the problem we are attempting to solve. The problems with education for Indigenous children is not with the children, but with the issues that arise when we try to fit a child with certain needs into a system that may not have the attributes or resources to match the child’s needs.

At the same time, in consideration of my partners in SD87, I did not want the staff at Atlin School to feel that teaching strategies at the school were under scrutiny. In an appreciative inquiry approach, care is taken to assist participants to focus discussion upon the strengths of a community and build upon those strengths (Bushe 2011), rather than getting caught in interactions that only serve to rehash issues often at the expense of others. To avoid negativity and the perpetuation of Indigenous students’ achievement or teachers’ practice as a problem, my research partners and I agreed that we would use the positive tone from an appreciative inquiry approach throughout the planning, interviews, consideration of the comments from community

members, and reporting of our research.³⁶ By asking questions in the interviews about the best things that happen in school, we would focus upon positives to move forward with ways to enhance education in the future. As I was reviewing my readings to write this chapter, I noticed that both Chilisa 2012 and Kovach 2009 make a brief mention of the compatibility of appreciative inquiry as a methodology with Indigenous methodologies. Kovach explains, “(a) both approaches are relational and (b) both must show evidence of process and content” (2009, 32). Chilisa (2012) contends that appreciative inquiry is an approach, which counters deficit thinking in research, i.e. that there is a problem with the community that needs to be fixed.

Before continuing with the discussion of respect in research, I wish to share a connection between appreciative inquiry methodologies and Métis epistemologies. As I reflect back upon my idea to rely upon the strengths of students, parents, and teachers to create new understanding, I realize now that I was following Métis epistemologies. The European fur traders and Indigenous women who married in the early 1800’s created a new culture by selecting the best of two worlds. Métis culture combines European ways with Indigenous ways. Métis musicians use both drums and fiddles. Métis clothing includes functional pieces such as sashes and moccasins combined with European style shirts and jackets. These are only two examples of the many ways that Métis people built upon the strengths of two societies to create a new culture. I did not recognize the connections between appreciative inquiry and Métis epistemologies before I began interviews in Atlin. This is one of the reasons I wrote in the introduction to this chapter that my Métis methodology has evolved during the process of this research. I now see a link between Métis epistemologies and what some researchers have come to call “the third space” which can arise when two or more cultures collide (Chilisa 2012, 25; English 2005, 25). Chilisa (2012) and

³⁶ In Chapter 3 Methods I describe in detail the meetings that I had with my research partners throughout Phase I to plan for Phase II.

English (2005) use the term “the third space” (25), attributed to Homi Bhabha (1994) and Moquin (2007), to describe the space in between European and Indigenous research paradigms. I discuss this link further in the conclusions to this chapter, after the continued discussion of respect, community, spirit, and renewal.

With regards to respect, another way to ensure that the principle of respect would be followed in our methodology was to honour the fact that respect in research extends to preserving the integrity of the researcher (McIvor 2010, Smith 2012, Weber-Pillwax 2001). Respect for everyone involved in the research means researchers must listen to the stories of members of the community as well as sharing personal information about themselves. Sinclair explains the importance of locating oneself as a researcher:

It [location] means revealing our identity to others; who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things, and our intentions for the work we plan to do. Hence, ‘location’ in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point. (Sinclair, 2003, 122)

Absolon and Willett suggest that “researchers today must be prepared to explain who they are and what interest they have in the proposed research before they are allowed to proceed” (2005, 107). Absolon and Willett (2005) give three reasons for the importance of location. First, the history of research without consent and research that exploited Indigenous peoples has created the demand from Indigenous peoples to know who is conducting the research in their communities. Second, to address concerns about non-Indigenous researchers conducting unethical research about Indigenous peoples, Absolon and Willett (2005) claim that including researcher location as a principle of Indigenous methodologies will assist Indigenous peoples in knowing “who has a vested interest in the research and who does not” (107). Third, Absolon and Willett (2005) contend that if researchers include their epistemological location before beginning research, they will likely avoid the neutral and objective characteristics of Eurocentric writing.

Absolon and Willett (2005) are suggesting that it is impossible for researchers to remain neutral and objective, as is sometimes assumed within the academy, due to the relationships that exist between all entities. They advocate that researchers who hope to decolonize research must acknowledge the subjectivity of their position and the positions of the Indigenous peoples with whom they are working.

Steinhauer reinforces, “Respect is more than just saying please and thank you” (2002, 73), it is about listening to others and not insisting one’s own ideas must prevail. Following the advice of Steinhauer and other Indigenous scholars, throughout our research process, whenever members of the Atlin community asked about my graduate studies, my family, and my personal thoughts on matters, I answered their questions as openly and honestly as possible while acting ethically and preserving the privacy of others. Also, because members of the TRTFN were very generous about inviting me into their homes for tea or a meal, I tried to reciprocate by bringing jars of homemade jam to Atlin to give as small individual thank you gifts. I hoped that the jam from my home demonstrated respect because I had noticed that members of TRTFN seemed to give gifts of food to others. As a thank you gift to the community at large I purchased a collective gift, a SmartBoard for the students at the school, which could be used to integrate technology with Indigenous ways of learning. Finally, in all my interactions with members of the TRTFN and SD87 I endeavoured to demonstrate respect for of all those involved in the project. This included walking a fine line between ensuring that all members of the Atlin community knew about the opportunity to participate while honouring decisions by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Atlin community not to be involved in the project. I was also very aware that the worldviews of members of the TRTFN, staff of SD87, and people living in the Atlin community might be very diverse and dynamic.

When writing about integrity in research, Weber-Pillwax (2001) suggests that maintaining accountability to the community will maintain the integrity of the researcher and his or her research partners. This leads to the second pillar, which holds up relationships in research, namely benefit to the community.

Community

A common theme in the literature about Indigenous methodologies is that all researchers who conduct research with Indigenous peoples have a responsibility to bring some benefit to the Indigenous community (Battiste 2008, Battiste and Henderson 2000, Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley 2015, Kovach 2009, Lockard 2010, Louis 2007, McIvor 2010, Smith 2012, Weber-Pillwax 1999, 2001, Wilson 2003). Smith contends that, “Respectful, reciprocal, genuine relationships lie at the heart of community life and community development” (2012, 125). Weber-Pillwax (2004) claims benefit to the community is the purpose of research. McIvor stresses, “We are held accountable to Elders, wisdom-keepers, leaders, family members, and fellow community members for what we write and teach” (2010, 141). As a safeguard to ensure that research benefits the community, Weber-Pillwax explains, “a good heart guarantees a good motive, and good motives guarantee benefits to everyone involved” (1999, 40). These are just a few of the descriptions of the meaning of benefit to the community.

Weber-Pillwax emphasizes that at the start of any project and throughout the research process, researchers must act from the heart by continuously examining and re-examining the motives for their actions. Following the advice of Weber-Pillwax, I made it a habit to include personal reflection in my writing and to share my reflections with my supervisor, my committee members, and my research partners throughout my coursework, comprehensive examinations, and fieldwork. As well, the intent of this research project was to ask students, parents, and

community members about successes they have experienced in order to build upon those successes for future change. By asking students, parents, school staff, and community members in Atlin about what is working well in the school and community with respect to education for Indigenous students, community members could celebrate their accomplishments and build upon these to create more successes.

To benefit Indigenous communities, Indigenous scholars (Battiste 2008, Kovach 2009, Weber-Pillwax 2004) identify the importance of including Indigenous people as partners in research. Weber-Pillwax (2004) writes about community members as collaborators in research projects and advises, “If however the people I am working with are Indigenous people within Indigenous communities, the nature and quality of the relationships I establish with them will certainly contribute and impact on any outcomes or results, findings, or developments that flow from that research” (89). Battiste (2008) recommends that research projects must be managed jointly with Indigenous peoples, community members must benefit from research project employment opportunities, and, most importantly, the community members must have a voice in the development of the research project. Battiste reminds researchers that, “to act otherwise is to repeat that familiar pattern of decisions being made for Indigenous people by those who presume to know what is best for them” (2008, 503). To add to this advice, researchers must be aware, even though I did not find this emphasized in the literature, that members of a community might share many diverse views about conducting research in partnership and what partnership might mean (Dr. Christine Schreyer, January 15, 2014, personal conversation). In order to respect my research partners, throughout Phase I and II, my partnership research with TRTFN and SD87 focused upon the views of all community members in Atlin—young and old, male and female, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Wolf and Crow clans (mentioned in the introduction to TRTFN

in Chapter 1), speakers of Tlingit and non-speakers of the language—as we worked together in the production of knowledge.

Indigenous scholars remind researchers that to ensure that research benefits an Indigenous community, any new theories that are formed as a result of the research must be grounded, not in European epistemologies, but within Indigenous peoples' epistemologies (Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley 2015, Kovach 2011, Weber-Pillwax 1999, Wilson 2003). Cora Weber-Pillwax reminds researchers to be cautious to ground new knowledge in the experiences of the people in the communities where they conduct their research, not in their own ideas and experiences. To ensure that the information gathered from the partnership research was grounded in the experiences of the people in Atlin, I opted to follow some of the methods from a grounded theory approach. In describing grounded theory, Charmaz states:

The inductive nature of these methods assumes an openness and flexibility of approach. Thus, you follow the leads gained from your view of the data, not from the careful and exhaustive literature review of the traditional research design. A fundamental premise of grounded theory is to let the key issues emerge rather than to force them into preconceived categories (2001, 351).

My research partners and I agreed that we would use elements from a grounded theory approach—gathering, coding, and analyzing to determine emerging theory—for three reasons. First, the history of research and policies for Indigenous peoples in Canada includes many top down implementations of strategies, that have in many cases perpetuated colonization and done more harm than good in ameliorating conditions for Indigenous peoples (Episkenew 2009; Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996a). Second, using a grounded theory approach in partnership with Indigenous partners is another step to ensure Indigenous voice in the determination of emerging theories. Finally, Bell et al. (2004) and Morin (2004) suggest there is a need for studies, which focus upon wholistic approaches to learning and achievement. I

believed that by employing elements from a grounded theory approach our partnership research would be both respectful and beneficial to the Atlin community.

Kovach expands upon the notion of grounding research in Indigenous peoples' epistemologies, by adding the term, *local*, to this principle. She explains that while there are common epistemologies between Indigenous peoples, *local Indigenous epistemologies* must be used with Indigenous methodologies to avoid an approach to research, which treats all Indigenous peoples as the same. Perhaps this is obvious, however, the inclusion of the word *local* emphasized to me how observant an outsider needs to be. For me, attending to local epistemologies meant paying attention to details, such as when and where to meet, who to invite, what to serve for refreshments, what to say and what not to say. I include an example to explain. In the beginning of Phase I, Spokesperson Louise Gordon, would remind me, "Let's talk about it together, but not now." This was a gentle or sometimes not so gentle reminder of protocols. Because my visits had start and end times, whenever I was in Atlin I would be excited to talk about the project at every opportunity. However, I had to respect the fact that TRTFN community members, the school staff, or the Atlin community at large were very busy and might have something else on the go that week. Asking people if and when they might have a moment to chat was important to show respect for my research partners and participants and to honour all the work they do as members of a small community. For example, in one visit, I had hoped to talk with Louise about the interviews and the progress of the project, however, Louise was hosting a Comprehensive Community Planning event that week to plan future initiatives for TRTFN. She was coordinating a huge gathering at the Atlin Recreation Centre with a meal, dancers, and stations to gather input from all members of the TRTFN about future planning. Louise asked me to help with some of the set up and clean up. The new learning I gained by

participating in the event was invaluable. I came to recognize that if I offered to help with community events, I would have many new opportunities to learn. One of my favourite learning times was washing dishes in the kitchen with other women at the community lunches on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I tried to be there whenever I was in Atlin. I learned that with patience on my part to meet when the timing was right, many members of the Atlin community were enthusiastic to talk about our partnership research. As I talked more and more with members of the Atlin community about the research project, we found a common interest, education for children, and we began to get to know one another.

Throughout the process of partnering for research, I was conscious, and perhaps even overly concerned, about conducting the research in a way that honoured Indigenous knowledge, epistemologies, and worldviews. I had to remind myself often and was reminded sometimes by my supervisor, Dr. Schreyer, or by members of the Atlin community that our partnership was a three-way collaboration, which include the members of SD87 as well as TRTFN. For example, my original proposal suggested that we interview Indigenous students and parents. However, in the planning stages of our project, members of the TRTFN and SD87 thought that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students ought to be invited to participate in the project to gather information about best practices in education.

Later in the project, Dr. Schreyer reminded me again that respect for one another extended to all aspects of the project when she asked the intriguing question, “How might ‘local Indigenous epistemologies’ blend with the researcher’s own local epistemologies? Does it have to be one or the other?” (Dr. Christine Schreyer, November 26, 2015, editing comment). To answer this question, I thought again of my Métis ancestors. My response to this question is that in a partnership, the partners must find a way to honour the epistemologies of all partners. Métis

peoples honoured the epistemologies of their marriage partners and their alliances with others to create a new culture. My response to Dr. Schreyer's question did not come to me easily. This is another example of what I meant in the introduction to this chapter when I wrote that a Métis methodology evolved throughout the process of the research.

To conclude this discussion of community involvement in research, I want to say that I am very grateful to members of TRTFN, SD87, and the Atlin community at large who spoke from their hearts about education for children and who often shared personal stories of challenges they had overcome. As the members of the Atlin community and I began to build a relationship, I felt that we were in agreement in our philosophies about education for Indigenous students and about how to proceed with our research.

Spirit

In an Indigenous worldview every entity on earth is alive and has spirit (Belanger 2014). Belanger (2014) and Restoule et al.(2010) teach that spirit is what connects us together. Restoule et al. define spirit as “a mysterious energy that pervades the universe and gives life its essence, that animating force which joins all living things together” (2010, 1). Referring to Leroy Little Bear (1994) Belanger explains, that if everything and everyone has spirit, “then I can relate to all and all can relate to me”, therefore “all are my relations” (2014, 13). Relationships are formed and maintained then by relating through spirit.

Indigenous scholars write about the importance of connecting to spirit in Indigenous methodologies (Ahnungoonhs/Debassige 2010, Deloria 1999a, Lester-Smith & Price 2010, McIvor 2010, Restoule et al.2010, Wilson 1995, Wilson & Restoule 2010). Styres (2008) describes experiencing spiritual connections with the Maori peoples who were her mentors for research. She writes:

We have all become a part of each other's stories, and so this experience has created change in my personhood that has somehow elusively become a part of defining who I am now and how I will journey on from here. This is not to be construed as some vague classroom exercise, but is in essence a spiritual awakening, and there is no way to quantify or measure the effect of this experience. (2008, 306)

I can relate to Styre's words. The connections I have made with some members of the TRTFN and SD87 have become a part of my life story and I hope that my feelings are reciprocated. My worldview has been altered as a result of my partnership research with the TRTFN and SD87. I am convinced that my research experience will continue to effect me wherever I go in my life journey and I know that the journey will be richer for what I have learned from members of the TRTFN and SD87.

McIvor, as well, writes about the need to be strong in spirit to take up the calling of Indigenous research. She claims that "connection to spirit and spirit in research" is essential to research that comes from an Indigenist paradigm (2010, 147). I am in the beginning stages of understanding the role of spirit in Indigenous methodologies, however I understand the responsibility to *be true to all my relations* and how this applies to our partnership research. As I began to make connections with people in Atlin about education for their children, it seemed that we had common beliefs about teaching and learning, that we were kindred spirits,³⁷ people who shared similar attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. One way to include spirit in our partnership research was to listen for and attend to the spirits of those who were involved in the project and to look for ways that the spirits of everyone involved were connected. For example, whenever I spoke with members of the TRTFN and SD87 about education they would mention that the needs of the children came first. Throughout my teaching career, whenever my colleagues and I

³⁷ I first heard the term, "kindred spirits" in the Anne of Green Gables stories from Canadian author, Lucy Maud Montgomery (1908). This is a stepping-stone for me to explain spirit in partnership research.

were planning or solving issues, we would reiterate the phrase, “the students come first.” In this way, my research partners and I were kindred spirits.

The second way that I found to include spirit in our partnership research was to find ways to incorporate the spirit of my Métis ancestors and the ancestors of my research partners into the project. Brenda McDougall writes that identity, and one can infer spirit, of the Métis peoples is tied not only to land, but also to family. She writes, “Identity, in this conceptualization, is inseparable from land, home, community, or family. They are all one and the same” (2010, 3). McDougall explains, “The Métis family structure that emerged in the northwest and at Sakitawak³⁸ was rooted in the history and culture of Cree and Dene progenitors, and therefore in a worldview that privileged relatedness to land, people (living, ancestral, and those to come), the spirit world, and creatures inhabiting the space” (2010, 3). In every visit to Atlin and in Juneau, I witnessed the importance of family relationships to members of the TRTFN. A research methodology that attended to the spirit of our ancestors, then, would have to involve families and ask questions about relationships with others at school, at home, and in the community. My research partners agreed. Learning about relationships then, meant that the research was being conducted in the spirit of our ancestors.

Restoule et al. suggest that there are many ways to integrate spirit into research through “medicines, prayer, fasting, ceremony, relationships with sacred teachings, Elders, and community” (2010, 1). A third way to include spirit in our partnership research was for me to listen, read, and learn stories from Tlingit Elders and ancestors and to attend Tlingit ceremonies with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, whenever I was invited. I share details of my

³⁸ Sakitawak, a community in Northern Saskatchewan, is the setting for Brenda McDougall’s book, *One of the Family; Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan*.

interactions with Elders, the Tlingit Celebration in Juneau 2014, and the ceremony to erect a Tlingit totem pole at the entrance to the Atlin town site in Chapter 3 Methods.

In summary, including spirit in research can be achieved by looking for ways to connect the spirits of the partners in research, by building upon the spirits of our ancestors, and by including learning from ceremonies.

Renewal

The principle of renewal applies to the participants in the research, the community members and the researcher, as well as to the process and outcomes of the research (Chilisa 2012, Kovach 2009, Styres 2008). Researchers must be aware that change, beneficial or otherwise, will occur in a community as a result of the research conducted there (Weber-Pillwax 1999, 2001, 2004). Cora Weber-Pillwax warns, “Transformation is to be anticipated within every living thing participating in the research project” (1999, 10) and she cautions that researchers must be aware of their responsibilities in this regard. I saw evidence of this principle of renewal during Phase I (Establishing Relationships). One principal had not visited at the TRTFN government offices until Spokesperson Louise Gordon and I brought him there for the community luncheon and a meeting of the Education Committee when she was the Acting Manager for Education, Health, and Social. Two years later, when I was visiting in Atlin, the principal that year was a regular attendee at the TRTFN Education Committee meetings.

Renewal applies to researchers as well as to the community members where research occurs (Styres 2008). Styres describes her personal transformation during her doctoral program:

My engagement with Indigenous community-based research meant that I was not simply immersed in an experience, I was the experience: I was not an objective observer, but became the observed. It was a process of continually contesting my own perceptions of reality and ways of generating meaning. (2008, 293)

Again I can relate to Styre's comments. Continuous reflection and journaling were essential for me to make sense of my experiences and my new understandings as a result of my participation in the research process. In my humble experience, if research with Indigenous peoples attends to Indigenous principles, then transformation for the community is inevitable (Weber-Pillwax 1999), and transformation for the researcher(s) will be life changing as it was for me.³⁹

Absolon & Willett (2005), Kovach (2009), Smith (2012) write that new knowledge from Indigenous research includes new understandings about the process as well as the outcomes of the study. The new knowledge that our partnership research offers to the processes of research includes: 1) the connections between Indigenous worldview, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous epistemologies, and Indigenous methodologies, 2) the creation of an Indigenist research paradigm using principles of Indigenous methodologies 3) the use of aspects of appreciative inquiry to begin to create a new culture in schools for education for Indigenous students, 4) new theories grounded in the voices of the Indigenous students and parents, 5) the methods of establishing and maintaining partnerships (which will be described in Chapter 3), and 6) the creation of a Métis methodology. I return to these outcomes in Chapter 7 Conclusions in a discussion about the ways that this research contributes to new knowledge about partnership research.

This discussion of the five principles from Indigenous methodologies—relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal—completes the explanation of my Indigenist research paradigm. By attending to respect, community, spirit, and renewal, I hoped that relationships between TRTFN, SD87, and myself would be established and sustained. By following this

³⁹ A transformation for myself as a result of my participation in this research is that now, more than ever before, I recognize the importance of relationships in everything that I do. As well, I recognize how fortunate I have been in my lifetime, which inspires me to be more appreciative of my family and friends.

Indigenist research paradigm the research, the research would be conducted “in a good way” (Kovach 2009, 141, Lavallee 2009, 27; Restoule et al. 2010, 3) and “with a good heart” (Wilson 1995, 69) with “all my relations” in mind.

Métis Methodology for Partnership Research

As I stated earlier, the methodology for this research evolved as I attended to “all my relations” during Phase I (Establishing Relationships) with my research partners, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine). I did not create a methodology for the research and then present it to my partners for approval. Rather, the methodology evolved in consultation over the three years that we were getting to know one another in Phase I. I present our methodology as a Métis methodology because I believe that some aspects of our methodology are closely related to principles practiced by Métis peoples, namely: 1) an emphasis on partnerships, 2) a positive appreciative inquiry approach with the potential to create a new culture in schools for education for Indigenous students, 3) a strong belief in renewal, and 4) a focus upon relationships. I explain these principles in more detail in the following paragraphs.

First, our methodology is based upon partnerships. Métis ancestors were once recognized for the alliances and partnerships they established prior to Confederation (1867). Métis peoples, particularly women (Van Kirk 1980), were known for their skills as interpreters, trade negotiators, and guides. The marriages between European fur traders and First Nations women were partnerships that created “a third space” (Chilisa 2012, 25; English 2005, 85). A new culture and a new language, Michif, grew from the marriages “a la facon du pays” (Van Kirk 1980, 4), which translates as after the custom of the country or country marriages. If our partnership continues or if others develop partnerships such as ours, our research has the

potential to create “a third space”, a new culture for planning for education for Indigenous students.

Second, Métis ancestors created a new culture and language by using what scholars today might describe as an appreciative inquiry approach. They melded customs from two cultures that were binary opposites (Chilisa 2012) to create a new way of living and knowing. Métis peoples combined words and phrases from Cree, Algonquian, Sioux, Dene, French, and English (Belanger 2014) to create Michif, a trade language for use in “the third space.” Our approach to this research project was to ask questions about students’ positive experiences in school. We hope that educators and policy makers will be able to build upon the positive experiences reported in subsequent chapters to create a new culture in schools that bridges the gap between Indigenous and European approaches to education. In this way, our research methodology is similar to the Métis ancestors’ approach i.e. choosing the best from two worlds, to bridge the gap between Indigenous and European ways to create a new culture.

Third, Métis people, past and present, have a strong belief in renewal. Despite marginalization, Métis peoples have a sense of identity, a sense of belonging to a distinct nation, and a sense of sustaining that nation through renewal. Louis Riel, the infamous Métis leader, stated, “My people will sleep for one hundred year, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.” (Riel July 4, 1885). Our research brings hope for a renewed relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as they work together to improve educational opportunities for Indigenous students. Our methodology for partnership research has room to grow, but is a starting point for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Finally, attending to relationships is the principle that connects citizens of the Métis Nation Canada. Despite marginalization by governments and citizens of Canada past and present⁴⁰ and lack of a land base for many members, Métis people are a nation.⁴¹ Attending to the Métis belief in “all my relations” was the overall principle for our Indigenist research paradigm and for our partnership research.

My hope is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars will recognize our methodology as an Indigenous methodology with unique features that make it a Métis methodology. Perhaps future researchers will be inspired to expand upon the components in our Métis methodology to develop it further.

Summary of The Evolution of a Métis Methodology

Indigenous scholars write about the dominance of European worldviews in the academy and the need to bridge gaps between Indigenous and European worldviews (Battiste 2008, Bishop et al. 2002, Hart 2010, Wilson 2003). Shawn Wilson (2003) advocates that Indigenous scholars must negotiate their work between Indigenous and dominant European worldviews to assist in the decolonization of the academy. Wilson explains that, “as part of their ‘white privilege,’ there has seldom been a requirement [for non-Indigenous scholars] to see other ways of being and doing or even to recognize that other ways exist” (2003, 161). Wilson (2003) advocates for scholars to ease tensions between Indigenous and European worldviews by bridging the gap between these two distinct worldviews. Battiste (2008) and Bishop et al. (2002)

⁴⁰ For example, Métis leaders are speaking out about the lack of inclusion of Métis peoples in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

⁴¹ In April 2016 the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously decided that Métis and non-status Indians are “Indians”. The ruling states that the term “Indians” in The Constitution Act, 1867 (formerly the British North America Act (1867)) applies to not only members of First Nations, but also all Aboriginal peoples in Canada. This is exciting news for all Métis (Galloway and Fine 2016).

recommend that researchers look for similarities rather than differences between local Indigenous and their own European worldviews. Bishop et al. (2002) suggest that concentrating upon differences only maintains relationships of oppression and advise researchers to tolerate the ambiguity and uncertainty that comes from examining worldviews that differ from one's own worldview. Battiste suggests that building synthesis between European and Indigenous methodologies will assist to "create ethical behaviour in a knowledge system contaminated by colonialism and racism" (2008, 503). These scholars advocate for research, which will change the academy and the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The Métis methodology used in our partnership research intends to bridge the gap between Indigenous and European worldviews by focusing upon building relationships as the key to decolonizing research in the academy. This can be achieved by attending to Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous epistemologies to inform Indigenous methodologies and new knowledge production. As well, following an Indigenist research paradigm to guide research decisions ensures that the research is grounded in Indigenous worldviews. Finally, methodologies that focus upon relationships, guarantee that all partners and participants in the research are respected and honoured. Our research methodology was a Métis methodology, which was grounded in Indigenous worldview, followed an Indigenist research paradigm, and demonstrated how to conduct research "in a good way", that honoured "all my relations." In the next chapter I describe the methods that adhered to "all my relations."

Chapter 3 Methods

Simply because a researcher is Indigenous (or following an Indigenous framework) does not automatically translate into community trust. Trust needs to be earned internally. Trusting relationships are engendered in a variety of ways: following protocol, showing guardianship or sacred knowledges, standing by cultural validity of knowledge, and giving back. (Kovach 2009, 147)

In my mind, if I were to assign one word to describe Métis methodology and methods of practice, past and present, the word I would choose would be *partnerships*. To accomplish the goal of conducting research “in a good way”, while attending to “all my relations”, the research methods for our project had to include ways to build partnerships between Taku River Tlingit First Nation, School District 87 (Stikine), and myself. Establishing partnerships through participant observation became my first goal and focus before conducting interviews and focus group sessions. Therefore, Phase I (Establishing Partnerships) had to begin before and would continue throughout Phase II (Learning from TRTFN and SD87). In this chapter, I describe the methods for Phase I and II, which include participant observation, interviews and focus group sessions.

Phase I (Establishing Partnerships)

During Phase I, I participated and observed in many events and activities in Atlin in all seasons and all terms of the school calendar. This method of participant observation increased my understanding of the unique cultures in the north, in Atlin, within School District 87, and within the Taku River Tlingit First Nation community. In the beginning, I observed to ensure that I did not offend anyone by making an error in social customs and protocols. However, as community members and I began to establish relationships, I was able to be more relaxed. As people got to know me, I trusted them to tell me when and if I made an error.

Participant observation gave me a better appreciation for the context for comments made by research participants in interviews and focus group sessions. Kathleen Musante writes, “Participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as a means of learning both the explicit and tacit of their life routines and culture” (2015, 251). For me this was true.

Geertz (2012) uses the term, *deep hanging out*, to describe participant observation activities when anthropologists hang out or spend time doing daily routines to learn about another culture. In an article, “Deep Hanging Out,” on the Cyborg Anthropology website (2011),⁴² the authors suggest that, “observations gleaned from deep hanging out may typically end up being the most poignant insights of one’s anthropological research.” I must agree with this statement. There are too many examples to name, but some of the insights I gained pertained to ways of contacting people and gathering for a meeting, the commitment from members of a small community when there are only a few people to get things done, the struggles to recover from drug and alcohol abuse, the resourcefulness of people who live in poverty, and multi-generational trauma from residential school. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, in my early visits to Atlin I learned about the importance of attending Tuesday and Thursday luncheons at the Band Office if I wanted to connect with anyone and everyone. Sometimes during lunch, or in other conversations, members of the TRTFN would unexpectedly share stories of trauma. These stories are not shared in this dissertation because, not only did they not fit with the appreciative inquiry approach described earlier in this chapter, but also I felt that it would be

⁴² The Cyborg Anthropology website is a site which takes the view that most of human existence is connected to non-human objects, since humans have become so dependent upon the devices and networks that surround them. Cyborg Anthropology studies the influences of technologies upon human beings and culture (Cyborg Anthropology 2014). Cyborg means “a person whose body contains mechanical or electrical devices and whose abilities are greater than the abilities of normal humans” (*Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “cyborg” [Accessed January 9, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cyborg>]).

extremely rude and inappropriate to ask for consent after people had trusted me to share emotional personal stories. Asking for consent to share painful stories would have jeopardized the relationships I was trying to build. Deep hanging out in daily activities was a form of participant observation that served me well to understand the comments in interviews and focus group sessions.

However, the Cyborg Anthropology website also describes a controversy with deep hanging out. On one hand, deep hanging out can build trust, which might lead to the outsider hearing sensitive stories from community members. On the other hand, some anthropologists argue that deep hanging out can “affect objectivity in research” (Cyborg Anthropology 2011). In my case, the stories I was told by adults of all ages (for example, personal stories about suicide attempts, the effects of childhood adoption, and rehabilitation from alcohol abuse) were invaluable in helping me to understand pertinent background information for our project. I understand the concern about objectivity and the danger of getting “a warped or corrupted story from group members” (Cyborg Anthropology 2011). I would include an additional clause to this statement that “if a researcher does not spend enough time with *all* community members”, there could be a risk of hearing only one side of the story. In my early visits to Atlin, I sometimes had a difficult time recognizing the various positions and ideologies in conversations. The Taku River Tlingit culture, the culture in SD87, and to a degree the lifestyle in the north was so new to me and I believed almost everything I was told.⁴³ However, as I got to know more people and they got to know me over my nine visits in three years, I was able to maneuver the local politics to gather all sides to a story or situation.

⁴³ I was somewhat prepared because of mentorship from Dr. Schreyer and Spokesperson Louise Gordon and my twenty-two years of living and teaching in Prince George, however Prince George is not the north. I had to spend time in Atlin in all seasons to get a bigger picture of the lifestyle there.

I wish to emphasize that as well as learning about the cultures of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine), another purpose for participating in activities with members of TRTFN and SD87 was to build relationships with them to establish a research partnership. This is different than the purposes of participant observation described by Fife, who writes about observing and analyzing and “then we test these analyses out by attempting to participate in the life world that we are currently studying” (2005, 72).⁴⁴ At no time did I feel that I was studying the TRTFN or SD87. In every visit to the Atlin community, I felt that I was working with the TRTFN and SD87 to gather comments from the community that might help to guide future directions for education.

During Phase I (Establishing Partnerships) I made five visits to Atlin in March 2013, July 2013, November 2013, and March 2015 and one trip to Juneau, Alaska in June 2014 to build trust before conducting interviews with participants. The next sections describe the methods I used during these visits.

Prior to My First Visit to Atlin, January 2012-February 2013

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, my first meeting with my research partners was in Kamloops in January 2012 when Dr. Schreyer invited me to share my idea for a research project with Linda McGill, who is not Tlingit,⁴⁵ but was employed by TRTFN as Manager of Education, Health, and Social, and Louise Gordon, who had worked with Dr. Schreyer on projects in the past as an

⁴⁴ This quote from Fife may seem insensitive or uncomfortable to some readers, which is why I think it is important to include it. Since Fife’s book, *Doing Fieldwork; Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries and Beyond*, is used as a text in graduate level courses and, in fact, in one of my courses at UBC Okanagan, I include this comment to demonstrate that while improvements have been made in anthropological research, there is still a need to decolonize research by partnering with rather than studying research participants.

⁴⁵ When I met with Linda in March 2013, she identified herself as Métis.

elected Director for the TRTFN Council.⁴⁶ I believe that an introduction through Dr. Schreyer was helpful to beginning a partnership for research. At the time I thought that perhaps Linda McGill and Louise Gordon thought that the introduction through Dr. Schreyer meant that I was someone to be trusted. I sent copies of my research proposal to Linda McGill and Louise Gordon soon after. They were both excited about working together on a research project. In April 2012, I sent the research proposals and formal requests for permission for research to Bev Fairful, Principal of Atlin School, Mr. Gerry Brennan, Director of Instruction, SD87, retiring Superintendent Bryan Ennis, SD87 and Linda McGill, Manager for Education, Social and Health Programs, Taku River Tlingit First Nation. Everyone was enthusiastic about the project. Shortly afterwards, Ms. Fairful left Atlin School, Mr. Brennan went on medical leave, and Mr. Ennis retired. That fall, I contacted the new principal for Atlin School, Mr. Ron Bentley, and the new Superintendent for SD87, Mr. Roman Mahnic, about the project. They were also enthusiastic. However, the new Superintendent resigned in November. In January 2013, I received signed permission forms from Spokesperson John Ward, TRTFN, and returning Superintendent Bryan Ennis, SD87 and on February 12, 2013, I obtained approval from the UBC Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. With support from a Northern Scientific Technology Program (NSTP) grant, I was excited to make my first visit to Atlin in March 2013 (see Figure 3.1 *My First Glimpse of the North out the Plane Window!*). There was a benefit to the many changes that occurred because every time I introduced our partnership research I became clearer in my own mind about the details of the project.

⁴⁶ When I first met Louise Gordon she did not have a position with the TRTFN as an elected director or employee as she had in the past. Then later, in Fall 2014, Louise was employed by SD87 as the Aboriginal Language and Culture position at Atlin School for several months. In Spring 2015, Louise was elected as the Spokesperson (Chief) for TRTFN.



Figure 3.1 *My First Glimpse of “The North” out the Plane Window!* (Larson, March 3, 2013)



Figure 3.2 *Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei (Five Mile Point)* (Larson, March 2, 2015)

Participant Observation in Atlin, March 2-7, 2013

During my first visit to Atlin I met and interacted with many members of TRTFN, staff of SD87, and citizens of Atlin who were not members of TRTFN or employed by SD87. These interactions happened in both informal and formal settings. Examples of informal meetings are: 1) lunch and dinner with Linda McGill, Manager of Education, Health and Social with TRTFN, 2) lunches and dinners with Louise Gordon, 3) two lunches at the Band Office with Elders and several community members, and 4) meetings with two Tlingit language teachers, Gail Jackson, at the school, and Ali Carlick at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre. More formal meetings included: 1) a meeting with Louise Gordon and Principal Ron Bentley, 2) a monthly meeting of the Atlin School staff, 3) the regular monthly meeting of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), 4) a meeting with Louise Gordon and Elder Melvin Jack to plan for a TRTFN Education Committee Meeting, and 5) a meeting of the TRTFN Education Committee. During all of the meetings with groups and individuals, I was able to learn about education and Tlingit language

revitalization in Atlin and I was able to introduce our project. This list of informal and formal meetings summarizes the methods I used for my first visit to Atlin to begin a partnership, however it does not explain the unique situations I found myself in as I worked to establish partnerships.

When I began to write this chapter for my dissertation, I realized that I would be remiss if I did not include a retelling of some of the events that occurred as I developed relationships with my research partners. At first I thought that if I included my reflections about, for example, washing dishes with other women after lunch at the Band Office, my writing might be deemed to be too detailed and that some of the events that I believe are methods would be considered to be too insignificant to include. But the opposite is true. Including the details of my participation in the community as part of the research methods is important for two reasons. First, drinking tea in an auntie's kitchen or cleaning up at the Band Office after the Tuesday and Thursday luncheons are important for building partnerships. Second, if I do not include the "little things" I did in the Atlin community, others who read my dissertation might make assumptions about ways to build partnerships. It would be easy to assume, for example, that meetings are arranged through emails or phone calls and miss out on hearing about the unique ways of doing business in small communities, such as word of mouth or driving around town to spot someone's car. Therefore, I have included the story of my first and subsequent visits in the order in which they occurred with the details that I think are important to give an accurate representation of the methods used to establish partnerships. As Nader (2011) explains, "Ethnography is never mere description, rather it is a theory of describing that has always been controversial as to the what and how thus inspiring a dynamic intellectual process." I believe that Nader would agree with my approach and hope that my readers enjoy reading the details below of my visits to Atlin.

The meetings described above were not achieved as easily as I first expected. In the week before my visit, when I called to confirm travel times, Principal Ron Bentley suggested that I postpone my trip because the teachers and some members of TRTFN were upset by a letter expressing dissatisfaction with the school that had been delivered to the school by Spokesperson John Ward. I suggested to Mr. Bentley that because our project focused upon what is working well in Atlin School, perhaps the project could be seen as a way to move forward. Mr. Bentley agreed that I should continue with my travel plans to come. When Linda McGill, Manager for Education, Social and Health Programs, met me in Whitehorse on Saturday, March 2nd, to welcome me to the north, she received a call on her cell phone while we were shopping for groceries for the week, to let her know that she might be placed upon a leave of absence for the week. Linda invited me for dinner at her home in Atlin that first night, however the following day (Sunday March 3, 2013) she was temporarily released from her duties as Manager for Education, Social and Health Programs.⁴⁷ Sunday morning, I telephoned Louise Gordon, who took me under her wing for the week. Louise Gordon invited me to come to her home at Five Mile Reserve and then we went for tea with an auntie. On the way back to Louise's house, we stopped to talk to David Moss, elected Director for Education. As we stood on the snow in his driveway, David asked Louise Gordon to be Acting Manager for Education, Social and Health Programs for the week. For the rest of my visit, I followed Louise's car in my rental car, up and down the Warm Bay Road between Atlin town and Five Mile reserve, to almost every formal and informal meeting she attended. At every meeting, Louise would make introductions

⁴⁷ Linda McGill did not return to the position of Manager of Education, Social and Health. I do not know all the details, however during my first week in Atlin, everyone I met in the community was upset either because the letter from some TRTFN members had been delivered to the school or that the response to the letter was not adequate. There was even a petition on the counter at the general store for citizens to sign to express their rejection of the concerns expressed in the letter, but it was removed after a few days.

(introducing me as Christine Schreyer's graduate student) and invite me to briefly explain our project.

For my first visit to Atlin I stayed at the Atlin Art School in a cabin overlooking Five Mile (see Figure 3.2 *Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei (Five Mile Point)*). I wanted to remain neutral and not look like I was siding with TRTFN or SD87 about the letter that was the talk of the town. During my first week in Atlin, everyone I met in the community was upset either because the letter from some TRTFN members had been delivered to the school or that the response to the letter was not adequate. There was a petition on the counter at the general store for citizens to sign to express their rejection of the concerns expressed in the letter, but it was removed after a few days. The owner of the accommodations where I was staying informed me that a rumor was circulating that a psychologist was coming to Atlin to sort things out and that maybe I was that person. Everywhere I went in Atlin, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members had an opinion to share with me about education at Atlin School based upon their personal experiences. Even my landlord had opinions to offer and he would come to chat whenever he saw my car returning from town. I was surprised by the commotion that the letter caused because I have not lived in a small community for many years and I had forgotten how stirred up things can get when everyone knows everyone else. I stayed neutral and tried to avoid engaging in conversations about the letter during this visit.

On Monday, March 4th, Louise Gordon and I went to the school to meet with Principal Ron Bentley and to request a meeting with the school staff. Mr. Bentley thought that the staff would be reluctant to meet with us, but we asked and he accepted our request to make a brief presentation at the staff meeting on Wednesday that week. At the staff meeting, Louise Gordon and I presented the project and the appreciative inquiry focus, i.e. what is working well in Atlin

School. No one asked questions, but at the end of the presentation the teachers expressed interest in the project.

I returned from my first visit to Atlin feeling that I had accomplished much more than I expected regarding making connections with members of both TRTFN and SD87. At the same time, I felt that building relationships was going to be more complicated and take longer than I had expected. I was very grateful to Louise for including me in so many meetings at the Band Office and in peoples' homes. Louise Gordon had also signed a Letter of Agreement (see Appendix C.1) to become my first research partner. I thought that I would have to be patient and follow the lead of Louise Gordon and the TRTFN if I wanted our partnership research to be successful.

In my journal reflection from March 2013, I wrote:

I was pleased that the teachers and community members were willing to meet with me as I arrived in the middle of a political event that sent the community reeling--a letter accusing the teachers of abusive behaviour had been delivered to the school by the TRTFN Spokesperson John Ward. The education manager, Linda McGill, was placed on temporary leave and the entire Atlin community was in an upheaval with many people expressing hurt feelings. At the meetings I attended the perceptions of my proposal shared by community members and teachers were positive and in fact my research project was viewed as a possible way to heal from the week's events. (Larson, March 6, 2013, journal entry)

I was able to use some of the funds from my NSTP grant and some of my personal funds to purchase a gift for the community to thank them for hosting my visit. The deadline for spending the grant money was fast approaching, but in consultation with Louise Gordon and members of the TRTFN who attended the TRTFN Education Meeting, I was able to purchase a Smart Board with a portable stand to be used in the classrooms at the Atlin School. I thought that the Smart Board would be an appropriate gift because of the capabilities it offers for integrating technology with learning about traditional Indigenous knowledge and because children today often love learning with technology.

Participant Observation in Atlin, July 29-August 4, 2013

A new opportunity for establishing partnerships with TRTFN and SD87 came to me when my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer, offered me a position as a research assistant, for a SSHRC funded project with the TRTFN called, *Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names*. Beginning in 2005, Dr. Schreyer had partnered with the TRTFN for her doctoral degree and on several projects for language and place name revitalization. For this new project, Dr. Schreyer, Dr. Jon Corbett, and TRTFN developed “an online participatory mapping tool that combines Taku River Tlingit ideologies of stewardship with Tlingit language place names and stories” (Schreyer et al. 2014). My role as a research assistant was to create lesson plans, which connected the TRTFN Tlingit Place Names with the B.C. Ministry of Education curriculum. From this experience I gained new knowledge about TRTFN initiatives and teachings. I was able to create lessons for viewing the interactive website that could be taught with a computer or Smart Board. For example, in a lesson for Language Arts, students would write about their personal experiences of visiting a place with family members and post their reflections on the website forum.

My second visit to Atlin occurred for one week at the end of July 2013. I travelled to Atlin with Dr. Christine Schreyer, Dr. Jon Corbett, and Computer Programmer, Nick Blackwell, to unveil the TRTFN website, Taku River Tlingit Place Names (TRTFN 2014) at TRTFN community meetings in Atlin and Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. Although the purpose of our trip was the *Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names*, I had new opportunities to visit with members of TRTFN and to be involved in participant observation activities. I attended meetings with Christine Schreyer at the Band Office, and had many opportunities to chat with people I had met in March, for example, by again attending the

community lunch at the Band Office. A highlight of this visit was the opportunity to see the summer Cultural Camp in action. We spent a day at the camp observing activities and playing the “*Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat*” language game with the children and Tlingit language teacher, Gail Jackson (see Figure 3.3 *Playing the “Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat” Language Game at Culture Camp*). Some students remembered me from my visit in March and I was excited to connect with students again before I would be coming back to hold interviews with them.



Figure 3.3 *Playing the “Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat” Language Game at Culture Camp* (Larson, July 31, 2013)



Figure 3.4 *Students Swimming in Áa Tlein (Atlin Lake) at Culture Camp* (Larson, July 29, 2013)

Participant Observation in Atlin, November 11-14, 2013

In October, 2013 I contacted Mr. Bentley at Atlin School to inquire if the Smart Board had arrived and to ask about attending the November Professional Development Day for teachers to share some of the lesson plans I had made for the *Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names* project. The Smart Board had arrived and had been mounted on the wall in one of the classrooms. The School District had purchased a wall mount and the portable mount I had purchased was now being used to make it easier to move the school television from room to room. Mr. Bentley suggested that I might come to Atlin in November

2013 to talk about the *Learning to Talk to the Land: (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names* project with the teaching staff for the Professional Development Day and he put me in touch with Mr. Rod Lamirand, the teacher who was the Professional Development Representative. Mr. Lamirand and I planned that I would come for the day on November 12th. I ended up spending two days at Atlin School for that visit. After the Professional Development presentation about the TRTFN Place Names website on Monday, the teachers asked if I could come to the school the next day to demonstrate the website on the Smart Board with the students from the two older classrooms. Of course, I was thrilled to be able to work with the students to continue to build relationships with them. Many students remembered me from the summer and it was great fun to hear the stories they could tell and their excitement about places on the map. I enjoyed my two days at Atlin School because I had opportunities to interact with the staff and students to begin to build relationships.

During this visit I was also able to meet and get to know more parents from TRTFN. On my first evening in Atlin for that trip, November 12th, Louise invited me to attend a baby shower at her sister's home for Shawna Byers and David Moss's new baby, Ryker. They insisted on taking a picture of me with the moose bone left over from the dinner (see Figure 3.5 "*Moosing Around!*"). On my last night in Atlin, Louise Gordon her daughter, Nicole Gordon, and I had lunch at the Pine Tree Restaurant to talk about our research project. Louise wanted Nicole, whose daughter was attending Atlin School, to hear more about the research project. I felt that I was getting acquainted with more members of TRTFN.



Figure 3.5 “*Moosing*” around!
(Gordon, November 12, 2013)



Figure 3.6 *Wéinaa Town-site Reserve*
(Larson, August 2, 2013)

That fall Holly Dalrymple was in the position of Acting Manager for Education, Social and Health Programs for TRTFN and TRTFN was planning a change to make Education a separate department. As well, the Language and Culture Teacher Assistant position at the school had not yet been filled. At Christmas time, Mr. Bentley left Atlin School. In the New Year 2014, Mr. Rod Lamirand became Acting Principal at Atlin School, Kate Kittridge became the Manager for Social and Health Programs, and Tammy Fetterly accepted the dual position of Manager of Education and Manager of Tlingit Family Learning Centre. During this visit I had minimal contact with Rod Lamirand, Kate Kittridge, and Tammy Fetterly to honour the fact that they were in new positions. However, in June 2014, I was introduced to Rod Lamirand, Kate Kittridge and Tammy Fetterly when I travelled to Juneau, Alaska to join members of the TRTFN for the 2014 Celebration, a gathering of Indigenous peoples from Southeast Alaska.

Participant Observation in Juneau, Alaska, June 12-14, 2014

On June 12, 2014 I flew to Juneau to participate in Celebration 2014⁴⁸, sponsored by Sealaska Heritage Institute,⁴⁹ with members of TRTFN, Dr. Christine Schreyer, Managers Kate Kittridge and Tammy Fetterly, and Acting Principal Rod Lamirand. Louise Gordon arranged for me to reside in the dormitories at the University of Alaska, Juneau, with the group. I stayed in the dorm with Pamela Jim and her two daughters, Donna and Ashley, who were attending Atlin School. The Juneau trip gave me many opportunities to hang out with members of the TRTFN and to watch the TRTFN dancers perform on stage during the four days of dancing and singing (see Figure 3.7 *Taku Kwann Dancers Performing at Celebration 2014 in Juneau, Alaska* and Figure 3.8 *Taku Kwaan Dancers Posing at the Motel in Juneau*). I visited the University of Alaska Juneau with the students from Atlin as they toured the campus and listened to presentations about post secondary education. I cheered for Louise Gordon as she participated in the Tlingit ice cream making contest and I tasted my first soapberry ice cream. I was invited to a dinner with a houseful of guests and tasted many unique Tlingit delicacies, such as herring roe served in spruce branches (see Figure 3.9 *Herring Roe in Juneau*), smoked salmon cheeks (see Figure 3.10 *Smoked Salmon Cheeks and Tails*), and oolichans. On one of the days, I cooked salmon with the TRTFN as they hosted a large barbeque for other nations (see Figure 3.11 *Barbecuing Salmon in Juneau*). People from Atlin and Juneau made me feel welcome and I was developing relationships with more members of TRTFN. I was excited to be invited into the home of a local Tlingit family and to join in the festivities in Juneau (see Figure 3.12 *Wayne*

⁴⁸ Celebration is a biannual festival in Juneau, Alaska, to celebrate Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures through song, dance, arts, crafts, and food. Two thousand dancers dressed in traditional regalia fill downtown Juneau for four days (Sealaska Heritage Institute 2016a).

⁴⁹ Sealaska Heritage Institute is an Indigenous institution with more than 22,000 Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian shareholders. The cultures and core values of the shareholders guide the economic and social decisions of Sealaska. Sealaska strengthens business with culture through businesses, investments, and partnerships (Sealaska Heritage Institute 2016b).

Carlick Saying Gunalchéesh (Thank You) to Our Hosts at the House Party in Juneau). I had heard Dr. Schreyer and people from Atlin speak about Celebration and it was important to me that I could be there to learn more about Tlingit culture as I witnessed the participation of TRTFN onstage with hundreds of other Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida performers.



Figure 3.7 *Taku Kwann Dancers at Celebration 2014, Juneau* (Larson, June 13, 2014)



Figure 3.8 *Taku Kwaan Dancers Posing in Juneau* (Larson, June 13, 2014)



Figure 3.9 *Herring Roe in Juneau* (Larson, June 12, 2014)



Figure 3.10 *Smoked Salmon Cheeks and Tails* (Larson, June 12, 2014)



Figure 3.11 *Barbecuing Salmon in Gunalchéesh Juneau* (Michel, June 13, 2014)



Figure 3.12 *Wayne Carlick Saying (Thank You) to Our Hosts at the*

Juneau (Larson, June 12, 2014)

In Juneau, I had time to get to know more children and parents. I also had time to talk briefly with Tammy Fetterly and Rod Lamirand about the plans for our partnership research and the possibility of holding interviews. However, Rod Lamirand would be leaving Atlin School and a new principal was coming for September 2014.

