

**An Examination of Career Paths of  
Aboriginal Women Principals of Band-Controlled Schools**

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**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

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**BY**

**Nora Murdock**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of  
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## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
ABSTRACT .....	5
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	8
<b>Purpose of the Study</b> .....	8
<b>Significance of the Study</b> .....	8
<b>The Role of the Researcher</b> .....	10
<b>Limitations of the Study</b> .....	13
CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE REVIEW .....	17
<b>Background to the Study</b> .....	17
<b>Pre-European Contact History</b> .....	17
<b>The Development of First Nations Education</b> .....	19
<b>History of Band-Controlled Schools</b> .....	19
<b>The Development of More Aboriginal Teachers and Its Impact on Aboriginal Education</b> .....	24
<b>Pre-European Status of Aboriginal Women</b> .....	28
<b>Aboriginal Women and Colonization</b> .....	29
<b>Women and Educational Administration</b> .....	31
<b>Aboriginal and African-American Women</b> .....	32
<b>Career Paths</b> .....	35
<b>Challenges - Women in Educational Administration</b> .....	38
<b>Societal Attitudes</b> .....	39
<b>Role Conflict</b> .....	42
<b>Supports and Encouragement for Women in Educational Administration</b> .....	44
<b>Role Models</b> .....	45
<b>Mentors</b> .....	46
<b>Networking</b> .....	47
CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS.....	50
<b>Research Methods</b> .....	50
<b>Research Design</b> .....	50
<b>Identifying and Recruiting Research Participants</b> .....	50
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	54
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	55
<b>Introducing the Research Participants</b> .....	55
<b>Table 1 - Profiles of the Research Participants</b> .....	59
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS - CAREER PATHS, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS .....	60
<b>The Career Paths of the Participants</b> .....	61
<b>Early Life Experiences and Family Expectations</b> .....	61
<b>Motivation to Pursue Training as Teachers and to become Principals</b> .....	67
<b>Table 2 - Positions Held Prior to Becoming a Principal</b> .....	78
<b>Initial Appointment as Principal</b> .....	81
<b>Working as Principals</b> .....	87
<b>Advice and Looking Back</b> .....	94
<b>Challenges</b> .....	101
<b>Earlier Challenges Prior to Post-Secondary Education</b> .....	102
<b>Challenges Faced while Training as Teachers</b> .....	104
<b>Challenges Faced at Initial Appointment as Principal and in Administrative Practice</b> .....	106
<b>Societal Attitudes and Discrimination</b> .....	109
<b>Family and Role Conflict</b> .....	115
<b>Role Models and Mentors and Supports</b> .....	118
<b>Support and Encouragement (Early Life Experiences)</b> .....	118
<b>Supports and Encouragement during Training and Initial Teaching Positions</b> .....	121
<b>Supports and Encouragement during Administrative Practice</b> .....	125

CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....136

REFERENCES .....145

APPENDICES .....153

**Appendix A - Interview Protocol.....153**

**Appendix B - Request to Participate in the Study .....156**

**Appendix C – Research Proposal.....157**

**Appendix D – Ethics Approval.....159**



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## ABSTRACT

In this study, I describe and analyze selected aspects of the career paths of five Aboriginal women working as principals of band-controlled schools. The purpose is to explore the career paths of the participants and to relate the experiences that the women had in their lives that led them to become principals of band-controlled schools. In this qualitative research study, I focus on the challenges that they face and on the supports that enable them to overcome and cope with the challenges, prior to becoming principals and in their work as school principals.

The data for this study is derived from interviews with five Aboriginal women who related their perspectives and experiences in their careers as Aboriginal women educators in Manitoba. The participants were chosen from a group of women who responded to an invitation to participate in the study and who met the specific criteria. All five of the participants shared their experiences openly and willingly and the data that they provided is described according to common themes and then analyzed and interpreted using qualitative research methodology. The literature review for this study includes the background that puts the study in its important historical context.

The findings from this study are grouped according to the three research questions, career paths, challenges and supports. The career paths of the five participants were influenced by these factors: (a) early life experiences and family expectations, (b) the motivation to become teachers and principals was initially for economic stability and a secure income but later evolved to a commitment to make things better for children, (c) the women in this study are highly qualified for their positions and have a commitment to continuous

learning, evidenced by their high academic qualifications, (d) they taught for a relatively short time prior to becoming principals and did not actively pursue a position as principal but were either appointed or accepted the position unexpectedly because of a situation in the community they were working in at the time of initial appointment, (e) for four of the five participants there was an issue of working in their home communities, where there was a lack of acceptance or political interference with their employment as principals, and (f) the participants stressed a high commitment to making things better for the children and were comfortable and confident in their ability as educational leaders.

The challenges that the participants faced: (a) lack of opportunity, poverty and dependence on social assistance were early challenges, (b) returning to post-secondary studies after being in out of school for many years, (c) family responsibilities and role conflict made it difficult for their studies and careers to go smoothly, (d) being unprepared and untrained for entry into administration, (e) did not plan to go into administration but were asked or appointed to the position unexpectedly, (f) lack of acceptance in their home communities, and (g) societal attitudes of discrimination and sexism interfered with their careers at some point.

The participants relied on the following supports: (a) role models including fathers, friends, other teachers and superiors, (b) mentors were husbands, friends, elders, family members and colleagues, (c) networking, (d) spirituality, and (e) academic qualifications.

Recommendations for actions: (a) develop training programs for aspiring Aboriginal teachers who work in band controlled schools, (b) begin to build an administration pool for potential school administrators, (c) establish a formal networking group for principals of

band-controlled schools, and (d) provide a support system for current principals of band-controlled schools.

Recommendations for further study: (a) do a similar study of principals of band-controlled schools including both men and women relating it to turnover of school administration and how this has affected the progress of band-controlled schools, (b) conduct a similar study with a larger sample of Aboriginal women, (c) do a life history interview study of an Aboriginal woman who has been in education for many years in Manitoba, (d) conduct a longitudinal study about women in Aboriginal education, and (e) conduct a study about leadership for Aboriginal schools, what works best, possibly servant leadership model. These are some of the suggestions for further study but the list can be greatly extended as I discovered in doing this study, that more research is needed in many areas in Aboriginal education.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze selected aspects of the career paths of five Aboriginal women who currently work as principals of band-controlled schools situated on different reserves in Manitoba. There are three areas which are the focus for this study. Firstly, through this study the participants share their perceptions and experiences they had throughout their lives and outline the career path that they followed to get to where they are now. Secondly, I explore the challenges the participants faced in striving for and gaining access to administrative positions and while working as principals. The third area of focus identifies the supports that helped the participants to make the initial move into school administration and those that help them in their work as principals. The study highlights the common themes that emerge as the women share their stories through taped interviews. The data collected through the interview process is presented according to the themes and analyzed using qualitative research methodology. The data is summarized and conclusions and recommendations are presented for the purpose of increasing the understanding and awareness of Aboriginal women's participation in school leadership in First Nations communities.

### **Significance of the Study**

Reynolds (1995) advocates for further study of women in Canadian educational administration. She points out the need to study about the experiences of different categories of women including First Nations women. She states that we need to expand our knowledge about them and that we need to "situate personal narratives within historical contexts which

help to understand why people make the meanings that they do out of the worlds which they encounter and help to construct” (Reynolds, 1995 p.13). As a researcher and a member of the group being studied, I felt that it was important that the background for this study include a history section. In order to understand and “situate the narratives” of these women within the historical context, then it must be part of the information contained in this study. There is a need to understand, not only Aboriginal women’s status and performance in leadership in contemporary society but also to be aware of their history. There is a lack of research of First Nations women in leadership and a more productive starting point is to begin with the life stories and the narratives that each woman has and let them speak. In a 1981 review of research for women in educational administration, Shakeshaft makes the point:

At this time, descriptive data are needed about women in positions of power and the accompanying isolation. Available information is not sufficient for formulating, let alone testing, theories. What is needed is for researchers to collect information so that theories can be developed to explain the slice of life involving women in educational administration. (p.26)

In this study, I have collected descriptive data and information from the five participants who were willing to share their stories. Although there has been more research conducted with women in educational administration since the 1980’s, this is not true for First Nations women in leadership. Just as it is important for people to understand and be aware of themselves in history, it is likewise important that women become aware of themselves as leaders, that they study themselves as leaders so that they can view leadership in a more fundamental way and perhaps be in a better position to affect positive and consequential

change. Research about Aboriginal women can help to build new paradigms and frameworks so that there is a better understanding of Aboriginal people. In developing this understanding we also need to be aware of the effects of history to be in a better position to be able to pave the way for pedagogical changes for Aboriginal education in Canada.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

As I read through the studies and the articles for the literature review and listened to the participants share their stories, I often felt that I was reading about myself. I was able to relate personally to many of the findings in the research studies of non-Aboriginal women. Role models and mentors are mentioned many times in the literature as being crucial for women who are aspiring to and in educational administration (Edson, 1988, Ortiz, 1982). In 1986 when I first became a principal, there were few Aboriginal women in educational administration. I was fortunate to work with a mentor who was a male principal with many years of experience. This mentor validated my choice to become a principal and encouraged me against all odds to do the best I could. He helped me gain the skills needed for administrative work. Later in my career, I was privileged to work with an Aboriginal woman principal who became my role model and mentor and the relationship continues to this day. She provides encouragement and support, invaluable advice, constructive criticism and feedback on my job performance. Mentoring is one of the themes that are explored in this study as a support for the women in their careers.

As a member of the group of focus in this study, I am interested in a comparison of experiences with other Aboriginal women who work as principals of band-controlled schools. I took the position of principal after working in a band-controlled school as a teacher

for two years. I saw a large turnover of principals and I felt that this was detrimental to the school. Since I felt a commitment to affect change for the better, it was inevitable that I accepted the position of principal on the reserve where I was working. Throughout my first six years of teaching I became convinced that I could do the job as well as or better than several of the male non-Aboriginal principals that I had worked with throughout the years of my teaching career: not because I felt that I had better skills but because I knew that I had a better understanding of the issues that were affecting the education of the community.

