Two Worlds of Knowing: Examining the use of Aboriginal Ways of Knowing in the High School Context

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Abstract

Aboriginal students who walk the hallways in British Columbia’s schools may wonder what the purpose of a western education is. These students walk in two worlds of knowing with one foot heavily submerged in a Eurocentric Western way of knowing in school, and the other, an Aboriginal way of knowing at home. These unique students represent a large body of learners who leave school and are “push-outs” in our Eurocentric and bureaucratic education system. The research presented in this paper examines the use of Aboriginal ways of knowing incorporated in an Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) funded by School District 72 in Campbell River, British Columbia.

The purpose of the ASB was to support at-risk Aboriginal students academically and emotionally while attending Carihi Secondary School. The researcher presents eight case studies from a variety of students that included both Aboriginal males and females, ranging from Grades 9-12. 30 minute semi-structured interviews were facilitated by the researcher. Data was coded for themes, links and patterns from each. The data was analyzed to address how the ASB and the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing affected Aboriginal student-participants’ perceived academic and emotional experiences.
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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

Aboriginal students who walk the hallways in British Columbia’s schools may wonder what the purpose of a western education is. These students walk in two worlds of knowing with one foot heavily submersed in a Eurocentric Western way of knowing in school, and the other, an Aboriginal way of knowing at home. These unique students represent a large body of learners who leave school without graduating (Battiste, 1998; Cassidy & Marsden, 2009; Curwen Doige, 2003; MacIver, 2012; Morin, 2004; Stairs, 1994). Fine and Page (1991) suggest these types of students are “push-outs” in an education system that is Eurocentric and bureaucratic. Aboriginal students in BC’s school system struggle to find meaning in the current education model which promotes Western ways of knowing, as the system fails to connect with the lives of these Aboriginal learners (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Aboriginal students are unique and the focus of learning in school does not necessarily meet their emotional and spiritual needs (Lee, 2007; Battiste, 2009; CCL, 2007). Curwen Doige (2003) contends Western ways of knowing are “blind to the spirituality that infuses or underlies Aboriginal epistemology” (p. 144-145) and that Aboriginal students are thus marginalized by Western pedagogy and curriculum. As a result, low engagement and success rates of Aboriginal students affect many school districts province wide (BC Ministry of Education, 2012). New approaches to learning are needed to foster “two ways of knowing” in school (CCL, 2009). Halbert and Kaser (2008) both suggest a “weaving” of worlds. As such, the goal of this study was to discover how relationship building through the incorporation of “Aboriginal ways of knowing” (Williams, 2008) could lead to engaging Aboriginal students, and reduce the number of “push-outs” in BC schools.
The purpose of this action research was to investigate how incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing would impact the experience of at-risk Aboriginal students. This was carried out in a class called the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB), which was primarily created to re-engage these at-risk Aboriginal students to ensure greater success in school. Developing meaningful relationships was at the core of this process because the researcher quickly understood from the literature and his experience that trusting relationships were essential before academic goals could be achieved (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Lavallee, 2009; Stairs, 1994).

To create and build upon positive relationships with these students, the researcher looked to incorporate Aboriginal worldviews to establish a sense of community within the ASB facilitated at Carihi Secondary School in Campbell River, British Columbia. It was the goal of the researcher to integrate traditions such as sharing circles, sacred circles, preparing authentic Aboriginal meals such as bannock bread, as well as traditionally preparing and smoking salmon, drumming and drum making, nature walks, hosting community Elders, visiting the Campbell River Big House, storytelling, discussing traditional virtues, and of course – humour. These Aboriginal ways of knowing were used to positively develop relationships with at-risk Aboriginal students. The researcher’s main goal in facilitating the ASB was to establish a safe and trusting classroom community within the larger context of the high school. This was important because many Aboriginal students lack a sense of community in school (Curwen Doige, 2003). A sense of belonging was paramount for them to forge ahead in in their academic goals and coursework required for graduation (Lavallee, 2009; MacIver, 2012).

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) bolsters a consensus for all Aboriginal educators to infuse these ways of knowing in their teaching practices, which inevitably benefits all learners. It is by these learning principles that Aboriginal student learners will progress in
their cultural understanding, and these principles should be integrated into the teaching strategies of BC educators (FPPL, 2013). For example, some of the principles delineate how educators can foster the success of Aboriginal students: learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational; learning supports the well-being of family, self, community, the land, the spirit, and ancestors; learning recognizes the consequences of one’s actions; learning involves generational roles and responsibilities; learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge, learning is embedded in memory, history, and story; learning involves patience and time; learning requires the exploration of one’s identity; learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission (FPPL, 2013).

**Justification and Historical Context**

According to the BC Ministry of Education’s Aboriginal Report (2012), nearly 65,000 students in BC were reported to be Aboriginal. This large body of students are vulnerable to the alarmingly high “push-out” rates in the province. The percentage of Aboriginal students attaining BC certificates of graduation, or Dogwood Diplomas, was approximately 48% compared to 69% of non-Aboriginal students (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 30). These statistics suggest that Aboriginal students are leaving school in relatively high numbers because the current education model is not meeting their unique needs (Battiste, 2005; CCL, 2007; Cassidy & Marsden, 2009; Hampton & Roy, 2002; Lavallee, 2009; Lee, 2007), likely because Aboriginal learning is holistic and spiritual in nature (Curwen Doige, 2003).

Scathing historical practices affect today’s Aboriginal communities and have largely influenced today’s Aboriginal students. Factors relating to high “push-out” rates may be originally tied to the genesis of legislation enacted in 1876 by the Canadian government to assimilate Aboriginal people into a Eurocentric society. The Canadian government enacted a
coercive national education program designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society through residential schools (Battiste & McLean, 2005; Royal Commission, 1996).

Barnes et al. (2007) claim “Aboriginal children who attended residential schools were leaving culturally rich societies where family was central, complex religious beliefs were the basis for numerous ceremonies, and knowledge was passed from one generation to the next” (p. 19). The Canadian government “adopted a policy of assimilation” (Royal Commission, 1996, para. 1), which reshaped the future of thousands of Aboriginal children across Canada because they were removed from their homes and communities and put in the care of culturally insensitive strangers (Royal Commission, 1996).

One acclaimed researcher in this area of study, Battiste (1998), summarizes the historical implications factoring into today’s Aboriginal “push-outs”:

Education has not been benign or beneficial for Aboriginal peoples. Rather, through ill-conceived federal government policies Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to a combination of unquestionably powerful but profoundly debilitating forces of assimilation and colonization. Through various systems of boarding schools and educational institutions, the Aboriginal world views and the people who held them were attacked. Although instructed by Catholic and Protestant clerics in almost all of the boarding schools, Aboriginal children were subjected to persistent violence, powerlessness, exploitation, and cultural imperialism, only to become impoverished and devastated in the cognitive aftermath of schooling (p. 19).

Aboriginal children who were coerced to attend residential schools, left culturally rich societies, where family and spiritual traditions were central to their way of life (Barnes et al., 2007). Knowledge was passed down from generation to generation through story, song, dance,
and drum. The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) maintains there is a holistic approach to Aboriginal ways of learning, underpinning the notion that “knowledge is not classified into hierarchical competencies or disciplinary specializations,” but all knowledge is “related by virtue of their shared origins (with the Creator)” (p. 5). Aboriginal ways of knowing include the community, natural environment, language, and shared spiritual experiences in the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings (CCL, 2007, p.6).

The maltreatment of Aboriginal students in residential schools stifled the growth of these people because they were victims of cultural genocide, physically and sexually abused, and ultimately transmitted negative attitudes of school to their parents, siblings, spouses, children, and grandchildren (Barnes et al., 2007). The Royal Commission (1996) reports that to re-socialize Aboriginal people from “saved to civilized” was violent insofar as the Canadian government aimed to “kill the Indian in the child” by severing the artery of culture that ran between generations (para. 1-2).

Battiste (1998) additionally points out that Aboriginal people continue to suffer from the effect of colonization and imperialism. Largely relational people, Aboriginals are mainly influenced by their families. Aboriginal students are often reminded of the horrors that inculcated the lifestyle of their families who suffered residential school atrocities. Today, Aboriginal students’ perspectives have been influenced by their parents and grandparents who were taught to distrust Western education from residential schools. Due to the negative impact of residential schools, a positive paradigm towards school for today’s Aboriginal students is still hampered by history (Battiste, 2005).

There is little doubt that the histories of former Aboriginal students who “met their deaths” or found “escape in death itself” (Royal Commission, 1996, para. 26), directly or
indirectly impacted, the attitudes of Aboriginal students walking the hallways in BC schools today. As such, the historical implications largely affect the attitudes of Aboriginal students in schools today. A cultural rift was created by the Indian Act and is largely responsible for the factors that result in high “push-out” rates.

The historical implications of residential schools will have generational effects for years to come. The discussion of them in this paper is brief, but the researcher acknowledges their impact and that this topic is grander than the scope of this study. The researcher discovered the resilience of Aboriginal people and their spirit of good will towards others.

Relationships are fundamental to the Aboriginal way of life. Therefore the researcher prioritized relationship building with the Aboriginal students that attended the ASB, to garner a sense of community and forge relationships. Gaining the Aboriginal students’ trust was essential before encouraging the completion of academic coursework. Their way of living and spirituality needed to be understood and respected if learning and productivity was to occur in the classroom (Curwen Doige, 2003). The researcher and his First Nations Educational Assistant have lived this notion since the inception of the ASB in 2010.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question driving the focus of this paper was: How does the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing contribute to Aboriginal students’ academic and emotional success in school? In order to unpack the answer to the proposed question, the researcher read applicable literature, consulted the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, discussed ideas with Aboriginal Educational Assistants, Aboriginal Support Workers, Aboriginal teachers, cohort members, and informally discussed topics with Vancouver Island University professors in how to create and sustain meaningful relationships with Aboriginal students.
The researcher posited that by incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing, these students would be more engaged emotionally and academically in school. On an emotional level, the researcher believed these students would have a stronger sense of belonging in school, and thus, once they were emotionally involved, they would begin to develop educational goals and succeed in the completion of the Ministry’s graduation requirements.

**Definition of Terms**

It is important to note the key definitions from the research question, and how they develop context for the action research. The operational definition for “Aboriginal ways of knowing” (Williams, 2008) is, for this study, inclusive of sharing circles, sacred circles, preparing authentic Aboriginal meals such as bannock bread, as well as traditionally preparing and smoking salmon, drumming and drum making, nature walks, hosting community Elders, visiting the Campbell River Big House, storytelling, and discussing traditional virtues. Further, Aboriginal knowledge is understood to be “personal, oral, experiential, holistic and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language” and is discovered when “an individual places himself or herself within and outside of this knowledge” (Cassidy, 2009, p. 3).

*Aboriginal students* for the purpose of this study refer to the Canadian Council of Learning (2007) definition of people who are identified as having First Nations (status or non-status), Metis, or Inuit ancestry (CCL, 2007) and who are enrolled in Carihi Secondary School.

*Emotional success* refers to the degree to which an Aboriginal student in the support block feels they are connected, safe, and, supported within the school community, as self-reported by students through personal interviews.

*Academic success* refers to the degree to which an Aboriginal student has completed the required coursework mandated by the Ministry of Education in the Province of British Columbia.
in order to receive a Dogwood Diploma, or graduating certificate, as self-reported through the personal interviews.

The Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) was funded by School District 72 to assist Aboriginal students who were considered at-risk and require support in order to achieve the graduation requirements mandated from the Ministry of Education in the Province of British Columbia.

*Push-outs* in relation to this study was a term developed by Fine and Page (1991) arguing that many factors prevent and discourage groups of students from remaining on-track in completing their education. Whether through a lack of resources, socio-economic status, lack of engagement, an unwelcoming school or home environment, lack of parenting, expulsions, criminal activity, lack of academic mentoring, or systemic racism or inequality within school, many factors affect the success of these disadvantaged students.

**Brief Overview of Study**

The action research conducted took place in Campbell River, British Columbia at an inner-city school called Carihi Secondary School. The school supports a rich culture of acceptance and tolerance of diversity. The school’s student population was approximately 900 students when this study was done with students in Grades 9-12. Just under one-quarter of the students at Carihi Secondary self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry. Carihi Secondary is a dual track French Immersion school with thriving programs created to engage a variety of learners as well hosted many extra-curricular activities and clubs.

School District 72 funded the creation of the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) to care for at-risk Aboriginal students in their academic achievement and to foster an emotional connection to learning. The criteria used to guide which Aboriginal students were selected and encouraged
to attend was based on missing graduation requirements (lacking required total courses), parental/student request to transfer into the block, or referral from counsellors, teachers, or administrators.

The students who attended the ASB ranged from Grades 9-12. Enrolment in the blocks differed each semester, but averaged approximately 10-15 students. Assisting the researcher was a First Nations Educational Assistant. She provided an awareness of culture and language perspectives for the students and researcher, as well as assisting students in their studies and academic goals. Her companionship and effort were invaluable in helping to facilitate the activities and the learning that took place.