Participant Observation in Atlin, March 2-6, 2015

In Fall 2014, the school year began with Mike Gordon as new superintendent for SD87, Michael Basran as the new principal at Atlin School, and Louise Gordon in the Aboriginal Language and Culture Position at Atlin School. Mr. Gordon and Mr. Basran were enthusiastic about our partnership research, however teachers in British Columbia were on strike at the start of the school year. Mike Gordon, Michael Basran, Tammy Fetterly, Louise Gordon, and I made tentative plans through emails and phone conversations to wait until the strike settled and school

was fully in session for my next visit. Superintendent Mike Gordon offered that I could stay at the School District 87 Guest House in Atlin for my next visit. We hoped that I could visit in March 2015 to interview students, parents, and school staff.

Sunday, March 1st, I flew to Whitehorse and arrived Monday morning at the Atlin School and the SD87 Guest House. I had time that day to walk after school from Atlin School to the Tlingit Family Learning Centre with the children who attend the After School Program (see Figure 3.13 *Students Walking to Tlingit Family Learning Centre After School Program*). I spent time with the children as they played long the walk home, ate a snack, and did their homework. On Tuesday that week, I went to the Band Office to participate in the luncheon and was pleased to sit with Elder Jackie Williams. Mr. Williams book, *Lingit Kusteeyí: What My Grandfather Taught Me* (2015) had just been published and I was excited to purchase an autographed copy (see Figure 3.14 *Lunch at the Band Office with Elder Jackie Williams*). After lunch at the Band Office, I attended the TRTFN Education Committee meeting to invite members of the committee to become research partners for the project. It was comforting that I knew all members of the education committee and had spent time chatting informally with each of them during my previous visits to Atlin and Juneau. I explained that the role of research partners was to be advisors for the project, for example to preview and provide feedback about the interview questions and to review comments from the participants to agree or disagree with themes that become apparent. All members of the TRTFN Education Committee who were present were interested in the project and signed Letters of Agreement (see Appendix C.1) to become research partners. We reviewed the interview questions for students, parents, and teachers and no changes were requested.



Figure 3.13 *Students Walking to Tlingit Family Learning Centre After School Program* (Larson, March 2, 2015)



Figure 3.14 *Lunch at the Band Office with Elder Jackie Williams (Tizya,* March 4, 2015)



Figure 3.15 *Debra Michel and Ali Carlick Teaching Me to Sew the Button Blanket* (Larson, March 5, 2015)

Figure 3.16 *Learning how to sew on the Button Blanket* (Michel, March 5, 2015)

That week, I started most mornings in the schoolyard and in the school, talking to the principal, teachers, parents, and students. I was able to have coffee at the Pine Tree Restaurant with the President of the Stikine Teachers' Association, Asa Berg, to talk about the research

project and she was supportive of the project. Tammy Fetterly invited me to attend the TRTFN Management team meeting to make a short presentation. There I made connections with Stuart Simpson who was with Atlin Taku Economic Partnerships Ltd (ATEPL). He was very keen about the project and put me in touch with Lynn Jancek of the Skills Training and Employment Program (STEP) with TRTFN. I was excited to meet with Lynn Jancek because the STEP program supports youth and young adults in Atlin to acquire training for employment and is one of the options for students in Atlin to upgrade their qualifications after Grades 9 or 10. On Thursday, Superintendent Mike Gordon arrived in Atlin and I was able to have several conversations with Mr. Gordon (in person for the first time) about the research project and education for Indigenous students in the province on Thursday and Friday before I left Atlin.

During this visit, on my first evening, Louise Gordon and I had dinner at the Pine Tree Restaurant. Louise Gordon had resigned from the Aboriginal Language and Culture position at Atlin School and was working as the Coordinator for Comprehensive Community Planning. She was busy that week, planning a meeting for community consultation with the TRTFN community about planning for the future. Louise asked me to help with set up and clean up at the event on Thursday, March 5th. The event at the Atlin Recreational Centre was another wonderful opportunity for me to participate and observe in the TRTFN community. At the event, TRTFN community members sat at stations and responded on charts, with post it notes, or on surveys to questions about community planning. Community members gave their input about their dreams, what projects have been important to them in the past, and what support they can bring to new projects. Then, following a performance by the Taku Kwaan Dancers, everyone joined in a community dinner. Again, I was excited to be invited to this event and to assist in any way I

could. I enjoyed chatting with adults and children as we sewed buttons on a button blanket⁵⁰ (see Figures 3.15 *Debra Michel and Ali Carlick Teaching Me to Sew the Button Blanket* and 3.16 *Learning How to Sew on the Buttons*) and wandered from station to station. I was reconnecting with people whom I had met on previous visits to Atlin and Juneau and I felt that we were ready to begin the second phase of the project, the interviews and focus groups. I was sad to be leaving Atlin and excited that my next trip would be to begin Phase II (Learning from TRTFN and SD87).



Figure 3.17 *Atlin town on Áa Tlein (Atlin Lake)* (Larson, March 6, 2015)



Figure 3.18 *Leaving and Looking Back at K'iyán mountain* (Larson, March 6,

Phase II Learning from TRTFN and SD87

In Phase II, I continued to build and maintain relationships by attending community events, however my main activities during this phase were to conduct interviews and focus group sessions with community members, sort through their comments for common themes, and share

⁵⁰ Tlingit peoples wear button blankets as part of their traditional regalia. It is a blanket made from heavy woven fabric, usually red and black wool, decorated with buttons, which are arranged to depict an image representing the person's clan.

summaries of comments from students, parents, school staff, and community members with TRTFN and SD87 for feedback.

Interviews and Focus Group Sessions in Atlin, April 27-May 7, 2015

I arrived in Atlin in late April to begin the process of contacting parents and conducting interviews and focus group sessions in the Atlin community. A notice about the research project and a Letter of Recruitment had been sent out to parents prior to my arrival through the Atlin School online newsletter. As well, I set up a table in the front hallway of the school during the two days of parent teacher interviews on April 29th and 30th, 2015 to share information about our partnership research and to distribute Letters of Recruitment to parents and staff. A sample of the Letter of Recruitment is attached to this document as Appendix C.2. When I spoke with parents as they came to the school for parent teacher interviews, I was surprised that none of the parents had heard about the project. Some said that their internet connections or computers did not work to receive the school newsletters; others said they had not had time to read the newsletter.

Tammy Fetterly assisted me greatly at this stage with advice about the best times to catch parents to ask if they had read the invitation in the newsletter or to follow up with parents who wished to participate. Between April 30th and May 6th I contacted parents and teachers, gathered consent forms, and interviewed students, parents, and school staff. Parents and teachers who participated in the interviews signed consent forms before doing so and students, whose parents had given consent, signed assent forms. The assent and consent forms for students, parents, and teacher interviews had similar formats. A sample Letter of Consent is attached as Appendix C.3.

Three interview schedules for students, parents, and school staff had been submitted to UBC Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board for my ethics approval back in February 2013. The interview schedules contained similar questions for students, parents, and staff

members with twelve questions about experiences at school, eight questions about Tlingit culture and language, and ten questions about relationships with others. Copies of the three interview schedules are included in Appendix D. Before beginning the interviews, I shared the interview questions again with research partners who had not had the opportunity to read them—one member of the TRTFN Education Committee, the superintendent, the principal, and members of the Atlin school staff—to confirm the appropriateness of the questions. Questions about personal information such as, “what is your age?” and “who lives with you?” were eliminated to protect anonymity. Two questions were added to the interview schedules to ask participants about students’ plans for completing grades ten, eleven, and twelve and whether or not they have considered attending school in Atlin for those grades. Members of the TRTFN Education Committee and the Atlin School staff recommended that all students in Atlin School, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, be invited to participate in our research. Revisions to the interview questions were sent to UBC Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and approval was returned within four days.

During this first week, I had many hallway talks with teachers and chats on the playground when teachers were on supervision to continue to build my relationship with them and to answer questions about the interview process. As they got to know me, the teachers began to chat more openly. One day a teacher commented to me that this was a project with the TRTFN and not the school district because I had contacted the TRTFN before I contacted the school district.⁵¹ To alleviate this concern, I decided to make sure that I was at the school early in the morning, during recess, and after school to be available to chat with teachers to build my relationship with them and to model for them that this was three-way partnership. Some teachers in Atlin School were

⁵¹ It is true that I had contact with Linda McGill and Louise Gordon first to find out whether or not they would be interested in partnership research, however, the formal letters to invite TRTFN and SD87 were sent at the same time.

in the routine of leaving the building to go home for lunch, so the best times to catch them for conversations were when they were out on the playground for supervision in the morning and at recess. In fact, they seemed to enjoy having company during supervision and we had many professional chats about teaching. Two teachers were reluctant to participate in the project as interview participants, even though they were always willing to chat informally with me and seemed interested in sharing their stories in the hallways.⁵² One staff member agreed to be interviewed and then withdrew consent because they said they feared ramifications if they participated. Another staff member was concerned that the TRTFN was planning to use the information from the project to remove their children from the SD87 school and start their own school. One teacher expressed that they did not want students from their class to participate in the student interviews, although no reason was given. I spoke to Superintendent Mike Gordon about the staff members' concerns. Mr. Gordon spoke to staff members and came to me to say that the staff had concerns that they thought would be relieved if I were to share the comments from students, parents, and teachers with him for approval before distributing summaries of comments to the TRTFN Education Committee and community members. I agreed to this request and describe this process in a following paragraph.

At the end of my first week, I was having doubts that I would have enough signed consent forms from parents and teachers for participation in the project. I felt that I was spending a lot of time chatting on the school ground, in the parking lot, around town, and out at Five Mile, however, parents and teachers were not giving consent to be interviewed. An entry in my journal on Sunday, May 3rd, reads, "I am surprised that parents are reluctant. There seems to be

⁵² In each of my five trips to Atlin in 2015, I had many, many conversations with the two teachers, including conversations about their input in the interview revisions, the positive things that students were sharing, and the progress of the project. However, I was disappointed that the two teachers did not give consent to be interviewed.

fear...Why? Is it fear of retribution directed at their kids? Has [a teacher] talked to parents? Is it due to election? Who is Wolf Clan? Who is Crow Clan? Who is an ally with Louise? Or not?"

However, on Monday, May 4th, any fears I had began to dissipate when suddenly parents began to schedule interviews with me and the principal and I planned a focus group session for all staff at the Wednesday staff meeting scheduled for that week. I had a busy week interviewing students, parents, and teachers during the day at the school and into the evening hours in some homes. Most parents came to the school to be interviewed, however, some parents invited me to their homes and one parent requested that we do the interview as a family with the parents and student together in their home in the evening. In the end, during my ten-day visit, six days were devoted to talking about the project and four days to actually getting the interviews done.

During each meeting with students, parents, and school staff I followed an interview schedule but I also attempted to create a conversation rather than a question and answer period. I made this decision after reading Kovach's description of conversation as a method:

Conversation as method is unlike structured or semi-structured interviews that place external parameters on the research participant's narrative. An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant's story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with respect to the research question. (2009, 124)

I thought that having conversations with participants during the interviews would produce more authentic information than simply reading the questions from a piece of paper, which I thought would make participants feel more like subjects who were being studied. I also realized that my three trips to Atlin in 2013 and Juneau in 2014 had paid off because I had often participated in or knew of events that participants spoke about in their interviews. This helped me to engage in conversation and to give the right prompts to gather more details. I did not have to ask participants to explain things to me, which I think would have been a deterrent for building trust.

I thanked all interview participants for their participation by giving them gift cards from Subway Restaurant valued at ten dollars for students and twenty for parents. TRTFN research partners suggested this gift because many families attend events at the Canada Games Centre, a recreation centre in Whitehorse where there is a Subway Restaurant.

In my research proposal, I indicated that I intended to invite students and community members to focus group sessions to hear their comments about ways to enhance education. With support from Principal Michael Basran and Education Manager Tammy Fetterly, I hosted three focus group sessions with adults. One focus group session with the staff of Atlin School was planned collaboratively with Principal Michael Basran and held at a staff meeting on May 6, 2015. Mr. Basran, Tammy Fetterly, and I created the questions for the session with Atlin School staff, which asked: 1) What were your best moments in your classroom today, yesterday, last week, this year? 2) What are some current opportunities for students to learn Tlingit or other cultures? and 3) Will opportunities to learn Aboriginal Culture enhance student achievement?

Two more focus group sessions were held with the staff of the Tlingit Family Learning Centre on April 30, 2015 and members of the TRTFN Education Committee on May 4th, 2015. These focus group sessions were planned collaboratively from start to finish with TRTFN Education Manager Tammy Fetterly.⁵³ At the TFLC focus group session the conversation focused upon the important things for children to learn in an early childhood setting. At the focus sessions with the TRTFN Education Committee we discussed three questions: “Does Aboriginal culture and language improve student achievement? “Does sense of belonging improve achievement?” and “Does learning Tlingit culture and language improve sense of belonging?”

⁵³ During my five trips to Atlin in 2015, I recall that often I was driving back and forth between the school, Five Mile, and the Tlingit Family Learning Centre to meet with Tammy to fill her in on where I had been, who I had talked to and what I had learned. Tammy was an excellent mentor and together we solved many glitches and small details to sign consent forms, complete the interviews and focus groups, and discuss the emerging themes.

All participants in focus group sessions signed consent forms for participation. The comments from the focus group sessions with Atlin School staff and the TFLC staff are included with the comments from the interviews in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 where they are applicable. Some comments from the Atlin School staff and TRTFN Education Committee form part of the discussion in Chapter 7 about creating a sense of belonging for Indigenous students in British Columbia.

Principal Michael Basran and I decided not to host a focus group session for students because some parents had not given consent for their students to participate in interviews due to personal family reasons. We did not want to create a situation where some students might feel left out if most of the class was to participate in a focus group session but they could not. Also, a teacher was still reluctant about the project. When I was chatting with students at the end of a school day, the teacher asked me to please give them advance notice if I wanted to speak to their students. After this comment, Principal Michael Basran sent students to me for interviews during the P.E. classes that he taught. Because of these challenges and the fact that we had good student participation in the interviews, in the end Principal Michael Basran and I decided not to hold a focus group session with students.

At the end of my two weeks in Atlin, I had interviewed ten students, six parents, and three staff members and hosted three focus group sessions. The length of the interviews with parents was from thirty to forty minutes and interviews with students were twenty to thirty minutes. The majority of the students and parents who participated were members of the TRTFN. I was satisfied that I had gathered many helpful ideas from students, parents, and school staff to begin transcribing and coding. However, I was also concerned that some families, who I had been unable to reach, might feel left out of the project and so I mentioned everywhere I went that I

would be back in Atlin several times and that I would be available to take more comments during the next year. I wanted to spread the message that this was an ongoing project, not a “once only opportunity to give input”. I thought that this was important for a project with a goal to establish and maintain relationships with the research partners. As well, I knew that for some families the timing was quite not right to participate in May and I found myself reassuring parents that I would be available in the fall to conduct interviews when it was more convenient for them.

The interviews were audio recorded on a Sony digital recorder. During the interview process, I sometimes made hand written notes on an interview schedule, for example, if the speakers voice was quiet or if there was something I thought was a highlight. I was excited to begin transcribing the interviews.

Pole Raising Ceremony in Atlin, June 21-23, 2015

On Aboriginal Day, June 22, 2015, the members of TRTFN and SD87 held a ceremony to raise the totem pole that the students had carved at Atlin School during the school year (see Figure 3.19 *Pole Raising Ceremony* and 3.20 *Honouring the Students*). Members of TRTFN and SD87 invited me to attend the assembly at Atlin school, the parade to the site at the entrance to Atlin town site, the erection of the pole, and the celebration including a community dinner at the Atlin Recreation Centre. It was an honour to be invited and I travelled to Atlin for this special event. When I arrived in Atlin, I was asked to speak at the school assembly by the committee who organized the ceremony. I made a short speech at the assembly to recognize the students for their achievements in revitalizing Tlingit culture in Atlin through the carving and erecting of the pole. Although the main purpose of my visit was to participate in the ceremony to raise the totem pole, I did finish one interview with a teacher and had conversations with a few more parents to let them know that it was not too late to participate in interviews if they desired, as I would be

back in the fall. The Pole Raising Ceremony was an opportunity to reconnect with students, parents, school staff, the principal and the superintendent who was in town for the occasion. More importantly, the Pole Raising Ceremony was very meaningful and emotional. Everyone in attendance was very proud of the children and their accomplishment and of the fact that there was now recognition for TRTFN at the entrance to Atlin town.



Figure 3.19 *Pole Raising Ceremony*
(Larson, June 22, 2015)



Figure 3.20 *Honouring the Students*
(Larson, June 22, 2016)

Transcribing and Coding the Interviews, June-September, 2015

In the summer of 2015, I transcribed the interviews from May. Following the protocols in my application to the UBC Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, interview recordings and transcripts were stored on my password protected Macintosh laptop.

I began coding the interview transcripts manually to look for emerging themes. I wanted to code the interviews manually to keep the conversations intact and not chunk the comments into small excerpts, which might lose meaning. To accomplish this, I created a two column Microsoft Word document with codes in the left column parallel to participants' comments in the right column. As well, while I was coding the transcripts, I sometimes re-listened to the oral transcript to hear and make a note of the tone of the comments, for example, when a participant sounded

excited, emphatic, or sad. To ensure that the coding terminology was consistent, I coded three interviews and then made a list of codes to refer to as I coded the remaining interview transcripts. I wanted to have consistency with the codes to simplify future searches through the pages of comments. See Appendix E for a list of the codes used for coding the interview transcripts.

When the interview transcripts were coded, I sorted comments from students, parents, and school district employees into charts to cluster commonalities together (see Table 3.1 *Sample Portion of a Chart of Students' Comments about Experiences at School* for an excerpt from the charts). Looking across a row, I could read all the comments made by one respondent.

Alternatively, while looking down a column, I could read all the comments made about a specific topic. The charts were also useful to take note of the number of students, parents, or school district employees who answered a question in a similar way. However, I found that I needed to compile the responses in a list for each theme, as well, for ease of viewing and in depth reading. I made lists of the answers to each question in a Word document. The two formats, the chart and the comments written out in a list, complemented one another and I found myself relying on both to cross check information. The comments from students, parents, and school staff were compiled to create three summaries: students' comments, parents' comments, and comments from school staff.

Table 3.1 *Sample Portion of a Chart of Students' Comments about Experiences at School*

1. Do you like coming to school?	2. Best things about school?	3. Last week, month, year?
Student A: No. Because of the teachers and stuff because the teachers are kind of mean (chuckle). They won't let us do stuff like very much. Like work together. Like go somewhere quiet so you could like actually work	The library because it is the most quiet Soccer with my friends out in the field. Because the friends are there helping me.	Carving, "if the teacher lets me." Wayne just comes and picks you up, but sometimes the teacher says, no and stuff (chuckle).
Student B: No. Because I have to wake up early for the bus and I just don't like school. Can't talk...all morning. Ummmmm, lockers. If	Breakfasts on Friday. Those are great.	Soccer, heritage fair This year...nothing much.

we could use the lockers that would be great.	Morning announcements, I like those. The “good stuff” all around the school...it’s good. Soccer during lunch when we all go down to the field	
Student C: Uh, a little bit.	Um, more gym time. Outdoor soccer, and learning how to decompose objects in math. Yea we do skiing.	I’ll be back in Kindergarten when I had my brother and sister here. C: Oh, are they older than you? Yep. C: And why did that make it good you think? Just someone close? Yep

Sharing the Summaries of Comments from Participants in Atlin, October 18-22 and November 23-27, 2015

The students’ comments were shared as email attachments with Spokesperson Louise Gordon and Superintendent Mike Gordon in early October 2015. After they had had time to review the comments from students I travelled to Atlin to share a summary of the students’ comments for discussion and feedback at a meeting with the TRTFN Education Committee on October 20th, 2015. I met privately with some members of the Education Committee who were unable to attend the meetings to attain their feedback about the comments for a total of three meetings with individuals in Atlin, one in Whitehorse, and two meetings in Kelowna.

During this October visit, five more parents and four more students gave consent and assent, respectively, to participate in interviews. I conducted these interviews on October 20 through 22 in Atlin and in Whitehorse following the same methods used in May.

I travelled to Atlin again in November for a meeting of the TRTFN Education Committee on November 25th to share parents’ comments for feedback. During this same visit, I was also able to visit at Atlin School, participate in one community event, and host a focus group meeting for grandparents of the students who had participated in the interviews with support from Tammy Fetterly, Manager for Education. I hung out at the school in the mornings and joined the students and staff from the two older classes on their morning walk around the field (see Figure

3.21 *Daybreak Walk with Students*). A teacher who was new to the school gave their consent to be interviewed and I was able to hold one more teacher interview for a total of four teacher interviews for the project. I attended a two-day workshop at the Culture Centre at Five Mile Reserve to learn how to make a drum with Cultural Teacher Wayne Carlick (see Figures 3.22 *Making Drums at Culture Centre at Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei (Five Mile Point)* and 3.23 *The Finished Drum!*). Tammy Fetterly and I organized a grandparents' focus group session at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre, which included lunch, to gather their input about education for their grandchildren (see Figure 3.24 *Luncheon with Grandparents*).



Figure 3.21 *Daybreak Walk with Students* (Larson, November 24, 2015)



Figure 3.22 *Making Drums at Culture Centre at Liyaat'i X'áa Jigei (Five Mile Point)* (Larson, November 24, 2015)



Figure 3.23 *The Finished Drum!*
(Carlick, November 24, 2015)

Figure 3.24 *Luncheon with Grandparents*
(Fetterly, November 25, 2015)

Tammy Fetterly and I started planning for the luncheon when I was in Atlin in October and I kept in touch with the caterer and phoned and emailed grandparents to let them know the date for the luncheon in early November. When I arrived in Atlin Tammy and I discovered that the caterer was unable to make the soup and there was another meeting happening on our date. However, two grandmothers were able to leave one luncheon to join three other grandmothers for our luncheon. Tammy and I prepared a pot of homemade soup and one student and her grandmother brought a vegetable plate and cupcakes for dessert. Spending the day cooking and sharing a meal at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre was a nice finale to the process of gathering information. It was also a highlight to hear the grandparents' responses to our question, "What is important for your grandchildren to learn in school?"

My last day in Atlin in November 2015, Louise Gordon, Tammy Fetterly, and I met for breakfast at the Pine Tree Restaurant. We talked about how challenging it is for everyone in Atlin to get to all the meetings that they could attend. We agreed that attendance at meetings was affected not by lack of commitment, but rather by too many commitments for some members of the community.

Transcribing, Coding, and Sharing, January-May 2016

During this period, I transcribed the remaining four student interviews, five parent interviews, and one teacher interview and the comments from the focus group sessions. By May 2016, I had finished compiling the comments from the interviews with fourteen students, eleven parents, and four teachers and the notes from focus group sessions with the four staff at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre, the four staff at Atlin School, the four members of the TRTFN

Education Committee, and five grandparents of students who attend Atlin School (see Table 3.2 *Chart of Participants in the Project, Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?*) for a summary of interviews and focus group sessions). After I completed transcribing the interviews, I sent copies of the recordings and the transcripts to my supervisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer, for storage on her computer as per my ethics application.

Table 3.2 *Chart of Participants in the Project, Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?*

Dates	Participants
April 27-May 7, 2015	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 students • 6 parents • 2 teaching staff Focus Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tlingit Family Learning Centre Staff (4 staff) • TRTFN Education Committee (4 members) • Atlin School Staff (4 members)
June 21-23, 2015	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teaching staff
October 18-22, 2015	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 students • 5 parents
November 23- 27, 2015	Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teaching staff Focus Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 grandparents
Totals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 student interviews • 11 parent interviews • 4 teacher interviews • 17 community members in focus groups

Ongoing Partnership, January 2016-The Present

As I drafted chapters of this dissertation, I kept in touch with Tammy Fetterly, Louise Gordon, and Mike Gordon to keep them informed of my progress. As well, in March 2016, I contacted Spokesperson Louise Gordon and Superintendent Mike Gordon to co-author the introductions to TRTFN and SD87 in Chapter 1. I sent drafts of the chapters to Spokesperson Louise Gordon and to Superintendent Mike Gordon for their perusal. I asked them to scrutinize

the writing to ensure that everyone involved in the project would feel respected throughout the document. In this way, I would be attending to “all my relations” and conducting the research “in a good way” from start to finish.

Summary of the Methods

The methods I have described above are complementary with a Métis methodology. A partnership between the research partners was established in Phase I and continued in Phase II ensuring that “all my relations” were attended to throughout the research. I have shared the details of our activities to provide information about the ways that partnerships were established and maintained. I return to the topic of partnerships in Chapter 7 Conclusions, where I share my insights about partnerships as well as education for Indigenous students.

In the following three chapters, the comments from all interviews and focus group sessions are presented as Chapter 4 Students’ Experiences at School, Chapter 5 Students’ Opportunities to Learn Indigenous Culture and Language, and Chapter 6 Students’ Relationships with Others.

Chapter 4 Students' Experiences at School

“When you work by yourself it’s kind of lonely and it’s hard to come up with crazy ideas but when you’re in a group you come up with a bunch of crazy ideas because you’re thinking about a whole bunch of other things” (Student G).

“We need to have those interactions, we need to have those dialogues, you know we need to have where we come to a place of problem solving, decision making as a group of people rather than individual. We’re communal and we need to have those interactions in order for students to feel supported. I think that would be really helpful. Because, you know, this person shared with me and that is what this person thinks and that way they become more clear as to what’s important to them and how they interact, so they learn that social skill” (Parent A).

“Well I think it is a really interesting question because if school isn’t fun why would students come here and to me that is the key component” (Teacher C).

The interviews and focus group sessions for our research project, *Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?* gathered information about students’ experiences at school, opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language at school and in the community, and relationships with others with respect to learning. Comments from students, parents, and teachers for each of these three themes are presented in Chapters 4 Students’ Experiences at School, Chapter 5 Students’ Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture and Language, and Chapter 6 Students’ Relationships with Others. In this and subsequent chapters the names of student, parent, and teacher participants are protected. The consent forms provided a space for people to approve the use of their names, however, not all participants gave consent to use their names. Therefore, identifying some participants might have compromised the anonymity of other participants. Hence, for the purposes of sharing participants’ comments, students, parents, and teachers were cited as Students A through N, Parents A through G and Teachers A through D. There is no correlation between students, parents, and teachers, that is, Student A is not related to Parent A or Teacher A, however, when two parents from one family were interviewed, I used the code Parent C1 and Parent C2 to keep parents comments connected.

I made the choice to assign letters rather than numbers to mark quotations because, for some, numbers might have been reminiscent of the numbers assigned in residential schools. I also did not rename participants with pseudonyms because I had not asked for permission to use pseudonyms in the consent forms. The quotations from participants are presented in full with some editing of false starts and “ums” for ease of reading.

In each chapter, the comments from participants are presented in sections. In each section, I share the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers about a topic and include my own reflections and the reflections of the TRTFN Education Committee at the end. I have written these next three chapters in this way to honour the voices of the participants. I believe that including my interpretations of community members’ comments throughout the sections would interrupt the flow of the narratives, delegitimize participants’ ideas, and perpetuate colonization. I have intentionally included many quotes from participants in this and subsequent chapters because this story of education for Indigenous students is the students’ story and should be told by them and by the people who support them in their learning experiences. I have also sometimes included longer quotes rather than dividing the comments from participants into smaller excerpts. This decision was deliberate, again, because coding and sorting comments into smaller bits might take away from the meanings that the speakers want to convey.

As for my own reflections, often as I wrote my perceptions about a topic, I felt grateful to the TRTFN and SD87 for my many opportunities to engage in participant observation as a method for this research. If I had relied only upon interviews, without the opportunity to join in community events and to talk with people as they went about their daily lives over a period of three years, I would have misunderstood and made many wrong assumptions about so many

topics. I would have missed out on conversations that were critical to describing the current educational opportunities for students in the north.

Before presenting the descriptive comments from participants, I want to acknowledge that students were positive about their experiences in school. When I asked if they liked coming to school each day, nine of fourteen students affirmed, “yes.” Three students expressed that they enjoy school because they like to learn (Students E, G, J), four said that they liked to see friends (Students D, F, G, N), and two commented that they wanted to get a good education (Students D, F). Of the five students who did not respond, “yes”, to the question, “Do you like coming to school each day?” three commented: “not every day, but I don’t mind it” (Student L), “not each day, well as much as any student, I guess” (Student K), and “a little bit” (Student C). Two students, who responded, “no”, talked about wanting more opportunities at school such as electives (Student B) and working in groups (Student A).

Seven of ten parents believed that their eleven children like coming to school (Parents B, C1, C2, D, F1, F2, G1, G2). Three parents said their three children did not like coming to school for three different reasons: more support is needed for learning disabilities (Parent A), it is “natural” not to like school because “it’s just an everyday thing and it is boring” (Parent E2), and “there is not a lot of structure” (Parent E1).

Students’, parents’, and teachers’ perceptions of students’ experiences are provided in more detail below under the subheadings: 1) Best Things about School, 2) Developing Lifelong Learners, and 3) Students’ Future Plans.

Best Things about School

The first questions in the interviews asked about the best things about coming to school, the best things from last week or last month or last year, and students’ favourite activities.

Students' Perceptions of the Best Things about School

Students mentioned sports as one of the best things about school. One student mentioned skiing (Student C) and six students (Students A, B, C, D, E, L) mentioned playing soccer (see Figure 4.3 *Soccer Game*). When I asked Student A, "What is good about soccer?" Student A replied, "Because the friends are there, helping me." When Student C explained that students had to take turns to share the same set of skis, I asked if more skis were needed. Student C replied, "it is okay to share."

Nine students mentioned aspects of academic learning as one of the best things about school, such as "learning how to decompose objects in Math" (Student C), learning "multiplication for the first time" (Student M), Heritage Fair (Students B, G) (see Figure 4.9 *Heritage Fair in Whitehorse*), learning new things (Students F, M), learning to read (Student M), Music (Student L) and learning how to handwrite (Student J).

Some students named social aspects of school, for example, Spirit Week (Students F, J), "Breakfast on Fridays" (Student B), "morning announcements and the good stuff⁵⁴ around the school" (Student B), playing with a friend, and "running to the bus each morning" (Student I). One student commented that the best experience in school was, "back in Kindergarten when I had my brother and sister here" (Student C) and another said, "when my grandpa comes to school for carving because he's fun to hang around with" (Student identity withheld for anonymity).

Other topics were raised as best things about school. Student C mentioned the iPads at school. Three students mentioned creative activities such as Art (Student H) and carving (Students A, F). Two students mentioned a camping fieldtrip to Warm Bay as the best thing

⁵⁴ "Good stuff" was initiated by the school principal in the 2014/2015 school year. Students receive recognition for a job well done in the form of paper celebration certificates that are posted down the main hallway in Atlin School.

about school (Students K, L). Finally, one student commented that the best thing about school was the amount of work the class got done in the first week (Student M). The student said, “It makes me feel good cause when I learn new things it just makes me excited to tell my parents what we did and my favourite part of the day” (Student M). The students’ perceptions about the best things about school varied and touched on academics, sports, socialization, creativity, and relationships with others.

To confirm and gather more details about the best things about school I asked students about their favourite subjects in school. Again, responses were varied. Six students named Math (Students A, B, D, E, I, M). Students enjoyed Math because it was easy (Students A, B), they were good at it (Students A, B, D), “it keeps my brain going” (Student D), “I need to learn more” (Student E), “I think I want to get better at Math to learn more Math” (Student I), and “I learn the most” (Student M). Two students mentioned Writing as their favourite subject (Students C, G). Student G enjoyed writing about “my history, like my favourite movies, music, my heritage, carving, dancing” (see Figure 4.5 *Taku Kwaan Dance Practice*). The other student described, “writing about Science or something that we are doing, but not English” (Student C). One student named Science as a favourite subject because “we do experiments” (Student L). Two students said Art was their favourite subject (Students G, H). Four others named Social Studies (Students G, I, K, N), particularly the Heritage Fair (Student I) and learning about government (Student N). One younger student was enthralled with learning to handwrite (Student J) and mentioned it throughout the interview in response to many questions! Students had many favourite subjects; almost every subject was someone’s favourite.



Figure 4.1 *Atlin School* (Larson, May 6, (2015)



Figure 4.2 *A classroom in Atlin School* (Larson, November 24, 2015)



Figure 4.3 *Soccer Game* (Larson, April 27, 2015)



Figure 4.4 *Culture Camp at Five Mile* (Larson, July 31, 2013)



Figure 4.5 *Taku Kwaan Dance Practice* (Larson, April 28, 2015)



Figure 4.6 *Carving the Totem Pole* (Larson, April 28, 2015)



Figure 4.7 *Homework at TFLC After School Program* (Larson, March 2, 2015)



Figure 4.8 *Homework Club with Vince Esquiro* (Larson, April 28, 2015)

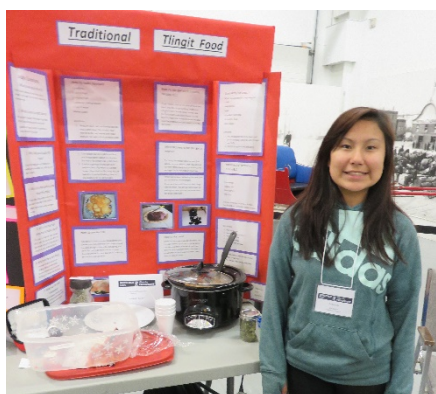


Figure 4.9 *Heritage Fair* (Larson, May 7, 2015)



Figure 4.10 *Painting Signs to (Re)claim Tlingit Place Names* (Larson, May 1, 2015)

Parents' Perceptions of the Best Things about School

From parents' perceptions, the best things about school were varied as well. Parents G1 and G2 said that their children like everything about school and “tell us different things every day” (Parent G1). The other elaborated, “Sometimes a particular subject like PE or Centres⁵⁵ or Free Reading Time or Math” (Parent G2). Parent G1 said, “Every day at supper time we ask them

⁵⁵ Centres or Centre Time is a teaching strategy where students are taught a skill and then given time to work independently to practice the skill at learning centres. Teachers might set up four to six learning centres or stations to teach skills that are related to one concept or they might create a variety of centres to teach unrelated topics and/or social skills.

what was your favourite part of today, so we get different answers” and Parent G2 added, “So it’s a whole myriad of reasons of why they like school.”

Some parents described learning experiences as the best things about school. Three parents mentioned that their three children love learning (Parents D, G1, G2). Parent D said, “My younger child just loves school, she loves learning. She loves the challenges she gets from her teacher. She loves Science. If it was up to her, she’d want Science all day long.” Parent G1 said, “_____ loves school, she loves everything about school. She loves learning. She loves it.” and “_____ likes to learn too. They like school.” Two parents mentioned that their children get excited about hands on learning. Parent A said, “Hands on type of work. So it’s back to the kinesthetics, it’s back to the hands on physical movement, the total physical. Parent G1 responded, “So _____’s favourite last week was Math because they were working with blocks to learn.” Three parents said their children enjoyed the Heritage Fair (Parent B, D, F1). Parent F explained that her children liked the Heritage Fair because they liked the projects and presenting them, the research about a topic that interests them, and working together in a group interacting with their friends. When asked about the best things about school, two parents stated that their children liked the principal, although they named principals from two different years. One parent explained that the child liked helping the principal, for example, with setting up for an assembly (Parent A), and the other parent described how the principal understood the child (Parent B). Parent F1 said that her children enjoyed seeing the progress that they made. This parent also mentioned, “I know they were looking forward to school starting because they were getting pretty bored sitting around at the house, around the community and stuff so I know that they were looking forward to that. Just being around their friends again” (Parent F1). Finally, one parent said, “_____ really likes to make sure she’s just there at school so she can get information

about projects and stuff” (Parent B). All of these comments from parents indicate that some of the best things about school for students are the learning experiences.

Some parents stated that the best things about school for their children were traditional teachings and outdoor learning, such as, carving (Parents A, D, E1), dancing (Parent E1), and “traditional stuff and getting out” (Parent E2). Parent E1 also mentioned fieldtrips such as camping and Parents B and D named the fieldtrips to Whitehorse to the Canada Games Centre, Swan Haven, and the Polar Games.

To describe the best things about school, some parents spoke about special events. One parent spoke about Spirit Weeks⁵⁶ and themed days like Jeans Day, Pajama Day, or Crazy Hair Day (Parent C1). Another mentioned Remembrance Day, Christmas concerts and the Career Fair (Parent F).

When asked about their children’s favourite subjects taught in school, parents named a variety of topics which interested their children at school, such as, working with tools, carving, quiet time (Parent A), soccer (Parent B), gym (Parent E1), and academic subjects, for example, Math (Parents B, F1), Science (Parents D, E2), Reading (Parents F1, G2), and Social Studies (F1).

To conclude this discussion of parents’ perceptions of the best things about school, like the students’ perceptions, most parents perceived that their children enjoy school for a variety of reasons including: academic learning, socialization, and cultural teachings.

⁵⁶ Spirit Week is an event where something special is on the calendar for every day of one week. The events might be Crazy Hair Day, Red Day where students wear the colour red, Twin Day where friends dress alike, etc. During the 2015/2016 school year, there were three Spirit Weeks, one per term, at Atlin School. Students, parents, and teachers mentioned the fun of Spirit Weeks in the interviews.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Best Things about School

Teachers' comments in this section come from focus group sessions with the Tlingit Family Learning Centre staff and the Atlin School staff and from interviews with teachers at Atlin School. The Tlingit Family Learning Centre staff members said that the best part of a day at the centre is when a child does not want to go home at the end of the day because they are having too much fun, acknowledging students' successes—even the smallest accomplishment, and giving students encouragement when they need it. The TFLC staff spoke about Early Childhood Development and did not speak about students' favourite activities per se.

At the focus group session with Atlin School staff a variety of topics surfaced as the best things about school for students: the Totem Pole Project⁵⁷, personal writing, centre or station time because students have choices, singing, the Heritage Fair, assemblies to recognize students' success, and opportunities to demonstrate independence. Two teachers elaborated, "The Ground Breaking Ceremony for the totem pole because I was so proud of the kids" and "The totem pole, kids wanting to do it every day." With respect to Writing, a teacher added, "On the days we don't do Writer's Notebook, they still want to do it" and another said, "the effort students put into their writing about DARE."⁵⁸ Teachers spoke about assemblies and commented that "watching students waiting for their names" and "seeing the reaction from students at the Success Assemblies" was rewarding. Another liked when students say things like, "I don't need help with Math cause I get how to do it now." More comments about school experiences from the teachers' focus groups are shared in the next chapter about opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language.

⁵⁷ During the 2014/2015 school year, older students carved a totem pole under the leadership of Wayne Carlick and erected it on Highway 7 at the entrance to Atlin town. Students, parents, and teachers referred to the Totem Pole Project throughout the interviews, beginning with the first questions about things students enjoy about school.

⁵⁸ DARE stands for the RCMP's Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program.

Teachers in interviews elaborated on the ideas from the focus group brainstorm and like the students and parents included comments to indicate that students like academic learning, activities to learn traditional culture, outdoor activities and sports, opportunities to socialize, activities where they have choices, and celebrating personal success. One teacher commented, “They are all so different. You know I would have to ask each one of them. Because one would like this and another would like that” (Teacher D).

Two teachers named carving as one of the students’ favourite activities. Teacher D said that students enjoy working on the totem pole and having the culture teacher in the classroom because he is family for some students and they like having family in the school. Teacher A named the opportunity to carve on the pole as the best part of the day for many students and elaborated:

Some of the boys are quite interested. [They] ask a lot of questions about technique, about traditions and the history around art and carving and the boys that are interested come from traditional families already and I think they are interested in their culture. When they are in the carving shed with Wayne, a couple of the boys ask him a lot of questions about the tools, about the technique, how did this first start, what do these things mean, how can we do it like this, all that sort of thing. So a lot of questions are generated just around the process and the reasons why.

When I asked the teacher how they knew this information, Teacher A said, “Wayne [the culture teacher] tells me.”

Teacher C joked that lunch time was a favourite activity for students and then went on to describe that students seemed to enjoy the opportunities they had to play soccer, badminton, and European handball during lunch play time. Teacher C talked about the whole school participating and enjoying the multi-aged teams for noon hour activities. Teacher A mentioned indoor and outdoor soccer at lunch as well. Teacher B responded to this question by commenting that students usually say they like gym time.

Teachers named socialization as one of students' favourite things about school. Teachers A and C described the Breakfast Club⁵⁹ as something students enjoyed and commented "not because we have hungry kids but to form a sense of community, to bring everybody together in one room so that they can sit, eat, have a check in with one another, talk about how their week has been" and added, "it has been a very joyful occasion for everybody that participates." Teacher B suggested that being with friends is important to students, adding, "When school starts, that tends to be what they are pleased with is to be back socializing with their friends." Teacher A mentioned that students enjoy Spirit Weeks when students come to school dressed for a Pajama Day or Hat Day. Finally, Teacher A mentioned that older students like to have a space of their own, outside of the classroom, to eat lunch and play Ping-Pong and foosball and socialize away from the younger students.

Teacher C added to the conversation about the best things about school with the comment, "there's a number of aspects that are really good, but on a regular basis, I would have to say it would probably be the activities where they are engaged in small groups and get to have some choices."

The final suggestion raised by teachers for the best things about school was student recognition through Success Assemblies, Good Stuff Certificates, and Student of the Month. Teachers A and C elaborated that students love being acknowledged at Success Assemblies. Teacher A shared:

We've had two. So the big part of it is, as a teacher you go up to the front and you have each student stand up one at a time and you talk about what they have been successful at or what they have been good at during that time period. And it is my understanding that that has never happened before either. And it is interesting because the very first time we did it, I had my students standing up and they are standing up [wondering], "What is going on?"

⁵⁹ Breakfast Club is an event, which happens on Friday mornings at Atlin School through partnership between the Tlingit Family Learning Centre and School District 87. Community volunteers prepare breakfast for students and students and volunteers socialize as they eat breakfast together in the Home Ec room at the school.

When we said, “well, so and so, this is what they have been successful at and this is what they are good at,” a big grin and everybody turns around. The whole school knows what they have been successful at. After that first one, I noticed a small shift in the way they acted, I guess probably, thought about themselves.

Success Assemblies occurred once per term during the 2014/2015 school year and included individual recognition as well as slide shows about events during the term. Teacher A explained, “And then the other part is a slide show showcasing the different things that we have done to date. And the kids like seeing the pictures of themselves up there and the pictures of their friends and things like that.” Teacher A mentioned that students appreciate the Good Stuff Announcements on Friday mornings and the small recognition certificates which are posted along the ceiling in the main hallway for students who contribute in a positive way to the school. Teacher A commented, “they all of a sudden sit up and perk up in their desks and they are waiting for their names to be called out. And so that is what they like.” Then, they added, “Oh, we also have Student of the Month.”⁶⁰

As with the students and parents, when I asked teachers for details about students’ favourite subjects, answers were varied. Teacher B commented, “They like what they are good at. Same as all of us. Some of them really, really like reading and some of them like physical activities, but certainly all of our favourite things are the things that we are good at.” Another teacher made a similar response, “I would imagine it is personal preference and personal interest and probably tied to ability as well” and went on to name Math, English, Social Studies, Art, and PE as favourites for students (Teacher A). Teacher C named the Heritage Fair and the Science Fair, but commented, that it was not so much about the subject area, but the teaching strategies

⁶⁰ Students are nominated as Student of the Month in each classroom and their photographs are posted in the front entrance of the school. When I visited Atlin School during the 2014/2015 school year, I thought that the Student of the Month display in the front hallway and then the Good Stuff Certificates as visitors continue down the hallway by the front office were excellent ways to build pride for students and relationships within the school community (journal entry, April 27, 2015).

used to gain the new knowledge. Teacher C spoke about students in grades four to nine enjoying Project Based Learning⁶¹ and having time on Friday mornings to work on their projects. This also involved working with technology, which “kids are all keen on” (Teacher C). Teacher D also confirmed that students like using technology for learning and added that students enjoy music both in music class and when music is incorporated into other curriculum areas. Teacher D attributed this to the fact that students “like learning about things that they know about already.”

Teachers’ comments about students’ favourite things indicate there are a variety of best things about school: Writing and Mathematics, traditional cultural learning, sports and outdoor fieldtrips, having choices, learning from family members, being recognized for individual successes, and socializing through sports, small group work, Spirit Weeks and Breakfast Club.

Reflections about the Best Things about School

After reviewing the students’ comments together, the TRTFN Education Committee and I thought the students were happy going to school. One member of the committee stated, “I think that’s promising” (TRTFN Education Committee, October 20, 2015, discussion) and another commented, “They all enjoy learning. All different things. It’s such a variety.” The committee was somewhat surprised that students did not mention technology more often as a favourite thing. They had a short discussion about how “playing soccer is learning, too. It’s strategizing, gross motor skills,” “teamwork,” “learning to depend on one another,” and “equally as important as the academics” (TRTFN Education Committee, October 20, 2015, discussion).

Although most of the comments from students, parents, and teachers indicate that students enjoy school, I do want to mention that some students were less enthusiastic. The three students

⁶¹ Project Based Learning is a teaching strategy whereby teachers guide the curriculum topic, but students are invited to design their own project to understand the concepts.

who answered tentatively and the two who said they did not enjoy school were older. The three parents who said that their children did not enjoy school were parents of older students as well. Two of the parents provided possible reasons for this when they mentioned that their children were looking forward to going to high school in Whitehorse.

Sometimes little comments in the interviews were very interesting to me. This occurred when Student A said that he enjoyed soccer because friends were there helping him and Student C said that it was okay to share the ski equipment with others. In hindsight, I wish I had pursued comments like those with more prompts. For now, I think that it is important to note that Students A and C linked sports with sharing and helping others.

I also thought that the words students chose to describe their learning were important to note, for example, when Student C said that one of the best things about school was “learning how to decompose objects in Math.” In other examples, students said they enjoyed Math because “it keeps my brain going” (Student D), “I need to learn more” (Student E), “I think I want to get better at Math to learn more Math” (Student I), and “I learn the most” (Student M). I liked the language students used to describe their learning experiences and how they seemed to know what they needed as learners. I thought that the language they used in the interviews demonstrated that students in Atlin are knowledgeable about learning processes.

Students’ responses to questions about their experiences at school also indicated to me that students in Atlin have awareness and even a mature attitude about their responsibilities as learners. Although students mentioned that they enjoyed coming to school to socialize, they seemed to perceive that the focus of school was learning. Students talked about wanting to learn and getting a good education and could articulate what they enjoyed about their favourite subjects. When I asked them about the best things at school, I thought students would name play

more often. Although many students did mention playing with friends at lunch and recess, particularly soccer, students surprised me by naming many aspects of academic learning, as well as, socializing with friends and cultural activities because I thought the majority of students would name socializing as the best thing about school. Even the two students who said they did not like coming to school gave suggestions about improvements to school that focused upon learning, i.e. more learning in groups (Student A), opportunities to work independently in a quiet place (Student A), and more electives (Student B). However, the reasons students gave for enjoying particular aspects of school often acknowledged relationships with others as a component to making the experience positive. Examples of these are friends helping friends on the soccer field, sharing skis with another student, enjoying carving because it is with a grandparent, being recognized for accomplishments with certificates and morning announcements, and attending school with siblings.

Regarding recognition, I believe that the Success Assemblies, Good Stuff Certificates, and Student of the Month initiatives help to raise self-esteem and sense of belonging for students. In addition, when these activities included Tlingit language and culture, the prestige for Tlingit students is raised up as well. This is an application of the recommendations in Chapter 1 from scholars (Ager 2005; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Haarmann 1990; O hlfearnain 2013; Perley 2011; Schreyer 2011) who advocate for Indigenous language revitalization that builds prestige for the culture and language of Indigenous peoples.

In Chapter 1, I also wrote about the recommendation from scholars that students must be prepared for self-determination (Bishop 2011; Castellano, Davis, and Lahache 2000; Fife 2005; Ngai, Karlsen Baek, and Paulgaard 2015; Hynds and Sleeter 2011; May and Aikman 2003; Shanley 2015). Participation in opportunities to make choices about what they are learning

prepares students for self-determination (Bishop 2011, Hynds and Sleeter 2011). I was excited when teachers at the focus group session and Teacher C commented that one of the best things about school for students is when they have opportunities for choices. Giving students choices about what they are learning is a small step towards self-determination, but it is a step in the right direction.

Before summarizing this reflection about the best things about school, I wish to comment upon participants' responses about cultural activities. I discuss opportunities to learn culture in depth in the next chapter, however because participants named carving the pole as one of the best things about school for students, I mention it briefly here. I thought that carving the totem pole provided so many benefits to students, such as learning about culture and language as well as personal development. I liked that the culture and language teacher and other teachers communicated together about students' learning experiences and thought that this project was helping to bridge the gap between European and Indigenous ways of learning. I wonder if the school curriculum and calendar could be expanded to include more Tlingit cultural activities and special events, such as, celebrations at the start of hunting or fishing seasons, the beginning of berry harvesting, and more. Participants' comments, especially ideas from the grandparents' focus group about including more Tlingit culture in school will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

From listening to students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of the best things about school and from my observations in Atlin School, I believe that students in Atlin enjoy school for a variety of reasons, which support students' intellectual, social, physical, and emotional development. All three groups mentioned academic learning, traditional teachings such as carving and dancing, socializing with friends, outdoor activities and sports, having choices,

working independently, learning from family members, and celebrating successes. My observations in classrooms and participation at special events, such as the Heritage Fairs in Atlin and in Whitehorse combined with the comments from interviews and focus groups confirmed for me that students' experiences at school are positive.