I was appointed as a school principal and accepted the position. I was encouraged by my father and a former principal of the school, both of whom I value as mentors. I was ready for a change and thought that taking this position would assuage the feelings of frustration I felt at the inadequacy of the other administrators. Barriers to my success, both internal and external, were present then and are still present in my current position as principal of a band-controlled school. An internal barrier I experienced was the fear of going into administration and lack of self-confidence. An external barrier was the attitudes of the leadership and the community at large toward a woman being in leadership. I was curious to know if my experience was common to other women. In the early part of my career I felt the isolation of a woman administrator in a field dominated by men both at the local and provincial level. Especially in the early part of my career, I felt that the "old boy's network" mentioned by Edson (1988) and Shakeshaft (1981), was prominent. In the year 2004 and beyond, what is the experience of these Aboriginal women who bravely entered the field of school administration and faced and overcame the challenge of the encounter of leadership?



Through in depth interviews and analysis of the information shared by the five women, I gained an awareness of their career paths, heard their stories and was able to relate to many of their experiences. Throughout the interviews I had to make a very conscious effort to not get too involved in the conversations by expressing my own view or asking questions and making comments that would lead the participant down a path that I might have wanted them to take. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that “a qualitative researcher requires theoretical and social sensitivity, the ability to maintain analytical distance while at the same time drawing upon past experiences and theoretical knowledge to interpret what is seen, astute powers of observation and good interaction skills” (p. 18). The participant’s interviews caused me to reflect on my own experiences and assumptions as a principal of a band-controlled school. Sharing my experiences, occasionally, as part of the interviews acted as prompts for the participants to elaborate further and explore more in depth a particular issue or experience. As an Aboriginal woman studying Aboriginal women, I felt that this was beneficial for both myself as a researcher and for the participants. There was often the sense that there was a mutual understanding of the experiences and the perspectives that they shared which contributed to more genuine and honest expression of their views. However, I made a conscientious effort to limit sharing my own story for fear I would bias the interviews.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) make a case for feminist research in saying that a more “loosely structured research methodology is necessary to learn about women, to capture their words, their concepts, and the importance they place on the events in their world (p.37). They suggest that an interviewer should not be neutral and that being a collaborator or partner in the interview makes for a better interview.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study, like all others, has some limitations and raises more questions and topics for further research. In this study, I present very subjective aspects of the experiences of the five women who are the research participants and discover some common themes that emerge from the interviews. Through the data collection, I uncover, discover and document their stories and describe their common experiences and outline some of the differences in their experiences. The Aboriginal women who are part of this qualitative research study may or may not have unique experiences that are different for other Aboriginal women principals or non-Aboriginal women. I did not focus on the comparison of their experiences with other women but instead describe their experiences and provide some analysis of the data collected. Reynolds (2002) reminds us that all research methods have limitations and can only provide a partial analysis of the phenomenon under study. She states that in doing qualitative research, generalization is not the aim but “the investigator instead wishes to deepen insights by providing rich descriptions of complex issues” and “to develop and refine frameworks, or useful “ways of seeing,” which inform and lead to further questions” (p.30).

I chose not to focus or expand on many of the areas or themes that I came across in the data. For example, three out of the five participants mentioned spirituality as being a very strong force in their lives and that their faith and beliefs gave them strength in their careers. Spirituality is generally recognized as an important aspect of leadership and in the daily lives of Aboriginal people. Although, the nature and significance of spirituality and leadership would be interesting to study, it is only noted in the data as a support. As well, there are several references to leadership style and leadership as culturally or gender influenced that

were very interesting but I did not explore further as this is not specifically a study on leadership. I felt that the theme/topic of leadership would be beyond the scope of this study and therefore did not ask the participants to elaborate further than they did. Another question that was not addressed in this study was the question of whether women lead differently from men. This came up several times during the interviews and all of the participants did agree that there was a difference, but there was no extension of the information to specify the nature of the difference. Other questions that were not explored were:

- How significant are race, gender, and culture in regards to the career path?
- Are the experiences of Aboriginal women in terms of career paths, aspirations, struggles and challenges different from non-Aboriginal women? Or men? If so, how are they different?

The specific focus of the study thus will not answer these specific questions but I hope that the study will benefit Aboriginal education and motivate First Nations communities to address the issues of leadership and possibly help other women who want to become principals.

The question may be asked as to why look at Aboriginal women as principals exclusively? Perhaps their experiences may not be entirely different from the experiences of male Aboriginal principals and why is it important to consider the relevance of gender as a basis for this study? The answer to this is not profound but merely that as an Aboriginal woman principal, I wanted to find out what the experience was of the Aboriginal woman principals of band-controlled school because I was aware that more women were becoming principals in band-controlled schools. Perhaps some insight may be gained as to how, and if,

Aboriginal women principals have influenced the schools and consequently the reserve communities in which they are located, in a positive way. This latter question may not be answered in this study but my personal and professional curiosity may be appeased in the sense that I can gain understanding as to why women aspire to be principals and how they realized this aspiration. This study allowed me to hear from these women on a personal level through the interviews as to their career paths, their preparations, their supports and the challenges that they have as women working in the Aboriginal communities. Gaining an understanding of how these women overcame challenges and became principals may provide an impetus for women to aspire to school or community leadership in the Aboriginal communities. This understanding and awareness of their experiences may also provide an indication of what training support is needed for women who aspire to or are beginning their careers in school administration.

This is a research study about Aboriginal women; it is important that there is an acknowledgement of the history of Aboriginal people and that the study is understood in the context of the unique history of Aboriginal people. It is important to be cognizant of the past so that the legacies that were detrimental to the development of the education of Aboriginal people are neither repeated nor sustained. Researchers and readers of research need to be cognizant of the relationship that exists between the past experiences and the contemporary status of Aboriginal people in Canada. Castellano (1999) indicates how an understanding of the history can help Aboriginal people on the road to self-determination. She states:

Aboriginal people look back to a time when oral traditions and colonial records agree that communities and nations were self-regulating, self-reliant, and in remarkably

good health. They examine the focus that disrupted the equilibrium - new diseases, loss of lands and livelihood, relocations that tore the fabric of community relations, the imposition of alien forms of government, and assaults on spirituality and family life. They reclaim the history that for a long time period was systematically erased from the story of Canada. And they acquire an analysis of present dysfunction in their midst (Castellano, 1999, p. 95).

Castellano further makes the point that the legacy of history must be understood and recognized in order for Aboriginal people to be able to deal with the present distress that they experience. For these reasons, the next chapter includes a brief history which provides the background for the study and places it in its proper historical context.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

### Background to the Study

#### Pre-European Contact History

Prior to contact with European civilization, there were distinctive groups of Aboriginal societies living in North America each with a well-established system of religion, governance and education (Miller, 2000, The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). The RCAP (1996) outlines five Aboriginal cultures that existed in what is now Canada, prior to European contact. The Aboriginal people who have lived on the land for countless generations had developed ways and means to ensure the survival of the tribes. They determined how tribal knowledge was communicated to the younger generations to ensure survival of the culture and language of the tribes. Dickason (1996) states that Aboriginal people were, historically, oral rather than literate societies. She states further that, although it is important to understand the pre-contact history, it is difficult to reconstruct. Effort to develop an understanding of pre-contact history must utilize a multi-disciplinary approach. She contends that it is only through understanding history that we can realize that the Aboriginal people had fully formed societies which were distinct from those in the European settler's homelands.

Miller (2000) states that before contact:

Indian communities were highly diversified societies of people who had adapted to their environment and worked out a code of behaviour for living compatibly with their world. There was no monolith called Indian, but a wide variety of people,

depending on the topography and fauna of the region in which they lived and consequent nature of their economy (Miller, 2000, p.15).

Miller (2000) and RCAP (1996) give detailed outlines of the relationships of the newcomers and the indigenous people from the earliest contact to the present day. Both outline a period of cooperation up to the early 1800's when the European settlers viewed Aboriginal people in a positive way and found them to be militarily and economically useful.

Miller (2000) outlines how strategies and constitutional actions on the part of the British government changed the relationship from one of conciliation and nation to nation status to one of complete domination and control. From the 1860's, there followed years of external domination and control of the education of Canada's Aboriginal people. Miller (2000) describes the change in the relationship between the Europeans and the Aboriginal people:

The response by Euro-Canadians to this changing relationship was to begin to develop Indian policy as part of the work of civil government, and to numerous and extensive programs to assimilate the Indian. As the Indian moved from alliance to irrelevance, the European responded with a change of attitude from eager gratitude to pity and contempt (Miller, 2000, p.123).

From the 1830's, the European settlers and the colonial government of the day came to believe that education was the key to civilizing the Aboriginal people. The course for Aboriginal education was determined by, and dependent upon, the early European missionary orders and government policies. Niezen (2000) states that there was "a comfortable fit between the goals of education and the evangelical efforts of the missionaries" (Niezen,

2000, p.254). The use of education to Christianize and assimilate Aboriginal people has been a critical issue in the historic negotiations between the First Nations and Canada ever since.

## **The Development of First Nations Education**

### **History of Band-Controlled Schools**

The process of local control has been very slow in coming to fruition and it is only recently that the schools in the First Nations communities have begun to make significant progress in establishing true local control of education. In 1972, *Indian Control of Indian Education* was published, which was partly in response to the 1969 White Paper issued by the federal government on Indian policy which, if enacted, would have eliminated the special status of Indians. Aboriginal education and political leaders and many other Indian and non-Indian supporters, objected to the assimilation and integration policy of the white paper. The policy document *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972) demanded band control for the education of Aboriginal people. The Canadian government agreed in principle with this demand for local control but nevertheless continued in many ways to maintain control over most aspects of First Nations education. For many years, the federal government's use of the term "band-operated" in referring to the schools on the reserves was an indication that they had not truly relinquished control of First Nations education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972).

Formal education for the Aboriginal people in Canada has typically been controlled by church and government agencies with outcomes that were not always beneficial for Aboriginal people. The long era of external control of Aboriginal education had limited



success in fulfilling the assimilation motives of these institutions of educating Aboriginal people to be acceptable members of the dominant society. Nevertheless, the mission and the residential schools had a significant detrimental effect on the traditional values, culture and languages of the First Nations people. Many First Nations communities now have administrative responsibility for the education system on the reserve. In Manitoba, the location for this study, there are sixty three First Nations. Fifty of them have band-controlled education systems (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Data). Since the inception of band-controlled schools, there has continued to be difficulties with jurisdiction, funding and administration of the schools on the reserves. There are band-controlled schools in most of the reserves but there is always a question as to how much control they really have.

