

**NATIVE STUDENT TRADITIONAL TRIBAL VALUES  
AND SECONDARY SCHOOL RETENTION**

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the relationship between Native student traditional tribal values and beliefs and the secondary school retention of seven Amerindian secondary school graduates. It is a departure from previous studies on retention in that it has taken a positive rather than a deficit or cultural discontinuity perspective to the problem. Several key constructs emerged as essential to understanding the successful retention of these Amerindian secondary school students: family life, strategies for coping, life experiences, academic experiences, relevancy in programming, traditional tribal values and beliefs, and Aboriginal epistemology. Respondents' previous family and life experiences contributed to the development of strong positive identities which empowered them to harmonize and balance two cultures. Respondents had developed positive relations with at least one teacher. These positive relations compensated for other experiences where content was emphasized. A positive rapport between teacher and student and holistic or learner-centred teaching methods appear to have contributed to the success of some of these Amerindian students. Epistemology was an intricate part of the fabric of the Native learning experience for three of the respondents (ie, dreams, lifepath, nature). The findings suggest that key stakeholders such as the family, Native agencies and organizations, the community, and educational systems have responsibilities in promoting the successful retention of Amerindian secondary school students. Further ethnographic and phenomenological studies are recommended to explore and describe those factors and processes which contribute to the successful retention of the Amerindian student.

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## **DEDICATION**

**This thesis is dedicated to the honour of my father and his father and all the mothers and fathers of the land whose children we are given the educational responsibility and privilege to *serve*.**

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

The study describes the perceptions of academically successful Amerindian secondary school graduates on the relation between traditional tribal values and secondary school retention. The study was qualitative and the primary method of data collection was the interview. The sample was a theoretical sample (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Patton, 1990). The seven respondents were identified through the snowball technique (Li, 1981). They included seven Amerindian secondary school graduates who had successfully completed grade twelve and/or Ontario Academic Competency (O.A.C.) programming and were enrolled in postsecondary institutions at the time of the study. Chapter one presents the overview for the study: rationale, personal ground, research questions, design, definition of terms, limitations, and significance.

#### Rationale

Despite recent signs of improvement in the success of Native children within the educational systems (Kirkness, 1992, Deyhle and Swisher, 1997), Native students continue to exhibit poor attendance and attrition rates from secondary school (Leary & Stiegelbauer, 1985; Deyhle, 1989). One of the problems with understanding the current Native drop-out situation is the absence of viable data on Native student retention (Mackay & Myles, 1995; Eberhard, 1989). Research studies have examined the problem of low retention rate from perspectives such as cultural discontinuity (Reyhner, 1992; Wilson, 1992; Ledlow, 1992) or social economic status (Hull, 1990). As well, the research methods used to collect data have been problematic. Several researchers have found that the presence of traditional tribal values in the home has a significant impact on Native student success in school (Rindone, 1988; Katt, 1995; Deyhle, 1989). The purpose of this study, then, was to describe the relationship between traditional tribal values and secondary school retention from the perspective of recent Aboriginal secondary school graduates. The questions guiding the research are described below.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the perceptions of academically successful secondary/post secondary Amerindian students of the relationship between traditional tribal values and their success and retention?
- 2.1) What traditional tribal values are held by these Amerindian students?
- 2.2) How do these values directly relate to education?
- 3) What is the nature of the curricula and instruction in which the Native students were most successful?

## **A Personal Ground**

I am a graduate student in the Masters of Education program at Lakehead University. I am an Ojibway-Cree Native who has experienced the educational system through a provincial integrated (Catholic) school and various public school settings. I am a teacher who has had three years of experience in Native retention classroom settings. I have, within the last 10 years or so, become increasingly interested in the cultural values and traditions of my ancestors and have been striving to develop a closer relationship with these values.

I have also witnessed some disturbing events and issues related to the education of Amerindians. I have remained focussed primarily on the actual needs of Native children. I want to contribute to solving the dilemma of poor retention of Native students, cultural discontinuity in educational programming, and other pertinent issues relevant to the education of Amerindians because I firmly believe that children's well being must come first in their communities, at home, and in school.

I am a supporter of traditional tribal values but do not see them as the only means of Native educational success. Rather, I view these values and the possible conflict arising from cultural discontinuity in the educational context as one component of a complex problem.

I do not believe that Native students are generally well served in the system based upon my own experiences as a teacher. This perception is consistent with some of the current research on the problem (Kirkness, 1992; MacKay & Myles, 1989, 1995; Burns, 1996). I believe in Native

education "Sui Generis"; yet I also believe that teacher development and strong family participation and values, tribal or otherwise, are essential to success.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

One of the assumptions underlying this study was that all Native persons who identify themselves with a particular Amerindian group, including those who have learned to speak their Native ancestral language, possess tribal values inherent to that particular culture. A second assumption was that there is a relationship between traditional tribal values and the success and retention of Native students.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to describe recent Amerindian high school graduates' perceptions of the relationship between traditional tribal values and their success and retention in school. The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Patton, 1990). Respondents were identified through the snowball technique (Li, 1981). Seven participants were interviewed using an interview guide technique (Patton, 1990). The individual interviews ranged from one and one half to three hours. Much of the data analysis occurred after the interviews were completed. A process journal and research memos for reflective as well as analytical purposes were also kept throughout the study. This enabled the researcher to incorporate initial findings into later interviews and triangulate data across the sample.

This research was conducted subject to the rules, guidelines and procedures of ethical conduct in research on human subjects articulated in the handbook of *Ethics, Procedures and Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects* and Lakehead University's *Research Integrity Policy* (1995). Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, risks and benefits and storage of data are described below.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Value.** According to Parsons (1951) "value" can be defined as "an element of a shared symbolic system which serves as a criterion or standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open in a situation" ( p. 12).

**Tribal values.** Tribal values are defined as those values which are spiritually and ecologically based in association with a communal relationship and a world view that is of a natural and holistic orientation (Cajete, 1994). These values may vary somewhat from group to group because each group is different (Little Soldier, 1992; Cajete, 1994; MacKay and Myles, 1995) but all hold universal commonalities (Brant, 1990; Cajete, 1994). In this study, the meanings of tribal values held by the respondents emerged during the interviews.

**Traditional.** The term "traditional" refers to historically and culturally established "standards and arrangements of convention" associated with a particular group (Parsons, 1951, p. 199). In this study, the researcher was alert to the respondent's meaning of tradition as an expression of the conventions or standards of behaviour within their particular tribal group.

**Amerindian.** "Amerindian" refers to any persons who identify themselves as either American or Canadian Indian. George Sioui (1992) is acknowledged by this author for bringing the use of the term 'Amerindian' into focus in his publication titled 'Pour une autohistoire amerindienne'.

**Native.** "Native" is used to describe any persons who identified themselves as having an Amerindian lineage or considered themselves Indian as defined by the Indian Act, R.S.,c.1-6,(1985) and its subsequent amendments or Addendum's and Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution (1982).

**Retention.** "Retention" is used in this study to refer to the successful completion of secondary school education at the grade 12 or O.A.C. level of accreditation (See Leary & Stiegelbauer, 1985). It is noteworthy that the term "retention" sometimes has a different connotation, not to be confused with the thesis usage: that of a student repeating a particular grade because she/he has not attained a required academic standard for advancement.

**Academic success.** The term "academic success" describes students who have met the academic requirements for advancement. In this study, one criterion for selection of the theoretical sample was regular admission to a post-secondary institution. The researcher was also sensitive to personal meanings of the term "success" as articulated by the individual participants.

**Beliefs.** The words "belief" and "teaching" have been used synonymously to indicate value-based lessons about life as often expressed by Native elders to explain life meaning.

### **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, the population **sample** is small in that this research involved seven (7) participants. Second, the findings are not **generalizable** although the findings may be transferable (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). A third limitation is that the **emergent design** of this research limits its scope and may have resulted in the omission of important or salient topics (Patton, 1990, p.196). A fourth limitation was **language barrier** in that there are differences in meanings associated to words in the Indian language and the translation of those words and their intended meanings into the English language. However, in this study the participants were asked to translate any information they conveyed in their Native language. Lastly, the decision to **focus on factors contributing to the successful retention of Amerindian students** while overlooking those factors which have been known to influence Native drop-outs or attrition as a whole could be viewed as a limitation of this study as well.

### **Significance**

This study provided insights into the perceptions of academically successful Amerindians of the relationship between traditional tribal values and secondary school retention. Thus, the study illuminated the influence of a unique paradigm of traditional tribal values on Native student retention. This research also contributes to the embryonic literature relevant to Native student success in education. It also contributes knowledge and information which will inform the development of culturally relevant curriculum, materials, and programming.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The review of the literature is organized into three sections. The first section discusses the problem of retention of aboriginal students in secondary school, the conceptual and methodological limitations of existing studies of retention, and factors which influence Native student attrition. The second section describes the role of values in retention. The final section discusses epistemology and values including the significance of language, aboriginal epistemology, Native values and ethics, and a spiritual/ecological basis for education. Each section is explained below.

#### **Retention of Aboriginal Students**

Leary and Stiegelbauer (1985) studied the education of Cree Indian students in Manitoba to describe the minority experience within a majority culture. They found that "student assessment, retention, and graduation data indicate[d] change in Native student movement or success in the system to be markedly below the success and movement rates of the general population as a whole" (p.13). They concluded that problems experienced by minority students could be attributed to discontinuities: "discontinuities may exist in language use, in structuring time, in values, in the meaning of traditions, in the lifestyle of the home versus that of the school, in social interaction and communication style" (p.3). Cultural discontinuity is discussed below in the section on factors affecting aboriginal student retention.

Leary and Stiegelbauer (1985) suggested that most research into minority school failure was based on one of two perspectives: the deficit syndrome and the discontinuity/mismatch explanation. They explain "Deficit Syndrome" as a theory that assumes students are backward or inferior in development. "Discontinuity/Mismatch" was described by them as the theory which recognizes that different experiences of the minority conflict with those of the majority in the school experience. Leary and Stiegelbauer also proposed that a cultural diversity paradigm would facilitate "instructional alternatives at the school, classroom, and personal levels" (p. 18).

"Cultural diversity paradigm" is described by Leary and Stiegelbauer as the recognition and incorporation of cultural experience brought to the learning place and includes the assumption that cognitive styles, learning and teaching styles may vary for each particular student or cultural group. This view of education, then, incorporates programming which recognizes and accounts for variations in group diversity. However, their study illuminates the need for a more positive conception of the term 'retention' which is the case of the use of this term in this study.

### **Difficulties of Research**

There have been conceptual and methodological problems in conducting research into the successful retention of Native students (MacKay and Myles, 1995; Eberhard, 1989). MacKay and Myles (1995) conducted a survey of 310 informants, parents, teachers, and students, to determine how much schools contribute to the Native student dropout problem (p. 161). They found that:

in Native student dropouts, the salient factors were almost invariably intertwined with other factors. It was therefore impossible to identify a particular factor or cluster of factors and recommend appropriate remedial steps in the school, home, or community that might directly increase Native student retention (p. 163).

MacKay and Myles also examined other relevant literature on retention. They found that, "based on nominal roll statistics, Northern Aboriginal students are generally at greater risk of dropping out than their Southern counterparts" (p.169). These researchers proposed that "our study of factors contributing to Native student success in Ontario secondary schools indicates that establishing and maintaining effective structures and mechanisms for community school communication are superordinate" (p. 172).

Mackay and Myles (1995) suggest that there is an absence of viable data on retention: "there are no provincial or federal databases specifically designed to provide information of this type for the purposes of monitoring student progress, evaluating aboriginal student support programs, or undertaking empirical research" (p.158). They proposed that current available statistics

disguise the very significant variations in school retention and graduation rates between Native communities and within the contexts in which they receive their



education across the province. They also tend to obscure the fact that appropriate solutions to dropping out must be sensitive to particular contexts. Successful intervention for the students of one First Nation may be very distinct from successful intervention for the students of another First Nation. (p. 161)

Eberhard (1989) conducted a study of four graduating classes of aboriginal students to determine the relations among the variables of academic achievement, family constellation, gender, family mobility, school attended, and tribal affiliation. Data were collected from both parent and student groups. Eberhard calls for an accurate mechanism to record Amerindian rates of attrition: "there needs to be accurate reporting of dropout data so that problems can be correctly identified and solved" (p. 36). Both Mackay and Myles (1995), as well as Eberhard, point to the need for a quantitative data base. Qualitative research is also needed because this methodology enables researchers to describe the meanings and lived experiences of individuals in greater depth. Patton (1990) states that "qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry"(p.13). Thus this study was conceptualized as a qualitative study to allow participants to articulate their meanings.

The literature points to a number of key factors which contribute to the retention or attrition of aboriginal students in secondary schools. These include: socioeconomic status (Hull, 1990), cultural discontinuity (Okakok, 1989; Wilson, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Reyhner, 1992; Sprinthall, Sprinthall, and Oja, 1994), the use of add-on curriculum (Reyhner, 1992), and language barrier (Cajete, 1988).