Developing Lifelong Learners

Four interview questions asked student, parent, and teacher participants about students' support with schoolwork, what makes learning easy and fun, and whether or not they have opportunities to make choices about what they are learning.

Students' Perceptions of Developing Lifelong Learners

From their current and past experiences, students described a variety of ways to make learning fun. Student C explained, "Most of the time I think that school is fun" and added, "Learning is easier when it is fun." Students mentioned learning is fun when they have learning opportunities that include using computers (Students G, I), Project Based Learning (Student I), Art (Student J), and Math games (Students G, L, M) including Mathletics on the web. One student noted that having more time to learn in stations would make learning fun. One student described two activities that were fun because students were writing stories in a group (Student G). In the first activity, the students in the class created a story together by contributing lines. In the second activity, "We were in a group again. And then so there's this story [the teacher] photographed and then we all tried to figure out how the story went, and that was fun" (Student G). More comments from students about working in groups will be discussed in a later paragraph. Three students mentioned learning was fun when there was more free time to read

(Student G), draw (Student E), or be on computers (Student I). These ideas from students build upon practices that are already in place in the classrooms in Atlin School.

Students also mentioned making school more fun by having more time to socialize. Two students mentioned more breaks (Students B, D) and time to talk (Students B, D). Three students mentioned the need for more activities: more time to play outside (Student C), “more activities besides just gym and lunch” (Student F), and the need for more electives (Student B). One student suggested organizing a school barbeque or a trip to the lake or the point at Five Mile (Student F).

Finally, with respect to ways to make learning more fun, one student’s comment stood alone. When I asked if there were ways to improve the school experience at Atlin School, this student replied, “Maybe trust me a lot. Start trusting me and like, to do more stuff, like go to the library for one because [the teacher] doesn’t trust me doing that. Yah, just trusting me to go somewhere” (Student A). It is difficult to know the context and background as to why the student would make this comment, however, the comment seems important to include.

To flush out more information about what helps students to engage in learning activities, I also asked students about what makes learning easier. Sometimes students answered these two questions similarly, which was expected and intended. Again students’ responses varied to questions about ways to make learning easier. One said learning would be easier if students had more time to go “outside to let out energy” (Student A). Nine students talked about ways that the teachers currently make learning easier, for example, the teacher supports students at a table group (Students C, F), the teacher explains the task (Students D, L, N), “[the teacher] shows it on the board” (Student E), “[the teacher] tells us a clue or the answer” (Student I), “Maybe [the teacher] keeps telling us, like [the teacher] tells us the easiest ways to do it, not the hard way”

(Student I), “[the teacher] helps me till I understand it” (Student K), and “[the teacher] makes good ways to figure out problems” (Student M). According to students, teachers seem to explain concepts and tasks until understand.

When asked who supports them with homework, ten students stated that they receive support with homework from their parents, stepparents, and grandparents (Students A, C, D, F, G, H, I, L, M, N) and three students (Students B, D, E) mentioned support from Vince Esquiro in the Homework Club (see Figure 4.7 *Homework at TFLC After School Program* and 4.8 *Homework Club with Vince Esquiro*).⁶² Two students mentioned receiving support from siblings (Students A, E) and Student A mentioned an expectation that in the future a sister and brother will give support with homework in Whitehorse. Student C expressed not wanting support from the Homework Club, but did not give a reason. Two younger students mentioned receiving support with homework from the After School Homework Club at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre (Students I, J). One mentioned support from a private tutor (Student G). One student elaborated about the difference between support from the teacher and support at the Homework Club. The student explained, “We are in a group and I don’t know it is more of a fun thing to do instead of by yourself doing your homework” (Student B). When I asked the student what was different between group work in class and group work with Vince, the student said, “It’s different. Vince is not a teacher. He’s not a teacher, so he doesn’t have regulations to follow. We

⁶² During the 2014/2015 school year, the Tlingit Family Learning Centre was sponsoring two homework clubs for students. On Tuesdays, the Youth Coordinator with TRTFN, Vince Esquiro, supported students age thirteen and older at the school after school with homework completion as part of his mandate. Students could ride a bus home to Five Mile at five o’clock. The Homework Club did not run in the 2015/2016 school year because of a change in the youth coordinator position with TRTFN. An After School Homework Club for students age five to twelve was hosted at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre from Monday through Thursday. A staff member from the TFLC walked from the centre to the school to pick up the students. Students played outside and then walked to the centre for a snack and support with homework until five o’clock when they could take a bus to Five Mile or be picked up by parents. The club for younger students has operated for many years. The club for older students was not available in the 2015/2016 school year.

don't have to be a certain way all the time. We can be ourselves, while doing homework” (Student B). Students' comments indicate that they believe that they have support with schoolwork.

Although I did not specifically ask, several students made subtle comments during the interviews, which suggest that the students view school as work. One student used the phrase, “when you are working all day” (Student A). Another said that a way to improve school would be to have “electives instead of just straight work all day” (Student B). When I asked the student if straight work meant Math, Social Studies, Reading, and Writing, the student said, “ Science. English. It's everything” (Student B). When I asked a third student about ways to improve Atlin School for future students, the student said, “work would have to be easier for them” (Student C). Two students said that they thought that school could be improved by allowing more breaks and time to talk to others (Students B, D). One of these students said that a five-minute break in the morning and again in the afternoon to do this would be a good idea (Student D). One student spoke about “getting work on Monday and doing it for the rest of the week”(Student F). When I asked the student how the teacher helps with the work, the student said, “I'm not really sure how [the teacher] helps. [It] just seems like basic work” (Student F). Two students talked about wanting more free time. One said, “Maybe let us have a little bit computer time or free time like I want to do some drawing. And like we only have 30 minutes for it. And sometimes we could just go on the computer or draw or do whatever we want for a little and then we have to go back to work.” When I asked, “how would that help you with your learning?” the student responded, “Well you would clear your mind because you would get bored on the computer or something, and then you would have to work. And maybe we can like have a little bit of time for ourselves so we always don't get bored of working every single time“ (Student G). When I was asking

Student J about ways to improve school, the student said, "I like to, sometime, once, I play[ed]. I had only once. And I just work, work, work, work, work, work, work." When I clarified, "You just work the whole time you are there?" Student J answered with emphasis, "Every day!" The tone of these comments about 'school as work' was not a complaint. The comments were offered more as a description of 'the way it is'. For example, the student who made the statement using the word, work, seven times, was smiling and enthusiastic while they spoke. In fact, as I mentioned in a previous discussion about school, one student named accomplishing work as one of best things about school (Student M). I think that it is important to include these comments about school as work because it shows students' attitude about school and their responsibilities at school. In their descriptions of the work at school, students gave suggestions about ways to make learning easier or more fun.

The final question in the interviews, which pertains to developing lifelong learners,⁶³ asked students about making choices in determining what they were learning. Three students mentioned Project Based Learning (Students D, F, G) and one said Science Fair (Student I) as opportunities where students get to make choices about what they are learning. Two students said that the teacher asked the class at the start of the year about what they wanted to learn in each subject area" (Students B, K). One student said that the teacher asks students about what they are learning, but that the teacher also guides the learning to prepare students for high school (Student L). Three students said that they did not have choices about what they were learning (Students A, C, E). One student mentioned learning in stations, but qualified, "yah but [the

⁶³ The terms, *lifelong learning*, and, *lifelong learners*, have often been used in the B.C. Ministry of Education curriculum documents since the 1980's. According to *Wikipedia*, the term originated in Denmark in the early 1970's and refers to the fact that learning does not only occur in childhood in school classrooms, but "takes place throughout life and in a range of situations" (*Wikipedia* s.v. *lifelong learning* [accessed October 16, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifelong_learning#cite_note-3]). I believe that helping students to understand that learning is lifelong, rather than a series of tests, is an important role of all educators.

teacher] chooses your station”(Student J). One student said, “In the beginning we had choices [about electives] but we never got to them” (Student B). Finally, one student gave a reason why making choices about what you are learning is a good thing when the student said, “Maybe you know what the book knows” (Student I). I think this student is saying that perhaps students might already know what the teacher is teaching in the lesson, but by making their own choices they will always be learning new things.

During the interviews, many students mentioned that they liked working in groups with others. I did not ask a specific question about group work, but as students were responding to other questions, the topic of group work emerged. For example, when one student was speaking about why they did not want to be in school, the student stated, “Like, they won’t let us do stuff very much. Like they don’t let us do a lot of stuff in school.” When I asked what kind of stuff would make school better, the student responded, “Like maybe work together” (Student A). This surprised me. I was expecting a reply such as, “play more sports.” The student’s response suggests to me that the student knows their responsibilities towards school and knows what they need to be successful in school. In another interview, when I asked a student what was good about homework club, the student responded, “we are in a group” (Student B). When Student C and I were talking about how the teacher makes learning easier, Student C said, “I like it in a group.” The student was referring to the table group format for learning that the teacher uses regularly in the classroom. When I asked Student C if they could tell me why learning in a group was better, the student said, “cause it helps me understand the questions.” To me, Student C’s response and the Indigenous principles of relationships and community discussed in Chapter 2 are connected and will be revisited in Chapter 7. A fourth student said Spirit Week was the best memory of school over the past three years. When I asked if the student could tell me why Spirit

Week was so good, the student replied, “its cause it’s a school project and everyone is working together” (Student F). A fifth student and I were discussing ways to make learning fun when the student suggested that working in a group to make a story was fun, “because we got to use our own imagination to make a story come true” (Student G). When I asked how working in a group to use your imagination was different than working alone, the student replied, “When you work by yourself it’s kind of lonely and it’s hard to come up with crazy ideas but when you’re in a group you come up with a bunch of crazy ideas because you’re so, you’re thinking about a whole bunch of other things” (Student G). Finally, a sixth student said reading was a favourite activity because, “I like when I read with _____, my best friend” (Student J). I was not specifically asking students about group work or teaching strategies when these comments about working together were made. These comments about working in a group, made voluntarily by students, indicate experiences they like at school or would like to see in the future.

Student leadership was another topic, which emerged from the interviews unexpectedly. Some students spoke about opportunities to help others (Students A, C, J). This was true for all age groups. When asked about the best experience at school today, a student said, “Meeting the kindergartens...because you got to show them everything”(Student J). Student C spoke about the opportunity to be a leader at culture camp (see Figure 4.4 *Culture Camp at Five Mile*). Students seem interested in activities that provide them with leadership opportunities.

Students’ comments about making learning fun and easy, support for homework, school as work, students’ choices about learning, opportunities to learn in groups, and opportunities for leadership give useful suggestions for helping students to develop as lifelong learners.

Parents' Perceptions of Developing Lifelong Learners

Parents were asked two questions about ways to help students engage in learning, “What does your child’s teacher do, or could they do to make school fun for your child?” and “What does your child’s teacher do, or could they do to make learning easier for your child?” Parents’ responses to these questions reflected suggestions from past experiences, from current practices, and for future direction. Parents’ comments about the past included: RAP (Parent B),⁶⁴ individualized learning plans (Parent G2), and guest teachers to teach specialty topics (Parent B). Parent B described the RAP program that one principal introduced in a previous school year. Parent B commented, “But it was more based on behaviour. And so that was the only time they took a proactive approach about like, balance of her life, what’s missing in the classroom as well as at home. Everyone participates, teacher, principal, superintendent, and myself.” Parent G2 described how the teacher created an individualized learning plan to raise the child’s reading ability to an appropriate level.

Well when both kids were in Mrs. _____’s class, essentially, both kids had an individualized learning plan, especially when _____ got her first full year here. She was in French immersion [in the previous school]. Her reading wasn’t that good. Reading English wasn’t all that great. So we had two and a half days of school before the year ended and Mrs. _____ had her accessed and had a plan to bring her up to a level that the rest of the kids were at. And so by the first three weeks, _____ was caught up and probably surpassed a lot of her classmates in Reading. (Parent G2)

Parent B described how, one year, their child was excited to learn about photography when a guest teacher came in to do photography with the students. Parent B added, “So she’s eager to go to a school that can offer more stuff, not just academics.”

⁶⁴ Response Ability Pathways (RAP) is a trademarked curriculum with a mandate that “Children and youth need supportive persons who respond to their needs rather than react to their problems” (Reclaiming Youth International, Circle of Courage 2016, n.p.).

Parents described current teaching practices that assist students to engage in learning, such as, teaching Math using games (Parent G2) and teaching reading with strategies such as Readers' Theatre (Parent G2). Quotes from parents describe these ideas in more detail. Parent G2 said, "[the teacher] always had games, like for counting, using blocks, different approaches especially with Math. [The teacher] mentioned a couple of games or strategies we could use at home to help out with counting." Then, Parent G2 went on to describe how the teacher used Reader's Theatre as a strategy for teaching reading, "Basically, they took a story and used it as a play and each of the kids had different roles and they performed this play for the younger kids." Parent G1 added, "Which is good for the public speaking and it's good for her to put herself out there, right?"

Three parents made suggestions for the future: more dialogues and interactions with others (Parent A), more one on one support for Math (Parent D), and more hands on learning (Parent F).

Parent A spoke about learning together:

We need to have those interactions. We need to have those dialogues. You know we need to have where we come to a place of problem solving, decision-making as a group of people rather than individual. We're communal and we need to have those interactions for students to feel supported. I think that would be really helpful. Because you know this person shared with me and that is what this person thinks. And that way they become more clear about what's important to them and how they interact. They learn that social skill.
(Parent A)

Parent D spoke about the need for more one on one support, especially for Math, "I think more just one on one. I think with mainly Math, both of their weak points. I think more one on one would be good, but there's three grades per class, so it makes it a little harder" (Parent D). Parent F1 also spoke about support for Math, but approached the issue by suggesting that more hands on learning would help.

After asking about ways to help students be engaged in learning, parents were asked about who supports students with homework. Parents responded that students receive support for

homework at home and from the Tlingit Family Learning Centre. Five parents spoke about helping their children with schoolwork (Parents A, D, F1, G1, G2). One spoke about support from the teacher via an email to know the expectations for homework:

Yes, ____ [teacher's first name] is really good about emailing me and he will often come home and say there is no homework and so I will pull out the email and say, "this is what I am expecting from you before tomorrow morning." And [the teacher] will have outlined exactly what is needed for the next day. So, like, [the teacher] goes above and beyond to provide that support. So me having it on a piece of paper helps him to say, "Okay, I need to get this done." (laughter) And then he does it. [The teacher] is really good that way. And if I have no paper, there's nothing extra then he won't do the homework (Parent A).

Parents G1 and G2 elaborated about helping their children with homework:

Parent G1: We do, ____ and ____ both last year because they were in Mrs. ____, they always had reading and journal entries. Every day. And so we do journal entries and reading every day. This year, ____ isn't getting as much homework as ____, so...

Parent G2: He doesn't think it is fair.

Parent G1: That really irks him. So they will come into the kitchen and ____ will whisper, 'mommy, I don't have homework today, so I am just going to read so that ____ doesn't get upset'. They just read anyway. They do, ____ especially, they read, gosh, we have to tell them sometimes, "put down the book". We help them every day with homework. And they get their homework done everyday.

Parent G2: Yah

Two parents spoke about the support their children receive with homework from the Tlingit Family Learning Centre After School Program (Parents C1, D). Two parents said that their children work independently by getting the homework done with little or no support (Parent B) and by getting their homework done at school (Parent E1). One parent spoke about the benefits of homework:

Every night, Yah, she's actually had homework since Kindergarten. I thought it was pretty cool that they got homework from Kindergarten, because I don't recall having homework before Grade 3. The younger they are and the skills you put into them at a young age, in my opinion is the best. Well what I am actually saying is the more responsibilities they have at a younger age makes it easier for them to learn as they get older. (Parent C1)

When I asked this parent if learning a routine was a good thing, the parent agreed with me.

Finally, a parent spoke about the Book Club for students on Monday nights with a member of the

Atlin community (Parent F1). These comments from parents indicate that parents believe that supports are in place at home and in the Atlin community to assist students with homework.

When parents were asked if they or their children get to make choices about what students learn, parents seemed less sure about how to answer. One parent said, “I don’t know” (Parent G1). Another parent replied, “Yeah I’m not too sure what goes on in the classroom. [The teacher] just goes over the work with me and what we need to work on together at home” (Parent C1). A third parent said, very decisively, “No. But it’s because I don’t participate, like I’m not on the PAC and I used to go to parent teacher interviews but I don’t anymore. Last year I decided I just wasn’t going to do it” (Parent B). However, four parents thought that some choices were available. Parent D replied, “I’m not too sure. I think just in English they get to pick what they’re going to write about and stuff” (Parent D). Parent E1 said, “I think so. Yah, well, it depends on the teacher. I am sure if they said, ‘I would like to learn about whatever’ that [the teacher] would probably fit that in somewhere because the teacher seemed so open. It’s really dependent on the teacher.” Parent F1 gave the example of the Heritage Fair projects as a way that students have choices about what they learn. Finally, Parent A answered, “In the past, I have in younger grades. I think this year we wanted to focus upon making sure he had the prerequisites to go into Grade 10.” Except for the Heritage Fair projects, parents seemed less sure about how to answer if students had opportunities for choices about learning. No parents commented that they had ever made suggestions about what their children needed to learn.

Parents have reported ways that teachers currently make learning easier or fun and made suggestions for more ways to engage learners. Parents’ comments indicate that they feel that they are able to support their children with learning. Some parents reported opportunities their

children had in school to make choices about learning, but some parents seemed unsure about how to respond to this question.

Teachers' Perceptions of Developing Lifelong learners

Much of the discussion at the focus group meeting with the TFLC staff focused on promoting students' social, emotional, and cognitive development. Social skills to learn included turn-taking, wait time, following instructions and sharing. Emotional development involved learning kindness, confidence, self-regulation, and the ability to identify feelings. To promote cognitive development the program for preschoolers at the TFLC was focused on becoming familiar with the alphabet including sounds and tracing letters, counting to twenty, and identifying, tracing, and printing one's name. The TFLC staff also spoke about the importance of giving students choices and guiding children to make good choices "so that they know what it is like to be uncomfortable, but not overly stressed." Comments from the TFLC staff were focused upon developing preschoolers' repertoire of skills and experiences to prepare them for future learning.

Teacher interview schedules contained similar questions as the student and parent interview schedules to determine teaching strategies that help students engage in learning, complete homework, and make choices about what they are learning. When teachers were asked what makes learning fun, Teacher C began:

Well I think it is a really interesting question because if school isn't fun why would students come here and to me that is the key component. So to make it fun, to make someplace where they feel that they can come and feel safe, enjoy what they are doing. And once you start enjoying what you are doing, you can start learning. If you have always got your guard up, or you are not enjoying, or you are finding it just humdrum and boring, well, it would be really difficult to come and actually engage in what we are doing.

Teacher B answered this question with, “A repertoire of things, of ways of approaching things.”

When I asked if there was anything to add about making school enjoyable, Teacher A spoke about assisting students to have a dream:

I think doing things that expand their horizons beyond, beyond what’s here. Because I don’t, I have found that a lot of kids they don’t, they have never been beyond Whitehorse. They don’t know that there are alternatives. And some people, some of the kids have never been out of Atlin, which I find surprising. So I think bringing in things that open up their eyes and broaden their horizons to make them realize that there is a big world out there are lots of different choices and that you don’t have to settle for the one or two choices that a lot of people seem to settle for staying in here. That you can have a dream.

To illustrate further, Teacher A gave the example of a lesson when an RCMP member came in as a guest presenter with a forensic evidence kit and taught about the many ways that forensics works. Teacher A stated, “So he just focused mainly on finger printing. The kids had no idea that that sort of process existed and they had no idea of the information that can be collected that way. So doing more things like that.” Teachers’ comments indicate that a variety of learning activities and choices about learning opportunities are necessary to keep learning fun.

When I asked teachers about strategies they use to address the needs of all students, teachers spoke about giving students multiple ways to show what they have learned and teaching independence. Teacher C explained, “Getting them to show that they can demonstrate that they have reached the outcomes through different means rather than putting pen to paper all the time. Actually showing us, talking to us, sitting down and interviewing them, and having small group discussions.” Teacher D gave an example of using multiple means for instruction:

I have incorporated Mathletics, the online one and Power of 10, because they allow individualized learning completely. Mathletics is at their own pace. They are doing their own assignments. I have one student for example, if there’s one hundred assignments for the goal over the year, she has done like forty already. Others have done two.

Teacher D described how Mathletics teaches students to be independent learners who “can learn on their own two feet” because they can try on their own, watch an online video, or ask the

teacher for assistance. Teacher D commented, “Like my goal, every teacher’s goal I think is to become unnecessary.” To achieve this goal, Teacher D elaborated about the importance of having routines in place and teaching routines to students, although Teacher D’s comment spoke about ways to manage as a teacher as well:

I want to say routine, that’s just me because then I think, at least, it is easier for me as a teacher to monitor what they are missing because there is a lot of absenteeism. People will be away, that also helps me to know what they have missed or what they could do in compensation. So last month, I had three students away for like three weeks, so that’s a big chunk of time and so at least I know.

In answer to this question about meeting the needs of students, Teacher A said, “It’s all individualized instruction and a lot of modeling and guided practice and then independent practice.” Teacher A went on to explain how this is achieved in a multi-grade classroom by having everyone working on the same subject at a table with the teacher moving students to sit beside the teacher as they need assistance. Teacher A used the phrase, “like a revolving door” to describe this scene where everyone is working on the Ministry of Education Prescribed Learning Outcomes for a similar topic, but at their individual grade levels.

According to the staff at Atlin School, student support for homework comes in varying degrees from parents, the Tlingit Family Learning Centre (TFLC), and the Homework Club.

Teacher C described a positive partnership with TRTFN regarding homework:

For the younger kids, the Afterschool Program at the TFLC works really, really well. The kids get a lot of support down there to get their homework done. And then when they go home, families at that level get really involved with what the students are doing with their homework activities.

Supporting older students with homework seemed to be a bit more challenging than supporting younger students. Teacher C stated, “[We] had more difficulty engaging parents in the homework regime with the older kids.” Teachers A and C mentioned that older students received support with homework from the Homework Club. Teacher A commented that a handful of

students attended the Homework Club regularly, but some did not participate. In Fall 2015, Teacher D discussed how homework that is sent home is often lost or not returned. Two teachers explained their philosophies that homework was only for work that was not completed in class time (Teachers A, D). Teacher D elaborated:

No, I don't give homework because I find that it doesn't get returned. At this age anyway, it is not being returned. They even forget to bring it home and often parents are not home or they are absent. So I would rather, if they don't finish what they do in school, then it is homework. But I like to allot enough time so that home can be learning home stuff. I guess that's my philosophy on homework anyway, allowing enough time in class for them to get done, specifically what needs to get done, and if parents are wanting that extra help and I am able to give that help, then I will gladly give that extra help. But just out of fairness for all of them because some of them don't have that support at home or don't have someone forcing them or making them to do. I would never make it part of marks.

Teachers' comments suggest that the Afterschool Program with the TFLC for younger students and the Homework Club for older students are beneficial, but that not all older students take advantage of these supports.

From the teachers' perceptions, students have choices at Atlin School for extra curricular activities and academic learning. Teachers commented that students have opportunities to give input into extra curricular activities, such as, noon hour sports and themes for Spirit Week (Teacher C). Teachers also indicated that students have opportunities to make choices what they are learning. Teacher A stated, "I do my planning based on the IRP's [Integrated Resource Packages, i.e. British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum guides] and the PLO's [British Columbia Ministry of Education Prescribed Learning Outcomes] and then personal interest too.

Teacher A clarified:

For Science we have done Project Based Learning. We tried that with them this year. So what we did was look through the IRP's. Look at what must be covered and then had the students look at that. What are you interested in? These are the topics. What do you want to

find out more about? And so they chose what they were interested in. So that was kind of neat. They did research on the computer, plus book research. So primary source research.⁶⁵

Teacher D gave more examples of ways for students to have choices while following the Prescribed Learning Outcomes. Teacher D said:

They get choices in how they demonstrate their learning. And it depends on the course of course. It depends on what we are doing, like if it's Language Arts and we are doing the news, they get to search what kind of news interests them and they want to share with everyone.

In another example, Teacher D elaborated, "Same with Poetry. I like to do a sharing time, so that's where they get to choose, whether it's a poem they like, or a news story they like, or a story they like. So they can have their own choice in that." Teacher C also described Language Arts and Project Based Learning as opportunities for choice. Teacher C also described a pilot project in Spring 2015 where students made choices about learning, "We did a big project that was specifically around Project Based Learning. So we tried it out with the four to nine classes as a pilot project that was separate from Heritage Fair or Science Fair." From teachers' perceptions, students have opportunities to make choices about what they are learning during Language Arts and in Project Based Learning for Science and Social Studies.

Teachers also described challenges for providing choices for students. Teacher D illuminated:

In terms of teaching, I guess I am still stuck in "if I have to teach the Chemistry unit, how do I let them determine what they want to learn in Chemistry because I have a curriculum to follow. When you have outcomes to fulfill so that they are learning the same as all kids across B.C. that is where it is hard to let them choose what they want to learn. I think projects are important. So how they decide to demonstrate their learning can be through art or even a model, or through sculpture or a video. There are so many formats, but if we

⁶⁵ One of the learning outcomes in the British Columbia Ministry of Education Integrated Resource Packages for many grades is to teach students to gather information from primary rather than secondary sources of information. For example, students might read historical documents on the Internet, instead of reading books, which report the information in historical documents. For example, in Grade 4 Social Studies (see <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/social-studies/4>) students are expected to be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources of information (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016b).

don't teach them what they are learning in Grade 5, then they get to Grade 6 and it's that domino effect of getting frustrated cause they missed a key step. So trying to balance it out.

However, despite the challenges, Teacher D seemed enthusiastic and creative about giving choices to students in the classroom. Teacher D had future plans for student choice based upon previous practice:

I haven't actually brought it in, but I have it on our timetable where we do "Whatever Wednesdays." And I did this last year in _____. So they can search whatever they want within a structured format. They would spend their morning thinking of a question that they really want to answer, something that really interests them, and then they would spend the midmorning researching that question, and then in the afternoon they would all present the answer to their question. I need to bring that in.

When I asked teachers to elaborate about the challenges of providing choices while teaching the required curriculum for multiple grades in the classroom, Teacher A explained that there are similarities between what is expected to be taught for each grade level. Teacher A replied, "There's similarities and themes. You do the same thing when you are researching a topic and then often it is just pointing them in the right direction." We then discussed how this approach to teaching is a reverse of putting the process rather than the topic first in the planning of lessons. My response to Teacher A in the interview was, "So its, that's a flip. A lot of teachers think of teaching in terms of, 'I am going to teach this topic', but if you teach, 'I am teaching this process' then it doesn't matter what topic you are going to go do because you are working on process. Our discussion seemed to give direction for future planning about giving students choice about what they learn, i.e. that students have more opportunities for choice when assignments focus upon process as well as product as students do research through Project Based Learning.

Reflections about Developing Lifelong Learners

The TRTFN Education Committee responded to students' answers about lifelong learning. A committee member stated, "They all see the importance of learning." The committee had an interesting discussion about the language we use with students when we speak about school, citing words such as, "schoolwork" and "homework". We also had a discussion about how to instill in children that learning is a lifelong journey, and not tasks to complete. One member of the committee asked another, "What do you say to your grandchildren when you want to teach them something?" The other member commented, "I say, come here, you guys, I'm going to skin a rabbit" and added that her grandchildren tell her, "You teach us such neat things." The grandmother attributed the children's comments to the fact that the learning is "hands on." Our discussion was inconclusive. We thought that the comments about school as work might mean that students have a good work ethic or are proud of their work and that their comments were something to notice.

The TRTFN Education Committee thought that comments from students indicated that teachers see how each child learns and that teachers have "a good grasp of the needs of the students." (TRTFN Education Committee, October 20, 2015, discussion). However, they thought that students would like the opportunity to make more choices about what they are learning.

My reflections about developing lifelong learners are presented here as five topics: 1) students' maturity in the way that they talk about their responsibilities for learning, 2) parental awareness of what happens in the classroom, 3) support and responsibility for homework, 4) opportunities for making choices about learning, and 5) absenteeism. My initial reactions to hearing the comments from students were that the students were very knowledgeable and responsible about their roles as students. For example, when students spoke about wanting more

free time at school their choices for activities during that time were related to learning rather than play. As well, students seemed knowledgeable about teaching strategies and could articulate many strategies the teachers use to support learning, for example, sitting with a table group, explaining, showing a lesson on the board, giving a clue, repeating directions, demonstrating an easier way, helping until the student understands, and using multiple strategies to solve problems. These comments from students are evidence to me that students understand the responsibilities that come with being a student.

Although supports are in place to assist students with homework completion, students, parents, and teachers comments did not seem as aligned with respect to homework as they were for other topics. Students and parents believe that students receive support with homework, however teachers' comments indicated that improvement is needed with homework completion. Not all students took advantage of the Homework Club and when it was discontinued in Fall 2016, Teacher D spoke about the challenges of having students complete homework. Teacher C mentioned that homework completion was an issue for older students. I was fortunate to observe students doing homework at both the TFLC After School Program and the Homework Club. In both programs, the facilitators offered encouragement and incentives to ensure that homework was done. I wonder what steps are being put in place to assist students to be independent with homework to prepare them for situations later in life when these supports may not be available.

I was very excited to hear students, parents, and teachers speak about students' opportunities to make decisions about what they are learning through Project Based Learning because of the connections between making choices and self-determination. As I mentioned in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, Bishop (2011) and Hynds and Sleeter (2011) advocate that providing students with opportunities to make choices prepares them for self-determination.

Another benefit of Project Based Learning is that Indigenous students can choose to include traditional knowledge in their projects, which can in turn raise the prestige of Indigenous culture and Indigenous peoples. I was fortunate to attend two Heritage Fairs in Atlin (2015 and 2016) and to observe the pride in students as they demonstrated their presentations. As well, I followed the three finalists for the 2015 Heritage Fair to Whitehorse for the Yukon Heritage Fair competition and was able to witness pride again amongst the contestants and family members from Atlin. At the time, I thought that events such as Heritage and Science Fairs give Indigenous students opportunities to share their cultures and raise the prestige of their First Nations in the eyes of others. Project Based Learning is one way that students in Atlin School have been given opportunities to make choices about what they are learning. I believe that building upon this strength of the school would be advantageous for all students in the future.

An important topic to discuss, which was not asked in the interviews but came up in conversations, is the issue of students being absent from school. Teachers (in interviews) and Superintendent Mike Gordon (conversation, March 5, 2015) raised the issue of absenteeism for students at Atlin School and in SD87. School District 87 (Stikine)'s attendance records show that on average students miss thirty one days per year, with spikes for Kindergarten and Grade 12 to forty three and forty four days respectively. The following excerpt from the *School District*

No.87 Achievement Contract 2014-15 articulates the issue with attendance:

Frequently mentioned in this report is student attendance. The data is quite staggering. The significant impact of attendance on academic performance cannot be ignored and it is a priority of the school district and its staff to positively impact the attendance rates of students. Numerous factors impact attendance rates. These include cultural practices around deaths in communities; geographic isolation; the modelled importance of school. The important cultural practices are to be valued and promoted; however most attendance issues arise from the isolation and the current priority placed on school. (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015a, 24)

If students miss thirty-one days per year on average, then after thirteen years of schooling they will have missed approximately four hundred days, which is the equivalent of two school years. This is even more significant if students do not complete Grades 11 and 12. Students who leave school after Grades 9 or 10 may have in effect only been in school for eight to nine years. School District 87 (Stikine) has made attendance levels a priority for improvement and an objective for improving numeracy and literacy. In the *School District No. 87 Stikine Superintendent's Report on Achievement 2014-15*, Superintendent Mike Gordon explains that the geographical distances to larger centres, for example, for medical appointments, impact attendance because a trip could take three days, however, he also states that raising the importance of attendance is an initiative of the district (School District 87 (Stikine) 2015b).

My final topic for discussion about developing lifelong learners is the fact that while parents were able to name ways that teachers make learning fun and easy for students, they seemed to be less sure of how to answer the two questions about making learning fun and easy. Sometimes parents were very aware of classroom activities and other times I thought that two way communication between home and school could be improved to the point where parents and teachers are more involved as partners. An example of this would be sharing with parents about ways that teachers effectively address the multiple grades in classrooms. My visits in classrooms at Atlin School and the comments from students, parents, and teachers assure me that students are receiving the attention they need in Atlin School despite the multiple grades in each class. Because class sizes are about ten students per teacher compared to eighteen to twenty six students elsewhere in the province,⁶⁶ I am surprised when parents in Atlin have commented to

⁶⁶ As an aside, in larger classes in the province, the range in abilities for reading, writing, and arithmetic can be extensive as well. Sometimes I wonder if one of the issues for Indigenous students transitions to secondary schools, particularly for those students who must leave their small communities and small classrooms for larger school and

me in interviews and in casual conversations that the multiple grades in each class is a problem (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016a). It seems that teachers have many strategies in place to accommodate for multiple grades, that students welcome opportunities to mentor younger students, and that students are receiving far more individualized attention than they receive in larger schools outside of Atlin. I wonder what could be put in place so that parents' concerns regarding multi-aged classrooms can be relieved.

Sometimes, the comments from community members were more extreme. At the Comprehensive Community Planning session (March 5, 2015), I introduced myself and our project to a community member and she immediately said, "They hit our kids and yell in their face."⁶⁷ This is just one example of the message and tone that I sometimes heard in comments from community members about education that indicate parents' distrust of the education system. Another example of lack of trust in the system was the tone of the conversations at the focus group session for grandparents. Although the grandparents did not speak about their own experiences in school, I wondered how many of them were thinking of their own experiences in residential schools as we spoke about sending their grandchildren away for secondary school. Since the 1970's and 80's researchers have written about the mistrust between parents and educators. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) and Walberg (1984) wrote about the misunderstandings and mistrust between parents and educators which Chavkin and Williams (1987) attributed to misconceptions about each other's roles and abilities. Haynes et al. (1989) and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978) claimed that teachers view parent involvement as a threat to their decision-making authority. Eisenhart et al. (1988) reported that teachers view interactions with others as

community environments, is the fact that students from small communities often attend schools with small classes and a family feeling in the building.

⁶⁷ This particular comment was surprising because in my four years of visiting in Atlin I have only witnessed respectful interactions between teachers and students.

interruptions that keep them from teaching the children. Although, changes have occurred in the past decades, I wonder if the findings of researchers in the 1980's, since Lawrence-Lighthouse's watershed book, *Worlds Apart: Relationships between Families and Schools* (1978), still hold true today. For Indigenous families, I believe that the mistrust between parents and educators that escalated when Indigenous children were removed from homes to attend residential schools is still evident in many communities in Canada. If partnerships are to be rebuilt between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada to improve education for Indigenous students, parents and educators need to be aware of and address the historical barriers that may impede progress.

Students' Future Plans

The third and final section of this chapter, Students' Future Plans, includes comments from students, parents, and teachers include responses to questions about career choices and transition to high school.

Students' Perceptions about Students' Future Plans

The last three interview questions about school in general asked students about their future plans, specifically, questions about career choices, transition to secondary school, and whether or not students might stay in Atlin for Grade 10 rather than transitioning to Whitehorse. Students mentioned a variety of career choices, such as, becoming a doctor, nurse or dentist (Students B, J), a doctor (Student J), a heavy-duty mechanic or welder (Student C), a carpenter or chef (Student D), a hair stylist (Student E), an artist (Student F), a pianist (Student G), a scientist (Student H), an employee in retail for computer games (Student A), and a sports player (Student M). There were few hesitations in answering questions about future career plans, however not all

students named a career choice. Two students said, “go to college” (Student K) and “probably get a job” (Student L) and younger students said they did not yet know what they would like to do.

As I mentioned earlier, the trend in Atlin for many years has been for students from Atlin School to move to Whitehorse to complete Grades 10, 11, and 12. Students in Atlin have a choice to stay in Atlin to acquire Grades 10, 11, and 12 through Atlin School or through correspondence. However, for many years now, students typically move to Whitehorse to live in dormitories to attend high school. SD87 purchases education from the Yukon for B.C. students.⁶⁸ The success rates are not high. Graduation rates for these students are not available from SD87 because technically the students are registered in the Yukon (Superintendent Mike Gordon, June 22, 2015, personal conversation). However some information is available about success rates. For example, in September 2015, five students from TRTFN moved to Whitehorse and by Christmas 2015, four had returned to Atlin to continue their studies in a variety of ways through School District 87 (Stikine). Two students re-enrolled at Atlin School. Two students were provided with alternate programs of study. Therefore, parents and teachers in Atlin are understandably concerned about the transition to secondary school for Atlin students.

When I asked students where they would go to school for Grade 10 and beyond, most spoke about moving from Atlin. Seven students said they had plans to attend school in Whitehorse (Students A, B, C, G, H, K, L), two said they might be moving from British Columbia (Students D, E), one said they would stay in Atlin (Student I), one did not know

⁶⁸ At the start of every school year, school districts submit enrollment statistics to the B.C. Ministry of Education, which determine the funding per student that the respective school district will receive for the district’s annual operating budget. School District 87 (Stikine) transfers the funding for Atlin students attending school in Whitehorse to the Yukon government.

(Student F), and three students were not asked.⁶⁹ Three students talked about a need to move on to learn about the world outside of Atlin (Students A, B, C). One student explained with more detail, “Like the work doesn’t bother me, it’s the people here. Small school, everyone knows each other. Everyone knows, like knows (with emphasis) people very well” (Student B). The student went on to say, “We are so used to each other because we have known each other so well since we were like toddlers. So like people act themselves and sometimes they get a little goofy and start yelling or doing weird funny things that normally people wouldn’t do” (Student B). When I asked if the student would come back to Atlin, the student said, “I would probably go to a city or something. Vancouver and come home to visit in Atlin” (Student B). When I asked the student if the prospects of going to Whitehorse in the fall were exciting, the student said, “Yes. And having more change and experience. Cause I have lived in Atlin my whole life. I have kind of experienced everything there is to offer” (Student B). Another student said, “I’ve stayed here 12 years and I’m ready to see how hard Whitehorse is” (Student C). When I asked these three students about supports in Whitehorse, all three mentioned that support would be available from other family members in Whitehorse. The student’s comments did not negate their experiences of school in Atlin, but rather seemed to indicate that students have a desire to learn more and to experience communities outside of Atlin.

Parents’ and Grandparents’ Perceptions about Students’ Future Plans

The questions for parents in the interviews asked about their children’s career choices and plans for Grades 10, 11, and 12. Some parents said their children did not know yet about a career

⁶⁹ The three young students who were not asked had indicated in the previous question about their career choices that they had not yet thought about their futures. In hindsight, I probably could have asked the questions about high school, however due to the ages of the students I made the decision not to include the high school questions.

choice (Parents B, C1, E1, E2, G2), but others said their children had talked about their career aspirations. Parent B replied,

She doesn't know yet. She's trying to figure it out. I mean she's said things over the years like doctor, nurse, but nothing really. I've been telling her she needs to figure it out, but she really likes Sciences. Outdoor Ed stuff. So I don't know. But right now she says she doesn't know. I don't know, she's never told me what she wants to do. What does she want to do (wondering)?

Parents E1 and E2 replied that their children did not know yet (E1) because they were "having too much fun" (E2) "in life" (E1). Parent G1 thought the children were too young to know.

Parent D said one child wanted to be a scientist and the other wanted to be "an artist like her grandmother." Parent F1 answered "she wanted to become famous and be a dancer or a singer, but now I think that changed a little bit." Parents seemed to be more challenged than students to answer this question.

Because most students move to Whitehorse for Grades 10, 11, and 12, parents were asked, "Have you considered having your child take Grades 10, 11, or 12 in Atlin?" Responses varied. Parent A responded, "We said that's not an option to him because children that have stayed behind, young people that have stayed behind to do school in Atlin have never been able to leave Atlin. So we want him to go to Whitehorse and explore his options and have different opportunities over there." Two families talked about moving to Whitehorse when the time came (Parents D, F1). Other parents responded that they preferred that their children stayed in Atlin. Parent E1 said, "_____ is saying he wants to stay here. Well now he is saying he wants to go there, but that is just a teenage thing. He wants to get out of Atlin. Our preference would be if they could do it here, they wouldn't have a choice. If it was available here, they just wouldn't leave. But it is not available here." Some parents did not want their children to stay in Atlin, while others wanted their children to move on to new experiences.

Parents spoke about the trauma of leaving the community to acquire Grades 10, 11, and 12.

One parent replied:

She didn't even want to move from Atlin. So when we started telling her that for high school she had to move, so this was about three years ago, cause I always tell her well in advance (emphasis) what we're doing. And it meant moving, and so she bawled her eyes out and thought she was going to work at the Pine Tree⁷⁰ when she was fifteen and go to the college for high school. That's when the college was open for the high school students. She was bawling her eyes out (Parent identification withheld for anonymity).

The parent then said that the student had now changed her mind about leaving. When I asked about the change, the parent replied, "I think because her peers were all going and her cousins from other communities are moving into the dorm (pause) and I think it's appealing to go live out on your own. It's like the dorm. Like she thinks she's moving out" (Parent B). Another parent said, "So here we are. He's going into Grade 9 in high school in Whitehorse and he is terrified. He doesn't feel like he is academically ready. Or emotionally ready I think too" (Parent identity withheld to preserve anonymity). Another parent compared the process to residential school. Parent E1 said:

It is like a continuation of residential school. You know like where our kids have to be separated from their parents when they are too young. You know we are still instilling cultural values. The kids leave at the time when they are supposed to be getting their first moose, you know right at the time when they are supposed to be doing lots of first things. And they are going to be taken to Whitehorse.

These comments show the difficult decisions parents are making for and with their children at the age of fourteen about how to acquire schooling for Grades 10, 11, and 12.

On October 22, 2015 when I interviewed one of the parents, the parent shared concerns about their child's transition to Whitehorse. Parent F1 said, "She seems to be enjoying it. She is a little behind in a couple of subjects, well in one subject anyway, but for the most part it's, she's doing well" and "She's adjusting okay I think (hesitation in parent's voice). I think she just has

⁷⁰ The Pine Tree is the local gas station and restaurant in Atlin.

that lonely feeling though, cause she is away from home and family.” The parent also spoke about stress, “The stress. Like I have worried about her all the time. I wonder how she is doing? What she is up to? Me too, it’s tough, cause I am so used to being there for her all the time in a heartbeat, a phone call away, I’ll be there in two minutes, but now it’s two hours away” (Parent F1). By Christmas 2015, Parent F1’s child had returned to Atlin.⁷¹

At the Grandparents’ luncheon, we had a lengthy discussion about the challenges of making the transition to secondary school. This was due to the fact that TRTFN students who had left for Whitehorse in September had all returned home in the weeks before the luncheon. Grandparents were concerned about grandchildren leaving their families to go to school in Whitehorse. One grandparent spoke at length about the how devastating it was for the sibling and the entire family when her granddaughter left to go to Whitehorse and how challenging it was for her granddaughter in Whitehorse to make responsible decisions. The grandparent commented, “There needs to be more exposure for the children to make the transition from leaving home and going into a city.” Grandparents were concerned about the children from communities all across the north, such as, students from Teslin, Old Crow, Lower Post, and Haines Junction who make the transition from small communities to Whitehorse. At the session, they brainstormed solutions, which included creating a home in Whitehorse parented by parents from Atlin, acquiring bussing to bring children in Whitehorse home to Atlin for the weekends, and hiring a youth liaison person to support the TRTFN students in Whitehorse. Grandparents were unaware that students have the option to stay in Atlin School for Grade 10. Tammy Fetterly explained to the grandparents that, “nobody has taken advantage of it because all the kids want that right of

⁷¹ To preserve confidentiality, I am reluctant to share details or reasons why students returned to Atlin except to say that the reasons included expulsions and suspensions from school (due to fighting and use of drugs or alcohol) and returning to Atlin because adult family members missed the student (Superintendent Mike Gordon, March 18, 2016, personal conversation).

passage to be able to go to Whitehorse and not have Mom and Dad looking over their shoulder.”

Most of the discussion at the grandparents’ focus group was about the transition to secondary school in Whitehorse and the conversations were quite emotional at times.

To summarize this section about future plans, parents and grandparents expressed concerns about their children’s transition to Grades 10, 11, and 12 and particularly the prospect of moving their children away from home to Whitehorse to attend school away from their families at such a young age.

Teachers’ Perceptions about Students’ Future Plans

One teacher seemed to know students’ plans for career choices. When asked about students’ goals, Teacher A said:

One boy wants to get into movies somehow either directing or producing or acting, something to do with movies. One girl wants to be a hairdresser. Another one wants to be a published author. One of them wants to go have a career in music. Not sure what yet, but something to do with the music industry. Another girl wants to work with animals and she is thinking of being a vet. One of boys wants to, he’s got two career choices. He wants to be the next Rick Mercer or a heavy equipment operator. But he is a little scared to leave town.

The other teachers may not have been able to respond to the question about career choices because one teacher had only been Atlin School for two months at the time of the interview and the others taught younger students or had different roles in the school from that of the classroom teacher.

Teachers’ comments about transition to high school addressed local issues for Atlin students and their families as well as supports that would ease transition. Teachers A, C and D spoke about the reasons students choose to go to Whitehorse to attend Grades 10, 11, and 12.

Teacher C suggested course work was a key factor, commenting:

And the main reason for that is the specialty courses that they can offer up there. It is really difficult for us to offer a full academic program, for example, having courses like Math 11, 12, Physics 11, 12, Chemistry 11 and 12. It is really difficult for us to do. Students that are looking for a career in the Science or the heavy Math can be better served in the Yukon.

Teacher A stated: “I think because for so long it’s expected that you will go to Whitehorse for Grade 10 by the community and the parents.” Teacher A added “We would like to see Grades 10, 11, and 12 offered here for sure because what has traditionally happened is everybody goes to Whitehorse, some of them are successful, some of them are not. They come back to Atlin and that is it. They just hang out at home” and “Oh yah, there’s five that are moving on next year. They all want to go. I have two Grade 8’s that want to stay here and the parents have said if the opportunity exists they would like their children to stay here.” These two comments again demonstrate the difficult decisions parents make about sending their children to Whitehorse or keeping them in Atlin. During my interviews with students and parents it seemed that parents did not realize that staying at Atlin School for Grade 10 was an option for students. Superintendent Mike Gordon assured me that staying in Atlin has always been an option, but students and parents choose to move to Whitehorse (March 5, 2015, personal conversation). He explained that because of the poor success rates in the past years, School District 87 (Stikine) was looking at ensuring that parents are informed that remaining in Atlin School for Grade 10, 11 and 12 is an option and at making Grade 10 classes look more appealing to students by offering elective coursework and apprenticeship training through the Skills Training Employment Training (STEP) program at Atlin Taku Economic Limited Partnership (ATELP) in Atlin (Superintendent Mike Gordon, March 18, 2016, personal conversation). Teacher C commented on plans for the future:

However, we are at the point now where we have a number of students who are coming through that could finish their, potentially finish their high school in Atlin. So we are looking at ways where we can do that with them. So it’s pretty exciting because we are

looking at bridging, doing some things with ATELP [Atlin Tlingit Economic Ltd Partnership]⁷², which is the program out at Como Lake [Como Lake Reserve, Highway 7, ten kilometers north of Atlin], tying in with their trades program starting in Grade 9. So students who are in Grade 9 could have a taste of what it would really be like to work in a shop. And have those opportunities so that they can start looking at what they want to do for a career and perhaps work jointly with us in Grades 10, 11, and 12. We would do the academic program here at Atlin School and they would have other opportunities to do their trade training in a shop that could be out at ATELP. (Teacher C).

It will be interesting to follow up with my research partners during the 2016/2017 school year to see what develops for older students in Atlin.

Whether or not students attend high school in Whitehorse or Atlin, students still need preparation for the experiences of secondary school and beyond. According to teachers' comments, some strategies are in place at Atlin School to support this transition: a Career Fair, the British Columbia Ministry of Education Planning 10 course, and opportunities to work independently. Teacher C described the success of the first Career Fair in Atlin in June 2015, "It was another joint effort between the school and the community. And we had over twenty different careers represented in a small town like Atlin, which was absolutely amazing." Teacher C described some of the exhibits by the Atlin Board of Trade, Yukon College, the RCMP, the ambulance and local health care providers, the highway maintenance contractors who brought in heavy machinery, and a helicopter company who landed a helicopter on the field. Teacher C described the reaction of student to the Career Fair:

So, again, that ties in to the future after Grade 9 with these students starting to think about, "Heh, I can stay here and still be okay." Because they had no idea and when they saw everything that was here, it opened up their eyes and they thought, "wow, I do not have to go out."

⁷² The focus of the Atlin Tlingit Economic Limited Partnership is to build capacity for TRTFN by supporting life skills training, on the job training, employment, and employment support. The mandate for ATELP is "to empower TRT citizens to develop sustainable careers while upholding Tlingit values that maintain the physical and spiritual values of the TRT Traditional Territory" (TRTFN, 2016a).

Clearly, opportunities such as a Career Fair assist students to make career choices.

Teacher D described how Planning 10 is also an important tool to assist students to determine their future directions:

Planning 10 is great. I am glad I am doing that now because they can learn about, “this is what you need, these are your options. If your goal is to graduate, if that is what you want, then this is how you get there. If you want to just start a family and drop out in Grade 10, this is your option. You know like knowing those different paths. Cause not that one is right or wrong, but I think that they really need to know where they want to go. So Planning 10 is a great course. So I am glad that these students can learn it early cause when they get to Whitehorse and there are so many other factors coming in effecting their life that it might even seem overwhelming.

