Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs: Stories of Successes and Challenges

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Stories of Successes and Challenges

**Dedication**

I raise my hands to all the Early Childhood Educators in making a difference in children’s’ lives, and the little ones who teach us the most about how to shine bright and bring the joy in learning through play.

My gratitude of who I have become today is because of my ancestors, Elders Florence James, Philomena Williams, Harold Joe, Ray Peters, Louise Underwood, my late great Grandmother Helen Alphonse, Grandparents: Late Dennis Alphonse, & Philomena Alphonse, Charles & Donna Galloway, Bill & Olwen Mc Neil, Parents: David and Lucy Galloway and Doug Regan, Sisters Candace and Mary Galloway, Aunts, and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews. Also, to my dear mentor Linda Mc Donell.

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I would like to acknowledge with respect for the past and present Early Childhood Education and Care students, community members and Nations supporting my thesis and volunteering your time to understand with depth regarding supporting Aboriginal learning.

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Abstract

Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs: Stories of Successes and Challenges takes a look at Vancouver Island University Early Childhood Education programs and examines at the factors that contribute to a students learning and successes and challenges to completing their studies. The research is two-fold: a student questionnaire and focus groups with students, faculty, and community members from Nations on Vancouver Island. The purpose is to bring awareness to institutions, faculty, community and students to understand the depth of Aboriginal learning and how to create learning pathways that encompasses cultural capacity.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Retention and successful completion of First Nation students in post-secondary programs has been an ongoing issue for many First Nation communities. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) report, *Post-Secondary Education in Canada Meeting Our Needs?* (February 2009) states: “(First Nation) rate of university completions is one-third that of the non-Aboriginal population. Surveys of First Nation on reserve youth show that they face a number of barriers—including financial and cultural—that limit their participation in Post-Secondary education” (p.41).

This paper defines First Nation people as a group of people who self-identify as having cultural ties to specific territory or Nations such as: Snuneymux’w (Nanaimo), Stz’uminus (Chemainus), Cowichan (Duncan), and First Nation communities in Central and Southern Vancouver Island. The terms Aboriginal and Indigenous encompass all First peoples in Canada including First Nation (FN), Metis, and Inuit.

Purpose of the Study

Vancouver Island University (VIU) has partnered with the First Nation communities in Central and Southern Vancouver Island to develop Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs since the early 1990s. This study stemmed from my motivation as an Aboriginal Early Childhood Educator and instructor to understand how we can encourage FN students to be successful in their post-secondary ECEC courses. I believe that enhancing the quality of ECEC education will support healthy, holistic child development and promote healing in communities that have experienced trauma due to residential schools. I would like to understand the barriers and challenges for First Nation students in attaining post-secondary ECEC credentials. This
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project will explore the problems associated with the low success rate of First Nation learners in mainstream\(^1\) post-secondary programs; the ways in which community based programs can improve success; and the importance of providing a culturally inclusive learning environment for Aboriginal students. I will examine the strengths and challenges of the academic preparation of First Nation students participating in the community based and mainstream post-secondary ECEC programs from 2003 through 2013. The intent is to take a look at previous ECEC cohorts and learn how to continue to improve the success rates of Aboriginal learners. I believe that the study will point to a need to be more inclusive of the cultural context of Aboriginal students.

Halbert and Kaser (2013) share ideas about how to shift into an inquiry mind set, recognize Aboriginal issues and consider holistic approaches to incorporate Aboriginal ways by including cultural values, traditional teachings and ways of knowing and being in the classroom. They believe that the culture of Aboriginal students can be utilized to engage learners and strengthen their identity to their community.

I believe that introducing culturally relevant curriculum will bring insight and vision to working with First Nation students. As well, effective leadership will complement partnership building between post-secondary institutes and First Nation communities and will support First Nation students to complete post-secondary programs.

As an Aboriginal person in ECEC I am motivated to the support positive growth of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) profession in Aboriginal communities. I believe that education (specifically ECEC) can support child development and help to heal communities that have had traumatic historical experiences due to residential school and the foster system. Also, as a First Nation person I am dedicated to Aboriginal children and families and I would like to

\(^1\) Mainstream is defined as current programs delivered at the VIU campus in Nanaimo
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understand what the barriers and challenges are for First Nation students in attaining post-secondary ECEC credentials.

**Justification of the study**

To address the issues described previously, Canada is looking at ways to work alongside First Nation communities to encourage their students’ successful completion of post-secondary studies. Stonechild (2006) suggests it is important to consider a strong emphasis on collaborating with First Nation communities to deliver post-secondary education. He quotes the 2002 report *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enrolment Rates*, “Almost all Aboriginal education dollars are spent in universities and programs that are not under Aboriginal control . . . whenever Aboriginals are given control over their own programs or institutions, there have been higher rates of success in Aboriginal enrolment and graduation” (p.118-119).

The key ideas that have informed my understanding about the First Nation struggles related to post-secondary education include: the historical legacy of First Nation people in the education system; governments’ education policy related to supporting post-secondary First Nation students; data collected about the success of post-secondary partnerships with First Nation communities, and an exploration of how integrating First Nation family, culture, and community values and beliefs can improve students’ experiences and successes. Alfred (2005) suggests it is important to weave mainstream learning and First Nation ways into First Nation learning experiences. He reflects on the words of Thohahoken:

The elements of the Indigenous learning process: learning is transformative and involves critical reflection and a positive view of change; it is participatory and involves working with others in the learning process; and knowledge comes from learning traditions within a society of thoughtful people (p.199).
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In the *VIU Aboriginal Service Plan 2013/14* Aboriginal Education plan looks at the overall enrollment of Aboriginal students indicating a five year plan students who declared to be Aboriginal had the highest enrollment 2010-1 at 2,041 and the lowest enrollment was in 2007-08 a gap of 245 students (p.55). Comparing the enrollment of other students 2010-11 had 15, 722 students and in 2007-08 enrollment was at 17, 034. Central Data Warehouse Standard reports that of twenty two colleges and Universities VIU ranked as the third highest for Aboriginal enrollment (self-identified) based on the data in October 2012. This study reflects the current trend in Aboriginal student enrollment at the University overall.

**Historical Overview**

Education is a fundamental concern for First Nation families as a result of a long history of distrust stemming from the experiences of neglect and abuse in residential schools in Canada. I refer to these devastating experiences as ‘the thorn of tragedy’. Ball, Pierre, and Kuchne (2002) describe residential school as a wave of destruction of (First Nation) family life. Residential schools resulted from the policies of Prime Minister John A Macdonald and his government in 1885. Stonechild (2006) states “the federal government imposed draconian measures that took away the Indians’ freedom of movement, suppressed their traditional beliefs, and removed their children to residential schools” (p.19). He discusses the increase of residential schools. By 1931 eighty residential schools were fully operational with students maintaining the buildings in long days of labour. The level of professionalism was compromised with forty percent of teachers with no training, only “missionary zeal” (Stonechild; 2006, p.20). After forty years of demoralizing impacts in First Nation communities the last residential school was closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. The governments’ action in using education as a means to assimilate and isolate First Nation children continues to haunt families today. Based on this history and its’
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devastating intergenerational effects, it is not surprising that First Nation people hesitate to pursue a higher education. This disturbing history is compounded by the Indian Act through its policies and laws. For example, if a First Nation student enrolled in a post-secondary institute, the government would take away his/her Indian status. Stonechild (2006) further explained that this section of the Indian Act Section 86(1) was “a reflection of official beliefs that possessing higher education gave one a type of independence such that he need no longer remain an Indian” (p. 21).

The government of British Columbia and post-secondary institutions are recognizing the need to work with First Nation communities by creating educational pathways to effectively build trust and strengthen relationships and include First Nation cultural values and traditions in community based programs. Doing this will enhance access and inclusion of First Nation students in mainstream educational programs. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2011) What is the Future of Learning in Canada? report states, “Only 8% of Aboriginal people had completed a degree compared to 23% of non-Aboriginal Canadians” (p.35).

There is something to be learned from the success of post-secondary, community based ECEC programs that will enhance education and strengthen completion rates of First Nation ECEC students. Ball, Definney, and Pence (1999) look closely at what is working with communities and suggest ways to develop relationships with First Nation people. Ball et al. (1999) state that relationship building with First Nation community partners is an important step in “. . . yielding a central place to community input in all aspects of program and decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [is central to a quality education for First Nation learners]” (p.192).
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Research Question and Hypothesis

My research question is:

What are the key factors that contribute to First Nation students’ success in post-secondary Early Childhood Education Certificate and Diploma programs?

Hypothesis

The success of First Nation students relates to the cultural inclusiveness of post-secondary training. ECEC programs prepare practitioners to support and nurture families in First Nation communities. The factors that contribute to ECEC student success include: ongoing family and community support; enhanced community programs that include Elders to strengthen cultural integrity; and strong support systems within the post-secondary community.

Definition of terms

The key factors influencing student success will be determined by using a questionnaire to identify supports that students reported were helpful during their time in the ECEC program. These supports could include: Elder teachings, First Nation community speakers, culturally inclusive curriculum and other forms of community support. Success is defined by retention and completion rates (from both mainstream and community based contract programs) and by students self-reporting about what was helpful to them in the ECEC program. Another aspect of

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2 Contract programs are those programs developed in partnership with local First Nation communities. Mainstream programs are base funded, core programs offered each year as part of regular on-campus delivery in Early Childhood Education and Care.
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success is whether the students are presently working as Early Childhood Educators and Assistants.

**Brief overview of study**

The first part of the study will examine successes and challenges of First Nation students’ post-secondary experience by gathering data through a survey of three previous First Nation cohorts in 2005, 2008, & 2012 that have participated in or completed an (ECEC) program. This research will involve volunteer participants of previous cohorts completing a questionnaire. I will analyze the student responses, reviewing their perceptions of the program strengths and challenges, to better understand those factors that contribute to their success.

The second part of the study will include four focus groups of First Nation students, ECEC instructors, First Nation Elders and community members which include employers from Aboriginal Early Childhood programs to gain their perceptions about how to best support and strengthen student learning in community based ECEC programs.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The focus of this literature review is to examine both the statistics regarding First Nation post-secondary students in British Columbia and research studies that emphasize successes and challenges experienced by Aboriginal students during their post-secondary programs.

British Columbia Government Plan

On the Statistics Canada website for British Columbia the *British Columbia’s Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan* discusses effective ways of working with First Nation people that are “based on reconciliation, recognition and respect” (p.1). In 2005, the Province, the Federal Government, and the Leadership Council (representing the First Nations of British Columbia) signed the Transformative Change Accord. This action suggests that the BC government acknowledges the need for changes to current post-secondary education for First Nations people in British Columbia. Demographic data show that:

- Over the past six years, the percentage of First Nations students receiving a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation from a public school has increased.
- Despite this improvement, 4 out of 10 First Nations people in British Columbia complete post-secondary education compared to 6 out of 10 non-First Nations students.
- British Columbia’s off-reserve First Nations labour force faces high unemployment; nearly three times that of the non-First Nations population.
- When employment rates are compared between First Nations and non-First Nations people who have the same levels of education, differences in labour market outcomes largely disappear (p.2).

Taking action to address these systemic challenges by supporting First Nations students through strong meaningful partnerships with communities backed up by government policy will
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enhance First Nations post-secondary education. I believe developing partnerships between
government and community will allow for proactive change within society.

Research Findings

In Canada, research about First Nation partnerships with post-secondary institutes has been
fully explored and developed at the University of Victoria. For example in the field of Early
Childhood Education and Child and Youth Care researchers, Ball and Pence (2009) look at three
First Nation communities in Canada and evaluate the results of partnership programs with post-
secondary schools. The nature of the partnership includes an emphasis on working with the
Nation’s leaders and the community to include cultural aspects within the ECEC programs. The
results of a two year program delivered by the University of Victoria are:

76 people from the three groups of communities participated in the research . . . The
research found that 33 (94%) of the post-secondary program graduates were working in
their own communities, most in career-relevant jobs, such as infant development,
supported child care, preschool, and Aboriginal Head Start (pp.186-187).

Successful partnerships between post-secondary schools and communities like the ones
described by Ball & Pence will provide learning opportunities that will help to advance
education and create jobs. This in turn will support families and build trust and commitment to
education. Most importantly, education will help the community to heal the ‘soul wounds’
caused by the destruction of family and cultural identity that occurred to the First Nation people.

First Nation Cultural Ways and Community Development

What are the First Nation ‘ways of being’ that can be incorporated into mainstream
programs to help maintain cultural identity and esteem? The values of understanding a culture
based on respect and looking to Elders for knowledge and wisdom is the foundation for many
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Nations. Elders are highly regarded in First Nation communities and are seen as essential advisors as they share teachings and stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. Including Elders as part of an Aboriginal student’s educational experience ensures positive cultural role models from the community and helps to connect students to their cultural and spiritual roots. Stonechild (2006) reflects about the elders as a connection to community by stating “the close involvement of Aboriginal Elders in these institutions is another sign of the close relationships with the community” (p.106).

Another important part of understanding First Nation society is to consider the importance of community and what community means to First Nation learners as part of a collectivist society. First Nation community programs and partnerships with post-secondary institutes can bridge the gap for First Nation learners who want to stay in their community and have the ability and the desire to reach their educational goals and work in their community or in mainstream society. Stonechild (2006) affirms collaboration between post-secondary and First Nation communities stating, “… by supporting an holistic approach to education and being cognizant of the multiple needs of the students, these institutions are best able to address the needs of Indigenous peoples in the communities” (p.106). The CCL (2009) states that results from the 2001 Census show that a higher proportion (31.2%) of Aboriginal families were living in low-income situations, compared with the average for all Canadian families (12.9%). . . children from low income are less inclined to attend post-secondary(p.45).

Furthermore, First Nation students are showing through their post-secondary choices that they want to be close to their community. Pidgeon (2008) reaffirms the demographic of Aboriginal students attending post-secondary programs. She says, “Statistics Canada shows that
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Aboriginal students tend to be older than twenty-one, and may have dependents along with familial and community responsibilities” (p. 344). Furthermore, Pidgeon (2008) shares that there is a common thread of Aboriginal students choosing a College or University which is geographically close to their community (p. 345).