The researcher’s role as an Aboriginal Support Teacher included responsibilities inside and outside the ASB. Ensuring Aboriginal students were on-track to graduate, welcoming new Aboriginal students to the school, and facilitating a supportive learning environment in the ASB were some of the researcher’s main responsibilities. Carihi Secondary ran a semester timetable, where the Principal of Aboriginal Education gave the researcher one seventy-five minute ASB each semester—making a total of two during the regular school year

The methodological approach of this research paper was based on 30 minute long semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal student-participants who consented to participate in the study. Allowing the students to speak about their experiences was most appropriate, considering Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal ways knowing, which emphasize oral sharing and storytelling (Toulouse, 2011). In this paper, each student is presented as a separate case study, wherein the researcher discovered a new body of knowledge from the interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Eight interviews were conducted with Aboriginal students who consented and volunteered their time to be interviewed. This included six females and two males. They ranged
from Grades 9-12. The questions were created beforehand to provide a framework of discussion, inclusive of warm-up questions and questions that directly related to the focus of the research. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed data was redistributed to the Aboriginal participants for final approval, and then analyzed for overarching themes, links and patterns.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Aboriginal Knowledge in a Western Education Model

The Canadian education system is failing its Aboriginal students as evidenced by significant numbers not completing school (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Cassidy & Marsden, 2009; Curwen Doige, 2003; MacIver, 2012). A Western Eurocentric way of knowing dominates the current education system in BC. This Eurocentric way of learning marginalizes Aboriginal students in the public school system (Curwen Doige, 2003).

Eurocentric learning asserts that only Europeans can progress forward and that Aboriginal people are “frozen in time, guided by knowledge systems that reinforce the past” and do not “progress” (Blaut, 1993). Students are disenfranchised through education based on a non-Aboriginal way of thinking and learning, and it has existed for hundreds of years (Curwen Doige, 2001).

Battiste (2002) contends that Western ways of knowing originated from ancient Greco-Roman understanding. From this, there has been a tendency throughout history to Europeanize a global scientific understanding without the regard of other cultures. It is this Eurocentric view that has led to Aboriginal knowledge and culture to be viewed as “backward” and as passive recipients of European knowledge (Battiste, 2002, p. 4). The colonizing by dominant nations in the world has legitimized their ways of learning through their power structures (Aikenhead, 2002; Ogawa, 1995).

Part of the underlying problem is Western knowledge and curricula were constructed without spirituality. Forbes, (1979) an Aboriginal American educator, firmly believes that “knowledge without the spiritual core is a very dangerous thing” (p. 11). Influencing Aboriginal students’ morals and values allows them to “live a life of the utmost spiritual quality” (p. 11),
which in turn, also allows them to understand how they are connected to other human beings and nature (Forbes, 1979). Curwen Doige (2003) echoes Forbes’ points in that Aboriginal education and spirituality are closely linked and are at the “heart of education for Aboriginal students” (p. 6).

Battiste and Henderson (2009) claim a need for the decolonization of Western education and for reform to incorporate the “collective genius” of humanity’s Aboriginal people. Western knowledge has been represented as the “authority” for learning (p. 17). Westernized schools have shut out, ignored, and neglected Aboriginal knowledge because it has been viewed as barbaric and inferior (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). However, a push to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing in an attempt to reconcile both Aboriginal knowledge with Western knowledge, to naturalize a “create a trans-systemic synthesis” in education, is long overdue, urgent and necessary (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 18). Aboriginal ways of knowing renews an understanding of the teachings to live well within the biological constraints of surrounding life and its processes.

Large gaps exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The high “push-out” rates in schools today, particularly regarding Aboriginal students should be among this country’s highest social priorities and responsibilities (Richards, Hove & Afolabi, 2008). Conclusive data suggests that school districts through their superintendents, principals and teachers, are the key in undertaking transformative change in schools (Richards, Hove & Afolabi, 2008). Further, effective leadership directly affects the success of educational initiatives spearheaded to bring change (Richards, Hove & Afolabi, 2008). Educational leaders are just beginning to realize observations made decades ago: “the school is the representation of lived experience, material
artifacts, and practice forged with unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish in a given society” (Giroux, 1988, p. 116).

Aboriginal students’ distinct lack of enthusiasm in school relates to future reliance on social assistance, individuals becoming entangled in the justice system, and the reduction in quality of life (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005; Farrington, 2000). There is no one clear reason why Aboriginal students are falling behind.

Though the effects of residential schools, low socio-economic factors and racism contribute, reasons may reside in a lack of belonging. Aboriginal students feel like strangers in school (Gallagher-Hayashi, 2004). To foster a welcoming place, Gallagher-Hayashi (2004) suggests practicing Aboriginal culture and integrating it with non-Aboriginal culture to instill pride and acceptance, while helping Aboriginal students feel a part of the greater school community. Toulouse (2011) echoes the same notion that “love” is needed in schools, as it measures a person’s attitude and behaviour towards others. Additionally, it measures their ability to be kind and grateful in the “wonder of all of Creation” (p. 31).

Morin (2004) points out an Aboriginal voice “must be expressed at every level of research and in every corner of the system” (p. 204). Data collected by the Ministry of Education suggests that Aboriginal student populations are on the rise, while Aboriginal students’ success is not increasing in any significant manner (Morin, 2004). Often, Aboriginal students find curriculum inaccessible and culturally irrelevant.

Cassidy and Marsden (2009) address this issue because blending the two ways of knowing has not worked well in the past to support the learner and has created a rift between what the Aboriginal learner understands and what is being taught. A system which “weaves”
ways of knowing to build upon the past to strengthen the future is a judicious and thoughtful way forward (Halbert & Kaser, 2013).

According to Halbert and Kaser (2013), educators today are bombarded by “seemingly incompatible ideas” concerning the education system’s direction and the best modes of reform (p. 13). Weaving three ways of knowing demonstrative of the “wise, strong, and new ways,” may foster a transformation of the education system. The three ways promote higher quality and equity among learners and provide new ways of learning for students that are born into an increasingly sophisticated world. The upshot of incorporating Aboriginal knowledge, according to Snively and Williams (2006), is it contributes to intellectual growth, facilitates informed decisions, provides foundations, and prepares Aboriginal students for employment in an increasingly technological society. Weaving the three ways may be a way to bring significant change to the current system.

Halbert and Kaser (2013) further discuss that their three ways may ultimately guide adolescent learners and create valuable opportunities for growth into adulthood. To foster the three ways, educators should be encouraged to build upon their strong practices, explore new possibilities in teaching, and develop inquiry for deeper learning in schools. It is important that educational leaders find and connect with courageous educators as it is one of the most important factors in bringing powerful, long-lasting change. Through collaboration, educators who embrace the “let’s do it, the time is now spirit,” will help to drive systems change (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 74).

Archibald (2008) points out that our everyday world is a diverse ecological system. It is the diversity within the system that is essential for its sustainability. Similarly, in public schools, incorporating Aboriginal worldviews and ways of knowing are crucial in educating the heart and
building experiential, relational, and holistic learning within Aboriginal students. Aboriginal ways of knowing foster a respectful and reverent learning atmosphere, which in turn embrace principles that maintain respectful relationships acknowledging that people matter, and that talking and listening are crucial when working with others (Archibald, 2008). Understanding the importance of Aboriginal knowledge and the values they embody are transformative. Cassidy and Marsden (2009) posit from their research that it is time for change in public education:

It is time to offer alternate approaches currently embraced by the public school system. Rather than expecting First Nations’ students to adapt to the dominant educational culture, we argue that school should provide the means for Aboriginal students to learn through hands-on engagement in their communities, through activities that are meaningful, through cultivating their natural talents and predispositions over time, through a holistic system that responds in balance to students’ emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental needs (p. 7).

Incorporating Aboriginal Ways of Knowing

Battiste (2002), a leading researcher and educator, encapsulates Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing, and their significance in the lives of Aboriginal peoples:

As diverse as Indigenous peoples are in Canada and beyond, so also are their ways of knowing and learning. Their stories of Creation and their psychological connectedness to their cosmology play a determining role in how Indigenous peoples envision themselves in relation to each other and to everything else. Knowledge is not secular. It is a process derived from creation, and as such, it has a sacred purpose. It is inherent in and connected to all of nature, to its creatures, and to human existence. Learning is viewed as a life-long responsibility that people assume to understand the world around them and to animate
their personal abilities. Knowledge teaches people how to be responsible for their own lives, develops their sense of relationship to others, and helps them model competent and respectful behaviour. Traditions, ceremonies, and daily observations are all integral parts of the learning process (p. 14).

Toulouse (2011) discusses that it is “holism” which should be incorporated in education (p. 10). The Holistic Wheel represents the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of being human and may help in guiding Aboriginal learners. In using a holistic approach, Aboriginal students may find learning more meaningful and engaging (CCL, 2007). Emotionally, Aboriginal students feel distant and marginalized. However, using humour and story-telling to encourage those reluctant Aboriginal students to share, may improve their connection to school and foster reengagement.

Humour is viewed as good medicine. It is said that humour was given to Aboriginal people as a gift from the Creator, to deal with hard times (Toulouse, 2011). Teasing, in a respectful and positive way, is a cultural norm that is equated with acceptance (Toulouse, 2011). Teasing is a method for social control. Humour and laughter are essential parts of an environment which is Aboriginal friendly (Morgan, 2009). Sharing circles and “group-talks” lay the social foundations for these Aboriginal students, who make real-world connections to content and learning in school (Lambie, 2005).

The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) reported that the involvement of community learning with Elders plays a key role in modeling lifelong learning and teaching responsibility to Aboriginal students. Transmitting cultural values through parables, allegories, and poetry, are positively linked in fostering culturally affirming school environments (CCL, 2007). Including community members encourages relationships which are rooted in the natural world and with
people. Community, family, and belonging are recognized as important social aspects of how people learn and view the world (Fiske, 2004). Aboriginal students largely grow up with an oral history of storytelling and it is the preferred delivery method used in sharing Aboriginal knowledge (MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006; Miller, 1996; Mitchell et al, 2008; Sutherland, 2002). A movement to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing to support more than one dominant worldview is arising.

Restoule (2004) suggests indigenous methods of teaching provide an experiential approach and create more fully engaged participants. It is a method, such as sharing circles, which provides healing, growth, and community. Healing is nurtured in the sense that participants are able to open their hearts to others (Stevenson, 1999). Growth and community are fostered as participants are viewed as equal and participate as equals within a sharing circle. Indigenous researchers imply sharing circles provide a discussion of the –heart, mind, body, and spirit. The circle is nonjudgmental, helpful, and supportive as it includes listening to others respectfully and acknowledging others and their ideas (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & Mackway, 1999). The circle has no beginning and no end. As Lavalle (2009) suggests, it is these ways of knowing that will help to “decolonize” education (p. 37). Sharing circles is a pedagogical approach that spotlights an Aboriginal way of knowing that creates a rich environment promoting equal status, equal power, and balance between teachers and students (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006).

In an effort to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal students, research was spear-headed by Cassidy and Marsden (2006) at an independent school in British Columbia, where Aboriginal ways of knowing and traditions were incorporated into the school’s learning and culture. The school was targeted because of its high record of school expulsions and drop-
outs, as well as an increasing amount of criminal behaviour. The goals of the research was to uncover and put into practice principles that were effective in engaging Aboriginal students in coursework, as well as turning around the students’ life trajectory of addictions, criminal involvement, poverty, and marginalization (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006).

From the onset, the researchers realized the importance of building relationships with the Aboriginal students. They valued the students’ spiritual and emotional needs by giving quiet spaces and allowing the relationships to naturally develop. Once the relationships were established, they began to incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing through the practice of talking circles. Cassidy and Marsden (2006) note that through the talking circles, students were allowed to “tell their story for the first time in a non-threatening way, rather than be labeled as a “non-communicative daydreamers” (p. 5). Additionally, the researchers incorporated another cultural aspect by teaching and practicing the knowledge of the First Nations Medicine Wheel. Incorporating Aboriginal language, relevant stories, drum-making, and hosting Elders impacted the Aboriginal students’ lives (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006). According to the Aboriginal teacher coordinator from the study, integrating Aboriginal ways of knowing did the following:

Aboriginal traditions are a sacred element to the survival of our culture. When an Aboriginal person has been disconnected from their roots they are confused about who they are and where they are from. Re-connection to their personal heritage and traditions begins to re-create an opening and eventually an understanding of self. This self-identity begins to grow and is nurtured through continuous support, love, and acceptance (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006, p. 6).
Aboriginal Students as Unique Learners

Aboriginal students are unique learners. According to Martin & Mirraboopa (2009), from the time they are born, Aboriginal children begin life-long learning with regard to nature and their cultural traditions, which have been passed down for thousands of years. When the child is able to sit up, they are taught by their guardians and Elders to observe animals, birds, and the nature around them (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009). A connection to a greater whole, family, and a spiritual connection to something bigger than themselves is incorporated into their way of life from a young age (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006). Through this, they feel a part of a world as much as it is a part of us all. They are observers of the world, and are taught to tread lightly and live closely with nature (Toulouse, 2012). This is not only their ways of knowing, but their “ways of being” (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009, p. 209). This is their sacred understanding of the world. Seeking alignment with ways of “knowing” and “being” are essential in affirming a motivated environment for learning at school (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2009).

Barnes et al (2006) discuss how the impact of residential schools has had a substantial effect on many Aboriginal parents’ participation in their children’s education. Aboriginal people have shared their maltreatment from residential schools, outlining their neglect and maltreatment (Claes & Clifton, 1998; Miller, 1996; Royal Commission, 1996). Leaving school was commonly associated with disengagement and unfavorable school experiences (Dolan, 1999). These difficult experiences have transmitted and painted negative views of a Canadian education. Many Aboriginal students carry these stories with them.

Aboriginal students find themselves not “getting” curriculum or are too “embarrassed” to ask for academic help, particularly in large crowds like classrooms (Schoenlein, 2004, p. 17). Having Aboriginal teachers as their mentors and teachers increases the likelihood of Aboriginal
students attending schools (Goulet, 2005). To some, communicating in their respective heritage language is a way to fully express their understanding (MacIver, 2012). Reflective practices are a cultural norm in many Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal students require the ability to use all of the senses to gather information, allow time for processing, and then share their ideas comfortably with others they trust (Toulouse, 2012).