Hull (1990) investigated the link between the socioeconomic status of Canadian Indian families and the educational attainment of their children. His work was based upon a meta-analysis of data collected by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) from 1983 through 1988. According to Hull, INAC has catalogued or collected a considerable amount of data which is available to researchers but is to date a largely untapped resource. He found that "registered Indians are two or three times more likely to drop out of school early than are other Canadians,

even when socio-economic status is taken into account" (p.3); reserve students tend to stay in school longer (p.10); and that "...among the on-reserve schools, band operated schools have better retention and graduation rates than federal and provincial schools" (p.11). He concluded that "more efforts are required of the schools in attempting to implement programs to overcome the problems created by poverty and cultural and geographic isolation" (p.13). Although poverty and geographic isolation have been noted as likely contributing to the early departure of Amerindians from school, this study focused upon the cultural component with an emphasis on exploring the relationship between Amerindian traditional tribal values and successful secondary school retention.

A number of studies have examined the high dropout rate of American Indian high school students. Ledlow (1992) reviewed the literature on Amerindian drop-outs and found that cultural discontinuity theory is too often relied upon as a means of explaining the high rate of attrition. According to Ledlow "the cultural discontinuity hypothesis assumes that culturally based differences in the communication styles of the minority students' home and the Anglo culture of the school lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and, ultimately, failure for those students" (p.23). She concluded that there is a need for macrostructural inquiry into minority school failure: "Further research into the problem of American Indian dropouts must test implicit notions about the importance of culture and devote equal attention to variables outside the boundaries of the school itself"(p.34). Her work lends support to the notion that an understanding of culture is critical in the process of understanding the high rate of attrition for Native students.

Wilson (1990) conducted an ethnographic study of 23 Canadian Sioux Indian students to explore the macrostructural factors which influence the academic performance of indigenous students. She noted that "although educational anthropologists have confirmed many findings of cultural conflict in the school setting, they have not often gone beyond a description of the conflict to articulate the effects of the conflict" (p.47). She reported the following:

- 1) Students' limitations in academic performance are consequences of macrostructural factors, rather than observed characteristics of individuals or characteristics common to the group of students.
- 2) The overwhelming frustration and isolation of students affects their academic performance.
- 3) The lack of understanding of cultural conflict on the part of school personnel contributes to student failure.
- 4) The school personnel's preconceived idea that the situation is hopeless is played out. Low expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy. (p.53)

Reyhner (1992) investigated the problem of cultural discontinuity in a meta-analysis of several sources: (1) testimony from the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force hearings; (2) research on Native and non-Native dropouts; and (3) theoretical frameworks which articulate and explain cultural discontinuity. She found that "supplemental, add-on-programs...have had limited success in improving the education of Indian children" (p.10). She concluded that there is a need to view curriculum as well as dropout prevention holistically. She contends that conflicting cultural messages between the culture and home leave Native students confused and resistant:

Positive identity formation, as the psychiatrist Erik Erikson (1963) pointed out, is an ongoing, cumulative process that starts in the home with a trusting relationship established between mother and child and develops through the child's interaction with other children and adults. To build a strong positive identity, educators that the child interacts with in school need to reinforce and build on the cultural training and messages that the child has previously received. If educators give Indian children messages that conflict with what Indian parents and communities show and tell their children, the conflicting messages can confuse the children and create resistance to school. (p.39)

Sprinthall, Sprinthall and Oja (1994) reviewed some of the literature on developmental growth and described how "ethnic minorities face a more difficult process of identity formation. In general, they have fewer opportunities for open exploration when in fact they need more time and support to "sift through two sets of cultural values and identity options"" [sic] (p.164). They suggested that

the teenager has to coordinate his or her own emerging identity while interacting with an environment of peers and adults that has increasingly potent influence. Leaving the relative safety of elementary school, the adolescent from an ethnically devalued background has fewer resources and a greater task to resolve ... when ethnic minority adolescents are provided with the psychological and social support to resolve the dual-identity questions, the outcomes are unusually positive. Once they have learned to

withstand the negative peer pressure and the negative influence of some community adults, minority teenagers and college students actually reach more advanced levels of psychological development than their majority-culture peers. (p.165)

Okakok (1989) studied the differences between Northwest Alaska Inupiat and Western world views and the influence of Western culture on Inupiat culture. She described Inuit youth as confused and drawn to Western values and away from traditional Inupiat values (p.406). Rather than contrast differences between groups, this study focused on the values held by the Amerindian respondents and their perceptions of the relationships between traditional tribal values and academic success and retention.

Language is one component of cultural expression and transmission wherein values are expressed through semiotic symbols (Parsons, 1951; McDavid and Harari, 1968). Cultural expression and transmission are discussed in the section on epistemology and values. The language barrier is a factor in the academic success and retention of Amerindian secondary school students. The ways in which Amerindian and English first language groups conceptualize ideas and express them are different (Cajete, 1988). Cajete describes some of the problems encountered by American Indian science and math students:

(l)inguistic differences of American Indian students can add to the problems which they encounter in science and math, especially if the student comes from a predominately Native language-speaking background. Most American Indian languages do not categorize or abstract concepts in the same way that English does. (p.2)

The issue of language is discussed below in relation to Native epistemology and values.

### **The Role of Values in Retention**

Educational researchers have recently noted the importance of Native values in relation to retention (Coladarci, 1983; Rindone, 1988; Deyhle, 1989; Katt, 1995). Deyhle (1989) explored Navajo student attrition in relation to the variables of race relations, academic achievement and culture change within the context of school and community among a number of Navajo and Ute school leavers. She used a combination of questionnaires and interviews in the data collection.

She found that

culturally specific factors that might be easy to overlook were important in understanding why many Navajo and Ute youth left school. Specific to this cultural framework were 1) racial relations in the community and school; 2) home child-rearing patterns of non-interference and early adulthood; and 3) cultural integrity and resistance. (p.45)

Deyhle (1989) also identified one group which experienced more success:

[T]he most culturally secure group of youth were Navajo from Navajo Mesa, one of the most traditional areas of the Navajo reservation. They felt least as though school was irrelevant, expressed little 'trouble' in school, and dropped out primarily because of pregnancy or work needs. (p.50)

This finding supports the notion that traditional Native culture, which would include culturally specific values, may contribute to students' experiencing more success in school.

Several studies also suggest that traditional tribal values may be key to the success and retention of Native students. Rindone (1988) conducted a survey of Navajo college graduates in an attempt to identify those factors which contributed to Native American's academic motivation. She suggests that "the family, as measured through the stability of traditional values, is the key to the academic success of these high achieving Navajos" (p.17).

Katt (1995) investigated the educational success of Native students in a University Native Nurses Entry Program and found that "the influences of cultural practices, time orientation, religion, language, customs, family ties and educational preparation are key considerations for providing a supportive educational environment that recognizes the needs of culturally diverse students" (p.58). She contends that "...a move toward greater understanding and valuing of cultural diversity would benefit First Nation students" (p.59). She recommends that "future studies need to take a cross-cultural approach to the exploration of persistence in the context of cultural differences" (p.59). While it is important to note that Deyhle (1989) as well as others (Coladarci, 1983) have directed their studies at factors which contribute to leaving school, this study focused on factors which contributed to successful retention in school.

## Epistemology and Values

### Language

A number of factors distinguish traditional tribal values from those of other cultures. These include: The significance of language (Parsons, 1951; McDavid and Harari, 1968; Cajete, 1988; Cajete, 1994; Kouritzin, 1996), an aboriginal epistemology (Ermine, 1995; Cajete, 1994; McPherson and Rabb, 1993), Native values and ethics (Brant, 1990; Hargreaves and Earl, 1990), and a spiritual/ecological philosophy for education (Cajete, 1994).

A number of researchers describe language as a means of cultural expression or transmission including the transmission of the values of the group. Parsons (1951) states

a social system in the present sense is not possible without language, and without certain other minimum patterns of culture, such as empirical knowledge necessary to cope with situational exigencies, and sufficiently integrated patterns of expressive symbolism and of value orientation.(p. 34)

McDavid and Harari (1968) suggest that "[b]ecause languages provide symbols to represent conceptual ideas, they permit ideas to be *hypostasized*. [Italics in original] This word means, figuratively, that ideas can be 'placed out there' [sic]" (p. 158). In addition, the authors suggest that

language permits the exchange of ideas between one individual and another, consequently facilitating the transmission of cultural ideas, beliefs, and values, over both time and space. As a cultural product, then, language plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of cultural traditions over time, and in the spread of culture spatially through cultural diffusion. (p. 158)

Cajete (1994) conducted extensive research on Amerindian spiritualism, culture and tradition in relation to Amerindian education. He noted that for Amerindian people "...the spoken word has a quality of life energy within it..."(p.43).

Amerindian languages conceptualize ideas of the group in a manner which is unique to that particular group. Language, therefore, is a key element in the transmission of cultural values, beliefs and ideologies. Since there is no one-to-one correspondence between ideas and meanings

in Amerindian languages and English (Cajete, 1988), the researcher in this study was alert to particular meanings of the participants and asked for translations if they were necessary.

Kouritzin (1996) conducted a study of first language loss involving retrospective life histories of twenty-one respondents. Her sample was made up of persons representing first, second and third generation Canadians and included indigenous, European and Asian language groups. Her findings were discussed in terms of five emergent themes: Family relationships, school relationships, school performance, self-image, and the meaning of loss. She also found that "the older the participants, and the further away they were from their loss, the more poignant and nostalgic were their feelings about language loss" (p. 27). Kouritzin's study focussed on language loss and with it carried the implication of "loss". Although sensitive to the emotion sometimes associated with a loss, the focus of this study was on the relationship between the traditional tribal values and beliefs of the participants and successful secondary school retention. Kouritzin's study illuminated the importance of the researcher in this study of being sensitive to potential emotional expressions on the part of the respondents in relation to their cultural views and experiences.

### **Aboriginal Epistemology**

Ermine (1995) defined "aboriginal epistemology" in the following way: "Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology" (p. 103). He explained that Aboriginal peoples have a different way of looking at the world which is grounded in tribal resources, a uniquely cultural perspective. Amerindian people possess a worldview that is uniquely different from that of a post-modern western society and that is grounded in their own unique value system (Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995).

Mackay and Myles (1995) suggest that "because First Nations communities across Canada are unique, with different social and cultural values, levels of economic development, and internal administrative structures, it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply a universal blueprint for

success" (p.171). Native groups are indeed quite diverse yet, according to Cajete (1994) they share "elemental understandings held in common by all"(p.42).

Cajete (1994) articulates similarities amongst Amerindian groups:

A shared set of structures and tools for learning about spirit was used in similar ways by different tribes. The roles and structures of shamanism, the making of sacred art, the use of the sweat lodge, the reflection of the cosmos in a tribe's central ceremonial structures, vision questing, ceremonies, rituals, and dances tied to Nature's cycles are a few examples. Added to these are a group of shared metaphors and concepts that found unique expressions in different regions and tribes, but were derived from a similar understanding and orientation to life.(p.42)

Cajete's theory provided a theoretical construct that assisted the researcher in identifying the presence of tribal values in the analysis of data.

Cajete (1994) describes five elements which characterize American Indian spiritual tradition: the lack of an espoused doctrine of religion; the belief that life and spirit follow a cyclical pattern of nature and the cosmos; the belief that nature is the true plane of spiritual reality; the belief that the spoken word has a quality of life energy within it; and the practice or sacred expression of making something with spiritual intent, for example, spiritual power in art (p.43). He also articulates four essential concepts that are key to the spiritual aspect of Native education: the interrelated concepts of "seeking life" and "becoming complete"; the concept of the "highest thought"; the concept of "orientation"; and the concept of "pathway" (p. 45). Cajete's thesis is that Amerindian spirituality is a complex yet pragmatic system which, balanced against the ecological orientation, offers educators a viable basis for curriculum development for Amerindians. His suggestions for educational programming are described below in the section on a spiritual/ecological basis for education.

Consistent with Cajete (1994), McPherson and Rabb (1993) have studied Native philosophy. They draw upon the work of Swedish author and professor Ake Hulkrantz (1987, cited in McPherson and Rabb, 1993) in conceptualizing their theory. They recognize that "Four prominent features in North American Indian religions are a similar worldview, a shared notion of



cosmic harmony, emphasis on experiencing directly powers and visions, and a common view of the cycle of life and death" (p.2). To support their theory, they identify cultural phenomena such as the near death experience of the vision quest and the orientation of the person to place or environment. Such values, they argue, help to explain contemporary socio-political issues such as the Native perspective toward land ownership, the cross-cultural context of land claims issues, and the effect of various treaties and legislation on the individual. McPherson and Rabb cite Stevenson's (1992) perspective to support their thesis of world view:

long before the modern science of ecology the Native peoples of North America discovered that they and their environment form a kind of ecosystem "connected by a complex web of interdependencies and feedback loops which maintain the system in a delicate balance " (p.85).