Adding cultural knowledge from elders or First Nation teachers in Post-Secondary programs enriches development two-fold: first, it supports traditional knowledge in mainstream educational theory and practice and second, it enriches a culture which has survived colonization. Again, Stonechild (2006) sums up the relationships between post-secondary and First Nation communities by quoting Barnhardt “the need to meet generally accepted university standards … should not be [at] the expense of the uniqueness of these institutions. At the same time, there must be the proper balance of “, think globally, act locally,” (p.106).

Community integration, an approach to supporting First Nation learners by partnering with Post-Secondary, is part of the vision of building capacity and increasing the numbers of skilled First Nation workers in fields such as ECEC and Child and Youth Care (CYC). These two professions are highlighted because of the emphasis in both fields on nurturing families and children. Ball and Pence (2009) state “First Nations people already have the capacity to strengthen conditions for children, youth, and families within their communities. . . one support is post-secondary education and training that is truly community based” (p.63). This reinforces the importance of First Nation ways of raising children - ways that have been passed down from the ancestors. Considering Ball and Pence’s perspective, are First Nation people successfully maintaining cultural standards of community programs but sacrificing mainstream standards? Ball and Pence think not.
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Ball (2009) evaluates university and community partnerships and their ability to result in successful outcomes for students. She believes that finding out from community members what they recognize as positive aspects of these programs is essential. In her article, Ball (2009) highlights a statement from a community leader regarding a partnership with a post-secondary program:

The second major benefit is the program helped our students in the community to find their voice. They were a shy bunch of ladies; today they have the confidence to work with community members and our Elders. They gained skills on how to work with Elders, which is an important component in Tl’azt’en Head Start program. The CYC [Child and Youth Care] students have the confidence, education and capacity to deliver a well thought out program for the children. They will one day become true leaders in our community... The women are building the foundation with the families, where they are moving forward now to become leaders. We are proud of their accomplishments; the program was worth the energy and commitment (pp.191-192).

Another contributing factor in community success is “cultural safety.” Ball (2009) suggests that these programs create a sense of safety for students as they learn within their own communities. She also states that being in a cultural cohort motivates students to maintain and complete their studies.

Previous Research Studies

In the Te Heru- a Framework for Maori success within an initial teacher education programme. Mead, Kirikiri, Paratene and Allan (2011) do an analysis of students who were enrolled in their program and the students who were “on hold” when data was downloaded from the student management system on 24 May 2010. The download occurred when the researchers
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had ethical approval to begin the data gathering. The last ten student intakes from July 2005 to January 2010 were used. (Intake refers to the month the student was selected and commenced their studies. The group for each intake is referred to as a cohort) (p.21).

Mead, Kirikiri, Paratene and Allan (2011) outline two reasons “why the Te Tari Puna Ora o diploma programme enables Maori students to achieve a higher completion rate and identifies the factors by examining what are the factors that are critical for continued successful completion” (p.15). For example, in this method the researchers used ten different intakes of student data in the Early Childhood Education program. The study compared several cohorts of Maori students by age and ethnicity. The other part of the study considered where the students were at in each stage of the program. Researchers were interested in determining the frequency of withdrawal over a five year period.

The data tables in the report helped me to get a sense of the actual numbers/percentages related in Table 2.3: Students enrolled in 2010, by base and ethnicity. Mead et al. (2011) look at sixteen Maori communities and compare non-Maori and Maori enrollment. An example is the Whakatane that “30 Non-Maori and 32 Maori (52%)” (p.23) compared to another community of Dunedin that had “45 Non- Maori and 5 Maori (10%)” (p.23) enrolled in Post-Secondary. Another aspect that I thought was interesting was the age of students and drop-out rates. In my opinion, the five year period of this study strongly validates the study data because of the length of time each cohort was researched. Also, I found it revealing that the female students reported that they put their education on hold due to child bearing responsibilities.

Mead et al. (2011) outline factors that influenced Maori students’ successful completion of their ECE degree studies. The researchers suggest that student success appeared to be positively affected by the extent to which they experienced:
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- Being relationally connected to the program or Whanaungatanga;
- Tautoko (support), awhi (help), manaakitanga (care for), akiaki (challenge), te mihi (praise)
- Kanohiki te kanohi, face to face classes
- An interactive learning environment
- Small class size
- Kaupapa Maori/ te reo meng, tikanga integrated in the programme as well as a module with a specific te reo meng, tikanga focus
- Passionate, enthusiastic, empowering lecturers/pouako
- Professional teaching staff
- Clearly stated learning outcomes in the diploma programme material
- Learning support for academic writing
- A facility to step on and step off the programme (p.88).

Evaluation of Community Involving ECCE Training in Seven First Nations Communities

Ball, Definney, and Pence (1999) looks at the development of community capacity to support the optimal development of children and youth in culturally congruent ways. This has been the primary mission of seven First Nation Partnership programs over the past decade. Using principals of the generative curriculum model for developing curricula, seven First Nation community partners engaged with a university- based team to co-construct, deliver and evaluate community-based, bi-cultural course work leading to a diploma in Child and Youth Care (p.188).

Ball, Definney, and Pence (1999) outlined three objectives: 1) to be able to define success in training ECEs in partnerships with First Nation communities; 2) to access the impacts of the
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training programs in communities; and 3) to determine the effective components in the training approach that might be applied in other settings (p.188).

The method is qualitative in design and Ball et al. (1999) state that the method “is based on a constructivist epistemology that seeks to understand the family, community, and the larger societal context” (p.189). Ball et al. conducted a longitudinal assessment (over ten years) to look at seven partnerships programs with First Nation across British Columbia from Cowichan to Tl’azt’en Nation. Included in the research were three post –secondary institutions involved with the program delivery. The range of data came from eight groups of people including: Elders, instructors, students and family member. The research data was collected through group interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The main themes that were brought out in the research report were: 1) the importance of meeting community based needs by supporting families of students enrolled in the programs, and 2) the consistently high completion rates (60-100% students completing one full year of university coursework. As well 95% of students completing the program remained in their community to work.) The researchers also highlighted the importance of the program demonstrating cultural sensitivity and being inclusive to the ways First Nation people view child development.

Ball et al. (2009) reviewed the transcriptions of a full 290 interviews. As well the longitudinal approach provided a wealth of knowledge about the benefits of linking education and community an effort to build capacity in helping families and children. I am appreciative of the depth of their work and the ways in which it informed me about different ways of gathering data from both groups and individuals.
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*Centering community services around early childhood care and development: Promising practices in Indigenous communities in Canada* documents a research study that followed three groups of First Nation community members four years after these communities had completed a partnership program with the University of Victoria. (Ball, 2009) The program included the community-based delivery of a bicultural (Indigenous and Euro-western), university accredited diploma program in Child and Youth Care. This program called the First Nation Partnerships Program, focused mainly on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).

The research examined how delivering the (ECCD) post-secondary program in community influenced the development of community based programs for children and families. The research included 76 participants from three communities that were informants in a combination of interviews, questionnaires and group forums.

Overall Ball (2009) found that “94% of the post-secondary program graduates were working in their own communities…many graduates created new programs and new roles in existing programs” (p.187). Reviewing the research in each of the three Nations the impact of building capacity is evident. Many quotations from the participants illustrate the growth and change of the graduated students and their strong commitment to helping families and children in their communities. It was meaningful for me to read the quotations to be able to connect with the experiences shared by each participant. A community leader spoke about the change in the students, who completed programs saying,

The second major benefit is the program helped our students in the community to find their voice. They were a shy bunch of ladies; today they have the confidence to work with community members and their Elders (Ball, 2009).
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Summary

In summary, several themes emerged in the literature review. These include: 1) importance of understanding about the context of First Nation people, most importantly the impact of government policy related to residential school. 2) Importance of culturally inclusive post-secondary programs for Aboriginal students; 3) the value of family and community support and involvement; and 4) the improved participation and retention of Aboriginal students in community based (post-secondary) ECEC/ECCD programs.
Chapter Three

Procedures and Methods

This study will employ a collaborative participatory approach by using a mixed method qualitative and quantitative methodology. This study will explore the holistic experience of First Nation students in ECEC programs at VIU. The data collected will influence expanded understanding and knowledge about the key contributing factors affecting First Nation students’ success such as: instructional support and teaching methodology, student support services, First Nation Band support, and Elders/community involvement. Using a holistic approach will also improve our ability to do research in an increasingly respectful and ethical way that is inclusive of Aboriginal ways of knowing.

The focus of this study is to identify past and present ECEC First Nation students and to survey those students regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education (ECEC) Certificate and Diploma programs at VIU. The respondents will include those enrolled in and graduating from Vancouver Island University (VIU) community partnership programs. First Nation students completing the mainstream ECEC Certificate and Diploma programs at VIU will also be invited to participate in the study. The community partnership programs are unique as they were developed by VIU in response to needs expressed by First Nation communities in Duncan, Saanich, and Chemainus. This collaboration between VIU and their First Nation partners has provided unique educational pathways that have helped to build the capacity of First Nation Early Childhood programs. These programs are believed to have enhanced the educational preparation of First Nation students by including cultural teachings and experiences that reflect the cultural context of the communities in which the students would practice.
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I believe it is essential to increase awareness about the ways in which research has affected Aboriginal people and to ensure cultural sensitivity as I develop the methodology for this study. As an Aboriginal person I am especially aware of the historical factors that have influenced Aboriginal attitudes toward research. Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) quote from statements by Aboriginals at a forum held at the University of New Castle, Australia saying, “every time research is done a piece of my culture is erased…” (p.91). This statement underscores for me the importance of being inclusive to Aboriginal culture as I gather data. I believe it is critical that I come from a true intention and genuine interest in finding ways to better support Aboriginal student success in their post-secondary studies. Denzin et al. (2008) continue,

Bennett and Blackstock (2002) cite the daunting task of decolonizing the research process to legitimize their own way of generating Indigenous knowledge that is controlled, owned, and protected by First Nations peoples collectively….and to support initiatives that create opportunities for First Nations people to conduct research that is congruent with Indigenous values and priorities (p. 91).

Research Design

Using culturally inclusive practice helps to clearly identify values around gathering knowledge from an Aboriginal point of view. This includes respecting cultural protocol and processes in all parts of the study from data collection to data analysis.

The study will examine the strengths and challenges of the academic preparation of 60 First Nation students participating in the community based and mainstream post-secondary Early Childhood Education programs. The intent is to study the experiences of previous and present ECEC cohorts and learn how to continue to improve the success of Aboriginal learners. These cohorts are First Nation students from the Duncan, Chemanius, and Saanich areas. The design is
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to gather data through a questionnaire. The intent of the questions is to construct an overview of a range of student perspectives and describe the experiences of each participant in the ECEC program. Focus groups will be organized as a talking circle with the key people involved in the ECEC program. Participants will share their stories and reflect on their learning through discussions and an art activity. The focus groups will involve three groups: students; faculty; and First Nation and VIU administrators, employers and Elders.

Sample

The study sample will include three groups of participants. The first group will be First Nation students enrolled in and graduated from the Vancouver Island University, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program. The students and student alumni will be drawn from three First Nation cohorts including those graduating from Cowichan and Saanich 2005, 2008, & 2013. First Nation students from the mainstream VIU ECEC program will also be invited to participate. The total number of students is estimated at sixty. These student alumni will be invited to complete a questionnaire and participate in a structured focus group activity. A second group will include ECEC faculty who have taught or had coordination responsibilities in one or more of the First Nation cohorts in Cowichan and Saanich. A third ‘community’ group will include: First Nation Band administrators who helped to recruit and financially support student registrants; Early Childhood Educators providing supervision of ECEC students in practicum; community ECE professionals (potential future employers); and Elders who have worked with and supported the ECEC First Nation students. Both the faculty and community groups will be invited to participate in a focus group session.
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**Instruments used.**

**Questionnaire.**

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) is intended to gather information that will reflect the participants’ experience of their ECEC studies. The instrument will use both closed and open-ended questions to reveal both the demographic background of the student/participant and construct a story about their educational experience in the Early Childhood Education program at VIU. In the questionnaire I will ask questions that inquire about student demographics, and post-secondary ECEC education and program delivery information related to teaching, courses, and cultural components. These questions directly link to the themes I noted as the key factors in determining success in the First Nation ECEC program. The survey will be accessed through an online Fluid Survey link where students’ will be able to complete the questionnaire on a computer or through their mobile phone. Alternatively, to complete the survey there will be a paper document that will be available at the Focus group sessions and at the Cowichan campus.

**Focus Group.**

The purpose of the focus group sessions is to develop a collective insight into students’ shared learning experience. Focus groups that also include VIU ECEC faculty and community members will attempt to gather shared visions as to what success looks like for those working with the program graduates and supporting them on their post-secondary education path.

**Procedures Followed**

The recruitment of participants in this study will begin by meeting with several First Nation Bands to request permission to distribute a poster announcing the research project initiative and provide contact information. Another way I hope to generate interest in
Stories of Successes and Challenges

participating in the study is by creating a web based group site on Facebook asking for interested participants to share their personal story and to join a focus group talking circle.

There are three participant groups in this study including: graduate/former Aboriginal students; VIU ECEC faculty; and administrative staff and community partners. The participants will be sent an information package that outlines a summary of the project and a description of the questionnaire and consent forms and processes. Graduates/former students will be invited to participate in the questionnaire and focus group. They will have an opportunity to complete the form online through a Fluid Survey link from their home or work. The focus group session will be held at the VIU Cowichan Campus and will first honor the previous student cohorts in the form of a reunion with a luncheon. After lunch a discussion forum will be held to discuss as a group their achievements in the ECE program at VIU. Second will be a focus group with past and present faculty that will invite their personal insights about teaching in the First Nation ECE program. Third a focus discussion will be held to encourage dialogue among community members such as Elders, and others to discuss what they envision will support First Nation ECEC students. The Focus groups include an afternoon luncheon.