Toulouse (2012) discusses how Aboriginal students’ ways of learning should be acknowledged. They require affirmation and as well as inclusion and appreciation. Three techniques may be used to engage Aboriginal students’ learning: first, couple basic words with an Aboriginal language; second, use strategies and transition that are physically moving and build community; third, incorporate kinesthetic activities to confirm understanding of the learning outcome (Toulouse, p. 22-23). The ability to speak and listen is the earliest stages of literacy of Aboriginal students. In Aboriginal culture, speaking and listening are highly valued and encouraged (van der Way, 2001)

Trust is also important to Aboriginal students as they live within a community of family that extends beyond the nuclear unit (Morgan, 2009). Elders in the Aboriginal community possess significant influence and are essential in building trust and establishing lines of communication (Toulouse, 2012). Further, Aboriginal students may have grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or other community members who participate fully in their lives (Redwing-Saunders & Hill, 2006). Educators are encouraged to be patient and initiate a relationship with the Aboriginal community, rather than expect someone to come forward (Toulouse, 2012). These partnerships are crucial for bridging community with education, and it essential for Aboriginal student success and engagement in public schools (Bell et al. 2004). Positive parental interactions are linked with higher achievement and performance in school (Cole, 2003;
Stephens, 1994; Sugar & Homer, 1999). Strong support for programs that result in safe school for future generations of Aboriginal students should be a priority, starting with parental involvement (Barnes et al., 2006).

MacIver (2012) examined Aboriginal student perspectives affecting their level of engagement in school. The Aboriginal students included in this action research were from 50 locations spanning across Canada at a treatment center situated in the prairies. Students’ ages ranged from 12 to 16 years with a total school population of 150 students with 80% being of Aboriginal ancestry. The students attending this treatment center were deemed at risk for a variety of factors which included: drug and alcohol addiction, sexually intrusive behaviours, mental health issues, conduct disorders, and absenteeism in school (MacIver, 2012).

The purpose of the study was to discover how their lived experiences as perceived by Aboriginal students contributed to their school engagement, which further extended into their perceptions of principals and teachers as influencing sources. The results of the study were successful insofar as the data collected, showed Aboriginal students emphasized six main themes. The themes tied to their engagement and included: peer pressure, cultural influence and racism, school day routines, activities, goal setting, and relationships.

MacIver (2012) discovered teachers who make school an enjoyable experience, positively influence school engagement and participation with Aboriginal students. Teachers hold considerable power of influence over Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging, through interaction with their students, curricula taught, and instructional strategies used (MacIver, 2012). Participants of the study revealed that when Aboriginal teachers spoke in their ancestral language, provided knowledge of their past and incorporated cultural activities in school, they had an increased level of comfort while being in school (MacIver, 2012). Results from the study
show that a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students is fostered through culturally inclusive learning, where they feel valued and safe as learners (MacIver, 2012).

The review of literature relating to the topic of this study supports the notion of improving Western education by identifying Aboriginal students as unique learners and fostering new and innovative ways to incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing and curriculum to engage these learners.
Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

The methodology of this study was action research. The researcher integrated semi-structured interviews with consenting Aboriginal student-participants and presented their stories as individual case studies. Primarily, the study was designed to provide information to the researcher and to improve the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) at Carihi Secondary School in Campbell River, BC. In addition, the researcher shared the data and results with School District 72, the Aboriginal Department, and Carihi Secondary School’s administration.

The researcher collected rich data from 30 minute semi-structured interviews with consenting Aboriginal student-participants who attended the ASB. Free and informed consent was given, as students could opt out from the study anytime, and their interview data was kept confidential. Students were asked to create pseudonyms to protect their identity. The researcher had limited power over students, as his role was to provide academic and emotional support to students in need, and did not assess completed work. Qualitative case studies were selected because Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing promote oral approaches to learning and sharing (Lee, 2007). It is case studies that facilitate empirical inquiry investigating contemporary phenomena in depth and within real life contexts, where boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Merriam, 1998). This blending seemed most suitable for the researcher, considering the student-participants were of Aboriginal ancestry.

The researcher created an instrument that guided the interviews with scripted questions (Appendix A). Since there were no other studies to draw from that the researcher knew of, a variety of sources were used in designing the questions. An interview protocol was read to each participant to set the tone, remind them of their confidentiality and the purpose of the study.
Similarly, it encouraged each participant to fully share their personal experiences while in the ASB. Eight consenting Aboriginal students who attended the ASB in semester 2 of the 2012-2013 school years, and/or semester 1 of the 2013-2014 school years volunteered to participate from a population of approximately 25 students who previously attend the ASB during that time. The data collected was audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis of themes, links and patterns.

Sample

Carihi Secondary School is an inner-city school that supports a rich culture of acceptance and tolerance of diversity. The school’s student population was approximately 900 students when this study was done. Just under one-quarter of the students at Carihi Secondary self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry in the ethnic self-identification forms that are distributed yearly at the beginning of each school year.

A variety of factors influence these Aboriginal students. Often, these students are at-risk and are affected by “push-out” factors causing them to leave school which include: the historical implications of residential schools, having poor role models, lacking emotional and academic supports at school and home, disengagement from Eurocentric curricula, coming from low socio-economic backgrounds, having little or no sense of belonging in school, involvement in criminal activity (Cassidy & Bates, 2005), and from what the researcher had personally discovered—coming to school hungry.

School District 72 funded the inception of ASB to support at-risk Aboriginal students in their academic achievement and to foster an emotional connection to learning. The criteria used to guide which Aboriginal students were selected and enrolled in the ASB was based on missing graduation requirements (lacking required total courses and credits mandated by the Ministry of
Education), parental/student requests to transfer into the block, or referral from counsellors, teachers, or administrators. The Aboriginal students ranged from Grades 9-12. Enrolment in the blocks differed each semester, but an average of 10-15 students were supported each semester. The researcher’s responsibilities outside of the ASB included welcoming new Aboriginal students to the school, tracking and meeting Aboriginal students not meeting graduation requirements, and intervening in a positive manner.

In addition, the ASB was facilitated by the researcher and a female First Nations Educational Assistant. Each specialized in a variety of subject areas which brought a proper balance of academic support. Both worked along with the guidance of the Aboriginal District Principal and Aboriginal Support Workers who do their best to ensure the success of the Aboriginal students at Carihi Secondary School.

**Instrument**

Informal semi-structured interviews approximately 30 minutes in length were conducted to elucidate how the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing contributed to Aboriginal students’ academic and emotional success in school. Interviews were chosen in order to yield in-depth responses from the Aboriginal student-participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The pre-scripted questions used in the interview process were developed beforehand in order to draw upon the Aboriginal student-participants’ personal experiences, allowing for a wider range of responses from the interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Above all else, the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to bridge the participants’ responses to the action research being investigated, with the creation of pre-scripted questions relating to the guided framework of the study (Wengraf, 2001).
Though there were no instruments from other studies that directly related to the research conducted at Carihi Secondary School, the researcher created questions that prompted meaningful responses. The researcher drew from a variety of authors, as the goal was to create effective questions which promoted a wide range of responses for interpretation and analysis. This interview style was also selected to allow interviewees to elaborate and openly share their thoughts.

Incorporating an understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing from Toulouse’s (2011) work, the researcher was able to focus questions that appealed to the Aboriginal student-participants’ emotions. An understanding that Aboriginal communities transmit their culture and traditions orally was a “critical component” (Toulouse, 2011, p. 16) in working with these students. Moreover, in Aboriginal culture, speaking and listening is highly valued and is one of the earliest stages of literacy (Toulouse, 2011). Thus it was significant that the researcher modeled good listening behaviour to “neither affirm nor dispute, verbally or nonverbally the responses that emerge during the interview process” (Stringer, 1996, p. 71).

Stringer (1996) articulates the importance of incorporating key questions and specific questions to extend the researcher’s understanding of the problems and contexts in which the Aboriginal student-participants respond. Key questions were created for the interview process and prompted interviewees to share the: who, what, where, when, why, and how of their experiences (Stringer, 1996). Specific questions were used to prompt a focus on specific activities or phenomena they wished to share. Questions were created to maximize and present their responses on their own terms (Stringer, 1996).

Specifically, the pre-scripted questions were tasked to accomplish three goals. First, questions were aimed to collect data on students’ perspective on their culture and Aboriginal
ways of knowing (in general). Second, questions were crafted about the specific activities facilitated in the ASB. Third, questions about how and if the ASB supported their learning in school (or not). For example, some of the questions asked during the interview were: Do you feel a strong connection to your culture? Do you feel a sense of belonging in school? In what ways did being in the Aboriginal support block help you? Why did you join the Aboriginal support block? What are your overall thoughts of school? (Appendix B).

Procedures

To obtain informed consent, the researcher distributed parental consent forms outlining the methodological approach and purpose of the study (Appendix A). These consent forms were distributed in the semester one class of the 2013-2014 school year, and announcements were made asking if former Aboriginal students who attended the block during semester two of the 2012-2013 school year were interested in the study. Aboriginal ways of knowing were incorporated in both semesters being petitioned for interviews.

Morning announcements (Appendix D) were made for a week early in November of the 2013 school year along with regular school announcements. The researcher read a student recruitment script (Appendix E) discussing the purpose of the study to the Aboriginal students in the ASB. To reach as many candidates as possible, the researcher set up an information bulletin (Appendix F) in the First Nations room, encouraging former ASB students to participate in the study if interested. Consent forms were distributed to each student in the ASB and extra copies were made for the First Nations room as well as the front office.

The consent forms requested interested Aboriginal student-participants to have their parents/guardians sign if interested in volunteering to be interviewed about their experiences when they attended the ASB. The parents/guardians were then asked to keep a copy of their
consent forms for their personal records. Considering these were at-risk participants, counselling information brochures were made available in case sensitive issues arose during the interview process. Each Aboriginal student-participant was given a $10 gift card to Tim Horton’s as a gesture of appreciation for their time.

The interviews were conducted one-on-one in a safe, private area of the school and were audio-recorded. A recorder was used to provide detailed and accurate information provided by the interviewees (Stringer, 1996). Participants were reminded they could withdraw from the study at any point and a copy of their response would be given to them to verify and confirm their experiences. Next, the researcher asked each interviewee to adopt a pseudonym to be used throughout the study to help ensure a higher degree of anonymity (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Initial warm-up questions were used to relax the Aboriginal student-participants (Douglas, 1985) so the researcher ensured they were as comfortable as possible during the interview process.

Upon completing the interviews, transcriptions were made from each response using Microsoft Word. A total of eight Aboriginal student-participants agreed to be interviewed. After completing the interview and being presented with a transcribed copy to preview, interviewees were reminded they could still opt out of the study without any penalty. Their responses were organized into individual case studies and then analyzed for themes, links and patterns.

**Validity**

In determining the validity of this study, the researcher familiarized himself with how action research depended upon an effective planned intervention (Mills, 2011). In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to ensure that no distortions of the truth were seen or heard (Maxwell, 1992). Wolcott’s (1994) take on “talk little” and “listen a lot” and the development of questions to elicit thoughtful responses was incorporated in the interview process in order to
collect unbiased data from the interviewees. The researcher’s experience aided in the study, as familiarity of the context and the people involved, provided a good understanding of the data produced. Interpretation of their responses was based on the knowledge of what happened in the classroom, which provided rich data to later analyze for patterns, links, and overarching themes.

To ensure proper transcription of the data, interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks in the 2013-2014 school year. Interviews were not conducted back-to-back, but were spaced out to ensure that a proper amount of time was dedicated to the transcription and organization of the student-participants’ responses. In doing so, the researcher decreased instrument decay. For the most part, the initial interviews were not as thorough or polished as later ones, but as experience was gained, the researcher’s interview skills improved. Though there may be no true protection from this threat, the researcher did his best to prepare for each interview by familiarizing himself with the pre-scripted questions, conducting interviews in the same room, pausing for breaks if needed, and using the semi-structured format as a way for interviewees to openly share their ideas without rigid structure.

To increase validity, the researcher transcribed the Aboriginal student-participants’ responses and forwarded a hard-copy to each of them to verify. They were reminded that they still had the opportunity to withdraw from the study, but each verified their responses and submitted them for analysis. Data was organized and stored on a secure password protected computer using Microsoft Word. The collated data was made available to both the researcher and the researcher’s supervisor. After five years the data will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this action research involved summarizing collected data in a dependable and accurate manner (Mills, 2011). Data was organized and interpreted by the
researcher to find meaning, not only in relation to the proposed research question at the centre of the action research, but the “so what?” of it all (Mills, 2011). Upon completing all of the interviews, categories which depict thematic interpretation of each Aboriginal student’s response was done in three steps. The researcher integrated Mills’ (2011) approach in the interpretation of qualitative data in teacher facilitated action research. First, the researcher had to become familiar with the data and identify potential themes that linked to reoccurring patterns. Second, the transcriptions were examined to provide detailed descriptions of each interviewee’s context. Third, categorizing and coding pieces of data by grouping like phrases or ideas into themes classified the transcription data (Mills, 2011).

Careful reading and rereading of each Aboriginal student-participant’s transcription was done. The researcher was familiar with Krathwohl’s (1998) claim that “the first time you sit down to read your data is the only time you come to that particular set fresh” (p. 309). The researcher sought to organize the data with notes and labels. Several copies of the transcriptions were made so the researcher could develop themes and patterns which attempted to answer the research question (Mills, 2011). Comprehensive descriptions of each participant were developed keeping in mind the school setting and any phenomenon studied that conveyed rich complexities for the research (Mills, 2011).