This perspective is consistent with both Ermine's (1995) and Cajete's (1994) notion of aboriginal epistemology.

### **Native Values and Ethics**

Brant (1990), a Mohawk scholar, observed various Iroquoian, Ojibway, and Swampy Cree Natives over 24 years of medical practice, including 12 years of clinical assessment. Frequently occurring behaviours in Natives were influenced by a Native ethic and belief system. These behaviours, related to conflict suppression and directed at enhancing group cohesiveness, included the use of certain superego constructs like bogeymen, admonitions or teasing, shaming, and ridicule used to reinforce and promote group behaviours (p.537). He also discussed certain child rearing practices like teasing, shaming, and ridiculing which, by instilling fear and social shyness in the individual, functioned as a mechanism for promoting group unity.

Brant (1990) suggested that the value system of Native people has a significant impact in their interactions with others. He identified eight ethics: 1) the ethic of non-interference used to discourage physical, verbal, or psychological coercion; 2) the ethic of non-competitiveness used to suppress and avert intragroup rivalry and prevent embarrassment; 3) the ethic of emotional restraint used to promote self-control and discourage the expression of strong or violent feelings including positive ones like enthusiasm or joyfulness; 4) the ethic of sharing used to discourage

the hoarding of material goods by any one individual; 5) the Native concept of time which is likened to doing things when the time is right, or not doing them because the time is right for something else; 6) the Native attitude of gratitude and approval which is rarely shown because gratitude is viewed as superfluous; 7) the Native protocol, complicated by the ethic of non-interference, but usually refers to clan or group specific rules which do not overlook the individual's right to behave as they see fit, and; 8) the practice of teaching by modelling. Brant's work provided theoretical constructs for interpersonal communication and understanding when working with Native subjects which enhanced the data collection and analysis of this study.

Hargreaves and Earl (1990) viewed adolescents as moving from one value system [that of their parents] to another much more strongly influenced by their peers (pp.20-21). They contend that adolescent identity formation involves three constructs: peer-group membership, psychosocial crises, and relationship to society. Citing Palomares and Ball, (1980) Hargreaves and Earl describe peer group membership as "provid[ing] an identity to adolescents, expanding their feelings of self-worth and protecting them from loneliness" (p. 22). They also describe how adolescents struggle to sort out their own roles and values during a period of conflict and inconsistency. The authors suggest that early adolescents need "to understand and to cope with the controversies and complexities of the world around them and to develop considered attitudes towards them" (p.24). Their work also provided a framework through which the identity formation of the respondents could be viewed during data collection and analysis.

### **Spiritual/Ecological Education**

Cajete (1994) articulates an ecology of indigenous education founded upon the premise of universal similarities amongst all Indigenous groups. He proposes that "given the diversity and richness of American Indian spiritual traditions, it is impossible and misleading to reduce them to simple descriptions. However, they come from primal roots and continue to express universal perceptions and concepts" (p.43). He articulates that tribal education centres around a spiritual ecology of two conceptual triads, the spiritual and the ecological. According to Cajete, "These orienting foundations of spiritual ecology include: the environmental, the Mythic, the

Artistic/visionary, and the Affective/communal" (p.37). "The Ebb and Flow of Tribal Education" is a metaphor representing a balance between spiritual and ecological orientations to life (p. 29). His book is a spiritual and ecological framework for Amerindian life span development and education - a Native philosophical view of the world unlike that of the neoWestern view of today.

In summary, the review of the literature suggests that traditional tribal values may play a significant role in the successful retention of Amerindian secondary school students. The value systems of Native peoples may have a significant impact on their interactions with others. Certain factors are identified as influencing Native student retention including socioeconomic status, cultural discontinuity, the use of add-on curriculum, and language barrier. There have been methodological problems in studying Amerindian retention which point to the need to incorporate the Native worldview in conceptualizing and conducting research. Aboriginal epistemology also differs from that of non-Native groups and may need to be given more emphasis in curriculum planning because students who are culturally secure have been identified as experiencing the least difficulty in school. Traditional (tribal) value orientations are suggested as being significant to academic success for the Amerindian learner.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

This study describes Amerindian secondary school graduates' perceptions of the relationship between Amerindian traditional tribal values and successful retention in secondary school. This chapter describes the theoretical framework of the study including the design, methodology and the research process. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first section describes the theoretical foundations of the study: research questions, the research design, and the methodology of the inquiry. The second section describes the research process: the ethical considerations, data collection and analysis, and decisions made throughout the study. The theoretical foundations of the study are discussed below.

#### **Theoretical Foundations**

##### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research methods of inquiry originate from the disciplines of history, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology and can involve phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnography (Reynolds, 1992). Patton (1990) describes the phenomenological perspective as

- 1) a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world (in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon oneself) or
- 2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated (in which case participant observation would be necessary). (p. 70)

This study is a phenomenology which described the lived experience of the participants, in particular, the perceptions of Amerindian secondary school graduates of the relationship between their traditional tribal values and beliefs and successful secondary school retention. Patton tells us "the phenomenon being experienced may be an emotion - loneliness, jealousy, anger. The phenomenon may be a relationship, a marriage, or a job. The phenomenon may be a program, an organization, or a culture" (p. 69).

Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993) describe qualitative research as "predicated on the assumption that each individual, each culture, and each setting is unique" (p. 195). They submit that qualitative research "typically yields verbal descriptions, largely derived from interview and observational notes. These notes are analyzed for themes and patterns, which are described and illustrated with examples, including quotations and excerpts from documents..." (p.199). In this study, the primary method of data collection was the interview. Research memos and a process journal were also kept throughout data collection and analysis.

Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993) cite an example of a qualitative study of at-risk students which is similar in design to this study. They note that "all aspects of the students' lives were of interest to the researchers, as reflected in their statements that the interviews with students were 'unstructured' and 'on the general topic of what life is like for a young person in New York City'[sic]" (p. 199). They also describe how "researchers found themes in their interview data that might explain why these students do so poorly in school" (p. 202).

Patton (1990) articulates a similar rationale for the use of qualitative research methodology. He states that the qualitative study "permit[s] the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry" (p. 13).

The review of the literature in Chapter Two (2) suggested that studies of retention and attrition of aboriginal students have been problematic both conceptually and methodologically. The design of this study was intended to explore, through the respondents' perspectives, their lived experiences in secondary school and their perceptions of the relationship between traditional tribal values and beliefs and secondary school retention. Thus, it represents a departure from studies which impose a framework which assumes either a deficit or cultural discontinuity perspective. The qualitative design invited respondents to articulate personal meanings.

## **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the perceptions of academically successful secondary/post secondary Amerindian students of the relationship between traditional tribal values and their success and retention?
- 2.1) What traditional tribal values are held by these Amerindian students?
- 2.2) How do these values directly relate to education?
- 3) What is the nature of the curricula in which the Native students were most successful?

## **Design**

The nature of the research questions guided the selection of the design. The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Patton, 1990). The design allowed the researcher the opportunity to explore themes and issues arising during the interviews and from an ongoing analysis of data throughout the data collection process (Patton, 1990, p. 196).

### **Time Frame**

The interviews took place over a period of five weeks.

### **Sample**

Li (1981) describes snowball sampling as a non-probability sampling technique which “relies on the subjects referring other subjects to the researcher” (p. 31). This study incorporated a purposeful sample selected through a snowball sampling method of seven Amerindians who had successfully completed grade 12 and/or Ontario Academic Credits (O.A.C.) and were enrolled in programs at postsecondary institutions. Initial respondents were nominated by university professors and an administrator from an education authority. Respondents then in turn nominated other participants.

### **Methodology**

The primary method used to collect data was the interview guide approach (Patton, 1990).

Patton (1990) defines an interview guide in the following way:

An interview guide is a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. An interview guide is prepared in order to make sure that

basically the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material. The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style-but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined. (p.283)

The interview guide (Appendix III) was initially piloted with one participant and a few minor revisions were made before the interviews were conducted.

### **Data Collection**

Patton (1990) describes data triangulation as "the use of a variety of data sources in a study"(p.187). In this study, multiple respondents responded to the same interview guide. Field notes were taken to record observations made during the interviews.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocate the use of memos during data collection to identify emerging categories or themes. This study incorporated the use of memos which were written as categories or themes emerged and to document key points for analysis. A research log was also used in this study for reflective as well as documentation purposes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

### **Data Analysis**

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used in the study to identify emerging codes, patterns, and themes "yielding discussional or propositional theory" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.115). Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify four stages in the constant comparative method: " 1) comparing incidents applicable to each category; 2) integrating categories and their properties; 3) delimiting the theory; and 4) writing the theory"(p. 105). They recommend that researchers use the following strategies: " 1) while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category, and; 2) Stop coding and record a memo on your ideas"(p.106).

## **Research Process**

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent.** Respondents who met the eligibility criteria were given/mailed a letter (Appendix I) which explained the purpose of the study and invited their participation. The letter described the benefits of the research and indicated the following:

- participation was voluntary
- participants could withdraw at any time without penalty
- there were no risks involved
- a procedure for maintaining confidentiality and anonymity would be used
- data collected would be stored for seven years
- the study would be available at the Faculty of Education library at Lakehead University.

Participants were also asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix II) before the interview was scheduled.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity.** Each respondent was assured that the data and their identity would be confidential. Each was assigned a pseudonym which appears on the transcripts, the interviews and any reports of the findings.

**Risks.** There were no risks to the participants. Benefits from this study included insights into the perceptions of academically successful Amerindian students of the relationship between traditional tribal values and secondary school retention. Also, this research contributes to the embryonic literature relevant to Native student success in education and may contribute knowledge and information which will inform the development of culturally relevant curriculum, materials and programming.

**Storage of Data.** The data and information collected through this study are being stored for seven years in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home as outlined by Lakehead University's Research Integrity Policy (1995).



## **Entry**

I began by talking with university and college professors and the staff at the Rainy Lake Ojibway Education Authority for leads to the first respondent.

## **Data Collection**

Participants were asked for permission to tape the interviews. Each respondent was also asked to nominate potential respondents who were then contacted by the researcher. Face to face interviews ran an average of two hours and ranged from one and one half hours [the pilot] to three hours. The setting for each interview was a private location convenient to the participant. For example, interviews took place in the micro teaching lab at Lakehead University and the graduate student office at Lakehead University.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

After piloting the instrument a few minor changes were made to certain questions and additional probes were added. Below is an example of the typical use of a probe and a prompt during a interview:

*Q. Talk about your traditional tribal values and beliefs or your teachings?*

*A. My own?*

*Prompt. Yes.*

*A. ...as you're growing, as you're aging, you pick up different types of traditional values throughout your years. I know that there are some things that I'm still learning today. But some of the things that I was taught when I was young was respect. That was one of the most important things ... teachings that my grandmother gave me... while a lot of other young people were out doing what you would refer to as ... teenage things. I wasn't doing that. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. And even in that I was ridiculed because of that. Because I used to get teased ... they used to always say "oh, she's with her coo-coo. She's not coming out. She's always with her coo-coo". ... and I used to be ridiculed.*

*PROBE: And who is this?*

*A: The other kids, like my highschool friends. (Crystal, p. 17)*

As the study proceeded, I built into interviews a discussion of findings from previous interviews as noted on research memos or in the research log. Below is an example of a typical research memo:

*It is apparent from the interviews to date that the use of the word "belief" is confusing the participants as they are looking at me with blank stares when asked about their traditional tribal values and beliefs. They also ask about it ie, "what do you mean by beliefs?" and they appear to not understand what I offer as an explanation. It could be that the word "beliefs" needs to be changed or a modifier added. I will need to consult the committee on this.*

Memos were written to triangulate data across sources and it enabled me to refine questions, mostly through the addition of various probes and prompts or alternative words or secondary questions as the interviews progressed.

The majority of the data analysis occurred near the end of the interview stage of the study and took close to two months to complete. It was completed in three stages. In the first stage, transcripts were read several times. Key words or phrases were written in the margins of each transcript. An index of the codes was developed to facilitate triangulation of respondent statements across the sample. It included a list of the key words, ideas or phrases noted in the margins of each transcript and cross-referenced by page and paragraph number across the transcripts. The list was revised several times and resulted in thirty-three key points or codes. The following are five examples of key points yielded from the initial stage of the analysis:

- 1) Well being of ethnic group.
- 2) Systemic barriers.
- 3) Loss of traditional values.
- 4) Pride in Amerindian heritage.
- 5) Identity.

The second stage of the analysis involved the use of the computer word search function. Each transcript was searched for key words which were initially generated from the data in

research memos, the transcript index or the transcripts. As new information or ideas emerged using this approach, it was once again triangulated across transcripts. This second stage added another eight salient points from the data.

The third phase of the analysis involved looking at the data generated by each question on the interview guide. However, this third approach only provided four more meaningful ideas from the data and it was at this point that I decided data saturation had been reached.