The RCAP (1996) mentions that there is a process of *resuming* control of education to indicate the previous control of education by Aboriginal people. True local control will mean the First Nation communities will determine what would be best for their people and what knowledge ensuing generations need to have for continued survival.

Henley and Young (1990) examined some of the issues related to this struggle for control. They contend that four dimensions must exist together in a school setting before there is meaningful control over Indian Education:

1. The control of appropriate systems of governance that allow for representation and a sense of ownership at the local level;
2. The control of adequate levels of funding for Indian schools;
3. The control of curriculum and the capacity to develop and implement curriculum,  
and

4. The availability and utilization of appropriately skilled teachers. (Henley & Young, 1990, p. 207)

Many band-controlled schools in Manitoba still struggle with these dimensions. With the recent establishment of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), the areas of curriculum content and curriculum development are being addressed in band-controlled schools in Manitoba. Individual band schools work extensively in curriculum and Aboriginal language development although they continue to operate within the guidelines of prescribed provincial curricula. More Aboriginal people are being trained to be teachers, many of whom graduate from the special teacher education programs that were established by Brandon University (IMPACTE, PENT and BUNTEP). A question often posed is whether these or other mainstream university education programs are adequately preparing teachers to teach in the context of an Aboriginal band-controlled school. None of the available programs have any significant focus in the area of educational administration for band-controlled schools. MFNERC has begun to provide professional development services for principals of band-controlled schools and establish more networking for them.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, First Nations leaders advocated for a change in the way in which First Nations children were educated. After decades of others determining what kind of education the First Nations children received, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) formulated a policy document in 1972 that reflected the realization that control of education was critical for Aboriginal people to maintain their identity and culture in an increasingly multi-cultural Canada. It advocated for local control of education where individual First Nations bands would establish their own education systems

on the reserves. In response to the sustained political pressure from First Nations leadership rallying around the NIB position, the federal government agreed to transfer control and funding to the bands to run their own schools on the reserves. This was a significant step forward, one that would result in a critical change in formal schooling for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal people would have a say in what their children learned and be in a position to make changes so that the schools would better reflect the population that they served. Schools would be transformed from instruments of enforced assimilation to a means of revitalizing the Aboriginal culture, values and languages of each First Nations community. That was the dream that Aboriginal people envisioned with the inception of band-controlled schools. Since the 1970's most of the bands in Manitoba have assumed responsibility for the delivery of elementary and secondary education on their reserve.

The terms "band-controlled" and "locally controlled", which are used interchangeably are used to identify those schools on the reserves that are administered by the band. Since the inception of band-controlled education there has been ongoing research by First Nations communities across Canada to determine what constitutes an appropriate education for their children. They experience a continuous struggle to establish culturally relevant curricula taught by Aboriginal teachers (Maina 1997, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Establishing an appropriate education for Aboriginal people has not been simple and there are many factors that explain the difficulties that have been encountered in striving to make education more relevant and appropriate for Aboriginal people. Some reasons include a lack of resources, lack of effective leadership and a lack of a sense of direction. School administration for band-controlled schools has not had the

necessary focus that it warrants. When the bands initially took control of their educational systems in the 1970's, there was, understandably, a lack of experienced educational leadership in the reserve communities to make the necessary pedagogical and structural changes to the existing systems, that were, for the most part, being administered by non-Aboriginal people working for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Changes are still being implemented and the situation is still less than ideal. No concerted effort has been made that has resulted in principals being trained to work in band-controlled schools. Taylor, Crago and McAlpine (1993) summarize the problem that First Nations schools in Canada have had in acquiring trained education administrators:

Aboriginal board members and high level administrative personnel, no matter how wise, may have little or no experience or expertise in administrative, pedagogical, and educational practice. Yet they will be called upon to make weighty decisions that will ultimately impact not only on a large staff of teachers and lower level administrators, but more importantly on the educational experience of children in these communities (Taylor, Crago & McAlpine, 1993, p.177).

When the bands first started to run their own systems, the principals hired to operate the schools on the reserve were usually from outside the community and were mostly non-Aboriginal and male, due in part to the fact that there were few Aboriginal teachers working in the schools. Aboriginal teacher training programs resulted in more Aboriginal school administrators being hired; although more were from the community, they were still typically male. Only recently has the number of Aboriginal women assuming the principalship in

band-controlled schools been increasing. This study examines, in part, this important contribution to Aboriginal education.

### **The Development of More Aboriginal Teachers and Its Impact on Aboriginal Education**

Grant and Pratt (2001) present an overview of Aboriginal teacher training programs in Manitoba. They outline the four programs that were started in the early 1970's that enabled more Aboriginal people to be trained as teachers. These four programs are Program for Educating Native Teachers (PENT) from Brandon University, Indian and Métis Program for Careers through Teacher Education (IMPACTE), Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) and the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC). The PENT program continues to this day and continues to train teachers with a combination of work experience and university courses. The PENT students work in the schools as teaching assistants for eight months of the year and spend 12 weeks per year on the Brandon University campus. Grant and Pratt (2001) indicate that more than 90% of the PENT students are female. Most of the students in the PENT program are from isolated communities in Manitoba. IMPACTE was phased out and replaced by the BUNTEP program, which is a community based program which has an enrolment that is 75% female. The BUNTEP program is based primarily in larger communities in northern Manitoba as instructors have to travel to these communities to deliver the teacher training.

The Winnipeg Education Centre is funded by the provincial government and was established to provide access to post-secondary education for socially and economically disadvantaged inner city residents and provide an education program that was specific to the needs of inner city Winnipeg. Reid (2002) describes the program:

The Winnipeg Education Centre has operated as an inner city education program with a mandate to recruit teacher candidates from residents of the inner city and to prepare them to teach in, and provide leadership for, the inner city schools of Winnipeg. Recruiting some 15 - 20 persons each year into this program each year has resulted in the graduation of 250 male and female teachers (as of July 1999).

These teacher training programs that were established in Manitoba have made a tremendous contribution to Aboriginal education for the past twenty five years. However, a major difficulty is that almost all of the Aboriginal teachers have been trained only in the early and middle year levels. Nevertheless, the result has been is that more Aboriginal teachers are working in the band controlled schools. Many of the graduates from these programs are working in their home reserves. One of the advantages of these programs has been that there are more Aboriginal educators and because of this, there have been more of them moving into administration. Given this fact, it is becoming increasingly important that these teachers, who are the prospective principals for the schools in First Nations communities, have access to administration training and support.

The teacher training programs described have been beneficial for Aboriginal education. Although there has been on going criticism and scepticism of these programs, they continue. The criticism has been that they are not adequately preparing teachers to teach. Reid (2002) points out that the Winnipeg Education Centre has struggled with the need for credibility. Many look upon WEC, PENT and BUNTEP as alternative programs and as a result face the issue of credibility from many groups. Reid (2002) states that credibility is questioned by the degree granting university, from the inner city teaching population, from the inner city

cultural and ethnic groups, social agencies and from many groups within the communities.

PENT and BUNTEP have faced this criticism throughout the years of their existence. Quite often the PENT and BUNTEP graduates are not hired to work in their home communities after they have graduated because of the credibility issue.

### **The Move to More Aboriginal Administrators**

One of the central elements of the struggle for local control of the band schools has been to acquire and train Aboriginal principals to work in First Nations schools. There is a pool of Aboriginal educators, many of whom are women, who desire to get further training and Grant and Pratt (2001) contend that many of the B.Ed. graduates from the teacher training programs seeking further training in specialist or administration areas are often unable to find appropriate and relevant training that will better equip them to work in Aboriginal schools:

There are a large number of Aboriginal B.Ed. graduates who are looking to further their education. Most post-secondary programs are not meeting the needs adequately. Most of the on-campus faculty does not have the expertise graduates are looking for as they move into local control of education, nor is the expertise there to guide the delicate balances that have to be maintained as culture specific materials, different teaching approaches and different world views are incorporated into the world of academe. There is still a great suspicion at the university level that incorporating Native wisdom into educational programs and practices will somehow lower standards or devalue a degree (Grant & Pratt, 2001, p.151).

There has been a demand for more Aboriginal leaders in education and, along with this, a need for leadership training. B.Ed. graduates employed as teachers in the band-controlled

schools are being pressured by their communities to go into educational administration. It is imperative that the post secondary institutions respond to this need. The number of Aboriginal women in educational administration will significantly increase if there are training programs for aspiring school administrators. Many new B.Ed. graduates, as well, feel socially responsible to go into school administration as a result of this conviction that they can make a difference in their communities by working toward a better school.

Grant and Pratt (2001) outline further why some of the graduates would want to get further training.

There is a zeal and commitment to provide a theoretical base for Aboriginal education which has long been denied Aboriginal cultures. They seek theory equivalent to, but often different from, that available to other cultures. They wish to address the educational challenges which lie ahead and share the knowledge they have acquired as classroom teachers. They have confidence, once again, in their cultural knowledge and wish to use their languages, vocabularies and modes of communication to express their ideas. They want to learn more from masters and mentors who come from their own cultures. They want upward mobility and the credibility that advanced degrees lend (Grant & Pratt, 2001, p.152).

Aboriginal schools should be making more of a difference and should be contributing more positively to changing the social and economic situation of Aboriginal people. The way to do this is to graduate more students from high school who have a solid education and the skills needed to enter the work force or successfully complete post-secondary programs. Since the principal is so central to making a difference in the school as the instructional



leader, then perhaps it is in training principals to work in band-controlled schools that will make a more fundamental change in Aboriginal education. This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base of Aboriginal women in particular who are working in a band-controlled school. This study provides a voice for their experiences and a forum through which they can share their stories. These stories are better understood if there is an awareness of the historical context.

### **Pre-European Status of Aboriginal Women**

Jamieson (1986) states that women were well respected in Aboriginal society prior to European contact. She states that Aboriginal women may not have had equal rights and status in all the tribal societies but certainly there were indications that women had high status. With the arrival of the Europeans, not only was there political discrimination against Aboriginal women but there were also social prejudices that arrived with European contact.