Teachers’ comments suggest that more strategies might be needed to assist students and family members with the transition to high school, such as learning independence and family support.

Teacher D spoke to the issue of transitioning to secondary school and beyond by explaining the importance of knowing how to be independent:

Again, they need to be self-directed learners. Because if there is not the population here to have a teacher to teach that grade and because it’s multi-grade, kids already have to be independent because it’s a lot of areas for one teacher to teach, especially high school. Teachers need to be more specific. They need to know Chemistry in order to teach Chemistry 12, for example. So they are going to have to do a lot of online distance courses, should they stay here. And if they can’t do it by themselves, they are not going to succeed. Or if they don’t have tutors or parent supports that can help them with that, they are also not going to succeed.

Teacher D has described one of the challenges of staying in a small community for secondary school coursework.

Finally, in the interviews, Teacher D raised an important point about the need for family support in order for students to make smooth transitions to secondary school:

And I know that some students, their families actually missed them too. So their families play a part in not necessarily quite letting them out of the nest. You know like missing them and it is young to be letting them go. So I have seen some that might just feel, “it’s okay. The kids should come back and they can stay at home” without really pushing them and giving them the support to stay there. Maybe they’re not able to because they can’t be

there with them or they don't have family in Whitehorse to support them. So if they are in the dorms, that can be harder too.

Teacher D added that family support is really important for students' success, but did not elaborate with details. Teacher D also commented that students "really need to be introduced and brought to Whitehorse," but did not give details about how this might be accomplished.

Teachers' comments indicate that they believe that preparing for the transition to secondary school is important, although I wondered if the parents, community members, and teachers in Atlin might do more to plan for students' futures. I will share more of my thoughts about this idea in the next section.

Reflections about Students' Future Plans

The members of the TRTFN Education Committee agreed that students were confident in their choices about career aspirations and that work needed to be done to change students' perceptions that they need to go to Whitehorse for school. A committee member said, "I think we need to make Atlin a viable option so that children don't think that Whitehorse is a right of passage" and added that the way that adults talk to students about transitioning to higher grades ought to make Whitehorse sound like the second best option. She stated, "Students need to perceive Atlin as the first best choice for Grades 10, 11, and 12." We spoke about how even young children think they will be going to Whitehorse because their parents went to Whitehorse and that work needs to be done to change the perceptions of students and parents about completing high school another way.

As I witnessed the stories of transitioning to secondary school from Atlin to Whitehorse I wondered, "At what age are students prepared and independent enough to be successful in larger educational institutions?" Even if students in Atlin could stay at home for Grades 10, or 11, or

12, at some point if students wish to attend trade schools, colleges, or universities, they will need to leave home. How are First Nations students from the north being prepared for these transitions?

The topic of transitions to high school came up often during my visits to Atlin because I was there in May and June 2015 when parents and teachers were preparing students for the transition to Whitehorse and in October and November 2015 when students were returning to Atlin for an alternative education program for high school. In the interviews Teacher D and Parent F1 spoke about bringing the students to Whitehorse ahead of time to prepare for the move. Youth Coordinator Vince Esquiro and Education Manager Tammy Fetterly spoke extensively about the need for transition visits to Whitehorse at the TRTFN Education Committee meeting on November 25, 2015 as did community members when I went for lunch on Tuesdays at the TRTFN Band Office. At this point, Vince Esquiro had been making weekly trips to Whitehorse to host a Teen Night to connect with students from Atlin as they transitioned to Whitehorse. Parents spoke about trying to get a bus to bring students home on weekends and purchasing a home through TRTFN with house parents from Atlin as mentioned earlier. I hope that TRTFN and SD87 can work in partnership in the future to create a Transition Plan for Atlin students.

I want to emphasize that the issues for transitions to secondary school are not only unique to Atlin. All over the north students as young as twelve years old make moves to larger centres to acquire schooling. At the TRTFN Education Committee meeting in November, Vince and Tammy told me how young teenagers were hanging out in the downtown Whitehorse in the late afternoons and evenings looking for something to do and making connections with others who are living in dormitories. Later that day, I witnessed at least one hundred young teens roaming

the streets in downtown Whitehorse looking as if they were at a party or a school dance. A first step to making improvements to education for Indigenous students in Canada would be to improve access to education for students in small northern communities. This will require creativity and most certainly partnerships between First Nations and educational institutions.

Students, parents, and teachers who were interviewed for this project made comments that could be useful for planning for transitions. Students expressed a desire to acquire new experiences and meet new people. Parents articulated their desires for their children to have more experiences in life and their concerns about sending their children away for schooling. Teachers spoke about the need to prepare students for the future with family support and opportunities to learn independence as well as experiences such as Career Fairs and Planning 10. The conclusions I would draw from the comments are that ideas expressed by students, parents, and teachers could be used as a framework to create a Transition Plan for Atlin students.⁷³ I hope that the comments from participants in this project can be viewed as community assets to build upon in a partnership between TRTFN and SD87. The successful Career Fair, for example, is an event that could be continued and expanded upon in the future. It is a fine example of celebrating and demonstrating to students the opportunities that are available in the community.⁷⁴ I believe that the British Columbia curriculum needs to be expanded from what is happening in the present in classrooms to what will happen in the future for students. Educators and communities need training and support to prepare young people for the careers that will be available to them if they

⁷³ It is common for schools in British Columbia to plan for students' transitions from elementary school to junior high school and from junior high school to secondary school. During my experiences in three school districts transition planning was a big part of our final term of the school year. This included many meetings between the school personnel at both the leaving and the receiving school.

⁷⁴ I am indebted to my Okanagan friend, Jami Tonasket, for teaching me to think about students' futures within their home communities. In 2014, Jami Tonasket constantly reminded us at Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement meetings in SD22 Vernon to think about, "What will our children do in our own community?"

wish to remain in their hometowns and territories. Transition planning for students is about capacity building for communities and could be a part of every comprehensive community planning session.⁷⁵

Summary of Students' Experiences at School

My personal reflections have been shared at the end of each subsection of this chapter. Students, parents, and teachers were quite positive about students' experiences in Atlin School, although parents and teachers were very concerned about transitions to secondary school. This chapter summary reviews the main points raised by students, parents, and teachers in their interview comments.

Students', parents' and teachers' comments provided information about the best things about school, developing lifelong learners, and students' future plans. Students, parents, and teachers perceptions about students' experiences at school were positive. Students' favourite activities and subjects included all academic areas as well as the social, physical, and emotional aspects of school. Students view school as work and welcome opportunities to help others and work in collaborative groups. Students felt that they are given opportunities through Project Based Learning to have choices about their learning, however they would like more opportunities for choices. Comments from parents and teachers confirmed and elaborated upon students' perceptions.

Regarding development as lifelong learners, students seemed knowledgeable about their responsibilities as learners. However, there may be a slight discrepancy between what teachers, parents, and students view as successful homework completion. It is also disconcerting that

⁷⁵ In June 2016, the TRTFN community members once again participated in Comprehensive Community Planning. I was excited to hear that Education was a focus for one of the stations at the event and that information was gathered to share with SD87 (Tammy Fetterly, June 1, 2016, email message).

students in School District 87 (Stikine) and presumably some students in Atlin might miss two years of school on average after thirteen years of enrolment. SD87 is working to improve student attendance as part of the district goals. Positive communication between parents, teachers, and community members is evident, but relationships and partnerships could be enhanced to benefit students' success.

Transitioning to secondary grades and post secondary training in remote northern communities poses unique challenges. Students and their parents have difficult decisions to make about leaving home versus desiring new life experiences. The issues and initiative in Atlin can inform other communities. Enhancing partnerships between the TRTFN and SD87 to plan for these transitions has the potential to enhance students' future learning.

This chapter has shared the information gathered about students' experiences at school in general. In the next chapter the discussion is focused specifically about students opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language in school and in the community.

Chapter 5 Students' Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture and Language

"Atlin is all about Tlingit stuff" (Student A).

"That is what I was taught. I just grew up that way. I was raised that way. I was raised eating all these cultural foods so that's, I don't know, that's just the way I was raised. If you were raised as a Christian, you wouldn't want to just throw your Christian religion away" (Student B).

"If our culture got lost it would be like you are basically throwing your ancestors away" (Student B).

The inclusion of Indigenous culture in the school is focused on form and not so much substance (Parent E1).

"If you don't know who your are, you don't know where you are going" (Teacher A).

In Chapter 1, I stated that Indigenous scholars advocate for the revitalization of Indigenous language and culture in school systems (Antone 2000); Battiste 2002, 2005; Bishop 2011; Castellano 2000; Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2000; Matilipi 2012; May and Aikman 2003; Savage and Hindle 2011; Sleeter 2011; Smith 2005). In this chapter, I present students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of current opportunities for Indigenous culture and language in one small community. Atlin is typical of many small Canadian communities in the north where one school must serve students of all ages, many of whom are Indigenous students. Therefore, the information gathered in the Atlin community may be similar to and can be compared with the situation in other communities in Canada. This information will be useful for educators and scholars as baseline data for future planning.

Participants in our project were asked nine questions to determine students' opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language in the school and community. The comments from students, parents, and teachers are reported here in five sections: 1) Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture, 2) Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language, 3) Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture, 4) Importance of Learning Tlingit Language, and 5) More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and

Language. As in Chapter 4, I have kept the comments from participants intact to ensure that nothing is lost from paraphrasing and I share my reflections about participants' comments at the end of each section. Participants', especially parents', comments were lengthy and abundant. To make it easier to retain the information both for myself and for my readers, I have created tables for this chapter to summarize the comments in each section. As in the previous chapter, comments from participants are presented under the subheadings: students' perceptions, parents' perceptions, and teachers' perceptions.

Opportunities to learn Tlingit Culture

Students' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture

Students memories of learning Tlingit culture in school, past and present, included: traditional, carving the totem pole and the canoe, learning about the Taku River, nature walks, making healing salve from pitch, making button blankets, picking rose hips and making jam, drawing Tlingit dolls, participating in the Pole Raising Ceremony in June 2015, and observing or participating in ceremonies in the school gym. Seven students from all classes mentioned dance practice at school (see Figure 4.5 *Taku Kwaan Dance Practice*) as a way to learn Tlingit culture (Students A, B, F, G, J, K, M).⁷⁶ Two students mentioned that dancing gave them the opportunity to go outside the community to perform, for example at Juneau Celebration 2014 and at Ha Kus Teyea in Teslin (Students C, I, L). One student said, with pride, "Everybody in Juneau would put up posters, 'Taku Kwaan are in Juneau'" (Student L).

⁷⁶ Dance practices three days per week at lunchtime with Taku Kwaan Dance Leader, Wayne Carlick, were introduced at the school in late Fall 2014.

Five students from the oldest class mentioned carving the totem pole (Students A, B, C, F, K) as a way to learn Tlingit culture (see Figure 4.6 *Carving the Totem Pole*).⁷⁷ Student C commented that carving the pole helped with schoolwork because, “it gets your mind off of things.” Student C elaborated, “it just clears your mind sometimes when you carve” which helps with schoolwork because, “I won’t get distracted so easily.” Three students (Students B, D, I) talked about an opportunity a few years ago when all students sewed on a button blanket that now hangs in the front foyer of Atlin School. Some students said they learned Tlingit culture in past years at the school, either in previous grades or from past cultural teachers (Student B, D, H, J, L, N).⁷⁸

In May and October 2015, when I questioned students about opportunities for Tlingit culture in school, students qualified their comments with phrases like, “we used to” (Student B), “when _____ was here” (Student B), “not any more” (Student H), “my Grandma _____ used to come” (Student H), “it was in Kindergarten she came” (Student J), and “We did earlier, when we first got into school, but then _____ doesn’t work here anymore, so we kinda stopped the Tlingit stuff” (Student D). One student surmised, “So I think, now, they are trying to bring it back. Tlingit Culture. Because I remember last year we did not do anything (pause) besides make pitch” (Student B). The tone of comments from students about their perceptions of past and present opportunities to learn culture implied that students valued having a teacher for Tlingit culture and language.

⁷⁷ As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Totem Pole Project with older students during the 2014/2015 school year was mentioned throughout the interviews with participants. This is one of those examples.

⁷⁸ When the students were interviewed in 2015, the Aboriginal Language and Culture position at the school was not filled and had been vacant since November 2014. In November 2015, a member of the TRTFN, Wayne Carlick was hired for the part time position to teach carving and dancing three days per week for two hours per day. Wayne Carlick held the position until June 2015, however, in September 2016, the Aboriginal Language and Culture position was posted again.

Students spoke of opportunities to learn Tlingit culture outside of school through attending programs at the Tlingit Family Learning Centre (TFLC), belonging to the Taku Kwaan Dance group, participating at celebrations, and learning Tlingit culture at home. Students mentioned learning at the TFLC After School Program and at Culture Camps (Students A, B, D, G, H) (see Figure 4.4 *Culture Camp at Five Mile* (Larson, July 31, 2013) and Figure 3.3 *Playing the “Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat” Language Game at Culture Camp* (Larson, July 31, 2013)).⁷⁹ These activities included picking berries (Students B, D), making Tlingit ice cream from soapberries (Student A), snaring rabbits (Student A), nature walks (Students B, D), stick gambling (Student G), making drums (Student G), clothing (Students B, G), and jewelry (Student B), and making healing salve from pitch (Student E). Student B stated, “It’s mostly...its not really in school that we are doing Tlingit stuff. It is outside of school with Vince.⁸⁰ Vince sets up most of the things.” Two students summed up the experiences at Culture Camp by stating, “Every summer there’s Culture Camp and all we do is just learn about culture.” (Student D) and “Well Culture Camp is all about the Tlingit learning” (Student G).

Several students mentioned that attending Tlingit Celebrations and Culture Camps teaches them about Tlingit culture (Students B, C, F, G, I, K, L). Students mentioned attending the Adäka Cultural Festival (Student B), Celebration 2014 in Juneau, Alaska (Students C, I, L), and Ha Kus Teyea in Teslin (Students B, C). They also referred to Tlingit camps such as Moose Tanning in Teslin (Student C), the Beaver Camp⁸¹ in Teslin (Students B, C), and a summer camp

⁷⁹ Culture Camp is a program for children in Atlin run by the Tlingit Family Learning Centre. Students participate in daily outdoor activities at a small summer building with a playground on Atlin Lake at Five Mile Reserve.

⁸⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, Vince Esquiro, a member of TRTFN, was employed as Youth Coordinator for TRTFN during the 2014/2015 school year. He coordinated many events for youth including activities at Culture Camp and the Homework Club for youth on Tuesdays at Atlin School from 3:00-5:00 pm. Vince held a new position with TRTFN during the 2015/2016 school year, but will be returning to the Youth Coordinator role in Summer 2016.

⁸¹ Beaver Camp, a week long camp held in the spring, in Teslin, Yukon, was attended by some members of the TRTFN in April 2015. Participants learned all the aspects of trapping and preparing beaver in a traditional Tlingit

in Juneau (Student F). One student spoke of dancing with another dance group in Whitehorse (Student F). Six students spoke about learning Tlingit culture at home (Students B, D, E, F, K, L) or on outings with their families. Student D said, “Right now we’re smoking fish, making dry meat, making dry fish and my parents do wood cutting.” Student K said, “Well, we hunt, we fish, we cut wood. We do lots of things. Smoke meat. Go across the lake camping. Yah, we do a whole bunch of things.” Student L responded, “[we go] hunting. My dad taught me how to do snares. Taught me how to walk quietly. Step on your heel.” Student F spoke about learning Tlingit culture from “around the campfire stories.” When I asked Student F if the campfires were for special occasions, Student F corrected me and said they were, “anywhere” and in every season. The student explained that the stories were in English and Tlingit and were “stories of our memories, funny memories” (Student F). Student A, who I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, summarized, “Atlin is all about Tlingit stuff.” Another student made comments about “growing up that way” (Student B). I have saved some of the comments for a following discussion about the importance of culture.

In summary, students named a variety of cultural activities and seemed to be confident that they are learning about Tlingit culture at school, in their homes, in the community, and at celebrations in and outside of Atlin. The students recognized that they learn more Tlingit culture at school when SD87 is able to hire someone for the language and culture position at Atlin School.⁸²

way. The Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC), the governing body for the self-governing Inland Tlingit First Nation in Teslin in the Southern Yukon Territory, sponsors the camp. Members of TRTFN often mention travelling to Teslin to visit or attend this and other Tlingit events.

⁸² I spoke with SD87 Secretary Treasurer Ken Mackie (July 20, 2016) to clarify if the position for teaching culture and language in Atlin School is a teaching or a teacher assistant position. Mr. Mackie called the posting the Aboriginal Language and Culture position and said it would be similar to a consultant.

Parents' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture

Like the students, in the interviews parents also spoke about examples of learning Tlingit culture at school and in the community. Parent A gave examples of cultural activities involving the school:

I think seasonal, because they go into hunting, they go into food gathering, they go into preparations like firewood. And then, you know, last year it was just amazing because the school participated in the Juneau Celebration as families and that was just an amazing outcome. And I am so grateful for it because that was an opportunity for my family to travel over to Juneau and just celebrate for the four days in the culture. It was just incredible. So to me that was really exciting.

Some parents mentioned that students have been carving at school (Parents A, D, E1, E2, F1, G2). Parent A responded, "He does like to work with other people, but the carving seems to be a quiet place for him to be. He really likes his quiet time, his self-time, self-reflection time. Parent D said, "I think it's pretty much just _____ doing the carving."⁸³ Parent E1 assumed that the carving was the only cultural activity at school. Parent G1 said, "Wayne was here last year but that was for the older kids, right, so our kids didn't, but they got to take part in the raising of the pole ceremony, which they were thrilled about. We took them out of school. That was for Aboriginal Day and we went to the feast, but that wasn't school."⁸⁴ These comments from parents indicate that carving the pole not only teaches carving, but also brings people together and provides time for self-reflection.

⁸³ The way that this parent answered my question to me demonstrates the close connections between people in the Atlin community. It is common for people to use first names only or to say, "my dad", "my mother", "my auntie", "my grandpa", or "my grandma." No one questions who is being referenced because everyone knows how everyone is related. This informal close connection between people in Atlin is notable to me. I wonder how different it is for students who leave small communities to move to larger centres where first and last names and even ID cards are needed at schools and universities.

⁸⁴ Older students carved the totem pole, but all students participated in a morning assembly of celebration at the school and in the pole parade to the site on Highway 7. Some students attended the feast at the Atlin Recreation Centre in the afternoon.

Some parents commented that students dance at school (Parents C1, E1, E2, F1, G1, G2).

Parent C1 elaborated upon her child's comments about dancing:

It's so good. It's funny cause when I first brought her to Atlin _____ was 3 years old. And we were at a potlatch and all the Taku Kwaan dancers were dancing and _____ had this cute little Winnie the Pooh blanket that was her blankie. And _____ goes up and has this blankie wrapped around her and starts dancing away. And she didn't even know anybody or anything like that. We were so proud of her and we took pictures.

Two parents said they had recently been encouraging their children to join the dance group because their children danced at home with their friends but were shy to join the Taku Kwaan Dance Group (G1, G2). Another parent spoke about the carving and dancing and then described the community involvement for teaching other aspects of traditional culture:

I think they are working well with Wayne Carlick already through the carving and the dancing practices. Wayne was anticipating to have three dance practices a week and then have one dance practice here in town on payday Fridays.⁸⁵ And so we are trying to find ways to merge the two together with working schedules and parents. I think they are looking to hire a cultural assistant again for the school. I think Ali works well with children too, when it comes to culture. Between Ali and Vince, those two got together and they managed to get the kids filleting fish, and canning fish, and smoking fish, and they were jarring fish. All the fish that they worked with was distributed out to all their Elders. Just back in September. (Parent F1)

Parent A spoke about cultural opportunities in the past, "He used to go to the After School Program. They used to do a lot of singing and dancing. Singing and language, which was really good." Only one parent responded that they did not know what cultural teachings occurred in school (Parent B).

Parents had more to say when they were asked if and how the children were learning about Tlingit culture outside of school. Parent A talked about a trip to tan moose, "I just got back from

⁸⁵ In Atlin, many families make the two-hour trip to Whitehorse on Fridays for shopping and other activities. To accommodate for students missing school on Fridays, weekday hours were extended by a few minutes to allow for an early dismissal at noon on Fridays. In June 2015, Principal Michael Basran spoke about an attempt to make Friday mornings a time for Project Based Learning to further accommodate for students' absences on Friday mornings.

tanning moose hides down in Teslin. _____ came down. He had a look around. He wasn't interested because it was all women, but he at least got to explore, you know, what it was all about and he asked questions and then he was just on his way (laughter).” When I asked if the child was interested in learning about culture, the parent said, “He is, to a point. If it were a bunch of guys that were doing something, he would be right in there. But this was a bunch of women. There were thirteen of us women” (Parent A). Parent B responded to my question about learning culture outside of school with, “Yes. (definitively, with emphasis) For sure (with emphasis). From myself, from their grandmother, how we deal with salmon, how we make an offering, how we go and get medicines. How to make soapberry ice cream. Respect. I don't know. It's just the way we live (with a smile). Just normal.” They went on to say:

And I think it's better that way. That it's done with their family. Yep, I think it's better and also like say, I'll like send her with other extended family to do stuff and if I can't go to something and she wants to go, I just ask somebody, like my cousin or my uncle or my aunt, someone who's older than her to watch over her and things like that. You know she is going to the Beaver Camp this year, and that's a new thing. I can't go so I won't be going, but she will be going with her aunts. But like that kind of stuff is very educational. (Parent B).

Parent D was also enthusiastic about teaching and learning culture in the community. Parent D commented, “Yes. I am very cultural. We spend a lot of time with my dad and we spend time sewing a lot and we go to the Culture Centre. In the summertime my kids are pretty much with my dad and stepmom the whole time doing Tlingit camps and Tlingit language camps. When I asked what they were sewing, the parent responded, “Button blankets. Octopus bags and _____ is halfway done her octopus bag right now (Parent D).”⁸⁶ Parents E1 responded to my question about opportunities to learn Tlingit culture with, “Well from us at home, yah (emphatically).”

⁸⁶ Octopus bags are beaded bags made to hold tobacco, pipes or other small items. The bag usually has four long tabs or tentacles. Some members of the TRTFN wear octopus bags as part of their regalia.

The following conversation with Parents E1 and E2 describes family activities and activities at Culture Camp.

Parent E1: Culture Camp this summer.

Parent E2: I was showing them blazes on the tree.

Parent E1: how to read the blazes and how to blaze.

Parent E2: You cut them down this way. If you're going to go over there, then you cut the blazes on this side of the tree and you hit up against this way so the blaze is this side and that side. Then you know the trail goes that way. They seem like small things, but it's a trait that has been carried forward for thousands of years.

Parent E1: If you are lost on the mountain and you come across some old blazes you'll be happy you know how to read the trail.

Earlier Parents E1 and E2 were talking about teaching the children how to make shelters

Parent E2: I think it's a pattern. We are saying we are learning what the Tlingit have learned for hundreds of years, thousands of years, but there is a lot more attached to that. And I think it tells it's own story. And when I say that, I mean some of the things that I do, like build underground walk in coolers, stuff like that when you go out in the bush and dig in the dirt, and when you put the cooler in, then it will stay cooler longer. Stuff like that and the links to land.

Parent E1: Or those Indian houses. Like a cooler, like in the ground or in the hill, some of them are big. He makes some that you walk right in to. They use to have a word for that. Caches. That thing you made too with the kids this summer. They just loved it. What was that?

Parent E2: It's a rush bed, but I put moss underneath.

Parent E1: Yah, they loved it.

Parent E2: And ah, you know, I give them different versions of how to build little brush houses. People built it with A frames.

Parent E1: Shelters.

Parent E2: Where it goes all the way around a tree. There's so many ways to build a brush house. You know, it seems like they pushed all that away and concentrated on just a few things that are necessary in today's world. When you look at it, that's what Tlingit do. Hello, I'm Tlingit.

Finally, Parents G1 and G2 described the integration of Tlingit culture in many events in the community:

Parent G1: Well we took them to the Aboriginal Day.

Parent G2: At a lot of the community ceremonies, there is a Tlingit component. When the Lieutenant Governor was here, the Tlingit dancers performed. When Rick Hansen was here last fall, the Tlingit dancers performed.

Parent G1: or blessings before a meal.

These conversations with parents demonstrate that families are involved in teaching traditional culture to their children on many levels.

In summary, parents, like the students, named a variety of places where students learn Tlingit culture: in school, at culture camps, at celebrations, and at home with family members. The activities for learning traditional culture reported by parents included: carving, dancing, hunting, food and medicine gathering, food preparation including filleting, smoking, and jarring fish, tanning, creating Tlingit ice cream, sewing button blankets and octopus bags, making offerings,⁸⁷ learning about survival on the land, and learning about respect and *Haa Kusteeyí* (Tlingit way of living). The activities described by parents complemented and elaborated upon students' perceptions of opportunities to learn Tlingit culture.

Teachers' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture

Teachers named opportunities for students in Atlin to learn about Tlingit culture at a focus group meeting and in individual interviews. At the focus group brainstorm, teachers named traditional dancing as cultural learning for students of all ages. This included dancing at dance practice three times per week, for performances at school and community events, and for a School District 87 Board Meeting. A teacher said that older students had the opportunity to carve on the totem pole. Younger students were reading literature from the Eagle Crest leveled book series⁸⁸, which a teacher commented was improving reading results for young readers. Younger

⁸⁷ Tlingit people say prayers and make tobacco offerings to the land to thank the earth for the bounties it provides. I learned about tobacco offerings on my first visit to Atlin in March 2013 when I mentioned to Elder Melvin Jack that I was going cross-country skiing on the land. He said, "Make sure you take some tobacco for an offering." When I asked, "I wonder where I can get some tobacco", he replied with a matter of fact manner, "buy some smokes." I laughed because of my naiveté and because of this blend of traditional and modern practice, which keeps Tlingit culture alive.

⁸⁸ Leveled books are stories to teach children with words that are at a certain level or ability to promote successful reading and comprehension. The Eagle Crest Book publishing company publishes leveled books, which feature First Nations and Native American children in the stories.

students also had opportunities to learn Tlingit language through CD's of oral language, the integration of Tlingit words into the curriculum, and Calendar Math with Tlingit words for themes and seasons. Teachers responded that students have opportunities to learn about Tlingit culture and language in the community at Beaver Camp, Teslin Moose Tanning Camp, and Culture Camps.

In interviews, teachers named opportunities to learn Tlingit culture in school through traditional dancing, carving, First Nations topics for the Heritage Fair, community members as guest story tellers, artwork, painting signs in Tlingit for the *Learning to Talk to the Land; (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names* Project,⁸⁹ and by integrating Tlingit culture into other school subjects. Teacher C referred to community members who come in as guest presenters to, “do story telling and pass down stories through their families and share them with their kids” adding, “very powerful because then students can tie that to who they are and what they are about.” Teacher C also spoke about learning Tlingit culture through art lessons with a local artist, for example, by “making intricate First Nations snowflakes at Christmas and doing some beadwork.” When I asked Teacher A, if there was any way to subtly include Tlingit culture in the classroom, Teacher A responded:

Yah, because you can make comparisons, especially in Social Studies. What did we talk about? When cultures are invaded by other cultures. And talking about the parallels between that and colonization a few times, for example, family structure in ancient civilizations was similar to traditional Tlingit family structure, so there's connections there.

She added, “Sometimes I find too, with the kids, for Math concepts, if you suddenly say ‘okay, you're going out to salmon camp and you have this many pounds of salmon’ and you can take it

⁸⁹ The *Learning to Talk to the Land; (Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names*, (Schreyer et al. 2014) project included a plan to post new signage in and around Atlin with Tlingit names for places. Students at Atlin School helped to paint the new signs (see Figure 4.10 *Painting Signs to Re(claim) Tlingit Place Names*).

from there, whatever the concept is.” These comments from teachers demonstrate how teachers attempt to integrate Tlingit history and traditional teachings into all subject areas.

Teachers commented about the need for a teacher and resources to teach Tlingit culture in school. Teacher B mentioned that the Aboriginal Language and Culture position at Atlin School was not filled at the time adding, “When we have them they are great.” Teacher D spoke about the need to increase the hours for the Aboriginal teacher position:

And unfortunately a lot of people who know it have other jobs or don’t want to work only six to fifteen hours a week.⁹⁰ They are either balancing it with another job. The key is having the teachers and having the incentives to have an Aboriginal teacher within the school.

Teacher D added, “And so if you don’t have someone to teach the job, it is really hard to pass on that knowledge in school.” Teacher D also talked about the need for Tlingit resources.

And you can bring in stories or maybe you would need a compilation of stories that are local culture and maybe you can bring it in whether you are Tlingit or not and incorporate it as a teacher. Always, I am just trying. Right now I am just doing one day at a time because I want to upgrade resources because there’s a lot of resources, but not current and up to date. So, you know, there’s stories that may be, (pause) not to say they are not relevant, but if you are a kid and you are reading a book that is kind of dusting away, you kind of want something that connects with you. Even a newer version, surprisingly makes a big difference.

Comments from teachers suggest that the opportunities for learning Tlingit culture would be enhanced by developing resources and maintaining the Aboriginal Language and Culture position.

Teachers named many opportunities to learn Tlingit culture in the community outside of school time. These included: celebrations, such as, the New Beginnings Celebration in September, Beaver Camp, Culture Camps, Fish Camps, Moose Tanning Camp, going on the land with parents and grandparents to pick berries, rosehips, yarrow, and traditional foods from

⁹⁰ Teacher D is speaking about the fact that the position for Aboriginal Language and Culture at the school is only a part-time position. The person who takes the position cannot live on the salary and must have another income.

nature, making jam, and travelling to Liard Hot Springs seven hours to the northeast to connect with members of the Tahltan and Kaska nations. Teacher A mentioned, “At the beginning of the year they have the New Beginnings Celebration. Down in the reserve in town, the big house there. They have that to celebrate going back to school. And it’s traditional prayer and then a feast. So they do that.” I return to this quote in the reflections at the end of this section.

Teacher C described students’ experiences at community events, such as this comment about the Beaver Camp in Teslin:

Another opportunity that came up shortly after that was the Beaver Hunt. A number of our students went on that for a week. It was a whole week, the May long weekend. And they went down the Teslin River and did everything from scouting out the beaver, hunting, harvesting, and skinning the beaver. The whole bit.

In my journal entry, June 23, 2015, after conducting this interview, I noted that teachers seem informed about community events even if they were not in attendance. Students and parents share this information openly and teachers seem interested to know the details.

In summary, the comments from teachers indicate that students in Atlin are learning about Tlingit culture from collaboration between the school district, the TRTFN, and other partners. Teachers named many opportunities in school, such as carving, dancing, Heritage Fair, guest story tellers, artwork, painting Tlingit signs for the community, and integrating Tlingit culture into all areas of the curriculum. Teachers also commented that they are aware of cultural events that occur in and outside of the community, such as Beaver Camp, the Teslin Moose Tanning Camp, and Culture Camps.

Reflections about Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture

I was excited about the quality of some of the opportunities to learn Tlingit culture in Atlin, such as, dancing, carving, and painting Tlingit signs for the community (see Table 5.1

Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture). The media in Canada, particularly CBC radio, seems to report continuously about the improvements that are needed in education for Indigenous students. The Ministry of Education recommendation that school districts create Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements also implies that education for Indigenous students needs improvement. I was pleased to learn of positive projects in Atlin School because I am a firm believer in identifying assets and building upon the strengths of individuals and communities to move forward.

Table 5.1 *Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture*

Students', Parents', and Teachers' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture		
Students' Comments	Parents' Comments	Teachers' Comments
Carving	Carving	Carving
Traditional dancing	Traditional Dancing	Traditional Dancing
Learning about the Taku River	Hunting	Heritage Fair
Nature walks	Food and medicine gathering	Guest story tellers
Making healing salve from pitch	Food preparation including filleting, smoking, and jarring fish	Artwork Painting Tlingit signs for the community
Making button blankets	Tanning	Integrating Tlingit culture into all areas of the curriculum
Picking rose hips and making jam	Creating Tlingit ice cream	Beaver Camp
Drawing Tlingit dolls	Sewing button blankets and octopus bags	Teslin Moose Tanning Camp
Participating in the Pole	Making offerings	Culture Camps
Raising Ceremony in June 2015	Learning about survival on the land	
Observing and participating in ceremonies in the school gym	Learning about respect and <i>Haa Kusteeyí</i>	

Whenever I hear members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation speak of attending camps and celebrations outside of Atlin, I am impressed at the commitment people make to travel long distances to participate in these events. I wanted to include this reflection as a reminder to myself and to others who do not live in the north of this aspect of living in remote communities.

I also want to comment that sometimes the written comments from the interviews do not capture the tone of participants' comments. For example, the excitement in one student's voice increased when the student commented that she enjoyed the opportunity to learn from her grandfather (Student identity withheld for anonymity). Another student sounded sad when she said, "not any more. My Grandma _____ used to come" (Student H). The way that these two students spoke of their grandparents is important to note. It must be a special experience to see your teachers and family members working together as you learn from someone you love. I can only imagine how proud and prestigious students might feel when their grandparents come to the school to teach.

Teachers mentioned being aware of community events, however, in my visits to Atlin, it seemed that employees of SD87 were sometimes unaware or not involved in activities that were going on in the community. For example, when Teacher A spoke of the New Beginnings Celebration, she used the words, "they do that" rather than "we do that." In another example, when I visited March 2015 the superintendent and principal were not aware that the TRTFN Comprehensive Community Planning event was scheduled that week even though some students and families were participating in the event.⁹¹ I wanted to note these two examples now because in later sections participants use the word "they" rather than "we" as well. I thought this was an important observation to record at this time.

⁹¹ The following year, I was excited to hear that a station at the Comprehensive Community Planning event was set up to gather information that SD87 had requested about the community members' ideas for education enhancement.

I am grateful that I had the opportunity to observe the success of the dancers in Atlin and in Juneau, the totem pole completion, and the *(Re)claiming Taku River Tlingit Place Names* project. Witnessing these events in person helps me to understand the scope of the teachings that are attached to these projects. Each of the projects involved so many aspects of individual and community development. Not only do students participate in the creation of the project, but also they are learning many life skills. The totem pole now stands at the entrance to Atlin as a marker for Tlingit peoples. Students demonstrated leadership in the community and will have pride for years to come at their accomplishments as children. Students, parents, and community members were so proud of the students' accomplishments on Aboriginal Day when the pole was erected. It is difficult to describe the emotion of that day as the TRTFN paraded down the road with the pole to erect a marker for Tlingit territory made by the future generation of adult leaders.

Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture

Student, parents, and teachers had much to say about the importance of culture. This section is therefore somewhat lengthy because I did not want to exclude anyone's comments.

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture

Students thought that learning about Tlingit culture was important for many reasons: to enhance identity, to pass culture on to future generations, to recover from colonization, and because learning about Tlingit culture is fun. All fourteen students made insightful comments regarding the importance of culture. Two students spoke about knowing yourself by knowing your culture (Student B, C). Student B explained that if students do not learn about their culture, "then we will have no culture" and "you can't just not have a culture or else it's like a pen with no ink." When I asked Student B, "You wouldn't be whole?" Student B agreed and said, "You

wouldn't, especially in a little town like this. Everyone would just be walking around. There would be no point besides going hiking and stuff. And even then, you are doing that for the wrong reasons." Student C answered this question with, "Everybody should know where they are from. What their culture is." Student K responded with, "Cause it is my culture," in a tone that said, "Why would you even ask?" Student K's words were said so easily and yet they capture the essence of the importance of learning Tlingit culture.

Students explained their perceptions that Tlingit culture came from their ancestors and must be passed on to future generations. One student said, "And also, all our Elders, that have died over the years, like Antonia, because I remember Antonia Jack, and so I don't know, if our culture got lost, it would be like you are basically throwing your ancestors away. Because then, I don't know, it just doesn't seem right" (Student B). Student G said, "I think it's important because a lot of us are forgetting about our culture. And I think a lot of Elders want us to learn about our culture." When I asked Student G if she wanted to learn about Tlingit culture, Student G agreed. As well as learning from ancestors and Elders, students spoke about passing on cultural knowledge to future generations. When I asked Student B if she could imagine life without Tlingit culture, Student B said, "Well I wouldn't know about the Tlingit culture so I guess I would be fine with it. But, I guess, knowing that I didn't have a culture in the future, it would suck!" When I asked why "it would suck", the student said, "Probably the ink in the pen. And, my children, like, my children wouldn't have a culture. And I'd know how it felt to have a culture. Seeing them not have a culture would suck! Especially this culture cause it's good!" (Student B). Student D said, "Because we live like that and we still want to keep it for the generations." Student I spoke about future generations, saying, "You might want to learn and when you're older you can tell other people." Student F said, "So when I get older I can teach the

younger.” When I asked Student F why teaching younger people was important, Student F said, “Because I don’t really want people to forget our culture and how things work. Like ceremonies, dances, and language.” These comments from students demonstrate that they believe that they have responsibilities to their ancestors and to future generations.

Three students spoke about the need to bring back Tlingit culture that was taken away through colonization. Two students spoke about loss of culture, commenting, “cause it’s kind of like a dying culture” (Student K) and “so our culture doesn’t become extinct” (Student L). Student D explained, “Because culture hasn’t really been the same ever since people started, the white, the government started residential schools. So First Nations need their own culture back.” Student B said, “Because it will get lost if no one keeps participating and already it is on the side where it is starting to get lost.” Student B went on to give an explanation of why bringing back culture is important, which I included it as one of the quotes in the introduction to this chapter:

That is what I was taught. I just grew up that way. I was raised that way. I was raised eating all these cultural foods so that’s, I don’t know, that’s just the way I was raised. If you were raised as a Christian, you wouldn’t want to just throw your Christian religion away.

A younger student said that Tlingit culture needed to be taught, “cause it might end” (Student I). These comments from students as young as nine to fourteen years of age explain the effects of colonization.

Four students, from the younger to the older classes, talked about a desire to learn Tlingit culture. Student B spoke about the need for different perspectives:

Because you want different perspectives, it’s like, I don’t know, you won’t know this other side of the world so you just know one thing and not a whole bunch of other different things. Like, if I didn’t have a culture, I would not know how to gut a fish. I wouldn’t know how to do anything. I wouldn’t know how to fish. I wouldn’t know how to run a boat or anything. And also, I wouldn’t know that people go hunting for food. And I wouldn’t know my culture a long time ago, what it was like. I would just know no culture.

Student C said that learning about Tlingit culture in school was important, “Because some people want to learn their culture, some people don’t even know their culture, and some people are Tlingit for the fun of it.” Student L commented that learning Tlingit culture was important because, “it is interesting.” Finally, Student G explained that learning culture makes students do well in school. Student G said, “Well some of this stuff [curriculum] has culture things in it. So that can get us good report cards. And it makes us feel good about ourselves because we know that our ancestors are telling us that we did a good job.”

In summary, students provided several reasons about the importance of learning Tlingit culture: to know yourself, to honour ancestors and Elders, to hold knowledge for future generations, to satisfy a desire to learn more about your own culture and to feel good about yourself. These reasons apply not only for Indigenous students, but also to every student of every culture in Canadian schools.

Parents’ Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture

In this section I have included the comments from the TRTFN Education Committee focus group sessions as well as the comments from parent interviews because the committee is mainly made up of parents from TRTFN.

At the focus group session with the TRTFN Education Committee the committee members discussed how learning Tlingit culture and language might influence students’ achievement in school. The committee members thought, “If you don’t know where you came from you don’t know where you are going.” They also agreed that people need to know about diversity of cultures and that “there is not just one type of people out there.” One parent said, “Instead of feeling that I was just going to be wiped out, learning about it [Tlingit culture] makes me realize I can achieve something.” Another parent added that it was important “to understand our own

culture and language to be able to carry that with you, to know who you are everywhere you go.”

Two parents spoke about how learning Tlingit culture helps you to connect with others. One

said, “Understanding one’s own self helps you to understand others and creates empathy.”

Another responded, “when you are more connected to self, you are more at ease, ready to

connect with others.” Finally, a parent said that leaning Tlingit culture “brings a sense of

belonging and connection to the land.” According to participants in this focus group session

learning Tlingit culture then is important for knowing oneself and connecting with others and

with the land.

In the interviews parents explained the importance of learning Taku River Tlingit culture in a variety of ways: to value traditional knowledge, to assist with identity formation, to teach governance and leadership skills, to prepare students for the future, and to teach acceptance of all peoples. If I summarize and condense the comments from parents too much, meanings could be lost. Therefore, to keep the explanations intact and because parents had lots to say about the importance of culture, this section includes longer quotes from parents. Parent A spoke about honouring, valuing, celebrating and revitalizing traditional knowledge:

I think they need to back up. The education system needs to reflect prior to contact. Prior to 1492 and prior to any sort of contact on Turtle Island, North America, because we were the scientists, you know. We have a very rich and diverse culture and it’s all reflected on their sense of belonging and we need to be really valued and appreciated. Our stories, our history, our culture, the protocols for all of the above because those were connected to the sacred laws of life and they were disrupted and not only do our children in schools need to be learning but we also need to have the ability to bring them out because they were put away when potlatches were put away. And we need to bring them back now to celebrate who we are as Indigenous people, bring it back out and celebrate it.

And the education system needs to be rewritten to reflect that (pause). And it needs to be a balance between our way of life and mainstream society’s way of life. Because right now it just reflects the mainstream society’s way of life and it doesn’t necessarily coincide with our value system as Indigenous people.

Parent A has expressed the importance of honouring the diversity of cultures in classrooms and the impact that culture has upon sense of belonging and identity.

Parent B, D, and F1 spoke about the importance of culture for forming identity and pride in oneself. Parent F1 began with a comment about maintaining Indigenous culture and language and then stated that language is linked to identity:

To keep our culture and tradition going. To keep it strong and it still goes back to our identity. From the very beginning of the conversation, of finding our identity and being. It's part of who we are. It's who we are is our language, and it's strong to keep it going.

This comment by Parent F1 indicates the connections between culture, identity, and language.

Parent B began the explanation of the importance of culture with a tone of voice that said, "isn't it obvious?" She said it was important for her child to learn the culture, "because she is Tlingit and it's her culture so that's why it's important." Then, Parent B spoke about the importance of identity, "And, I just feel it's important to know who we are, so to rank how important it is it's really hard because it's just the way it is. You're just supposed to learn your Tlingit culture and live it." When I asked Parent B how do we teach the importance of culture to people who are not Indigenous, Parent B described the importance of teaching the Taku River Tlingit creation story and the importance of learning from someone you trust. Parent B explained:

I don't know. I think if you used examples like say our creation story. I know for non-Aboriginal people they might think it's a fairy tale, but to us it's how we were made, how we were created. And right now I don't agree with what they teach them, like we came over the land bridge and blah, blah, blah. Now what faces me is my [child] doesn't believe our creation story because now she has been taught we evolved from monkeys and we came climbing over the land bridge and we're actually natives from over there. So, you know, I'd like it if the school teaches them our creation story as well.

When I asked Parent B how learning about Tlingit culture helps students with academic work,

Parent B responded:

I think part of it is they can relate to the work. Like to the stuff that they're learning. And it's not all of this stuff that they didn't even know about, like say the land bridge thing.

When I was told that in school, I thought they were crazy. I thought they were teaching me something that was false. And then I was confused. Back then, First Nation language classes were just being introduced in the school system. So Grade 5 was the first time I ever went to a language class (pause). No, did we have Tlingit language in Atlin? I can't even remember. My grandma just used to do it with me when she babysat me, so my Tlingit language class was just being with her, so I don't know. I was confused for a few years because they were teaching me stuff I didn't believe. I was taught different. Oral history is different than what the facts are, I guess. I don't know how to explain it.

Later in the conversation when I asked Parent B if they would like to add more about how

learning Tlingit culture helps students to do better in school, Parent B replied:

Well there's not like confusion, right? Like if you're taught a certain thing at home because you're a Tlingit person, then you're taught that and you believe it because it's probably being taught to you by one person that is probably so close that there probably isn't anyone else in school that would be so close to you, so then you of course trust them. You probably even love the information that's coming towards you. Then you go off to school and you hear something different and you're confused because it's probably somebody who you don't live with, you don't love. You don't have all these really deep connections with that's telling you something different. And they're you're teacher so you think they're supposed to be right. Like it's, I don't know. That's kind of what I think happens.

I thought these quotes were significant to include in their entirety and I refer to them again in the reflections at the end of this section.

Parent D spoke about how learning about Taku River Tlingit culture prepares students for the future, but more from the point of view of personal growth and pride in oneself. Parent D answered:

I just think it's very important for them to grow up and know (pause), like *Haa Kusteeyí*. That's Tlingit way of living, live Tlingit way, talk Tlingit way, be respectful and kind, it's the *Haa Kusteeyí* way. I really love how Teslin School⁹² is all about Tlingit. And how everything they do in Teslin is, yeah, the Tlingits pretty much run the school. They make sure everything is included Tlingit way. I would love for that to be here in Atlin. Just to know more about being Tlingit. I think that's very important for the school.

⁹² Teslin School, a school for students in grades Kindergarten through Grade 9, is under the jurisdiction of the Yukon Department of Education.

When I asked Parent D how learning Tlingit culture and Tlingit ways would help students with academic achievement, Parent D replied, “To do the best they can. Just to grow into more being proud of who we are.”

Parent C2 talked about the importance of learning Tlingit history for governance and creating future leaders:

For me it’s important, I’d like to see them focus on First Nations governance, First Nations education. What [child’s name] is talking about with Tlingit dancing, I think that’s important. And I think it’s important in school to learn about history and all First Nations of Canada in general. Tlingit specific history in school. I think all aspects of Tlingit education need to be put into the school.

Canadian education is forced into every aspect of schooling and there hasn’t been enough emphasis on First Nation history or education and a lot of stuff isn’t talked about. You know it’s only been fifty years of voting rights and it’s only been twenty years since the last residential school was shut down. And those are the things that aren’t talked about and they should be. The holocaust is talked about and all sorts of sex education in the news now. We need First Nation education to help people that are going to be young leaders and to acknowledge our histories and the struggles of people to get to where we are now.

Parents E1 and E2 also spoke about governance, but with a focus on connection to the land.

Parent E2 answered:

For me there are two forms of education. One is education and the other one is traditional education. Because when we go to a political level, we go there as Tlingit. We don’t go there as society, you know. We are Tlingit and the negotiations can start at a level where we can communicate. And I think that is why there is not so much money put into it. Because negotiations at a political level, it’s about land and it’s about money. Well it’s about money, but it’s mainly about land. And land is what makes us traditional people because we believe in land. We believe in the resources. That’s who we are.

I followed this comment with the question, “So can you teach me how that relates to education?

What kind of education the kids should be receiving?” Parent E2 replied hesitantly, “language?”

and Parent E1 added, “Or culture, or about land.” Parent E1 then elaborated:

Well the whole school should have Tlingit studies where they study the TRT Constitution. You know, where they study the TRT Land Plan. The TRT Conservation Area Design. You know, the TRT has done all this stuff and they are not teaching it in the school. And

they should be teaching it to Tlingit and non-Tlingit kids because these are the kids who will grow up and fight about it for the next generation.

Earlier in the interview, Parent E1 and E2 explained that the curriculum in school needs to include Indigenous content that is not only performance, such as Indigenous Fine Arts and dancing, but also functional. They said:

Parent E1: It's like the photo opt. No disrespect to the carving or the dancing. We carve and dance. But it is what the mainstream culture finds...

Parent E2: Entertaining

Parent E1: most entertaining. Yah exactly, _____. You know it's like, what looks best in the school division report, you know, but taking the time to go out and making arrangements for _____ to teach kids brush houses or whatever is not as sexy, you know, as a totem pole, or wearing his wolf dance outfit, you know.

When I asked if their children had opportunities to learn Tlingit language in school, Parent E1 said, "not of any substance I don't think" and then elaborated about culture:

And that is what I think the issue is. The inclusion of Indigenous culture in the school is focused on form and not so much substance. You know, this is this cup. [Parent E1 held up the teacup from the table.] It's a cup and you don't know what I have got in there. It could be an empty cup. But, it still looks good. It's a nice cup, eh? But what makes it useful is what is in the cup. And so there is tea or water or whatever. So you can have a lot of cultural form, globally even, whatever. You know. It's just like Christians. You can have Christians that have the form. They go to church every Sunday. They know the bible. They know the commands. But they don't live it. They don't have the substance. So the focus right now in the schools, I think everywhere, is pretty much just on form you know, and not substance.

More comments from Parents E1 and E2 on this topic are included in the discussion of improvements that are needed for teaching culture in schools later in this chapter, however, I wanted to introduce the issues raised by Parents E1 and E2 now because the comments describe current cultural teachings and the important cultural content to teach.

Finally, Parents G1 and G2 spoke about accepting people from all cultures and teaching a part of Canadian history that has previously not been taught. This is their conversation about the importance of culture:

G2: It broadens their horizons. They're likely to accept people with differences or people that look different or maybe talk with different language. It would make them a better, I know more accepting is the word I am thinking of.

G1: Why wouldn't they? Half the population here is Tlingit. They should learn about the Tlingit language.

G2: When you (pause) teach about different cultures, it makes them more accepting of every culture as opposed to just First Nation's culture. Accepting is not the word I am thinking of, or the word that I want to use to describe why I think it is important. Yah. I am drawing a blank right now. It is important. Ah, I can't think of the word.

G1: We think it's good. We also believe that it is good to have, I think it sort of bridges the gap for bringing people together so that it lessens the questions of the differences. Does that make sense? (Pause) So that our kids, but I think, too, it is good for the Tlingit kids to learn about the culture too, because for so long they weren't allowed to talk about it or learn about it, right? So, I don't know. I think it is great!