I have culturally adapted the idea of storytelling as a method of sharing personal experiences for the focus group sessions to reinforce the value of appreciative inquiry. Stories have played an important role in First Nation communities. Denzin et al. (2008) noted that:

Stories provide data that have a focus on ways in which cultural and social constraints act upon individuals. They are powerful tools for reflection. The language used is an act of epistemology. Bruner (1990) suggests that storytellers take meaning from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression (p. 91).
Stories of Successes and Challenges

The focus group will be organized as an appreciation lunch for the past and present students of VIU. Participants who attend the Focus Group will have reviewed the event poster on the Facebook link to the questionnaire and will have found information there about the Focus group session. The Facebook event page connects to the Fluid Survey that has information regarding the project summary, consent process, and confidentiality. After lunch the principal investigator will review the project summary, consent process and confidentiality forms with participants. As noted previously, all student participants will have been involved with one of the ECEC programs. At the start of the Focus Group session, the principal investigator will invite the participants to a talking circle to discuss the formal process of the project by reviewing confidentiality, consent forms and project summary. Then in the circle discussion with an eagle feather each speaker will have an opportunity to address and discuss their thoughts and feelings about their educational experience by responding to a few guided questions. Participants will also be invited to participate in a guided art activity where they will create two art pieces: one that provides an opportunity to reflect on their feelings about themselves as professionals in the ECEC field from two perspectives, that of a student and that of a professional practitioner who helps children and families. The second part of the art activity will be a collective group activity that helps me to understand their perspectives about helping children in the early years. The final activity that will conclude the Focus Group session will invite participants to write a wish on a piece of paper about how they might view themselves as an Elder in the community supporting students who are wanting to go into the field of Early Childhood Education. These holistic approaches to gathering data are intended to create an environment of cultural safety by following Aboriginal ways of using stories to create inclusive activities for students, faculty and community.
Stories of Successes and Challenges

The focus group with faculty will aim to gain insight from them about what had helped them to reach Aboriginal students in the program and what things they learned teaching ECEC in the community based programs in Cowichan and Saanich. The Focus group will happen in March at the Nanaimo VIU campus for one hour-half and the answers will be transcribed to a flip chart.

The third focus group with community members will explore what they believe is important to support students in their post-secondary experience. The community Focus Group session will be held at the Cowichan VIU campus and will be one and one-half hour not including the luncheon. The principal investigator will transcribe the answers on a flip chart.

Recruitment process

The recruitment process for the project is outlined below. A private Facebook group page will include a poster (Appendix B). The poster provides a link that will lead participants to the Fluid Survey. After following the link students will be provided with the recruitment script (Appendix C), Consent form (Appendix D), Project Summary (Appendix E) and contact information. The Facebook page will only be accessed by the participant wanting to review the project details. In the Facebook status update the investigator will state that she is involved in the Research project and is looking for First Nations ECEs who attended VIU from 2003-2013. Willing participants will be encouraged to pass contact information to others in the cohort. A recruitment script for Faculty focus groups (Appendix F) will be read at a staff meeting and placed into faculty members' mailboxes.

Another way to distribute the 'Events' poster will be to link to other identified Facebook groups that already exist including: Vancouver Island University Alumni Association, VIU
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Indigenous Students and Alumni, VIU Early Childhood Education and Care programs, ECEC First Nations, Cowichan Tribes Public Page, and WSANEC First Nation.

The PI will also recruit participants by mailing information (Appendix B) and project summary (Appendix E) about the project to the FN communities to post on community bulletin boards and at the child care centers.

A letter of invitation to the Faculty Focus Group Session (Appendix G) and a project summary (Appendix D) will be distributed to VIU ECEC instructors in their mailbox, a face to face announcement of the study will be shared at a staff meeting where the recruitment script (Appendix F) will be read and a hard copy poster will be put up in the ECEC department (Appendix B).

Following First Nation protocol the PI will visit Elders and community members to personally invite them to participate in the Community Focus Group Session. The PI will then share through conversation the overview of the research study.

Also, a hard copy poster will be posted at VIU campus in Nanaimo and Duncan, Cowichan Tribes, Chemainus, and Saanich (Appendix B).

**Validity**

The issues that may influence internal validity are insufficient numbers of subjects in the study, and possibly participants, lapses as there will be considerable distance between their post-secondary experience and the present. I will attempt to minimize these factors by reaching as many participants as possible to ensure valid results. I will encourage students to actively participate in both the questionnaire and the focus groups by focusing my questions on their personal education. Also, the Focus Group session will provide the participants’ time to think
Stories of Successes and Challenges
about their educational experience and talking with others about their experience may generate
more ideas and trigger memories across the group of students. I also have included a Likert scale
in the questionnaire to help the participant determine their answers more easily.

One way to provide external validity is to encourage feedback from experts in post-
secondary ECEC and related areas to the questionnaire, focus group plan, and my analysis of the
data. Potential experts could include: the Aboriginal Early Childhood Development Advisory
committee, other researchers of Aboriginal education, and Elders and community members who
were not involved in the study. Also, reviewing and comparing other studies will help me as I
compile and analyze data and begin to develop some conclusions and recommendations.
Additionally, information from the VIU student database will be used to provide quantitative
data regarding enrollment completion dates and student credentials completed.

Analysis Techniques

The procedures for analysis in this study are followed by the recommendations from the
Ethics Tri Council policies that discuss the importance of conducting research on Aboriginal
people in sensitive ways. Article 9.17 recognizes the importance of working collaboratively with
First Nations groups in interpreting and reviewing the data. The people selected include Linda
McDonell Early Childhood ECEC instructor, and Aboriginal Early Childhood Development
(AECD) Regional Innovation Chair at VIU and the AECD Advisory group, comprised of Elders,
Aboriginal Early Childhood Educators, AECD organizations and agencies, and AECD specialists
from various communities.

The process of analysis will include: coding the data, creating categories in which to sort
data, and finding patterns and themes in the data collected.
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Summary

Overall, the research process I have designed to gather information about the Aboriginal ECEC students is consistent with Bear’s (2009) *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge* acknowledgment that culture has a pivotal role in learning through research. He states:

Culture plays a very important role in regards to knowledge, learning, and education. One must have a thorough understanding and appreciation of culture if he/she is going to educate or otherwise impart knowledge to another. One can safely say that culture is “the end and be all” when it comes to knowledge, education, learning, and pedagogy (p.8).

Bear (2009) continues to look at Aboriginal way of learning by looking at incorporating learning from visions and dreams, origin stories, influence of Elders, Experiential learning, developmental learning, holistic and critical thinking and environmental learning (p.12).

By coming from a cultural perspective, I have attempted to enhance knowledge from a cultural stance through sharing in circles, this dialogue creates a holistic nurturing understanding about what is happening for students. The questionnaire is looking for individual answers that speak to (professional learning, curriculum, community based activity, cultural learning through Elders and faculty supporting them on their studies).
Chapter Four: Findings and Results

The results of this study are partly based on a survey that past and present ECEC VIU Aboriginal student alumni completed online and in person. There were twenty one participants who were students in the years 2003, 2006, and 2013. The survey contained seventeen questions that examined: student/alumni demographics; rate of ECEC program completion; the extent to which students/alumni perceived that they were prepared to work as ECE professionals; course delivery; instructional practices; perceived cultural inclusiveness of the program; student learning; and the administration of the programs at VIU.

The first three figures review the demographics of the students who were enrolled in the ECEC program at VIU.

Question 1. Aboriginal Background of Respondents

The first question reflects the Aboriginal Background of respondents. All participants identified as First Nations with one participant identifying herself as both First Nations and Non-Aboriginal. No respondents indicated either Metis, Inuit status, or multicultural.

![Figure 1. Aboriginal Background of Respondents](image-url)
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Question 2. Population Served

The chart below identifies that the majority of participants were Cowichan (55%) with Saanich (14%), Chemainus (18%), and Other (14%). The other category includes Esquimalt, Tsawout and Diditat Nation participants that were enrolled in the ECEC program. The majority of respondents were from the 2010-2013 Cowichan Tribes and VIU ECEC contract program.

Figure 2. Population Served
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Question 3. Age Ranges of Respondents

The chart below shows the age range of participants who were enrolled in the ECEC program at VIU. Of the twenty-one responses, 23% were between the ages (34-38), and (53-59). The lowest numbers of respondents (5%) were ages (18-23), and (24-28). The data shows that the large majority of Aboriginal respondents were over age twenty-nine.

Figure 3. Age Ranges of Respondents
Stories of Successes and Challenges

**Question 4. Completed ECEC Programs at VIU**

The participants were asked which ECEC programs they completed at VIU. The ECEC program is a two year program which ladders from the ECE certificate to specialization of Infant Toddler and Special Needs. Students successfully completing all courses for the certificate and specialty areas will attain their ECEC diploma. The Child and Youth Care (CYC) program was included because there is an option of laddering from ECEC program into CYC at third year. Of the twenty-one respondents, six (29%) had completed only the certificate with fifteen (71%) of the respondents completing both certificate and diploma qualifications.” (It is important to note that in order to complete the ECEC Diploma students will have successfully completed all certificate courses. Also, several of the respondents were in the last month of the most recent contract ECEC program at VIU and a number of those respondents were still working on final course completion 3.) No respondents had entered the Child and Youth Care program at the time this data was collected.

![Figure 4. Completed ECEC Programs at VIU](image)

**Figure 4. Completed ECEC Programs at VIU**

---

3 The contract program with Cowichan Tribes at VIU focuses on delivering the two year diploma. Students are supported through the Band for tuition, books and living allowance...
Question 5. Professional Role of Respondents

The figure below shows the professional role that the student alumni indicated was their current work. Not surprisingly, the three roles most frequently cited were those that were promoted as part of the student recruitment. That is, the program was intended to prepare students to work in licensed early childhood programs as Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). In BC, ECEs typically have completed a basic program in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). A full 52% of respondents indicated they were working as ECEs with 30% working as Special Needs Educators and 30% as Infant Toddler Educators. The two areas of specialty were included in the ECEC Diploma. ECE credentials are highly valued for the other professional roles indicated - that of Family Support Worker (3%) and Supported Child Development (SCD) worker (3%), Social Worker (0%), Child and Youth Care worker (3%), Special Needs Educator (9%). Typically these other professional roles include some competency areas on which the ECEC program focuses.

Figure 5. Professional Role of Respondents
Question 6. VIU ECEC Program/Courses Preparation

As shown in the table below, participants were asked about their perception of how well they were prepared with regard to a number of areas required of ECE professionals. These included: child development, communication with families and other professionals, implementing lesson plans, guiding practices, child health, safety and well-being, working with children with special needs, administration, history of ECE practice, and practicum experiences in daycare settings. The highest number of students (10) strongly agreed and 11 agreed that they were well prepared by their practica courses in the ECEC program. The responses indicate that student alumni were in high agreement that overall they were well prepared by the VIU ECEC program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 6. Please indicate below the extent to which you believe the following statements are true:</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rating Scale:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to understand</strong></td>
<td>Strongly Agree:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child development of the children in my community.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree:</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to communicate</strong></td>
<td>Strongly Agree:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectively with children, families and other professionals</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in my community.</td>
<td>Agree: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to plan and</strong></td>
<td>Strongly Agree:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implement appropriate activities for children in my community.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree:</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree:</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Stories of Successes and Challenges

| The ECEC courses provided me with the knowledge and skill to guide the behavior of young children in the ECD programs in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 11  
Agree: 6  
Undecided: 1  
Disagree: 1  
Strongly disagree: 0 |
|---|---|
| The ECEC courses/program helped me to enhance the health and safety of the children in the programs in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 11  
Agree: 10  
Undecided: 0  
Disagree: 0  
Strongly disagree: 0 |
| The courses provided me with good background to work with Children with Special Needs in the programs in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 5  
Agree: 11  
Undecided: 2  
Disagree: 0  
Strongly disagree: 0 |
| The Administration courses provided the knowledge and skill to manage early childhood programs in communities in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 3  
Agree: 14  
Undecided: 3  
Disagree: 0  
Strongly disagree: 0 |
| The courses helped me understand the history and professional context of early childhood practice in the communities in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 5  
Agree: 15  
Undecided: 1  
Disagree: 0  
Strongly disagree: 0 |
| The practica courses helped me to apply the early childhood theory to working with children, families and other professionals in the communities in which I have worked. | Strongly Agree: 10  
Agree: 11  
Undecided: 0  
Disagree: 0  
Strongly disagree: 0 |

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Figure 6. VIU ECEC Program/Courses Preparation
Stories of Successes and Challenges

**Question 8. Culturally Inclusive Experiences in the VIU ECEC program**

As shown in the figure 7 below, participants were given several different options of ways the program was ‘culturally inclusive’. They were asked to indicate (by checking the appropriate boxes) some of the ways they experienced the ECEC program as culturally inclusive. The highest number of participants (15) indicated that “Elders as participants and teachers” was a method used to provide culturally inclusive experiences. The next highest was “family, community and cultural teachings”. As shown in the chart, the remaining areas each received similar numbers of responses with language lessons and educational activities both with six responses; five responding those cultural days & related activities were a method used. Traditional practices and ceremony were also noted by five respondents. For the ‘other’ category participants could choose and add comments such as these statements shared: ‘more Hul’qu’mi’num language,” “cultural activities in other communities.”

![Figure 7. Culturally Inclusive Experiences in the VIU ECEC program](image-url)
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Question 12. Overall Experience in the VIU ECEC program

As shown below in figure 8 question twelve posed a series of six statements to which students were asked to respond. They were to indicate their level of agreement with the statements, with one of five possible answers on a likert scale (1 representing ‘strongly disagree’; 2 representing ‘disagree’; 3 ‘undecided’; 4 ‘agree’ and 5 ‘strongly agree’). The statements related to a number of areas experienced by the participants including: their perceptions regarding their level of professional preparedness at the completion of the ECEC program (represented in column titled Q.1), the extent to which inclusion of cultural activities and teachings were essential to their preparation (represented in column titled Q.2); the level to which they felt comfortable and supported by their peers in the classroom (column Q.3); the level to which they felt comfortable and supported by the instructors in the classroom (column Q.4); the level to which they felt comfortable and supported by the administrators and secretaries at VIU while in the ECEC program (column Q.5); and the level to which the ECEC course delivery (location, length, times of delivery, length of classes) worked well for them (represented in column Q.6). The highest number of student alumni ‘strongly agreed’ (12) that they were well prepared professionally. (Column Q.6) Nine respondents ‘agreed’ they felt supported by other students in their ECEC classroom. (Column Q.2) The lowest number was 3 respondents who were ‘undecided’ regarding their satisfaction with the course and length of classes. (Column Q.5). See Appendix A for more details.