The design of this action research protected anonymity of the participants, while attempting to discover how Aboriginal ways of knowing contributed to the participants’ perceived success while attending the ASB. The research instrument was created to guide the 30 minute semi-structured interview process. It helped to provide quality data for the researcher to interpret and analyze. Emergent themes and repeating patterns were organized to create meaning from data set. This data was used by the researcher to attempt to answer the research question,
yet also served as a reflective tool. Information gained from the learning process would be used to enhance future ASB’s and the experience of the students that will attend them.
Chapter Four: Findings and Results

Qualitative Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to discover how Aboriginal ways of knowing affected at-risk Aboriginal students in the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) at Carihi Secondary School. Data was generated from eight interviews, inclusive of six Aboriginal females and two Aboriginal males ranging from Grades 9-12. The questions of the study focussed on three aspects. First, questions aimed to collect data on the Aboriginal students’ perspective, their culture, and Aboriginal ways of knowing in general. Second, specific questions honed in on the particular activities that were done. Third, questions asked how and if the ASB helped in their learning.

The data began to reveal that by incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing, the Aboriginal student-participants enriched their relationships with their peers in the ASB, the First Nations Educational Assistant, and the researcher. Each presented a strong sense of belonging to Carihi Secondary School, but an even stronger connection within the ASB and the students enrolled in it. Aboriginal ways of knowing fostered meaningful connections with their culture and students had greater sense of belonging in school because of the strong relationships that were forged. Themes quickly emerged from the data set.

The Aboriginal student-participants were asked to create pseudonyms to protect their identity in this study. The students who were interviewed were mixed in grades and sexes: Bob Waters (male) graduated in 2013, Nichole Babster (female) in Grade 12, Jane Parker (female) in Grade 12, Raeli McKay (female) in Grade 12, Sally Peterbug (female) in Grade 12, Josh Hank (male) in Grade 10, Wendy Graham (female) in Grade 10, and Adrianna Smith (female) in Grade 9.
After asking introductory warm-up questions to relax the interviewees, the researcher began his investigation looking into their cultural perspectives and ways of knowing. Each student represents a separate experience and therefore a unique case study in the context of a Campbell River high school. These are their stories.

**Case Study: Bob Waters**

Bob Waters attended the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) since he began at Carihi Secondary School in Grade 10. Bob often regarded school as more of a social experience and what he often conveyed to the researcher over the years was that friends and girls were most important to him. The researcher had the opportunity to see the maturation and growth of this particular student, who overcame many personal issues throughout his three years in the ASB. His resiliency was a model for others. By graduating he showed to others it was possible, even if school was a struggle. Having revisited the ASB countless times since his graduation, Bob attends sharing circles when he can.

Asking Bob about his culture was how the researcher opened up the interview. When asked what his culture meant to him he responded: “*Means a lot to be a part of a different culture. It feels good. It helps a lot. It’s pretty cool.*” He recalled learning about his culture in middle school in classes that supported Aboriginal culture like a Kwakwa’la language class. The researcher prodded more on how his culture affects his life, “*every day I guess. I dunno.*” It is “*kind of*” a part of his everyday life, but he does not “*think about it really.*” He said he would like to go out to more potlatches “*and stuff*” to celebrate in his culture more. Additionally, he also mentioned that being more involved in his culture would help.

Ironically, when Bob was in school his attendance was poor and grades were low. Although he did come to the ASB, he usually discussed how little he enjoyed being in school,
but now that he graduated, he misses school: “I miss it every day. I wish I was back there with all my friends and stuff. Yeah, school had a big impact on me and my life. It was a good time.”

School for him was “more social, but the support block made it more whole,” he commented. The researcher prompted how the ASB made him more whole: “it just made me feel good, like the sharing circles and everyone was just so open and good with each other. There were no bad vibes, just good.”

Questioning Bob’s sense of belonging, the researcher asked how he felt about school. He mentioned struggling in English initially and using the ASB for it. However, he also needed support in Workplace Apprenticeship Math 10 and 11, English 10 and 11, Communications 12, Science 10, Earth Science 11, and Social Studies 11 over the years. The researcher asked if he felt he belonged in school: “Yeah I did actually! With all my friends and that support block also.” He continued, “I just looked forward to going to that class and every Monday having that sharing circle and sharing about everything. It was good.” When prodded as to why he was in support and how it affected his schooling he responded: “I honestly think I wouldn’t have graduated without that support block cause I don’t do my homework at home, so that blocked helped me graduate for sure.”

When asked how he felt emotionally supported while in the ASB he responded: “Well everyone just cared about everything. I was always happy when I was there. Everyone supported it and that sharing circle helped.” The researcher asked about how Aboriginal ways of knowing through the activities that were done and how it affected his time in school.

Yeah, we got to go on field trips and stuff. Like we got to go to the Thunderbird Hall, carving shed and stuff like that. Sharing circles, they were just fun. We had guest speakers. Kind of made the culture better, more fun and interesting in class. At first, I
really didn’t want to share. I didn’t really know anybody, but later on, once I got more comfortable with everyone they started opening up, then I started opening up. Everyone was just supporting and listening. It was a good time actually. Learned how to make bannock bread and it was a really good experience.

Bob explained how he felt about having Elders: “It was definitely interesting. Going in there [Big House and carving shed] seeing that. I had never met them before and they had some good stories. It was some good learning.” When making meals together as a group, Bob described, “when I cooked with people, I didn’t really know them that well, but I got to know them while we were cooking. It was a good time.” Being in the ASB for Bob was “definitely a good experience.”

Academically Bob reported that he “didn’t really pay attention in class and [that] you guys helped me pay attention and get my work done. If it wasn’t for you guys, I wouldn’t have made it.” The researcher asked what his thoughts were if there was no ASB. He replied that it would have impacted his schooling, “because I skipped a lot. I probably would still be at Carihi right now trying to graduate doing my classes because I would definitely fail.” Working through difficult assignments was key: “I wouldn’t have done them if it wasn’t for that class. Like I said, you guys pushed me and motivated me to do them and get them done.”

His favorite activity and memory of the ASB were when “Elders came in and talked, when we went out, and when we had pizza days.” To Bob, those were the “best” activities. Some final thoughts he shared were that “everything was good. It was pretty organized. There isn’t much I’d change about it.” He excitedly remarked how his favorite memory was when the group signed t-shirts: “that’s my favorite part. Yep, singing the shirt everyone had a good time and you get to keep the memory. So hopefully you’ll never forget us.” In closing he mentioned that
Running head: TWO WORLDS OF KNOWING

“everyone that’s Aboriginal should join it and see how good of a time it is and how much it helped.”

Case Study: Nichole Babster

Nichole Babster, a Grade 12 student, attended Carihi Secondary School since Grade 10. She has been in the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) twice: once in Grade 11 and now in Grade 12. She received academic support for English 12 and Foundations Mathematics 11. The researcher asked Nichole what it means to be Aboriginal. She responded that it “doesn’t change anything” for her and that it was a “normal” part of who she was. Being Aboriginal was not something that “stands out” to her as she is “used to it” and has been for her whole life. She was taught about her culture mainly from her grandmother growing up.

Nichole shared that her grandmother, “use to be a Native spiritual teacher and used to teach all of the kids. She died when I was like 10. So I learned a lot there.” She also mentioned she learned some of her culture in middle and high school, but noted “I haven’t done anything since I’ve been here.” Nichole pointed out that being Aboriginal hasn’t really affected her life, other than being able to be a part of the ASB at Carihi Secondary.

The ASB “helps me like lots. I never use to pass school last year, let alone get good marks.” For Nichole, school has been a place she disliked: “I really hate school,” and her dislike for it began in Grade 9 when she rarely attended classes: “like I failed everything, and now this year I’m passing everything again.” She expressed how difficult her Grade 11 year was when her parents separated: “that made it really hard. They weren’t really focussed on me and school, and they were more focussed on breaking up.” Their twenty-three year marriage was over and contributed to “my bad year” of schooling.
The researcher asked how the ASB helped her. She pointed out that last year her time in the ASB was not used as well as it could have been. “I never really got any help because I never really tried or did what I was supposed to, so it wasn’t as beneficial as it has been this year.” She reinforced that she has been trying to take advantage of the support available in her Grade 12 year. “I didn’t take advantage of the ASB and didn’t really use it wisely, but if I did, it would have been smart.” Her attendance that year was an issue, along with the personal problems she faced at home.

When asked if she felt she belonged in the ASB, she quickly responded, “yep, I feel comfortable” and “it’s a dope place to be.” Her overall feelings were that everyone is welcoming and that she “enjoys coming here in the morning,” and that “it’s really helpful being in here rather than in the classroom.” She expressed that she had people to talk to and that no one put anyone else down. Talking frequently in activities like sharing circles helped her feel emotionally supported. When asked if she would recommend activities that were done, she responded “yeah for sure because it’s like support to kids who need it.”

Academically, the ASB “helped me be able to actually pass school and manage my homework in ways I couldn’t before, and actually find time to do my work.” Further the researcher asked how she felt supported in her school work and she replied, “I am academically supported, completely” so much so that “I’m passing like everything with flying colours.” If she had not been in the ASB she responded “I’d probably still be doing not as good.”

The researcher moved the interview to discussing the activities done in the block. When asked how some of the activities help with her learning? She replied, “It’s good to do stuff like that. I’d like to learn stuff like that and I like to learn new things,” when referring to Aboriginal culture. Sharing circles impacted her in that, “well it’s actually good for people especially cause
if people need somebody to talk to. People are there to listen. It’s kind of like what we do.” When asked if we should continue sharing circles, she commented “yeah for sure.”

Some last thoughts she shared answered how the block prepared her in school. Her words on some of the skills she learned in the ASB:

*Essay writing for sure because I never really knew how to write. Plus I’ve never really done school in like two years so I forget how to do everything. And, oh...being around people is like beneficial to me because I’m not like a people person and I don’t like associating with people or even being around people. In classes I can’t talk or anything and like I don’t really like get help as much as I need because it’s a full classroom and I need a lot of help. It’s just the way I am.*

The researcher asked what her favorite activity was:

*I just like to come here and do my work more than anything. It’s the only place where I get lots of help when I need it. For me it’s more about my work than like the fun stuff. That’s what I’m more here for. But the stuff is a bonus and it’s nice to do stuff like that and learn about culture.*

She concluded with some thoughts about the ASB:

*I have fond memories every day. I get to come in and get help with people who are willing to help me. It’s something I enjoy. I come here every morning and know I can get help. It’s something I’m fond of. It’s nice to have support. And I’m most likely going to grad! Like I’m just graduating this year, just barely.*
Case Study: Jane Parker

Like Bob Waters, Jane Parker attended Carihi Secondary School since she was in Grade 10. What makes Jane unique is the fact that she attended the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) each year throughout her high school experience. She was supported in nearly all of her subjects over the years: English 10, 11 and 12, Science 10, Foundations of Mathematics 10 and 11, Earth Science 11, Planning 10, and Social Studies 10 and 11. Though Jane has dealt with many personal issues, too intimate to divulge in the study for risk of her anonymity, it is important to note her resiliency and newly discovered career passion as a homecare worker.

Jane was asked about her culture and what it meant to her: “I’m not fully with my culture at all.” The researcher questioned why that might be. “Umm I kind of grew up with it until my grandpa passed away. He was the person who taught me.” Jane’s grandfather taught her Aboriginal ways of knowing through potlatches and dancing in the Big House every year. However, after he passed, Jane “didn’t really get into it at all” but she “acknowledges it a bit” and is “becoming more fond about it.”

Her feelings toward school were largely negative over the years. That was until she realized her career passion as a homecare worker through the co-op workplace program at the school. She went as far to say that she is “looking forward to what I want to be” and that she “didn’t like school before this” and now she “kind of does.”

She felt as though she belonged in the ASB as she made a point of enrolling in it each year. She signed up to be a part of it to receive the extra help with her assignments and homework. Throughout the interview she shared that in the ASB she knew “everybody so it makes me feel more comfortable than being in a classroom where I don’t know anybody.” Jane first entered the block in Grade 10 when she could not keep up with her Social Studies 10 class.
“I didn’t finish Socials 10 after I failed it once already” and “I just needed a lot of help with it because I don’t like Socials.” The time spent in the ASB also “helped me with the classes I was doing each semester.”

One aspect of the ASB that she enjoyed was the sharing circles. She commented on how it made her feel more emotionally connected to school, “some of the subjects are kind of deep” and “people listen.” Further, Jane spoke of how circles affected her: “I think they are nice because it makes us know each other more.” She concluded, “yeah, I like sharing circles” and when asked if it was her favorite activity she replied, “mmmmhmmm.”

Having her partake in Aboriginal ways of knowing was at times difficult because she said she came from a Christian upbringing. “I don’t believe in any of that stuff because I was raised Christian.” Even though she enjoyed making bannock bread at the Thunderbird Hall, she mentioned that the time spent with Elders in preparing smoked-salmon traditionally on the beach was not enjoyable: “I don’t like seafood” but admitted that she watched it happen. When Elders came in to conduct traditional sharing circles she was impressed by “just how open” the Elders were. She would highly recommend these activities for future students because some of them were “very helpful” even though they were not Christian.

The researcher asked how the ASB helped her academically. She informed that it was simple: “Just finishing off my classes.” She communicated that without the ASB she would “probably be failing.” Being a part of the ASB allowed her to “just hang around and ask for help” when needed. Her skills in “essay writing” improved because she mentioned she “just didn’t know how to write an essay” before. Further, Jane was clear about the ASB because it “helped me with the classes I was doing each semester” and helped to pass them.
In closing, Jane “recommend[s]” the ASB for future students if they struggle. Though she did not enjoy the traditional preparation of salmon, there is “nothing” she would change about the ASB and that by being in it “helped out a lot for graduation and better grades.”

**Case Study: Raeli McKay**

Raeli McKay attended the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) in the 2012-2013 school year. She was enrolled in Grade 11 at the time and required assistance in her Social Studies 11, English 11, and Biology 11 courses. The researcher came to know Raeli both as a writing student and support student throughout her time at Carihi Secondary. Often, Raeli’s focus was more social, spending time with friends and befriending others made her a well-liked young lady.