G1: Well it is good for everybody. It doesn't do our kids any harm. Like it is good for them and it is good for us.

G2: Exactly. Like with the whole addition to the curriculum throughout most provinces about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, you know the findings there, you know, forgotten part of the history, previously untaught part of our history. I think it is really important. A better appreciation, maybe accepting *is* the word [spoken with emphasis], of people of different cultures. They're more broad-minded. More open to, more open minded. More accepting of people that have a different colour of skin or different languages.

Parents G1 and G2 have described the benefits of teaching Indigenous culture to all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

To summarize parents' perceptions of the importance of teaching Indigenous culture to all children, parents' perceptions are that cultural teachings are important for honouring, valuing, celebrating and revitalizing traditional knowledge, to avoid confusion and conflicting messages to children about creation, to enhance identity, to teach governance and promote leadership in youth, to promote personal growth and a sense of pride in oneself, to teach *Haa Kusteeyí* (Tlingit way of living) and survival on the land, and to teach acceptance of everyone.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture

Teachers' perceptions about the importance and value of culture made links between culture and identity. Teacher A said, "I think it's important, it's very important, because that's

your identity. If you don't know who you are, you don't know where you're going" and added, "I think if you don't know who you are and where you come from, you can't take pride in your background." Teacher D stated, "It's pivotal. To me, they need a sense of who they are before they can explore." This statement from Teacher D about knowing who you are to know where you are headed complements a similar statement made by a parent at the TRTFN Education Committee meeting.

Teacher A also linked identity to sense of belonging, "But I think because when you have that [identity] you have a sense of belonging, right? You have a sense of belonging, a sense of community" and completed the discussion with, "So I'm wondering if identifying and feeling a sense of belonging as a Tlingit and as a community of Tlingits, surely that must tie in with being successful in other areas." Later in the interview, when we were speaking about relationships between teachers and students, Teacher A commented again about connections between culture, sense of belonging, and achievement:

Of course there is [a connection] because when you think just in general about students, you make a good connection with a student, regardless of what their cultural background is, that student knows that you care about them, you're interested in what they're doing, you make them feel welcome. Of course their achievements are going to go up. They feel it's a safe place to come into the classroom. It's okay if things aren't going well to let the teacher know that.

If you don't get along with somebody, you're not going to do anything for them anyways, and you're not going to be happy. And because that's tied in together, having the language and culture come in is, I think, only going to add to the connection. And I think too, teacher's need to be open to have that occur in the classroom and show interest, that "yes, I'm interested in this too, I find this interesting, I'm going to practice the dialogue, I'm going to participate in the cultural activities." So you have to set that example too, that it is valuable, that it is important. Well when it's all working together, kids are going to be happier. They're going to feel better about themselves. Their self-esteem is going to go up. And that can't help but rub off in other area, right?

Teacher D also spoke about sense of belonging for students in school:

Some kids unfortunately want to hide from their culture because they want to be more with the current trends, you know, they don't necessarily like certain traditions and it is sad, but I think that often it takes for people to get older and they start to appreciate what was passed on to them. But at this age in school I think that they really just want a sense of belonging with each other in their classroom. They want to feel like they belong together as a part of their peer group and they don't want to stand out as different or special. They want to feel pride and if a student is very confident I think they do. But I think mostly they want to connect. They want to feel that they belong with their peers at this age group.

To illustrate the point further, Teacher D spoke about nieces and nephews who are Indigenous who do not want to participate in Aboriginal Education Programs in school because they do not want to stand out as different.

Teachers B and D spoke about the importance of learning Tlingit culture and language because of the traditional knowledge held in the teachings. Teacher B answered the question about the importance of culture by referring to their own children's experiences in school:

My own children went to this school and what they said was "the stories they told and the way they talked to all the children and made sure they were able to do the language things that they did, but also the stories they told about how people should treat one another and about how they did things in the past." My children consider [the stories and the lessons from Aboriginal language and culture teachers] to be very, very valuable. So I can only suppose that it's at least that valuable for every child.

Teacher D spoke about the importance of learning one's heritage for students from all cultures in Atlin⁹³ and commented that knowing one's ancestry was important for all nationalities because children are the "knowledge keepers" for the future.

To summarize, from teachers' perceptions, learning Tlingit culture is important for building student's individual identity, for promoting sense of belonging for students, and because children are the knowledge keepers of the future.

⁹³ Many non-Indigenous students in Atlin have German ancestry from the miners who came from Europe to mine gold.

Reflections about the Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture

The TRTFN Education Committee was very impressed with the way that students articulated the importance of learning Tlingit Culture. The committee highlighted three important quotes from Student B: “you can’t just not have a culture or else a pen with no ink,” “Especially this culture cause it’s good!” and, most importantly, “if our culture got lost it would be like you are basically throwing your ancestors away.” I think that these comments from students were uplifting for the TRTFN Education Committee to hear. The meeting started with one member of the committee expressing her frustration with trying to revitalize culture and stating, “I have a hard time because people don’t want to learn anymore [about culture]” (TRTFN Education Committee, October 20, 2015, discussion). The committee member spoke about hosting workshops but nobody came. I think that she was quite heartened by students’ comments about the importance of culture.

My reflections about responses from participants about the importance of learning culture are focused upon four highlights. First, I loved the metaphor from Student B that not knowing one’s culture is like an empty vessel, a pen with no ink. This is such a powerful metaphor to describe the importance of knowing one’s culture, ancestry, and identity.

Second, students, parents, and teachers named many reasons why learning Tlingit culture is important, but agree upon two, i.e. that knowing one’s culture is important for identity and to honour the ancestors. Students and parents also spoke about feeling good about oneself and pride respectively. Teacher A and a member of the TRTFN Education Committee at the focus group session used the same words about knowing who you are to know where you are going. I thought these words were important and included them in the chapter introduction. The comments from

students, parents, and teachers are sorted and presented as Table 5.2 *The Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture*.

Third, when I heard the analogy about the contents of the teacup being as or more important than the cup, I felt that Parent E1 had accurately described a way to approach teaching Indigenous culture in schools. I thought that her suggestion to teach values and philosophies as well as artistic expression would be useful for SD87 and other districts as they set goals for enhancing education for Indigenous students and for all students.

Finally, Parent B eloquently expressed the confusion for students when they hear conflicting stories at school and at home and the importance of trust and learning from loved ones. At the Heritage Fair in Atlin in 2016, I spoke to a parent who was not Tlingit who wanted her children to learn Tlingit culture in school, but not if the teachings conflicted with the family's Christian beliefs. When I compare this parent's comment about Christian beliefs to the comment made by Parent B, I feel that school districts must help non-Indigenous parents to understand that Indigenous parents feel the same way about the beliefs that are taught in schools. European beliefs and ways of learning must not dominate in classrooms. Classrooms must promote all cultures, i.e. the cultures of all students in the community.

Table 5.2 *The Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture*

Students', Parents', and Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Culture		
Students' Comments	Parents' Comments	Teachers' Comments
To know yourself	To know who you are to know where you are going	To build student's individual identity
To honour ancestors and Elders	To feel connected to self, others, and the land.	Because children are the knowledge keepers of the future
To hold knowledge for future generations	To enhance identity	To promote sense of belonging for students
To satisfy a desire		

To learn more about your own culture	To honour, value, celebrate and revitalize traditional knowledge
To feel good about yourself	To avoid confusion and conflicting messages to children about creation
	To teach governance and promote leadership in youth
	To promote personal growth and a sense of pride in oneself
	To teach <i>Haa Kusteeyi</i> (Tlingit way of living) and survival on the land
	To teach acceptance of everyone.

Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language

Students' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language

Students' comments were focused upon the Tlingit language opportunities they had in the past and the Tlingit language they hear in their homes and community. All students spoke about learning Tlingit language in school in the past. Students used phrases such as, "we used to" (Student C) and "a long time ago" (Students F, J). They spoke about learning to count (Students C, D, J), how to say some words (Student D), and colours (Student J). One student said that students were currently learning to use Tlingit language to say the date and day in calendar time (Student M).

Students had more to say about learning Tlingit language outside of school. Three students mentioned hearing grandparents speak Tlingit (Students C, F, H) and one student said, "Daddy does" [speaks Tlingit] (Student J). Student C responded, "My great grandma or one of my other

great aunties used to talk to my grandma for hours and hours in Tlingit,” however this same student said that his grandmother did not speak Tlingit to him. Two students said they often heard the word for thank you, *Gunalchéesh*, at home and in the community (Students C, F). Student F commented that a grandparent says words, “Like ‘I’m so proud of you’, ‘thank you’, like she knows how to say things for holidays and all that stuff.” Students also spoke about hearing Tlingit spoken at celebrations (Student D, E, F), in dance groups, and at Culture Camps (Students D, K). As was mentioned earlier in the section about opportunities to learn Tlingit culture, Student F talked about hearing Tlingit words in stories around the campfire because the stories are told in English and in Tlingit words. Few students mentioned learning Tlingit words in dance group, however at the dance practices and celebrations in Atlin and Juneau I heard students responding to commands and singing in Tlingit. When I asked one student about learning language through songs, Student K commented, “Well, there is some songs I know what the meaning is. I don’t know what the words actually are, but I know what the meaning is.” Nevertheless, students perceive that they hear Tlingit in their community.

Even though students believe that they have opportunities to learn Tlingit from family and community members, when I met with the TRTFN Education Committee to review students’ comments, Ali Carlick explained that the only person who speaks Tlingit fluently is Elder Jackie Williams. Ali added, “And who does he speak to? No one” (Ali Carlick, October 20, 2015, personal conversation). When I spoke with Elder Jackie Williams, he said that he likes to go to Teslin so that he can speak Tlingit with other Elders (Elder Jackie Williams, March 4, 2015, personal conversation). The comments from students and Ali Carlick indicate that while students sometimes hear Tlingit spoken in the community, they are not learning to converse in Tlingit on a daily basis.

Parents' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language

When asked about opportunities to learn Tlingit language at school, parents spoke about past programs and the current lack of a language program (Parents A, B, D, E1, E2, F1). When I asked, "Does your child learn Tlingit language at school?" Parent F1 said, "not very often" and Parent E1 answered, "not of any substance I don't think." Parent A responded, "Yah, they did while _____ was there. And, I don't know if they still offer that. She is not in the After School Program any more. She has outgrown it, but it would be really good to see some sort of leadership training with the language." Parent B answered the question about learning Tlingit language at school with:

I think so, I don't know. Whenever they have somebody. Don't they? It's always so sporadic when they have Aboriginal person to do that. The Tlingit language program and culture and that kind of stuff. So I don't think they have somebody right now. And I don't think they do it at the level like they used to like when my grandmother used to be the Tlingit language teacher. Or *Sheetixdu.oo*⁹⁴. They don't do it at that level anymore. And I don't know if, (long pause) I don't know (in a very quiet voice).

Parent D also spoke about language lessons in the past:

Yes. I'm not too sure how much they do now. There used to be a Tlingit language teacher here but it's been a while since they had anyone. My mom was actually the Tlingit language teacher here for four or five years. But she is at home now. And she taught them Math in Tlingit as well. The younger kids catch on really, really fast. My _____ was really good at doing Tlingit Math.

When answering my question about language lessons in school, Parent A added, "And F.H.

Collins⁹⁵ offers Tlingit language, so I am thinking that might be one of his options too. I would

⁹⁴ *Sheetixdu.oo*, whose English name is Lorraine Dawson, was employed at the school several years ago. Barb Dawson, one of my TRTFN research partners suggested I phone her mother, Lorraine, and when I spoke with Lorraine on the telephone on July 30, 2016, Lorraine said that she was a noon hour supervisor at the time and was told by the Elders that she could only teach Tlingit if an Elder was present because she was still learning to speak Tlingit fluently. Lorraine also mentioned that there were only a few people in Atlin who could speak Tlingit and that they did not get together often.

⁹⁵ F.H. Collins is one of the secondary schools where students from Atlin might attend Grades 10, 11, and 12.

really like _____ to continue with his Tlingit language. I think he will because his grandmother was a fluent speaker.” Parents’ comments indicate that opportunities to learn Tlingit language in school are intermittent.

Parents also responded to my question about learning Tlingit language outside of school. Again, parents perceived that opportunities to learn Tlingit were limited. Parents E1 and F1 replied, “no” (quietly) and “not very often, no” respectively. Parent B responded:

No. No. Other than the board game,⁹⁶ when she plays it. But I don’t think so. She doesn’t have an opportunity. ”Yah, she knows like “*Gunalchéesh*” (thank you) and “*haagú*” (come here) and her Tlingit name, and she probably knows more than I know. But, like, her grandma used to be the Tlingit language teacher of this school a long time ago, and she has always gone to the Tlingit Family Learning Centre and they do a lot of that there. She has been around a lot of this. A lot of people who still are able to speak it.

Parent D spoke about opportunities in the community to learn Tlingit language and their dream to become a language teacher. Parent D said, “There used to be a Tlingit language teacher here but it’s been a while since they had anyone. I used to be the Tlingit language teacher at the learning centre and they used to learn Tlingit all the time at home.” When I asked if they could speak Tlingit and hold a conversation in Tlingit, Parent D replied:

I’m still working on that, but I get help when I go to Teslin and go to work. I work with two Elders and they’re constantly talking Tlingit so I catch on. But sometimes it’s kind of hard for me. I’m still learning. Well my dream is to go to Juneau and live in Juneau for four years. I want to do my Tlingit language there. I’ve always wanted to do that. So within four year I want to be in Juneau.

When the child said her father spoke Tlingit, the parent responded, “We don’t really say them at all. I wanted actually to teach her more” (Parent C2). Comments from parents seem to indicate that there is a desire for more opportunities to speak and learn Tlingit in the community.

⁹⁶ Parent B is referring to the TRTFN board game, “*Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat*”, mentioned in Chapter 1, which was created to teach Tlingit language (Schreyer and Gordon 2007).

Teachers' Perceptions of Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language

Teachers had less to say than students and parents about Tlingit language instruction at Atlin School. When I asked about students' opportunities to learn Tlingit language, Teacher A said, "I really don't know" and added, "I don't know how many people still speak their traditional language." Teacher C said that Tlingit language is integrated daily in the primary classroom and that in the past there has been a language program at the school for all students. Teacher C thought that it was important to teach language together with cultural activities to make the learning more "tangible for students." Teacher D talked about attempting to teach Tlingit to students using the online learning tools through the Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC),⁹⁷ however, the teacher felt challenged to teach Tlingit language in the classroom because there was no language teacher at Atlin School for support and the Taku River Tlingit dialect was different from the YNLC online tools for teaching Tlingit.⁹⁸ Even though the plans did not go as expected, Teacher D had a creative idea for how to include Tlingit language by having students make storybooks using words that interested them. Teacher A said, "So it could be a traditional story or a funny, brand new story." Students were to work on the storybooks on Friday mornings, however the teacher added, "There were so many Fridays that were off or kids weren't here on Fridays. So the timing didn't work to accomplish as much as I had hoped." From teachers' perspectives it seems if Tlingit language is to be taught in Atlin School, partnerships must be developed between TRTFN and SD87 for that purpose and supports must be in place.

⁹⁷ The Yukon Native Language Centre provides training and research in the areas of linguistics and language education to Yukon First Nations and to the public. Located at the Yukon College, Ayamdiqut Campus in Whitehorse, Yukon, the Centre is funded by the Government of Yukon and administrated by the Council of Yukon First Nations.

⁹⁸ Language resources in the Taku River Tlingit dialect are available at Sealaska Heritage Institute (2016b).

Reflections about Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language

I believe that the comments from students, parents, and teachers indicate a need for more supports for Tlingit language instruction (see Table 5.3 *Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language*). I think that it important to note that the tone in the interviews when I asked about opportunities to learn Tlingit language was often subdued and quiet. Students sounded sad when they responded with words like, “not any more.” Parents were also quiet and sometimes paused for long periods of time before answering the questions about language. When Ali Carlick and Tammy Fetterly and I were reviewing students’ comments at a TRTFN Education Committee meeting, Ali used the word, “heartbreaking” when we read students’ comments about learning Tlingit language. Lorraine Dawson used the same word in our telephone conversation (July 30, 2016). As an interviewer and researcher, I also felt emotional to hear the comments about loss of language. I cannot imagine how emotional language loss must feel to the Taku River Tlingit peoples. My only connection to what the members of TRTFN might be feeling, particularly the children, is the loss I feel within my own family for not knowing my grandmother’s heritage and the lessons she could have taught us about Métis culture and language. The comments from students, parents, community members, and teachers make me want to help in some way. I hope that our partnership research will bring more awareness to members of the TRTFN, SD87, and the Atlin community at large about the need to support Tlingit language revitalization. In Chapter 7, I discuss possible applications of this research as part of the conclusions to our project.

Table 5.3 *Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language*

Students’, Parents’, and Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Language		
Students’ Comments	Parents’ Comments	Teachers’ Comments

Tlingit language was taught in the past.	Tlingit was learned in past programs.	In the primary classroom, Tlingit words are included in the daily Calendar Time and in Mathematics.
Students know some words, such as colours, counting, and the calendar.	Currently, a Tlingit language program does not exist.	Teachers would welcome support from a Tlingit language teacher and resources.
Students hear Tlingit words in the community at celebrations and in some homes	Opportunities to learn Tlingit in the community are limited.	

Importance of Learning Tlingit Language

Although students, parents, and teachers in Atlin sometimes spoke about the importance of language and culture simultaneously, they also emphasized the importance of learning Tlingit language as well as Tlingit culture. I believe it is important to distinguish language from culture in this section because languages hold the knowledge for cultural revitalization (Battiste 2005). In fact, Battiste argues that, “Aboriginal languages are irreplaceable resources in any education reform” (2005, 17). Second, I have noted that earlier Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (which are no longer posted on the Ministry of Education website) often included separate goals for increasing opportunities to learn Indigenous language and culture, however more recent agreements have sometimes edited the enhancement goals to include Indigenous culture, but not language. Given that scholars, for example, Antone (2000), Ivanic (2005), Norton (2000), and Stairs (1994) advocate that knowing one’s ancestral language promotes a strong identity, I have included the importance of learning Tlingit language here as a separate section to give it emphasis.

Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Language

Students agreed that learning Tlingit language was an important as learning Tlingit culture (Students A, B, C, D, E, F, G, L, M). Student B said:

It's like our culture. It's a good culture (spoken with emphasis). If we did not have our language or our culture we wouldn't be going down to the Taku, we wouldn't go to Ha Kus Teyea [Celebration]. We wouldn't do any of that. We wouldn't fish. We wouldn't go hunting moose and we would just be living.

Students thought the main reason to learn Tlingit language was to prevent the language from becoming extinct. Student C said, "Because if we don't do it soon it's going to be an extinct language. Because Tlingit is a dying culture and we need Tlingit people to speak Tlingit." Student G responded, "Because if we don't learn our language then none of us will remember how we teach it to others and then our language will be lost (Student G). Student L answered, "so we know the language, like some of the language, when the Elders pass on." Two students thought that learning Tlingit language was important "Because most Elders say it" (Student A) and "Cause it's the way how we used to talk, not all English" (Student F). As with learning culture, one student mentioned learning language from grandparents at school. A student said, "I want my grandma to come back. She was a Tlingit language teacher" (Student identity withheld for anonymity). As I said in an earlier section, I am impressed with the awareness and responsibility the students demonstrated in the interviews.

Two students made comments, which seemed to indicate that they enjoyed learning Tlingit. Student C said that learning the Tlingit language was interesting. Student M commented, with enthusiasm, "It's a different language. It's nothing like English and there is a lot to learn." Both students' comments and their tones were quite convincing.

To conclude this discussion of the importance of learning Tlingit language, students believe learning Tlingit is important to prevent the language from becoming extinct, because Elders speak Tlingit, and because it interests them.

Parents' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Language

Parents explained the importance of learning Tlingit language because of the connection between language and ways of living and for language revitalization. Parent A explained, "Because our Indigenous languages are connected to our sacred ways of life and those sacred ways of life are connected to the universal laws. And without those languages, there is a disconnect again." Parent B and Parent D spoke about maintaining Indigenous languages that are endangered. Parent B said:

Because our languages are extinct now. Like I am never going to learn the way I learned when I was younger like my daughter. I've just accepted there's no way she going to learn unless she goes to a four-year program in Southeast Alaska. So I just think it's important that she speaks a different language. Like English is not her first language. Tlingit is. And she does not speak very much of it. It's still her first language.

Parent D explained about language endangerment as well:

I think it's very important because we're losing our language and I want to work really hard with my kids to teach them the language because there's not very many young people, including in my generation, who know our language. I think it's very important for us to pass it on. I want to make sure my kids are able to learn as much about the language as possible.

Parent C2 spoke about using the language as well as learning words in the language:

Language, for me is important. It's as important as everything else. Like English and Math and culture is an aspect of education, but dancing is only one aspect. We should have Tlingit in every curriculum, even counting, maybe teach counting 1 to 10 in Tlingit or adding in Tlingit 1 to 10. Basic addition and stuff like that, simple verbal addition and subtraction, rather than just learning how to recite numbers. Actually learning how to use them and stuff. That's the missing link in the education and until the day they get it into the actual curriculum it's just going to be lip service.

According to parents, learning Tlingit language is important so that the language and ways of living are not lost.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Language

Teachers did not differentiate between the importance of learning Tlingit culture and language in the interviews. Teacher A said, "I think they're together. I don't think you can separate them. And I think traditional Tlingit language is connected to the activities you do on the land, it's connected to your worldview as well." Teacher D was speaking about the importance of children as knowledge keepers of Indigenous culture, when they added, "And it is so important because if they don't pass it on, it will be lost. The language will be lost." Like the parents, teachers suggested that Tlingit language and culture are connected.

Reflections about the Importance of Learning Tlingit Language

Participant's perceptions of the importance of learning Tlingit language are presented in Figure 5.4 *The Importance of Learning Tlingit Language*. Students, parent, and teachers are concerned that Tlingit language is becoming extinct. From their comments we can assume that students, parents, and teachers agree that retaining and revitalizing Tlingit language is important to teach Tlingit culture to future generations. Goals for culture and language revitalization must obviously come from the Taku River Tlingit people, however, school district support with cultural and language revitalization would be appropriate action towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to restore the effects of assimilation policies of the past. A partnership with clearly defined roles and responsibilities could support language revitalization for Taku River Tlingit. I discuss this partnership for culture and language

revitalization further in the last chapter of this dissertation as a contribution of this research, which needs to be explored further.

Table 5.4 *The Importance of Learning Tlingit Language*

Students', Parents', and Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning Tlingit Language		
Students' Comments	Parents' Comments	Teachers' Comments
To prevent the language from becoming extinct	Language is connected to <i>Haa Kusteeyí</i> (Tlingit way of living).	Language and culture are connected.
Because Elders speak Tlingit	To ensure that Tlingit ways are not lost.	To ensure that the language is not lost.
Because learning Tlingit is interesting.		

In the last section of this chapter, I present the ideas from students, parents, and teachers gathered in our interviews for improving opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language. I hope that the suggestions in the last section may inspire SD87 and TRTFN about possible steps for partnership. However, before I present the suggestions from participants, I wish to include comments from two focus group sessions in which participants were asked specifically if they believed that opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language would enhance student achievement.

Will Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture and Language Enhance Student Achievement?

In Chapter 1, I explained how many Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements have goals to introduce more opportunities for Indigenous culture and language into classrooms as a means of improving student academic achievement. Therefore after presenting the comments from our research participants, I believe it is pertinent to discuss comments, which may help to answer whether or not this strategy in enhancement agreements is viable. In the interviews,

participants made comments that indirectly answer the question. For example, students, parents, and teachers confirmed that one of the things that students enjoy about school is practicing Tlingit culture. Teacher D explained that enjoying school was important for wanting to learn. Student A said that carving helped with relaxation so that it was easier to focus upon schoolwork. Comments like these inspired me to ask more directly at the focus group sessions about the relationships between learning Indigenous culture and academic success.

In the focus group sessions with the TRTFN Education Committee and with the staff members of Atlin School, participants were asked whether or not opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language would influence student achievement. Members of the TRTFN Education Committee agreed that culture and language instruction would affect achievement and gave several reasons for agreement. As I mentioned in an earlier section, one of the reasons was, “If you don’t know where you came from you don’t know where you are going.” A second reason was, “If you know who you are, then you are ready to learn.” Another participant said, “People need to know they are not the only people about diversity. There is not just one type of people out there.” She also said, “Understanding one’s own self helps you to understand others, creating empathy.” The third reason to learn Tlingit culture and language has to do with building confidence and self-pride. A participant at the focus group session said, “Instead of feeling like I was just going to be wiped out, learning about makes me realize I can achieve something.” Finally, two comments are related to connections to others. One participant said, “Doesn’t matter where you are, it brings a sense of belonging and being connected back to the land” and another said, “When you are more connected to self, you are more at ease, ready to connect with others.” According to members of the TRTFN Education Committee the reasons to include Indigenous culture and language in the school curriculum are to enhance student identity to prepare students

to be ready to learn, to teach about diversity, to build confidence and self-pride, and to enhance connections with others. Although these responses are brief, they provide powerful statements about the importance of including Indigenous culture and language in schools.

In the focus group with the Atlin School staff, teachers spoke about identity, as well as goals for education and the importance of working in partnership with parents. A teacher said, “It helps to develop a sense of who they are and what they are about so that they are in a position to learn more or learn easier” and another added, “They feel good about who they are which goes for everybody.” Then members of the staff commented, “It’s not going to work if the foundational pieces are not in place. We must provide foundational pieces” and “Yes, Indigenous cultural activities will enhance achievement provided that the other pieces are there.” This led to a discussion of the goals of school, which indicated a wholistic approach when one teacher said, “You can put in all the feel good things you want, but you won’t have achievement. The program must be authentic and must combine all goals.” The discussion continued with ways to achieve an authentic wholistic program for students with an emphasis upon engaging families. Participants in the focus group said, “Engage families, look at where kids are at, talk to Elders.” This can be achieved a teacher said by “Speaking to families to find out what is important to them, otherwise what are we promoting and teaching.” A teacher said, “When you engage families, the children see that and then they know you care.” One teacher added that cultural activities provide, “an opportunity to connect with kids through culture and that will enhance student achievement.” Finally, teachers noted that, “the cultural component has been strengthened in the past ten years” and agreed that they wanted to, “Take the lead from TRTFN.” In summary, the Atlin School Staff articulated that including Tlingit culture and language in school will improve achievement because knowing who you are and feeling good about yourself

is important for learning. They believe that a wholistic approach that engages families would be most beneficial for students.

An interesting aside to this discussion of teachers' comments at the focus group session is that the three goals in the *Atlin School Growth Plan (2014-2015 and 2015-2016)* are: 1) students will continue to develop their reading fluency and comprehension, 2) students will continue to develop their ability in numeracy, and 3) students will develop their ability to express themselves through writing (SD87 (Stikine) 2016). The current goals at Atlin School reflect the direction that the British Columbia Ministry of Education has promoted in the past two decades. As schools begin to implement *BC's New Curriculum*, a curriculum which focuses upon communication and critical thinking and includes more Indigenous content in classrooms (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016b), it follows that school districts and schools will be revising goals for achievement. The new curriculum, particularly the core competency for positive personal and cultural identity, together with the First Peoples' Principles of Learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016c) will support SD87 as they engage with families to plan for more wholistic programs for education for Indigenous students.

More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language

The final questions about Tlingit culture and language asked students, parents, and teachers ways to create more opportunities for learning culture and language and who could help.

Students' Perceptions of More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language

Five students from two classes gave ideas for more opportunities for learning Tlingit culture and language. Student A suggested setting up a culture room. Student L said students should be taught to set snares. Student K mentioned the school camping fieldtrip in September

2015 and commented, “We should do it again in the winter to make it more interesting.” Student I said that they would like to learn how to “cook traditionally” to prepare “moose meat, caribou, and dried fish.” Student I also thought it was important for people to learn “how many different clans there is” and went on to name clans:

Student I: “There’s crow, wolf, beaver, bear, snake, killer whale I think, eagle, and frog, and I used to know lots, and frog and beaver.

Interviewer: What clan do you belong to?

Student I: Crow. And there’s dog salmon.

Student B commented that school could not teach culture. She said that she liked the opportunities now at school, but added with a chuckle, “I just like learning about it [Tlingit culture] outside of school cause there is not much things to do outside of school. So if we are doing the culture thing, cultural stuff, then I could have stuff to do” (Student B). When I asked the student if there were more cultural things that could be brought into school, such as games or websites, the following conversation ensued:

Student B: But kids aren’t interested in that. Honestly.

Interviewer: Why or why not? Can you tell me why or why not?

Student B: Because we don’t want to look up, I don’t know, it’s just nothing that teenagers want to do.

Interviewer: What do teenagers want to do? Do they want to be doing things?

Student B: Yah. Maybe, people to teach you just how to do stuff. So like, how to clean a fish, how to fillet a fish, how to make jam, just like courses kind of. Little field trips to go out. Making soap berry ice cream.

The suggestions for hands on learning from Students A, B, I, K, and L give ideas for future planning.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ It would be necessary for TRTFN and SD87 to partner to provide some of the opportunities suggested by students. Throughout the interview questions, students named people in the community who could help to create more opportunities at the school for learning Tlingit culture and language. The children named community members, Gail Jackson, Louise Gordon, Ali Carlick, Linda Johnson, Wayne Carlick, Debra Michel, and JoAnne Jackson, who could help to teach Tlingit Culture.

Parent's and Grandparents' Perceptions of More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language

At the luncheon on November 25, 2015 grandparents spoke about recognizing the assets in the community, creating a mandatory cultural curriculum, and involving the Elders in the plans for education. As the focus group session began, the grandparents were having a conversation about making cedar hats and a grandparent said, “Sometimes, what they have in the community, they take it for granted, and they don’t realize what they have.” Spokesperson Louise Gordon responded to this comment with, “So that’s a really important point, building on the strengths of the community.”

The grandparents used the term, *mandatory*, to describe a curriculum for teaching traditional culture. They agreed with a suggestion from Spokesperson Louise Gordon that a smoke shed should be built on the school grounds as an area for teaching traditional culture.

The grandparents were adamant that Elders must be involved in all steps of the planning for improving education. They spoke about reviving a Grandparents Committee to help teach traditional ways to younger generations. The comments from grandparents emphasized that learning about culture from Elders and ancestors is a tradition with members of TRTFN (Schreyer et al. 2014). These three ideas—building upon strengths, creating a mandatory curriculum and a place to teach it, and involving Elders are foundations for creating more opportunities for Tlingit culture and language.

Parents’ comments about increasing opportunities for learning Tlingit culture and language can be summarized into two categories, ways to implement more Tlingit culture into Atlin School and what to teach. Implementing more cultural teachings in school might be achieved by: creating a working group for education, integrating Tlingit culture into school subjects, making cross cultural training available to teachers, training a Tlingit language expert,

and involving Elders, and doing more spirit work. Parents elaborated on each of these ideas in their comments. Parent C2 suggested that a way to enhance opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language was to create a Tlingit working group for education:

They would need to start a Tlingit working group and not at the same level as the parent advisory group, so maybe a group opposite the parent advisory group. Without the same stuff, just focusing on the Tlingit curriculum. That way parents could help keep it relevant. I think that would be a big part of it. And have the teachers and maybe even the superintendent work here and be a part of it, just to see where the ideas come from. They don't have to be expensive ideas or anything, but even getting out in the bush and doing stuff.

Parent B and Parent C2 spoke about increasing the amount of time dedicated to teaching Tlingit culture. Parent B commented:

I think instead of putting it in this one-hour thing, like I think the kids going to the library to learn Tlingit, or whatever, but bringing the Tlingit right into the classroom. And they don't go to the library when it's a language they can learn in their classroom. It might need a lot of translation I think.

Parent C2 said:

I said lip service before. It's like we're going to include First Nation culture into the school curriculum, so once in a while with dance it covers their bases about what they have to do and what they've said they'll do. For me it's just the bare minimum of what could be done.

Incorporating more Tlingit culture into all subject areas might be a way to relieve the concerns of Parent B and C2.

When I prompted parents about ways to make change happen, Parents A, B and C2 suggested training for teachers, i.e. language teachers and classroom teachers. Parent B responded:

We need a translator. And have TRT be involved. Maybe even a university that teaches Tlingit language. I don't know. I just think the people that run this school, whoever does it from time to time, whoever's running this, needs to be right up front about being open to making some culture changes, culture and language changes at this school. And being really proactive about it, instead of being like, I don't know, if you're an educator you teach a certain way. I don't know if they get to choose the style or teaching methods. Like it's all up to them, right? And if they don't choose to include Tlingit language and culture

in their teachings, then they don't have to, do they? I don't think they have to? And so I think just being more open?

Parent B's comments imply that there is a need for a trained language teacher in-service training for teachers about ways to make the curriculum be culturally relevant. Parent B continued:

They would need support from the local First Nation and from the community as a whole. We need to figure out a strategy to provide people to be able to do that. And I don't even think this job should even be a part time job. They should have a full time person at the school so it's more appealing for a job. We live in a real rural community and I just feel like part time work is not good enough. I think there should be one whole position for culture and language or something. We need a full time person. We need to get people trained in Southeast Alaska for four years. We need to start promoting [the position] as a viable option as a career. So in Alaska you can learn Tlingit as a career.

Parent C2 also spoke about training a Tlingit language teacher for Atlin:

It is hard when we have people going to be language-trained technicians, they're seventy years old right now, you know? Why not send somebody who's eighteen who wants to become a language expert? That way we have them for another sixty years, instead of sending somebody who's seventy, who's already an Elder. The problem with language people is they are all Elders, and now we're sending more Elders. We're not sending the younger generation, and that is part of the problem. If we had somebody like ____ who was a language technician and knew the language verbally, written, every which way, an expert in all aspects of language. It would be better to have somebody who could do that.

Parent A offered a solution for training classroom teachers:

Cross cultural training. Yes, (with emphasis) there are resource people available and yes (with emphasis) there would have to be some work done on a curriculum for the cross-cultural focus. And it might even mean bringing in somebody like Brenda Ireland or, you know, there are other people here. Marilyn Jensen. She works at Yukon College. There are lots of good people that are available and willing to do those pieces.

The comments from Parents, A, B, and C2 imply that more training is necessary, both for a language teacher and for classroom teachers and, as Parent B has suggested, this will require collaboration between TRTFN and SD87.

The final comment to share about creating more opportunities for Tlingit language and culture in Atlin School is a comment from Parent A about spirit work:

Yah, yah, we can, what I have known is we can access it through spirit and I have done it. Because when I hear people say, “we have lost our language, we have lost our way of life”, we haven’t, we just need to do the spirit work. And through the spirit work, I have been visited by ancestors. I have been visited by spirit. I have seen visions, you know. So it’s there. It’s just a matter of how much you are willing to do to achieve it.

I return to the topic of possible changes to increase students’ opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language in Chapter 7 Conclusions.

As well as ways to incorporate more opportunities for Tlingit culture and language in school, parents made suggestions about topics to teach, including: Tlingit history, Tlingit governance including clans, making regalia, medicine picking, a school district powwow, and a canoe journey with many lessons as part of the projects. For example, for the Social Studies curriculum, Parent C2 suggested teaching Tlingit history in schools and Parent E1 talked about teaching Tlingit government. Parent E1 described:

I really feel like the point about the function of culture in education wasn’t, (pause) I want to make sure it was made from my point, our point. That the focus is just on the form and even _____ was saying that you know the substance in his view is teaching the kids how to survive on the land. Because if you are going to hunt and provide for your family and all that and not go and get lost and dead somewhere on a mountain, you know, you have got to learn all these things. And, the school hasn’t embraced that element of our culture. So that stuff is the substance in the cup, you know the dancing and the pole is the cup, that’s the form. Language is the form in the school’s mind. But, it’s great if I have my language, but if I don’t have my language, I am not any less Indigenous just because I don’t have my language. And so, you know, I think it is good if we focus on language and all that, but I think it is more important that we focus on the values and the way of life, and conflict resolution, and the clan system, our own governance mechanisms.

Those things should all be taught in school. The teachers should be required to know them, if they are going to teach in this country. I bet you none of them have even read the constitution. TRT Constitution. They should read the mining policy. They should have to read all our stuff. They are in our territory. It’s like going to Japan and not learning anything about the Japanese. That’s kind of stupid. It’s actually ignorant. And yet the school division sends people in here that don’t even know who the hell we are. It’s not responsible. And then these people are charged with you know ensuring our culture in education, like our culture and tradition is held up in the school. How are they going to do that?

When I asked Parent E1 about protocols, who could teach certain topics, and if teachers would be able to find resources to learn about Tlingit culture, Parent E1 responded:

Well what we have made public. They could at least do that. Bring in resource people. Like for example in the constitution there is a Wolf and a Crow Clan leader. You know, they could be going through the governance system and saying, “hey, maybe we should invite the Wolf Leader in and see if he wants to talk to us or the Crow Clan Leader. And make it real. Or, I wonder when the next Elders’ Council Meeting is? Maybe we should ask if the school, a class could come in for a half an hour and listen to the Elders’ deliberate. There are all kinds of things they could do that they don’t do.

Parents F1, F2, G1, and G2 made suggestions for teaching more Tlingit culture in school that include activities that community members participate in currently in and around Atlin. Parent F1 suggested “regalia making in the school as a class” and “medicine picking.” Parent F1 elaborated:

They could do medicine picking. They could be part of the harvesting because Ali put a medicine plant book together. I read through it and there is harvesting done every year. Back along time ago there was harvesting every month of the year. If we could get back into those books and start to be able to go into the lands and start picking the plants from those books and start harvesting them. (Parent F1)

When I suggested to Parents F1 and F2 that education for Indigenous students is slowly changing in Canada, Parent F2 responded, “That is what is happening. We are put on a pedestal. We are honored now, or appreciated for our lifestyle.”

Parents G1 and G2 suggested topics for lessons based upon opportunities their children had in another school district to attend a school district powwow and a canoe journey. Parent G2 suggested:

And that’s another thing. They’ve got a canoe here and on a couple of occasions this past summer they were able to get out with some community members. And I have talked to Wayne about organizing some kind of canoe journey in the summer time. Perhaps we could do that during the school year. Incorporate it somehow, focus more on the youth as opposed to the young adults. So that is just one event or one type of activity. And you

know the songs and singing and feasting. A whole bunch of things could surround the canoe journey.¹⁰⁰

Parent G2 spoke about a school campout in September 2015. Parent G2 said:

I know that they had a camp out earlier this fall. They went to Warm Bay, I believe, and had a camp out. So I mean, things like that. Doesn't have to be something that is super involved or super detailed. It can be as simple as an overnight camp and have some Elders come in and talk about the way they used to do things.¹⁰¹

When I asked which Elders could come, Parent G1 remarked:

Oh, any Elders. I think any of the Elders are the key. And it is good for the Elders too, because, for a long time they were the people that weren't allowed to talk about their culture so much, right. So it is good for them. I think, talking to kids brings everybody back, you know because kids can just ask the most outrageous questions and they have a tendency to bring you back.

In summary, grandparents gave ideas that are foundational for future planning with Elders involved, namely a place to teach Tlingit culture and language and a curriculum that is planned in consultation with Elders and based upon the strengths of the community. Parents made many suggestions for how to include more Tlingit culture in Atlin School and for what topics to teach. These ideas are presented with ideas from students and teachers as Table 5.5 *More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language* at the end of this section.

¹⁰⁰ This quote from Parent G2, again displays an interesting use of the terms, *they* and *we*. In this case, the parent says “they”, meaning TRTFN, but then switches to “we” when speaking about future plans for a canoe journey. The term, *they*, was also used at a meeting of the TRTFN Education Committee, when a member of the committee said in frustration, “What are they doing over there [at the school]?” (October 20, 2015, my journal notes). I believe that when members of the community use the term, *they*, connections between themselves and the persons they are referring to are not strong. However, when community members use the term, *we*, they seem to be moving closer to partnerships for the future. I discuss this further in Chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ I worry when people make suggestions that Elders could come to teach. I recently attended a goal setting event with Métis peoples where Elders were mentioned often. I realize that Elders are often the knowledge keepers and that protocols must be followed, but I think that as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples partner for improvements to education, we must be careful about how often we “volunteer” our Elders.

Teachers' Perceptions of More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language

Teachers had suggestions about ways to create more opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language in Atlin School, for example, renaming the school with a Tlingit name, projects such as moose hunting and canoe carving, and creating a community calendar. Teacher A responded, "I imagine probably just put in the Tlingit name on the school would be one way."

Teacher C talked about plans for two projects for the following school year: a moose hunt and finishing a TRTFN canoe. Teacher C elaborated about the moose hunt:

Then looking to the future, next year there is a plan to do a moose hunt. One of the last culture camps this summer is going out to where the moose are. So the students are going to be at a culture camp where they are sighting the moose. They actually watch them and they learn how to call them and bring them in. At that time they will be observing them. Then in the fall, there is going to be a hunt in that same area where they are calling the moose in the summer and the students. Some of them are going to be involved with that hunt, but it won't involve them all. However, after the hunt, they are going to do the processing of the moose at the school. So that is the plan for the fall. They are talking about putting a wall tent up outside. It is going to be in October some time and it is going to be in the regular hunting season so that the non-Aboriginal students can participate as well. And it will be a school wide activity. And it is really going to be a fabulous activity. And it is my understanding that they are going to look at processing the hide here as well, so it will be quite a huge event.

This comment from Teacher D was made in June 2015. Unfortunately, the moose hunt did not occur,¹⁰² however, the project to finish a TRTFN canoe was started in Fall 2015. Teacher C also described the canoe project:

So one of the projects that they are looking at doing, and this was initiated by the kids, is to bring the canoe in, the canoe that is at TRT out at Five Mile. And the canoe is not finished and the kids would like to finish it so that it will be ready to go. So it is a thirty-five foot canoe that will be in our shop sometime next year to be worked on. It will be in our shop to be worked on similar to what was done with the pole this year.

The canoe was completed in summer 2016 and some members of TRTFN made a journey down the Yukon River in the canoe that summer. Finally, Teacher D answered that having a

¹⁰² I have no information as to why the moose hunt did not occur and in fact I only heard it mentioned once, in this interview with Teacher D. I assumed that it was an idea for the future.

community calendar with seasonal activities would be helpful to refer to for planning and to interact with students about events. This comment connected to a conversation I had with Spokesperson Louise Gordon and Education Manager, Tammy Fetterly, on November 26, 2015 at a breakfast meeting at the Pinetree Restaurant. Tammy and Louise also spoke about the need for a community calendar to assist with the conflicts that occur when the members of a small community are pulled in many directions to organize the events.

When I asked teachers who might be able to help as cultural advisors in the school,

Teacher A responded:

In the fall when _____ was here, the teacher asked the kids what do you want to learn and we made a big list of people who could come in and do that. So the kids were interested in trapping and there's some people that trap, there's some people that talk about hunting, there's a couple ladies that talk about beading which some kids were interested in. There's a couple of ladies that dry salmon and make bannock and pick berries and preserve them, so there's a lot of different people that can come in and help. Share their knowledge.

Like the parents, teachers made suggestions of what to teach and ways to support the process. Topics to teach included: all aspects about traditional hunting for moose, another carving project for all students, trapping, beading, drying salmon, making bannock, and berry picking and preserving. The ways to ensure that cultural teachings happen are to create school projects that include many activities by asking students what they would like to learn, bringing in community members as guest teachers, and creating a community calendar.

Reflections about More Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture and Language

My perceptions of the suggestions from students, parents, and teachers are that the ideas they have put forth are realistic and achievable. I present the suggestions from students, parents, grandparents, and teachers as a chart in Table 5.5 *More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language* with the hope that TRTFN and SD87 and other First Nations and school districts will

find the list to be useful. The ideas from students, parents, and teachers include ways to implement a culture and language program and what to teach. I have included two suggestions from grandparents as foundational aspects: creating a mandatory cultural curriculum and ensuring Elder involvement. Although, participants did not mention building partnerships, to implement the foundational aspects and teach the suggestions from participants in Atlin School, partnerships between the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine) must be enhanced and maintained to implement the strategies suggested by participants.

Table 5.5 *More Opportunities for Tlingit Culture and Language*

1. Foundational Aspects
 - Create a mandatory cultural curriculum
 - Ensure Elder involvement
2. What to teach?
 - Clan system
 - Tlingit history
 - Tlingit governance
 - Language
 - Using Tlingit, for example, in Math
 - Harvesting
 - Moose hunt
 - Trapping
 - Medicine picking
 - Traditional cooking
 - Fishing and fish preserving
 - Berry picking and preserving
 - Bannock
 - Traditional skills
 - Canoe project
 - Canoe journey
 - Regalia making
 - Beading
 - Celebrations
 - Tlingit naming ceremony for the school
 - Activities
 - Culture camps in all seasons
 - Activities on the land, e.g. treasure hunt
 - Create a working group for Education
 - Retain a full time Aboriginal Language and Culture teacher
 - Cross cultural training for teachers
 - Community members as guest teachers
 - Bring Clan leaders in to present to students
 - Take a fieldtrip to the Elders' Council
 - Elders as teachers
 - Engage in spirit work
 - Integrate Tlingit culture into all subjects
 - Focus on functional aspects of culture as well as artistic form
 - Create a culture room
 - Create a place to teach traditional cultural lessons on the school playground
3. What is needed?
 - Create a working group for Education
 - Retain a full time Aboriginal Language and Culture teacher
 - Cross cultural training for teachers
 - Community members as guest teachers
 - Bring Clan leaders in to present to students
 - Elders as teachers, for example, take a fieldtrip to the Elders' Council
 - Engage in spirit work
 - Integrate Tlingit culture into all subjects
 - Focus on functional aspects of culture as well as artistic form
 - Create a culture room
 - Create a place to teach traditional cultural lessons on the school playground

Summary of Students' Opportunities to Learn Tlingit Culture and Language

I am pleased with how this chapter evolved. Students, parents, and teachers described current opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language and made authentic suggestions for future planning. Students' comments about opportunities to learn Tlingit culture show insights and highlight that students believe they have responsibilities to ancestors and Elders and to future generations. Parents have a vision for education for their children and the vision includes teaching Tlingit values and "*Haa Kusteeyí*, that's Tlingit way of living" (Parent B) in addition to performance and artwork (Parent E1). Teachers are supportive but require resources and support to create more opportunities to learn Tlingit culture and language. Comments from students and parents identified issues to be resolved, such as, maintaining the Aboriginal Language and Culture position as a full-time position, training a language teacher for Atlin, and cross-cultural training for teachers at Atlin School. Comments from students, parents and teachers indicate that a partnership exists between TRTFN and SD87, however there are little nuances that suggest that more could be done to enhance relationships to improve opportunities for learning Tlingit culture and language. Most importantly, students, parents, and teachers agree that learning Tlingit culture and language is important for identity and to honour the traditional teachings of ancestors.

Chapter 6 Students' Relationships with Others

"I never really had a best friend. I mostly have cousins cause I trust them" (Student H).

"Yeah, it's all family here, and it's all family in Five Mile" (Parent D).

"I think if you build a relationship with the students or especially the families, then kids value what you think because they know you are invested in their family and in their life" (Teacher D).

Interview participants were asked questions about students' relationships with their friends, teachers, and family members and Elders. In the project proposal, questions about relationships with others were included for two reasons. First, many Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in British Columbia have goals to improve students' sense of belonging, hence gathering information about students' relationships with others in school seemed to be important as a starting point for understanding how to build sense of belonging. Second, Penetito et al. (2011) report students' negative perceptions of relationships with teachers from the Te Kotahitanga Project from New Zealand. Penetito et al. (2011) summarize students' perceptions that low expectations for Maori students' achievement and conflicts with teachers negatively affect students' success in school. Since the Te Kotahitanga Project has gained recognition internationally, I was interested to know if there were any similarities between the experiences of Taku River Tlingit students in Atlin and Maori students in New Zealand. The comments from students, parents, and teachers about relationships with others at school and in the community are reported here under the five headings: Friendships, Activities with Friends, Students' Relationships with Teachers, Communication between Students, Parents, and Teachers, and Interactions with Elders.

Friendships

Students' Perceptions of Friendships with Peers

All students interviewed said that they had friends at school. Students mentioned that friends are cousins as well (Students A, H) and that the often students in Atlin School have been together since preschool (Students A, C, B). One student said that having friends at school was important, "Cause you actually have someone to hang out with and stuff and it makes school more fun because you have friends there to hang out with" (Student A). Student A also said that schoolwork was a lot easier because friends were there. However, another student disagreed, commenting, "If you just met them, yeah they'll probably work, but I've stayed with the guys most of my life in school and it's just hard to concentrate and work" (Student C). When I asked the student if it was going to be hard to go to Whitehorse where it is all new people, Student C said, "it'll be good to meet new people," but then the student mentioned, "I have one more friend who knows me there."

In addition to the friends at school, a number of students said they had friends outside of school and outside of Atlin. One student said he had older friends who were no longer in school (Student A), one said she had friends in Whitehorse who she saw every two weeks (Student B), one mentioned friends she had met online (Student C), one mentioned friends in Vancouver (Student F), one mentioned friends in Carcross (Student J), and two students had friends from the previous town where they lived (Students M, N).