In many of the pre-contact tribal societies, women were held in high regard and were very much a part of the leadership of the tribes in many ways. Colonization, the government policies, patriarchal authority and the missionary message severely eroded the social and political position of Aboriginal women and their personal autonomy and status in society. Voyageur (1996) discusses how the European settlers brought with them the view that women were inferior and that they were psychologically unstable, physically fragile and morally susceptible (Voyageur, 1996, p. 97). In contrast, the Indian women at that time were generally better respected within their societies. Voyageur (1996) states:

The hegemonic ideals of European traders and missionaries supplanted the indigenous perspective of Indian women. In contrast to what was written about

Indian women, indigenous customs held women in high regards; they were powerful within their communities (Voyageur, p. 98).

### **Aboriginal Women and Colonization**

Krosenbrink-Gelissen (1993) wrote a detailed account about the Native Woman's Association of Canada and the struggles that the organization faced throughout its years of existence. She states that Aboriginal women face sex discrimination from the legislation of the Indian Act and from male-dominated Aboriginal organizations. She also makes the point that women face discrimination at the reserve level. She identifies factionalism, favouritism and chauvinism as being major factors affecting the women of the reserve. She contends that Aboriginal women in Canada face a triple jeopardy in that they are women, Aboriginal and a visible minority. Aboriginal women are often socialized within their own communities to believe that they would not make good leaders. Leadership role models in the community are virtually non-existent as many of the leaders in senior school administration, organizational leaders and political leaders are male. It is often the men who are the decision makers in the community. Women are hesitant to go into leadership positions because they lack the self-confidence. They question their ability to do the job and their ability to cope with the challenges and resistance that they will likely face if they assume these positions. They are also aware of other women who were in leadership who have been ostracized by the community and male leaders.

Jamieson (1986) outlines the issue of discrimination against women from a historical and sociological perspective and relates how women were oppressed and discriminated against by the Indian Act. The Indian Act not only governed the lives of all Aboriginal people in

Canada, it has also defined who is, and is not, legally an Indian. From the inception of the Indian Act until 1983 the determination of Indian status was by a patrilineal system, that is, by a person's relationship to a male person who is a direct descendant in the male line of a male person. When she married a non-status man, an Indian woman born with status lost it, unable to regain it even if she subsequently was divorced or widowed. Along with her status, the woman lost her band membership and with it her property, inheritance, residency, burial, medical, educational and voting rights on the reserve.

Emberly (1993) discusses the legislated systemic discrimination against women and the implications of the institutionalized oppression of Native women's struggle for equality and self-determination. The Indian Act was amended in 1985. In the spring of 1985, Bill C-31 amended a portion of the Indian Act that gave Aboriginal women more rights. This legislation included the right of Aboriginal women who had lost their status because of sex discrimination to regain their status. The struggle for this amendment is related in *Enough is Enough; Aboriginal Women Speak Out* as told to Janet Silman (1987). For the first time in more than a century, sexual discrimination against Indian women was modified in law in Canada. However, sexual discrimination did not automatically end with Bill C-31. The patriarchal control embodied in the Indian Act had been in existence for a long time and extended to the communities and reserves. It served to prevent women from acquiring positions of power and influence that would allow them to impact on the development of their communities. Nevertheless, Bill C-31 initiated a stronger woman's voice and provided opportunity for more Aboriginal women participation at every level in their communities and in male-dominated organizations. The struggle for Aboriginal women to find autonomy and

equality has been slow and it is only recently that they have made headway in finding that equality. Aboriginal women continue to “fight” to be accepted as leaders because of the years of systemic discrimination that had become entrenched in the culture of Aboriginal communities.

### **Women and Educational Administration**

Statements that further study is needed in order to understand the unique problems that women face in leadership remains a common feature of the literature and research. Shakeshaft (1987), Young (1991) and Reynolds (1995) contend that much of the educational administration research that exists and is still done by males and typically from a white male perspective. Shakeshaft (1989) states:

Studying male behaviour and more particularly white male behaviour is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behaviour are assumed appropriate for understanding all behaviour (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 325).

Young (1991) compiled a review of Canadian research pertaining to women in educational administration and she concludes:

We have just begun to consider Canadian women’s experiences and contributions as dimensions of our research and theorizing about Canadian educational administration and leadership. Whereas scholarship on educational administration in this country has for over a decade incorporated “Canadian” and “education” as dimensions of our knowledge base, gender is still hardly acknowledged as an issue (p. 2).

Young (1991) highlights some studies that have been conducted about women the lack of women in educational administration in Canada. She points out:

Canadian women educators tend to be involved in providing instruction, managing classrooms, and making decisions with respect to individual students; but they are not involved in the management and policy making that affects the world of the classroom. That is, women most frequently deliver rather than administer public school education (p.86).

In Young's (1991) earlier review of research of women in educational administration in Canada, she cites references to indicate the notion of: women as teachers and men as principals was well entrenched in Canada by the end of the nineteenth century. This notion is still widespread to this day.

Glazer (1991) in her discussion on feminism and professionalism in teaching and educational administration argues that reform is needed to change this paradigm. She contends that educational research and practice must accommodate feminist perspectives in order to change the view that teaching is a feminine profession and educational administration is a masculine profession. Reform is needed that will result in increased representation in educational administration and break down the barriers that prevent women from acquiring positions in educational leadership. Women have made progress and inroads into the area of educational administration; however, research continues to point out that there is a long way to go before women have equal representation.

### **Aboriginal and African-American Women**

In writing the literature review for this study, I have looked at many books, articles and studies always with the question in the back of my mind as to whether or not the issues presented are relevant and applicable to this topic of Aboriginal women working as principals

of band-controlled schools. There is a very wide variety of literature on leadership, the nature and definitions of leadership, the role of principals, educational leadership, education administration and career development. There is much information on Aboriginal people and education and less on Aboriginal women. However, the literature and research on Aboriginal women in educational leadership, especially in band-controlled schools is virtually nonexistent.

I reviewed many studies about the experience of African American women in the United States who are in educational administration and in most of the studies I felt that there were parallels which could be drawn with the experiences of Aboriginal women in Canada. Sizemore (1986) studied African American superintendents and states that "the scholarly work on black superintendents must be interpreted in the larger social reality of Black life and the historical context of the struggle of Blacks for education" (Sizemore, 1986, p. 36). Doughty (1980) identified black female administrators as being in a "double bind". She states that the black female administrator has two strikes against her; one being the colour of her skin and the other her female gender, neither of which are valued very highly by society. She further states that before one can understand the "milieu" in which the black female exists and operates, one must be aware of her historical context. In this way only can "the context of her life be fairly viewed and its texture realistically examined". Doughty explains that African-American women in the United States are greatly influenced by their historical past of oppression, colonialism, racism and sexism. As Aboriginal women in Canada are greatly influenced by the same kind of history the correlation can be made that it is as important for us to understand the cultural and historical milieu in which they exist and

operate. The literature review for this study situates Aboriginal women's contemporary situation by providing an overview of the history of First Nations education out of which the contemporary context emerges.

Further in depth analysis and comparison of the experiences of African American women or other minority women and Aboriginal women are beyond the scope of this study. It was clear in the literature reviewed that there are many parallels. Banks (1995) presents an overview of the characteristics and experiences of women and people of colour who are in educational leadership. She points out a relationship between the social context and the under-representation of women and people of colour, and that further work in these areas will add an "exciting element" to the research on leadership. As in the case of African American women (Sizemore 1986; Doughty 1980), the study of Aboriginal women in educational leadership must be interpreted in the larger social reality of Aboriginal people in Canada and their historical context of their struggles in education. Although studies on African American women working as principals in mainstream American schools can offer an interesting comparison, it is important to note the distinction the Aboriginal band-controlled school in which Aboriginal women are working as principals, are segregated on the reserves. Reserve schools are unique and distinct from other schools, in the sense that the population of students is homogenous as virtually all the students are from the same cultural background. Band-controlled schools are similar to the former segregated Black schools in the United States and the all-black schools that still exist in the United States. Students in band-controlled school are typically from the same community and have lived all their lives in the same community and share the same lifestyle and social and cultural background.

Women in general face barriers and limitation in their aspirations for leadership. Men outnumber women in all leadership positions at the political level as well as in educational administration. In 1991/92, 25% of Canada's male teachers held school based administrative positions and only 7% of female teachers held administrative positions although 60% of Canada's elementary – secondary teachers are women (Statistics Canada, 1993, p. 207). It is only recently that more women have moved into the administrative positions. Aboriginal women face the same barriers as women in mainstream Canada but likely greatly compounded considering their historical past and cultural context. For the most part, men have dominated and continue to have the administrative and leadership positions in First Nations communities. Recently, more Aboriginal women have begun to make the choice to go into positions of leadership and many of them have chosen to become principals of schools on the reserve where they perhaps could have the greatest influence. There is still a need to come full circle by ensuring that the leadership in the Aboriginal schools is strong and effective. Part of the completion of the circle will be to re-establish women as a voice of influence and power in the lives of their people.

In the next section of the literature review, I have organized the literature around the main questions that will be addressed in this study. These include the career paths, challenges and supports.

### **Career Paths**

Gutek and Larwood (1987), state that the study of women's careers has often been based on a comparison with the career development of men in terms of how much they differ from the standard of men's careers. They believe that women's careers are different with



separate issues and to which different theories could be applied. Women's careers are driven by internal dynamics which need to be examined through research. The factors that influence women's careers are different from those which influence men in their careers. They list the following as the issues that need to be considered in the study of women's careers: there are different expectations for women in terms of appropriate career choice; spouses accommodate their careers in different ways with the wife more likely to accommodate the husband's career; the role of the wife as a parent is defined differently from that of the husband; and women are faced with more constraints in the work place (p.10).