The researcher began his interview by asking her about Aboriginal culture. Raeli quickly commented, “It’s been something that I have grown up with forever, so it’s not like it means something to me. It’s something that I am. I have never thought of what it means to me” and she concluded with “it’s a part of me.” Intrigued, the researcher prompted Raeli to discuss how she learned her culture growing up:

> Like I said, I had a lot of it growing up. I was in Kwakwa’la for pre-school. So right away I was put right into the culture. How to count it, speak it, I am not fluent in it which sucks, but my mom put me in it as soon as I was ready to talk. I would like to be more fluent in it. It would be super cool because I could be like – yo—I know how to speak Kwakwa’la, do you know how to speak Kwakwa’la? No you don’t. It would be awesome.

Her culture affected her in a few ways growing up. For example, she acknowledged that she would not be as close to the people she knows today if it was not for being Aboriginal because they “grew up together on the res and we went to home night and we did fun things together so I wouldn’t be as close with some people.” Although she has fond memories of growing up in her
Running head: TWO WORLDS OF KNOWING

culture, she further explains that she would like to be “more connected to the community part.”

Later on in her life, she had to move off of the “res” due to a “family situation” she could not live
with her mom anymore and that she “lost connections with the res.”

Introducing the topic of education and her general school experience, Raeli had much to
say:

*I like school, I enjoy being here sometimes. I feel like they [educators] need to… I feel like
they all expect us to be on thing. I feel like they teach us all in the same way, but then at
the same time they teach us how we are different and are individuals. I know it’s not in
the budget or something, but I feel like if you are all teaching kids the same way, they are
not going to learn the same way. I feel like they all demand us to be the same person and
get the same grades. I just don’t feel that’s how that should go.*

The researcher broached her weaknesses and strengths in school. Raeli reported her
weakness were “paying attention and stuff and staying focussed.” She further explained a
struggle in Mathematics and Social Studies. To her, “*some teachers do not do their job very well,
they just talk or give you stuff to do.*” Her strengths came through when she was interested in a
topic. As a result, she would truly focus and “*actually do a good job at it. I like writing, I like
your class. I like acting and stuff. I like being creative and trying new things.*”

Her sense of belonging at Carihi Secondary and the ASB were commented on:

*This school is a school. I went to both schools [referring to Campbell River’s Secondary
Schools], to Timberline so I know the other side and how it is. Carihi is much more
accepting and they will let you be. Like at Timberline, kids can’t just play their guitar in
the halls and stuff. You have to be like, be a certain way. If you are with these kids you
have to be with these kids. There is more diversity here so I do feel like you can belong here.

In regards to her sense of belonging in the ASB and her time involved in the activities that took place:

I felt like we....like I like sharing circle, and I liked hearing about everything, but if everyone got into it, it would be better. Something I felt like it was a waste of time because no one got into it. Sometimes everyone was like I don’t know, I don’t know, but I did appreciate getting to know everyone at the same time.

The reason Raeli transferred into the ASB, initially, was because she was going through family issues and need supported with her work: “I needed the help to try and graduate and stuff.” She recalled working on English and Social Studies 11, along with Biology 11. She completed English 11 and Biology 11, but struggled in Social Studies 11: “You and Charity helped a lot. You guys were definitely a great support group. I should have appreciated it lasted year more than I did. Like there was so much support there and I took it for granted most of the time.”

Raeli confirmed she was emotionally supported. She acknowledged that the researcher was “always there for you if you needed it.” If she required help in the ASB, or even during lunch, she knew “you would help me. I never felt like I could not ask you guys a question.”

Academically, Raeli commented on not feeling supported because “of the person I am. I would give up, like really quickly.” Often she felt as though the facilitators of the ASB were too busy helping others in the room.

With regard to the Aboriginal ways of knowing and the activities facilitated in the ASB, Raeli conveyed the following:
Well, like they don’t help you, they engage you, they didn’t make me feel like I belong. Like they were neat to see, but the support block helps me in school. Like there was this one time I went and I was like... I could be doing English instead of this. But at the same time, it was neat to do. It’s not like it’s a normal flex block [an online learning class], where you go in everyday and like I felt like it was, it gave it that extra push that flex needs.

She did however appreciate when Elders came in and expressed that they “were nice” and that she “liked the stories they had to say.” She explained how sharing circles were for her:

I like doing that sometimes. I felt like it was needed rather than going in to the same old class. Like flex is so boring and it makes you not want to go because you sit at a computer. No one really talks to you. The only time you talk to a teacher is when you need help and other than that no one talks, no one gets involved. You don’t know anyone in your class. That is another thing about school, you get to know your peers and you get to know your teachers. And I think that is what is so great about Aboriginal support for us. We got to know each other. We got to know what was going on and we actually weren’t just strangers in the room studying. We’re like a class.

Overall, Raeli felt as though she took the ASB “for granted.” Though she completed her class assignments, she felt her test marks brought her down. She declared that she “understood it way better” when the facilitators of the ASB sat her down to explained the learning concepts to her in a variety of ways. Often, Raeli left difficult assignments or concepts because she would “leave it for support class for you guys to help me with it.” Her school grades improved even though she was “distracted a lot” and many times when she had a test, she confirmed that the ASB was
“nice” to have to help her prepare and “get warmed up” before writing her in class exams. Skill wise, she acknowledged the information below:

You gave me good points on how to put an essay together, and how to make a poem for English. You helped me a lot for English and Charity helped me figure out a lot for Socials class. You helped me get organized that one day, when we went through my binder that one time. So like there was definitely help.

Raeli’s closing thoughts commented on how the ASB should provide credits for graduation:

People should get credits for going into Aboriginal support class because I think it’s really dumb that because we are Aboriginal kids we don’t get credits. It’s just like the flex class, so I don’t understand why we are going in there to learn? Why it doesn’t get credits? That has always bugged me.

**Case Study: Sally Peterbug**

Sally Peterbug attended the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. Unlike many other Aboriginal students, Sally was unique in that she was fiercely independent and used her time to complete homework assignments. Her athleticism helped her feel a part of the Carihi community as she played on the soccer team for a number of years, but in her Grade 12 year decided to focus on her school work instead. On occasion, she would ask for assistance in clarifying questions on assignments she had difficulty with, or required a small amount of explanation when working on more complicated problems.

The researcher opened up by inquiring about her Aboriginal culture. Sally stated that being Aboriginal is “just different from everyone else. We have like other traditions that other people don’t and we have the Big House that we can always go to.” Though she does not regularly practice her culture, she did learn about it through elementary school. Her teachers had
a large role: “We had like cultural celebrations that we would show to the community and we had cultural class.” Questioning her family’s impact on her cultural paradigm, she acknowledged that her father taught her some of her culture as well as well as her family’s history. To Sally, her culture “hasn’t really affected me much, I’ve just learned a lot about where my ancestry comes from and what Aboriginals had to go through and such.” To feel more connected, Sally would like to “learn more history,” but also stated that she learned a great deal when enrolled in First Nations Studies, where they went into “more depth” on Aboriginal culture and contemporary issues.

Sally stated, “I like school but I don’t like some of the teachers because their teaching ways are just outdated or they go too fast. But I like school. I just don’t like some teachers’ processes.” Her fairly positive view on school had her coming to learn and taking many core academic classes to pursue her passion for the tourism industry upon graduation: “I just like the learning. Like science and like Family Studies and all that kind of stuff.” She pointed out her weakness as “keeping up. I’m capable of doing the work, I just don’t do it.” Her strength she believed was also her weakness: “I’m capable of doing most of the work I have but I don’t. So it’s both.”

She wanted the researcher to know that she felt a sense of belonging at Carihi Secondary: “I dunno everyone just kind of feels welcome at Carihi. Everyone has their own little groups so there’s room for everyone here I guess.” Asking if she felt a sense of belonging in the ASB she commented:

Yep. Ummm...everyone in the support block like last year everyone was kind of close. Like mostly 11s and 12s and everyone I knew. This year everyone is different and it’s different I guess. Last year was my first time and I just knew all of them.
She reflected and shared that it was different now that she was the Grade 12 student in a block that had four different grades in it.

Sally requested to enter the ASB again in her Grade 12 year “because I needed help with my work pretty much.” Her capable work ethic was apparent to the researcher in her two years in the ASB, but to her it was the “motivation and stuff” that helped her complete English 10, Social Studies 10, Family Studies, and begin many new online courses. The ASB helped her in “a variety of ways. It just like helped me keep on track and like catch up.” She felt as though she was “always academically supported in this class, except for some days” and that she was “not ever without” emotional support. However, Sally was able to “finish two courses in the first couple of months. I started my other courses, plus I finished my Moving on Package [for graduation].”

Questioning the activities that were facilitated and the Aboriginal ways of knowing incorporated in the ASB, Sally shared many insights. She acknowledged that sharing circles were “pretty good” but struggled because “I like them but like some days I don’t like sharing at all. And other days I’ll just like do whatever. I’m just not a morning person. I’m tired.” Her visit to the Big House with the workshop on residential schools and resiliency done by Kathi Camilleri was that “the Big House was cold. Other than that, it was good.” Another speaker at the Big House stuck out for Sally when he shared his story of resilience and learned that “it’s never too late to start over, I guess” from hearing the struggles he had been through with addiction and suicide.

When asked about her feelings toward the Elders that visited, she quickly responded: “It depends on what they’re talking about, and where they came from.” An Elder from the same community where she was raised provided a strong connection for her. Another Elder, “just
didn’t relate to me at all and I didn’t have any interest” particularly when the Elder shared traditional stories: “Well it’s just he was talking about where we come from the stars and all that.” Her feedback was that “you should probably do a laughter one just not all serious ones. Bring some more humour.” For her, incorporating Elders in the ASB was “to help the students learn about different culture and how to make bannock and carry on traditions.”

Some closing responses from Sally informed the researcher of a few things. The ASB “helped a lot. I dunno, usually I plug my music in and do it [homework], it’s extra time I have...to put thought into English and stuff. It’s helped me pass.” If she had not been in the ASB she shared that she would “still be doing English 10 and Socials 10 to be honest.” Without the ASB it would have been difficult for her in that she would have had to “really focus on my own and that’d be hard. Like I’d have to put in extra time on my own. Yeah, I rarely ask for help. It’s the extra time.” She has “always been capable of passing grades on final exams, but it was the courses themselves that I failed. I don’t do homework I guess.” Goal setting and “time management” were two skills she learned while in the ASB: “like setting a goal and finishing it within the week, finishing my courses” were possible with time given in class. Visiting the Big House last year was her favorite activity and she concluded “I don’t think there’s anything I’d change. It’s a pretty chill class. Like you have music and stuff.”

Case Study: Josh Hank

Josh Hank was in Grade 10 at Carihi Secondary at the time of the interview and had also been in the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) in his Grade 9 year as well. Josh came from a family of carvers, and openly shared how proud he is of his father’s creations. The researcher came to know Josh throughout the years as both a comical and reclusive student, yet highly
cultural and proud of being Aboriginal. What set him apart from others was his Aboriginal pride.

When asked what being Aboriginal meant to him he replied confidently:

It means to me that I should probably learn all my lessons. Learn from my dad because he was a residential school survivor but still kept all of the traditions. So if I want to learn from him and if I have kids, I want to teach them.

His father was a respected Elder in the community. Josh admiringly explained, “he has always been a really great role model for me.”

He continued about his culture:

I have always been taught about my culture. Ever since I was a little kid, I have always heard about going to the river, which is basically when the voice starts changing and you go for an entire year in winter, no matter what, unless you are super sick, like can’t even move sick.

Curious about the traditions he grew up knowing, the researcher inquired for more detail:

“Carving is part of the traditions, but another one is sharing. Always sharing. Share your wealth.” He wanted the researcher to know that the only way being Aboriginal affected his life was through the “bonuses I get. No taxes at certain spots. Overall it doesn’t really change anything to me.” Josh’s desire to learn and speak his language, as well as being a carver to create “bigger things like totem poles and things” because carving “paddles and making a little bit of furniture and [drum] rings” is not where his passion is anymore.

He shared his feelings about school in general. Though he does not like to miss any days of school, if he does, he will make a point to go out and “gather” during the day. Overall, his opinion of school is that “it’s good. There are some points where it needs to be improved.” For
instance, teachers providing a few “more examples, more help maybe in someone of the more difficult classes.”

His sense of belonging was strong at both Carihi Secondary and in the ASB. Josh opened up that he had a strong group of friends and grew up with them since childhood. This has helped in his sense of belonging. In regards to the ASB, Josh did not know many of the people throughout his time in the ASB, but that it was “nice to hang out with some people that [he] didn’t know.” The ASB “was a really great time” in the two years he attended. In the year previous, he admitted “I was still immature and not really good at anything because two years before I was in homeschooling so my social skills got a little rusty.” Further, in his current Grade 10 year he noticed, “I am not doing well in Math and English so I am trying to get those up.” He has more confidence in the ASB because “last year I was doing awful. I still didn’t do great, but at least I passed.”

Josh felt connected in the ASB: “You can share stuff without other people making fun of you. It feels safe, secure, no one will talk bad about you. I am really emotionally connected,” he explained. Notably, “if I need help I’ll get it. If I don’t need it then you will focus on people that do need help. If I need it I’ll get it and really fast.” The ASB was something he grew to appreciate: “Last year I started to become more a part of the group, like talking and hanging out.” He expressed that this connection in school made him happy and that as a kid he was “away from the action growing up.”