Eleven students described best friends (Students A, B, D, E, F, I, J, K, L, M, N). Students had interesting answers to the question, "Why do you think you and your best friend are best friends but the other kids are just friends?" I include many of their responses because the way that they describe their relationships with people who are close to them may give insight into the

meaning of sense of belonging. Student M answered that his friend was his best friend, “because I met him first” and then added, “Mostly all of my friends are my best friends. I don’t really have one best friend.” Student N replied, “I knew my best friend since I was very little.” Student A said, “Cause me and my best friend have a lot of things in common and we knew each other basically all our lives. And we like to do some of the same kind of stuff.” Student B responded, “We are like the same, we are like sisters kind of. I don’t know. It’s like easy to connect and we have the same family, the same kind of family, and we just do lots of stuff together” adding, “and we have known each other or five years now.” Student D said, “we actually say a lot of the same things at the same time.” Student E answered, “My best friend is my best friend because she accepts me for me and we connect very good” and then added, “[My best friend is] easy to talk to, we both like soccer, and [my friend] considers me as a sister.” Student F said a best friend is, “Someone you can trust. Most of the time someone you know more than anybody else.” Student K commented, “Well you kind of like joke around with them more, talk to them, about personal stuff.” Student L stated, “They don’t talk about you behind your back. They don’t just use you for your money or anything.”¹⁰³ A final comment about why friends are best friends was, “Maybe cause they help you every day, or they play with you every day” (Student I). Two students mentioned that their best friends lived in the city where they used to live (Students M, N). Student H said, “I never really had a best friend. I mostly have cousins cause I trust them. I knew _____ since I was two years old.” To summarize these comments about best friends, the students have defined a best friend as someone you have known for a long time, perhaps a cousin, who you trust, who you know better than anyone else, who accepts you for who you are, is easy to talk to, has similar interests, and who accepts you as a sister or brother.

¹⁰³ I thought that this comment from Student L was somewhat unusual until I spoke with Teacher C who said that some students needed supports with positive ways to interact with peers.

Parents' Perceptions of Students' Friendships between Peers

All parents reported that their children had friends and best friends, although the reasons for the friendships varied. Three commented that the friends were cousins (Parents A, D, and E1). Parent D said, "Yeah, it's all family here, and it's all family in Five Mile." Some parents spoke about their children knowing their best friends since early childhood. Parent B said, "They went to daycare together since they were babies." Parent D responded to the question for two children, commenting that one child has had the same best friend, "ever since they were little. They all grew up together" and the other child, "has two cousins she's really close with." These comments from Parents A, D, and E1, like the earlier comments from Students A and H, speak to the unique situation in small northern communities where friends and cousins are one and the same.

Two parents mentioned that with only a few children in the community opportunities for friendships are unique. Parent A said, "He has several best friends I think at this point and because it is so small. They are mostly his cousins." Parent B commented, "But there isn't that many kids. Beggars can't be choosers." Parents G1 and G2 commented that their children have retained their relationships with best friends who live in the community where they lived before moving to Atlin. However, they also stated that their children now had close friendships with other children who lived nearby in Atlin town. Comments from Parents A, B, G1, and G2 indicate that children can form close friendships with best friends from an early age and that friendships develop between children who live within close proximity to one another.

Parents A, B, and C2 also mentioned that their children had friends in locations that are two hours drive from Atlin. Parent A responded, "And he has friends that he met at Camp Yukon, which is a bible camp. So those friends are now in Whitehorse. So he has relationships

already in Whitehorse.” Parent B said, “But her all time best friend is ____ who lives in Whitehorse.” Parents C1 and C2 confirmed that their child, who was younger than others interviewed, had a best friend in Carcross.

A summary of parents’ perceptions of how children establish friendships would include: students can establish close friendships at a very young age, some students become best friends with other children who live near to them and others have friends who live far away, close friendships can endure even when friends move away, and in small remote communities friends might also be cousins.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ Friendships with Peers

Like the students and parents, Teacher D also mentioned the fact that students are cousins and pointed out that there are disadvantages to some students because of this. Teacher D said, “It can get very cliquy, too, cause there are cousins in families. When I commented, “It is hard to imagine. There are only ten kids and it can get cliquy,” Teacher D replied, “I know right. But it can be like, “okay, we are cousins. And then that really stands out, right, because you have like two people, even one person left out of it. They really feel left out because they are not one of the cousins or they are maybe not siblings.” Teacher D elaborated more about isolation for students in the north:

I think that is just what makes it harder, being up north in an isolated setting. It comes down to, “oh, there is only thirty kids”, but there is so many other factors that balance out that bar. These kids are isolated. They don’t have a pool to go to after school. They don’t have any groups or fun things that allow them to meet other people, to do different things outside of school. That is where behaviours of boredom happen or same people, also same teachers, because they don’t get a change of teachers. They have the same teacher for three years in a row or sometimes maybe even more. So that can be hard. It’s like you become like a family in school. I think if you can connect as a family, people are going to listen to you more. They value what you have to say.

Teacher A made a comment that connects to the idea of the small family atmosphere in Atlin School. Teacher A said, “Then they’re helping each other out too. I think if you help each other out and if you’re able to teach somebody something that’s important, not only do you learn that better, but you’re giving back”.

Reflections about Friendships with Peers

I found it interesting that students and parents spoke about friendships with peers who do not live in Atlin. Six of fourteen students said they had friends who lived away from Atlin. I thought that it was a sign of the times that technology assists friends to stay connected even at great distances. It was also interesting to me when parents spoke about friends in Whitehorse and Carcross. Even after visiting for several years, I am still surprised and impressed when people in the north describe the distances they travel to connect with family and friends. During my visits, community members often spoke about making the four hour return trip from Atlin to Whitehorse all on the same day to visit or attend an event.

Students, parents, and teachers also pointed out that in small communities friends might be your cousins and people you have known your whole life. There is a unique closeness among the children in Atlin possibly due to the fact that everyone knows every child in town and not only have they known one another since they were babies, but probably their grandparents played with one another as well. Students, parents and teachers spoke about feeling connected like family (Student B, Parent D, and Teacher D). I wonder about the impact of transitioning to secondary school when your elementary school feels like family and then you leave that security.

Activities with Friends

I included a question in the interview schedules about students' activities outside of school because I thought it would interesting and important to get a sense of what activities students do with their friends in a smaller, northern community. If school districts want to promote sense of belonging for Indigenous students, knowing more about the activities students enjoy with their friends might provide information about ways to promote sense of belonging.

Students' Perceptions of Activities with Friends

Students talked about the activities they do with their friends at school. Several students said they hang out with friends on the playground (Students A, B, F, G, K, L) and at the bus stop (Students D, E). For example, Student A said, "We usually just hang out on the playground, mostly, and we talk and that's basically it." Student F answered, "[We] talk. Laugh, fool around. Mostly the group things you see on TV shows." Another student said, "We talk to each other. Do each other's makeup. Hair. She braids my hair" (Student identity withheld for anonymity). I smiled at this conversation between two students:

Student E: We like to play outside, we like to go swimming, we like to talk.

Student F: We like to sit there (in a monotone voice).

Student E: We like to hang out.

Student F: We like to sit there (in a monotone voice). Seriously we need to do more active things at the bus stop.

One student summed up, that lunchtime was the best part of the school day, "Because I get to hang out with my friends. I like hanging out with my friends and you get fresh air" (Student G). Although, many students named, "hanging out" as a common activity, other students named activities at school. I was able to observe these activities in my nine visits to Atlin.

Other activities at school included playing "stuffies" (Student J, N), playing hide and seek (Students M, N), playing with play dough (Student N) and drawing with chalk (Student N). For

the most part, students did not mention activities on the playing field, except Student B, who said, “[We] play soccer. We do lots of sports together.” However, in my spring and fall visits to Atlin, students played soccer on the field often. In one of my visits (two weeks) to the school, the superintendent, the principal, teachers, and a member of the RCMP played soccer on the field with most of the students, aged five through fourteen, every day at recess and noon hour.

Outside of school, students spoke about spending time using technology, however students also described activities that are more unique to the north. Students spoke about playing video games (Student A), talking to friends online (Student B), and playing on the internet (Student L). One student spoke about “playing school”(Student J) at home with younger siblings and her parent explained that there were no children in her age group who lived nearby. One student spoke of playing hide and seek indoors with friends, except I thought that the game had a unique northern twist because the student called the game, “trap and go seek or hunt and go seek” (Student M). He described a game that he and a friend had invented:

At _____’s house we played it as, we played it, the first door was, we set the traps in the boot room, and then our den was in the bathroom by the door and then, this is the funny part, if you tip down the trap then it means they got in it but they went away, and then the first time, we tipped down all the traps.

When I asked the student if the shoes in the boot room were the traps, he said, “All kinds of shoes. His dad’s boots” (Student M) and went on to explain hunt and go seek:

Well, you hide and then _____ made kind of, he has, you know those bunk beds where there is a bed here and a bed here? Um, he made a fort. He tucked in blankets on the top one and then blankets are going down and block all the entrance to the long bed and then at this side, he has a table and then a kind of a little blanket there and on this side it’s to the wall. So the only place in is to move the blanket or to slide in through the cracks. That’s the trapper’s shack and then people say, we’re ready and then you go out of the trapper’s shack. And then you go hunt and then, and then the people, um, when the people, the people are hiding and then if they catch you, they are the hunter. Yah. The trapper gets to pretend what animals they are. When you are first starting the game, say like you’re a lynx or you’re a wolverine and then you will go into the trapper’s shack and they’ll hide.

I wanted to include this description by Student M because it has such a northern feel and I love the way Student M describes the game.

Some students mentioned indoor activities but the majority of students talked about outdoor activities in all seasons (Students A, D, E, F, G, I, K, L). Student A said, “[we] go out into the bush and climb trees or something.” Student M responded, “We usually play a game where we go out, usually hide and go seek or a game where we are out in the bush.” Student M also said that the kids in the family “go on the zip line. We have a little zip line in our backyard.” Four students mentioned swimming in the lake (Students D, F, G, L). In the first week of May 2015, when I asked, “What were some of the best things that happened this school year?” Student G replied, “Me and ____ were the first ones to go into the lake here at the point, like a week ago.” When I pointed out that the ice was still on parts of the lake, Student G said, “There was still ice way down there. We just decided we were going to do it.” Another summer activity was four wheeling (Students F, I). Students also talked about camping with other family members (Students A, B, L). When I asked Student E if there were more activities in summer or winter, Student E said that they were more active outdoors in winter. Students talked about going skidooing and sledding (Students D, E, F, G, I, K, L). I think that it is important to note that students are describing play in wilderness that most people would consider to be very remote. For example, Atlin Lake is a large lake, yet one student commented, “I like to go skidooing. I know last year, me and _____ and _____, we hooked up a little sleigh to the back of _____’s skidoo and went across the lake and all that and it was fun” (Student K). Even young students are confident in the outdoors. The following is an excerpt of a conversation with a younger student. I wanted to include the whole conversation for those who do not know the north:

Interviewer: What do you do in the wintertime? You don’t use your bike in the snow do you?

Student I: Sometimes.

Interviewer: Sometimes you do.

Student I: Mostly ride my skidoo.

Interviewer: You mostly ride your skidoo in the wintertime. So you walk over there and then go skidooing with your friends?

Student I: No, I drive my skidoo.

Interviewer: You drive your own skidoo over there? Holy cow. Is it yours, or is it for your family?

Student I: My skidoo.

Interviewer: Your own skidoo. Wow, I didn't know that. How many skidoos does your family have?

Student I: We used to have three, but we sold one, but we have two still. I have to fix one, but one still works. My dad has one. I ride all of them.

This conversation seems to capture my surprise as a southerner and the student's skill and responsibility as a child who lives in the north.

In summary, students' activities with friends inside and outside of school seem to be sometimes typical of activities of students in any school, such as hanging out with friends, playing sports together, and connecting with one another on-line. However, sometimes the activities of students were unique to the remote northern setting in which they live, such as riding skidoos and playing in the bush and on the frozen lake.

Parents' Perspectives of Students' Activities with Friends

According to parents, the remoteness and small town atmosphere in Atlin influence the types of activities that students enjoy with their peers. Every parent made comments in the interviews to indicate that their children play outdoors. When I asked Parent A about what connects friends together, they replied, "Same interests basically, skidooing, four wheeling, because it is so remote. You know fishing, camping, Those sorts of things." Parent D mentioned other outdoor activities, such as, swimming and bike riding in summer and sliding in winter. Parent F1 mentioned sliding as well, and also commented, "They hang out at _____'s mom's cabin just below _____ and _____'s house where they watch movies together, hang out." Parent

E2 explained, “And they snowshoe around. And they run around. And they go playing in the bush. And they say, ‘Oh, we are going to go down to Fish Lake.’ It’s this little lake down on the rez here. They all go down there.” Parent E1 added, “They make a fire.” When I asked if students chose to play outdoors, Parent E1 nodded, “yes” and laughed, “Well look, they got their chores done and boom they’re gone. It’s raining. It’s dark. And they are gone out to play till 9:30.” The outdoor activities named by parents were similar to the comments from students.

In addition to the conventional outdoor activities mentioned above, such as hiking and snowshoeing, Parents G1 and G2 described how their children invent games to play outdoors. Parent G1 described how one child and a friend play with stuffed toys in the dirt, “They play stuffies. They have a little area up in the corner of the field and they have cleared away little pathways in the dirt and stuff and they have a little house. It’s just up in that top corner. When I commented that the stuffies must get dirty, Parent G1 exclaimed, “They’re filthy, filthy! I have to wash them. Oh my god. It’s filthy! It’s filthy!” Parent G2 described how a child and a friend invent games such as “out in the woodshed” and “trap line”. These anecdotes give more information about activities that children in Atlin invent for outdoor play.

Parents commented that students also have opportunities for organized outdoor activities as well. Parent F1 spoke about how both children look forward to summer camps at Camp Yukon on Atlin Road and Culture Camp sponsored by the Tlingit Family Learning Centre on Atlin Lake at Five Mile. Parent D gave an example of an organized activity at Five Mile:

Sliding. Lots of sliding. My dad doesn’t like the kids being bored, so he always puts on a sliding hill over the Christmas holidays. He brings a skidoo so the kids aren’t always walking straight back up the hill. My step mom always makes Tlingit food and there’s always hot chocolate for the kids. My dad and stepmom work pretty hard on keeping the youth busy.

In Atlin, I often witnessed or heard conversations about children participating in activities with adults, such as cooking, camping, or going out in the bush.

Parents also commented on the fact that sometimes students do not have activities to do. As the students mentioned, Parent B noted that students “climb the bus stop” meaning that students climb onto the roof of the bus shelter for something to do. Parents D and F1 stated that students’ activities include “walking around”. Later in the conversation, Parent D commented, “There’s not too much to do in Five Mile. They’re working on opening a drop in center for the youth at Five Mile.” Parent C relayed how one child played with younger siblings stating, “They [siblings] go outside and play together. I get them to go out and play together. She’s the teacher and _____ is the student.” In another interview with the parents of this child’s friend, Parents G1 and G2 mentioned that the distance between Atlin and Five Mile made play date arrangements more challenging. In my visits to Atlin, I often heard comments from community members about arranging travel to and from Five Mile to town. For example, planning events for students was sometimes attached to when the later school bus went home to Five Mile.

Parents mentioned some activities that are common for students everywhere, such as, taking pictures of one another (Parent B), doing Snapchat (Parent B), having sleepovers (Parent B), cooking together (Parent B). Parent A also spoke about taking her child and his friends to the Canada Games Centre or to a movie or dinner in Whitehorse. Although it might be common for students of all ages to go to a movie, to dinner, or to swim at a recreation centre, the fact that these events take place two hours from home on remote highways is unique.

In summary, parents’ perceptions of friendships and activities with friends indicate that students in Atlin enjoy outdoor activities in all seasons, however, students would also benefit from having more to do in Atlin.

Teachers Perspectives of Students' Activities with Friends

Responses from teachers about students' activities with friends indicated that teachers have a sense that students are isolated, as Teacher D mentioned above. Teacher D elaborated that some female students attend a book club and visit with aunties. When I asked if she knew what they did with their aunties, Teacher D replied:

I don't know, to be honest. Different things, whether it's the book club or they will just meet to, I don't know. I think it is more that connection, like someone they can talk to and they will do crafts together or the auntie will teach them different stuff. For the guys, I am not sure. Some of them will have done camping trips together but that is family.

Teacher A had been at Atlin School longer and confirmed that students snowshoe, cross country ski, hang out together, go to Whitehorse to the Canada Games Centre or a movie, and go on outings with the youth worker.

Reflections about Students' Activities with Friends

From my experience working in schools in three regions of British Columbia, the students' activities at school seem typical of activities in many schools in the province. However, I thought it was unique to see students age six to fourteen playing soccer together out on the field. Also, I believe it would be rare to see the superintendent and the local RCMP member playing with the students so often in other regions of the province.

I was surprised that students spoke about being on-line together because there is no cell phone service and access to the internet is sometimes disrupted in Atlin. Therefore, although these activities are typical for most students today, they might not be quite the same for students in Atlin as they are elsewhere in the province.

I thought that the friendships for students in Atlin were also a little bit unique. Friends are usually students who have grown up together since preschool, even cousins, or friends are people

who are quite far away. As well, sometimes students of all ages play together at school and in the community.

Finally, children in Atlin seem to play at activities with friends that other children in the province might do on a camping trip under adult supervision. Again I wonder about the transition to a larger centre for high school. Not only are students uplifted from their families and the family atmosphere of a smaller elementary school, but also the activities that they enjoy with friends are likely not available to them in the bigger centre. Also, although students may welcome the new activities that a larger centre has to offer for them, they may need support and resources to access activities and to make smart choices.

Relationships with Teachers

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Penetito et al. (2011) concluded that positive relationships with teachers are a key to success for Indigenous students. Therefore, I asked students, parents, and teachers about students' relationships with their teachers. Three interview questions asked students if they liked their teachers, if talking to their teachers was easy, and how their teachers give them praise for their accomplishments.

Students' Perspectives of Relationships with Teachers

When I asked students whether or not they liked their teachers, nine students said they liked their teachers (Students C, E, G, I, J, K, L, M, N), three students said, "sometimes" (Students B, F, H), one said "a little bit" (Student D), and one said, "no" (Student A). The student, who said "no", spoke about trust. The student said that he wanted the teacher to trust more (Student A). The student went on to say, "I never really had a chance. Like, I know it sounds weird because I have been with [the teacher] all year but I never actually had the chance

to get to know [the teacher]” (Student A). Student B said, “[I like] when [the teacher] talks to us about other stuff besides schooling and school. It makes me want to do my work more.” Student B went on to explain, “So if you actually develop a relationship with your teachers it’s better because you will want to impress them and you will want to show them what you can do. So like earlier on I didn’t even care about them. I didn’t care whether they thought I was a good student or not, but now that [the teacher] is talking to us, it’s good.” Student F said, “I feel like I need more help from [the teacher] sometimes.” Two students commented that they would like if their teachers would let them go on the computers and iPads more often (Student C, Student D). In summary, students like teachers who demonstrate that students are trusted, who take time to talk about non-curricular matters and allow students to get to know the teachers as persons, who provide necessary help, and who give students opportunities to use technology.

Parents’ Perceptions of Students’ Relationships with Teachers

The parents who participated in the interviews were speaking about eleven children in total. Of the eleven parents, eight parents responded that their children liked their teachers and three said they did not. Parent B replied, “She doesn’t like her teacher. And I think it’s just the style of the teacher. I don’t know this teacher well enough. And like I said I opted not to attend parent teacher interviews this year.” Parent A answered:

I know he is in resistance with his teacher right now and mainly because [the teacher] is really direct and straightforward with him. And he goes into resistance when that happens so I’m trying to prepare him to say, “you have to learn to work with lots of different personalities, lots of different people, in order to be successful in this life.”

Parent F1 said that one child did not like the teacher because the teacher and student had many minor conflicts.¹⁰⁴ When I asked Parent B, why connections between teachers and students were important, Parent B replied:

I think it's important because they need to know they can trust somebody at the school. They need to know they are valued. Like their smarts are valued. Whatever level they are at. You know? And so I know kids are on various different levels and learn different ways and I just think that if they connected with somebody, they could trust what they're being taught. Just that they're supported. I don't know. I just think it's important, really important.

Parent B had the perception that building relationships between teachers and students in Atlin School was challenging because of the changes in teaching staff that occur:

And it's hard because there have been so many changes in the school. It's very rare that _____ had a connection with a teacher at this school the full time she's been there because her teacher's have always changed. There's not enough time for them to build their relationships. And like when I was in elementary school I had an awesome relationship with my teacher but that's because she taught me and she was there for like five years. And so I connected with her in that year and she was always there and I could go to her classroom and sit down on my breaks, or ask to volunteer in her classroom.

These comments from Parent B suggest that while it is important for students to have trusting relationships with their current teachers, it is also important for students to have long-term relationships with all school staff.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Relationships with Teachers

When teachers were asked, "In what ways do you promote social skills in your classrooms and in the school?" Teacher A described the following morning social scene in the classroom:

So in the morning when the kids come in we have a check and connect. So I greet them when they come in the door, say good morning to them, ask them how they're doing. When they come into the classroom, a quick walk around. "How are things today?" If somebody's talked about doing something, I'll say, "How was homework club?", or "How's it going? Saw you in town with so and so." That sort of thing. I also have Riddle of the Day and Brain Challenge and everybody likes that.

¹⁰⁴ To preserve the privacy of the student, parent, and teacher, I am unable to give more details.

So we do that, talk about what we're going to do every day, the shape of the day. I go around, once class has started and say, "Let's see what you're working on. Let's set a goal for today." Then everybody is at the table. We'll stop and have the chit chat breaks and things like that. Kids can talk about what's going on and what they are interested in. It's a good opportunity too, if somebody's working on something and they're stuck, they'll say, "Hey, do you remember what the such and such is?" So it's a good way to share the information back and forth.

Teacher D responded to the same question by talking again about the family atmosphere in the classroom:

Like family means the world to them and they value what family thinks. I think if you build a relationship with the students or especially the families outside of that, then kids value what you think because they know you are invested in their family and in their life. So if tragedy happens or something happens, they know that you really empathize. Not just sympathize, but you empathize cause you know and you are going through the same thing. Whereas if they don't think you have gone through that or you don't know anything about them, then you might say outside, "I am sorry for your loss" or "my condolences", but unless you have been there. Yah, it doesn't necessarily make them a better academic learner or anything, but I think for those that maybe are struggling, they would put a bit of more effort because they do care about what you as a teacher think about them.

Teachers were also asked, "What would your students say they like about you as their teacher?"

In response to this question, Teacher A replied:

I think even though they sometimes say they don't like it, that I have expectations, that I want them to be successful, and I'm not going to let them not be successful. Probably because I talk to them like they're real people too, and we've had a few laughs and I use a lot of humour in the classroom.

Teachers C responded, "they see me as being fair and they really appreciate the things I do for them." For the same question, Teacher D replied, with a chuckle:

I let them listen to music in class. When they are doing independent work. So it has been a little bit testy lately. So I just try to get them to self regulate a little. You know at the beginning it's like, "Whoa"! It's kind of like giving someone a candy bar, they shove it all in, right? So allowing them to do these things they like so that they aren't, "oh school sucks", that there is some fun stuff.

Teacher D laughed and added:

One student said that I actually teach them. So someone said, "I like that you actually teach us". So that was one. I think, they might like the structure and the routines. For some, they

feel a little bit safer about what is going to happen, despite the odd murmuring, “oh this sucks”. I am hoping that is just with the age (laughter). I think they like that I am nice (laughter, again) most of the time.

These comments from teachers indicate some of the ways that teachers at Atlin School build relationships with their students.

Reflections about Students’ Relationships with Teachers

I wonder about the comment from a student, “I like that you actually teach us.” What did the student mean by these words? Perhaps this student meant that the teacher explained concepts. In my visits in the classroom when this teacher was teaching, I noticed that the teacher was explaining concepts but was also trying to support students to work independently to prepare them for secondary school. I sometimes wonder if students from Atlin, who have one on one support with the small class sizes and supports from the TFLC, are challenged by the greater class sizes when they move to larger centres.

One student made an interesting comment about not getting to know his teacher even after one year. This seemed unusual to me until I thought about students’ comments earlier about knowing most of their friends and family for their entire lives. When a community knows everyone and has known everyone’s families for generations, perhaps the citizens view that it takes longer to get to know a newcomer. I wonder how this also applies to making new relationships with teachers as students make the transition to larger centres for high school. If most of your experiences as a young person have been with people you know, how uncomfortable does it feel to leave your home community?

I also wondered about the comment from a parent about teachers changing every year, since in most schools in British Columbia students experience a new teacher every year. I understand the perception that it might be nice to see previous teachers in the hallways, but this

was in fact the case in Atlin School for one teacher, who taught the primary grades for twenty years but retired in June 2016. Since there are only three classrooms with three teachers in Atlin School, the primary teacher's retirement in June 2016 will have an impact for students and parents.

I think Parent B's comment, "they need to know they can trust somebody at the school" is important. My observations, informal conversations, and comments from students in interviews indicate that more could be done to raise up the number of students who like their teacher to one hundred percent. Building relationships of trust between students, parents, and teachers could be a way to achieve this goal.

Communication between Students, Parents, and Teachers

Students' Perceptions of Communication with Teachers and Parents

When students were asked if it was easy to talk to their teachers, eleven students said, "yes" (Students A, B, C, E, G, I, J, K, M, N) and three others said, "a little bit" (Student D), "I guess so" (Student F), and "not yet." (Student L). All fourteen students responded that their teachers let them know when they have done a good job. Some students shared strategies teachers used such as, "high five" (Students A, M), "free time" (Student D), "let's me read" (Student E), "My teacher says good job, and great that's excellent" (Student G), "My teacher says good job and gives extra points" (Student I), gives "stamps and stickers" (Student J), "usually marking it out of 30 or something and they mark it down on a piece of paper or saying, 'good job'" (Student L), and "sometimes she'll give us a hug" (Student M).

Although this project is focused upon Indigenous students' experiences at school, opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language, and sense of belonging at school, I did ask students about parental support with schoolwork because parents play an important role in

the lives of their children. All students said that they talk to their parents about school. As was described in Chapter 4, students stated that parents and grandparents assist them with schoolwork. As well students spoke about talking to their parents about their day at school (Students A, G, J, K, L, M, N) with comments such as, “Sometimes I tell them what I learned” (Student L) and “just what I did during the day. What we learned” (Student K). Students seemed to feel that they can talk to their teachers and parents about school.

Parents’ Perceptions of Students’ Communication with Teachers

Most parents thought that their children were comfortable talking to their teachers. Two parents answered, “no” when asked if their children could talk to their teachers comfortably. Parent B said, “No. It’s not, because she doesn’t like her teacher. And I think it’s just the style of the teacher. I don’t know this teacher well enough.” Parent F1 thought that one of her children could not talk to the teacher because of the conflicts mentioned above. Parent F1 thought that for her other child, the relationship between the teacher and her child was “a little bit” comfortable because, “When some girls were bullying _____ she would try to bring it up to her teacher’s attention and her teacher would be like, ‘yah, we will talk about this after’ or ‘tell your mom about it.’” Parent F1 felt that the problems were not yet resolved. Lastly, Parent E1 did not wish to comment and thought that I should ask the children if they could talk easily with their teacher.

Parents responses about the ways teachers let students know of their successes were varied. Parents mentioned: phone calls home from the teacher to report good days, face to face communication from teachers to students and to parents, written comments on assignments, and gestures, such as, high fives. Parent A said, “I get a phone call at home letting me know just you know, he’s had a really good day, a really good week, has been doing really good work, that sort of thing. So we celebrate at home. We take him out for dinner.” Parent G1 added, “You know

another thing that they do is even if they have had a bad day or a good day or whatever, every kid in Mrs. _____'s class gets a hug and a high five at the end of the day. And I think, it's wonderful." When the spouse agreed, Parent G1 continued:

You do too, right. And I just thought, "I wish I got a hug and a high five every day". No, but, they do, at the end of the day, whether it has been a good day or a bad day. And "you know what? We'll see you tomorrow, until I see you tomorrow." And like that. My kids talk about that a lot. And that is a really big deal for them. Not that they don't get enough hugs and high fives at our house. It makes that passing the torch to the teacher really easy too. So they know they do a good job at the end of the day even if they haven't had a great day.

Most parents seemed satisfied with communication from teachers to their children. Only one parent gave a suggestion for improvement. Parent B commented, "I wish there was an online thing that parents get to sign on for and send out homework and homework schedules and what they need to do." I reflect upon these comments at the end of this section.

I also asked parents how they felt about their own communication with teachers. All parents, except one, said that they were comfortable communicating with their children's teachers. Parents G1 and G2 liked that the teacher had an "open door policy" (Parent G2). Parent G2 said, "We have been told on a number of occasions. Drop in every day if you want. You can phone me whenever you want" and "every time we talk to them, 'You are welcome in the class any time'." Parent A responded, "[The teacher] is pretty open and straight forward and [the teacher] will phone me or [the principal] will phone me and let me know if something is going on, or they will phone me or email me and let me know." Parent D replied that parents and teachers "work together on how we could help them get their work done." Parent E1 answered with, "yah, she is very approachable" and "I felt welcome in her class. I didn't feel like she was threatened. I felt that she saw us as parents as a resource. You know like, 'help me, help me do this,' you know, not like, 'I'm having so much trouble managing your [children]' because they

do all have trouble managing our [children].” Only one parent indicated that they were uncomfortable talking to the teacher. Parent B explained:

Because every parent teacher interview I go to is about [my child’s] behaviour versus academics, and so then that annoys me. And I’d like to know more about what help [my child] needs academically and the behaviour stuff after. But not right out front, “your child is a menace.” Or like, they don’t say that, but that’s what I hear. And so I get distracted on behaviour versus the quality of work [my child] is doing in school. Well I don’t find it uncomfortable. I just don’t think it’ll be effective.

For the most part, parents seem to feel that they are working in partnership with teachers for the good of their children.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ Communication with Teachers

Teacher A felt that some of students were comfortable speaking with the teacher. Teacher A elaborated about how students chat during the morning check in time, “Yeah, the kids tell me. And then I also know when there’s different events happening in town and the kids will say I’m going to this or I’m going to that, or the such and such was on the weekend and this is what I did there.”

Teacher D, however, did not think students found it easy to talk to the teacher. Teacher D hesitated before answering:

No, I don’t think. I think a lot of them trust me and they will talk to me, but a lot of them seem to have troubles asking for help. And this was a good point that came up with one of the parent interviews because I think maybe at home they don’t have to ask for help. Someone will just tell them, “no, you’ve got to do this.” Home is a different thing, like, “do your dishes” and then here it is a little different because they are getting used to having to ask me for help. Because you can’t necessarily help everyone at the same time and I am trying to get them ready for that high school experience of, you know, you can ask for help, but you have to have patience. You have to at least try first yourself. You have to move forward until someone can help you, for Math, for example, “If I am helping another person, wait.” Or if I see a common problem, then we will address it and we will have that as a lesson, the next lesson.

She went on to say that students did not confide in her to solve problems:

But I think for a lot of them, they don't. I am not sure if it is still the school mentality, "You don't really confide in your teachers." I haven't had anyone come to me and say, "This is a problem." I've had a couple of the girls where they have had issues, you know, and then I'll just give them their time and I'll go and see if they need anything. But no one every really confides, has confided in me yet. Maybe that relationship is still building. Cause I feel the trust and I think a lot of them will stand up for, you know, they will tell each other, "Quiet" and "listen to the teacher". They respect me and we talk outside of class if I see them in the street.

As for communication between teachers and parents, Teacher A shared that she communicated formally with parents with the three formal reports and two informal reports required by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. In addition, Teacher A mentioned emailing parents every Friday to inform parents about assignments that are due, meeting with some parents often at the school, and meeting one parent regularly out in the parking lot with the envelope of homework. Teacher A commented, "They're all interested in what their students are doing. They want their child to be successful. They want them to keep on top of things." Teacher D felt that parents were still getting to know the teacher. When I asked, "Do you think that parents feel that they can talk to you?" Teacher D replied:

Again, no. Maybe, one. Or a couple. _____ maybe. I feel _____, but not the other parents. Like, I sent an email, no one replied. Everything is through the secretary. They haven't replied. Like a few haven't replied to me that way. I think parent interviews were good, you know. Everyone was really receptive. Outside of when they are requested to come in, I don't see a lot of other involvement in the school with parents in my class anyway. Except for _____, so she is obviously at the school all the time. It would be nice to see more parents come. I guess they are busy. This is like an ideal world. It would be nice if we were all friends and we could chat and they could come and tell me if they see any issues or if they are concerned. I try to make it very open. And they are still getting to know me, again, too.

Teacher D spoke about the importance of teamwork between parents and teachers so that students know they have support. Teacher D said, "there's a team for you and maybe they are also kind of accountable, like they know, okay, if I don't do it, someone is going to tell my mom or dad. So I think those relationships are important."

I believe the comments from teachers indicate that there is room to grow relationships between teachers and students and teachers and parents.

Reflections about Communication between Students, Parents, and Teachers.

Students, parents, and teachers seemed satisfied with student/teacher and parent/teacher communication. They gave many examples of praise from teachers to students for their accomplishments, which are evidence of positive learning environments in Atlin School.

Parent E1 had an interesting choice of words with the comment, “I didn’t feel like she was threatened.” I wondered if this response was an indicator of the parents’ perceptions of past communications with teachers and also of the fragile relationships that sometimes exist between parents and teachers (Larson 1993).

In my interview with Parent B, I noted that when Parent B was speaking about her child’s relationship with the teacher, she switched to speaking about her own relationship. When Parent B switched from talking about her child’s relationship to her own, I was reminded again of the findings in my master’s thesis that parents’ perceptions of communication are influenced by previous experiences (Larson 1993). If building partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples becomes a goal for provincial and federal governments as stated in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Canada. TRC 2015), then everyone must be aware of the influences that previous experiences and intergenerational experiences can have in the present.

Since Parents A and B had children in the same class, I can only assume that if Parent B made a request, the teacher would likely make phone calls or send emails about homework as they do for Parent A.

Teachers' comments about students not asking for help and the comments from Parent B about wanting more support to know about assignments prompted me to think that support is available to those who ask for help. Teacher D's remark about students not asking for help also made me wonder what is needed for a person to feel comfortable to ask for help. Is it trust, confidence, independence, and perhaps responsibility? This is an area that could be researched further.

Teacher D's comment about not receiving return communication from parents made me wonder about the steps that are needed to enhance two-way communication between home and school. In my own experiences in Atlin, I found that multiple ways to communicate were beneficial and even necessary for communication with parents. Although all parents gave me email addresses and phone numbers, sometimes after a message was missed, parents would tell me that their internet or phone was not working. Another factor, which seemed to make connecting with parents a little more challenging was the fact that parents were sometimes, working, doing volunteer work for the community, helping others, or off to Whitehorse for appointments. For a small town, I found Atlin to be a very busy community. I had to learn to be innovative to connect with parents. Thanks to advice from Tammy Fetterly, I learned that I could connect with parents in the parking lot of the Tlingit Family Learning Centre when they came to pick up their children at the end of the day. Once, when I was advised by Tammy Fetterly to look for the parent's vehicle, I drove up and down Warm Bay Rd out to Five Mile and back looking for the car, which I found at the Trading Post in Atlin Town. Every time I connected with parents in the parking lots or on the roadside, they were more than happy to meet right then and there at the school, the TFLC or in their homes. The point of my story is that sometimes adjustments to

the cultural ways in the community have to be made for effective communication and partnerships.

Interactions with Elders

Students' Perspectives of Interactions with Elders

I asked students if they had a chance ever to talk with Elders in the community. Six students said they had opportunities to talk with Elders (Students D, E, G, H, I, K) and eight others said they did not (Students A, B, C, F, J, L, M, N). Two students said they see Elders every day when they visit the Band Office after school (Students D, E). One said, "Well my family helps out a lot of Elders. [We] split wood for my uncle a couple of times. Cut wood. Do a whole bunch of things" (Student K). Student G mentioned that she talks to Elders about, "What I learned at school, if I learned anything really cool." One student said that she did not see Elders often because, "usually we're busy, my family" (Student F). Another said, "I have ____ and an uncle who's an Elder too, but he's not always happy all the time. He's always angry my grandpa said" (Student C). Student J responded, "There's not too many Elders around too much." The other students did not give reasons.

Parents' Perspectives of Students' Interactions with Elders

Parents had mixed comments about children's interactions with Elders. Parents A, D, E1, and E2 said that their children had opportunities to connect with Elders in the community. Parents B, C2, and F1 replied that their children did not have many opportunities with Elders. Parents G1 and G2 said their children speak to grandparents who do not reside in Atlin on the telephone. Parent F1 mentioned camps in Teslin as a place to connect with Elders. Parent C2

said, “Grandpa used to come over lots.” Parent B said, “In our world, in Atlin, we don’t have an Elder, I think the oldest Elder is Jackie Williams and he’s 78.

Teachers’ Perspectives of Students’ Interactions with Elders

When asked teachers if students had opportunities to interact with Elders, Teachers A and D responded positively. Teacher A thought, “Some more than others.” Teacher D said:

Yah, again, that auntie thing is great. A lot of them seem to do stuff, the girls anyways seem to have a lot of stuff planned with the women in town. The boys, Wayne, who is our new Aboriginal Education Cultural Teacher, he’s been involved in a lot of different events I have seen around town. He came on our camp and shared with us and kind of facilitated the dancing with them. Like teaching them how to dance. So that is really great to see. It’s a select few, not all, but a select few, I think, committed Elders that are really involved trying to help engage the youth and be that kind of person for them, which is wonderful to see. You don’t always have that in a bigger place.

Reflections about Students’ Interactions with Elders

I wonder if and how it might be possible to increase students’ interactions with Elders. This would require careful planning in consultation with the Elders of course. When I chatted with Elder Jackie Williams on a visit to Atlin, he said to me that the students do not want to listen to the Elders (Jackie Williams, March 4, 2015, personal conversation). Another member of the Atlin community suggested that Elders need time to tell their stories and students need to be taught how to listen. Jackie Williams told me he would prefer to video record his stories for students to view online. Not only would this solve the problem of students listening to Elders, he said, but also, the stories would be preserved for future generations. This sounds like an option that could supplement face-to-face interactions.

Summary of Students' Relationships with Others

Students at Atlin School seem to have strong connections with peers, teachers, and family members. Students spoke of knowing one another for many years, and of having cousins in school and cousins as friends. The close-knit community and family atmosphere of a small school are likely lost when students move to bigger centres for high school and post secondary education. If I were asked about sense of belonging for students at Atlin School, I would have to say that there is evidence that students have a strong sense of belonging at school and within the community. I wonder if and how students' sense of belonging is affected when students move away from Atlin to go on to secondary school?

Students in Atlin participate in outdoor activities in all seasons with family members and with friends. They are excited to talk about being the first one to swim in the lake in May or driving a skidoo across the frozen ice in winter. At the same time they talk about having not much to do in Atlin. When students move to acquire secondary schooling and post secondary training not only would they experience changes in their school environment, but also their lifestyles would change because activities they are used to at home would be different in larger centres. This would be another transition for students to make.

While most students found it easy to communicate with their teachers, not all students liked their teachers. One student even mentioned that now that the teacher was talking more to students, things were better (Student B). Especially since the students and parents view that there are too many changes with the teaching staff at Atlin School, finding ways to build teacher/student relationships and teacher/parent relationships would be beneficial. Since many students said they are comfortable talking with their teachers, this might be achieved simply by having more time to talk.

Finally, students, parents, and teachers report that while some students spend time with Elders, others have little or no opportunities to interact with Elders in the community. The first step to improve opportunities with Elders would be, as the grandparents said, to involve the Elders in the planning. The suggestion from the TRTFN Education committee to start a Grandparents' Committee and to bring more grandparents in to the school to teach traditional culture is a viable suggestion as well for two reasons. First, with grandparents to assist with teaching, the few Elders in Atlin would not be overburdened to teach Tlingit language and culture. Second, as more grandparents visit the school, there will be more opportunities to communicate to enhance the partnership between TRTFN and SD87.

In this chapter I have shared the comments from students, parents, teachers, and community members and my reflections about students' relationships with others in Atlin. In the following chapter I draw conclusions about 1) our research partnership and 2) participants' perceptions of education for Indigenous students.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

“Reality is not an objective truth or facts to be discovered but includes the ways in which people involved with facts perceive them” (Paulo Freire 1983, 29).

“The key principles of CBPR [Community Based Participatory Research] foster respectful relationships, utilize a strengths-based perspective to build capacity, and facilitate co-learning and collaborative, equitable partnerships in all components of the research project” (Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley 2015, 67).

“Indigenous people are people of place, and the nature of place is embedded in their language” (Cajete 2004, 46).

I approached the writing of this chapter with caution, respecting the words of Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley who write, “Researchers may not realize how their conclusions play into long time patterns of oppressive power over communities by governments and churches” (2015, 66). During my time of collaborating with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine) on this research project, I have learned to be more aware of what I don’t know, rather than what I know. I make this statement because when I was first getting to know my partners in the north, community members were keen to tell me their perceptions about students’ experiences in Atlin School. Sometimes, I would hear conflicting stories about something that had occurred at the school. I learned to keep an open mind, gather information from many sources, and accept that I may be missing pieces of the story. Always, I had a sense that the people who were sharing information with me were passionate about maintaining and improving education for the students. Never, did I forget the legacy of residential schools as I worked with my partners to gather information to have a better understanding of education for Indigenous students. In this chapter, I present the conclusions derived from our partnership research with the honest intent to offend no one and to celebrate the work of all who were involved in the project.

My dissertation began by introducing the three partners who were involved in this research, reviewing the international, national, and provincial context for education and presenting concerns and recommendations for education from Indigenous scholars. As I write the conclusions to this dissertation, I believe it is important to review why the research was important for each of the partners and to attempt to align our partnership research with the recommendations of Indigenous scholars.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Spokesperson Louise Gordon explained that for the TRTFN, the research gives mutual benefit to all partners by blending European science with traditional knowledge (January 15, 2016, telephone conversation). Spokesperson Louise Gordon commented, “It [research] gives me a higher level of understanding and that is really important.” Louise gave examples from previous research projects with Dr. Christine Schreyer about connecting to land and language, which emphasized the TRTFN guiding principles that land and language are pertinent to sustain “what is Tlingit” (TRTFN 2016b). For TRTFN, this research was important to continue their quest to sustain Tlingit land, language, and identity.

This research is important to School District 87 (Stikine) because, as Superintendent Mike Gordon stated, “We need to be asking our partners, ‘how are we doing’, ‘what should we be doing’, and ‘how best might we do it?’” (see Chapter 1). Superintendent Mike Gordon explained that a role of the school district is to partner to meet the current needs of students and to prepare them ‘for the rest of their lives.’ This research was an important opportunity for School District 87 (Stikine) to learn more about current successes and future needs of students.

For myself, with this research I hoped to answer a question raised by my review of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, namely, “How do Indigenous culture and language activities in public schools in British Columbia influence sense of belonging and

student achievement for Indigenous learners?” As I stated in Chapter 1, an underlying question for me was whether or not Aboriginal Enhancement Education Agreements would in fact be successful at improving education for Indigenous students. I shared in Chapter 1 that my interest in this research question comes from my desire to prevent assimilation, which occurred in my Métis family, and to help to create a future where every child feels that they can acknowledge their heritage with pride.

My other reason for research was to decolonize research by contributing to current studies of Indigenous education “in a good way”. First, I hoped to put theories I had read about into practice in a partnership project. I developed a Métis methodology, which focused upon “all my relations” for this purpose. Second, I wanted to participate in research that would gather information to support the recommendations of Indigenous peoples regarding education for Indigenous students, namely, the need: 1) to decolonize educational institutions, 2) to eliminate dominance of European knowledge and highlight Indigenous knowledge in education, 3) to revitalize Indigenous language and culture in school systems, 4) to prepare Indigenous students for self-determination, and 5) to develop sense of belonging and relationships of trust within schools for Indigenous students.

The conclusions in this chapter attempt to address our reasons for pursuing the research. The chapter is presented in six sections: 1) Contributions to Knowledge, 2) Integration of this Research with Current Research, 3) Strengths and Limitations, 4) Potential Application of the Research Findings, 5) Possible Future Research Directions and 6) Final Reflections. The conclusions are presented according to the two goals of the research, i.e. understanding more: 1) about partnership research and 2) about education for Indigenous students.

Contributions to Knowledge

About Partnership Research

Our research provides a model for how to put guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples (discussed in Chapter 2) into practice by using: 1) a framework for Indigenous knowledge production, 2) a Métis methodology and 3) an appreciative inquiry approach and methods that promote trust. First, our research has created a new model for authentic knowledge production, which benefits Indigenous peoples. Battiste 2008, Weber-Pillwax 1999, Wilson 2003 instill that the process of creating new knowledge, inherited from ancestors, is ongoing for all Indigenous groups. I believe that the new knowledge about education for Indigenous students presented in the next and subsequent sections of this chapter is authentic because the new knowledge was acquired following Indigenous epistemologies, abiding by Indigenous worldviews and using Indigenous methodologies. I have made adjustments to Figure 2.1 *Indigenous Knowledge Production* to demonstrate how the theory I proposed in Chapter 2 applies to the process of creating new knowledge for our project, *Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?* (see Figure 7.1 *Indigenous Knowledge Production in Our Project*).

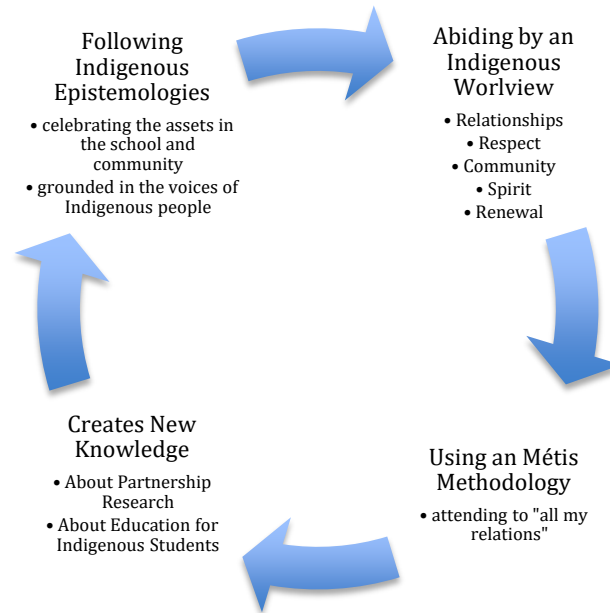


Figure 7.1 *Indigenous Knowledge Production in Our Project*

The second contribution of our partnership research is the way that our research follows an Indigenist research paradigm and a Métis methodology to attend to “all my relations”. This was achieved first through demonstrating respect by allowing more time when it was needed and by honouring the many commitments of the research partners. Second, the research benefited the community by involving community members in all steps of the process, by asking research questions that benefit the community, and by sharing the results with the community. As well, I have demonstrated my appreciation for the support I received in Atlin by assisting community members whenever I could at community events and by giving the gift of the Smart Board to the community. Third, our partnership research attended to spirit by bringing forward the voices of our ancestors as we worked together and by honouring the connections between land, language, and identity in our introductions, process, and conclusions to our work together. Finally, our research addresses the Indigenous worldview that renewal is ongoing and important by focusing upon the current strengths in the community and by connecting our research to the Calls to Action in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the*

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Canada. TRC 2015). I have revised Figure 2.2 Principles of Indigenous Methodologies to demonstrate how our research follows the Indigenist paradigm I presented in Chapter 2 (see Figure 7.2 Principles of Indigenous Methodologies in Our Project).



Figure 7.2 Principles of Indigenous Methodologies in Our Project

A third way that our research models recommendations for research from Indigenous scholars is in the appreciative inquiry approach and methods used to promote trust. These

included my engagement in participant observation activities to get to know the community, a focus upon positives in the conversations with community members, and the attention to sharing many quotes from participants (i.e. the voices of Indigenous peoples). As I explained in Chapter 3, the use of participant observation created relationships that enhanced the conversations during the interviews. Because I had observed and participated in events in the community, interview participants and I were able to develop further connections during interviews, for example, as we spoke about our emotions at Celebration 2014 in Juneau or during the Pole Raising Ceremony in June 2015. If I had not participated in these events, students, parents, and teachers would have been explaining these events to me during our interviews rather than using our time together to share their own thoughts and feelings. The information shared in our interviews would not be as rich without the relationships between interview participants and myself, which were achieved through participant observation.

Second, our appreciative inquiry approach ensured that participants were asked questions about the strengths in the school and community. In Chapter 2, I shared that my experiences as a mother of children with severe cerebral palsy taught me to celebrate even the smallest successes to move forward in challenging situations. I believe that focusing upon positives instead of negatives helped me to move forward in my grieving over the loss of what could have been had my children been able to walk and talk. Although I did not experience the trauma and effects of residential school, I sometimes feel that there are connections between the grief and loss I felt as a mother and the grief and loss in Indigenous communities. I believe that a way for Indigenous communities to heal from residential school trauma is to focus upon the positives and to celebrate the small successes on the healing journey. Non-Indigenous allies can assist in this approach by helping to identify strengths in communities as we move forward in reconciliation.

In addition to helping us to celebrate strengths and successes in the community and school, our appreciative inquiry approach helped us to avoid deficit thinking and blame. Bishop (2011) and Sleeter (2011) write about deficit-oriented approaches in education, which assume that improving education for Indigenous students will be achieved by improving students' basic skills and proficiency in the dominant language and culture. Sleeter (2011) claims that deficit-oriented approaches foster the continued control of the dominant group and the assimilation of minoritized students into the dominant culture (Sleeter 2011). Rather than focusing upon achievement data and interview questions about what was wrong in the school or community, our research questions focused upon positives and strengths in the community that could be developed further to enhance education for Indigenous students. Although we were focusing upon assets in the school and community, participants did express their concerns when they responded to questions such as, "What could make school better?" "How could school be more fun?" or "How could school be easier?" In addition, as the relationships between members of TRTFN and SD87 and myself grew, community members and I would share stories about past experiences and hopes for change. We would often share stories over lunch at the Band Office or during impromptu meetings at events. Sometimes the stories were about trauma and pain. Ethically, I did not feel that I could suddenly ask for signed consent to include someone's story of loss or pain in the narrative of this dissertation. Most importantly, including stories of pain and loss did not fit with my personal approaches to problem solving described above and the methodological approach of appreciative inquiry in our research design. I believe that the suffering of Indigenous Peoples has been well documented in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996a, 1996b) and in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of*

the Truth and reconciliation Commission (Canada. TRC 2015). My hope is that the appreciative inquiry approach used in our research, which celebrates the assets in the Atlin School and Atlin community, provides a model for the reconciliation and partnership described in the summary of the final report of the TRC.