Much of the research indicates that women often do not consciously determine career paths or strategize on advancement in their careers. They do not have a career plan. Women do not spend as much time planning their careers as do their male counterparts do. If they have career aspirations they may not act on them or articulate their desire for career advancement. Jones and Montenegro (1983) cite Hennig and Jardim (1977) suggesting the reasons that women may not act on their career aspirations are based on the internal barriers of lack of aggressiveness, unwillingness to take risks or lack of self-confidence. In their research on women in educational leadership, Prolman (1982) and others indicate that sex role stereotyping and socialization also determine the lack of career advancement and mobility for women. Prolman found that:

Though women made their occupational career choice earlier than the men they got their first principalship considerably later and have undergone a different series of career experiences (Prolman, 1982, p. 50).

Hall (1997) explored the experiences of women in Great Britain who were successful leaders in schools. She explored how the women arrived at their headship positions, by tracing their experiences from family of origin, school experience, work, family and education training and career experiences as adults. From her study the following themes emerged: an inner as well as an outer journey to school leadership, developing an inner locus of control, being authentic, being consistent, self-presentation, self-management and self-efficacy (Hall, 1997, p. 316). Her study highlighted that women's self-concept was central to their leadership styles. She states that the life experiences of the women shaped their professional identity and how they approached their job as school leaders.

Hill and Ragland (1995) interviewed 35 women in the United States who were educational leaders in order to get their perspectives and experiences from their personal and professional lives. They found that among the women interviewed there was no typical career path, only that they all began their careers as classroom teachers. Some went into counselling, special education or curriculum specialist areas prior to becoming an assistant principal or principal. Hill and Ragland (1995) identify the following barriers that women may encounter on their journey to leadership: male dominance of key leadership positions, lack of political savvy, lack of career positioning, lack of mentoring, lack of mobility and internal barriers and bias against women (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 9). They also state that there is no "magic track" to the positions of educational leadership. They contend however, that although there are more opportunities today for women to move into positions of educational leadership, it is still difficult.

The literature often refers to the barriers and challenges that are faced by women which hinder them from achieving the same level of success as men enjoy within organizations. The next section explores some of the challenges that women face in their quest for career advancement to leadership positions.

### **Challenges - Women in Educational Administration**

In spite of the many challenges that collectively could prevent any woman from seeking a leadership position, women continue to seek or accept principalships or other leadership positions. The women in this study and other studies faced many challenges both prior to working as principals and in their practice as principals.

Edson (1988) interviewed 142 women working in educational administration in the United States and found that women continue to face difficulty in getting hired and on the job as educational administrators. She identifies gender bias, lack of mentors, traditional hiring practices, inadequate job opportunities, perpetuation of role stereotypes, few opportunities to gain practical experiences, and limited job availability as major barriers. Edson (1988) also found that it was hard for women to get into administration because of the lack of a networking system in place for women.

Young (1992) found that although there were more women in educational administration in Canada, they were still proportionally underrepresented. In her review of Canadian research of women in educational administration she identifies the main barriers to women's career advancement as; sex role stereotyping, lack of encouragement from others, role conflict (incompatibility between administrative work and domestic responsibilities) and

lack of career planning. Women who were in educational administration faced the challenges of isolation, lack of networking support and covert discrimination.

The women in Hill and Ragland's study (1995) mentored other women to help them cope with the challenges that they faced in their roles in leadership in educational administration and encourage them to have "stick-to-ivity". They encouraged other women to "develop their own strategies and techniques by watching, analyzing situations, reflecting, and most importantly, trying something different when the first attempt doesn't work" (p. 68).

In the next section, I present two other significant challenges women in educational administration face: societal attitudes and role conflict.

### **Societal Attitudes**

As previously stated, women who are in educational administration often experience a lack of acceptance because there is still the attitude that women are to stay at home and not be leaders. Tabin and Coleman (1993), in British Columbia compared the experiences of recently appointed women principals with earlier appointees in order to determine the differences of their experience. They found that earlier appointees were not as readily accepted as equals as the recently appointees; they were more likely to be viewed as tokens. Earlier appointees experienced more sex-role stereotyping and less support. They had to work harder to become principals and to prove themselves once they were principals. Recently appointed principals received more support and mentoring from male principals and were more readily accepted in their role.

Little significant changes and growth have occurred over the last few years in how women principals are perceived and the experiences that they have in their careers as principals. Women continue to be underrepresented in administration and continue to face sex-role stereotyping and other challenges in their careers such as male bias among those who are responsible for appointed principals and lack of access to informal processes socializing them to administration.

Gill (1997) conducted a study about the experiences of women who were aspiring administrators or had attained positions in educational administration in New Brunswick. She concludes that barriers and obstacles exist for women who aspire to educational administration and for those who are practising school administrators. She outlines the nature of these obstacles and barriers.

They exist in the form of attitudes which claim that women cannot or should not do the job, particularly at the junior high school and senior high school levels. They exist in the form of the image of an effective school administrator as a "tough guy". They exist in the form of societal expectations that women will shoulder the major responsibilities for home-making and child rearing (Gill, 1997, p.60).

Patricia Schmuck (1976) discusses how women who aspire to educational leadership experience role conflicts. School leadership has been perceived traditionally as a male role and when women accept an administrative role they are expected to behave in a certain way as a woman and another way as an administrator:

On the one hand, they are supposed to be subservient, nurturing and maintain effective relationships, yet as administrators they are supposed to be independent, assume leadership and be task oriented (Schmuck, 1976, p.12).

She discusses how sex role stereotyping functions as an important “social mechanism” that influences the careers that women and men choose. She describes sex role stereotyping as:

. . . the process by which we attribute characteristics to individuals on the basis of their sex. It is a process through which we are predisposed to believe that an individual - because she is a female or because he is a male - will think and behave in prescribed ways and will occupy certain positions in society. It is prescribing a social role to individuals on the basis of their sex (Schmuck, 1976, p.9).

Betz (1987) points out that the most basic barriers to women’s career development are societal stereotypes and socialization. From early childhood, parents, teachers, religion and the media socialize young women and girls to focus their career aspirations on stereotypical female occupations which are generally low level and lower paying jobs:

The serious problem of under-utilisation of female abilities in career pursuits has not really diminished in the “enlightened eighties”. Research and intervention must focus of how to return women to the full range of career options, beyond the gender stereotype, to include the extent and variety of options that will make women’s choices free in reality as well as in name (Betz, 1997, p.636).

Teachers who leave the classroom are more likely to become specialists rather than administrators. A few will become principals at the elementary level, and many who attain their positions stay at that level for the remainder of their careers:

Women who enter the school administrative career experience a rich array of activities, interactions and sentiments which tell them that they will not move to high positions, that they should choose female-appropriate positions if they must move into administration and they will be allowed only partial inclusion in the administrator group if they adapt certain behaviours and attitudes (Marshall, 1985, p. 134).

Ortiz (1982) contends that female teachers are socialized to remain teachers and men are encouraged to advance to administration. She states that there is a general expectation that women will remain in teaching at the elementary level and that there is hesitancy by superiors to accept female teachers who aspire to administration. She further states that women themselves will hesitate to aspire to school administration because they have been socialized to believe that their place is in the classroom with the students.

### **Role Conflict**

Many of the women who make a career choice for administration, experience role overload and role conflict in which they feel the pressure to be successful in their careers as well as in their role as a homemaker and mother. Schmuck (1976) discusses the differential effects of marriage and family on careers of men and women. She states that there is a difference of how marriage and family are viewed by society depending on if you are male or female. She states that marriage is viewed as a career asset to a man and as a career deterrent

for women. Women are more bound by marriage and family and may not advance in their careers due to these responsibilities.

Tipping (1999) interviewed men and women for a career motivation and achievement study and found that although most of the participants struggled with role equilibrium, for women, it was particularly difficult:

Perceiving work and family roles as incompatible, women found that work-family decision making was an emotion laden process. They experience guilt over the possibility of neglecting a child, sadness or the prospect of giving up a valued career, fear of losing needed income, and, ultimately, frustration at their inability to reach a firm decision about how best to accommodate both roles (Tipping, 1999, p. 262).

She found that the participants were using several strategies for coping with sex role conflict including planning, clarifying role values, modifying roles, re-framing, and use of support systems. Women juggled schedules and tasks related to their roles, prioritized what is more important, made choices, managed stress and made use of any support systems that exist. Women had to be innovative and creative to find balance and serenity in their lives of multiple and often conflicting roles.

Young (1992) reports on a study which she conducted with four western Canada women with careers in education as teachers and administrators. She discusses two themes which emerged from the life-story interviews; "competing urgencies" and "late bloomers". She defines "competing urgencies" as "the dual commitment to paid and family work" and how women in educational administration need to find a balance (p.150). She defines a "late bloomer" as "a mature person who has achieved professional competence and is evidently



flourishing, but at a later age than is generally expected” (p. 154). She defines a career as a “sequence of paid-work roles that are related to each other and to unpaid work (i.e. volunteer, family, formal education) roles by choice and chance so that knowledge and experiences acquired from the various work roles is acknowledged and used from one paid work role to the next (p.157).”

With all the challenges that they face in the process of acquiring leadership positions in education, why do women choose administration? This question has to do with the motivation of women to face the challenge of leadership. Although their career choice may present them with many obstacles, they accept it as part of the job and gradually develop skills and strategies to cope with the obstacles. They eventually learn to view these obstacles as learning opportunities. Roberta Russell (1995) discusses the concept of “survivorship” stating that women who have survived as leaders have much to teach other women who aspire to leadership. In order to survive, women in educational leadership need supports and encouragement as they aspire to administration and during their practice. This next section identifies role models, mentors and networking as sources of support and encouragement.

### **Supports and Encouragement for Women in Educational Administration**

Several literature sources indicate that the support and encouragement of role models, mentors and networking play a very important role in the lives of women who are in educational administration (Edson 1988, Hill & Ragland 1995, Jones & Montenegro 1983, Ortiz 1982, Pavan 1987, Reddin 1997, Shakeshaft 1987, Young 1991).

## **Role Models**

Webster's dictionary defines a role model as a person considered as a standard of excellence to be emulated. Jana Reddin (1997) claims that female role models are critical for women who are exploring career options. She explored the career patterns of high achieving women and determined that same sex role models help to demonstrate for other women what is possible and helps to instil confidence in other women to actualize their aspirations. She states:

A role model provides an example of attitude, beliefs, and behaviour for one to emulate or reject. When women are exposed to individuals in professional careers, they become aware of the meaning work can have in one's life, the various professions one can have, the way one can combine work and family, and the availability of success (Reddin, 1997, p.120).