![Figure 8. Overall Experience in the VIU ECEC program](image-url)
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Question 13. Barriers to Completing VIU ECEC program

As shown below participants were asked to comment on what they perceived as barriers to completing their ECEC education at VIU. The highest percentage of comments (33%) indicated course work was a barrier. The lowest percentage of respondents (17%) indicated economic barriers affected the completion of their ECEC education. During the analysis, the themes were created to capture the variety of responses provided by participants. ‘Economic’ barriers included such things as “transportation to practicum”; ‘personal’ barriers referred to events such as “family responsibilities, cultural responsibilities (big house) and my children had to juggle all three.”; an example of ‘course work’ barrier was “getting things done in course work and writing was a challenge” and a barrier related to ‘teachers’ was “not much support lack of support when arrangements were made from employer, band and school.”

Figure 9. Barriers to Completing VIU ECEC program
Questions of Successes and Challenges

Question 14. Strengths of the ECEC VIU Program

As shown in chart below participants were asked what they perceived as the strengths of the ECEC VIU program. The highest percentage was Instructors at (21%) and the lowest strength was community at (4%). Again, the themes were established by the respondents’ answers specifically addressing: “Culture”, “Family”, “Community”, “Self- Growth”, “Instructors”, “VIU Support Staff”, “Classmates”, “Course Work”, and “Program.” Examples of each of the themes are noted below. The quotations reflect the actual words of the participants.

Culture, Family, Community:
- “Culture, family, community, and learning to speak in the classroom.”
- “We are all family - as a group we have connections through our family tree.”
- “We all carry various teachings and values in the classroom.”

Classmates, teachers and support staff:
- “Being with classmates, teachers and having support staff helped me.”
- “I liked getting to know [other students] in the classroom to build trust with each other as a group.”
- “The VIU staff supported me, and reminded students that they were there to help in any way.”
- “The instructors helped us a lot.”
- “I was close with the instructors.”

Self-Growth:
- “Being around new people [students in the classroom was a good learning experience].”
- “Learning to ask for help, and remembering self-care.”

Program and Courses:
- “Everything about the program - I enjoyed the courses but the program was too short.”
- “Small classes, more one to one with the instructors.”
- “I enjoyed how the program was delivered.”
Focus Groups

There were three focus groups held for students, faculty, and community. The focus groups discussed what they viewed as important about Aboriginal learning in the post-secondary ECEC program. The themes that were generated in these discussions included: student success; employment and professional practice as an ECE; administration; partnerships; program delivery and course development; and instructors. Participants’ hopes for future students taking the ECEC program were also discussed at each focus group. A more detailed discussion about each of the focus group sessions follows.

Student Alumni Focus Group

The student alumni focus group was held on March 16, 2013 at the Cowichan VIU campus. The two participants answered a series of questions in a circle format discussion. The first two questions asked about their student learning experience and what they enjoyed about the
Stories of Successes and Challenges

ECEC program. The third question asked participants to imagine themselves an Elder giving advice to future students. The last part of the focused session engaged the participants in an art activity that explored how they viewed themselves as a professional Early Childhood Educator.

**Question 1. Student Personal Learning**

Participants in the student focus group were asked to share in a talking circle format what they learned about themselves as a person and a professional in the ECEC program. The process included documenting comments on flip chart by the facilitator. In this way, comments were clearly visible to the participants. They were invited from time to time through the discussion to check for accuracy. The words portrayed in the Wordle art below reflect key words drawn from the actual statements made by focus group participants. Examples of participants comments were “Self-esteem, started having a strong sense of self in learning,” “Self-care, help yourself before you can help others,” “love yourself and really honor it...huge impact on my growth from residential school,” “Really learned to listen to myself and school strengthened my confidence.

![Wordle Art](image-url)

*Figure 11. Student Personal Learning*
Question 2. Student Feedback Regarding VIU ECEC Program

Participants in the student focus group shared what they liked most about being a student in the VIU ECEC program. Again, the process involved the facilitator documenting the comments on flip chart paper. The comments were clearly visible to the students. They were invited from time to time through the discussion to check for accuracy. Comments reflect exactly what the participants shared in response to this question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2: What did you like most about being a student in the VIU ECEC program?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The support that centered and grounded us as a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in relationship with other students that understood the challenges of home life and realized what was happening for everyone. [Support came] through talking and sharing the good and bad feelings, friendships, and feeling proud to be taking a program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing who we were - our involvement in the program helped develop self-awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on self in regards to the impact of residential school and working on my strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has a path - it’s what you take from it that is important whether positive or negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps open feelings when talking with classmates regarding personal experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I received encouragement from instructors who said, “do what you can”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[The course work helped me to look at my personal strengths and goals in education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. Student Feedback Regarding VIU ECEC Program
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Question 3. Advice as an Elder

Participants in the student focus group were also asked in the talking circle to imagine they were an Elder ten years down the road and to suggest what advice they would give a student enrolling in the ECEC program. The words below are actual words drawn from the statements made by focus group participants.

| Question 3:                                                                 |
| If you were an Elder ten years down the road and you were to talk to a student who is enrolling in the ECEC program, what advice would you give to that student? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can do it! There is support from family and instructors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are barriers – you need to ‘talk the walk’ and ‘take baby steps’ to get through assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t give up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to love yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be strong in everything you do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor yourself every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance both worlds - one foot on one road and the other in culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one can force you – you need to take responsibility to get things done in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self- care is important. Take care of yourself and choose to share your feelings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Advice as an Elder
Stories of Successes and Challenges

**Question 4. Creative Art Vision as an ECE**

As shown in pictures below participants created an art design showing how they see themselves as a professional ECE today. The participants explored with art media such as pastels, paints, glitter, glue, felts and crayons to express how they saw themselves as a professional. The group process provided an opportunity to discuss their experiences informally and present their art to the larger group and explain its meaning. The explanation below reflects the descriptions shared by focus group participants. The photographs that follow the description show the actual art design.

**Art Activity:**

Instructions: Create an individual vision of how you see yourself as a professional in the ECE field today.

Participant One: River (Explanation)

The river is ongoing and has different pathways with barriers to face some small and some big.

Participant Three: Teachings (Explanation)

I share through my natural gift of cooking and sharing teachings and connection to family.

![Image](image1.jpg) ![Image](image2.jpg)

**Figure 14. Creative Art Vision as an ECE**
Stories of Successes and Challenges

**Faculty Focus Group Session**

The Faculty focus group was held on March 14, 2013 at the VIU Nanaimo campus. There were three instructor participants, one had been involved with all the ECEC contract programs and the mainstream program over a period of nearly twenty years; one had worked with students in two separate ECEC contract programs; and one had been involved with the most recent ECEC program at the Cowichan campus. The instructors shared what they learned in teaching FN students in the ECEC program, recommendations for future instructors, and discussed what they believe makes a successful student. At the end of the session instructors participated in an art activity that was intended to reflect how they saw themselves as an Early Childhood Educator.

**Question 1. Faculty Learning with First Nation Students**

As shown in table below participants in the faculty focus group were asked what they had learned from teaching First Nation students in the ECEC contract programs. Faculty shared their thoughts and feelings in a circle format. Again, the process of documenting the comments was noted on flip chart by participants. The comments were clearly visible to the Faculty. They were invited from time to time through the discussion to check for accuracy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: What have you learned from teaching First Nation students in the ECEC Community Based Programs?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned what I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned to be flexible. There were many twists and turns along the way. For example, classes are planned in a certain order or way and they don’t occur in order – its okay – as long as the big picture is kept in mind it will work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the definition of respect and trust is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How central respect and trust is in building relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned some of the First Nations language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned to listen, wait, give time to understand and respond to student learning. I learned that the ‘process’ is more important than the ‘product’. The process helps student gain confidence and confidence at academic level (writing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned about the importance of the ‘life story’ as a way to understand students’ lived experience and be able to support them. Practicing communications skills helps to build student confidence and encourages them to contribute to classroom discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed a better understanding about where the students are coming from – in terms of the community and cultural context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I learned not to make assumptions such as student’s comfort and ability to write a paper.

The importance of feeling good about self in order to be successful.

How the whole community is prepared to support their students. This seemed easier in programs that were actually held on reserve.

The helpfulness of students remaining in the community when attending Post-Secondary education.

Getting the right Elders and guest speakers in the community to help students to be accountable and accept responsibility. Students need to hear it from the Elders and the community.

Learned about the community culture when immersed in the community. For example with funerals, big house activities etc.

I learned about the importance of celebrating the ‘little things’ along the way in the program. These little things add up to be big celebratory moments for the students.

I learned to not make assumptions about what students know. For example, some students don’t have prior knowledge of post-secondary systems such as grading.

Students have fears about working in practicum placements. They wonder how mainstream ECEs will treat them (common stereotypes, stigmas, and prejudice).

Being patient while students learn from their experiences in practicum - they rise to the occasion and are capable of solving their problems.

Figure 15. Faculty Learning with First Nation Students

Question 2. Faculty Advice to Instructors

Participants in the faculty focus group were asked what advice they could give to guide new instructors who are teaching Aboriginal students’ participants shared their thoughts in a talking circle format. The words in the Wordle art below reflect the key words I drew from each of their statements. Examples of Faculty statements were “Strengths, look at the strengths in each student they all bring something important,” “Process, trust the process and don’t give up be patient, some things are emergent in development and timing in learning,” “Supporting the student not enabling the student,” “Administration, extra days are needed and more hours to each course which gives more time to get the work done.”
Figure 16. Faculty Advice to Instructors

**Question 3. Aboriginal Students Success**

Participants in the faculty focus group were asked what stands out for them as an instructor about what Aboriginal students need to be successful. The statements were shared in the talking circle. Comments listed below reflect the actual words of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They have to believe in themselves and know that others believe in them too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong linkages between community, instructors, and students are essential - all should be working together through regular meetings and other interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need resources to cover the basics - food, home, daycare etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to adapt to their own and the community/cultural schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Elders in residence is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students feel connected to their community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing is a progression; try not to get hung up on standards the thoughts are important too!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing time in class to do assignments is beneficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from the Instructor when doing an assignment is very important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stories of Successes and Challenges

| Students learn from each other by sharing ideas and discussing assignments. |
| Valuing each student. |
| Students can be experts too. |

Figure 17. Aboriginal Students Success

Question 3. Creative Art Vision as an ECE

As shown in pictures below participants created an art design showing how they see themselves as a professional ECE today. They explored with art media such as pastels, paints, glitter, glue, felts and crayons to express how they saw themselves as a professional. This group process provided an opportunity to discuss their experiences informally and present their art to the larger group and explain its meaning. The explanation (below) reflects the descriptions shared by focus group participants, the photographs that follow the description show the actual art design.

Faculty respondent: The picture reflects organized chaos and you need to think outside the box

Faculty respondent: Multi pathways with sunshine highlighting go with your interests and the pathway opens to many possibilities.

Figure 18. Creative Art Vision as an ECE
Community Focus Group Meeting

The community focus group was held on March 18, 2013 at the Cowichan campus. There were six participants comprised of Elders, community administrators, Band members and other FN organizations specifically supporting early childhood development. They were asked to share their perspectives regarding what students need to be successful as a student, professional, and maintaining their role within the community.

Question 1. Aboriginal Students Success

As shown in figure below participants’ in the community focus group were asked what supports are needed to help First Nations students be successful. Community members contributed statements in the talking circle and key words were chosen for the figure below. Again, the process of documenting the comments was noted on a flip chart by participants. The comments were clearly visible to the Community group. They were invited from time to time through the discussion to check for accuracy. The words portrayed reflect key words drawn from the actual statements made by focus group participants. Examples of participants’ responses: “Student fit, making sure that students are in the right program. Right for the ECE profession,” “Ensure students take responsibility towards practicum time and assignments”, “Students need to look at their strengths by looking at the positive and negative with emphasis and focus on children,” “Students need a strong foundation of ethics, values, beliefs and each community has different perspective.”
Participants’ in the community focus group were asked what they were looking for when hiring an ECE worker. Participants shared their thoughts in a talking circle. These statements below reflect the actual words of participants.

**Question 2:** What are you looking for in hiring an ECE?:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I expect ECEs to be ‘exceptional’.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[I want them to] learn to accept where parents are at when working with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of Successes and Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope they will have a sense of wonder, asking the questions of what and why in your practice with children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They will need a sense of humor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want them to understand that they are never too old to learn and you never know everything as an ECE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid judgment as an ECE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to understand what it takes to work with your own people and the challenges of working in the community. Be aware of the reality of working as a professional with family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN ethics and professional ethics (routines, education, work and time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be respectful, reliable, open, and willing to learn the language and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace and enhance! Welcome all nations - beliefs are similar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave family politics out of the work place - leave it at the door.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The central thought as an ECE is being there for the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to develop trust with family members by developing relationships. Grandparent shared that when she left her grandchild at the daycare “[knowing the child was well cared for] gave me the confidence when I left for the day”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a job posting the term “all above skills” means you must be flexible enough as an ECE worker to do extra duties such as: cooking, and plumbing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE’s needs to be healthy by caring for themselves and be good role models for children and coworkers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To care for the families’ interests and needs, you need to know the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network with mentors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t take things personally. Take time to understand parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You must be understanding to work with adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You will need administration skills to document information and write proposals. Be inquisitive, know about subsidy, be aware of licensing regulations. Be in it for the heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you an Administrator you must be ready to “jump into the position and learn everything all at once!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many of us live in poverty and we need to understand how this affects people’s actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current wages for an ECE worker are not sufficient for living costs in BC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be aware of economic challenges related to lack of funds and difficulty in supporting families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need to continue and complete their Infant Toddler and Special Needs specialization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20. Hiring an ECEC Student
Questions 3. Vision for ECE students working in Community with Children and Families

Participants in the community focus group were asked what they would want ECE students to teach the children and families specifically related to cultural knowledge and traditions. For the analysis key words were drawn from the community comments. Examples from participants were “Model compassion”, “Honor the community,” “Follow the center protocols with honor and respect”, “programs can be very special, greeting families and developing strong relationships.”