The forty-five key points which emerged from the data were then arranged as a list. Related points were clustered to illuminate the themes as indicated in Figure 1. The themes resulting from the analysis of data included: family life, transitions, strategies for coping, life experiences, academic experiences, traditional tribal values, and perceptions of relevancy. These themes were also compared to the theoretical constructs noted in the review of the literature (Brant, 1990; Cajete, 1994; Sprinthall, Sprinthall, & Oja, 1994) and similarities and differences between the findings and the existing body of research were noted.

In summary, this qualitative study employed a phenomenological perspective to describe the lived experience of the participants. The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Patton, 1990). The perceptions of Amerindian secondary school graduates of the relationship between Amerindian traditional tribal values and beliefs and successful retention in secondary school was the focus of the study. The interview was used as the primary method of data collection. Research memos and a research log were also used for data collection and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A snowball sampling method (Li, 1981) was used to locate seven participants who responded to the interview guide (Patton, 1990). The constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of data analysis was used to identify 45 key points from the data. These keypoints were clustered into the themes of family life, transitions, strategies for coping, life experience, academic experience, relevancy of programming, and traditional tribal values and beliefs. The themes and similarities noted between them and the constructs discussed from the relevant literature are discussed below.

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- importance of family relations</li> <li>- family relations strained</li> <li>- customary parental transferring</li> <li>- nomadic lifestyle/moving</li> <li>- influence of family members</li> <li>- non-traditional Amerindian</li> </ul>	Family Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- comfort level</li> <li>- attributes</li> <li>- interactions limited</li> <li>- social development and relations</li> <li>- disapprobation</li> <li>- distant affiliations</li> <li>- motivation</li> <li>- rationale behind complacency</li> </ul>	Transitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- having goals</li> <li>- team sports/peer relations</li> <li>- mingling or mixing</li> <li>- balancing academics with other activities</li> <li>- health and fitness</li> <li>- talking to cope</li> </ul>	Strategies for Coping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maturation</li> <li>- significant event</li> </ul>	Life Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learning style</li> <li>- most successful courses</li> <li>- key component</li> <li>- listeners/productive study time</li> <li>- teacher</li> <li>- faculty support</li> <li>- view of learning</li> <li>- orientation toward education</li> <li>- teaching style</li> <li>- urgency to follow through</li> </ul>	Academic Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- balancing with other cultures</li> <li>- loss of traditional values</li> <li>- language loss</li> <li>- in school programming</li> <li>- systemic barriers</li> <li>- negative statistics</li> <li>- well-being of ethnic group</li> </ul>	Relevancy of Programming
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- positive contribution to learning</li> <li>- residential schools</li> <li>- identity</li> <li>- pride in Amerindian heritage</li> <li>- communicating beyond ordinary sources</li> <li>- life path</li> </ul>	Traditional Tribal Values and Beliefs

**Figure 1. Codes as clustered into Themes.**

**CHAPTER 4**  
**SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**  
**AND INTERPRETATIONS**

**Introduction**

This chapter presents the research findings. The first section describes the participants in the study and the themes which emerged. Themes include: family life, transitions, strategies for coping, life experiences, academic experiences, relevancy of programming, and traditional tribal values. The second section discusses the interpretation of the findings and any similarities of these findings with constructs discussed in the review of relevant literature.

**Research Findings**

**Participant Profiles**

Belinda is an Ojibway-Cree Native who recently completed grade twelve in Northern Manitoba. She describes herself as a proud, traditional Native who spent much of her childhood on the reserve. She is in her mid-twenties and single. Belinda attended a secondary school on the reserve and moved to the city to attend university. She is in her first year of a general degree program.

Crystal is an Ojibway Native who completed grade twelve in Northern Manitoba. A mother of two in her early thirties, she describes herself as a mature, Native woman with a world of experiences and advice to offer. Crystal spent much of her early years living on a reserve. Her family then moved to a rural municipality because her father had a change in employment. The family also moved so that the children could attend school. She later moved to the city to complete her senior secondary education. Crystal is in her final year of her Bachelor of Education degree.

Amy describes herself as a fair-skinned Ojibway Native with a new attitude toward school and learning. A grade twelve graduate and mother of two, she sees herself as a victim of teenage pregnancy. Amy grew up in a rural municipality situated within walking distance of her Indian

reserve in Northwestern Ontario. She is in her early thirties and in the process of completing a college secretarial program.

Joan is a Mohawk Native in her mid-twenties. She graduated from grade twelve in Ontario and attended most of her secondary schooling on the reserve. She views herself as athletic and outgoing and committed to securing a brighter future for both her and her son. She grew up on a reserve in Southern Ontario and had close ties with her friends, family, and community. She is currently completing her second year of a Bachelor of Education degree.

Wesley is an Ojibway Native from Northwestern Ontario. Wesley is single. He is an O.A.C. graduate from a private boys school. Wesley had limited relationships with family as he was growing up. He spent all of his childhood in a rural municipality. He observed that he has had little experience with his own cultural or spiritual practices until recently. Today he is seeking to embrace his long overlooked Amerindian heritage. Wesley is in his mid-twenties and in the second year of a degree in mechanical engineering. He was the only respondent who could not communicate in both English and a Native language.

Naokwaan is a recent O.A.C. graduate from Northern Ontario. He is single and speaks quite fondly of his childhood years on the reserve. Naokwaan is an Odawa Native who is quite involved with his traditional family life and spiritual practices. He also moved to the city to attend both secondary and higher education. He is in the first year of a Bachelor of Science degree in bio-physics.

Stephen, a Mohawk Native and O.A.C. graduate from a reserve school in Southern Ontario, describes himself as a non-traditional Native. He grew up on a reserve in Southern Ontario. Stephen is single and in his mid-twenties. He is completing his final year of a Bachelor of Education degree.

## **Themes**

**Family Life.** The first theme which emerged from the data illuminated the nature of family life and the influence of family and lifestyle on the educational endeavours of the respondents. All seven respondents referred to the influence of family members on their

academic success. This support came mostly from immediate family members but included extended family members as well. Naokwaan and Joan discussed how family members influenced their academic goals.

My father was ah, one of the biggest influences, because whatever, whatever I did, as long as he was alive, I was going to go to university, you know, because ah, his father had worked very hard and did the same thing for him and ah, it was just, even if you weren't going to do anything with that degree, it's just good that you have that broader sense of ah, your mind, opening your mind to new ideas and stuff like that. And so, it was something that, and, it was a positive thing... I've always wanted to go. And he always brought that out and I was able to do it. (Naokwaan, p. 13)

I never really thought about goals and stuff, dreams and goals, until my sister and I sat down one time and we had a chat and that's what she had told me. And she influenced me on that and she says "Just hang onto it... hang onto your dreams and your goals and you'll reach them"...She's really an inspiration for me. (Joan, p. 24)

Crystal and Belinda spoke of the practice of Native people to have grandparents or extended family members fulfil the role of parents:

...I think it's normal ... how I moved out and I went to go live with my grandparents and then my auntie and uncle...I think it's normal for Indians to move around...for a child to go live with their ah, extended family. (Belinda, p. 23)

On our reserve a lot of the children are brought up by their grandparents... (Crystal, p. 29)

However, not all influences were positive. Crystal's home life was difficult. Her parents were alcoholics and she had many responsibilities thrust upon her:

I was describing the whole, the responsibilities that were entrusted upon me at such a young age...Coming home on a Friday afternoon, we used to take our good old time about getting home because we knew that they would never be there...Sometimes if we knew it was pay-day, we'd know that there'd be treats there for us and, but we'd still be alone. Ah, sometimes we never seen them until late Sunday or they'd come home Sunday mornings and we'd just put them to bed and we used to keep the house clean, really immaculate clean. I think because of our, in a sense it was um, we seen it as being dirty that they were drinking so much that ah, that keeping the house clean kind of took away what we were seeing and what we were living with. Ah, I remember one time... we got a little red wagon one time from my grandparents and they gave us that wagon because we used to carry ah, bags of laundry to the laundromat which was like two, two blocks away. And we used to go and I remember we were told never to steal but, at that age when we were young like that, we'd wait for them to sleep and then we'd dig in their pockets and take their change

but we always said like, we were doing this because we were doing the laundry and we had to have school clothes and it was always like, through our school years we were always hiding the fact that our parents were alcoholics. I found I grew up doing that and it wasn't until I started having my own family that I really came to realise that, yes they were alcoholics and I lived in an alcoholic home and a lot of the things that ah, that were, that I had to do, I didn't believe that I should have been doing so much for being that young you know. I was caring for my younger brothers and sister and taking all the responsibilities. I remember when we used to have the doors locked and be afraid of the drunks and we'd have knives on our bedroom doors so, if they were having a party they wouldn't be ah, they wouldn't come like bother, bother them. I remember we used to sleep on our beds with bats beside our bed in fear that drunks would bother us. But my childhood overall is ah, very painful. But it wasn't until I started having my own kids that I really started dealing with my own pain because I think a lot of where I'm at today is because I never ever want to see my own kids go through that again. (Crystal, p. 19)

Crystal's family also moved frequently: "...fourteen times in nine years." Crystal encouraged her parents to stop drinking. When they did stop, she believed that she was influential in their decision. For her, success is linked with her experience with her family's struggle in overcoming their problems related to alcohol:

When I knew that I actually succeeded was when I seen... my parents and they had stopped drinking already. And ah, I knew then that ah, that my life was turning around. And that success was coming because, you know with the graduation and them not drinking anymore, that ah, for me that was success and that's when I knew that, that because I helped them. You know, I helped them stop drinking. And that was... the most important thing for me. You know, school was there and school was there because I had to go through the system. But at the same time, success for me was them. (Crystal, p. 40)

Five respondents lived on reserves but two of them were separated from their families to attend secondary schools. Stephen noted that for his parents, residential schooling resulted in a loss of traditional tribal values:

I know for me...I'm the product of ah, residential schools and like my mother and father are non-traditional as a result of residential schools and my grandmother was never taught, she used to speak but never taught another... (Stephen, p. 43)

For all the respondents, moving into secondary school involved a period of transition. Transitions, then, emerged as a theme in participants' experience in secondary school.

**Transitions.** For three of the respondents, entry into predominantly non-Native secondary schools was akin to "culture shock". Naokwaan commented:



...if they're brought out of their reservation and into another scenario, another surroundings such as a predominantly white school or let's say, you know, where white students are ah, sometimes that might have some...being accepted might be a harder thing and that might be something that, that say's "Well, oh, you know, these people don't even like me. These people look at me funny. I'm not coming here anymore. I'm not gonna stay in school." ...Fitting in, yeah...and that's hard...If you don't fit into your surroundings, then what are you doing there?... If you don't like it there you're not going to stay. (Naokwaan, p. 41)

Like many adolescents, the respondents wanted to "fit in" with their peer group. Naokwaan noted that his beliefs influenced his ability to socialize with non-Native peers:

Well, with my beliefs then I was able to see where...choosing my friends I guess it...it's everything that I stand for. So ah, you know, if I was going to talk to somebody and...my beliefs were ... the way I think. So, if I express myself in school then it was because of the beliefs that I had, you know. So it was ah, definitely the beliefs were there for me and affected everything that I did, because of what I believed in. (Naokwaan, p. 44)

Belinda explained that she was shy with non-Natives:

Ah, it makes me feel more at home when I am with Native people...I find I am relaxed and talk out more. But when I am with like, say different other people I won't say as much, I don't want to say anything really...it's me, I get more comfortable with a Native person first than I would with somebody else. (Belinda, p. 4)

One of the concerns noted by respondents was that they felt distant or alienated from Native peers. Joan became very involved in sports. She noted that other Native students did not participate in this type of activity:

Lot of times I was found in the gym. Like at lunch time, like before a game I was always with my team, so I was like sitting way over here with all my team and then...I would look over and I'd see all my Native peers and...walk over there and let them know, "Okay look, you know, got a game and you know, be there" and [They would say] "Yeah, yeah. We'll be there" and "rooting for you". and so I felt like a lot of support from my peers. (Joan, p. 7)

It is not clear, however, from her comments that they did attend. Instead, Joan spoke mostly about her associations with non-Native peers and teachers:

...through my sports I... associated a lot with the non-Native students only because of sports and you know, going on tournaments and stuff, you've got to stay overnight and... (Joan, p. 5)

Another concern for respondents was the disapprobation they felt from their ethnic group during their secondary school years. They commented that being successful at school and being Native often conflicted. They met with disapproval and scornful treatment from other Natives.

Joan and Amy described this experience:

I would have to say that the jealousy of my Native peers. That bothered me a lot...And it made me kind of afraid of them. (Joan, p. 14)

... And I had Indians that judged me that way, and they [would comment] "Oh, who does she think she is? Miss white girl?" And I've had people actually do that to me... (Amy, p. 35)

In retrospect, the respondents found that their secondary school experiences contributed to their relations with others and to their social development. Joan said that her experience was a "great success" and "a lot of fun." She attributes her level of comfort with others to the foundations laid in high school. "I can associate and be able to talk with anyone ... and feel comfortable with myself." Wesley noted that while he acquired knowledge which allowed him to pursue post-secondary education, "It was almost secondary to learning how to interact with people." Over time, the respondents developed coping strategies to facilitate their transitions to secondary school.