In regards to the Aboriginal activities facilitated in the ASB, Josh described how his experience was. Sharing circles felt good: “to talk to everyone about our highs and lows over the weekend or at the end of the week was a good idea.” He explored his thoughts on the visits to the Campbell River Big House. Josh spoke, “I really enjoyed it in the Big House. I didn’t go there a
lot, but that time when we did go to the Big House I liked it because it was fun and it was nice to be in the Big House again.” More detail arose with workshops conducted by Kathi Camilleri on residential schools and resiliency. For him, “it was a little hard because I heard what happened there because of my dad and a couple of relatives.” Being involved in other activities like making bannock bread also “felt good.” Furthermore, visits to the Elders’ carving shed “felt really great” and it had been “a while since I had seen him [Elder carver].” He even goes there for trips when he can. In regards to the Elders leading traditional sharing circles it “felt really cool because he came in and took off his shoes to be grounded. I felt happy. It’s nice to know that my culture is coming back.” Josh expressed how he felt strong connections with the Elders we had visited.

As the interview concluded, Josh wanted to state how much he appreciated the activities: “I appreciate them and I enjoy that. They are fun and they are something new other than just sitting in a room doing nothing, working really hard, but getting bored.” The ASB contributed to Josh’s school success in that “last year I was getting like 16%. It was just awful. Now it’s better.” The ASB “supported me in my life because I talked to people that usually just hang out with friends but don’t really talk about my problems.” Further, he described how he learned how to work hard and fast, to get “big stuff done, then focus on the little things” from other classes. His highlights include making the bannock bread with the Elder because “it was like seeing some relatives again. It felt like that at least. Cooking bannock isn’t something I’ve done since Grade 6 or 5.”

In closing he commented: “We have always been sort of connected and nothing really needs to be repaired. Don’t get rid of something that’s already good.”
Case Study: Wendy Graham

Wendy Graham moved to Campbell River in September of the 2013-2014 school years. She came from a small town on northern Vancouver Island to live with close relatives and left her difficult life behind. Wendy grew up resilient and was surrounded by drugs and alcohol. Dropping out of school in Grade 9, Wendy affirmed with the researcher that she has missed some learning and hopes to make up for it in her high school years.

During the beginning of the interview the researcher questioned Wendy on her Aboriginal identity and culture, as well as where she learned her culture. Being Aboriginal for Wendy, “means family” with many other “different meanings.” She refused to elaborate on the meaning, “that enough of that.” Exposed to her culture growing up in a small town, she recollects, “It was everywhere. My grandma would always show me. My Papa. The Big House. You learn a lot from the Big House and from Elders, lots of Elders.” According to her, the key most significant knowledge she was taught about from her culture was to “just be respectful, to use your manners, and never be rude.” Intrigued, the researcher asked how her culture affected her life: “I’m proud of my culture. It’s interesting.” To feel more connected to her culture, Wendy shared she was “really shy” and if she were to “actually speak and dance it” it might help “at some point in life.”

Her opinion of school contrasted with that of her culture. However, she communicated to the researcher that “this year I feel more...ummm...that I wanna be here, just so I can graduate and get through school.” Weaknesses while in school for Wendy include Mathematics and Reading: “I hate Math, it’s tough but Reading is not tough, it’s just something I’m not interested in. I like Writing and Socials.” According to her, she felt she belonged at Carihi Secondary: “I feel like I’m home,” she said regarding her previous life before moving to Campbell River. In
answering whether or not the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) helped her in school, she replied “yeah, I’d do it all blocks if I can.”

In regards to the activities facilitated, Wendy had her opinions: “When we do the circles. The circle. Yeah and being with all Aboriginal people, and you too. It doesn’t matter. It’s a good class.” She was encouraged to take the ASB by her aunt, who knew of the ASB and the success it had on many who attended. Wendy told the researcher that she was supported in the following ways: “My umm…resume and stuff. Charity kinda helped me with Math.” When asked what the ASB did to help her she informed: “Just people. The work. Doing work. Being around the people I got to know.” Asking if she was academically and emotionally supported, Wendy shared that “yeah, yeah, yeah…you guys are like help and all that kind of stuff.”

Being exposed to Aboriginal ways of knowing for Wendy was unique. She informed the researcher that the Elders who visited “were really cool” and “the full circle thing” was impactful. Further, Wendy noted some added details:

I felt like really positive and I felt that there were ancestors with us and it was really interesting. I dunno, you just feel calm and like yourself. Yeah grounded. Yeah it came at a good time. I don’t mind [sharing circles], just some days I don’t like to share but I’ll still do it. I use to be shy and didn’t want to do circles. I started getting more out of it when everyone started talking and I became more not shy. From shy to open.

Activities like making bannock bread with Elders, for Wendy “was fun actually! Really good! I was proud of it and it was fun. I didn’t know how to make it.” Having another Elder facilitate a sacred sharing circle for her was most enjoyable:

Yeah [he] was really cool and it was a different way of culture and it was nice. And there was different kind of like energy power from him. Yeah it was really different. Just energy
different. I like how he took his shoes off grounding himself with respect. That’s what you do in the Big House.

Wendy affirmed that she be highly recommend activities like this for future ASB students: “Yeah I’d like to do them again,” she explained. Her grades in school improved drastically since the year prior. “They’ve changed” since last year when she “dropped out. Yeah I dropped out and then I went back. My friends made me drop out. Just like alcohol I guess.”

Being in the ASB with Aboriginal ways of knowing “helped me do my work. It’s helped me like study and it’s just helped, yeah.” Without the ASB she acknowledged, “oh I’d be failing all my classes right now. No lie about that. I would be crabby and not wanting to be here. I’m not as shy or crabby. I’m getting out of my shell now.”

Wendy shared her favorite activity while in the ASB:

Ummm...actually I liked the beach. When we went to the beach. Just not being with the little kids. That was annoying. Yeah, when we sang songs, had the salmon, walked on the beach. I just felt Native. It was a really good experience while not at home. I felt comfortable.

She reported that the ASB “makes other people feel different.” What she meant was that “all the laughing. All the laughing and the umm people in here are pretty awesome. I’ve never had sharing circles, I’ve just had to do my work, but yeah it’s just different. I get to hear what people went through in the week and how they’re feeling and we just talk about it.” To her, “going on more field trips, getting out of school” were important aspects of the ASB for her. Her final request for future classes was to have “more people come in” to share their stories and lead more cultural activities.
Case Study: Adrianna Smith

Adrianna Smith, recently entered high school at Carihi Secondary in her Grade 9 year. Originally from the west coast of Vancouver Island, she has previously shared with the researcher some incredible hardships from her personal life that affected her middle school education. Therefore, from her difficult experiences, some gaps in her learning were evident while she was in the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB). She grew up not knowing much of her culture and when asked gave vague answers and admitted she did not “know about my culture actually.” Becoming more involved for her would involve steps in seeing her family and speaking to them about it.

Notably, she mentioned her weaknesses in school. Coming from middle school to high school was a drastic change for her. She began to struggle in Science 9, as well as, English 9 and Mathematics 9. When asked about her feelings toward school she shared that it was “the teachers” that made school enjoyable: “I feel, they make the students happy. Well, the first and second day of school when I met you...ummm...you just know what makes us more comfortable, what makes us happy.” Probing for more detail, she explained it is “when we have sharing circle. We kind of bond with others and laugh sometimes.”

Emotionally, Adrianna was keen on sharing how she felt comfortable in the ASB, but the words use to describe it were difficult for her. She did acknowledge however, “I feel letting my feelings out because I don’t even do that at home.” Adrianna confirmed it made her feel good to do this within the group but said she “can’t explain it.” The most detailed answer of her feeling emotionally supported and connected while in the ASB was that “you are doing good” and “it makes me happy” by doing sharing circles “because I really don’t know why...ummm it was fun.”
When asked why she joined the ASB she told the researcher, “I wanted to come in because I heard it was good from other people.” Academically, Adrianna felt safe and that she can “come here every day to work” and that she is “happy” to “finish [her] work.” Certainly having the First Nations educational assistant supporting her was something she noted: “She explains it more better than others. When it’s a different class how I feel…when I put my hand up she [the teacher] never comes and helps.” Additionally, Adrianna admitted that she did not “even do homework at home, and sometimes I don’t even pay attention in class.” The ASB provides the opportunity for her to prepare for exams and catch up on the homework needed for her to be successful.

In regards to Aboriginal ways of knowing, Adrianna slightly opened up about sharing circles and Elders visiting. When involved in activities like making bannock bread at the Thunderbird Hall and participating in Elder led sharing circles, Adrianna felt “more into my culture.” Though the visiting Elders made her “feel shy,” she appreciated when one Elder “shared his story.” Specifically, Adrianna felt “happy” when this Elder came, as she shared that she felt the presence of her mother, who had passed on. Adrianna confirmed that the Elders’ ceremonies brought back memories of her mother, that she did not feel sad about it but felt her spirit, “it felt like I’m with her right now.” Further, “the Elder helped to make my day” when he facilitated a traditional sharing circle. The traditional preparation of smoked-salmon on the beach fire “was pretty interesting.” She admitted that she “didn’t know how to cut a salmon” until it was shown to her by an Elder.

At the conclusion of the interview, Adrianna wanted the researcher to know that there was “nothing to change” about the ASB. Adrianna felt “good” and “confident” and that by
having the First Nations educational assistant in the ASB, students were provided with a great deal of humour.

**Emergent Themes and Patterns**

Upon completing the interview and analysis process, the researcher discovered the services the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) provided enhanced academic success and social-emotional support, and raised cultural awareness. Each case study presented insight from different perspectives.

**Academic Success**

One overarching theme emerging from the data set was reinforced throughout all eight interviews. Each Aboriginal student-participant reported that the ASB contributed to their academic success. Some participants went as far as saying they had great difficulty in school and without the ASB, their grades would be low, if not, failing. Most of the participants commented on the development and attainment of new skills while attending the ASB. The researcher noted from the participants that it was the personalized one-on-one or small group support, learning new strategies in writing, exam writing strategies, and having extra time outside of their regular classes to finish assignments, as the main contributors of their academic successes.

Many who had previously attended the ASB sought to attend it again because of the academic accomplishments they experienced and the relationships that were created. Two of the eight interviewed were new to the school and had only attended the ASB once. However, the other six participants attended the ASB one or more times, suggesting participants valued having the ASB timetabled in their schedule. A series of patterned responses developed. Student participants reported that the extra time and one-on-one support were the main factors in having higher and/or passing grades in school. Some went as far to divulge that by being in the ASB
they were on track to graduate from high school, and/or did graduate from high school because of the support offered throughout the school year(s). Further, three Grade 12 participants remarked that they would not have been a part of their regular graduation class without being in the ASB.

For one participant, academic success was in part due to goal setting and time management. Preparation for exams with one-on-one or small group support helped to provide more in-depth understanding of curriculum. When curriculum was explained in a variety of ways, some participants credited this as a factor in understanding assignment expectations. Notably, two participants recognized the ASB filled in some of their gaps in learning when they had previously chosen to drop out of school.

**Social-Emotional Success**

Another theme from the data set was the social-emotional support the participants felt. All eight commented on feeling emotionally supported while attending the ASB. The creation of trusting relationships over a period of several months was the key ingredient that led to the academic success of each participant. Without the social-emotional support, the academic successes of these students would have been significantly less. Providing a safe and compassionate environment helped students open up about their academic and personal struggles.

All participants perceived a sense of belonging while attending the ASB. It was through the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing, that trust was fostered. The participants were able to share their weaknesses and strengths in school, as well as shape educational goals. In doing so, the researcher and the Educational Assistant were able to academically support students by teaching or reviewing important learning concepts.
The integration of sharing circles twice weekly undoubtedly contributed to the social-emotional support for all of the eight participants in the study. Sharing circles were a way to remove existing barriers, create boundaries and protocols of respect, and add meaning to their time in the ASB. From this activity, participants were free to be themselves, share what was on their mind and heart, and express it to an audience who listened patiently and attentively. The incorporation of sharing circles and Elder led sacred circles strengthened the social fabric of the group, insofar as communicating with one another about their hardships and successes in and outside of school. This process built and fostered the foundations of trusting relationships. These meaningful relationships strengthened and continue to develop. Even after graduating from Carihi Secondary School, one participant still visits the ASB and attends sharing circles when able.

The activities facilitated by the researcher and First Nations Educational Assistant created lasting impacts on the participants. Each participant acknowledged the sense of community while in the ASB.

**Increased Cultural Awareness**

Also emerging from the data set was the overarching theme and pattern of how Elders impacted their experience. According to the participants, Elders who visited brought culture, experience, and humour. Even though Aboriginal ways of knowing were not fully embraced by all participants, incorporating them as a part of the ASB was significant. In particular, one Christian participant reported she did not believe in the stories told by Elders, but still appreciated what they shared with the group. Elders led sacred circles that provided spiritual nourishment and promoted a holistic balance. Even a less serious and more comedic Elder who led fun games and activities, developed the social-emotional relationships through humour and
playful teasing. A carving Elder provided inspiration for one participant who still regularly visits the carving shed for tips and ideas for his own carving projects. When attending a beach ceremony where salmon was smoked traditionally by an Elder, students reported an increased cultural awareness. Incorporating Elders in the ASB had lasting personal and cultural effects on the participants and provided an original experience.