![Figure 21. Vision for ECE students working in Community with Children and Families](image)

Question 4. Community Advice for ECE’s working with families and children

Participants in the community focus group were asked in the talking circle “what advice would you give people today who are going to work in the field of ECE helping families and children?” The statements below are verbatim comments made by the community participants in response to this question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What advice would you give people today who are going to work in the field of ECE helping families and children?:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love ECE - love doing it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE cannot be ‘for the money’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Children are our future. We need to care for the future.

As an ECE you have huge impact and value in your role as an ECE worker in the community.

Make all experiences for children and families every day positive experiences.

Ensure all experiences with children and families build trusting relationships.

As an ECE be truly honest and recognize you will fall and make mistakes when making decisions and working with children, families and colleagues.

Be authentic to yourself and others.

Chill out - it’s going to be ok.

Keep your sense of humor.

Play.

Remember as an ECE you are helping community.

Be reliable and consistent.

Remember you are making a contribution to the world.

Are you going to live to work or work to live?

Work can be fulfilling.

Build relationships.

As an ECE professional plan your day and be fully prepared mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally to influence children’s learning.

Be respectful of the child’s pace. It takes time to learn.

Get down and be at the child’s eye level (kids).

Care about learning.

Money will get you to town and children will get you to 100 - that’s the real pay.

Figure 22. Community Advice for ECE's working with families and children

Question 5. Community Suggestions to Instructors Teaching Aboriginal Students

Participants in the community focus group were asked “what suggestions would you give to new instructors who are teaching Aboriginal students?” In the talking circle community participants shared the following statements.

Question 5:
What suggestions would you give to new instructors who are teaching Aboriginal students?:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expect exceptional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase expectations in the program - don’t let it be less than mainstream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the assumptions that the program is easier in an ECEC First Nations program compared to the ECEC mainstream program delivery in Nanaimo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be patient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships and trust so students will be willing to share.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Realize that there is a history and understand that history. Be aware of the trauma of residential school and the 60’s scoop. These are real issues that will take time to resolve. It is generational, and we can’t “just get over it”. It is a ‘work in progress’. It has had a huge impact on our culture.

Our prior knowledge is culturally rich and should be considered equal to that of the academic learning.

Keep it Indian. (This intended as a reminder of students’ cultural teachings).

Teach about colonization and its effects. Understand the pain, oppression, racism, poverty and marginalization that have occurred. Understand the impact of the Indian Act. This will help eliminate the challenges the students face in the program. Teach this throughout the program.

Instructors need to be aware that student poverty means they have less money. This doesn’t mean we are poor.

Appreciate the students: I am what I am.

Experiences will come out if you keep an open mind.

Be nurturing, encourage and respond to learning moments with all students.

Fill the child/student up with opportunity.

Honoring who they are and where they are every day.

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**Figure 23. Community Suggestions to Instructors Teaching Aboriginal Students**

**Question 6. Creative Art Vision for Students Children and Families**

Participants in the community focus group did not have time to complete an art activity but they did share ideas and images that depicted key words of their wishes for students, children and families. The community participants also suggested what the picture might look like. Together they created a picture of a rainbow with light from the sun with a campus filled with busy, happy students. They also saw a picture of a child who is smiling with a big heart.

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**Figure 24. Creative Art Vision for Students Children and Families**
Stories of Successes and Challenges

Chapter Five

Project Summary

The focus of this study was to identify past and present First Nation ECEC students (2003-2005, 2006-2008, and 2010-2013) and to invite them to complete a questionnaire regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU. The intended participants included Aboriginal students enrolled in and/or who have graduated from VIU and First Nation ECEC (ECEC FN) partnership programs. Aboriginal students completing the mainstream ECEC programs at VIU were also invited to participate in the study. Questionnaire data was collected and then followed by three specific and separate focus groups held to explore the experiences of: 1) past and present ECEC students; 2) ECEC Faculty; and 3) First Nation community members including First Nation Elders, Band managers, employers of ECEC FN graduates, and other involved community members.

Across five communities (Cowichan, Stzu’uminus, Snuneymux’w, Beecher Bay and the four nations of Saanich) the total number of possible student participants was estimated at sixty. Questionnaire and focus group responses was analysed to gain an understanding of perceptions related to ECEC and ECEC FN programs strengths and challenges. This was to help us better understand the factors that contribute to student success, and to inform future course preparation and program development. The focus groups were structured to gain participants’ perceptions about how to best support and strengthen Aboriginal student learning in Post-Secondary ECEC programs.
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The focus of the questions in the questionnaire and focus groups were on the following areas: understanding historical and present statistics related to Aboriginal learners and identifying the strengths and challenges of the VIU ECEC program. It was hoped that the study would help us learn how we could enhance students’ learning by identifying ways to strengthen both the cultural inclusiveness of the program and the community and institutional connections. This would help to improve program delivery by being more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students in the classroom.

**Discussion: Interpretations of the results.**

Examination of the data of both the student/alumni survey and the three focus group sessions helped to identify the common themes, and help clarify successes and challenges of Aboriginal students’ experiences in the ECEC program at VIU. In the following pages, I will summarize what I learned from the questionnaire and focus group sessions and connect those learnings to some of the key literature reviewed.

**Key Learnings: Questionnaire.**

The questionnaire data revealed important information related to the student and student alumni perceptions of the extent to which they were professionally prepared by the ECEC program, their satisfaction with the course content and delivery methods, and how culturally relevant and inclusive the program was. Typically, respondents’ comments on the questionnaire fell into four key areas: professional preparation; cultural inclusivity and language; strengthening learning through relationship; and balancing personal and community life with their studies. These areas are examined further below.

*Professional Preparation.*
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The survey asked participants to state their perceptions of how well they were prepared with regard to a number of areas required of ECE professionals. Responses reflected their thoughts about how well prepared they were in areas such as: child development; communication with families and other professionals; implementing lesson plans; guiding practices; child health, safety and well-being; working with children with special needs; administration; history of ECE practice; and practicum experiences in daycare settings. Responses to this question showed that overwhelmingly students perceived themselves as well prepared with a small number indicating concern about their level of preparedness with regard to their training to work with children with special needs. While the practicum focuses on understanding special needs children based on textbook and child development theory, it does not emphasize actual work with a child who may have extra needs. Rather, the emphasis is on identifying supports for individual children in the program who are developing in more typical ways. This allows students to practice creating work plans to support children more generally with the expectation they will begin to think through approaches to building relationships with the family who have children with exceptionalities. It is important to note that participant responses are consistent with concerns commonly expressed by the community that additional instruction on theory and practice related to working with children with exceptional needs is needed in post-secondary ECEC programs.

*Culture and language inclusivity.*

Ball, Definney, and Pence (1999) evaluated a community based ECCD training program in seven First Nation communities. Their research suggested several primary themes including: the importance of meeting community based needs by supporting families of students enrolled in the programs; the impact of higher completion rates in community programs; the importance of cultural inclusiveness in program content; and the impact of more students completing programs
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to work in their own communities. Recognizing the importance of these themes in the context of
the VIU ECEC deliveries, programs need to help students recognize themselves as First Nation
learners through improved cultural relevance and assist students to identify more strongly with
their communities as part of their post-secondary learning. In the questionnaire, respondents
were asked in what ways they found the ECEC program culturally inclusive. The vast majority
of responses indicated that Elders participating in the classroom was an important contribution to
cultural inclusivity. Stonechild (2006) concurs. He identifies “the close involvement of
Aboriginal Elders in these institutions is another sign of the close relationships with the
community” (p.106). While Elders were highly valued for cultural contribution to the program, it
was less clear whether other efforts to integrate cultural experiences in the classroom, such as
traditional practices and opportunities to participate in cultural ceremonies were viewed as
important. Because responses were varied and at times inconsistent it seems more clarification is
needed about how students define culture and what culture and cultural capacity-building might
‘look like’ for students.

Respondents described ways in which cultural integration was used in the ECEC courses/program and how they would apply that learning in their professional practice. Participant
comments suggest that while they were students in the program, they found planning cultural
activities in the classroom and implementing those activities in practicum was a useful way to
share Elder teachings and Hul’qumi’num songs and crafts. One participant stated, “We forget
what we learned as children about values and beliefs and the instructors help open up the
memories to bring culture into our teaching at the daycare”. Some students did not have the same
experience stating “Culture is a natural way of living and being, and learning to practice it in the
daycare [is difficult].” Another participant stated “I learned from my Elders, community, and
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coworkers. Cultural knowledge wasn’t part of my VIU experience.” This question was open to
interpretation and required the participant to define culture for herself and then to comment how
that culture is incorporated into the curriculum and instructional practice. Many participants
come with traditional prior knowledge and it is important for instructors to create a space that
encourages students to share aboriginal knowledge and ways of being both in the classroom and
in practice in personally relevant ways.

Despite the variation of student’s perceptions, the literature strongly suggests the
importance of culture as part of students’ educational experience. For example, Bear (2009) in
*Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge* acknowledges culture as having a pivotal role in learning.
He states:

Culture plays a very important role in regards to knowledge, learning, and education. One
must have a thorough understanding and appreciation of culture if he/she is going to
educate or otherwise impart knowledge to another. One can safely say that culture is “the
end and be all” when it comes to knowledge, education, learning, and pedagogy (p.8).

Bear (2009) considers Aboriginal ways of learning by examining learning that he
suggests results from visions and dreams, origin stories, influence of Elders, experiential
learning, developmental learning, holistic and critical thinking and environmental learning.
Respondents were asked about cultural activities that were not included in the program. A
relatively small number of respondents (23%) answered that they wanted to learn the
Hul’qu’mi’num language so they could use the language in activities at the FN daycares such as
circle time. As the literature suggests inclusion of traditional language is important to the
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student’s academic experience, it was surprising that language wasn’t indicated as a priority for more of the ECEC students/student alumni.

The Assembly of First Nations Education Jurisdiction, and Governance (March 2012) 
*Supporting First Nations Learners Transitioning to Post-Secondary* final report, emphasizes the Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) and the connection to culture and Aboriginal lifelong learning that begins in the early years. I believe this is relatable to adult learners.

Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being. Indian culture and values have a unique place in the history of mankind. The Indian child who learns about his heritage will be proud of it. The lessons he learns in school, his whole school experience should reinforce and contribute to the image he has of himself as an Indian (p. 15).

One participant shared her thoughts about the importance of community and culture by stating “I wish we made more programs to fit the needs of our people in the same or similar way, including our own peoples in the program such as: instructors, elders and resources in our community.” This comment reflects the Assembly of First Nations Education report (2012) which attributes Hanson and Macleod (2004) speaking to the effects education can have on Aboriginal culture:

Education is a powerful platform … but the consequences of imposing a mainstream education of First Nations and Inuit can be devastating. Education is an instrument of acculturation without linguistically and culturally appropriate education system, First Nations are at a greater risk of losing their culture altogether. With growing populations
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of First Nations, it is time for a new vision of education. The vision needs to respect the integrity of both mainstream and First Nations cultures, and to open up opportunities in both (p. 17).

*Balancing personal and community life with studies.*

Participants were asked to identify the barriers they experienced in their post-secondary program. The most common barriers noted related to personal issues such as family responsibilities; cultural responsibilities; economic challenges; accessing transportation to class and practicum placements; and falling behind in course work and assignments. These challenges are reiterated in the CCL (2009) in their statement, “Results from the 2006 Census show that higher proportions (25%) of Aboriginal families were living in low-income situations which speak to students who are struggling with economic issues” (p. 45).

Pidgeon (2008) also reaffirms the complex lives of Aboriginal students attending post-secondary programs when she says, “… (students’) may have dependents along with familial and community responsibilities” (p. 344).

*Strengthening learning through relationships.*

Ball and Pence (2006) reference Robertson to strongly support building trusting relationships with Aboriginal learners in order to strengthen learning potential. They stated, “Teachers who see themselves as facilitators of learning will engage their students’ in intimate relationships, engendering learning that transforms both their students and themselves” (p. 49).

Further, Alfred (2005) stresses the important link between relationship and learning when he describes the elements of Indigenous learning proposed by Thohahoken, “…learning is transformative…it is participatory and involves working with others and the learning process;
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and knowledge comes from learning traditions within a society of thoughtful people” (p. 199). These sentiments were strongly reflected in the students’ comments. They shared that one of the primary strengths of the ECEC program related to instructional and classmate support. For example, they suggested “…we are all family and [had] a connection with each classmate and I felt close with the instructors.” And “being with classmates [was a strength], teachers were supportive. Getting to know each other and building trust with each other as a group [worked well].”

**Key Learnings: Focus Group Sessions**

Focus groups were a second form of gathering data. The focus group sessions provided opportunities for student, faculty and community to discuss questions that examined student success, employment and professional practice, ECEC program administration, VIU and community partnerships, program and course development, and the role of instructors. There was also discussion in each of the sessions about future visions for students entering the profession of ECE. The narrative that unfolded in these sessions emphasized the personal perceptions of students, faculty and community related to the topic areas noted previously. Each of the topics are explored in more detail in the following pages. As well, discussions are linked to some of the key literature on the subject.

**Student success**

So, what is the meaning of student success and how is it described by the students, faculty, and community? In all sessions, success was linked strongly to personal growth both in terms of academic learning and intrapersonal development. Students made several comments that suggested their own personal growth affected their ability to learn. For example one student said,
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‘my self-esteem grew…I developed a strong sense of self in the program’. Another suggested that they would tell future students to ‘Love yourself and really honor it!’ As well, students talked about the ‘huge impact of residential school’ on their learning. Even though many had not attended residential school their relatives had and this affected such things as parenting and trust in institutions of various kinds.