**Strategies for Coping.** Respondents developed a number of different strategies for coping in secondary school. These included making new friends, involvement in sports, and attending to their personal well being.

Belinda and Crystal talked about how their involvement in sports contributed to their successful retention.

...playing sports and stuff like that. It's like, you got out things, like if you got mad at the work or something. You can, you'd be playing sports. You'd get all that energy out. (Belinda, p. 33)

I see myself being very...actively involved in the school because I played all the sports that were being offered there. Through that I...was able to establish a lot of friendships with ah, mostly non-Native people than Native people because of the fact that a lot of my

Native friends were no longer there, [they] were usually kicked out before Christmas... (Crystal, p. 5)

Sports provided for these Amerindian students a mechanism to cope with school life pressures while it provided situations wherein they could enjoy new life experiences.

Naokwaan talked about how he attended to his personal well being:

Yeah well, definitely exercise had a lot to do with [coping]... I had played a lot of sports so, my physical part was okay. And in terms of emotions...I had to nurture and make sure that everything was okay and that, you know, because you can't have any successes you know, if you're a wreck or, you know, you're having a hard time emotionally. (Naokwaan, p. 12)

Naokwaan described how he needed to talk to elders and attend sweatlodges to help maintain the spiritual aspect of his life. He referred to the medicine wheel in his discussion of maintaining a balanced lifestyle. "Learn to be balanced. Learn to, you know, be always be grounded...make sure everything was essentially stable in me. My emotions, my physical part, my mind, my body...I'm talking about the medicine wheel." Crystal also talked about doing things for herself. "If I'm practicing traditional...things in my home in order to help me to succeed to get, you know from point a to point b, then and it's helped me."

**Life Experience.** The normal process of maturation was a factor in respondents' successful retention in secondary school. Over time, they developed positive attitudes toward learning and education. Three of the respondents described the effect of maturity on their perception of schooling:

I think [my success in school] had a lot to do with growth and maturity though...As I was getting older ... there was certain things that I seen that I wanted to learn. There were certain things that I couldn't be bothered. (Crystal, p. 32)

...Wow, finally! ... Somewhere I can be me ... and now it's time to grow, start growing now and I ... everyday I was looking forward to going back to school...just the school itself and ... getting involved in sports. It motivated me. So everyday I looked forward to going back, catching the bus and going on... (Joan, p. 4)

...when I was younger, I had an attitude ... so they judged me differently. And then when I came back [from a pregnancy departure], it was like I was more of an adult and grown up and I wasn't so cocky and everything. More respect ... (Amy, p. 5)

For two of the respondents, a significant event in their lives influenced their decision to continue or to persist with their schooling. Naokwaan decided to take a year off from his studies to travel to Europe and to Africa. When he returned to secondary school, he was more focussed on achieving his goals:

... I was in the high school system. I took a year off and ah, so I did my grade twelve and then I went back for my O.A.Cs. And ... when I went back ... I was a lot more serious about my goals. Because before, I [thought] I just [have] to get through highschool or I just have to finish this one year. But now, when I came back I was just able to ... knew that I was gonna succeed ... because I just wanted it. (Naokwaan, p. 38)

Crystal's attendance in school was sporadic because of her family problems. Many of her Native friends dropped out of school or were expelled. One day, the secondary school principal confronted her and suggested that she leave the school because she "was wasting the teachers' time" and "was costing the taxpayers a lot of money." He also said that she "would never amount to anything." This critical incident helped her to realize that she wanted to continue her education and that she could succeed:

And I was told to leave that school. So with the little dignity and pride that I had left from ... living amongst non-Native people at that time ... that was one of the driving factors that ah, I started looking into going to school elsewhere. But there are also a number of other personal things that [influenced] my decision to leave but that was the most ... I think that was the most influential reason that brought me [to this city]. (Crystal, p. 4)

**Academic Experience.** Another factor in respondents' successful retention was the nature of their academic experience. Six of the respondents spoke about the positive support and rapport they had had with faculty. They explained that they were encouraged by individuals who believed in them and were cared for by professionals with positive attitudes. Belinda and Wesley described the support they received from faculty:

It's my teachers... 'cause I remember I was talking to one of my teachers and they think, even my principals, that I am going to go far and just 'cause they believe in me. They all, all of them kinda believed in me... (Belinda, p. 29)

Well, they had a positive attitude. Again, these things I didn't know what they were called back then, but I would say [the two teachers] both had a holistic attitude towards teaching. That the whole thing wasn't about just going to school and playing extra-

curricular sports. That there were other things at play. They knew about this and they knew that this was important in doing well. (Wesley, p. 13)

Wesley also remembered his teachers as people "you could go to" and that "you didn't even have to let them know" [the problem]. His comments typified the feelings of most of these respondents regarding supportive faculty. Joan viewed one of her teachers as being "like a mother" and she noted that "she was the type of teacher who showed a lot of care for Native students." Stephen, on the other hand, described some of his teachers as "social with the students a lot more" and "involved in a lot of the extracurricular."

In considering their teachers' effectiveness, all of the respondents referred to the teaching methods as having a positive influence on their learning. They described learning experiences with teachers that were learner-centred. Naokwaan described his experience:

My ... grade eleven physics teacher brought me um, the fascination of the unknown ... the world of physics and how things move and how things are in this world that are governed by laws of nature and not by the laws of man. And that's what I really found interesting because in all the other courses ... in social sciences and all that, it talked about mankind and it talked about their structures. Then I was finding in physics I was learning the law of the entire universe. The law which we could never break. We could never change and we could never cheat. And so she brought me that. She opened up that door for me and ah, since then, hence my ... biological background in physics and I mean ... Well, she was able to accomplish that, I believe, by not being such a dry teacher. And sort of putting physics in a philosophical [perspective] instead of just a ... mathematical ... problem solving kinda course. She was able to spark our interest - spark our imagination. (Naokwaan, p. 6)

Respondents credited the teachers for meeting their needs as learners. Naokwaan and Wesley described situations wherein having their learning styles accommodated was essential to their successful completion of a task:

And the ones that I was able to ah ... Well, I did equally well in all of [the courses] except that I didn't have to do much work for the ones that I ... could be creative in ... just being able to ah, to probe my own mind for ideas. You know, get into that ah, kind of zone I guess, zone of thinking where ah, you can be creative and I was able to tap into that at an early age ... I was kind [of] lucky. (Naokwaan, p.8)

I think that anything that you could either do or you could visualize yourself doing ... you could see something being done... That helped... Yeah, I mean, we were always actually doing things in physics but if somebody could give you an example of how it related to actual something happening, then it was a lot easier. (Wesley, p. 26)

Four of the respondents described themselves as being listeners; five of them said their most productive study time was in the evening. Having a quiet workplace, usually the kitchen table, was also an important part of these students productive study practice.

All seven respondents shared a competitive orientation toward education. For most, having goals and planning ahead was an integral part of their education. The respondents also talked about a number of different courses in which they were most productive or successful. These courses included English, social science, world issues, history, physical education, drafting, law, computers, business and physics.

Yet no one course seemed to stand out over others. Instead, respondents offered different views of the nature of their secondary school experiences. Attitude, interest, personal wellness, fitting in, peer incentive, and faculty support were all mentioned as significant contributions to their secondary school experiences. Stephen, for example, talked about peer incentive through peer pressure:

... because of the population was so big ... a lot of their friends were graduating so, you know, the push was kind of a peer incentive to pull through... (Stephen, p. 30)

Amy discussed the negative side of peer pressure. For her, peer pressure could lead to situations wherein

... [Natives] want to be like those people. You know, so and so [whose] parents don't make them go to school and "I don't want to go to school. I want to hang out with this person and go hang out at their house". A lot of them seem like little gangs and that's what I call them ... Like school packs ... and it's usually ... the very odd times, unless it's like white Native like me, where it's just all little packs of Natives and they're [well], I call them hoods. (Amy, p. 42)

Participants also expressed compassion over Native students' academic success. There was an urgency in their choice of words when they expressed concern about the negative statistics on Native students. For these Native students there was a connection between success in school and future careers. However, they expressed concern for the well-being of their ethnic group. Belinda and Stephen talked about their concern:

What I do, it's 'cause I don't want to be another statistic and I want to help ... when you read stuff you know, I feel so sad when Natives are ... Oh my god ... I want to do better, you know? I want to help my community and everybody ... I was reading the statistic ... eight out of ten Native women won't go to university or something like that ... I don't want to be like that. (Belinda, p. 20)

... I would just like to see a lot more ... [Native] people stay in highschool and succeed. (Stephen, p. 43)

Joan expressed concern regarding the systemic problems in the education system and the perpetuation of failure transcending generations of Native learners. She noted:

... to me, it's just like that's the way it was when I was in high school. And it's happening now. It's like time is just repeating itself and that it's time, where I see it as, somebody has to get in there and somebody has to do something about it. (Joan, p. 37)

Wesley supposed "... I don't think the system works right now, no". Crystal also believed there were problems with the education system. " I think I would change the barriers that are set. That have been set". She discussed her view of the situation:

Well you still see the system failing them. You know, like where I come from, we have a high drop out rate of highschool students. What was going on when I was in highschool ... [hasn't] changed today because those students are still going through what we went through ... something that I would like to change is the thing about the culture. You know, the cultural differences. (Crystal, p. 32)

**Relevancy of Programming.** The next theme involved perceptions of relevancy in programming. In reflecting upon the integrated school system, four respondents referred to a need for balancing their values with those of other cultures. Their comments highlighted a belief that Native and non-Native views can be complementary. Naokwaan, Wesley and Stephen shared an appreciation for cross-cultural values:

... if something was different then I ... accepted that. Because that's what my belief said ... and I understood that I should accept a lot of other things. Accept my own. My own is what I have but I also can accept ... a belief of what a Muslim person would think and is a hundred percent just as valid as what I think. There is nothing ... different about it. He is or she has got just as much validity as I do. (Naokwaan, p. 44)

Because I think for a long time that it was ... in conflict. Studying and getting a degree and what-not was in conflict with what they saw as traditional values and I think there are a lot of sort of forward thinking people, forward thinking elders who do that all along ...

Who knew all along that that was important. That if you were going to live in this world that you had to have "white" knowledge in order to accomplish your goals along with the traditional ways and there were lots of people who said 'no ... you're just trashing your heritage' and all those sort of things and saying bad things about going to college and university when I don't think that's the case. I don't think that's the case at all. But you have to be ... the two things are not in conflict and I cannot think of any case where they are ever in conflict and it's very important that people realize that. That they're not going to be abandoning the old ways to go to school. This is just something that gets added. (Wesley, p. 32)

... it's the youth ... Native people ... one day these people are going to be leading the community. And for them to succeed I mean ... there's gotta be a balance somewhere between ... traditional tribal values and you know, mainstream society. (Stephen, p. 41)

Diversity, according to these respondents, offered the individual the most enlightened and promising perspective of the world.

However, some of the respondents expressed concerns over the relevancy of programming. Naokwaan, for example, viewed some of his educational experience as amounting to "Whatever you're carrying on your backpack, that's where your knowledge is" and he described this experience as "Not really learning." Crystal noted "I used to laugh because they [teachers] used to always want to find an answer for everything." She postulated that "If they would quit questioning so much maybe they would learn more if they were listening." Crystal described situations wherein she felt that she "Already knew what the answer was" but kept it to herself. She also spoke of her grandmother's teaching:

She left that all up to me to do. She would never give me a direct answer ... it was kind of like "this is what I'm going to tell you" and then you figure it out as you go along. (Crystal, p. 12)

Five respondents expressed an interest in having traditional tribal values and beliefs present in school programming. They perceived that these values and beliefs provided a positive contribution to their overall educational experience. Stephen noted that "From a personal point of view there I see ... not enough Native content in high school" and "It might provide an extra initiative to stay in school." Wesley, on the other hand, suggested that "It's not a separate part" and he proposed that "[educators] have to incorporate the traditional ways" and that "Everybody



has to realize that there's a connection." Belinda suggested that there needed to be a central meeting place for Natives to act as a support mechanism for them:

...if I was still going to school... and there was ... hardly any Natives in the school, I think they [would] need ... an organization like ... a Native organization where the Native students could go. I think that's good. I think that's what they need. They need ... someone to go and talk to, really! (Belinda, p. 34)

Joan, on the other hand, proposed the following:

... in the school itself I would have ... more ... Native ... a lot of [activities like] Native awareness week ... promote the Native you know, because the kids are losing their values for their culture. (Joan, p. 32)

These comments highlighted the respondent's perceptions of the potential contribution of Amerindian values and beliefs to the secondary school experience.