Shakeshaft (1987) goes further:

The importance of role models in helping both the women themselves and others within the system, to view women administrators as a normal occurrence, rather than an exceptional one, cannot be overstated (Shakeshaft, 1987, p.115).

She indicates that same sex role models are more critical for women than for men.

Edson (1988) found that many of the women interviewed for her study mentioned the lack of roles models for female administrative aspirants as a problem. The women in her study had career goals and the determination to achieve them but the lack of role models negatively impacted on their career aspirations. Women who do not have same sex role models may not realize their career options. Many of the women who are in administration

received encouragement at a critical time which provided an impetus to accept a position in administration. In Edson's study many women did not consider administration until late in their educational careers because they did not see any other female principals that they could emulate. She indicates that the women in her study are highly motivated despite the lack of female role models and that it was often male administrators who influenced them to broaden their horizons to include administration (Edson, 1988, p.63).

Betz (1987) also cites lack of female role models in the educational system as a barrier to women who want to go into educational administration. There are few women in educational leadership so role models are not readily available. Although women may overcome barriers, there needs to be a change in the society at large. Society's attitudes, systems and structures will continue to perpetuate socialization to sex role stereotypes. Women who do manage to overcome these barriers become role models for other women and inspire them to believe in their worth.

### **Mentors**

Some of the studies indicate that mentors are essential to success for women who aspire to educational leadership (Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Edson, 1988; Ortiz, 1982). Mentors are trusted friends or colleagues who provide guidance, encouragement and support for aspirants. The mentors can be very influential in encouraging women to acknowledge and utilize their strengths and abilities that they may not have recognize that they possess. Mentors often help the women to develop leadership skills and refine their own leadership style and philosophy. Mentors are often mentioned as being a very important factor in an administrator's career and play an important role for women aspiring to become

administrators. Mentoring relationships are critically important for the women both the women who aspire to administration and those who are already in the position (Hill & Ragland, 1995, Shakeshaft 1987, Young 1991). Pavan (1987) describes two categories of mentoring functions she compiled from the literature: career functions and psychosocial functions. Mentoring activities include providing mentorees with needed information (career function) and support and encouragement (psychosocial function). According to Pavan (1987), these functions are critical to aspiring or new women administrators. Career functions such as exposure/visibility; coaching and sponsorship are valuable to the aspiring or practising administrator. This is particularly important for women who enter a field dominated by men. The psychosocial functions of encouraging risk-taking, counselling and role modelling enhance their ability to perform and be successful administrators. A mentor often plays the role of being an encourager who shows faith in the ability of the woman. In a position where isolation is a factor this is a critical source of support. A mentor also helps and advises on opportunities for professional growth as the mentors are likely to be well-established in the profession. Also important in the lives of women who are in administration and a significant support is networking

### **Networking**

Networking with other women is seen as critical necessity for women seeking to advance in their careers in educational administration. Networking provides support for women in their initial appointments into administration as well as during their practice. Young (1992) identifies the advantages of being involved in networking and how women are

often excluded from participation in the mostly male network of administrators because of the lack of women in educational administration. :

Consequently, these women administrators were often very isolated, lacking access to the to the informal male networks that provided the men with so many forms of opportunity – to socialize, to seek advice and information, to observe and imitate acceptable conduct, to become known to those with more power and influence, to participate in the informal decision making of the organization (P. 6).

Tabin and Coleman's study (1993) of earlier and recent principal appointees in British Columbia found that earlier appointees networked extensively with other female principals. The earlier appointees found support of an informal network of women helped them to feel less isolated. They found that recent appointees did not network specifically with other women principals. They cite the possible reasons for this; they did not feel as isolated because there are more women principals, they had access to the male network or the women were choosing to go in their own in order to develop their own styles and establish their individual priorities. Some of the women in Coleman and Tabin's study (1993) relied on network support and some were able to function on their own. Networking support helps women to feel less isolated and could potentially provide them with role models which will inspire them with the confidence to face the many and varied challenges that they face.

The limitations and challenges that women face in these studies are compounded in women of minority groups. In Edson's study there was one American Indian woman in the study and a few other minority women who participated. All these women indicated that race

and gender affected their career choices. Edson concludes that no matter the race, minority issues will continue to complicate the lives of minority and non-minority women alike. Ongoing professional development and training, networking, having role models and mentors helps women to acquire the skills to cope with the challenges that are needed for administrative work. For the most part, women are appointed to administration without having the formal training for administrative work and it is crucial that they acquire the supports that will help them to develop as administrators. The challenges that are discussed are compounded for Aboriginal women principals who work in band controlled schools, although the study about Aboriginal women is largely absent in the research. This study about Aboriginal women principals in band-controlled schools will add to this body of research and provide more understanding of women's experiences and perhaps provide some impetus for identifying some targets for change so that women are better represented in educational administration.

## **CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

### **Research Methods**

#### **Research Design**

To address the questions in this study, I used qualitative research methods. I chose qualitative research methods for this study because I wanted to uncover the experiences and perspectives of these women in a more “natural” way. I wanted to share in their stories through “structured conversations” and not speak to them as “specimens” or “objects of research” to be studied. I wanted to gain a better understanding of their experiences in life and their point of view about their challenges, the supports that assist them, and the career path they took to get to where they are. In order to gain this understanding, I wanted to be able to get to “know” the participants, as much as possible in the context of this study. The interviews enabled me to do this and I felt that I was able to get the data that I wanted for this study.

#### **Identifying and Recruiting Research Participants**

The participants in this study were selected from a relatively small pool of Aboriginal women who work as principals in the sixty-two First Nations bands in Manitoba. When I began the study in 2002, the most recent information indicated that out of the sixty-two First Nations communities there were twenty-three Aboriginal women principals. This information was gathered through the directory published by the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center (MFNERC) in 2002. I sent a questionnaire to all the women who were listed and they were asked to respond if they were interested in participating in the study. The

questionnaire listed the criteria for the study which included being Aboriginal and having worked as a principal for more than two years. I received twelve responses and out of those responses seven of them met the criteria for the study. Those who did not respond to the questionnaire were polled by telephone to see if they met the criteria for the study. In the end, seven women were identified as meeting the criteria and five were selected to participate in the study. I kept in contact with all seven women who were interested so that I would ensure that I would have five women to interview. Because I have been a principal in a band-controlled school for several years, I knew most of the participants on a professional level. I had gone to the same high school as Laura and knew her casually but had not seen her for over twenty years. I had met Arlen, Myra and Darian once or twice at principal's meetings but had not spoken to them on a personal level. I met Sheryl for the first time at the first interview. I did not know the women on a personal level and this relationship helped them to speak more freely about their experiences. On the other hand, the participants all knew that I had been a principal in a band-controlled school for several years and this also helped in the way they responded to the questions. Quite often during the interviews they would ask me to affirm their experiences.

I selected five Aboriginal women to be interviewed based on several factors. I selected participants with more than two years of experience working as a school principal. I did not want to select principals who were new to the position because the first and second year of being a principal is very much a learning process and can be overwhelming. I also selected participants who were treaty status Aboriginal women and registered with a particular band because I felt that this would be more specific rather than getting into a more broad definition



of the term Aboriginal. The term Aboriginal could be defined in several ways (Frideres 1998, INAC 2002) and for this study I wanted to keep the designation simple. Out of the seven potential participants I ended up with the five participants as two of the potential participants were “lost” in the sense that in the new school year, they were no longer at the school where I contacted them and I did not know if they continued to work as principals in a band-controlled school. I was not able to locate these two although I thought that it might have been interesting to find out what happened to them as they were no longer principals.

The factor of mobility and turnover was an issue I faced in this study and one which has a serious impact on band-controlled schools in general. Out of the five women contacted, three of the women changed positions and locations during the course of the study. One of the women (Arlen) moved from being a principal in a northern school to being a principal to another school further north. She moved because she felt that she was not respected or accepted in her home community. Sheryl moved from being a principal to a director because she had been working as a principal until a suitable person was hired for that position. Laura moved from being a principal to a vice-principal in another location (after I had collected data from her) because the contract that she was offered at her previous location was not acceptable. Two of the participants stayed in the same position in the same school where they had worked for several years.

The participants are all experienced principals and selected because they were available and I was fortunate that I was able to get two from the north and covered three cultural groups (Cree, Ojibway and Dakota). The three other participants were from southern Manitoba. I wanted one principal from the north because the experience in an isolated

community could be very different from those in the south who live in close proximity to the cities. The career path of an Aboriginal woman from a northern community may be more restricted and choices made would have to take into consideration the availability of resources and supports. I also chose to have different cultural groups represented to contrast the differences in the way the women may view their experiences.

The five women who were selected to be participants represented Cree, Ojibway and Dakota backgrounds. It turned out that all five of the participants were very experienced principals having held a variety of positions throughout their career. All five of the participants had more than five years of experience being principals in a band-controlled school. Four of the women are in their early fifties and one of the participants is near retirement in her 70's. Since the pool of Aboriginal women principals is quite small, I explained thoroughly to the participants that I would try to maintain confidentiality as much as possible. All five of the women were very eager to participate in the study. They were not concerned about confidentiality and wanted their stories to be heard. One of the responses from the participant's was, "Well, it's okay, it's about time someone wrote about us" and another participant said, "Normally, I wouldn't respond to a questionnaire but when I read what the study was about, I immediately was interested, especially when I knew you were an Aboriginal woman yourself, I wanted to help you". In selecting the participants, there were two or three women principals that I knew casually whom I hoped would participate in the study but they declined to participate. I have assigned pseudonyms for each of the participants and have tried to omit some things that would identify the participant.

## Data Collection

The five women were all initially interviewed for one hour. Permission was given by all the participants to audiotape the interviews. The interviews, as much as possible, followed the interview protocol that was developed based on the research questions. In many of the interviews, there was some straying from the interview protocol and at times, I had to refocus the conversation when it was getting too far off track. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describe interviews in qualitative research as guided conversations where “the researcher gently guides the discussion, leading it through stages, asking specific questions and encouraging the interviewee to answer in depth and at length” (p.124). One participant, Darian, did not want the questions asked. She read the questions thoroughly before the interview started and she asked if she could just talk. I agreed and only asked a few questions to clarify some of the things that she said and if she had missed any of the critical questions. In contrast another participant, Arlen, was soft spoken and not very verbal, requiring many prompts during the interview. She admitted that ability to communicate in English was one of her weak points. The interview may have generated a more complete picture of her life if she had been interviewed in the Cree language.