The words of the students suggested a depth of learning that may not be typical in other student populations. It seemed that the Aboriginal students have more complex learning experiences and perceptions of what it means to be a student. Similarly faculty comments expressed that students need to have a sense of “belief in themselves and that others believe in them.” Community members discussed that they also see an important personal impact on learning. They suggested, “students’ personal growth happens in the program. For FN students, it seems their successes are often driven by “self-esteem. They need to believe in themselves.” Pidgeon (2008) looks at two ideas of success. One at the societal level “university degree is a social marker for success that leads to upward career advancement and higher socio-economic status” versus a second idea that, “higher education is also connected to empowerment of self, community, decolonization and self-determination (Battiste, Bell, & Findley, 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal people (RCAP), 1996; Smith, 1999)” (p.340). Both of these ideas of success co-exist in the broader society’s belief system and the First Nation communities. I found it interesting that all of the focus groups emphasized the importance of students having the confidence and belief in themselves to be successful in their studies.

Professional practice
Questions about community perceptions of student preparation for employment and professional practice were included in the community focus group session. Specifically, they
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were asked what advice they would give students entering the ECE field to work with children and families. Community participants said, “I expect exceptional”, “Learn to understand what it takes to work with your own people and the challenges of working in community, given the reality of working with family members as a professional.” They shared many great ideas regarding how to work with children and families. These ideas tended to center around the “impact and value of your role as an ECE”. Community participants suggested that anyone working with children and family must “be respectful, reliable and willing to learn the language and culture.” The participants also spoke to the challenges of the work. These included: the administration of programs requiring a high level of knowledge and skill; challenges of families living in poverty; and the diverse needs families for a variety of services such as weekend care. The aspect of including cultural knowledge and teachings were implicit in their comments about “honoring the community”, and “ECE students wear three hats, professional, community and family.”

The community focus group stressed the implications of students working in the profession and in their own community and the importance of the ECE balancing the needs of family and community member as well as their own professional demands. They emphasized that working with families and children has huge responsibilities and huge impacts on the health and well-being of children.

Administration

Another aspect of Aboriginal student success is the administration of the ECEC program, the delivery methods, and the course content. The community focus group discussed the importance of strong partnerships between VIU and “Cowichan Tribes and other Nations”. This they believed would help students with their personal, economic, and academic issues. As well
Stories of Successes and Challenges

these partnerships could help to address needed childcare while students are enrolled in the ECEC program. Faculty suggested that the program could be extended to “two and one-half years [from the usual two]” so that students could complete all necessary requirements of the ECEC program. Community members emphasized students being ready for the program through an intake process where there are more supports in place to check in with students, help with English, encourage students to get things done, and provide a forum to bring together all partners around the common goal of student success. They stated, “Less support services because of less money equals less support, more money means higher completion rates.” The other aspect of the program the partnership could address is course development and how the content resonates with the community needs. Ball (2003) in Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Post-Secondary Teaching, supports this idea of an inclusive process of development. She quotes Dennis Esperanz “We educators have to be visionaries, but we talk curriculum, we also have to consider the vision of people in our communities--- what their goals are…” (p. 99).

Instructors

The faculty discussed what they learned working with FN students in community based programs. They highlighted, “how central respect and trust is in building relationships. Listen, wait, give time to understand and respond to the student learning process. [The process] is more important as it helps student gain confidence and confidence at academic level.” Advice the faculty shared to other instructors is to “…trust the process. Don’t give up. Be patient - some things are emergent. [Be sensitive to the] timing and the pace of the student, supporting the student but not enabling. Academic writing is a progression; again don’t get hung up on the academic standards – [their] thoughts are important.” Community group comments aligned with the faculty when discussing not enabling a student. They stated, “Students and instructors need to
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realize the differences working in mainstream and FN communities - it is night and day.” To provide guidance to future instructors’ community members stated:

Realize that there is a historical piece and understand [the importance of] prior knowledge about the trauma of residential school and the 60’s scoop. These are real issues that will take time [to resolve]. It is generational; we can’t just ‘get over it’. It is a work in process. It had a huge impact on our culture.

Another comment was made related to incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the classroom and how instructors must value cultural teachings alongside mainstream learning. They said, “Our prior knowledge is culturally rich and is equal to academic learning.”

Also, having Aboriginal students and faculty study the history of First Nations in BC is important to understand the impact of the layers of colonization and how for Aboriginal students’, dealing with it is ongoing. As Pidegon (2008) stated, “colonization is still occurring and not an historical event” (p.341). A community participant stated:

Bring colonization teaching to the FN students to understand the pain, oppression, racism, poverty, and marginalization, [and to] understand the Indian Act. This will help eliminate the challenges the students face in the program.

Encouragement
The student focus group was asked, “If you were an Elder ten years down the road, what advice would you give a student entering the ECEC program? Students shared, “honour yourself every day, balance both worlds - one foot on one road and the other in culture, and don’t give up. [Be aware that] there are barriers. Talk the walk! Take baby steps to get through assignments.” These words are strong in the sense that you can hear the teachings from their family systems
Stories of Successes and Challenges

and the honour with which Elders are placed in Aboriginal communities. I believe it will be helpful for future students to be able to identify themselves through these words as they enter post-secondary education.

**Art Activity**

The art activity was a method used to creatively explore the vision of how the participant could visualize herself in the profession of ECE. One student created a depiction of a river. She said, “a river is ongoing and has different pathways with barriers to face, some small and some big.” Another student shared a creation that represented her gift of teachings that are reflected in her cooking and the connection to family.

Faculty discussed ideas relating to “organized chaos and think[ing] outside, looking inside”. They included a mandala that represented multiple pathways with sunshine highlighting to represent their idea to “go with your interests and the path opens.”

The community group did not have time to create through art but shared that it would look like a rainbow with light from the sun. The campus they would draw would be filled with students and include a picture of a child who is happy with a big heart in the middle.

The art activity was open to interpretation for students, faculty and community members. It allowed them to explore metaphors of learning and to look within to see themselves in an artistic and holistic way of being an Early Childhood Educator. It was fulfilling for me to see how the participants developed their ideas, choosing their colours and sharing their journey through art and story. It also provided an opportunity to create closure to the important process of sharing knowledge.
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Limitations

There were a number of limitations in this study. One was the recruitment process and the difficulty connecting with all the past students through Facebook. The Facebook event page linked to the Fluid Survey did not entice many participants to complete the survey. After I submitted an REB amendment to contact students directly and assist them with filling out the paper format survey I was more successful. Another challenge was that many participants responded they did not have computer access and when they were filling out the survey online through their mobile device it did not save information and they had to re try a couple times before finally giving up.

Another limitation was the small numbers in the Faculty and Student focus groups. There were two participants for each group. While the feedback was very informative and there was lots of depth to the conversation, more participants would have added to the shared discussion during the group process. Just prior to the student focus group there was a death in community which affected participation. As well many participants emailed me due to illness and lack of transportation and some responses indicated scheduling the session on the weekend did not seem to work for the participants. Another limitation was time. For example, the group art activity didn’t occur in the community focus groups as we ran out of time to undertake all the activities planned as part of the session.

A primary challenge in this study was that because there were fewer participants than originally planned there was less data collected. Therefore while the data showed strengths in all areas of course content, cultural inclusiveness, and instructional delivery additional perspectives about the students’ educational experiences may have affected the study outcomes. As well,
Stories of Successes and Challenges
talking with more students who had not completed the ECEC program may have helped to
generate more perspectives about barriers to success.

While my intention was to compare the experiences of Aboriginal students in the
mainstream program at the Nanaimo campus with the community based contract ECEC
programs there was no access to Aboriginal student data that examined enrollment and
completion of FN students in the ECEC program. Rather, the data in the Aboriginal Service Plan
provides statistics that give a general overview of the whole campus of FN students throughout
the years from (2007-2012).

Another aspect of the survey that introduced challenges was the open ended questions.
While my hope was to gather more detailed anecdotal responses, many participants did not
answer the open-ended questions and some responses were very limited in detail. It was possible
to consider themes that emerged from that data but I was left wondering how I might, in future
research, reach more participants and structure the questions to expand the data collected.

Recommendations for Practice

As I wind up my analysis of this study and consider future work in this area, I wonder,
“Where have we been?” and “Where are we going?” Answers to these questions may help me to
understand more fully how the many layers of history and current realities of Aboriginal students
influence successful post- secondary experiences. I believe that leadership is key to supporting
and facilitating Aboriginal success. Leadership must include the responsibility of institutions,
faculties, and First Nations. We must consider in great depth the strengths and challenges that
exist for Aboriginal students. Fasoli et al. (2009) in Exploring an Institutional Leadership
Paradigm for Indigenous Staff and Students explores how we can create a vision of change in
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working with Aboriginal people. He says we can “strengthen institutional leadership capacity to
develop and deliver culturally appropriate and relevant Indigenous teaching and learning
communities” (p.269). Involving all partners including students, community, academics and
institutional administration will help to create renewed relationships through a positive
transformative action process that will support innovative change. Fasoli et al. (2009) suggests
the stages of transformation are:

1. Identifying shared philosophy and values,
2. Establishing conditions,
3. Planning for change,
4. Implementing the change process; and,
5. Accessing and evaluating change (p.271).

Fasoli et al. (2009) goes on to describe a working group (ILP) established in Australia.
The group identified key values in related to Indigenous learning in Post-Secondary institutes.
These include:

- Openness, through a demonstrated belief that Indigenous education is
everybody’s business, not just the business of indigenous student services;
- Enduring leadership, through a long term commitment to an Indigenous
employment strategy;
- Transformation, by extending the learning of the individual into their respective
communities;
- Cultural integrity, through approaches to learning and teaching imbued with
Indigenous traditions;
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- Empowerment, including and involving the students’ families as well as the students themselves;
- Partnerships, bringing communities into the university;
- Inclusion, providing higher education in communities (ILP Working Group December 2007) (p.271).

The ILP group translated the stages of transformational leadership and looked at ways to apply the previously described elements and proposed ways for education to be more inclusive for Indigenous students in Australia. Fasoli et al. suggests this could be adapted and applied with First Nations groups in Canada. An example of this is occurring at Vancouver Island University (VIU) in Nanaimo B.C. For the last ten years the institution has slowly transformed the institutional culture where First Nation students’ culture is valued throughout the campus by visible art displays and totems. As well there is a building specifically for students to meet and connect to others who are attending the University. On the smaller campus in Duncan there are also welcoming totem poles. At both campuses there are Elders in Residence who connect with students throughout the day to provide community support for First Nation students who are attending VIU. King (2008) recommends “universities should provide cultural teachings to Aboriginal staff and faculty, and should increase Aboriginal programming . . . as well, a community advisory committee made up of Elders, Aboriginal students and representations from Aboriginal organizations”(p.11). Also, she takes into account the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) 2005 report which recommended “access to an Elder and cultural space” (p.12). Another change is the increase in First Nation teachers at VIU in programs such as: Native Indian Teaching Program (NITEP), Early Childhood Education, First Nation Studies and other departments on campus. These initiatives help to build First Nation leadership and trust.
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Further, students are able to identify themselves in their teachers, helping to instill confidence and create a safe learning environment in University programs.

Creating these opportunities strengthens both First Nations students’ ability and their commitment to help serve their communities. Another important strategy would be to look at how evaluating progress and transforming ways of working with First Nation students and community would affect student success. Including authentic leadership and utilizing evaluation tools will help to manage the transformative process within each system (post-secondary, First Nation students, and First Nation communities). Northhouse (2010) suggests practical ways to use Terry’s Authentic Approach Action Wheel. Northhouse suggests the wheel provides the “how to” steps to become an authentic leader (which) is action centered: it focuses on the actions of the leader, leadership team, or organization in a particular situation” (p.208). The six components of the Wheel are: “meaning, mission, and power, structure, resources, and existence with the center of the wheel of fulfillment” (p.209). This Wheel could help us both identify issues that arise for First Nation students and develop strategies to help with the issue at hand. The Wheel model can help to guide problem-solving, decide a course of action, and create more transparency across First Nation communities and post-secondary institutes. He continues to explore other authentic-models. Another one he suggests that would be culturally appropriate is George’s wheel. He states that George “focuses on the characteristics of authentic leaders” (p.211). This wheel he says will help individuals or students develop the skill set to be an authentic leader by articulating their: purpose-passion, values-behavior, relationship-connectedness, self-discipline-consistency, and compassion-heart. This could be implemented by working closely with student advisors and in the First Nation Education departments in post-
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secondary institutions. This would help students set goals to develop proactive ways to complete post-secondary programs.

Cultural leadership provides an approach that looks at developing long term relationships with First Nation students and maintaining standards for community partnerships with post-secondary institutions. King (2008) defines Aboriginal leadership as a worldview perspective “in terms of skills, abilities, and traditional gifts underlying an individual’s traditional-spiritual name, clan, life experience. . . [by] mentoring of peers, staff, and faculty; and from community’s traditional teachers, Healers and Elders” (p.2).

The commitment to maintaining these leadership models could create strength and hope for First Nation students who choose to pursue post-secondary education. Creating an action plan will help all involved more fully understand how to bridge diverse cultures and ways of knowing when working with First Nation people. I believe that using effective leadership models already in place is a starting point. VIU has created a wonderful holistic way of learning that creates possibilities in higher learning for First Nation students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The survey and the focus groups helped to gather the data from the students who were completing the program or have been students in past cohorts at VIU. It would have been helpful to meet with more students who did not complete the program and find out their perspectives regarding their challenges in completing their certificate and diploma. It is important to understand more fully both what the challenges are of continuing in the field and what they see as their future path with education at VIU. It would be helpful to start gathering data during their years at VIU and after. A formative assessment would help to identify earlier the barriers that
Stories of Successes and Challenges

are happening for some students and create preventive measures through additional Aboriginal Educational resources and services at VIU.

Another area for future action research would be to evaluate faculty instruction. It would be helpful to know how incorporating Aboriginal education throughout the year is working. As well, a formative evaluation on the use of inquiry-based learning and other methods used in the classroom may help to identify where to build knowledge and capacity to better support Aboriginal learners. Aboriginal Education professional development courses to support Aboriginal higher learning would be a good tool to facilitate instructor learning and evaluate instructor teaching in mainstream and First Nations programs.

I think the importance of increasing knowledge and understanding through research and practice helps to identify and communicate the necessary steps to implement transformative change at all levels: students, faculty, and community. In this way we can build Aboriginal capacity throughout the institution. Futures steps could include: implementing changes to reflect what is known about what works (based on current research studies); evaluating programs to influence transformative change to the learning communities; and continuing to conduct research to ensure post-secondary education more aptly reflects the needs, interests, traditional knowledge and culture of all aboriginal learners.