**Traditional Tribal Values and Beliefs.** The final theme arising from the data relates to traditional tribal values and beliefs. Respondents expressed interest in knowing about their Amerindian heritage and the potential contribution of that knowledge to their own self-actualization. Joan and Crystal, for example, spoke of the role of traditional tribal values in the development of identity:

I go into the schools and I look around and I says "There's no Native in here. There's nothing. How are these kids? You've got to feel that ... To find, to know who you are. And you know, like even myself, it's like I'm just learning about that now." (Joan, p. 32)

... I think we're seeing a lot of ah ... people who are trying to live a traditional way of life? I guess that's basically what I was saying ... they've tried living the other way. It's not working. The system is not working. Society is failing ... them for whatever reasons. And then I see them ... trying to find themselves, find their identity within their home. (Crystal, p. 27)

Four of the respondents expressed a concern that their own culture is at risk and that it is being overlooked by educators and society as a whole. Stephen noted that "There should be a strong push to get it back" and that "It just defines who you are". Belinda argued that "There's not enough traditional values in our school." Naokwaan suggested that "In this society nowadays...people throw away their elders into ... old age."

In talking about their concern over cultural loss, including a concern over the loss of traditional tribal language, respondent emotions were genuine and reflected a sense of loss. For example, Stephen described language loss as a problem for him because he was unable to continue learning his Native language in either intermediate or senior years:

... it relates back to elementary school for me ... because ah, again I don't speak the language so ... we were taught the language up until grade six ... I think if you chose, you could take it in grade seven a bit but in high school, that was a problem for me that you couldn't continue that. (Stephen, p. 25)

Respondents also shared a common interest in their own heritage and an inherent pride in their Amerindian ancestry. This pride was apparent in comments made concerning family values. Belinda said "...I'm proud to be an Indian. I'm proud of being traditional ...." Amy noted "I was always proud of being Indian."

Respondent comments also suggested that Native experiences can differ somewhat from that of the non-Native learner. Wesley discussed his perceptions of this difference:

...try and relate what you're learning to what you know of your traditional ways... because I think almost everything does relate and I think if you can see that what you're studying and almost no matter what you're studying, you can connect it with what you learned. I don't think they hardly teach anything at University that doesn't in some way ... I even see people who like study computers or what not and they say "How can you possibly relate that?" and I say "Oh, I think it's pretty easy" but we were on the fore-front of technology basically for thousands of years, how can you say that ... if I do good at computers or technology or different types of technology that that doesn't directly relate? Well, it doesn't ... directly relate, but it's simply a tool being, you're excellent at computers, you're not going to get a job doing computers, that was ... fifteen years ago. Now, they're a tool in getting things accomplished, the same way as the ... first man picked up a stick and used it as a tool. And that's all it is ... it's a really sophisticated stick. So the same way that we used rocks to scrape meat off of hides, you'd use the computer. (Wesley, p. 27)

Three of the respondents expressed the belief in following a lifepath. Wesley suggested "You can relate what are sort of modern careers to traditional paths". Crystal and Naokwaan also mentioned their belief in a lifepath:

... I don't really see myself as achieving anything ... I was given a path and I'm following that path. For each obstacle that's set in my way, put in my way, if I'm able to overcome

that obstacle then, it's a minor achievement. But I don't really see a really big achievement in my life. (Crystal, p. 14)

... there's alcohol and there's a lot of factors that affect ... where you go. Your path and ... you know pregnancy and a few other things that might inhibit you from ... having that goal. (Naokwaan, p. 33)

Three respondents shared a belief in communicating with people or phenomena beyond the realm of ordinary sources of communication. These beliefs simply added to their alternative view of the world. Crystal's somewhat lengthy rendition of one of her dreams provides an example of the Amerindian epistemological experience:

I want to share something with you. What brought me to where I am today. There was a time in my life when I was going through ... a lot of confusion is the word to use. And ... like I mentioned earlier that I wanted to become a lawyer and ah, I didn't know what I was going to do. So one time I had a dream with my grandmother, and we were alongside the riverbank on the reserve ... There was a white wolf and a black wolf standing across the river. And ... anishnabek-muk. They were talking in Ojibway. And ... I was sitting there and I didn't know what I wanted to do because I had to decide whether I was going to apply to law school or I was going to ... I didn't know what I was going to do basically. And I was working for ... the feds., for nine years while I was going to school. I was working there permanent part time. The job that I had there, I wasn't ... being there for such a long time and dealing with the people that I had to deal with ... I was becoming burnt out and I knew I wanted a change in my life. I knew there was going to be a change but I didn't know when. So one time ... I smudged myself before I went to sleep. Because my mind was racing and I was always ... I was smoking very ... heavy at that time. And I had a dream about my grandmother and she ... came to me. My grandmother, when she passed away, she was buried in ... her traditional outfit. She had ... her hair was grey silk and it was down to her ankles. And in my dream she came to me and I was sitting by that riverbank and I was listening to these two animals talking and one was trying to convince me that this is what I should do. But it didn't seem right because it, for some reason it just didn't seem right but ... that was the black wolf. Then the white wolf was talking to me and telling me that, to ask my grandmother because she's always around me for guidance and she would help me decide in what I should do. So anyway, I was standing there and she came to me. And I told her, I said ... that I needed help and in my dream I could speak my language. And I was talking to her in my language and yet, sometimes when I think about that dream I can't, it's just like I can't say it when I'm awake ... And yet I was, we were having a conversation. And then she went away. She walked away from me and she told me to wait there. And so I waited there and then she came back a few minutes later and I was watching her and she was smiling. She handed me this 'beshquaygun'... leather. And it was wrapped up like a present and she told me, she said 'your answer is right here'. And like I said, I was going through a lot of confusion. I didn't know what I was, if I was going to attempt to go to law school or I was going to be a teacher ... you

know going into elementary teaching or middle years teaching. And she came to me and she gave me that and she said your answer is right here. She said 'buckanon'. Open it. So I opened it and in there was a kids ... a children's elementary book. And that was my answer there. But you know that was ... the guidance that she gave me. That I was going to be going in that direction... that dream has always stood out in mind because I believe that was the guidance, I asked for guidance. It was given to me. It was shown to me and it was all up to me to do and to make the best of it. So that dream too also really opened my eyes to that ... I had some direction in my life and I knew who I was. And I knew where I was going. (Crystal, p. 24)

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The themes which emerged in this study included: family life, transitions, strategies for coping, life experiences, academic experiences, traditional tribal values and beliefs, and relevancy in programming. A number of connections may be drawn between the findings and the studies of retention discussed in the review of the literature.

The review of the literature argued that most studies have investigated the problems of retention from a deficit or cultural discontinuity perspective. This study provides new insights into retention by focusing on respondents who had successfully completed secondary school. Further, it adopted a cultural perspective in its focus on the relationship between traditional tribal values and secondary school retention. The study was exploratory and the results are not generalizable although they may be transferable to similar cases.

Interwoven through the themes were references both explicit and implicit to traditional tribal values and beliefs. All seven respondents referred to the influence of immediate and extended family members on their academic success and retention. Both Naokwaan and Joan spoke of the influence of family on their goals. And, while Crystal grew up in a family with alcohol-related problems, she still had the positive influence of her grandmother to lean on. The positive influence of family was consistent across the sample of respondents regardless of the history of their homelives. This finding is epitomized through Crystal's shared experience of her relationship with her grandmother and her grandmother's profound influence in her life. Crystal's story of her dream illuminates not only the power of her grandmother's influence in her life but the depth of Crystal's spirituality as well. Her dream is a rich illustration of Cajete's (1994) notions of

pathway, the reciprocal relationship with nature, communication through the dream or self-talk with the dead, and seeking the highest thought. Crystal's dream involved wolves and a message regarding her career path coming from her deceased grandmother. It characterized Cajete's position that seeking the highest thought "occurs in relationship to other people [in this case Crystal's dead grandmother, and a decision about teaching children implied through the children's book], plants [the sacred herbs commonly used for smudging are tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass], animals [the wolves], natural elements [the dream setting was near a river and interwoven with references to animals, plants, and leather] and phenomena [smudging, Ojibway speaking wolves, the implicit dream message]" (p. 45).

The role of the family, and particularly the influence of family life, is important to understanding the positive identity development of these Amerindian learners. These connections may also enlighten our understanding of the conflict experienced by Amerindian secondary school students when faced with the challenge of sorting out two cultural messages.

Reyhner (1992) describes the influence of culture and family life on the development of a strong positive identity for the child. Her position is that educators "... need to reinforce and build on the cultural training and messages that the child has previously received" (p.39). In this study, respondents emerged as individuals who had strong positive identities. This was evident through the transitions to secondary school and in the strategies respondents developed to cope with environments in which they were members of a minority group. The influence of family and extended family in the lives of these learners was also consistent with Reyhner's (1992) view in that this influence on the educational aspirations of these students did not appear to "conflict" with or "create resistance to school".

Crystal and Joan spoke of the role of traditional tribal values in the development of identity. The influence of family on the identity of these Amerindians is consistent with Sprinthall, Sprinthall, and Oja's (1994) emphasis that ethnic minorities have to "sift through two sets of cultural values and identity options" (p. 164): those of the family and those of their new school culture. The authors discussed the importance of allowing the adolescent from an ethnic minority

more time to sort out two sets of cultural messages. They viewed this as crucial to identity development and saw the system, rather than the individual, as deficient in providing resources to assist the adolescent in sorting out questions of dual identity. They discussed identity formation for the ethnic minority in terms of dualities:

... the teenager has to coordinate his or her own emerging identity while interacting with an environment of peers and adults that has increasingly potent influence. Leaving the relative safety of elementary school, the adolescent from an ethnically devalued background has fewer resources and a greater task to resolve... (p.165)

These dualities were apparent through the respondents' strategies to cope with their new environment.

Sprinthall, Sprinthall, and Oja (1994) note that ethnic minority teenagers must learn "to withstand the negative peer pressure and the negative influence of some community adults...[in striving to] reach more advanced levels of psychological development..." (p. 165). Sorting out the mixed messages was important to the successful retention of these Amerindian learners. Each found ways to cope with the pressures arising out of the conflicting value systems and messages they received during their period of transition into secondary school. The coping strategies they developed such as talking to others, making new friends, athletics, attending to their well being, and traditional practices enabled them to enter the "mainstream" of secondary life.

Despite the added pressures from Native peers, each of these respondents enlisted a coping strategy in order to survive in their new academic environment. Some of their strategies involved distancing themselves from Native peers. For example, Crystal, Joan, and Belinda talked about the contribution of sports to their successful retention; but the implication was that to survive they had to distance themselves from Native peers who were negative.

Hargreaves and Earl (1990) discussed adolescent identity formation in terms of three key constructs: peer-group membership, psycho-social crises, and relationship to society. Adolescents struggle to sort out their own roles and values during a period of conflict and inconsistency. For all seven respondents, going to secondary school involved a crucial period of transition which is consistent with Hargreaves and Earl's findings regarding psycho-social crises,

relationship to society and peer-group membership. Three of the respondents spoke of the culture shock of transition; while Naokwaan and Belinda described the influence of personal beliefs or shyness on their interactions with others.

Some of the comments made by the respondents were reminiscent of Brant's (1990) contention of the presence of a Native value and ethic. Joan and Amy, for example, described the scornful disapprobation they received from their Native peers for being successful at school. This brings to mind Brant's contention of the use of teasing, shaming or ridicule by Natives of each other sometimes used as a mechanism to promote group cohesiveness. Brant proposed that these actions were directed at ensuring that all behaviours remain within the confines of norms established as acceptable within the group (p. 537). In the case of Joan, Amy and Crystal, teasing or statements directed at ridiculing them were used by their Native peers although it was not apparent from the data if those efforts were successful.

In discussing her secondary school experience, Crystal described how she "knew the answer but never said anything." She also spoke about how she felt that teachers could learn to listen more -- a kind of learn to listen, listen to learn ideology. These statements were reminiscent of Brant's (1990) ethic of non-interference aimed at discouraging physical, verbal or psychological coercion. Crystal's comment about her grandmother wherein she states "She left it up to me to do...you figure it out as you go along" was also reminiscent of Brant's Native concept of time, wherein things are done when the time is right, as well as the ethic of non-interference.

In her study Deyhle (1989) found that "the most culturally secure group ... felt least as though school was irrelevant, expressed little "trouble" in school, and dropped out primarily because of pregnancy or work needs" (p. 50). In this study, Amy reported leaving school early because of an unexpected pregnancy and returned later to complete her secondary diploma. This is consistent with Deyhle's findings except that Amy did not believe she was "culturally secure." Instead, she described herself as someone who had had little experience with traditional Native culture and referred to herself as a person who is a "white Native like me". In contrast, although Crystal did experience trouble, it seemed to be primarily related to home.