The main themes addressed in the findings of this paper showcase how the student participants perceived their academic and emotional success through Aboriginal ways of knowing. The two main purposes of the block were enhanced by incorporating Aboriginal activities that cultivated identity and raised cultural awareness for the students. The academic supports received in the ASB ensured students were on track to meet the Ministry’s graduation requirements. The social-emotional support came from the creation of trusting relationships, which largely contributed to students’ sense of belonging and ability to open up personally and academically with the group. Aboriginal ways of knowing were used to connect students with each other, the researcher and the First Nations Educational Assistant, and fostered their sense of identity. Aboriginal knowledge served as a channel to guide the ASB in a direction which elevated cultural identity, trusting relationships, the pursuit and accomplishment of academic goals, and a sense of belonging in school.
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

Summary of the Research

This action research incorporated Aboriginal ways of knowing in an Aboriginal Support Block (ASB) for at-risk Aboriginal students at an inner city school in Campbell River, BC. The research question proposed in this paper was: How does the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing contribute to Aboriginal students’ academic and emotional success in school? The researcher incorporated Aboriginal ways of knowing in an ASB to support Aboriginal students at-risk of being “pushed-out” (Fine & Page, 1991) of school. The researcher interviewed eight consenting Aboriginal student-participants who attended the ASB. 30 minute semi-structured interviews revealed a rich data set which showcased the perceived academic and emotional success of each study through the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Currently, Aboriginal student populations are increasing province wide (CCL, 2007). However, Aboriginal students’ graduation rate is substantially lower in comparison with their non-Aboriginal counterparts. According to the BC Ministry of Education, 48% of Aboriginal students graduate with a BC Certificate of Graduation, or Dogwood Diploma, compared to 69% of non-Aboriginal students (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 30). Thus, a majority of Aboriginal students who attend BC public schools may wonder what the purpose of their education is, insofar as they walk in two worlds of knowing.

In school, Aboriginal students are taught Western ways of knowing through Western curricula that is driven by conventional scientific methods, which promotes a “blind reliance on citation” (Battiste, p. 4, 2002). In contrast, a second world of knowing, an Aboriginal way of knowing, is largely absent from school but is celebrated and fostered outside of school in the private lives of many Aboriginal students. Aboriginal knowledge “is far more than the binary
opposite of Western knowledge” (Battiste, p. 5 2002) and Aboriginal youth are the “invaluable sources of intergenerational transmission of [this] traditional knowledge” (Battiste, p. 33, 2002). For the most part, Aboriginal students are deprived of their traditional ways of knowing while attending school. Consequently, their engagement with school is fairly low and a lack of supporting programs may continue to hinder the success of these students (CCL, 2007) and their sense of identity during their formative years.

Aboriginal students are unique in their learning and being (Toulouse, 2012). It is essential that public schools adopt cultural programs that raise awareness to foster identity, purpose, and belonging for these distinctive students who are prone to becoming “push-outs” (Fine & Page, 1991). Aboriginal ways of knowing are spiritual and holistic in nature (Lee, 2007). Without school meeting these students’ needs, an increasing number of Aboriginal students will be driven out of the public school system because Western ways of knowing marginalize Aboriginal knowledge (Curwen Doige, 2003). Weaving two worlds of knowing is integral in sustaining a healthy Aboriginal student population to help meet their expressed needs in BC public schools.

The findings of this research suggest that by incorporating Aboriginal cultural elements, students’ academic and emotional success increases. Students were engaged in school and developed meaningful, profound relationships with peers and facilitators in the ASB. A greater sense of belonging was strengthened for these students than in an education system solely promoting Western ways of knowing (Curwen Doige, 2003).

**Discussion**

The results from the research strongly indicate how the ASB enhanced the learning of Aboriginal students’ who were not ordinarily engaged in, or connected with, school. Responses from the participants were not a surprise, as the current literature review supports the notion of
increased success for Aboriginal students who are engaged with their culture in school. Thus, Aboriginal students have more pride in their heritage and have a stronger sense of identity and self-worth in school with the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing (Cassidy & Marsden, 2009).

Due to the low number of Aboriginal graduates in BC, as well as large increase in the Aboriginal population, it should be an expectation that public schools ameliorate the learning conditions for Aboriginal students by examining the use of, and incorporation of, Aboriginal ways of knowing—to weave two worlds of knowing together.

Since Aboriginal ways of knowing have existed for thousands of years and were passed down generationally, policy change must occur and nurture Aboriginal input by consulting with the guardians and holders of sacred Aboriginal knowledge. Even though much of their ways of knowing have been lost due to the tragic implementation of residential schools and a myriad of factors that led to culture loss in the past centuries, Aboriginal students today still require an education to satiate their innate spiritual and emotional needs. This is done through cultural activities that support their identity and self-worth.

As pointed out in this study, Aboriginal students are unique learners, different from non-Aboriginal students in a variety of ways. However, through the implementation of Aboriginal knowledge and culture, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students can benefit from the rich traditions that have developed the spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual ways of knowing by First Nations people. Without knowledge or learning supporting a “spiritual core” (Forbes, 1979), education may end up misguiding or disengaging many more of BC’s Aboriginal students, further propelling a cycle of “push-outs” (Fine & Page, 1991) in an education system predominantly using Western way of knowing in school. Education should transform and build
capacity for Aboriginal students to feel authentic, connected, and prepared for an enriched life (Battiste, 2002).

When the themes of this paper were analyzed and presented, there was little doubt of the positive effects that integrating Aboriginal ways of knowing had on the Aboriginal students who attended the ASB. Aboriginal people navigate the world and thrive on building relationships with others. It is Elders who bequeath their knowledge to younger generations that help to cultivate the spiritual wisdom needed for a balanced and successful life. As Johnston (2006) points out, education is a “profoundly moral endeavor” and it is paramount public education embrace the notion of Aboriginal worldviews to further the success of Aboriginal students and to “decolonize” a Eurocentric traditional way of learning in BC schools.

Limitations

Eight consenting Aboriginal student-participants were interviewed in this study. Therefore there are limitations to the expressed themes and recommendations of this study in terms of generalizability. Though there was a fair cross-section of grades and sexes in this action research, it was a small sample size. Thus, this study cannot be generalized to the context of BC public schools. Further study in this area is needed at a variety of school levels and school districts to increase the generalizability of the recommendations.

Recognizing that outside factors also put these types of students at-risk of leaving school, also influences findings. These factors may include lack of resources, socio-economic status, lack of engagement, an unwelcoming school or home environment, lack of parenting, expulsions, criminal activity, lack of academic mentoring, or systemic racism or inequality within school (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Outside factors affect attendance and success in school. Even with the most supportive programs in place, students have unique experiences while attending school,
which in turn, impacts their academic and emotional experiences. Therefore it is not likely that the themes interpreted in this study could be applied to schools across BC without further research.

In regards to the recommendations of this research, limitations in funding and strained relationships in BC communities may have an effect on the generalizability and results in this area of research. The political climate bears weight on the financial contributions and agendas of the governments that fund Aboriginal Education. These factors are limitations outside the scope of this study, but are a present factor.

**Recommendations for Educators**

Recommendations on paper may be perceived as superficial, yet this action research has demonstrated the effectiveness and utility of incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing as perceived by the Aboriginal students who experienced their integration in the school setting. These research findings should not be limited in scope to secondary schools. Other school levels such as elementary or middle school could benefit from adopting some of the recommendations presented in this paper as a small step forward in enhancing Aboriginal Education in BC public schools. The implications of this research are significant and should be studied even further in depth, and at a variety of school levels, in school districts across BC.

A way for educators to begin an understanding of Aboriginal culture may come from the work of Laura Tait, a First Nations formal leader in BC. She contends that educators should take steps forward to “deepen their own understanding of our shared Canadian history and Indigenous ways of knowing” (Halbert & Kaser, 2013, p. 17). To her, there are four progressions in understanding and learning Aboriginal beliefs and knowledge. Tait metaphorically compares these four learning steps to a canoe journey wherein she developed a rubric to guide vested
Educators should consult this rubric as a way to begin their new learning.

The first step in understanding Aboriginal ways of knowing is accessing the “Awareness”, or moving the canoe towards the water, and recognizing there is a need to know that First Nations traditions are sacred. The “Developing” phase is where learners board the canoe, or develop a willingness to address and enhance Aboriginal knowledge and to encourage others to do so as well. Then the “Acquiring” of traditional knowledge, or raising a canoe paddle while on the water, implies learners demonstrate and respect Aboriginal traditions. It is in this step that learners become responsible and fully support and spread Aboriginal history and knowledge to others. The final “Advocacy” stage, where the learner is sent into deep waters to seek out and lead, yet recognizes the injustices First Nations people have endured, and are able to articulate and enhance others’ understanding (Halbert & Kaser, 2013). Infusing this learning process in for educators in schools may be a guide to promote Aboriginal understandings in school. What is most significant about the entire process is that it benefits all learners and is good for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. Above all else, it is the weaving of two worlds of knowing that will support Aboriginal students in the public school system.

The researcher’s personal recommendations for the brave educators who endeavour to incorporate or apply some of the concepts of this paper are to know that with patience, rewards will come. Know that the journey will not be easy. Be patient. Do not give up, even when you think the activities may not be going well. Persist over resist, and you will reap the social-emotional aspects of improved relationships and the re-engagement of at-risk students in their academic learning. The four recommendations below will serve as a way of beginning the process of incorporating of Aboriginal ways of knowing and will likely lead to even richer
experiences in school. Much more success will come once relationships are formed both in the group and with the community.

1. *Connect with Elders:* Begin by connecting with local Aboriginal Elders in your community to bridge Aboriginal culture with education. Aboriginal communities are open to those who seek help. However, do not expect Aboriginal community members to come forward and exert their cultural beliefs and values upon others. Relationships with these community members will take an uncertain period of time to foster and develop; but once trust is built, expect their contributions to be meaningful and powerful. When an agreement with Elders has been established, encourage them to come and share their culture, stories, and traditional knowledge with students. Elders promote the authenticity of Aboriginal culture and legitimize the process of incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing. Students perceive their presence as purposeful and impactful, promoting their social-emotional success in school (Cassidy & Marsden, 2006).

2. *Incorporate Sharing Circles:* A simple way to start incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing is to begin by integrating sharing circles into the classroom routine. With the students, discuss the purpose of the activity, protocols of respect, and do not expect an outcome each time one is facilitated. *Protocols of Respect* should be understood by all who participates and allow those who are uncomfortable to “pass” if needed. To encourage participation, provide an open-ended question and have students share their opinions. This fosters a sense of trust in the group. Gradually release responsibilities to the students by having them lead, as well as, open and close sharing circles. Teach the skill of listening. Elders have communicated listening as a fundamental skill when facilitating sharing circles. Have an object of significance which symbolizes the turn of
the speaker. Often an eagle feather or sacred rock is used to do this, but the object itself is only a symbol to respect and listen to the one who holds it.

3. Welcome Elders: Have students welcome Elders who visit with open arms and know their visits are precious and powerful. Remind students that even though the stories may contradict religious beliefs or personal values, it is the themes embedded within that have served Aboriginal people for thousands of years. The knowledge they share is sacred and may serve many Aboriginal students both in school and their personal lives. Debrief after an Elder visits to share in the knowledge and help to connect meaning to the stories.

4. Build Relationships: Aboriginal students are unique and as such are somewhat reticent until trust has been established. They enjoy working in small groups and in small classes. Often, humor and playful teasing are effective ways of building relationships. According to the research, humour and teasing were gifts from the creator that allowed them to cope during difficult times (Toulouse, 2011). This strategy works well in fostering trust and creating strong social-emotional connections with the researcher’s ASB. Be patient and kind. With the integration of sharing circles, the relationships between educators and learners will strengthen over time.

Recommendations for School Districts

In addition to recommendations for educators, further ones can be made for new initiatives and research at school districts in BC. Funding Aboriginal education at times may be costly. However, promoting the well-being of Aboriginal students should trump the financial cost because demographically Aboriginal people are among the fastest growing populations in BC and therefore bears consideration (CCL, 2007). These future members of society must feel a sense of identity, belonging, and have a healthy and balanced lifestyle to contribute in a positive
way. This starts at the school district level and will trickle into schools. The four recommendations below are ways in which school districts may begin a pragmatic approach to reforming Aboriginal Education.

1. **Build Community Partnerships**: School districts, schools, educators, parents/guardians, and Aboriginal community members must build respectful partnerships to foster the growth of Aboriginal Education in BC. By nurturing a respectful partnership with Aboriginal Elders and the Aboriginal community, school districts will be able to deepen Aboriginal knowledge and understanding for their students. It is paramount that these partnerships are forged in order to progress forward. The central goal for all stakeholders should be to put students and learning at the center of the process. By respecting the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements and using the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL, 2013) as a guide, these partnerships will advance Aboriginal Education in BC and likely engage more Aboriginal students in school.

2. **Create and Support Aboriginal Programs**: The researcher encourages the exploration of funding time for Aboriginal Educators to bring cultural initiatives and activities to regular mainstream students who are interested in learning Aboriginal culture. To grow Aboriginal culture at schools would benefit students who attend these public institutions and raise an awareness of Aboriginal worldviews. Integrating Western ways of knowing and holistic Aboriginal ways of knowing would enhance the educational experience of students’ province wide. This may be accomplished through school district programs like the Aboriginal Support Block (ASB). Programs such as this foster Aboriginal Education and support the capacity of building and strengthening Aboriginal knowledge. By providing an opportunity for Aboriginal Elders and students to teach their culture to non-
Aboriginal students at school may be a way to garner more empathy, interest, and raise a
deep consideration for Aboriginal worldviews in education.

3. Create and Support Specialty Educational-Leaders: The development of district wide
Aboriginal programs that foster and incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing in schools,
may also be a way to intrigue passionate educators and begin a process of weaving *two worlds of knowing*. As such, supporting educational-leaders that are willing and excited
about Aboriginal Education, school districts should look into the creation of small
cohorts of specialty educators that know and can teach others how to integrate Aboriginal ways of knowing in the classroom. Often, teachers feel uncomfortable teaching
Aboriginal knowledge because they are either non-Aboriginal or know little in regards to
Aboriginal ways of knowing. However, if school districts support a small cohort of adept
educational-leaders that can guide and support classroom teachers, then incorporating
Aboriginal knowledge will ease teacher anxiety and develop greater capacity for
Aboriginal worldviews within schools.