The final way that our appreciative inquiry approach and methods promoted trust was by using the comments from students, parents, grandparents, and teachers to provide enlightenment about students' experiences at school, opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language, and relationships with others. The findings from our research were grounded in the voices of the community members. In a recent book about Indigenous education in the international context, Jacob, Cheng, and Porter (2015) state, "we argue for indigenous voices to be heard in every aspect of education, including in the learning, teaching, and researching arenas" (7). Our research models how to include the voices of students, parents, and teachers in research about Indigenous education in a way that builds trust between one another.

These three innovations: 1) a framework for new knowledge production, 2) a Métis methodology, and 3) an appreciative inquiry approach and methods to promote trust are the main ways that our research contributes to new knowledge about partnership research. In the next sections I describe how our research contributes to new knowledge about education for Indigenous students.

About Education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Students

To begin to answer our research question about sense of belonging and the importance of opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language, my partners and I believed that it was important to understand the current experiences of students in school in general. As I stated earlier, SD87 was particularly interested in gathering this information to guide future directions

for the school and district. To present our conclusions about education for Indigenous students, which were formed in consultation with the TRTFN Education Committee, I begin with conclusions about students' experiences in school in general, high school completion, and supports for students' engagement in learning. Then I discuss the more specific topics of sense of belonging, the importance of learning Indigenous culture and language, and self-determination. I conclude with conclusions about the benefit of learning Indigenous culture and knowledge for all students.

First, as noted in Chapter 4, the TRTFN Education Committee and I concluded that students enjoy school for a variety of reasons, such as, academic learning, Project Based Learning (Heritage Fair), cultural learning experiences, sports and special events, and socializing with others. In addition, students spoke responsibly about education stating that they like to learn, want to get a good education, and feel good about learning. In addition to enjoying school subjects and activities, students said that they enjoy opportunities to learn from family members at school, sharing with others, dancing and carving, being recognized for their accomplishments, and attending school with siblings. Parents and teachers commented that students enjoy carving and dancing at school.¹⁰⁵ Parents added more information that students had not revealed, stating that students also enjoy being challenged, learning from hands on activities, and making progress. In general, comments from students, parents, and teachers were in sync with one another. Students understand the importance of learning and teachers understand the needs of students. It is important to note that not all students said that they enjoyed school and that the

¹⁰⁵ In the initial questions about the best things about school, students did not name carving and dancing, but as the interviews continued, dancing and carving were named by students as activities they enjoy. I wondered if students perceive school to mean the subjects, which correspond to the British Columbia curriculum. Perhaps because dancing was offered at lunchtime and students were invited by Wayne to carve in the shop, they did not consider carving and dancing to be part of the school curriculum?

five students who were less enthusiastic about school were older. These older students suggested that they would like more electives and more opportunities to work collaboratively with others. The TRTFN Education Committee also noted that students of all ages seemed to view school as work and discussed that students need support to see learning as enjoyment and as a life long experience (TRTFN Education Committee, October 21, 2015, discussion).

A second contribution about education for Indigenous students from our research pertains to students' opportunities to attend and complete high school. In Chapter 4, I described how students in Atlin leave their homes and move some distance further from their families to attend grades ten, eleven, and twelve. This trend occurs, perhaps, because students follow in the footsteps of their parents, who left Atlin to go to the dormitories in Whitehorse to attend high school and because the coursework that can be provided in Atlin is limited compared to the larger schools in Whitehorse. Indigenous parents and grandparents in Atlin described the trauma which family members experience when the children leave so young. For example, one grandparent said to me that one of her grandchildren cries every day because she misses her sibling so much. The student success with the current system of moving to Whitehorse for high school is minimal to say the least. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, in 2015, four of five students from TRTFN returned home before Christmas Break of the school year. Atlin is not the only community in the north where students must leave their families and communities to complete high school. Students from all over the Yukon, as young as fourteen years of age,¹⁰⁶ often move from their small northern communities to live in dormitories in Whitehorse. This is also the case

¹⁰⁶ When the Youth Coordinator, Vince Esquiro, described how these young people congregate unsupervised in downtown Whitehorse after school and into the evening, I wanted to see this for myself. In November 2015, I stopped downtown on my trip home from Atlin. From four o'clock until seven, Main Street, Whitehorse, looked like a party in the dark. On every street corner along Main Street, young teens were congregated in groups as if they were awaiting a high school event to begin.

for students in small northern communities across Canada. Because students must leave their communities and the people with whom they feel connections, the current system for high school completion in the north is reminiscent of the removal of children from their communities in the residential school system. In May 2016, Superintendent Mike Gordon confirmed that the partnership described in Chapter 4 (between ATELP and SD87) is moving forward to provide more learning opportunities for Grade 10 and beyond. Through partnership with Atlin Tlingit Economic Limited Partnership (ATELP), which includes the Skills, Training, Employment Program (STEP), School District 87 (Stikine) would offer more courses for Grades 10 in Atlin for the 2016/2017 school year (Superintendent Mike Gordon, May 6, 2016, personal conversation). In September 2016, TRTFN Education Manager Tammy Fetterly said in a telephone conversation that Grade 10 students were staying in Atlin. I am excited that TRTFN and SD87 have found a creative solution to this issue and look forward to June 2017 to hear if this approach has been successful.

A third contribution about education for Indigenous students from our study is that providing appropriate supports to assist students to be successful in school can be challenging. I draw this conclusion from the discussion with the TRTFN Education Committee about students' use of the supports available to them (November 25, 2015) and from my review of attendance records for SD87 after Superintendent Mike Gordon commented to me that attendance is an issue for students in Atlin School (Mike Gordon, April, May 2015, several conversations). In my opinion, students in Atlin have many opportunities for support with schoolwork. First, it is important to note that students in Atlin attend classes with approximately ten students for one teacher compared to provincial averages of twenty (Kindergarten), twenty-two (Grades 1-3), twenty-six (Grades 4-7) and twenty-three (Grades 8-12) students per teacher (British Columbia

Ministry of Education 2016a). As well, students in Atlin receive support with schoolwork from the two homework clubs described in earlier chapters and students commented that they feel supported by parents and grandparents for schoolwork. However, not all students engage in the opportunities that are available to them. Some students do not participate in supports TFLC After School Program and the Homework Club for older students (TRTFN Education Committee, October 21, 2015, discussion). As well, as explained in Chapter 4, although students spoke responsibly about wanting to learn and enjoying academic and social activities at school, district attendance records show that students miss thirty-one days per year on average, which is the equivalent of two school years over a thirteen-year period. This evidence suggests to me that something is still prohibiting students from participating in the opportunities for education that are available to them. This is an important issue to address and an area for future research, which I return to later in the chapter.¹⁰⁷

Often in education, attendance records are used as indicators of student engagement in learning, i.e. the assumption is that students who are engaged in learning will want to come to school. Because older students must complete Grade 12 in alternative settings, learning how to be engaged in learning and independent as a learner are important skills for students in Atlin to acquire. In alternative programs, such as the STEP program in Atlin, being engaged, maintaining attendance, and accepting responsibility for learning will be important. It follows that young students must be given opportunities to learn how to develop these routines and skills. In Chapter 4, the comments from students, parents, and teachers included activities that get students excited about learning, which could provide information about engagement, attendance, and enhancing

¹⁰⁷ I make this suggestion for future research because in some cases students may not have a choice about missing school. For example, to access medical services that are not available in Atlin, families must make the two-hour drive to Whitehorse during the week. SD87 has attempted to address this issue, for example, by adjusting the school timetable on Fridays. However, attendance records show that challenges still exist.

responsibility. First, students enjoy learning when they can make choices about what and how they will learn, when the work is hands on, when they are helping others, and when they work collectively in groups. Second, when students are not in school, for example, after school and on weekends, they are engaged in outdoor activities such as swimming in the lake, snowmobiling, four-wheeling, hunting, fishing, and hanging out around a campfire. As well, students, parents, and teachers reported that students enjoy learning about Tlingit culture at school, at home, and in the community. Finding ways to incorporate more local activities students and cultural teachings that students enjoy into the school curriculum could assist students to engage more in the concepts taught. Third, students and teachers reported that students enjoy learning with grandparents and feel supported by their family members for their learning. Finding more ways to partner with family and community members to bring more family members into the school may also support student engagement. These are three strengths of the community in Atlin, which could be explored further to improve students' attendance in school. I return to this topic in Possible Future Research Directions.

The fourth contribution about education for Indigenous students from our research relates to sense of belonging. When the members of the TRTFN Education Committee and I reviewed the comments by students with respect to sense of belonging, we were surprised and pleased at how well students articulated the strong connections they felt to the land, family, ancestors, community, and being Tlingit. Our conclusion from the students' comments was that Indigenous students in Atlin School have a strong sense of belonging to their community. Due to the isolation of many northern communities and First Nations reservations I believe that this finding might hold true for students from other northern First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. When enhancement agreements include goals to improve students' sense of belonging, there is

an inference that something within the students could be developed further.¹⁰⁸ Based upon students' comments in our interviews, this is not the case. Students have a strong sense of belonging as Tlingit. This finding raises many questions for me about goals to improve sense of belonging for students in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. How do school districts acknowledge students' current sense of belonging? What exactly is meant when goals include words such as "improve sense of belonging for Indigenous students?" Does this mean improving students' sense that they fit in with the mainstream population? How is this different from the assimilation policies of the past? School districts and their Indigenous partners who wish to continue with a goal about sense of belonging for students might want to have more discussion with all stakeholders to ascertain what is meant by the term, *sense of belonging*. The wording for goals about sense of belonging must be chosen carefully to acknowledge and respect the meanings of sense of belonging for all cultures in the community, for example, Indigenous students' strong sense of connections to their communities, to ancestors, and to the land. I believe that school districts and their Indigenous partners have good intentions when they write goals to enhance sense of belonging and academic achievement by increasing opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language. I state the caution above because we are in the early stages of recovering from our history of residential schools and assimilation in Canada and in all colonized countries (Jacob, Cheng, and Porter 2015).

Although I feel strongly about the wording of goals for sense of belonging, I do believe that goals for belonging are needed. The crux of the issue is how to help students have strong connections with others and with the curriculum in school. I believe this is what districts hope to

¹⁰⁸ My original title for this research did not include the question mark at the end. As I was analyzing the comments from participants I realized that without the question mark I was promoting the idea that Indigenous students' sense of belonging needed enhancement.

achieve by increasing opportunities for students to learn Indigenous culture and language. This brings me back to another research question from Chapter 1, “*How* do Indigenous culture and language activities in public schools in British Columbia influence sense of belonging and student achievement for Indigenous learners?” At the present time, I will rely upon the comments from students, parents, and teachers to attempt an answer.

Indigenous culture and language activities in school enhance sense of belonging and achievement when the activities are familiar to students and connect to the types of activities they enjoy with their families and in their communities. This sounds almost too simplified, however, it is more complex than one might think. The comments from students, parents, and teachers about what students enjoy (described above) provide clues not only about ways to make experiences at school more engaging, but also about the activities that would enhance sense of belonging at school. Students enjoy helping others, working collectively in groups, participating in outdoor activities particularly out on the land, learning about *Haa Kusteeyí* (Tlingit way of living), and learning with siblings, parents, and grandparents. These ways to learn are as important as what is being taught. As educators introduce more Indigenous culture and language, as is expected with *BC’s New Curriculum* (2016b) and *First Peoples’ Principles of Learning* (2016c), the way that the curriculum is introduced and implemented will be as if not more important than the content. Lessons, which follow Indigenous epistemologies, will have the most hope of enhancing sense of belonging for students. For example, going out on the land to learn a concept in Mathematics will have as much or more impact than reading a Tlingit story from a book and completing a written response in a journal. Both activities are important, but I believe that the way that all curriculum content is presented to students is key. When the lessons in all subject areas emphasize Tlingit ways and Tlingit lifestyle, the lessons have more hope of helping

students feel connections in school. I return to the topic of sense of belonging in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Our fifth contribution about education for Indigenous students is the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers that learning about Tlingit culture and language is important. Although this research set out to gather more information from Indigenous peoples about sense of belonging for Indigenous students, I believe that this is an equally significant finding from our study. Students in Atlin expressed their beliefs that they have a responsibility to know Tlingit culture to honour their ancestors and to pass along the teachings of their ancestors to the next generation. As well, students indicated that knowing one's culture is important for knowing oneself and feeling complete as a person.

The parents' perceptions, I described in Chapter 5, indicate that learning Tlingit culture and language is important: to honour, value, celebrate, and revitalize Tlingit traditional knowledge, to avoid giving students conflicting messages about creation, to enhance identity, to teach governance, to give youth opportunities for leadership in the Taku River Tlingit community, to promote personal growth and a sense of pride in oneself, to teach *Haa Kusteeyí* (Tlingit way of living) and survival on the land, and to teach acceptance of all cultures to all children.

For parents and grandparents in Atlin, the importance of Indigenous culture and language and goals for education cannot be separated from reconciliation and healing from residential schools. The intent of residential schools was to take away Indigenous languages and cultures from Indigenous children (Battiste 2009; Kennedy 2009; Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996b). For many Indigenous peoples the goals for education for their children must be to restore the language and culture that was taken away. This is, I believe, one of the main reasons why Indigenous peoples desire self-determination, to control what and how

their children will learn. By teaching language and culture to their children, Indigenous peoples are preparing their children for employment and leadership within their nations, to lead them forward in self-determination (Christine Schreyer, January 20, 2017, editing comment).

I do not believe that educators in school districts share these same goals. For teachers and administrators, goals for education seem to follow British Columbia Ministry of Education guidelines to prepare students with skills to assist them to be successful with education and employment in the future.¹⁰⁹ This discrepancy was evident in the comments from parents and teachers in the interviews and focus group sessions in our project. Teachers' comments in our study demonstrated that they support opportunities for students to learn Tlingit culture and language and believe that these opportunities are important for students to build identity, to promote sense of belonging and because the children are the knowledge keepers of Taku River Tlingit traditional knowledge. However, a main concern for teachers is that students will acquire the literacy and numeracy skills necessary for success in secondary school and beyond. This was also evident, as I mentioned in Chapter 5, from the goals in the *Atlin School Growth Plan (2014-2015 and 2015-2016)*. It will be interesting to follow the progress of BC's New Curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016b) to note if and how goals for education might change with the inclusion of First Peoples' Principles of Learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education 2016c).

Parents and community members in Atlin want their children to be prepared for future education and employment, however they would also like their children to be participating in activities that promote Tlingit identity. The devastating legacy of residential schools was

¹⁰⁹ It makes sense to me that teachers and administrators would have goals for developing skills for future education and employment because as employees of the ministry of Education they are mandated to follow the B.C. Ministry of Education curriculum. For the past decade, the focus in the B.C. curriculum has been reading, writing, and numeracy.

mentioned often as I sat down to interview parents, to begin a focus group session, or to chat informally with community members. This was especially true for grandparents who are the survivors of those institutions. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, Spokesperson Louise Gordon suggested that I ask questions about residential schools in my next surveys. As well, at the grandparents' focus group session Louise said several times, "it's not working." I did not understand Louise's frustration and the urgency in her tone until I realized that perhaps the goals for education for Indigenous peoples and for school districts are not synchronized. I now understand the importance of including Indigenous culture and language in schools from Indigenous peoples' perspectives although I am not sure that the phrase, "including Indigenous culture and language" captures the essence of what is needed to restore the Indigenous culture, language, and identity that was taken away through the policies of assimilation in residential schools. As Aboriginal Education Enhancement agreements evolve, as I think they will from my reading of enhancement agreements over the past five years, I hope that the language in the agreements will begin to include more wording about: 1) healing from intergenerational trauma due to the residential school system, 2) reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, 3) revitalization and restoration of Indigenous language and culture, 4) including Indigenous worldview and epistemologies in lessons about cultural practices, and 5) preparing for self-determination. With these modifications, the goals in Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements have the potential to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Without them, I worry that Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements will be ineffective in bringing about the kinds of changes that are needed for Indigenous students to be successful in school and in life.

The goals for education that I describe above are ever more urgent in a world where globalization is eroding away at Indigenous cultures around the world. Si Belkacem Taieb explains the effects of globalization using the phrase, *generalization of culture*:

A major tool of control in the world today is the generalization of culture. Generalization of culture is the creation of a global culture from bits and pieces of other cultures giving it a general taste of everything, while silencing the individual heart or essence of each and everyone of them. It is a way of silencing diversity, drowning it in the limits of itself and using the masses to silence the individual. (2014, 159)

Si Belkacem Taieb's quote suggests that goals for education in countries with diverse populations and Indigenous peoples who are healing from the traumas of residential schools ought to include strategies to celebrate the many heritages, cultures, languages, and identities of the students.

The final contribution of our research to new knowledge about education pertains to the fact that having more opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language in schools would benefit Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. The commissioners of the TRC expressed the need for all Canadians to understand the responsibility for all people in Canada to work together for reconciliation (Canada. TRC 2015). Although the students, parents, and community members who chose to participate in our partnership research were predominantly from Taku River Tlingit First Nation I am grateful to my research partners for recommending that the project be open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at Atlin School. The few non-Indigenous students and their parents who participated shared insights into the benefits of learning Tlingit culture for all children.

The comments from non-Indigenous children about being excited to learn Tlingit language and culture and the responses from their parents about how learning Tlingit culture prepares their children to accept all people are examples of the benefits of learning Indigenous culture and

language for all students. Ngai, Karlsen Baek, and Paulgaard write: “Indigenous education is not an issue for Indigenous peoples only. The question of how Indigenous education can be integrated into mainstream education systems in ways that benefit all students (Native and non-Native) in culturally plural societies needs to be addressed” (2015, 82). Jacob, Cheng, and Porter claim, “We also want to recognize that [I]ndigenous education has the potential to influence more than just [I]ndigenous peoples—all people of the earth have the ability to learn from each other” (2015, 8). Our project can enlighten others about ways to put these claims into practice. In our study, participants talked about the benefits of wholistic projects such as the totem pole carving by students in Atlin School. Projects, which involve bringing community members into the school and students into the community, seem to have the most potential to help all citizens to accept all cultures. This is an example of a way to approach Call to Action #63iii in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which calls upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to build “student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (Canada. TRC 2015, 290).

These six conclusions about education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and the previous three conclusions about partnership research contribute to research which hopes to benefit Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the journey towards reconciliation.

Integration of This Research with Current Research

In this section, I discuss the connections between our research and other studies conducted: 1) with Taku River Tlingit First Nation, 2) in partnership research with Indigenous peoples, and 3) about education for Indigenous students.

With Taku River Tlingit First Nation

As I mentioned when I introduced the Taku River Tlingit First Nation in Chapter 1, the TRTFN has partnered in research in the past. Two studies in the past decade have focused upon relationships between the land (including the water) and the TRTFN. In 2008, Susan Dain-Owens completed a case study of the TRTFN salmon fisheries including relationships between TRTFN fishers, non-Indigenous fishers, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Dain-Owens describes how the TRTFN know the Taku River as “Grandpa”(vii). She explains how the Taku River Tlingit fishers feel a responsibility to sustain the river and all that it has to offer. They respect the river and give offerings of food to thank Grandpa for giving them the fish they need for survival. There are connections between our partnership research about education and Dain-Owens’ case study of fishing on the Taku River. For instance, Dain-Owens describes cooperation between stakeholders, knowledge sharing, and interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. She argues that TRTFN, “cannot attain a fully equal status of legal co-management [of the fisheries] until they gain sovereignty through settling land claims in their territory or by signing a land-use agreement with the Canadian government” (2008). Dain-Owens asserts that cooperation and trust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders are necessary to incorporate traditional Tlingit knowledge into conservation science. Dain-Owens also acknowledges the need for more participation by the Tlingit peoples in the fisheries. She describes the importance of family on the Taku River, which I include here, because of the connections to family and pride mentioned in our research:

Fishing on the Taku River has always been a family affair. Most Tlingit who fish down river over the summer do so with parents, brothers, sisters, and cousins. Two main families have been coming down for fifteen or twenty years and have well-established camps on the river. The Taku is a special place for these families; it is a place where kids can stay out of

trouble, learn to fish, support themselves and their families, work hard, and get to know their cultural home. Children raised here continue to come back each summer, and know the river as a second home. In summer 2007 many teenage boys lived downriver, fishing, working at the landing station, or working at the ADFG [Alaska Department of Fish and Game] camp. They were all related somehow, either brothers or cousins. Most of them spent May to September on the river. Though the main Taku Wild fish camp now has amenities for “the bush” – a diesel generator providing power for electronics, a refrigerator and freezer, running water, and Internet – it still sits on the bank of a glacier-fed river in a very remote region of B.C.

Talking to the young people working on the river, I got a sense that most of them were very happy to be there. From all Tlingit fishers I felt their pride for being on the Taku River and fishing for their families and their community. (2008, 20-21)

These themes of cooperation, knowledge sharing, trust, family, pride and the merging of two worldviews resonate with the perceptions expressed by participants in our partnership research.

There are stronger connections between our research and another study with the TRTFN, Dr. Christine Schreyer’s doctoral thesis, *Reserves and Resources: Local Rhetoric on Land, Language, and Identity amongst the Taku River Tlingit and the Loon River Cree First Nations* (2009). Schreyer compared rhetoric in the communities of the Taku River Tlingit and the Loon River Cree First Nations with rhetoric used in the report of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (TFALC) (Canada. TFALC 2005). Schreyer describes that for the TRTFN land and language are linked and must be sustained. Just as the TRTFN are stewards of the land, so are they stewards of the language, which is in fact a resource of the land (Schreyer 2009). The knowledge about the resources of the land is embedded within the language. Therefore, rather than being a right that needs to be protected as explained by the Task Force on Aboriginal Language and Culture (Canada. TFALC 2005), the language is a resource to sustain; a resource which belongs to no one, but is the responsibility of everyone. In addition, because the TRTFN are currently engaged in B.C. land claims legal proceedings, the process of demonstrating that the Taku River Tlingit have lived in their territory since time immemorial is

ongoing and never ending. Schreyer explains how the ongoing land claims proceedings impact and influence the Taku River Tlingit First Nation's (and other First Nations) social identity and planning for language maintenance and revitalization. In other words, the members of TRTFN are on a constant journey to sustain Tlingit land, language, and identity.

Schreyer's descriptions of the TRTFN relationship with the land and language and how these relationships promote social identity have helped me understand comments by participants in our research. I mentioned Christine Schreyer's research in my introduction to the TRTFN in Chapter 1 and I had read her research prior to beginning my research with TRTFN. However, now that I have spent time in the community and have had time to learn from members of the TRTFN, I have a better understanding of themes in Schreyer's research and believe that our partnership research has many connections to her study. I now understand the urgency in participants' voices when they speak about sustaining Tlingit land, land and identity. To put it another way, if I knew that another nation wanted to take away my home, my neighbour's home, my community, my culture, and my language, all of my energies would be focused upon protecting what is ours. Sustaining land, language, and identity would be in my thoughts constantly and would likely surface from within me in every conversation. As I described in Chapter 1, the Taku River Tlingit have clear goals as stewards of their lands, language, and identity and they are driven to incorporate these goals into all aspects of community life including education. These goals are evident in the comments from participants in our partnership research.

As I stated in Chapter 1, as well as describing the theoretical links between land, language, and identity, Schreyer's doctoral research included partnering with the TRTFN to create a game, "*Haa shagóon ítx yaa ntoo.aat*" (Travelling Our Ancestors Paths), to teach about the resources in

Tlingit territory using Tlingit language (Schreyer 2009). In 2014, Schreyer partnered again with the TRTFN and Dr. Jon Corbett to create an interactive online map (Taku River Tlingit Place Names 2014). The game and the map, which were explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, are examples of what participants in our study described as combining traditional Tlingit knowledge with hands on teaching methods. They are important examples of how to teach about the land and the language in ways that are consistent with the sustainability goals of the TRTFN. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the TRTFN is lobbying the B.C. government to rename places in the territory with Tlingit place names. It will be exciting to see and hear about new projects, which teach members of the community and visitors about Tlingit land, language, and identity.

About Partnership Research

Although many Indigenous theorists write about what ought to occur for research with Indigenous peoples, “the literature remains sparse on how Indigenous theories are relevant to Indigenous research and pedagogical pathways” (Young, 2015, 23). However, as I was in the final stages of writing this chapter, I found two recent dissertations with methodologies that included collaboration with Indigenous partners and were, therefore, similar to our project. These are: *Survivance: an Indigenous Social Impact Game* by Elizabeth LaPensée (2014) and *Indigenous Elders’ Pedagogy for Land-Based Health Education Programs: Gee-Shee-Kan’dug Cedar* by Alannah Earl Young (2015). LaPensée gathered feedback from urban Indigenous peoples living in Portland, Oregon, after they had played a social impact game, *Survivance*, (<http://www.survivance.org>), which she designed to assist in healing from the trauma of colonization. LaPensée attends to the inclusion of Indigenous worldviews, knowledges and epistemologies in research and emphasizes the importance of including the voices of the Indigenous peoples by following a grounded theory approach to analysis. LaPensée writes that

research follows Indigenous epistemologies when the research directly presents the voices of participants “to the fullest extent possible” (2014, 48). In this regard, I felt a strong connection between our research methods. Another similarity between LaPensée’s dissertations and my own is our descriptions of journeys of healing, both personally and for our families. Finally, to explain the theoretical framework for her study, LaPensée presents a graphic illustration of three stacked infinity signs, the symbol for Métis peoples, to describe the journey of research. She writes:

The journey begins by venturing out. Then, through iterative cycles of revisiting or returning, the journey becomes clearer and reveals its greater interconnectedness. Finally, the journey completes itself and maintains openness to continue infinite loops that further clarify and deepen our knowledge. (LaPensée 2014, 51)

I found similarities between my Métis methodology and framework for Indigenous knowledge production and LaPensée’s approach, which was based upon the Anishinaabe and Métis approaches of her ancestors. Similar to myself, LaPensée stated, “I looked to my own ancestors and the research to inform the design of symbols that best represented the framework, themes, and impact in the research” (2014, 66, 67). Some of her wordings reminded me of my own writing style, for example, “the emphasis is not on my interpretation as a researcher, but rather on giving ground to the voices of the Indigenous players” (2014, 53). It is exciting and validating to find research with similarities to mine.

In the second dissertation, Alannah Earl Young utilized Indigenous story work methodologies with eighteen Elders in central Manitoba to determine practices, which supported local land-based pedagogies in a health education program. My connection to Young’s study began when I read her statement, “If Euro-Western knowledge and theory guides Euro-Western social research, it makes sense that Indigenous knowledge and theory should guide Indigenous research” (2015, 28). By coding and analyzing the comments from participants in eight research

circles in Manitoba and British Columbia, Young identified five pedagogical learning pathways, which corresponded to culture, land, orality, community, and ethics. As I did, Young visited again with the Elders, who were her research partners, to present the themes to ensure that they agreed with her analysis. Young also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the research benefitted the community. Like LaPensée and myself, Young created an illustration to explain her framework for research. Her metaphor of a cedar tree included Indigenous worldviews and values in the roots, individual and collective relationships in the stem and the five themes identified by Elders in the branches.

Indigenous methodologies have been described as “emergent” methodologies (Hart 2010, Kovach 2009, McIvor 2010, Smith 2012, Steinhauer 2002) designed to decolonize research by interconnecting the methodologies with Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous epistemologies, and Indigenous knowledge. The methodologies in this dissertation and the dissertations by LaPensée (2014) and Young (2015) are examples of emergent methodologies, which include partnerships between researchers and Indigenous partners.

About Education for Indigenous Students

In Chapter 1, I referred to White et al. (2012) who state that studies linked to British Columbia Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements are not yet available. However, as I was completing the first draft of my dissertation, I found new research by Lyn Daniels, which includes an analysis of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements as part of the data analysis for her dissertation, *Memories of Aboriginal/Indian Education: Decolonizing Policy and Practice* (2016). Daniels interviewed six Indigenous college students in 2011 about their experiences in public school and then, using a critical theory approach, created a “montage” of decolonizing “methodological frames” (2016, ii) by comparing the students’ perceptions with: 1)

a critical analysis of history goals in four Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, 2) fiction about survivance (Kearney (2004) and genocide (Sebald 2001), and 3) memories of residential school survivors. By comparing the multiple forms of data mentioned above, Daniels identified similarities between the residential school system and current education systems and concluded that the “Indian education policy of the past was transformed into the Aboriginal education policy of today” (Daniels 2016) because of the emphasis in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements to teach culture to erase history.

Like myself, Daniels aimed to utilize research methods to decolonize research. Daniels and I agree that the process and wording in many Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements suggests that students rather than the system need to improve. However, other than our common intent to decolonize research to improve education for Indigenous students, I did not feel a strong connection between the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and methods for our research. My research focused upon partnership with Indigenous peoples, whereas, Daniels utilized a methodology of montage, described above. Where my interactions with Indigenous students focused upon building relationships with students, parents, teachers, and Indigenous community members and including them in all steps of the research process over three years, Daniels methods included meetings with college students over a period of three months.¹¹⁰ Daniels methodologies included a critical analysis of history goals in four enhancement agreements, whereas my research was focused upon goals for sense of belonging and concentrated more upon

¹¹⁰ Daniels worked with two groups of students during two timelines. One group met in April, May, and June of 2011 and the other in September, October, November 2011. The groups each attended a session where each student created a collage using Education magazines as they discussed memories of school experiences. Then Daniels met with each student individually for one or two interviews to further discuss the artwork and memories of individuals. Seven students from a variety of nations (Secwepemc, Cree/Métis, Cree, Anishnabe, and Haida) participated in the artwork but six were interviewed. The questions in the interviews focused upon students’ parents’ experiences with education as well as their perspectives on what Aboriginal education meant for them as Aboriginal students” (2016, 38). Daniels does not provide a copy of the interview schedule for comparison.

participants' perspectives of sense of belonging rather than analysis of the documents. In some ways, I disagree completely with Daniel's interpretations. In the analyses of goals from two school districts Daniels wrote:

The photographs of students in traditional regalia also function to position students *outside* of time with their references to dancing and celebrating. These activities imply that Aboriginal students are not in control of their bodies and are linked to the childhood notions of dress up and dance celebration. (2016, 121)

The majority of photographs (twelve out of seventeen) of Aboriginal students and community members are in regalia or making arts and crafts and only two photographs show students involved in typical educational activities such as reading and writing. Once again students are depicted as out of time or captured in anachronistic space. (2016, 136)

These two interpretations are in complete disagreement with the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and community members in our partnership research, who spoke about the pride students felt when they wore their regalia and participated in dancing and celebrations. While I agree with Daniel's conclusion that there is room for improvement in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, I am hesitant to critique the documents too extensively because the process for creating the enhancement agreements includes collaboration between school districts and local Indigenous partners and that all parties accept and sign off on the wording in the agreements. For these reasons, I found few connections between Daniels' study and our partnership research.

Although more studies which include British Columbia's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements have not yet been published, the results of our research are linked to research from other scholars, particularly research that suggests that: 1) identity is linked to place (Cajete 2004) and "place means kinship" (Shanley 2015, 6), 2) grandparents play an important role in language socialization for children (Ferguson 2011), 3) there is a generation gap in language transmission among younger parents, ages 25-44, who are speak only English in their

homes with their children (Ferguson 2011), 4) opportunities which integrate academic and cultural support enhance students' engagement in school (Boyes and Ogden 2009), 5) an integrated model of education which includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge is most beneficial for students (Heber 2009, 2014), 6) education for Indigenous students ought to include revitalization of Indigenous language and culture in Indigenous communities (Antone 2009, Milne 2015), and 7) choices about learning prepare student for self-determination (Bishop 2011, Savage and Hindle 2011). I describe more details of the connections between our study and current research in the paragraphs below.

Cajete (2004) teaches that for Indigenous people identity is linked to the place where the people have existed for generations. Cajete writes, "The physical, cognitive, and emotional orientation of a people is a kind of 'map' they carry in their heads and transfer from generation to generation" (Cajete 2004, 46). Although I did not find studies with connections to Cajete's writing, in my search for research with connections to our study, I found one publication (Shanley 2015) that referred to Cajete's explanations of place. It seemed important to include students' strong connection to place and to connect their comments to Cajete's and Shanley's descriptions of place in this section. In the introduction to a volume of essays, *Mapping Indigenous Presence; North Scandinavian and North American Perspectives*, Shanley remarks, "Indigenous people—people vitally connected to geographical locations—place means both an imagined home and a vibrantly interactive space inhabited by many sentient beings, what Western thinkers might call a 'metaphysical' space. Place means kinship in its broadest terms" (2015, 6). The comments from students are evidence of Shanley's words, "place means kinship" and Cajete's comment, "Knowing the origins of their people, their place, and the all-important things the place contains is considered essential orientation for a tribal person" (2004, 46). For

me, these quotes explain the comments from students in Atlin about the connections they feel there and, in turn, the comments from students in our project are examples of the statement, “place means kinship” (Shanley 2015, 6). Students in Atlin spoke about feeling connected to the land, to the place, to their cousins, aunties, and grandparents, and to their ancestors and having a desire to know more. Taku River Tlingit students in Atlin seem to recognize Atlin and the Taku River Tlingit Territory as places where they have connections to the land and to others; a place where they belong with kin.

A second connection between our study and the research of other scholars is intergenerational teaching. In interview sessions for our project, students in Atlin spoke about connections to grandparents with comments about enjoying school when grandparents come and acquiring help with homework from grandparents. Students also spoke about hearing their grandparents speak Tlingit and about learning about culture from their grandparents. These comments complement assertions by Jenanne Ferguson (2011) that grandparents, particularly grandmothers, play an important role in language socialization for their grandchildren. Ferguson’s research looked at the intergenerational connections among Dän k’è (Southern Tutchone) speakers in Haines Junction and Whitehorse, Yukon, in 2007 and 2008, particularly, with respect to sustaining Indigenous languages in communities. Ferguson writes, “Parents’ attitudes and practices regarding the home language are significant factors in language maintenance” and “that it is not only mothers or fathers, but also grandparents and the children themselves who shape language usage in homes and communities” (2011, 116). Ferguson describes the “prominent role” (120) that grandparents play in raising grandchildren, for example, to instill pride in the children. This is true in Atlin, where many children see their grandparents daily and some grandparents are the guardians of their grandchildren.

A third link between our research and other studies is the similarities between the language experiences of families in Atlin and the families whom Ferguson met in Haines Junction and Whitehorse. For example, Ferguson writes, “there is a ‘gap’ generation among younger parents, generally those between the ages of 25-44; these mothers and fathers are socializing their children primarily in the majority language (English)” (2011, 118). The same statement could be made for parents in Atlin and parents in any Indigenous community where the grandparents were sent to residential school to be assimilated into European ways. Students, parents, and grandparents in our study spoke with sadness of the current lack of opportunities to learn Tlingit language in the Atlin community. Parents spoke about hoping that their children would learn more Tlingit words than they themselves could speak. As Ferguson has suggested, finding ways to utilize the bonds between children, parents, and grandparents is a strategy that might support Tlingit language and cultural revitalization. I return to this idea later in the section about possible future directions for research.

Fourth, our study complements Boyes and Ogden’s (2009) survey results for Indigenous students in Calgary, Alberta, which linked cultural opportunities with academic engagement. In a report of the evaluation of the Métis Calgary Family Services Aboriginal Student Program, Boyes and Ogden (2009) demonstrate that engagement in academic supports and cultural activities enhances student success. The scale scores from their report provide extensive data about the connections between students’ academic self-esteem or self-confidence and family support, student self-efficacy, cultural identification, and cultural community participation. The comments from our study complement the statistics reported by Boyes and Odgen (2009). For example, students in Atlin and in Calgary reported that they felt supported by their family members. As well, students in our study and in Calgary commented that they enjoyed the

academic support and cultural opportunities provided by the TRTFN Youth Coordinator and the MCFS Aboriginal Student Program respectively. In fact, Boyes and Ogden claim that the positive correlations between survey questions in their report confirm that “identification with native culture as part of identity development had a positive impact upon the participants’ academic engagement” (2009, 62). From participants’ comments in our study, I cannot make the same claim, however, our research shares qualitative information to support the quantitative results reported by Boyes and Ogden (2009). I return to the topic of sense of belonging for Indigenous students and for all students in the section about possible research future directions.

Fifth, Robert Wesley Heber (2009, 2014) advocates for a model for Indigenous education, which includes “parallel paradigms” (29) i.e., paradigms which draw upon both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives to prepare students to live in two worlds. He cautions against a “single-based colonial model” (2014, 29) which serves only to assimilate Indigenous people into the dominant society and a “single-based Indigenous model” (29) which, while it may support identity formation and build self-esteem, has the tendency “to promote parochialism and may further isolate Indigenous people by denying them a broad-based education and thereby limiting their opportunity within the larger society” (30). Therefore, referring to Marshall (2004), Heber recommends a third model, an integrated approach which he explains as “two eyed seeing”, recognizing the strengths from both Indigenous and European knowledge systems. I believe that students, parents, and teachers in Atlin gave evidence of the benefits of this integrated model for education in their comments about the best things about school and the importance of learning Tlingit culture and language. Students named many academic subjects and learning experiences as important for preparing them for the future, but they also expressed their desires to learn and maintain the ways of their ancestors. From listening to the perspectives of participants in our

research, I believe that the ideal education system for Indigenous students and for all children is one that honours the teachings from ancestors, includes the needs of students in the present by attending to students' voices in determining what is to be learned, and provides opportunities for students to acquire the skills, attitudes, confidence, and pride they need to prosper in life in the future.

Sixth, Indigenous peoples, including parents and grandparents in Atlin, would like their children to participate in an education system that helps to revitalize the Indigenous languages and cultures that were devastated by the residential school system. There are connections between the perceptions of participants in our study and the perceptions of participants in studies by Milne (2015) and Antone (2009) about the legacies of residential schools. Milne conducted interviews with 70 educators (50 non-Indigenous and 20 Indigenous), and 148 parents (128 non-Indigenous and 20 Indigenous) whose children were participating in a summer program in southern Ontario to assist primary children to retain academic and social skills over the school vacation. Milne concluded that the legacy of the residential school system and ongoing assimilative practices in education has contributed to poor relationships between Indigenous families and schools (Milne 2015). She argues that positive family-school relationships are crucial for improving the achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Canada. Milne approached her research from a sociology perspective, building upon theories of cultural capital (i.e. knowledge, skills and abilities) and social capital (i.e. social networks). Although I did not notice similarities between the methodologies and methods for our studies,¹¹¹ I believe that there may be connections to our research regarding her finding that, “the legacies

¹¹¹ Milne's study did not focus upon Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, knowledge, and methodologies. Also, although we both conducted interviews with participants, the conversations in my interviews were focused upon positive practices that could be extended rather than issues to be resolved.

of racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples in schooling influences the role that Indigenous parents play in their children's education" (Milne 2015, 5). As I described in Chapter 5, in Atlin there are tensions between the members of TRTFN and SD87 reflected in the use of phrases, such as, *over there* or *over here*, the letter that was sent to the school in March 2013, and Louise's comment, "it's not working." Because family and community members often mentioned residential school in my conversations in Atlin, I believe that Milne's dissertation and my own share important findings about the ongoing impact of residential school upon family-school relations.

In another recent study, Antone (2009) explains Indigenous parents' perspectives about the need to revitalize language and culture in the aftermath of residential schools through her study of Indigenous peoples' perceptions of literacy. Antone suggests that for Indigenous peoples in Canada, literacy is not only about learning to read and write, "literacy is a 'way of life' based upon a 'wholistic' worldview" (2009, 9). Antone writes:

Aboriginal literacy programs have built-in broader goals that are concerned with safeguarding Aboriginal language and culture rather than promoting assimilation. Many factors such as healing, self-determination, and reclamation of identity, language, and cultures play a major role in the complex issue of Aboriginal literacy. (2009, 12)

Antone (2009) elaborates that literacy programs must come from broad approaches that incorporate Indigenous peoples ways of knowing and learning as well as Indigenous values represented in many ways including narratives and art forms.

Although the curriculum in public school literacy programs includes oral communication as well as reading and writing, I would state with confidence that in countries where English is one of the official languages, most educators think of literacy as the ability to read and write in English. For example, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionaries*, and *Wikipedia* define literacy as the ability to read and write, although *Wikipedia* expands this to include "the

ability to use language, numbers, images, computers, and other basic means to understand, communicate, gain useful knowledge and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture” (Merriam-Webster, s.v. “literacy” [accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literacy>], Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “literacy” [accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/literacy>], Wikipedia, s.v. “literacy” [Accessed September 6, 2016. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy>]). This discrepancy regarding the meaning of literacy is just one of the ways that the worldviews of Indigenous and non-Indigenous are not yet synchronized. Differences such as these inevitably will permeate every aspect of education. As we move forward to reconciliation, a place to start is not only to review goals for education as mentioned above, but also, to carefully consider the meanings that partners attach to all aspects of educational programming.

The final link between our research and other studies are the connections between our research and reports about the Te Kotahitanga Project in Auckland, New Zealand regarding the suggestion that giving students opportunities to make choices about what they are learning prepares them for self-determination in the future (Bishop 2011, Savage and Hindle 2011). Bishop (2011) builds a strong argument for changing the power imbalances in classrooms by facilitating experiences of self-determination for students. In reporting the results of interviews with year nine and ten students in the Te Kotahitanga Project, Bishop writes:

Students were clear about how teachers, in changing how they related to and interacted with Maori students in their classrooms, could create a context for learning wherein Maori students’ educational achievement could improve, again by placing the self-determination of Maori students at the center of classroom relationships and interactions. (2003, 39)

Savage and Hindle (2011), in their reports about Te Kotahitanga, describe how classrooms where students have a choice about what and how they learn promote stronger relationships between teachers and students. They write:

For some teachers, the emphasis on developing relationships meant changing their classroom practice, repositioning themselves from holding a traditional teacher-centered role to co-constructing and sharing power with students. These teachers described the process of encouraging student voice and choice in classrooms when they had previously dominated the classroom space with teacher talk, highlighting the relevance of learning activities and their efforts to make connections to students' lives outside the classroom. (2011, 117).

I saw connections between the references to student voice and choice in the Te Kotahitanga Project and students' opportunities for choice and leadership in Atlin. Students and their parents in our project named opportunities for choice, such as Project Based Learning, as some of their favourite times at school. They also spoke about enjoying leadership opportunities, such as, the Totem Pole Project and times when they helped younger students. Compared to the study in New Zealand, where students reported minimal relationships with their teachers, many students in our study reported that they liked their teachers and had good relationships with them. However, there was room for improvement in the relationships between teachers and some older students in Atlin. Comparing comments from our participants with the results from Te Kotahitanga suggests to me that providing students with more opportunities for choices about learning will benefit relationships with teachers, academic achievement, and preparation for self-determination.

How do these connections to other research assist TRTFN, SD87, and myself with our reasons for the research? For TRTFN, the links to identity and place (Cajete 2004, Shanley 2015), the role of grandparents (Fergusson 2011), the generation gap in language transmission (Fergusson 2011), the benefits of Indigenous culture for academic achievement (Boyes and Ogden 2009), and opportunities for self-determination (Bishop 2011, Savage and Hindle 2011) help to further the TRTFN quest for an education program that sustains Tlingit connections to land, language, and identity. For TRTFN and SD87, the connections between our study and the

results of Fergusson (2011), Boyes and Ogden (2009), Bishop (2011) and Savage and Hindle (2011) provide more information about potential goals for planning for the future, for example in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. For myself and for school districts in the province, these connections also provide information about ways to improve the goals in Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in the province. As well, linking our research to other studies helped me to see how our research contributes to the recommendations from scholars that education for Indigenous students ought to address: 1) Indigenous culture and language revitalization, 2) self-determination, and 3) sense of belonging and relationships of trust. More discussion and collaboration is needed to pursue models for education that integrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews (Heber 2014) and wholistic approaches to literacy that include Indigenous ways of learning (Antone 2009). These two ideas are discussed again in the section of this chapter about topics for further research.

My Reflections upon the Strengths and Limitation of Our Project

Regarding Partnership Research

Strengths

I introduced this chapter with a quote from Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley (2015) because comprehensive summary of the expectations for Community Based Participatory Research describes the primary strengths of our partnership project. First, by conducting the research in two phases over three years, our project emphasized the importance and benefit of developing relationships before conducting research together. The interviews were conducted when the time was right rather than according to a set timeline. As my partners began to know and trust me, they were more willing to share details and personal anecdotes, which I may not have learned otherwise. Second, by focusing upon what was working at the school and in the community, the

current successes in Atlin have been celebrated and recognized as starting points for moving forward. For example, the Totem Pole Project is an example of revitalizing culture within the community with students in a leadership role. The success of the totem pole project is a foundation to build upon. Third, our partnership research attempted to facilitate collaboration in all aspects of the research project from the conception of the proposal to the sharing of data in the community. Our experiences of partnership research will hopefully be of interest to other researchers who aspire to collaborate with Indigenous peoples.

Limitations

Although I am confident that our research was conducted in partnership and presents a model for partnership research, I believe it is important to note that a limitation of our study is the ambiguity that might occur over readers' interpretations of the collaboration between the research partners. Since there are sometimes many interpretations for terms, such as, *partnership*, *relationship*, and *collaboration*, I want to highlight the complexity of these terms to eliminate assumptions that establishing relationships for research was easily achieved and maintained. If Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are to build partnerships for reconciliation as is suggested in the summary of the final report of the TRC, then the details of our partnership experiences must be shared so that the expectations for future partnerships are realistic.

In the case of our partnership research, I had expected and hoped that there would be more opportunities to collaborate with members of the TRTFN and SD87 throughout the research process, particularly for the analysis of the comments from participants. However, my position as an outsider, the distance between us, and the many commitments of the TRTFN and SD87 felt to me to be barriers to overcome that I had not anticipated. In my proposal, I had planned that a committee of research partners would be established and that the research partners would meet

with me as consultants throughout the research process.¹¹² I had expected that because of our common interest in education for Indigenous students that more members of TRTFN Education Committee would attend the meetings that TRTFN Education Manager Tammy Fetterly and I had planned. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, I soon learned that people in Atlin have many commitments to keep their community going. With only two hundred members living in Atlin, from infants to Elders, many adults are very involved in working and volunteering for the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. It is not uncommon for members of TRTFN to attend meetings in the evenings or on their way home from a day of work. Rather than assuming that people were not interested in our project, I had to recognize community members' other commitments.

In Chapter 3 Methods, I described strategies I used to overcome barriers, such as, making several trips to Atlin to strengthen our relationships, being flexible about timing, being creative about ways to meet, and coordinating with other community events to gather information for our project. Because the summary of the final report of the TRC includes Calls to Action, which require collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, I believe that it is important to accurately describe our experiences of collaboration to inform others who desire to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

Initially, I was disappointed that not all staff members in Atlin School participated as interview participants. I had expected that all employees at Atlin School would want to be interviewed to give their voice to the project. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, a staff member commented that they thought the project was with TRTFN and another had withdrawn consent because they feared repercussions. Perhaps other teachers had similar perceptions. I also wonder

¹¹² In hindsight, I believe I was imposing my own belief system about collaboration from my years of experience in education. Collaboration in education settings usually implies setting a meeting date and expecting attendance at the meeting.

if this hesitancy to participate was because of tensions I sometimes noticed between TRTFN and SD87, as I described earlier, with the use of *we* versus *they* and *over here* or *over there*. I also have to honour the fact that members of TRTFN and SD87 have many commitments and that participating in the project was optional. I am grateful that the teachers and other staff members who did not participate in interviews did invite me into their classrooms and chatted with me often before and after school and at recess time. I want to emphasize that although the partnership activities I had envisioned did not develop quite as I had expected, the relationships I now have with members of TRTFN and SD87 surpassed my expectations.

Regarding Education for Indigenous Students

Strengths

With respect to education for Indigenous students, four strengths of our research, which have also been mentioned as contributions, are the attention it brings to: 1) including Indigenous voice in research about education, 2) describing sense of belonging for Indigenous students, 3) understanding the importance of Indigenous culture and language revitalization, and 4) bridging the gap between Indigenous and European ways of learning to benefit all students. The aspect of this research that makes me most proud is the focus on the perceptions of participants. By including original comments from students, parents, and teachers, with little or no editing, this dissertation raises up the voices of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 employees. Belcourt, Swaney, and Kelley (2015) claim that new knowledge has the best chance to inform policy and practice if the knowledge includes “the perspective of the actual life experience of research participants” (62). They also state that, “research that does not prioritize Indigenous voices and methodologies places Indigenous communities and science at risk” (66). I

am confident that our research, which “prioritizes Indigenous voices and methodologies”, contributes to authentic new knowledge about education for Indigenous students.

The second strength of our research is the new knowledge it provides about students’ sense of belonging. Students in Atlin have a sense of belonging to land, families, ancestors, and community. The students insights into what they enjoy about school, which were describe earlier, will give educators suggestions for ways to implement curriculum in ways that help Indigenous students make connections in school. Teaching strategies that follow Indigenous epistemologies, for example, by giving students opportunities to work collectively in groups and through outdoor activities that resemble the lifestyles students live, have the most hope of helping students to make connections. This is important information for school districts with goals to enhance students’ sense of belonging. For future planning, educators and Indigenous partners might ask, “How can we build upon students’ strong connections to the land and to their families, communities, and ancestors to rebuild relationships of trust?”