Most respondents' strategies for coping with their new environment reflected a kind of traditional perspective. Crystal and Naokwaan's coping strategies were quite consistent with Deyhle's (1989) findings in that respect. They appeared to rely on traditional approaches like "the medicine wheel" [Naokwaan] or "practicing traditional things... to help me to succeed" [Crystal]. The other respondents seemed to rely upon less traditional approaches. Each applied his/her own "personal experience" and strength in finding measures to cope; a finding consistent with Cajete's (1994) notion of a spiritual and ecological education.

Stephen, Wesley, Joan, and Amy, described themselves as "non-traditional"; they were less familiar with the traditional practices of their group. While Belinda said she was "proud to be traditional," the findings suggest a distinction between those respondents whose positive identity included the presence of "traditional" experience and those whose positive identity did not. For example, respondents spoke of certain coping strategies which did not appear to be of a traditional nature. Joan immersed herself in sports and had few Native associations in the process; Belinda talked about "get[ting] mad at the work" and "get[ting] all that energy out" through sports; Crystal spoke of establishing "a lot of friendships with...mostly non-Native people" through sports. But when framed against Cajete's (1994) position that "...American Indians and other Indigenous groups used rituals, myth, customs, and life experience to integrate both the process and content of learning into the fabric of their social organizations" (p. 34), the suggestion that these Amerindian learners applied alternative traditional coping strategies seems less likely. Instead, it seems more plausible that their "life experience" included both the traditional and non-traditional and that, in an effort to "integrate both the process and content of learning," each subscribed to inner strengths afforded them through their personal life experiences and capabilities such as athletics or traditional practices.

Certain life experiences also emerged as significant in contributing to the academic success of these respondents. Three respondents discussed maturation in terms of its positive impact on their perception of schooling while two others described significant life experiences or events which were instrumental in their decision to persist in secondary school. These findings are



consistent with Cajete's (1994) notion of Pathway in that they illuminate the respondents' internal sense of self-direction or tenacity in sorting out their goals. Wesley, Crystal and Naokwaan expressed the belief in following a lifepath. This belief in following a lifepath on the part of some respondents is consistent with Cajete's own view of a pathway wherein the individual "...in every learning process...metaphorically travel[s] an internal, and many times external, landscape" (p.55).

Wilson (1990) investigated how cultural conflict between faculty and Sioux Indian students negatively influenced the academic performance of indigenous students. She found that a "lack of understanding of cultural conflict on the part of school personnel contributes to student failure" (p. 53). Although this finding is reminiscent of Crystal's critical incident with the principal, the findings of this study suggest that faculty may have played a significant role in the successful retention of these successful Amerindians.

Several positive aspects of academic life stood out in this study. All of the respondents discussed the benefits of learner-centred teachers and teaching approaches. Wesley and Naokwaan described how individual teachers accommodated their learning styles. This contributed to their level of enthusiasm and inspiration to learn. Thus, the findings illuminate the supporting role of the teacher in the academic lives of these Amerindians.

Some of the respondents also talked about having role models. Stephen, in particular, talked about peer incentive through peer pressure; while Joan discussed how she elected to subscribe to the positive relations with non-native peers ignoring the negative peer pressures and scorn from Native peers. Joan also talked about the positive influence of her sister as a role model as well. The implicit message was that their role models were their peers through peer pressure and not the role models more commonly thought of such as teachers, sports figures or well known members of the community. This underscores the potential influence of peers at school while it calls into question the assumption that older role models are crucial to success.

Respondents expressed a concern over relevancy in programming. Naokwaan talked about "backpack knowledge" as "not really learning;" while Crystal expressed apathy over the emphasis on the systemic accumulation of knowledge "as if they couldn't sleep at night because

they needed to find the answer." She suggested that there was too much emphasis on finding prescribed solutions to problems and not enough on letting the learners find their own solutions to or interpretations of problems. This point is reminiscent of Brant's (1990) ethic of non-interference; it is also indicative of the conflict she experienced between her belief in how content should be presented and how she actually experienced it.

Respondents expressed concern over the lack of Native content in the secondary curriculum. In describing his beliefs regarding Native content, Wesley stated "that it's not a separate part." Joan meanwhile felt that there was a need "to promote the Native" because of the loss of values. Four respondents talked about balancing traditional tribal values with those of other cultures; five of the respondents described an interest in having traditional tribal values and beliefs present in school programming. Wesley's beliefs in integration expressed through the story about the "sophisticated stick" or statements such as "white knowledge...[as] something that gets added" illustrates the potential connection to be made across cultures. In many cases, respondents eventually found their niche in the school by integrating the two cultures into a new reality; a sort of harmonious synthesis of two value systems. Cajete (1994) suggests that this phenomenon illuminates the use of "life experience [in this case, academic life experience] to integrate both the process and content of learning..." (p. 34).

Respondents expressed an interest in their Amerindian heritage and pride in being Amerindian. Their emotions were genuine and reflected a sense of loss in talking about their concern over loss of culture. Stephen, for example, talked about language loss as a problem for him because he could not continue learning it in high school. This finding is consistent with McDavid and Harari's (1968) finding that

language permits the exchange of ideas between one individual and another...facilitating the transmission of cultural ideas, beliefs, and values, over both time and space. As a cultural product...language plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of cultural traditions over time, and in the spread of culture spatially through cultural diffusion. (p. 158)

For Stephen, language loss may have indeed meant a loss of cultural information as well.

In Kouritzin's (1996) study on first language loss, words used by respondents associated to language loss included grief, regret, robbed and loss of soul (p. 1). She also found that older respondent feelings on language loss were more poignant and nostalgic than younger ones (p.27). In the case of this study Stephen described his inability to continue Native language courses as a "problem" for him.

Other respondents also commented on their feelings of loss and concern over their culture: Naokwaan described how "people throw away their elders into old age;" Joan described school as a place where "There's no Native in here. There's nothing;" Belinda suggested "There's not enough traditional values in our school;" Crystal argued, "I would like to change...the thing about the cultural differences." Each expression, although unique to each respondent, was consistent with the level of emotion and sense of loss expressed by participants in Kouritzin's study. These findings, though "poignant" and "nostalgic" in their own right, illuminate the respondents' belief in the integration of their cultural values into the mainstream. Although four respondents expressed a concern over their culture being at risk, Wesley observed that there were similarities in experience of Native and non-Native learner. He prescribed associating the two as an approach to integrating the two cultures. His reflective and insightful story about the computer as "a sophisticated stick" testifies to the capacity to integrate his experience with new information.

Three respondents described a form of communication which involved either the dream [Crystal], nature [Naokwaan], or self-talk to people long dead [Wesley and Crystal]. These beliefs are similar to Cajete's (1994) view of a world which is balanced between the spiritual and ecological; they are consistent with Cajete's suppositions regarding Amerindian spiritual and ecological foundations of education. Cajete described these foundations as including: "the environment, the Mythic, the Artistic/visionary, and the Affective/communal" (p. 37). In this study, Naokwaan's belief in communicating through nature is consistent with Cajete's contention regarding a reciprocal relationship with nature on the part of the person and community. Communicating through the dream or self-talk with the dead [Crystal and Wesley] is also consistent with Cajete's position on seeking the highest thought wherein the person strives to

think of their community, environment, and self richly (p.46). According to Cajete, this kind of thought "occurs in relationship to other people, plants, animals, natural elements and phenomena..." (p. 47).

The beliefs expressed by Wesley, Crystal and Naokwaan are similarly consistent with McPherson and Rabb's (1993) contention that a Native philosophy considers "a shared notion of cosmic harmony, emphasis on experiencing directly powers and visions, and a common view of the cycle of life and death" (p . 2). For Crystal and Wesley, experiencing directly powers and visions could be viewed as their belief in communicating with the dead through the dream or self-talk. For Naokwaan the notion of a cosmic harmony is implicit in his belief of communicating through nature as though he were interconnected with it. These findings are also reminiscent of Ermine's (1995) suggestion of a distinct aboriginal epistemology as they also reflect an attempt "...to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward [providing] a different incorporeal knowledge paradigm..." (p. 103). Crystal, Naokwaan, and Wesley could be viewed as seeking to understand their own realities and reaching harmony by internalizing their new environments and framing them within their own epistemological arrangement. These findings underscore the suggestion that traditional tribal values and beliefs may play a significant role in the epistemological and academic experience of the Amerindian.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings and interpretation of the study. The role of the family and extended family members, the pressures of adolescent identity formation during a critical period of transition, the development of individualized coping strategies, the supporting role of faculty, the concern over culturally relevant programming, and traditional tribal values and beliefs were constructs which emerged as an integral part of these respondents' secondary school experience and significant in understanding their successful retention in secondary school. The implications of these findings for the educator, administrator, family member, student, and scholastic researcher are discussed below.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Despite recent signs of improvement in the treatment of Native children by educational systems (Kirkness, 1992, Deyhle and Swisher, 1997), Native students continue to exhibit poor attendance and rates of attrition from secondary school (Leary & Stiegelbauer, 1985; Deyhle, 1989). Methodological and conceptual perspectives in research on low retention rate have been problematic. However, researchers have suggested that the presence of traditional tribal values in the home has a significant impact on Native student success in school (Rindone, 1988; Deyhle, 1989; Katt, 1995). This study described the relationship between traditional tribal values and beliefs and secondary school retention from the perspective of recent Amerindian secondary school graduates. The study was qualitative with an emergent design (Patton, 1990). A snowball sample (Li, 1981) of seven recent Amerindian secondary school graduates responded to the interview guide (Patton, 1990). Constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was the method of data analysis. The findings, although non-generalizable, may be transferable.

The findings of the study suggest the following factors were significant to the successful secondary school retention of these Amerindian students: family life, transitions, strategies for coping, life experiences, academic experiences, relevancy in programming, and traditional tribal values and beliefs. The role of the family and extended family members emerged as important to understanding the identity and success of these Amerindian students. Respondents developed coping strategies to ease the pressures of adolescent identity formation during a crucial period of transition. Coping sometimes involved distancing themselves from negative Native peer pressure in order to succeed. The supporting role of teachers through learner-centred approaches was also found to be related to success in school for these respondents. Each developed a positive relationship with at least one teacher. Concern was expressed by respondents regarding programming, particularly, the need for culturally relevant programming and approaches to problem solving which respect the ethic of non-interference (Brant, 1990). Interwoven

throughout the themes were implicit and explicit references to traditional tribal values and beliefs. Traditional tribal values and beliefs, then, emerged as a significant part of the secondary school experience for these respondents and important to understanding the successful retention of these Amerindian students in secondary school.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Previous studies into retention have assumed a deficit or cultural discontinuity perspective (Reyhner, 1992; Wilson, 1992; Ledlow, 1992). This study was a departure from them in that it explored the lived experience of seven Amerindian secondary school graduates concerning their perceptions of the relationship between traditional tribal values and beliefs and secondary school retention.

Consistent with Rindone's (1988) hypothesis that "the family as measured through the stability of traditional values, is the key to the academic success of ... high achieving Navajos (p. 17)," the influence of the family and extended family members on the successful retention of these Amerindians did not appear to conflict with the purpose of school. Instead, family members were supportive and influential in the academic aspirations of these Amerindian students. The influence of family life, was also important to understanding the positive identity development of these Amerindian learners and their successful secondary school retention. Their identity formation during transition to secondary school involved the negotiation and integration of two sets of cultural messages and value systems, home and school, into one. Respondents' previous family and life experiences contributed to the development of strong positive identities which empowered them to harmonize and balance two cultures.

Respondents had developed positive relations with a least one teacher. These positive relations compensated for other experiences where content was emphasized. Naokwaan described his teacher's influence on his performance in class through inspirational lesson plan implementation; while Wesley described how technology could be related to Amerindian experiences. Both examples illustrate how connections can be drawn between the experiences of the Amerindian student and new information (content) when presented through a learner-centred

approach. Thus, a positive rapport between teacher and student and holistic or learner-centred teaching methods appear to have contributed to the success of some of these Amerindian students.

Respondents described negative peer pressure from Aboriginal peers. Some of the respondents in this study noted how their interactions with non-natives took time to develop during the transition period to secondary school. For several, relations with non-Native peers contributed to secondary school retention. It is important for schools and aboriginal organizations to provide support for Native students to stay in school, to encourage Native students to see retention as positive rather than as “betrayal” of the peer group.

Respondents’ Amerindian worldview was interwoven with their secondary school experience. Epistemology was an intricate part of the fabric of the Native learning experience for Naokwaan, Crystal, and Wesley. The study illuminated connections between respondents’ Aboriginal worldview and their constructions of personal meaning in their secondary school experiences and success. Crystal, Wesley, and Naokwaan spoke of their belief in following a lifepath. They also spoke of how they communicated with their environment either through the dream or through nature. Naokwaan also related new material in science to “Indian thinking” or “philosophy” while Wesley suggested “...try and relate what you’re learning to what you know of your traditional way’s.” Crystal actually sought and felt she received career advice or direction from her deceased grandmother through a dream. Each of these respondents’ view of their world was framed within an Aboriginal Epistemology.