The community focus groups highlighted what student's need to be able to do as they transition into the profession and work in the community. Research that builds on this understanding to further support professionalization and administration of ECE practice would help to inform future instruction in Post-Secondary Early Childhood Education and Care.
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Ongoing program evaluation will help to support community development in the area of early childhood.

Finally, I think research needs to be more aligned with Aboriginal ways of knowing and more inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives. Learning and sharing knowledge has been an oral tradition in First Nation communities and has primarily taken place through storytelling. We must discover ways to reform post-colonial attitudes and be more consistent and in tune with Aboriginal learning and ways of gathering knowledge.

Conclusion

The overarching issue is that First Nations students are not completing Post-Secondary programs. The Canadian government and First Nations communities are successfully creating some partnerships with post-secondary institutes where students are completing programs and actively working in their communities. This shift of awareness will benefit all First Nations in society and most importantly their Nations by rebuilding what was lost with respect to cultural values and beliefs and thus establishing a true sense of cultural integrity. First Nations students will adapt by achieving their educational goals and re-connecting as a group in their communities dedicating their knowledge in holistic ways to support and work with families and children in their communities. They will contribute to community development by consistently maintaining leadership roles and using their collective voice. Pidgeon (2008) reiterates “if a student’s own cultural integrity is to be respected in retention models, institutions need to become spaces that validate Indigenous capital, epistemologies, and ultimately become sites of change for all students” (p.353).
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Appreciative inquiry through research helps us to better understand various aspects of Aboriginal learning – specifically, in this case, the Early Childhood Education and Care program at VIU. This form of inquiry has assisted us to highlight factors generated by students, First Nations, and instructors to help us better support all learners by being more culturally responsive within the institution, instructional practice, and community partnerships.

Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, the Chancellor at VIU and Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, speaks directly to Aboriginal students pursuing their post-secondary dreams. I believe his comment resonates with the hopes of all future learners and my own wishes for Aboriginal students. He states:

I honor and applaud you; you have made great sacrifices by moving away from home and family to pursue your dreams and aspirations. No matter what you do or where you are, always be mindful of the wisdom in our old peoples’ teachings. We must not forget our roots and our identity as First Nations people. I encourage you to make every effort to stay grounded in our peoples’ way of life. Education is the foundation that brings about personal development and growth. Vancouver Island University is committed to advancing and supporting Aboriginal ways of knowing and being and I encourage you to access the services that have been developed for our Aboriginal students’ wish you much success as you continue to pursue your personal aspirations and academic goals.

References


Stories of Successes and Challenges

Canadian Council on Learning, (2011, October). *What is the Future of Learning in Canada, 1-76*


Retrieved from http://www.senecac.on.ca/quarterly
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Appendix A
Vancouver Island University Early Childhood Education
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs: Stories of Successes and Challenges Research Project
Sharing your perspective
Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions including comments as appropriate to support your opinion and/or explain your response. If you require more space for any questions or wish to comment further on any related topic, please feel free to use the reverse side of the questionnaire or to add space into the document.

Please check the box in front of the option that most closely describes you.

1. I am:
   - □ First Nation
   - □ Métis
   - □ Inuit
   - □ Multi-cultural
   - □ Non-Aboriginal

2. My Nation is:
   - □ Saanich
   - □ Cowichan
   - □ Chemainus
   - □ Nanaimo
   - □ Other (Please specify)
   - □ Not applicable

3. Age range
   - □ 18-22
   - □ 23-27
   - □ 27-32
   - □ 33-38
   - □ 39-43
   - □ 44-49
   - □ 50+
4. Please indicate below which programs you completed at Vancouver Island University. In the space provided, please indicate the year you started the program and the year you completed and/or if you have not yet completed the program? Please note, the Child and Youth Care Degree option has been listed as, at this time, it is the primary degree with credit transfer options for VIU ECEC graduates.

☐ Early Childhood Education Basic Certificate
☐ Early Childhood Education Diploma Speciality: Special Needs
☐ Early Childhood Education Diploma Speciality: Infant Toddler
☐ Child and Youth Care Degree
☐ Other degree or credential – please specify: __________________________

Year started: Year
Completed:
☐ Not yet completed

Year started: Year
Completed:
☐ Not yet completed

Year started: Year
Completed:
☐ Not yet completed

Year started: Year
Completed:
☐ Not yet completed

5. Please check the box that most closely reflects your professional role related to working with children and family: (Please check all boxes that apply to your work.)

☐ Early Childhood Educator
☐ Infant Toddler Educator
☐ Special Needs Educator
☐ Supported Child Development
☐ Language Teacher/staff
☐ Child and Youth Care Worker
☐ Family Support worker
☐ Social Worker
☐ Teacher
☐ Other (please specify)

6. Please indicate below the extent to which you believe the following statements are true.

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<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Please Comment</th>
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<td>Stories of Successes and Challenges</td>
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<td>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to understand child development of the children in my community.</td>
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<td>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to communicate effectively with children, families and other professionals in my community.</td>
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<td>The ECEC courses/program prepared me well to plan and implement appropriate activities for children in my community.</td>
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<td>The ECEC courses provided me with the knowledge and skill to guide the behavior of young children in the ECD programs in which I have worked.</td>
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<td>The ECEC courses/program helped me to enhance the health and safety of the children in the programs in which I have worked.</td>
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<td>The courses provided me with good background to work with Children with Special Needs in the programs in which I have worked.</td>
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<td>The Administration courses provided the knowledge and skill to manage early childhood programs in communities in which I have worked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The courses helped me understand the history professional context of early childhood practice in the communities in which I have worked.</td>
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<td>The practica courses helped</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
me to apply the early childhood theory to working with children, families and other professionals in the communities in which I have worked.

7. Please describe below those teaching methods and approaches that you found most effective to support your learning and success as a student.

8. Please check the boxes below that best describe some of the ways the ECEC program was culturally inclusive:

- [ ] Elders as participants and teachers.
- [ ] Family, Community and Cultural teachings.
- [ ] Language lessons/classes.
- [ ] Educational activities (eg. traditional arts and crafts; nature-based activities.)
- [ ] Cultural days/activities/events.
- [ ] Traditional practices/ceremony.
- [ ] Other (please specify):

9. Please describe below some of the key ways your community supported you in your studies.
10. Please describe below some of the ways the ECEC courses/program enhanced your cultural knowledge and your ability to bring the cultural teachings into your professional practice?


11. Were there cultural activities that you wish were provided in the ECEC program that were not?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Unsure

Please comment:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

12. Please indicate the response below that fits best with your experience of the ECEC program.

Following my completion of ECEC program/courses I felt professionally prepared and confident as an ECEC professional.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
Stories of Successes and Challenges

☐ Strongly Disagree

The inclusion of cultural teachings and activities were an essential part of my professional ECEC preparation.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

I felt comfortable and supported by the other students in the ECEC classroom.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Please comment:

I felt comfortable and supported by the instructors in the ECEC classroom.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Please comment:

I felt comfortable and supported by the administrators and secretaries that supported the delivery of the ECEC program.

☐ Strongly agree
Stories of Successes and Challenges

☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Please comment:

The ways in which the course and program was delivered (location, length of courses, time of courses, the length of classes) worked well for me.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Undecided
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Please comment:

13. Please describe below any specific barriers you experienced in your efforts to complete your ECEC education at VIU?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

14. Based on your personal experience, what were the strengths of the VIU ECEC program?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15. Based on your personal experience, what were the challenges/issues/barriers that you experienced as a student in the ECEC program?
16. Do you have any advice for us to inform future ECEC programs for First Nations students?

17. Are you interested in participating in a focus group to further discuss your experience as a student in the ECEC program? Please check the appropriate box below.

☐ Yes       ☐ No

Please provide your name and contact information (email and/or telephone) in the space provided below.

Name:
Email:
Telephone:

Huy chq u!        Kleco Kleco!        Gile’kesla!

Thank-you!
The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for her Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, Danielle’s research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) with whom she works as a Student Research Associate.

The AECD Research Team plans to contact sixty past and present VIU Early Childhood Education and Care students to request their participation in the Stories of Success Research Project.

If you are an Aboriginal person who attended the ECEC Program at VIU or were enrolled in any of the ECEC First Nations partnered programs in Cowichan, Stzu’minus, Snuneymux’w, Beecher Bay or the four nations of Saanich between 2003-2013 you are invited to respond to a project questionnaire and participate in a Focus Group Session in early Spring 2013 through a Fluid Survey online survey software.

The research will inform future ECEC curriculum and delivery methods and seeks to advance our understanding about:

- Students experiences in the ECEC program.
- Strengths and challenges related to program curriculum and delivery methods.
- Strengths and challenges related to Indigenous community partnerships.
Stories of Successes and Challenges

- How to improve the cultural relevance and locally appropriateness of ECEC training.

If you are interested in participating or require further information about the study "Stories of Successes and Challenges" please click on the link provided.

[Survey Link HERE]

Viewing this information in no way obligates you to participate in the study. Also please note that the site is NOT monitored by me therefore I will not know who reviews the information provided in the link.

While it would benefit the study for you to participate in both the questionnaire and the focus group session, if for some reason you are only able to participate in one aspect of the study you are welcome to do so. If you would like to be part of the focus group session please contact me by email or telephone (contact information below).

Thank-you for considering this request. I look forward to talking with you further about this important project.

Danielle Alphonse

VIU AECD Student Research Associate
Office Telephone: 250-740-6267
Email: danielle.alphonse@viu.ca
Appendix C

Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Recruitment Script for Questionnaire & Focus Group

*The recruitment script will be what students see when they access the link on the Recruitment Poster. Students will need to read the recruitment script where they will find a link to consent form. At the end of the consent form they will find the link to the survey.

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AEC) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

You are receiving this invitation to participate in the research project because you were enrolled in ECEC or ECEC First Nations (FN) courses at VIU or those delivered in partnership with First Nation communities.

You are being invited to complete an online questionnaire. The focus of the questions on the questionnaire will document your perspective about the strengths and challenges of the cultural inclusiveness of both course content and delivery methods. It is intended that the data collected through the questionnaire will increase the cultural appropriateness and sensitivity of students’ educational experiences, ultimately positively influencing the professional practice of both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Early Childhood Educators working with Aboriginal children.

You are also invited to participate in a focus group session. If you are interested in attending the focus group discussion, the fluid survey link will have an opportunity at end of the questionnaire to leave your contact information through email or phone to register and to confirm the date, time and place of the session. If you are interested in participating in the focus group discussion but not the questionnaire you can contact the researcher, Danielle Alphonse, at the contact information below.

If you decide to participate, it is also required that you sign a consent form. This form outlines your rights in relation to your participation, how the information will be used, and where the information will be stored. It also confirms your interest and willingness to participate.

To help you make your decision about your participation the following documents are also provided:
Stories of Successes and Challenges

- A Project Summary [LINK to document]

If you are interested in participating in the questionnaire please read the consent form located at the link below. The link to the survey is located on the consent form.

- Consent Form [LINK to document]

We value the contributions you may make to our discussion about Aboriginal Early Childhood Development programs and hope you will join us for these important discussions.

If you have any questions about the project regarding the questionnaire and focus group please contact Danielle Alphonse at 250-753-3245 local 2354 or by email Danielle.alphonse@viu.ca. If you are unable to reach me please feel free to contact Linda McDonell at 250-740-6267.

Thank-you.

Danielle Alphonse, Student Research Associate
Aboriginal Early Childhood Development
Vancouver Island University

Appendix D
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Student Questionnaire Participant Consent Form

Date:

Meeting Organizer/Facilitators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Danielle Alphonse, BA</th>
<th>Linda McDonell, MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIU AECD Student Research Associate</td>
<td>BC Regional Innovation Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Telephone:</td>
<td>Co-Investigator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(250-740-6267)</td>
<td>Telephone: 250-740-6267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:danielle.alphonse@viu.ca">danielle.alphonse@viu.ca</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:linda.mcdonell@viu.ca">linda.mcdonell@viu.ca</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background Information
The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Successes and Challenges has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development
Stories of Successes and Challenges

(AECD) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

As a current or former First Nation ECEC student you are being invited to complete a questionnaire on a Fluid Survey link regarding your perspectives about your educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU. When you fill out the survey you will be provided information about participating in a focus group session which will be held to explore the experience of past and present ECEC students, ECEC Faculty and previously involved community members including Elders. If you would like to participate in the focus group, the questionnaire provides a space to leave your contact information: email and phone number. If you would like more information please contact me directly at danielle.alphonse@viu.ca or by telephone at (250) 740-6267.

The questionnaire should take about thirty to forty five minutes of your time to complete. You will be asked eighteen questions in total. Three questions relate directly to your nation and age. Other questions relate to the teaching, community involvement, and cultural components included in the ECEC program. You are also asked to share information about what you perceive as the strengths and challenges related to your experience in the ECEC program at VIU. This information will help us to better understand the factors that contribute to student success and inform future course and program development.

What will be done with the information that is collected?

The researchers will collect and collate information from the questionnaires and will organize the data into common themes. The themes identified and the results of the research process will be documented in a final report that will be presented to my graduating class in the MEDL program at VIU, as well as in my thesis for the MEDL program. At no time will identifying information about yourself or your Nation be linked to the data in the final report.

The information collected through the research will inform future ECEC curriculum and delivery methods and inform our understanding about:

- Student experiences in the ECEC program.
- Strengths and challenges related to program curriculum and delivery methods.
- Strengths and challenges related to Indigenous community partnerships.
- How to improve the cultural relevance and local appropriateness of ECEC training.

All data both paper and electronic will be stored in the office of the BCRIC for AECD at VIU. Paper files will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the locked office. This data will be used only by the Principal Investigator, the AECD Chair researcher assistants. The final summary report will be available to you at your request.

It should be noted that the Principal Investigator, Danielle Alphonse is related to a small number of potential participants. If you are concerned about any potential conflict because of your
Stories of Successes and Challenges

relationship to Danielle please let either Danielle or Linda McDonell (Co-Investigator) know about your concern by contacting them at the numbers listed below.