A third strength of our project is that the research shares the perceptions of participants about the importance of revitalizing the Indigenous culture and language that was devastated by residential schools. As I was writing this final chapter, I read two chapters by Jacob, Liu, and Lee (2015) and by Ball and McIvor (2013) about the role of education with respect to language revitalization. Jacob, Liu, and Lee (2015) assert that Indigenous education has a central role to play in reversing policies of assimilation. Jacob, Liu, and Lee write, “Native language acquisition contributes to the preservation of specific cultures, histories, and identities. Hence, it is essential for government leaders to promote [I]ndigenous languages as a priority in education of [I]ndigenous peoples” (57). Ball and McIvor quote from the Assembly of First Nations, who state, “any strategy to increase the number of speakers of any language must necessarily involve

the education system” (1992, 2). However, Ball and McIvor (2013) claim that Indigenous movements for language revitalization and self-determination in education have become increasingly separate. They call for more collaboration between language revitalization and “language-in-education” (2013, 19) that places Indigenous language interactions in the home with supports from school and community language programs, training for teachers, research, policies and funding, and a re-examination of Indigenous language rights. These quotes complement the Calls to Action for language and culture in the summary of the final report of the TRC (see Appendix A.2). Comments from participants in our study support collaboration for language-in-education. Students in our study spoke about the responsibilities they have to future generations to sustain Tlingit language and culture. Grandparents spoke about revitalizing language and culture to heal from the assimilation policies of residential school. Collaboration between the TRTFN and SD87 for culture and language revitalization will be discussed further in the section of this chapter about future directions for research.

Finally, in the introduction to *Indigenous Education; Language, Culture, and Identity*, a recent volume about the international context for Indigenous education, Jacob, Cheng, and Porter write, “What is needed most in our increasingly interdependent world are bridges to span the gaps of inequality and injustice that have so long prevented indigenous and non-indigenous educators from coexisting in synergy” (2015, 29). Shawn Wilson (2003) also raises the notion of bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews in his discussions of easing tensions. Our research is attempting to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews with respect to research about education by sharing the perceptions of mainly Indigenous students, parents and community members and mainly non-Indigenous teachers in one small community. By focusing upon the perceptions that the participants held in

common, our research provides a starting point to assist in bridging the gaps between Indigenous and European worldviews to enhance education for Indigenous students.

The phrase, *bridging the gap*, seems similar to the term, “third space” (Chilisa 2012, 25; English (2005, 85)¹¹³ used by postcolonial writers to describe a space, “where identity is constructed and reconstructed, where life in all its ambiguity is played out” (English 2005, 87). English explains that third space practitioners employ strategies such as, “non-violence, inquiry, engagement, subversion, listening, family and friendship networks, and critical self-reflection” (2005, 96) to challenge the third space where different perspectives converge. In Chapter 2, I indicated that our research had the potential to bridge the gap and to create “a third space” by creating a new culture for planning for education for Indigenous students. A strength of our research is the approach we used and the information we gathered to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews to create a third space for education, i.e. a third space which supports skills for future success and identity for Indigenous students.

Limitations

Regarding education for Indigenous students, a limitation of our study is the fact that the participants in our study reside in a remote community in Northern British Columbia and as such the findings may not be generalizable to schools with diverse populations of Indigenous students in urban centres. Although the students attend school in a public school administered by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, the conclusions from our study are unique and would be most applicable to other small communities in the north who are in similar circumstances. In particular the discussions about high school completion would be most relevant to other isolated communities in the north or on the coast. On the other hand, some aspects of the discussions

¹¹³ English (2005) refers to Bhabha (1994), Khan (2000), and Spivak (1999) to explain the notion of *third space*.

about sense of belonging and the importance of learning Indigenous culture and language would apply for all Indigenous students in the province and across Canada. For example, I believe that some Indigenous students throughout the province would feel strong connections to family, to the land, and to ancestors. Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who read about our study are cautioned to make their own decisions about which conclusions might apply to their own unique situations.

To conclude this discussion of strengths and limitations, I hope that our research will be recognized for the insights it brings to: 1) partnership research between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, 2) Indigenous voice in studies of education for Indigenous students, 3) sense of belonging for Indigenous students, 4) revitalization for Indigenous culture, language, and identity and 5) bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews to create an education system which prepares Indigenous students for the future while strengthening their personal identity as Indigenous peoples.

Potential Application of the Research Finding

For Partnership Research

Our research has potential applications for partnerships both nationally and locally. Indigenous community members, school districts, and scholars might look to our partnership research as one example of moving towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples described in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Canada. TRC 2015). The contributions and strengths of our research regarding partnerships and education for Indigenous students will be useful for the implementation of the Calls to Action for Education for Reconciliation (see Appendix A.3). Our research is supported financially via my doctoral award

from the Social Sciences and Human Research Council (SSHRC) and, as such, our partnership experience is useful as an example of research, which assists to advance understanding of reconciliation (see Canada. TRC 2015, Call to Action #65).

Second, I hope that our shared experiences of partnership research will strengthen the relationship between Taku River Tlingit First Nation and School District 87 (Stikine). Ager (2005), Harmann (1990), and O hlfearnain (2013) write about planning that raises the prestige of Indigenous languages. TRTFN and SD87 have raised the prestige of Tlingit culture and language through the dancing and carving lessons in the school, the Totem Pole Project, and the fieldtrip to Celebration 2014 in Juneau, Alaska. An application of this research would be to expand upon the ways that the TRTFN and the school district are raising the prestige of Tlingit culture, language, and identity in Atlin. Another important aspect of these projects is the opportunity for students to demonstrate leadership in the community. Leadership opportunities assist students to prepare for self-determination. The TRTFN and SD87 have successes to build upon with respect to student leadership, culture and language revitalization, and collaboration which will help to diminish perceptions of *over here* versus *over there* and *we* versus *they*. I look forward to hearing about future partnership projects between TRTFN and SD87 and discuss potential future collaborations in the section about possible future research directions.

For Education for Indigenous Students

The new knowledge about education generated from our study has applications nationally and locally as well. Our study offers ideas for the implementation of the TRC recommendations for Education for Reconciliation, i.e. in the areas of developing curriculum and learning resources, sharing best practices, and supporting teacher training needs (see Canada. TRC 2015, Call to Action #63). Our findings inform ministries of education, curriculum planners, and

school districts about current perceptions of Indigenous students and their parents and teachers and about positive actions to build upon for the future. There are similarities between Indigenous communities and I hope that other Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples will find our study interesting and relevant. Hearing about successes in Atlin may give others inspiration about ways to build upon community strengths to enhance partnerships between Indigenous families and educators to improve education for Indigenous students.

Our research will hopefully guide future actions for educational change in School District 87 (Stikine). Summaries of the comments from participants were shared with the TRTFN Education Committee and Superintendent Mike Gordon and drafts of chapters were shared with Spokesperson Louise Gordon and Superintendent Mike Gordon. The comments from participants provide renewed information about ways to enhance education for Indigenous students in the Atlin community. In particular, the suggestions for new opportunities to learn about culture, the comments from participants that students enjoy opportunities to make choices about learning through Project Based Learning, and the success of the Totem Pole Project as a model for student leadership are strengths to build upon as the school district plans for future goals and directions.

Possible Future Research Directions

The possible directions for future partnership research include: 1) expanding upon the methodologies used in our partnership research, 2) improving students' attendance 3) gathering more information about sense of belonging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and 4) exploring more ways for school districts and Indigenous peoples to collaborate for culture and language revitalization, and 5) expanding upon opportunities for self-determination.

For Methodologies for Partnership Research

Three aspects of our methodologies, which future researchers may wish expand upon or modify are: 1) the model for Indigenous knowledge production, which explains that new knowledge for Indigenous peoples is derived from following Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and methodologies, 2) a Métis methodology, which attends, “to all my relations”, and 3) the Indigenist research paradigm, which focused upon relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal. Descriptions of these have been provided in earlier sections of this chapter.

About Improving Student Attendance and Access to Secondary Education

Another direction for future research would be collaboration between TRTFN and SD87 to look into the challenges that impede attendance at school and the student, family, or community supports that are needed to improve attendance. For example, the TRTFN Education Committee and I noticed that students perceive “school as work” rather than “school as fun” even though they reported many things that they enjoy about school. We wondered how students are developing an understanding of learning as a lifelong process (Ali Carlick, October 20, 2015, TRTFN Education Committee Meeting). In Chapter 4, the comments from students give many suggestions about what they enjoy about school and about what activities would make school more fun. Perhaps these comments from students could generate ideas for partnership research in the Atlin community to enhance attendance. Although the TRTFN and SD87 have implemented a creative plan for the 2016/2017 school year to support students in Grade 10, research is needed to assess the success of the new program and to plan for sustainable ways for students from Atlin to acquire Grade 11 and 12.

About Sense of Belonging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Students

The comments from participants in our study provide more understanding of the sense of belonging for Indigenous students however, the strong connections that students have for place and to the ancestors of that place could be researched further. In the conclusion to his auto-ethnography, *Decolonizing Indigenous Education*, about his experiences as an Algerian and as a Kabyle, Si Belkacem Taieb states:

I wish to work on bringing back a sense of belonging to mankind rather than to limit it to members of a geopolitical system one is a part of. I wish to bring back a sense of culture as seen by [I]ndigenous people, a sense connected to the strong belief of belonging to the earth rather than a sense of coming from somewhere else and abusing the earth like an everlasting resource of wealth. (2014, 162)

I like Si Belkacem Taieb's notion of sense of belonging because it is in sync with the Indigenous worldview that everyone and everything is connected to the earth and because it dispels the perception of who belongs and who does not. I believe that this view of sense of belonging would be helpful for students in schools, who are often concerned about belonging to the right group instead of belonging with one another. This Indigenous way of thinking about sense of belonging for all students is an idea for school districts and scholars to research further. As I mentioned earlier, current goals for sense of belonging within Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements sometimes imply that Indigenous students' sense of belonging needs enhancement. As well, there is sometimes ambiguity about sense of belonging to whom? Clearly, students in our study had a strong sense of belonging to land, ancestors, and community. Rather than writing goals for sense of belonging within Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, the British Columbia Ministry of Education and all school districts in the province should consider writing and researching goals for sense of belonging for all students. The goals for all students ought to include ways to empower individual identities, including Indigenous

identity, while facilitating sense of belonging to all of humanity. More research is needed about sense of belonging to the earth and to all of humanity.

About Collaboration for Indigenous Culture and Language Revitalization

Another direction for future research is related to the need for all peoples in Canada, particularly those involved in education, to become more aware of importance of Indigenous language revitalization and more accepting of the need for and benefits of language revitalization for all citizens in our country. As I mentioned in an earlier section about the strengths of our research, Ball and McIvor (2013) and Jacob, Liu, and Lee (2015) advocate for more public education involvement in Indigenous language revitalization. Ball and McIvor explain the need to improve language-in-education policies in Canada “to increase the number of Indigenous language speakers and honour the right of Indigenous children to be educated in their languages and according to their heritage, with culturally meaningful curriculum, cultural safety, and dignity” (2013, 9). In 1992, in a much quoted article entitled, *The World’s Languages in Crisis*, Michael Krauss predicted that one half of the world’s 6000 languages will disappear in this century and that the remainder will be endangered by the end of the century. The loss of Indigenous language will include the loss of the Indigenous knowledge that is embedded in those languages (Battiste 2000, Crystal 2000). In Canada, only *Nihîyaw* (Cree), Anishnaabe (Ojibwa), and Inuktitut (Inuit) are expected to survive due to the number of speakers of those languages (Norris 2007). Indigenous peoples and scholars (Assembly of First Nations 2011; Barman et al. 1987; Battiste 2000, 2002, 2005, 2009; First Peoples Cultural Council 2010, 2014; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton 2001a; Walsh 2006) present many strategies to revitalize Indigenous languages. However, the literature about language revitalization rarely includes ways that public

schools could be involved to support Indigenous language revitalization.¹¹⁴ If we in Canada are serious about reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, then research to investigate ways for Indigenous peoples and school districts to collaborate for Indigenous language revitalization would be beneficial at this time. Our partnership research provides starting points to build upon. The TRTFN and SD87 have collaborated to bring opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language into Atlin School. More research could be conducted about ways to implement strategies from language revitalization research into school programs. In the following paragraphs, I present four ideas for future research for Tlingit language revitalization, which stem from the findings in our current study.

First, in a previous section, I explained connections between our research and Ferguson's research about the role of grandparents in language socialization for children and the generation gap in language transmission among younger parents, ages 25-44, (2011). Ferguson (2011) refers to Fishman (1991, 2000), who she contends, "has also long considered intergenerational mother tongue transmission as the most important factor in language maintenance, specifically focusing on the mother-child dyad at home" (118). As well, I alluded to Ball and McIvor's comprehensive strategy for language revitalization, which focused upon revitalizing language at home (2013). Parents in Atlin shared their desire for their children to learn Tlingit and their concern that opportunities to learn Taku River Tlingit are limited in the Atlin community. An area for future study would be to refer to the ideas presented by Ferguson (2011) and Ball and McIvor (2013) to consider how students, parents, grandparents, Elders, community members, and the school district staff in Atlin could partner in more ways to learn Tlingit.

¹¹⁴ In *How to Keep Your Language Alive; a Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning*, Leanne Hinton (2002), an expert in language revitalization, includes an appendix about ways to include mentoring principles from language revitalization in classrooms with children.

Second, students in our study enjoyed opportunities to demonstrate leadership. Perhaps, strategies from Hinton's Mentor-Apprentice Language Learning Program (2001b) could be modified to be included in the curriculum at Atlin School. Older students could mentor younger students in Tlingit language to give all students more opportunities to use the language. Research could be conducted to gather information about the benefits of this strategy for language revitalization.

A third area for research with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation would be to expand upon the ways that the TRTFN and the school district are raising the prestige of Tlingit culture, language, and identity in Atlin. As I mentioned earlier, language revitalization experts (Ager 2005, Grenoble & Whaley 2006, Haarmann 1990, Perley 2011, Schreyer 2011) advocate for programs, which build the prestige of Indigenous languages. As the TRTFN and SD87 collaborate on more projects to raise the prestige of Tlingit language and culture, opportunities would be available to research the benefits of this approach.

Fourth, educators in SD87 could collaborate with members of the Tlingit community to integrate Antone's description of wholistic literacy with the goals for language and literacy in Atlin School. It is possible that many Indigenous ways of learning are already incorporated into the language arts program. Sharing these strengths could be a focus for research. The lessons that were developed with the Taku River Tlingit Place Names Project (TRTFN 2014) could also be included in this new research. Student achievement in language and literacy using this wholistic approach could be used as data for this research.

There are, of course, many directions for future research about collaboration for Indigenous culture and language revitalization. The examples above are four that come to mind through linking our research with other current research.

About Self-determination

If education is to prepare Indigenous students and Indigenous communities for self-determination, then more research is needed to build upon the suggestions by Bishop (2011) and Savage and Hindle (2011) that giving choice and voice to Indigenous students will prepare students for self-determination. The comments from students in our study suggest that having choices about learning and opportunities for leadership help them to enjoy learning. More research is needed about how choices, voice, and leadership prepare students for self-determination.

To support reconciliation in Canada, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada could create partnerships, such as our research project between TRTFN, SD87, and UBCO, to expand upon what we have learned about sense of belonging, the importance of Indigenous culture and language, and self-determination.

Final Reflections

To write the final conclusions to this narrative about our research project, *Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?* I asked myself, “What is important to remember about this research?” Years from now, when I reflect back upon my experiences with TRTFN and SD87, what will I recall? I predict that I will remember that the research was conducted in a way that honoured my partners and that I learned a great deal from the students, parents, teachers, and community members in Atlin.

I am pleased and proud of the way that our research followed a cyclical process for Indigenous knowledge production to incorporate Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, and methodologies to create new knowledge about education for Indigenous students. I am also very

satisfied that the Indigenist research paradigm for the project followed Indigenous principles of: community: relationships, respect, community, spirit, and renewal. I believe that our research presents a unique Métis methodology for conducting research, a methodology that honours Métis principles of partnership, appreciative inquiry, renewal, and relationships. Our research was conducted “in a good way” (Kovach 2009, 141; Lavallee 2009, 27; Restoule et al. 2010, 3) and “with a good heart” (Wilson 1995, 69).

Our research aimed to gather input from Indigenous peoples about the ways that opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language influence Indigenous students’ sense of belonging and achievement. I will always remember my conversations with students, parents, teachers, and community members. I will remember the teachers who spoke about the strong family connections among the students and community members and the feeling of being like family in Atlin School. I believe that working together to include more opportunities for Indigenous culture and language in schools will enhance the family feeling and relationships between student, parents, teachers, and community members. I will remember the parent who spoke about teaching Tlingit culture as form but not function, as only a pretty cup with meaningless content, if students do not learn the values and tenets of *Haa Kusteeyí* (Tlingit way of living). Most of all, I will not forget the words of the student who said that without Tlingit culture they would be “like a pen with no ink” (Student B). Her metaphor of an empty vessel described the essence of why opportunities to learn Indigenous culture and language must be included in schools. Without opportunities to learn about their culture, languages, heritages, and contributions of ancestors, Indigenous students will not feel complete. As one teacher and one parent said, Indigenous students must know where they came from to know where they are going.

Years from now, I hope that I will see changes in the education systems to enhance learning for all students in schools in our province. As some parents in our study stated, learning about Indigenous culture and language is important for all students. I hope that I will see a new space, perhaps a third space (Chilisa 2012, 25; English 2005, 85), where Indigenous and European worldviews merge to create a new climate in schools. Part of this new climate ought to include innovative ways to offer education programs that accommodate for the unique lifestyles in isolated communities.

For Indigenous peoples in Canada, the goals of education have not changed for many decades. In 1972, in the legendary policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations articulated goals for education to prepare Indigenous children for the future while retaining their Indigenous identity. Students, parents, grandparents, and community members in our study have articulated that these same goals persist. Members of Taku River Tlingit First Nation want an education system that retains Tlingit identity by teaching Tlingit culture and language while preparing students for the future. I believe that these goals for education for Indigenous students can be achieved, not only in Atlin, but also throughout Canada, by building upon current assets in each unique community through partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I hope that the narrative of our research, *Creating a Sense of Belonging for Indigenous Students in British Columbia?* will offer inspiration to others as they pursue the journey of enhancing education for all students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action

The subheadings for the three sub-appendices below are the same as headings for Calls to Action in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.

Appendix A.1: Education

(6) We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

(7) We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

(8) We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

(9) We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

(10) We call upon the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

(11) We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

(12) We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

Appendix A.2: Language and Culture

(13) We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.

(14) We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:

- i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
- ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
- iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal language revitalization and preservation.
- iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
- v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

(15) We call upon the federal government to appoint, in consultation with Aboriginal groups, an Aboriginal Languages Commissioner. The commissioner should help promote Aboriginal languages and report on the adequacy of federal funding of Aboriginal languages initiatives.

(16) We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.

(17) We call upon all levels of government to enable residential school Survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years for the name-change process and the revision of official identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports, driver's licenses, health cards, status cards, and social insurance numbers.

Appendix A.3: Education for Reconciliation

62) We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada mandatory educational requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to point-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63) We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal Education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of the residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64) We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.

65) We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

Appendix B: Goals from a Sampling of Ten Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements—Sampling of Goals, January 2015

School District Name (Number)	Academic	Belonging/ Self Respect/Pride in Heritage	Aboriginal traditions/ Culture/Language	Physical/Other Goal
Central Okanagan (23) 2014-2019	Achieve high academic standards from K-12.	Attain a sense of belonging, self-respect, & pride of heritage.	Actively participate in Aboriginal teachings, traditions, culture, and language.	Make healthy choices that will enhance their physical well-being.
Surrey (36) 2013-2018	3. Increase achievement for Aboriginal learners.	1. Increase positive identity and sense of belonging for all Aboriginal learners.	2. Increase knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and cultures for all learners.	
Delta (37) 2012-2017	Achieve academic success to the best of their ability.	Feel safe, respected, and included in the school setting.	Develop awareness of Aboriginal culture, feel pride in being Aboriginal and draw strength, guidance and support from the Aboriginal community.	Live a healthy lifestyle. Develop attributes that lead to independence, self-advocacy, and responsibility
New Westminster (40) 2012-2017	2. Improve performance in Grades 4-7 reading and writing.	1. Develop pride, confidence, and self-esteem through identification with their ancestry.		3. Support Aboriginal students in making smooth transitions as they enter school, move between schools, move from elem to middle to sec, move from Gr 10 to 11 and 11 to 12, and prepare to enter the workforce or post-sec.
Sea to Sky (48) 2014-2019	3. Enhance academic skills and achievement, for success in school, community, and life.	2. Enhance a sense of belonging, connectedness and responsibility in the learning environment and community.	1. Enhance understanding, respect, and engagement in Aboriginal language, culture and history.	4. Enhance awareness and use of healthy personal choices, and an active lifestyle to increase physical well-being.
Haida Gwaii (50) 2012-2017	2. Improve grade transition rates and school completion rates, with enhanced academic performance in key meaningful high school subjects (English, math,	1. That students develop a strong sense of belonging to their learning environment and community.		

	science, social studies).			
Nicola-Similkameen (58) 2012-2017	4. To improve the graduation/six year completion rate of Aboriginal students (Dogwood Certificate).	3. To improve Aboriginal students/parents feeling of self-worth and identity.	2. To increase the level of participation and knowledge of local Nlaka'pamux and Syilx culture and language among students.	1. To increase the level of health and wellness amongst Aboriginal students.
Greater Victoria (61) 2013-2018	Goal 4: (Salmon's gift) To increase success of all Aboriginal students.	Goal 1: (Bear's Gift) To provide a sense of place, caring, safety and belonging for Aboriginal students in the Greater Victoria School District.	Goal 3: (Raven's Gift) To continue raising awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions and culture for all staff and students in the Greater Victoria School District.	Goal 2: (Wolf's gift) To honour, nurture and support relationships between the Greater Victoria School District, Local First Nations, Aboriginal Nations, families and community.
Saanich (63) 2013-2018		Goal 2: Wsanec, other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students will strengthen their sense of identity and belonging within the school's learning community.	Goal 1: All students and staff will develop an increased knowledge of, and respect for, WSANEC, other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples histories, cultures and traditions.	Goal 3: Wsanec, other First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students will have successful transitions into school, throughout school, and into their world beyond graduation.
Gulf Islands (64) 2013-2018	3. (Learning) From the time Aboriginal learners enter a school community they will experience a culture that encompasses equality, awareness and engagement in learning, allowing for formative feedback, evidence of knowledge, and self-assessment.	1. (The Individual) Every learner will have the dignity of knowing who they are, the knowledge of where they are from, and the confidence to shape their future.		2. (Community) Every Aboriginal learner will have opportunities to connect with community members to enhance and extend the learning beyond the classroom.
Gold Trail (74) 2013-2018	The Academic Goal is to continue to improve the literacy, numeracy, and graduation rates of Indigenous students.	The Belonging Goal is to improve a sense of belonging for Indigenous students throughout the school environment.	The Cultural Goal is to continue to increase participation and success in Indigenous Language programs and cultural activities, and all students' awareness of Indigenous	The Healthy Living Goal is to encourage a healthy, active lifestyle based on Indigenous values.

Fraser Cascade (78) 2012-2017	2. Middle Years Learning – to retain students and build a foundation for success through graduation.	3. Ways of Knowing and Learning to improve Aboriginal students understanding of who they are and where they come from.	cultural and traditional knowledge.
North Okanagan Shuswap (83) 2012-2017		East—(Children) Resiliency: To create an environment that supports resiliency through a sense of belonging and health.	South—(Youth) Relevance: Increase understanding and awareness of Aboriginal history, culture and diversity for all students.
Vancouver Island North (85) 201-2017	2. All partners will work towards increasing the level of academic success for each Aboriginal student.	1. All Aboriginal students will experience a sense of belonging and respect through the recognition and honouring of their culture, history and values.	North— (Elders/Culture) Respect: Increase students' knowledge of local Secwepemc language, culture and history. 3. All students will experience Aboriginal content in all subject areas and at all grade levels.



Appendix C: Letters of Agreement, Recruitment, and Consent

Appendix C.1: Letter of Agreement for Research Partners

**Irving K. Barber School of
Arts and Sciences**
Okanagan Campus
Community, Culture and
Global Studies
Arts Building, 270 – 3333
University Way
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7
Phone 250 -807 -9337

LETTER OF AGREEMENT FOR RESEARCH PARTNERS
Provisional Document

Dear Members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation

I am writing to request your involvement as a research partner in a research project with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation in Atlin, B.C. The information about the project is as follows:

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Schreyer, Anthropology, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250-807-9314, email christine.schreyer@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators: Colleen Larson, PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250 260 0132, email clarson@shaw.ca. This research will be conducted as partial fulfillment of a PhD degree and will be published as a thesis (public document).

Sponsor: This research is supported by a grant from the Northern Scientific Training Program.

Research Description: The goals of this research are (1) to collaborate with community members as research partners and (2) to investigate the influence that language and cultural activities may have upon students' sense of belonging and achievement. The aim of the research is to assist school districts and their Aboriginal community partners to know more about ways to improve student achievement. In Phase I, Colleen Larson, co-investigator, will contact the education manager for Taku River Tlingit First Nation (TRTFN) to create a committee of research partners following protocols of the TRTFN. In phase II, information from teachers and Aboriginal students, parents/legal guardians, and community members will be collected through interviews and group discussions called focus group sessions. You are being invited to take part in this research project as a research partner because your ideas are important.

Project Procedures: The research will be conducted in two phases, which will involve visits (by me) to the Atlin School and community. Phase I, Establishing Partnerships, will begin at a mutually agreed upon time between February 1 and March 31, 2013 and continue until Phase II. Phase II: Data Collection and Analysis will begin with interviews and focus group sessions as early as April or May 2015. I will maintain contact with the school principal and research partners electronically throughout the data analysis to ensure that feedback and input from all partners is included throughout the research process. I hope to maintain relationships with the community research partners even after the research project is complete.

Activities for Phase I, Establishing Partnerships:

- I will meet with the principal of the school and the members of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation to establish a research partnership.
- The principal of Atlin School will be invited to act in a liaison role or to participate as a member of the research partnership.
- The research partners and I will meet (at two meetings on the agenda of the TRTFN Education Committee) and be in contact through email and phone conversations to discuss research processes, such as participant selection, interview questions, and timelines.
- I will participate in community activities to get to know members of the community and to any answer questions about the research project.

Activities for Phase II, the Data Collection and Analysis

- Teachers and Aboriginal students, parents, and will be invited to take part in interviews and all members of the community will be invited to participant in group discussions called focus group sessions.
- Informed consent will be obtained for participation and audio recording of all interviews and participation in focus group sessions.
- The research partners will provide feedback through email, phone conversations, and in one meeting on the agenda of the TRTFN Education Committee (no longer than one hour) about the interviews and focus group sessions before they are held (to address any issues that may have arisen since the first meeting in Phase 1).
- Interviews and focus group sessions will be conducted at school or in a place where participants feel comfortable (Interviews will take 1 to 1½ hours and focus groups will take up to 2 hours).
- The audio recordings from interviews will be transcribed into written format and reviewed to look for ways to support Aboriginal students' learning.
- The meeting notes from the focus group session will be reviewed to look for ways to support Aboriginal students' learning.
- Results of the reviews of interviews and focus group sessions will be shared with the research partners for feedback as they are created.
- The research partners and Colleen Larson will meet (no longer than two hours) to discuss the results of the research and ways to publish/share the results with others.

Potential Benefits and Risks: The comments from the interviews (with students, parents/guardians, and teachers) and focus group sessions (with students and community

members) will be studied to look for connections between language learning, cultural activities, sense of belonging, and student achievement. This information will be useful to plan learning opportunities for students in your community and perhaps in the province. The investigators do not believe that your role as a research partner will pose any risks to you. If feelings of emotions do arise as a result of participation as a research partner information regarding referral to counseling services will be made available.

Confidentiality and Storage of Information: A code will be assigned to all the interview audio recordings and transcripts to keep them confidential. The research partners from the Taku River Tlingit First Nation will have access to the information shared in interviews, but not the names of the people interviewed. All copies of the audio recordings, transcripts, and codes will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet. Digital copies will be password protected and stored in the Principal Investigator's computer. Published reports of the project will not identify interview participants by name.

Intended Use of the Research Materials: Colleen Larson, Graduate Student, will use the results of the research to write her PhD thesis and perhaps other academic publications. These publications could include anonymous quotes from the interviews. Teachers and community members might use the information from the research to plan future learning activities for students. Policy makers might use the information to create future curriculum.

Contact Information about the Project: If you have any questions about this research you may contact the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator at phone numbers or email addresses listed above. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research partner, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or at the UBC Okanagan Campus Research Services Office at 1-250-807-8832.

Sincerely
Colleen Larson, Graduate Student
UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, B.C.
250 260 0132 clarson@shaw.ca

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Consent: Please sign this document to indicate that you agree with the guidelines of the research partnership outlined above and with your participation as a research partner for this research project. Please return page 4 of this Letter of Agreement to the education manager for Taku River Tlingit First Nation. If concerns or changes arise in the future, please contact my academic advisor, Dr. Christine Schreyer, or myself so that we may make changes to procedures to ensure ethical research procedures are adhered to at all times and that our research partnership remains intact.

Name of Research Partner: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Alternate phone (cell phone or workplace): _____

Research Partner's signature: _____

I would like to be identified by name in any research related publications and/or presentations.

Research Partner's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher (signature): _____



Appendix C.2: Letter of Recruitment for Research Participants

**Irving K. Barber School of
Arts and Sciences**
Okanagan Campus
Community, Culture and
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Arts Building, 270 – 3333
University Way
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7
Phone 250 -807 -9337

LETTER OF RECRUITMENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Provisional Document

Dear Teachers, Parents/Legal Guardians and Community Members

This letter is an invitation for you to give your ideas for a research project, which plans to look at ways to support achievement for Aboriginal students. The information about the project is as follows:

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Schreyer, Anthropology, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250-807-9314, email christine.schreyer@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators: Colleen Larson, PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250 260 0132, email clarson@shaw.ca. This research will be conducted as partial fulfillment of a PhD degree and will be published as a thesis (public document).

Sponsor: This research is supported by a grant from the Northern Scientific Training Program.

Research Description: The goals of this research are (1) to collaborate with community members as research partners and (2) to investigate the influence that language and cultural activities may have upon students' sense of belonging and achievement. The aim of the research is to assist school districts and their Aboriginal community partners to know more about ways to improve student achievement. In Phase I, Colleen Larson, co-investigator, will contact the education manager for Taku River Tlingit First Nation (TRTFN) to create a committee of research partners following protocols of the TRTFN. In phase II, information from teachers and Aboriginal students, parents/legal guardians, and community members will be collected through interviews and group discussions called focus group sessions. You are being invited to take part in this research project as a participant because your ideas are important.

Project Procedures: In Phase I research partners and the co-investigator will meet to make final decisions about what questions to ask participants in Phase II as well as how, where, when, and who to ask. In Phase II, the project procedures include interviews (with students, parents/guardians, and teachers) and group discussions called focus group sessions (with students and community members). Parents/legal guardians who are interested in participating in this research are invited to sign and return page 4 of this letter of recruitment. Participants for focus group sessions will receive notification of the sessions after the research partners have met to determine a time and place. All members of the community may participate in the focus group sessions.

If you agree to participate in an interview, Colleen Larson, Graduate Student, will ask you for permission to interview you and/or your child. She will also ask your child to sign a Letter of Assent indicating that s/he does wish to participate in the project, since participation for students is voluntary. Colleen will ask you and your child for permission to audio record the interviews. Each interview will take 1 to 1½ hours and will be held at the school or in a place where you feel comfortable. Interview participants will be asked questions about student activities at school, in particular, activities that students enjoy. They will also be asked about the Aboriginal language and cultural activities that children experience in school as part of their opportunities for learning. The interviews will be transcribed into written format and reviewed to look for ways to support Aboriginal students' learning.

If you and/or your child wish to participate in a focus group session, Colleen Larson, Graduate Student, will ask you to sign a permission form prior to the focus group sessions for students and community members.

Information about ways to support student learning from the interviews and the focus group sessions will be shared with the research partners. The research partners will help to decide how to share the results with others who wish to support success for Aboriginal students.

Potential Benefits and Risks: The comments from the interviews with teachers, parents/legal guardians, students, and community members will be studied to look for connections between language learning, cultural activities, sense of belonging, and student achievement. This information will be useful to educators and policy makers to plan for learning opportunities for students in your community and perhaps in the province. The investigators do not believe that the interview process will pose any risks to you or the children who participate. If feelings of emotions do arise as a result of the interview process, information regarding referral to counseling services will be made available.

Confidentiality and Storage of Information: A code will be assigned to all the interview audio recordings and transcripts to keep them confidential. The research partners from the Taku River Tlingit First Nation will have access to the information shared in interviews, but not the names of the people interviewed. All copies of the audio recordings, transcripts, and codes will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet. Digital copies will be password protected and stored in the Principal Investigator's computer. Published reports of the project will not identify interview participants by name.

Confidentiality in a group is limited. As a participant in the focus group sessions, participants will be asked to respect the privacy of others and to keep the identity of the other participants private from people not involved with the focus group. As well, participants will be asked not to discuss the specific points made by other participants outside of the group. Notes

from the focus group session will be written up and stored in the Principal Investigator's computer. The notes and the published reports of the project will not identify participants of the focus group sessions by name. The research partners from the Taku River Tlingit First Nation will have access to the information from the focus group sessions.

Intended Use of the Research Materials: Colleen Larson, Graduate Student, will use the results of the research to write her PhD thesis and perhaps other academic publications. These publications could include anonymous quotes from the interviews. Teachers and community members might use the information from the research to plan future learning activities for students. Policy makers might use the information to create future curriculum.

Contact Information about the Project: If you have any questions about this research you may contact the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator at phone numbers or email addresses listed above. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or at the UBC Okanagan Campus Research Services Office at 1-250-807-8832.

Sincerely

Colleen Larson, Graduate Student
Community, Culture, and Global Studies
UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, B.C.
250 260 0132 clarson@shaw.ca

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Consent: Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time without consequence. Your signature below indicates that you consent to be contacted about your participation in the project.

Name of Student: _____

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Alternate phone (cell phone or workplace): _____

Email address: _____

I am interested in participating in an interview for the project, Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia.

Parent/Legal Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____

I am interested in participating in a focus group session for the project, Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia.

Parent/Legal Guardian's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____



Appendix C.3: Letter of Consent for Parent/Guardian and Student Interviews

**Irving K. Barber School of
Arts and Sciences**
Okanagan Campus
Community, Culture and
Global Studies
Arts Building, 270 – 3333
University Way
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7
Phone 250 -807 -9337

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN AND STUDENT INTERVIEWS
Provisional Document

Dear Parents/Legal Guardians

This letter asks for consent for you and/or your child to participate in interviews for a research project, which plans to look at ways to support achievement for Aboriginal students. The information about the project is as follows:

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Principal Investigator: Dr. Christine Schreyer, Anthropology, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250-807-9314, email christine.schreyer@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators: Colleen Larson, PhD Student, Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies, UBC Okanagan, telephone 250 260 0132, email clarson@shaw.ca. This research will be conducted as partial fulfillment of a PhD degree and will be published as a thesis (public document).

Sponsor: This research is supported by a grant from the Northern Scientific Training Program.

Research Description: The goals of this research are (1) to collaborate with community members as research partners and (2) to investigate the influence that language and cultural activities may have upon students' sense of belonging and achievement. The aim of the research is to assist school districts and their Aboriginal community partners to know more about ways to improve student achievement. In Phase I, Colleen Larson, co-investigator, will contact Linda McGill, Manager, Social and Health Programs, Taku River Tlingit First Nation (TRTFN) to create a committee of research partners following protocols of the TRTFN. In phase II, information from teachers and Aboriginal students, parents/legal guardians, and community members will be collected through interviews and group discussions called focus group sessions. You are being invited to take part in this research project as a participant because your ideas are important.

Study Procedures: In Phase I research partners and the co-investigator will meet to make final decisions about what questions to ask participants in Phase II as well as how, where, when, and who to ask. In Phase II, the study procedures include interviews (with students, parents/guardians, and teachers) and group discussions called focus group sessions (with students and community members). Parents/legal guardians who wish to participate in interviews must sign and return the letter of recruitment. Participants for interviews will be chosen by randomly selecting from the returned letters of recruitment until the names of three Aboriginal students have been drawn for each class and there is a balance of male and female students. Parent participants will be the parents/ guardians of the selected students.

If you agree to participate in interviews for this project, please sign the consent form on page 4 of this letter and return it to the school. Your child will be asked to sign a Letter of Assent indicating that s/he does wish to participate in the study, since participation is voluntary. You and your child must also give or not give permission to audio record the interviews. Each interview will take 1 to 1½ hours and will be held at the school or in a place where you feel comfortable. Interview participants will be asked questions about student activities at school, in particular, activities that students enjoy. They will also be asked about the Aboriginal language and cultural activities that children experience in school as part of their opportunities for learning. The interviews will be transcribed into written format and reviewed to look for ways to support Aboriginal students' learning.

Information about ways to support student learning from the interviews and the focus group sessions will be shared with the research partners. The research partners will help to decide how to share the results with others who wish to support success for Aboriginal students.

Potential Benefits and Risks: The comments from the interviews with teachers, parents/legal guardians, students, and community members will be studied to look for connections between language learning, cultural activities, sense of belonging, and student achievement. This information will be useful to educators and policy makers to plan for learning opportunities for students in your community and perhaps in the province. The investigators believe that the interview process will not pose any risks to you or the children who participate. If feelings of emotions do arise as a result of the interview process, information regarding referral to counseling services will be made available.

Confidentiality and Storage of Information: A code will be assigned to all the interview audio recordings and transcripts to keep them confidential. The research partners from the Taku River Tlingit First Nation will have access to the information shared in interviews, but not the names of the people interviewed. All copies of the audio recordings, transcripts, and codes will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet. Digital copies will be password protected and stored in the Principal Investigator's computer. Published reports of the study will not identify interview participants by name.

Intended Use of the Research Materials: Colleen Larson, Graduate Student, will use the results of the research to write her PhD thesis and perhaps other academic publications. These publications could include anonymous quotes from the interviews. Teachers and community members might use the information from the research to plan future learning activities for students. Policy makers might use the information to create future curriculum.

Contact Information about the Study: If you have any questions about this research you may contact the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator at phone numbers or email addresses listed above. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-877-822-8598 (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or at the UBC Okanagan Campus Research Services Office at 1-250-807-8832.

Sincerely

Colleen Larson, Graduate Student
Community, Culture, and Global Studies
UBC Okanagan, Kelowna, B.C.
250 260 0132, clarson@shaw.ca

Project Name: Creating a Sense of Belonging for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you or your child may refuse to participate in this study at any time without consequences. Your signature on this form indicates that you understand the information provided including all procedures, personal risks and use of the information. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participation in the study and in the interview for yourself and/or your child and/or to the recording of the interview. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Student: _____

I give my consent for my child to be interviewed for this research project.

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature: _____

I give my consent for the interview with my child to be audio recorded.

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature: _____

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian _____

I give my consent to be interviewed for this research project.

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature: _____

I give my consent for my interview to be audio recorded.

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature: _____

I would like to be identified by name in any research related publications and/or presentations.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Appendix D: Interview Schedules

Appendix D.1 Interview Schedule—Students

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE—STUDENTS

This schedule has been developed as a guide for semi-structured interviews with students whose parents have given consent for the interview. Interviews will require one session for one to one and a half hours in length and will be conducted at the school or if the parents prefer, at a comfortable place for the student. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Parents will be given copies of the transcripts upon request. Parents may request that editions and deletions be made to the transcripts. All requests for editions and deletions will be honored.

Personal Background:

1. What grade are you in?
2. Do you have any brothers and sisters in the school? Not at the school? Other family members?

School:

1. Do you like coming to school each day?
2. What is the best part of the school day?
3. What were the best things about school yesterday? Last week? Last month? Last year?
Why?
4. What are your favourite activities at school? (Prompt: Sports? Subjects?)
5. What is your favourite academic subject at school? Do you know why it's your favourite?
6. Is there anybody outside of school who helps you with schoolwork? How do they help?
7. What do your teacher(s) do to make learning easy?
8. What do or could your teacher(s) do to make school fun? (Prompt: What else could your teachers do to make school more fun?)
9. Do you get a chance to make suggestions about things you would like to learn about in school? (Prompt: Who decides what you are going to learn about, only the teacher, or the teacher and the kids?)
10. Do you know what you plan to do when you grow up? What will you do when you get out of school?
11. Where do you think you will get your grade 10, 11, and 12?

12. Have you considered staying in Atlin to get your Grade 12? Why or Why not?

Aboriginal Language and Cultural Opportunities:

1. Do you do any activities at school that are about Aboriginal ways of doing things?
2. Do you learn about Aboriginal ways of doing things outside of school? (Prompt: In the community? With your family?)
3. Do you learn Aboriginal words at school? (Prompt: When?)
4. Do you get a chance to learn and speak Aboriginal words outside of school? (Prompt: In the community? With family?)
5. Do you think it is important to learn about Aboriginal culture? Why or why not?
6. Do you think it is important to learn Aboriginal language? Why or why not?
7. Could your teacher(s) give you more chances to learn about Aboriginal language and culture in school? In what ways?
8. Who in the community could help with this? (Prompt: Could your family help?)

Relationships:

1. Do you have friends at school? Outside of school?
2. Do you have a best friend? Why do you think that you and he or she became best friends?
3. What kinds of activities do you and your friends like to do at school?
4. Do you see your friends outside of school?
5. What kinds of activities do you and your friends like to do outside of school?
6. Do you like your teacher? Why or why not?
7. Is it easy to talk to your teacher? Why or why not?
8. How does your teacher let you know that you have done a good job?
9. Do you talk to your mom or dad (or guardian) about school? Why or why not?
10. Do you get a chance to talk to elders in your community? Prompts: (What do you talk about with elders? When and where?)

Is there anything that I have not asked you about school and the people you know that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview and in this research study.

Appendix D.2 Interview Schedule—Parents

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE—PARENTS

This schedule has been developed as a guide for semi-structured interviews with parents have given consent for the interview. Interviews will require one session for one to one and a half hours in length and will be conducted at the school or if the parents prefer, at a more comfortable place for them. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Parents will be given copies of the transcripts upon request. Parents may request that editions and deletions be made to the transcripts. All requests for editions and deletions will be honored.

Personal Background:

1. What is your child's age? Grade?
2. What is your relationship to your child? (Prompt: Mother, father, auntie, uncle, grandparent, guardian, legal guardian?)
3. Do you other children who attend the school? Other family members? (Prompt: Who makes up your immediate family?)

School:

1. Does your child like coming to school each day?
2. What is the best part of his or her school day?
3. What would he or she say were the best things about school yesterday? Last week? Last month? Last year? Why?
4. What are your child's favourite activities at school? (Prompt: Sports? Subjects?)
5. Does your child have a favourite academic subject at school? What is it? Do you know why it's his or her favourite?
6. Is there anybody outside of school who helps your child with schoolwork? How do they help?
7. What do or could your child's teacher(s) do to make learning easy?
8. What do or could your child's teacher(s) do to make school fun for your child?
9. Do you or your child get a chance to make suggestions about things you would like your child to learn in school? (Prompt: Who decides what your child is going to learn in school, only the teacher, the teacher and the kids, or the teacher and the parents?)
10. Do you know what your child plans to do when he or she grows up? What will you do when you get out of school?

11. Where do you think your child will take grade 10, 11, and 12?
12. Has your child considered staying in Atlin to get Grade 12? Why or Why not?

Aboriginal Language and Cultural Opportunities:

1. Does your child do any activities at school that are about Aboriginal ways of doing things?
2. Does your child learn about Aboriginal ways of doing things outside of school? (Prompt: In the community? With family?)
3. Does your child learn Aboriginal words at school? (Prompt: When?)
4. Does your child get opportunities to learn and speak Aboriginal language(s) outside of school? (Prompt: In the community? With family?)
5. Do you think it is important for your child to learn about Aboriginal culture? Why or why not?
6. Do you think it is important for your child to learn Aboriginal language(s)? Why or why not?
7. Could your child's teacher(s) offer more opportunities to learn about Aboriginal language and culture in school? In what ways?
8. Who in the community could help with this? (Prompt: Could you or your family help?)

Relationships:

1. Does your child have friends at school? Outside of school?
2. Does your child have a best friend? Why do you think that he or she and your child have become best friends?
3. What activities do your child and his or her friends like to do at school?
4. Does your child see his or her friends outside of school?
5. What activities do your child and his or her friends like to do outside of school?
6. Does your child like his or her teacher? Why or why not?
7. Is it easy for your child to talk to his or her teacher? Why or why not?
8. How does your child's teacher let him or her know that he/she has done a good job on a task?
9. Is it easy for you to talk to your child's teacher about his/her learning? Why or why not?
10. Does your child get a chance to talk to elders in your community? (Prompts: What does he or she learn or talk about with elders? When and where?)

Is there anything that I have not asked you about your child's learning or relationships that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview and in this research study.

Appendix D.3 Interview Schedule—Teachers

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE—TEACHERS

Personal Background:

1. What is your teaching position at the school? (Prompt: Grades?)
2. How long have you been teaching? At this school?
3. What is your training and experience in teaching?
4. What training and experience do you have prepare you for teaching children with Aboriginal ancestry?

School:

1. What excites you about your current teaching position? (Prompt: Do like coming to school each day?)
2. What would your students say is the best part of the school day?
3. What would your students say were the best things about school yesterday? Last week? Last month? Last year? Why?
4. What are your students' favourite activities at school? (Prompt: Sports? Subjects?)
5. What are your students' favourite academic subjects at school? Do you know why this is? (Prompt: What lessons do your students' excel at?)
6. Do your students have someone who can help them with their homework? How does this person help?
7. How do you accommodate for the variety of needs of the students in your classroom?
8. What do or could you do to make school fun for your students? (Prompt: What else could you do to make school even more fun?)
9. Who determines what your students learn in school? (Prompts: Is there time in the curriculum to include teachable moments generated by the students? Do the students have opportunities to choose topics?)
10. Are you aware of your students' plans for after they leave Atlin School? Do you know their plans for after they leave school?
11. How do your students complete grade 10, 11, and 12?
12. Do your students plan to stay in Atlin or leave the community to complete Grade 12? Do you know their reasons for this decision?

Aboriginal Language and Cultural Opportunities:

1. Do the students in your classroom participate in activities that are about Aboriginal ways of doing things?
2. Do your students learn about Aboriginal ways of doing things outside of school?
(Prompt: In the community? With family?)
3. Do your students learn Aboriginal languages at school? (Prompt: When?)
4. Do your students have opportunities to learn and speak Aboriginal language(s) outside of school? When and where?
5. Do you think that it is important for your students to learn about Aboriginal culture?
How does this help them? Or, not help them?
6. Do you think that it is important for your students to learn Aboriginal language(s)? How does this help them? Or, not help them?
7. In what ways could the school create more opportunities for your students to learn about Aboriginal language and culture?
8. Who in the community could help with this? (Prompt: Could family or community members help?)

Relationships:

1. In what ways do you promote social skills in your classroom and in the school?
2. What do your students and their peers like to do for non-curricular activities?
3. Do your students see one another outside of school?
4. What kinds of activities do your students and their friends like to do outside of school?
5. What would your students say that they like about you as their teacher?
6. What would your students say are the things that you do as a teacher that help them to learn?
7. Is it easy for your students to talk to you about things that are important to them? Why or why not?
8. How do you let your students know that they have done a good job on a task?
9. Do you find it easy to communicate with the parents of your students about their child's learning? Why or why not?
10. Do your students have opportunities to interact with elders in the community? (Prompts: What do they talk about or learn from elders? When and where?)

Is there anything that I have not asked you about your students' learning and relationships with others that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview and in this research study.

Appendix E: List of Codes

Aboriginal Culture	Homework
Aboriginal Culture in school	Importance of Culture
Aboriginal Culture outside of school	Importance/Culture
Aboriginal Culture Teachers	Importance/Language
Aboriginal Language	Independence
Aboriginal Language in school	Learning styles
Aboriginal Language outside school	Lunch room for older kids
Activities at school	Making learning easier
Activities outside of school	Making learning fun
Activities with friends at school	Meeting students' needs
Activity on the field or in the gym	Need to explore the world
After high school	Next year
Atlin for high school	Partnership
Attitude towards school	Picking berries
Best things about school	Pitch
Blankets	Praise from parents
Breakfast Club	Praise from teachers
Career choices	Recognition
Carving	Relationships between teachers
Carving	Relationships with Elders
Choices	Relationships with parents
Choices about learning	Relationships with peers
Collaboration between teachers	Relationships with teachers
Communication between teachers	School improvement
Communication with elders	Spirit Week
Communication with parents	Student support—homework
Communication with peers	Success assemblies
Communication with teachers	Support from parents
Community building	Support from peers
Community involvement	Support from teachers
Class Description	Teacher—excitement
Culture and Family	Teacher—experience
Curriculum	Teaching independence
Dance	Tlingit Celebration
Decision making	Training for SD Teachers
Favourite subjects	Training for Language Teachers
Friendships	Transition
Friendships—Best Friends	Transition
Good stuff	TRT not PAC
Grade 10	Walking in two worlds