Except for Arlen, the other participants in this study spoke freely about their experiences and were eager to share their stories. All of the participants were not worried about confidentiality and all said that they were glad to participate in the study and wanted to have their stories heard. I informed them that all the data collected will be treated confidentially and would not be shared except for the publication of the thesis. For all of the participants I had to make some follow-up contacts after the interviews to validate and verify the

information. After the data was collected and I was in the process of writing the thesis, several of the participants contacted me to see how I was doing in completing the thesis. I informed them initially that I would send them information about the findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed fully for analysis. I examined all of the transcripts to analyse them by themes. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define a theme as an idea or concept that emerges from the data. The transcripts were examined for the emerging themes and the research questions based on the research focus. The research focus has to do with the career paths of the participants, the challenges and supports.

### **Introducing the Research Participants**

The following is a brief biography of each of the women who were participants in this study. This brief sketch of the participants, the information given in the description of the data and in the data analysis will not do them justice in capturing their personalities and character. I found that the participants in this study were highly committed, intelligent and reflective educators. They were all classic examples of “life-long learners” because during the course of this study and the work on the thesis, they were all involved in post-graduate studies in one way or another. Darian, at the age of seventy-three had recently completed a specialist degree and Sheryl, as another example, was intent on completing her doctorate degree while working full time. They each have such a unique and wonderful story to tell and they have gone through hardships in their personal and career journeys. I felt it was important

to have a background context for the participants before the next chapter which provides a description of their individual experiences and perspectives.

### **Laura**

Laura is in her early fifties, is married and has three children. Laura was born in a southern Manitoba community. She is Ojibway and does not speak her language. She comes from a family of ten children. During the course of the study, she moved from being a principal at band-controlled school in a northern community to being a vice-principal in a provincial school in another northern community. She returned to university to get her teaching degree after several years of working in a variety of positions, not related to education. Laura received her Bachelor of Education degree from the BUNTEP program. Laura has experience working in a band-controlled school in another province. Most of her experience has been working in band-controlled schools. Towards the end of the study, she was moving back to being a principal in her former school, where she had worked as a principal and a director.

### **Myra**

Myra is an Ojibway woman in her early fifties. She is the oldest of twelve children in her family and she said that this influenced her to become a leader because all her younger brothers and sisters looked up to her. She is married and has four grown children and has been a principal in her own community where she has been for fourteen years. She is fluent in the Ojibway language. Myra has Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Bachelor of Education degree and is completing her Master of Education degree. Myra speaks of herself quite often as “wearing many hats” as she is involved and has been involved in setting up and operating

many different programs. She also spoke frequently that her primary motivation in going into education was her mentally-handicapped son. She is currently working as a principal/director in her home community. She worked in a variety of positions in education before becoming a principal.

### **Arlen**

Arlen was born in an isolated community in the north where there is typically very high unemployment in her community. She is Cree and the youngest of seven children in her family. She is in her early fifties. She worked in her own community for several years and is currently working as a principal in an isolated community further north. Arlen has a Bachelor of Education degree and is working on her Master of Education degree. Arlen spoke about the lack of acceptance in her home community and regretted that circumstances had forced her to leave her own community. She is on her own, working full time as a principal while her grown children and husband live in the south.

### **Sheryl**

Sheryl is also an Ojibway woman in her early fifties and fluent Ojibway speaker with one grown daughter and two grandchildren. She is currently a Director of Education in her home community. During the course of this study, she moved from being a principal to director in the same community. She had a very varied career and held many different positions in education. Sheryl has a Bachelor of Education degree, a Master of Education degree and is completing her Doctorate degree from a university in the United States. Out of all the participants, Sheryl's focus was on her school and on her students and spoke more about them rather than speaking about herself.

**Darian**

Darian is currently working as a director/principal in a school that is not in her home community. She was born in a southern reserve and is the youngest of nine children. She went to a residential school when she was young. She is the most experienced principal and is near retirement. Her career has also been varied and she has held a variety of positions in education. Darian has a Bachelor of Teaching degree, Bachelor of Education degree, a Master of Education degree and a Specialist Degree in Reading Language and Culture from a university in the United States. Darian is very experienced and knowledgeable about education. She is a wonderful story teller and her interview transcripts read like a story because of the variety of experiences that she has had and her unique perspective on life.

**Table 1 - Profiles of the Research Participants**

Participant	Current Position (As of 2004)	Year of Initial Appointment as Principal	Education (P – degree in progress)	Certification
Laura	Vice Principal	1997	B.Ed.	Level 1 School Administrators Level 2 Principal's
Myra	Director/ Principal	1989	B.A. B.Ed M.Ed.(P)	Level 1 School Administrators Level 2 Principal's Counselling Bookkeeping
Arlen	Principal	1997	B.T. B.Ed. M.Ed.(P)	Level 1 School Administrators Level 2 Principal's
Sheryl	Director	1994	B.Ed M.Ed. Ph.D.(P)	Level 1 School Administrators Level 2 Principal's Counselling
Darian	Director/ Principal	1987	B.T. B.Ed. M.Ed. Reading, Language & Culture	Level 1 School Administrators Level 2 Principal's Special Ed.

All of the participants have had a variety of positions throughout their careers. As in the Hill and Ragland (1995) study in which 35 women who were educational leaders were interviewed in order to get their perspectives and experiences from their personal and professional lives, these women had no single, typical career path, only that they began as classroom teachers and held a variety of positions prior to becoming a principal.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS - CAREER PATHS, CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS

In this chapter I will describe the experiences of the participants in relation to the themes that emerged from the data and present their perspectives and experiences as they relate to the research topics of career paths, challenges and supports. After the description of the data for each section, I will provide an analysis and a summary of the data for each of the themes.

Young (1992) in her examination of the life stories of four Canadian women in educational administration identified two themes; “late bloomers” and “competing urgencies”. Late bloomers describe the career development of women in their mid-thirties and competing urgencies describe the multiple roles of the working woman. These terms capture the experience of all five participants in this study. All five of the participants revealed that they were married and had children by the time they had the opportunity for post-secondary education. Laura had worked at a variety of jobs prior to becoming a teacher. Myra was in her thirties by the time she decided to go back to school and Arlen and Darian were both married with children when they began their teacher training. Throughout their careers they had multiple roles to play. One of the participants sums it up when she says that she wears many hats including being a mother, grandmother, volunteer board member and principal. All five of the participants in this study have unique life experiences and influences which led them to where they are today. One of the participants, Darian, stated that, for her, “the road on earth is not an easy one”. This can be said for each of the participants as the path that each took, was unpredictable and was often a matter of being in the right place at the right time and sometimes was a case of being in the wrong place at the

wrong time. Nevertheless each of the women demonstrated determination and a passion for their work as principals. The odds were against them yet they overcame the odds to become successful women who evidently are happy being school principals.

### **The Career Paths of the Participants**

The themes that emerged from the interviews relating to the career paths of the participants are categorized under: early life experiences and family expectations, motivation to pursue training as teachers and to become principals, academic training and credentials, positions held prior to becoming a principal, initial appointment as principal, working as principals, and their advice to aspiring women principals as they reflect back on their careers.

#### **Early Life Experiences and Family Expectations**

Laura's early childhood was spent "in the bush" because her father was in the lumber business. She was the oldest of ten children in her family. She was taught the value of education and her father modeled a good work ethic. She had to face an early separation from her parents in order to attend school. Her grandparents influenced her mother and father to send her away to school as they believed that education was important. She speaks of her grandparents who had a lot of influence on her:

My grandfather was a self-taught man. He taught himself to read and write. He operated and ran his own business. He hired a fellow to do the bookkeeping and that but he understood a lot of it. My grandmother, from the way she talked, I think went to high school. It was really kind of unusual for that time like you know? They never really got married until she was nineteen and, at that time was nineteen was late, for a woman to be

married. They really encouraged education for their children and grandchildren and they had a lot of influence on me because I spent a lot of time with them. I grew up in bush camps; my grandfather and my father were both in the lumber business and when we got to be to school age they sent us, about an hour away to live with an aunt and uncle to go to school. I remember my first day of school in grade one, it was really hard. Although, Laura found it difficult to be away from her parents, was glad that she had the opportunity to go to school. She was taught from an early age the value of work and that education was important. Her father and grandparents were role models for her.

Myra's father was a positive influence on her and was a good role model for her. Her father worked for the railway and was away much of the time but did well to become a road master even though he had only a grade five education. She states that her father taught her to work and to always be doing something and to stay active.

Arlen grew up in an isolated northern reserve where there was high unemployment. She went to a one-room school until her community was relocated because of the construction of a hydro electric dam. She began to do volunteer work at the school in the hopes that it would lead to a job.

Sheryl is from a southern reserve and always enjoyed and excelled in school. She says that she went into education because this is what was expected of her and she was brought up to believe education was important:

I guess I took that route ... I kept going for more education. I took that route because that was what I was expected to do. My father expected that of me. He raised me to

believe that you are the smartest girl on this reserve; you are going to go to the end!

That has always influenced me to keep on going.

Sheryl speaks of her father having a very strong influence on her and expecting her to go to school and further her education from when she was a young child. When asked why she was encouraged to go into education she indicated that it was because she had a very competitive nature and a strong personality from when she was a young child.

I found learning very easy and they knew that (her parents). They knew that I found it easy. I found it challenging and I keep at it until I get it right. I won't give up, I don't give up. I don't walk away from anything I start. And they knew that, they knew that if I didn't succeed I would try again and I would keep trying until I did succeed.

That's perseverance and determination. As a child I didn't let anybody beat me. And I kept on trying until I beat everybody. (Laughter)

Darian is the youngest of nine children and spoke about her childhood and how her father taught her the value of learning. She spoke frequently about all the things that she was taught at home and how this love of learning eventually led to her "passion" for education which was evident in her interviews and in her career path. Her father taught her how to skin muskrats and to ride horses.