There is no known harm to you in responding to the questionnaire. You can choose not to answer any questions or not to participate in this research for any reason. You have the right to ‘skip’ any question that may be asked and to withdraw from participation at any time, for any reason and without penalty. However, if you decide to withdraw from the questionnaire portion of the study after completing and submitting the questionnaire, your data would remain in the study because the researchers would not be able to distinguish it from anyone else’s who have contributed.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer at 1-888-920-2221 (ext 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

I have read and understand the above information and understand that I may ask questions in the future.

The return of your completed questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this study and for the information you provide to be included in study results

[LINK TO SURVEY]

Thank-you!
Appendix E

Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project

Stories of Successes and Challenges

Project Summary

Background Information

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

The reason I chose this area is because as an Aboriginal person in the ECE profession I believe it is important to positively influence the development and growth of culturally relevant, high quality Early Childhood Education for Aboriginal communities. I view education in ECEC as an important way to support child development. I believe that doing this may help to heal communities that have historically had traumatic experiences due to residential schools. I am dedicated to children and families and I would like to understand what the barriers and challenges are for First Nation students toward attaining post-secondary ECEC credentials.

The focus of this Stories of Success Research Project is to:

- Identify past and present Aboriginal students enrolled in ECEC or ECEC First Nations (FN) courses at VIU and/or who have attended those programs delivered in partnership with First Nation communities (Cowichan, Stzu’minus, Snuneymux’w, Beecher Bay and the four Saanich Nations).
- Invite those students to complete a questionnaire regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU.
- Involve Aboriginal students, First Nations community members previously involved with the First Nations ECEC programs, and ECEC faculty in Focus Group Sessions held in the Cowichan Valley in early Spring 2013.
- Collect and collate questionnaires and Community Focus Group Sessions data and organize the data into common themes. The themes identified and the results of the research process will be documented in a final report.
- Distribute a report summarizing the research through the BCRIC for AECD office at the participants’ request.

I believe the information collected through the research will inform future ECEC curriculum and delivery methods and inform our understanding about:

- Students’ experiences in the ECEC program.
- Strengths and challenges related to program curriculum and delivery methods.
- Strengths and challenges related to Indigenous community partnerships.
Stories of Successes and Challenges

- How to improve the cultural relevance and local appropriateness of ECEC training.

If you have any questions about the Stories of Success Research Project, please contact me by email or telephone. Contact information is noted below.

Danielle Alphonse,
VIU AECD Student Research Associate &
Principal Investigator, Stories of Success
Office Telephone:
(250-740-6267)
Email: danielle.alphonse@viu.ca

Appendix F
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Faculty Focus Group Invitation to Participate (Script)

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

You are invited to participate in the faculty focus group session. The faculty focus group participants will be past and present instructors who taught First Nation ECEC students (2003-2005, 2006-2008, and 2010-2013). The focus group session will be in Spring 2013.

You will be provided with information regarding your rights related to participation, have an opportunity to ask questions about the study and sign forms consenting to the use of the research information collected.

The reason I chose this area is because as an Aboriginal person in the ECE profession I believe it is important to positively influence the development and growth of culturally relevant, high quality Early Childhood Education for Aboriginal communities. I view education in ECEC as an important way to support child development. Doing this may help to heal communities that have historically had traumatic experiences due to residential schools. I am dedicated to children and families and I would like to understand what the barriers and challenges are for First Nation students toward attaining post-secondary ECEC credentials.
Stories of Successes and Challenges

The focus of this study is to identify past and present First Nation ECEC students (2003-2005, 2006-2008, and 2010-2013) and to invite them to complete a questionnaire regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU. The intended participants include Aboriginal students enrolled in and/or who have graduated from VIU and First Nations ECEC (ECEC FN) partnership programs. Aboriginal students completing the mainstream ECEC programs at VIU will also be invited to participate in the study. Questionnaire data will be collected and then followed by Community Focus Groups which will be held to explore the experience of past and present ECEC students, ECEC Faculty and previously involved community members including Elders.

Across five communities (Cowichan, Stzu’minus, Snuneymux’w, Beecher Bay and the four nations of Saanich) the total number of student participants is estimated at sixty. Questionnaire and focus group responses will be analysed to gain an understanding of perceptions related to ECEC and ECEC FN programs strengths and challenges. This will help us to better understand the factors that contribute to student success and inform future course and program development. The focus groups will be structured to gain participants’ perceptions about how to best support and strengthen Aboriginal student learning in Post-Secondary ECEC programs.

To help you make your decision about your participation, we have attached some materials to this email/letter. These materials will provide more detailed information about the project and the community focus meeting. The materials include:

- A Project Summary.
- An outline of the Faculty Focus Group Meeting (along with questions we will ask as part of the discussion).
- Contact information.
- Consent form.

If you have questions about the project or the focus group meeting, please feel free to contact us at the numbers listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linda McDonell, MA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC Regional Innovation Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</table>
Stories of Successes and Challenges

We value the contributions you may make to our discussion about Aboriginal Early Childhood Development post-secondary programs and hope you will join us for these important discussions.

If you decide to participate please reply to this email or call Danielle Alphonse at 250-740-6267.

Thank-you,

Danielle Alphonse

Appendix G

Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project

Stories of Successes and Challenges

Letter Requesting Support from VIU Human Services, VIU ECEC, Cowichan Tribes, Chemainus Band, Saanich Indian School Board Adult Education Centre (SAEC), and Beecher Bay Band.

Title and name of the person
Name of the organization
Mailing Address

Dear :

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRIC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

The reason I chose this area is because as an Aboriginal person in the ECE profession I believe it is important to positively influence the development and growth of culturally relevant, high quality Early Childhood Education for Aboriginal communities. I view education in ECEC as an important way to support child development. Doing this may help to heal communities that have historically had traumatic experiences due to residential schools. I am dedicated to children and families and I would like to understand what the barriers and challenges are for First Nation students toward attaining post-secondary ECEC credentials.

The focus of this study is to identify past and present First Nation ECEC students (2003-2005, 2006-2008, and 2010-2013) and to invite them to complete a questionnaire regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU. The intended participants include Aboriginal students
Stories of Successes and Challenges

enrolled in or who have graduated from VIU mainstream ECEC programs and First Nations ECEC (ECEC FN) partnership programs. Questionnaire data will be collected and then followed by focus groups which will be held to explore the experience of past and present ECEC students, ECEC Faculty and previously involved community members including Elders.

Across five communities (Cowichan, Stz’uminus, Snuneymux’w, Beecher Bay and the four nations of Saanich) the total number of student participants is estimated at sixty. Questionnaire and focus group responses will be analysed to gain an understanding of perceptions related to ECEC and ECEC FN programs strengths and challenges. This will help us to better understand the factors that contribute to student success and inform future course and program development. The focus groups will be structured to gain participants’ perceptions about how to best support and strengthen Aboriginal student learning in Post-Secondary ECEC programs.

Participants in both the questionnaire and the focus group discussions will be provided with information regarding their rights related to participation, have an opportunity to ask questions about the study and sign forms consenting to the use of the research information collected.

As the principal project researcher I am requesting permission to recruit participants in your community and am writing to request your support in the research project to complete my MEDL program at VIU. To streamline the permission process attached is an authorization form that indicates support to hold a focus group meeting in your community. If you agree to your community’s involvement please sign the form and fax it to: Danielle Alphonse at 250-740-6256. Alternatively, if you wish me to pick the form up in person please contact the number below.

If you have any questions or comments about the project, please feel free to contact me at 250-753-3245 extension 2354 or email me at Danielle.Alphonse@viu.ca.

Sincerely,

Danielle Alphonse
Appendix H

Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project

Stories of Successes and Challenges

Student Focus Group Meeting Format

1. Welcome, introductions, purpose and plan for the session using an eagle feather and sitting in a talking circle.

2. Overview of project
   - Background
   - Project Summary

3. Project Consent Form:
   - Distribution of forms
   - Explanation of consent
   - Questions/comments
   - Signing and collection

4. Facilitated group discussion:(Ideas will be transcribed on chart paper)
   - As a group, discuss what you think you learned about yourself as a person and a professional in the ECEC program.
   - What did you like most about being a student in the VIU ECEC program?
   - If you were an Elder ten years down the road and you were to talk to a student who is enrolling in the ECEC program what advice would you give to that student?
   - **Art Activity:**
     - Create an individual vision of how you see yourself as a professional in the ECE field today.
   - **Group Process:** What do you wish for all the children you have worked with in helping families and children.

5. Other ideas or suggestions?

6. Wrap up and debrief.
   - Questions/comments about the project or the facilitation process.
   - Distribution of Debriefing Form Contact information.
   - Would you be interested in meeting after the data has been collected to help interpret the results and to give critical feedback of the data analysis.
Appendix I
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Faculty Focus Group

1. Welcome, introductions, Purpose and plan for the session using an eagle feather and sitting in a talking circle.

2. Overview of project
   - Background
   - Project Summary

3. Project Consent Form:
   a. Distribution of forms
   b. Explanation of consent
   c. Questions/comments
   d. Signing and collection

4. Facilitated group discussion: (Ideas will be transcribed on chart paper)
   - What have you learned from teaching First Nations students in the ECE community based program
   - What suggestions would you give to new instructors in teaching Aboriginal students?
     - What stands out for you about what Aboriginal students need to be successful?
     - Art Activity:
       - Individual metaphor how your see yourself as an ECE professional
       - Group Process: What do you wish for students, families and children?

5. Other ideas or suggestions?

6. Wrap up and debrief.
   a. Questions/comments about the project or the facilitation process.
   b. Distribution of Debriefing Form Contact information.
   c. Would you be interested in meeting after the data has been collected to help interpret the results and to give critical feedback of the data.
Appendix J
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Community Members and Elders Focus Group Meeting Format

1. Welcome, introductions, Purpose and plan for the session using an eagle feather and sitting in a talking circle.

2. Overview of project
   a. Background
   b. Project Summary

3. Project Consent Form:
   a. Distribution of forms
   b. Explanation of consent
   c. Questions/comments
   d. Signing and collection

4. Facilitated group discussion: (Ideas will be transcribed on chart paper)
   - What supports do you believe are needed to help First Nation students be successful in the ECEC program?
   - What are you looking for in hiring an ECE graduates
     - Expectations
     - Strengths
     - Challenges
   - Elders:
     - What do you want ECE students to teach the children and families to share in sharing cultural knowledge and traditions in their ECEC program?
     - What advice would you give young people today who are going to work in the field of ECE helping families and children?
     - What suggestions would you give to new instructors who are teaching an Aboriginal student’s?

   Art Activity:
   - Group Process: What is your wish for students, children and families?

5. Other ideas or suggestions?
6. Wrap up and debrief.
   a. Questions/comments about the project or the facilitation process.
   b. Distribution of Debriefing Form Contact information.
   c. Would you be interested in meeting after the data has been collected to help interpret the results and to give critical feedback of the data.
Appendix K
Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project
Stories of Successes and Challenges
Focus Group consent Form

Date

Meeting Organizers/Facilitators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Danielle Alphonse, BA</th>
<th>Linda McDonell, MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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Background Information
The Aboriginal Early Childhood Post-Secondary Programs Research Project: Stories of Success has been developed by me, Danielle Alphonse as part of the requirements for my Masters in Educational Leadership (MEDL) degree with the Faculty of Education. Also, my research is mentored by Linda McDonell, Vancouver Island University (VIU) BC Regional Innovation Chair (BCRiC) for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (AECD) with whom I work as a Student Research Associate. The purpose of the project is to gather information that will inform future Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs at Vancouver Island University (both regular on campus and First Nations partnership programs).

The focus of this study is to identify past and present First Nation ECEC students (2005, 2008, and 2013) and to invite them to complete a questionnaire regarding their perspectives about their educational journey in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) certificate and diploma programs at VIU. The intended participants include Aboriginal students enrolled in and/or who have graduated from VIU and First Nations ECEC (ECEC FN) partnership programs. Aboriginal students completing the mainstream ECEC programs at VIU will also be invited to participate in the study. Questionnaire data will be collected and then followed by three separate focus groups which will be held to explore the experience of a) past and present ECEC students, b) ECEC Faculty and c) previously involved community members including Elders.

Focus Group Meeting Information

The meeting will take about four hours of your time and will be jointly facilitated by the Principal Investigator, the AECD Chair and project research assistants. As a participant in the focus group meeting you will discuss and provide suggestions about: your experiences as a student, faculty member or community member in the Early Childhood Education and Care program at VIU. As well, you will be asked to share values you think are core to cultural inclusion, strategies for working successfully with First Nations communities; and provide some suggestions about program delivery.
Stories of Successes and Challenges

What will be done with the information that is collected?

The information collected through the research will inform future ECEC curriculum and delivery methods and inform our understanding about:

- Student experiences in the ECEC program.
- Strengths and challenges related to program curriculum and delivery methods.
- Strengths and challenges related to Indigenous community partnerships.
- How to improve the cultural relevance and local appropriateness of ECEC training.

Because focus groups involve discussion among several participants, we cannot guarantee that what you say at the focus group will remain confidential, given that others will also be in attendance. Please note however, at no time in the written reports will information be linked to you as an individual or to your Nation. A final report will be presented to my graduating class in the MEDL program at VIU, as well as in my thesis to meet MEDL program requirements.

All data both paper and electronic will be stored in the office of the BCRIC for AECD at VIU. Paper files will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the locked office. This data will be used only by the Principal Investigator, the AECD Chair and research assistants. The final summary report will be available to you at your request.

It should be noted that the Principal Investigator, Danielle Alphonse is related to a small number of potential participants. If you are concerned about any potential conflict because of your relationship to Danielle please let either Danielle or Linda McDonell (Co-Investigator) know about your concern by contacting them at the numbers listed below.

There is no known harm to you in responding to the interview questions. You can choose not to answer any questions or not to participate in this research for any reason. If you withdraw from the focus group, the data/information you have contributed to the point of withdrawal would remain in the study.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer at 1-888-920-2221 (ext 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

I have read and understand the above information and understand that I may ask questions in the future.

I consent to participate in this project and to allow the information I provide to be used in this research.

Name________________________________ Date__________________