4. Pilot a Cohort Model: Creating a cohort of students as a pilot project to study the
shortfalls and gains of incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing, is a way to overcome
the issue of timetabling at the secondary school level. Selecting students interested in a
unique holistic experience that weaves *two worlds of knowing*, may increase student engagement to those students otherwise disinterested in the conventional education model. Often, time becomes an issue for secondary educators who wish to promote
experiential field trips and/or host Aboriginal Elders in a rigid school timetable. For
educators, issues such as time, preparation for activities, and/or feeling rushed to prepare
for the next classes, may impact the success of Aboriginal programs because time is
needed to build relationships and to further authentically promote Aboriginal culture. A cohort model may be a way to foster a unique learning experience that reduces “push-outs” (Fine & Page, 1991) in the current education system. Students in this cohort will be able to meet the graduation requirements by allowing passionate educational-leaders to fuse Aboriginal ways of knowing with inquiry project-based learning. Here, students will have input in the direction of their learning, which may also develop students’ identity because projects could incorporate both Western ways and Aboriginal ways of knowing.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Elementary and middle school educators and researchers, who are passionate and wish to begin the learning journey of incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing, should begin by consulting Tait’s rubric (Halbert & Kaser, 2013) and the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL, 2013) to guide their inquiry. Here both educators and future researchers have a way of understanding the process and developing a framework respectful of Aboriginal culture.

Since the scope of this study analyzed the effects of Aboriginal ways of knowing in the secondary school context, further research may point to their use in elementary and/or middle school levels as well. At these different school levels, it would be worth researching how younger Aboriginal students identify with their culture, and how integrating Aboriginal ways of knowing would affect their social-emotional and academic success in school.

Another suggestion for future research may be examining the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Indeed, many non-Aboriginal students are interested in learning about Aboriginal culture, yet are rarely given the opportunity to learn and explore, particularly at the secondary level. To increase Aboriginal culture in school,
future researchers and educators may pilot programs or showcase events that raise cultural awareness and study the impact for non-Aboriginal students.

Lastly, examining the impact of how Aboriginal teachers affect Aboriginal students’ academic and social-emotional success in school may also be worth studying. Researching how Aboriginal role models influence Aboriginal students at all levels of the school system would be a study of interest because students in BC are mainly taught by non-Aboriginal teachers, many unaware of Aboriginal culture and traditions. Studying the impact of Aboriginal educators may inspire further study in Aboriginal Education.

Conclusion

The recommendations from this paper may in effect, impact the learning for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners, educators, and school districts interested in progressing and building capacity in Aboriginal Education. Though there are plenty of limitations, including funding, strained relationships in communities, and the dwindling engagement of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in school, the opportunity to move forward in Aboriginal Education is now. True leaders of change for Aboriginal Education are the educational-leaders who appreciate Aboriginal worldviews and knowledge and wish to build even greater capacity in education by promoting traditional Aboriginal knowledge and traditions.

Incorporating Aboriginal ways of knowing in school may profoundly impact at-risk Aboriginal students who may otherwise leave school early. This research points out that there is increased academic, social-emotional, and cultural success with the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing. Schools and school districts that embrace some of the recommendations in this paper will foster strong learning experiences. This process will help learners in affirming their identity and development in their formative years. BC Aboriginal Education can lead the way for
others. It simply takes commitment, partnerships, and putting learners at the centre of the process.
References


Battiste, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in first nations education: a literature review with recommendations. (Ottawa: National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Indian Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)).


Running head: TWO WORLDS OF KNOWING


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Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Consent for “Two Worlds of Knowing: Examining the use of Aboriginal Ways of Knowing in the High School Context”

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC

Contact Information: [Removed for publication]

Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
250.753.3245 ex. 2161
rachel.moll@viu.ca

Purpose of the Study:
In addition to being the Aboriginal support teacher at Carihi Secondary School, I am also a student in the Masters of Educational Leadership Program and Vancouver Island University. I am conducting a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements of that program, and would like to invite your son or daughter to participate.

As an educational researcher, I am interested in exploring if the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing in the Aboriginal support blocks at Carihi Secondary School helped Aboriginal students’ academic and emotional success. My hypothesis is that if Aboriginal students experience some of their culture in school, they may be more engaged in learning, develop a greater sense of belonging, and achieve greater academic success. Results from this research will be used in my graduate thesis as partial requirements for the Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. The findings will also be shared with the School District 72 administration, School District 72’s Aboriginal education principal, Carihi Secondary’s administrators, and interested professional colleagues who may want to read the final thesis.

Study Procedures:
In this study, Aboriginal students who attended the support block are being invited to voluntarily participate in a one hour semi-structured interview. The procedure of the interview will be as follows:
1. By returning this consent form to the front office of Carihi Secondary, you consent for your son or daughter to participate in the study, and to receive a $10 gift card to Tim Hortons’s.

2. During the interview, I will first read a scripted introduction outlining the purpose of the study, and then he/she will be asked a variety of questions that will encourage them to share their experiences from class. This will allow them to express their opinions about the support block and the activities we did in it throughout the school year.

3. Interviews will take place in the First Nations room. It is a safe, comfortable location at Carihi Secondary School. Dates will be scheduled to fit your schedules.

4. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped to ensure accurate transcription of their responses.

5. Your son or daughter will not be asked to state any identifying information about themselves or others, and will create a pseudonym (anonymous name).

6. I will be transcribing the information I collect from the interviews for analysis, and publish the results in a thesis document.

7. To ensure accuracy of the data collected, a copy of transcribed responses will be given. They will have one week to review, revise, or remove content as they see appropriate.

**Potential Risks:**
Although I will use a pseudonym in my research, please know that your son or daughter may still be identified based on the information they provide. Accordingly, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Some of the interview questions may bring up personal feelings that may cause discomfort. Should this occur, counseling services will be made available.

**Potential Benefits:**
Your son or daughter may develop sense of fulfillment by being involved in the Aboriginal support block. Greater bonds between them and I may form. Student participants may be reminded of their personal and academic achievements within the block.

**Confidentiality:**
Individual name will **not** be recorded in the data collected in this study. As mentioned, even though a pseudonym will be used, please know that your son or daughter may still be identified based on the information they provide. The data will be stored in the principal investigator’s office in a locked cabinet. Electronic data and results will be stored on a password protected computer with access for both me and my research supervisor.

**Contact for Information about the study:**
If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, Nicolas Pisterzi [information removed for publication].

**Concerns about your treatment in the research:**
If you have any questions or concerns about your son or daughter’s treatment as a voluntary participant in this action research, please contact the Vancouver Island University’s Research Ethics Officer at reb@vui.ca or by telephone at 250.753.3245 ex. 2665.
Consent:
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. **Student participants can opt out at any point in the interview, or can choose to not answer specific questions without penalty if they so choose.**

Your signature below indicates consent for your son or daughter to participate in the study and that they can be audio-recorded. Even though you may consent to allow participation, they may still choose not to participate in this research if they do not want to.

○ I consent for my son or daughter to participate in this research.

_____________________________
Date

_____________________________
Student’s Name (Please Print)

_____________________________
Student’s Signature

_____________________________
Parent/Guardian Name (Please Print)

_____________________________
Student and Parent Contact Information (Telephone or Cellphone Number)

_____________________________
Student and Parent Contact Information (Email Address)

_____________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature

*Please submit this to the drop box at the main office of Carihi Secondary School.*
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for “Two Worlds of Knowing: Examining the use of Aboriginal Ways of Knowing in the High School Context”

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC

Contact Information: [Removed for publication]

Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
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Vancouver Island University
250.753.3245 ex. 2161
rachel.moll@viu.ca

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of the study is to explore how the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing in the Aboriginal support blocks at Carihi Secondary School helped Aboriginal students’ academic and emotional success.

My hypothesis is that if Aboriginal students experience some of their culture in school, that they may be more engaged in learning, develop a greater sense of belonging, and achieve greater academic success.

Warm-Up Questions
1. Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how are you feeling today?
3. Tell me about a high and a low from your week.
4. What music are you listening to lately?

Interview Questions:
5. What does being Aboriginal mean to you?
6. When do you remember being taught about your culture growing up?
7. In what ways does your Aboriginal culture affect your life?
   ○ What would make you feel more connected to your culture?
8. What are your feelings about school?
9. What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses in school?
10. Do you feel a sense of belonging at Carihi Secondary School?
    ○ Do you feel a sense of belonging in the Aboriginal support block?
11. What year(s) were you enrolled in the Aboriginal support block?
What grade were you in?
12. Why were you in the Aboriginal support block?
   o What do you remember working on over the semester?
13. In what ways did being in the Aboriginal support block help you?
   o In what ways did you feel emotionally supported while in the support block?
   o In what ways did you feel academically supported while in the support block?
   o In what ways did you not feel emotionally supported while in the support block?
   o In what ways did you not feel academically supported while in the support block?
14. How have some of the activities we did engage you in learning?
   o What did you think about sharing circles?
   o How did you feel when we visited the Big House?
   o What did you think about when we made bannock bread?
   o How did you feel when Elders came to share their stories?
   o What did you think about when we made meals together?
15. Would you recommend including these activities in the future?
16. Did you feel the support block contributed to your grades in school? How?
17. Tell me how you think you would have done in school if you were not in the support block.
18. Do you feel you were able to work through difficult assignments because of the block? If yes, how so?
19. Discuss with me if you were better prepared to achieve passing grades on exams because of the support block?
20. What tools, if any, did you gain while attending the support block? (eg. studying habits, essay writing, test strategies, etc)
21. What was your favorite activity we did while in the support block?
22. What was your least favorite activity while in support block?
23. If you could enhance or change something we did in the support block, what would it be?
24. What is a fond memory you had while in the support block?
25. Do you have anything you would like to share before we conclude our interview?
Appendix C: School-Wide Morning Announcement

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC
Contact Information: [Removed for publication]
Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
Faculty of Education
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Good morning Carihi,

Mr. Pisterzi is doing his Master’s degree at Vancouver Island University. He is wondering if there are interested Aboriginal students who have been in the Aboriginal support block, and would like to participate in a one hour interview for his research. The research is looking at the effects of the Aboriginal Support Block on student success and relationships. If interested, please visit the front office or First Nations room to read the information bulletin and pick up a consent form. Students who volunteer to participate will be offered a $10 gift card to Tim Horton’s.
Appendix D: Interview Protocol - Introduction and Conclusion

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC

Contact Information: [Removed for publication]

Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
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rachel.moll@viu.ca

Scripted Interview Introduction
This is a voluntary interview and you may withdraw from the study at any point. If you are ever uncomfortable with a question, you can choose to not answer it without penalty. With your permission, the information will be audio-recorded and be kept completely confidential. Your real name will never be used in the study, and I would like for you to think of and create a pseudonym or fake name right now. You will only be referred to by your pseudonym, or fake name in this study. During the interview please don’t include information that will identify yourself or others.

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed. Your participation will help me to understand if Aboriginal ways of knowing help those who attend the support block. It is my hope to make this a successful program at Carihi Secondary for years to come, and to help future Aboriginal students who enrol in the Aboriginal support blocks.

Scripted Interview Conclusion
Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions. I will be transcribing your answers and will provide a copy of your response and one week to review, revise, or remove content as you see appropriate, along with a copy of your submitted consent form. You can still choose to opt out of the study at any point before I publish the data. I will follow up and provide you with a $10 gift card to Tim Hortons.
Appendix E: Student Recruitment Script

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC

Contact Information: [Removed for publication]

Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
250.753.3245 ex. 2161
rachel.moll@viu.ca

Good morning. As you may know, I’m doing my Master’s degree at Vancouver Island University and I’m writing my thesis on the Aboriginal support blocks at Carihi.

Now, at this stage of my research, I want to invite you all to participate in a one hour interview. Please don’t feel pressured. This is completely voluntary and if you decide not to, that’s okay. The research is looking at the effects of the Aboriginal support block on student success and relationships. You will need to take a consent form home to your parents/guardians and have them sign for you to be interviewed. I will hand them out to you once I’m done talking. I won’t be collecting them now, but I’d ask that you take them home, and once you have them signed, drop them off at the front office in the drop-box.

I’ll host the interviews privately in the First Nations room and make a time that work best for you. Those who volunteer their time receive a $10 gift card to Tim Horton’s.

Information from the interview will be confidential. I’ll even ask you to come up with a fake name, so I won’t even use your real name in my research.

In the interview I will audio-record your responses to the questions I ask. If a question makes you uncomfortable, you don’t even have to answer it. I’m asking questions that encourage you to talk about the support block. I want to know how it has affected your experience and what you think about the activities we’ve done together.
Appendix F: Information Bulletin

Principal Investigator: Nicolas Pisterzi, Teacher, SD 72 – Campbell River, BC

Contact Information: [Removed for publication]

Action Research Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Moll
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
250.753.3245 ex. 2161
rachel.moll@viu.ca

Mr. Pisterzi is doing his Master’s degree at Vancouver Island University and he is writing his thesis on the Aboriginal support blocks at Carihi. The research is looking at the effects of the Aboriginal support block on student success and relationships.

If you have attended an Aboriginal support block at Carihi Secondary and are interested in a voluntary interview with Mr. Pisterzi, please take a consent form home and have it signed. The interview will be approximately one hour in length and you will be asked to create a fake name to protect your identity. If you volunteer to participate in an interview, you will be offered a $10 gift card to Tim Horton’s.

This is a voluntary interview and you may withdraw from the study at any point. If you are ever uncomfortable with a question, you can choose to not answer it without penalty. With your permission, the information will be audio-recorded and be kept completely confidential. Your real name will never be used in the study.

Your participation will help me to understand how Aboriginal ways of knowing may help those who attend the support block. It is my hope to make this a successful program at Carihi Secondary for years to come, and to help future Aboriginal students who enrol in the Aboriginal support blocks.

Please consider taking a consent form and have your parents/guardians sign it and hand it into the drop box at the front office. You will be contacted for an interview at a later date.