In articulating Pan-Indian value platforms, Amerindian cultural values and beliefs might be viewed as virtual wellsprings for programming content. Stephen said the inclusion of culturally relevant programming might provide “extra initiative” for the Amerindian student; Wesley and Naokwaan spoke of the value in other cultural views and prescribed integrating new information and meaning with their traditional values and beliefs. Joan, Belinda, and Crystal expressed concern over the exclusion of culturally relevant materials in programming. Concerns over content relevancy suggest that these Amerindian learners may have benefited from culturally

relevant programming were it available to them. Educators, concerned with the successful retention of Amerindian secondary school students, might well consider the nature of integration strategies - especially strategies used to incorporate the value systems of each ethnic group - into the planning and implementation of both curriculum and programming. Yet Stephen, Wesley and Naokwaan believed that cross-cultural balance would be a positive factor in Aboriginal students' successful secondary school retention, that it would enhance Aboriginal students' understanding of their own culture and tribal values. The overall implication was that a balance and integration of cultures would benefit the learner. Without further research directed at determining the extent of cultural inclusion or omission, both the identity and the self-esteem of our Amerindian learners might well be at risk.

The limitations of the study outlined in chapter one suggest that this study provides a limited view of the relationship between traditional tribal values and beliefs and secondary school retention based upon the perceptions of seven Amerindian secondary school graduates. A greater depth of understanding the retention problem for the Amerindian secondary school student might be achieved through further qualitative research designed to explore and appreciate the lived experience of Amerindian secondary school students and their cultural identities.

### **Recommendations**

Native families, communities, organizations and school systems have responsibilities in promoting the successful retention of Amerindian students in secondary schools. It is critical that these groups work together to develop curricula, support strategies and networks to promote academic success and an appreciation of Native heritage, culture, values and beliefs. Such collaboration may take a variety of forms. It is recommended that:

1. Schools and school systems include native representation on parent councils in communities where there are Native populations;
2. Establish committees whose members include stakeholder groups to develop culturally relevant programming;



3. Develop transition programs which help Native students to bridge the gap between the cultures of home and school;
4. School Boards establish professional development programs for elementary and secondary teachers on cross-cultural education and learner-centred approaches which recognize and respect a variety of learning styles.

It is also recommended that Native families, communities, and organizations:

5. Work with families and extended families on developing positive strategies to promote the academic success of their children;
6. Collaborate in the development of information programs for families and communities;
7. Develop programs which introduce and/or reinforce for students Amerindian philosophy and tribal values and instill pride in their heritage;
8. Establish mentoring, or big brother/big sister networks in which children and adolescents are paired with academically successful Aboriginal role models.

Further research is needed into the role of family and extended family on positive identity development and successful retention of Native students in secondary schools. As well, research should be conducted on the nature of transitions between elementary and secondary school, particularly when the transition involves bridging two cultures. Such research would inform stakeholders (home, community, native organizations and school systems) of the coping strategies and support systems which work. It is important that research on the relationship between traditional tribal values and beliefs and successful retention be continued to further illuminate the connections. It is recommended, therefore, that :

9. Longitudinal and exploratory ethnographic and phenomenological studies be undertaken to explore and describe the factors and processes which contribute to Native students' retention; and that

10. Such studies be conceptualized from a positive rather than a deficit model with respondents who have achieved successfully the negotiation of two cultures and academic success.

Future qualitative studies may provide direction to our intervention and support strategies for enhancing the successful retention of the Amerindian learner while clarifying our understanding of the problem.

Without further research into factors influencing Amerindian student secondary school retention, our knowledge of the situation remains limited. Some of the findings of this study may prove to generate a more speedy resolution to the retention situation for Natives given further exploration. Factors which may drive future investigation into successful Amerindian student retention include adolescent identity development, interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, the nature of culturally relevant programming, and the challenges of transition including effective strategies for coping.

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## **Appendix I: Cover Letter**

**Dear Participant:**

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University, where I am engaging in research into the relationship between Native Student Traditional Tribal Values and successful secondary school retention. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Mary Clare Courtland.

At present, although there is a lot of information available on why students drop-out, there is little research available on the successful retention of Native secondary school students. There is a need for research into the culturally based value systems of Amerindian students and how these might affect their academic success. This research might help educators by contributing to the development of culturally relevant curriculum and materials.

I would like to interview Native students who have successfully completed secondary school/Ontario Academic Credit Competency (O.A.C.) programming and are enrolled in post secondary college or university institutions.

The interview would take approximately 60 minutes and would focus on the traditional tribal values held by the participant, the type of curricula in which he/she was most successful, and factors which contributed to native student success and retention. There also may be some participants that I will contact a second time. I ask your permission to include you as a voluntary participant in this study.

If you give your consent, it is important that you understand the following:

- There are no risks to you in participating in the study.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- Your anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- In accordance with the Lakehead University Research Integrity Policy, I will store the data securely in my home for seven years.

The study will be available in the Faculty of Education Library at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. James Turner, at (807) 625-9540 or Dr. Mary Clare Courtland, Chair of Graduate Studies in Education at (807) 343-8706.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

James W. Turner  
B.A., B. Ed.  
Graduate student  
Lakehead University

## Appendix II: Consent Form

Should I give my permission to participate, I understand the following:

- 1.1 I have read the letter informing me of the research study being conducted by Mr. James Turner.
- 1.2 I understand that this research is being conducted under the supervision of a thesis committee and is governed by the guidelines and procedures for ethical conduct in research on human subjects as set out by Lakehead University, in Thunder Bay.
- 1.3 I am aware that there are no risks to myself and that my participation is voluntary.
- 1.4 I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.
- 1.5 My anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.
- 1.6 I understand that interviews and other forms of data will be collected and transcribed and will be stored for seven years by the researcher.

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree/do not agree (circle one) to participate in the study.  
(print name)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix III: Interview Guide

#### Native Student Traditional Tribal Values and Secondary School Retention

Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_ Native Language spoken \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduation year \_\_\_\_\_ Admission year (post Secondary) \_\_\_\_\_  
Home community \_\_\_\_\_ Male/Female (circle one)  
Location of post secondary institution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ O.A.C. \_\_\_\_ grade 12 \_\_\_\_\_ other (specify)  
Native Group affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_ Clan: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### 1. Secondary School Years

- > What was the location of the secondary school?
- > What were your first impressions of secondary school?
  - P: Think back to when you first started grade nine.
- > Describe your peer group relations?
  - P: How were your interactions with others at school?
- > Describe your memories of a day at school?
- > Discuss memories of a class that stood out?
- > What were your favourite courses?
  - P: what made them so good?
- > Discuss courses where you felt you were most successful?
  - P: what made them successful?
- \* Seek to clarify their role academically:
  - when did they succeed?
  - At what did they succeed the most?
  - when were they proud of themselves?
  - how did they cope?
  - who impacted positively upon them/influences?
  - what bothered them/concerns about schooling?

#### 2. Traditional Tribal Values

- > Talk about your Traditional Tribal Values and Beliefs?
  - P: About your customs, practices and teachings?
- > Talk about your childhood?
- > What was your community life like?
  - Alt: Describe your community?
  - P: What do people do there?
  - P: What goes on there?
- > Talk about your relationship with your family/grandparents and elders.
- \* Seek to identify customs, practices, and beliefs related to their native heritage and clan or tribal group:
  - P: what is the guiding force behind what they do?
  - P: is there a code of conduct in your community?
    - eg. non-interference, reciprocity with nature, no conflict, etc.



- P: what do their parents/grandparents value in life?
- P: what are the norms of their tribal group?

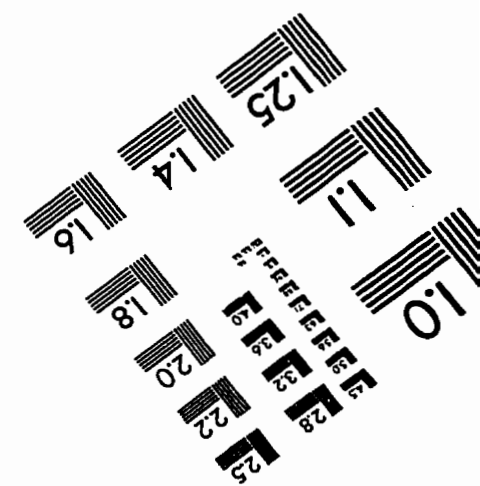
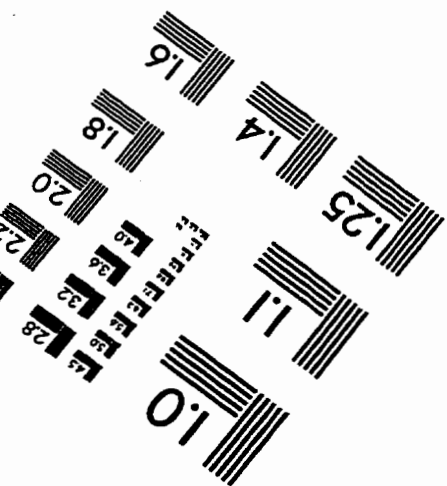
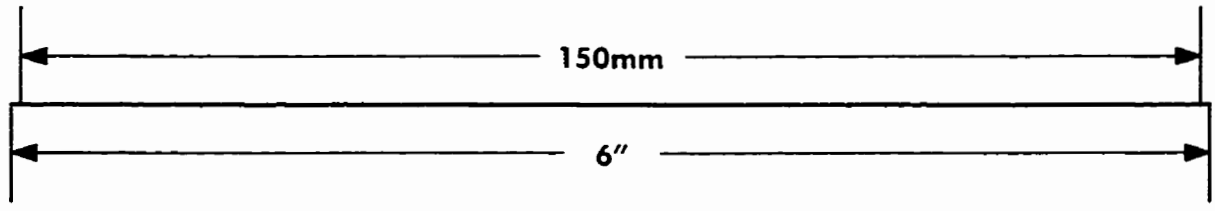
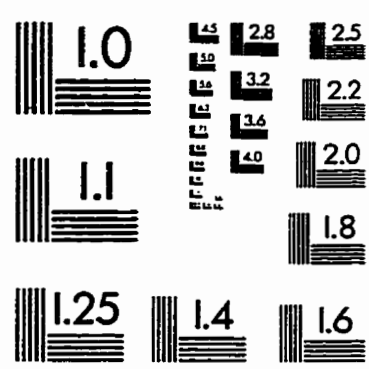
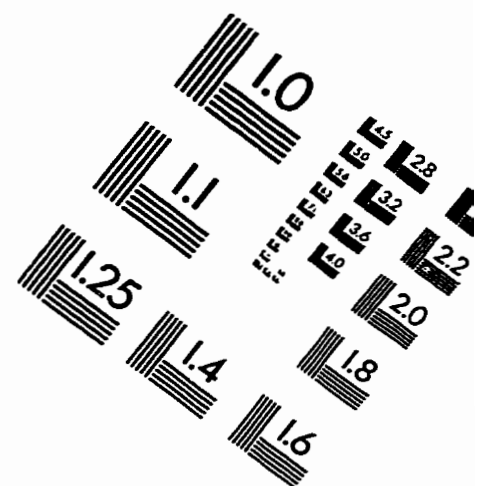
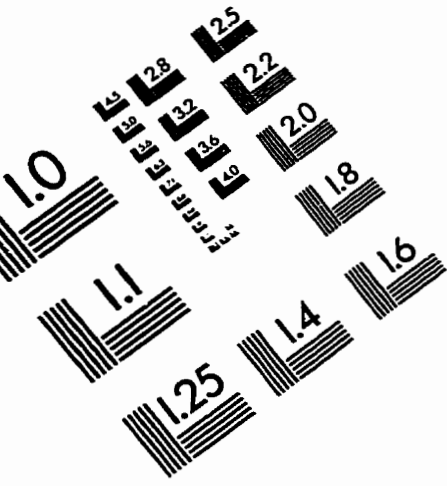
### 3. Curricula and Instruction

- > Discuss concerns about your academic program
- > If you were the principal, what would you change?
  - P: What is it about "a" that makes you want to change it?
- > Describe yourself as a learner
  - P: What was successful for you?
  - P: Are you a reader, talker, studious..?
- > What advice would you give to a new secondary student?
- > What advice would you give to a native secondary student?
- > What do you think about native student success in school?
  - P: How do feel about native student success?
- \* Seek to explore their academic life with them:
  - Who were their supports?
    - P: If they had a bad day at school, who would they go to?
  - What do they think of secondary school years?
  - What have they gained from their secondary school experience?

### 4. Successful Retention

- > What were some of your strategies used to cope in overcoming problem areas?
- > What does success in school mean to you?
  - Why did they succeed?
  - When did they realize they were going to succeed?
- > What were some of your strategies for success?
- > If you were going to write a book on strategies for success in secondary school, what would you say?
- > Retention has been identified as a problem for native students. What do you see as some of the greatest problems they have to overcome?
  - Alt: Retention = Dropping out = Absenteeism
- > Discuss any relationship that you see between traditional tribal values and beliefs and secondary school?

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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