In those days in the early fifties my dad went on the trap line. He went a week ahead to set up a camp, to get the ground ready, to have the fire going all the time. He took us on the trap line and we went. I learned how to skin muskrats. Muskrats! So we spent our days learning. He taught us how to skin the muskrat. You don't make any holes in the pelts at all. Things like that are very important. I did all that. I was a good

horseman. My dad had lots of horses, Indian ponies. I learned to ride really well. I spent my young life on horse back riding I knew every inch of the reservation because I went all over, through the valleys and all over. Those are good experiences I feel I had a really good childhood after residential school. I still learned a lot from my parents. My dad was in favour of education. My dad was raised off the reserve. In those days when there was no school, no country school, that lady taught her children at home. She taught her children to read and write and do Math at home. She included my dad in that. She taught him and my dad was very eloquent in English. He could speak and like he was really self-taught but in a lot of ways she had a great influence on him. She was a Scottish woman. My mother had been in residential school.

Darian went to school at a mission day school and also to residential school. She remembers her experience of her early school days.

I was the youngest of nine children and when I went to residential school and day school at the mission school. I was just a six year old little kid. I was the only one that could speak English and the children were very mean to me. They pinched me and they fought me and they made life miserable for me. Even as a six year old I endured a lot already. And you know what? It was because I could speak English and they couldn't. The children there wished that they had what I had which was the ability to speak English. So they were in particular, very cruel so I am no stranger to these things. I can still remember their names and I can almost remember vividly how cruel they were and how they treated me there. But I left there and I went to residential school.

The participants' early life experiences and their family expectations clearly played a

part in the career that they chose. All of the participants spoke about their families and how their up bringing has influenced them in their careers. Four of the five participants (Arlen, Laura, Myra and Darian), spoke about how their families valued learning and encouraged formal education which motivated them to continue with high school and university. They mention the roles of family members who influenced them and provided the emotional and moral support at critical times in their careers. This influence caused them to make choices that ultimately led them to work as principals. They spoke about the values that were modeled and taught to them. This is representative of the Aboriginal culture which values extended families and their involvement in the raising of children.

Four of the five participants indicated that their early years and their family up-bringing was a factor in their choice of career and in their career path. Laura, Myra, Sheryl and Darian speak highly of their fathers and the influence that their fathers had on teaching them responsibility, the value of education and a work ethic. Laura chose to become a teacher because the teacher training program came to her community and she decided to seize the opportunity to train as a teacher. She was influenced by her grandparents to value education and work. Laura's grandparents were a significant influence in her life and her father modelled a work ethic that she followed as she struggled with a variety of jobs to try to make ends meet and support her family. Her early childhood experiences taught her a work ethic and her father and grandfather were her role models. She worked at a variety of jobs prior to training as a teacher and when BUNTEP ran a community based training in her community, she trained as a teacher.

Both Myra and Sheryl were influenced by their families, in particular, their fathers to pursue education. Myra mentions her father's influence on her career path. He modelled a work ethic and she admires her father for becoming a road master for the railway even though he only had a grade five education. She spoke about how she must "have picked up some of his brains". Her father's accomplishments motivated her to continue to go to school and to get somewhere in life. Myra was motivated by her father to work hard as he was successful, in her eyes, as a self-taught man. Myra mentions her mother and only one reference where she indicates that her mother did not get her education. Darian states that her mother attended residential school and that her parents were married for fifty-eight years.

For Sheryl, pursuing her education was never a question. She was expected to go to school and complete her degree. She was determined to complete her education and to "go all the way" in her education. Again, her father was the primary influence for her to go to school and value education and work. Sheryl was motivated to go to school by her father and she fulfilled his expectations to achieve. Sheryl indicates that she has "perseverance and determination" to succeed. This is evident as she continues to pursue her doctorate degree in education while working full time. The motivation for Myra and Sheryl to choose their career path was not other women who had become teachers and principals but the influence and example of their fathers. Darian's family upbringing taught her, not necessarily formal education as valuable, but the value of learning. She was taught the value of learning when her father taught her how to skin muskrats and ride horses. She mentions that her father was "in favour of education" but speaks very highly of how her father taught her many things as a child that motivated her to pursue her life-long passion for learning. It is evident that Darian

is committed to learning and acquiring knowledge. Darian, Sheryl, Myra and Laura all attribute their desire to learn and to be in leadership to their families, particularly their fathers. They were willing to accept the challenge of leadership and be successful because of a family role model and their early childhood experiences. Their early life experiences shaped their career paths and influenced the choice they made to get into education.

### **Motivation to Pursue Training as Teachers and to become Principals**

Laura found it difficult to go back to school after several years of being out of school but wanted the stable income that teaching would provide. She puts it this way: “We knew, my husband and I, together that if I made it, then it was going to be our rock” She did make it and in her words “it all paid off in the end”. Her husband is a seasonal worker and encouraged and supported her to go into education. While she was raising her children, she worked at a variety of different jobs including post office clerk, day care worker, and caterer and operating a fast food business. Throughout these years, they managed to make ends meet but after seventeen years, she decided that they wanted more stability and when the opportunity came up to take the training right in her community, she could not pass it up.

Myra’s was working in her home community when I asked her to participate in the study. She was also involved in many other things and she spoke often during her interviews about her many hats that she wears. Her primary motivation to go into education was that she wanted to get off Social Assistance because she wanted a better life for her children. She began her career in education working as a teacher assistant because she wanted to get away from dependence on welfare. She spoke about her children and how important they were to her and how her motivation to make the best life for them helped her make the



decision to go into education. She spoke about how having a mentally handicapped son has helped her to be grounded and strong. She stated that if it were not for her son, she would most likely not be in education. She comments:

Well yeah back in '69 when I met my husband, there were three or four years when we were on SA and I said, "I don't want to raise my kids like this I want something better. I will go out and get this job". It all kind of evolved from there.

Arlen decided to volunteer as a teacher assistant because she was hopeful that this might lead to paid work. Her community had high employment and she felt that if she could work that this would help her to make a better life for herself. The principal and another teacher at the school suggested to Arlen that she apply to university to receive training to become a teacher.

There was a teacher that used to work in my community who used to talk to me about going back to school as a teacher and so one day he gave me an application. That was the PENT program. I filled it out and I sent it out. The principal at the school at the time also gave me some references because I was volunteering because he thought that I would make a good teacher. They must have thought that I had potential, the potential for becoming a teacher. I worked all day every day, even though it was volunteer work. It was volunteer work but the principal must have thought, "Well, we will give her a chance". He helped me... gave me a good reference. Then I was asked to go for an interview at the university to see if I qualified or to see if I could do it. The interview was difficult for me but I tried my best you know to the best of my ability. That's when my training started.

Sheryl went into education because this was expected of her. There seemed to have been no question that going to school was what she was expected to do.

I guess I took that route ... I kept going for more education. I took that route because that was what I was expected to do. My father expected that of me.

Darian was motivated to become a teacher assistant because she wanted an income for her family. She applied for the position although she felt that it was a token position.

I went into being a TA mostly because I wanted the income, because my husband was in an accident. He was no longer providing for us, I had to provide for the children somehow because being on assistance was not very nice. It was just a bare existence, and I didn't like that. And I hadn't really thought very much about: "Well I really want to be an educator and do this and that". I really just applied for the position of TA just because it would give me a source of income. I guess that they (Indian Affairs) had to make out that they were really doing their best for Indians so they wanted a Native person working in that school as TA. So it was a token position. They didn't care whether we went anywhere or not. Just make sure there is an Indian working in that school, after all we are funding this provincially run school. It was integration, they called it. So when I went to work, integration had started in '61 and this was '71. They wanted a TA in the school. That's all I wrote, I am just interested in the position. I didn't try to go and sell myself beyond that. The next thing the job was mine and because also I was the only one that applied. So I went to work as a TA.

Four of the five participants were motivated to go into education as a career because

the teaching would provide a secure job and a stable income for their families. The participants had children prior to beginning their career in education and their family situation was a factor in helping them to determine their career path.

In addition to their early life experiences and family expectations, the participants in this study were also influenced by other factors to pursue their particular career path. Four of the five participants were motivated to go into education because they wanted to better provide for their families. Laura went into the BUNTEP program because she had worked at odd jobs for a number of years and being a teacher would provide a stable income. Her husband was a seasonal worker and her employment over several years had not been consistent. She mentions that going into teaching would be their “rock” referring to the fact that there would always be a need for teachers either in her community or other communities where they chose to live. Arlen volunteered as a teacher assistant in the hopes that it would lead to a paying job. She worked full time as a teacher assistant, although she was not getting any pay. This shows her determination to get full time employment so that she could make a better life for her and her family. Both Darian and Myra wanted to get off social assistance and wanted a reliable income to support their families. All five of the participants had children and this contributed to their motivation to establish themselves in a career that would provide a stable income and teaching was a good choice because teachers would always be needed in their communities. Laura worked at many different jobs in order to provide for her family before entering a teacher training program. For Myra, her mentally handicapped son was her inspiration and motivation to go into teaching and following a career path that would provide a good income so that she could provide for him a better

quality of life. Myra also mentions that she wanted to go to university to get away from home and “a bad family situation”. The women faced challenges but they were able to overcome them because of their strong motivation of having to provide for their children and establish a better future for them. The choice to become teachers was not so much a choice of wanting to become a teacher but of necessity and opportunity to have employment and economic stability. This is an important point as their career path was chosen primarily for altruistic reasons rather than motivation to get ahead or a pursuit of ambitious fulfilment of a goal to become a teacher. However, it is also clear that this was not their sole motivation to become teachers and principals. Quite often the participants mention their desire to influence and change the schools in their communities to be better places for children. Myra went back to being a principal partly because she was concerned about parents being barred from the school in the community. Sheryl talks about meeting the basic needs of the children who attend her school by providing warm clothing and hot meals. She states that she has compassion and how the school cannot ignore the basic needs not being met. Arlen mentions that she is sometimes too compassionate in her work as a principal and Darian strives to provide a better experience for children than the one that she had as a young child.

### **Education and Credentials**

All participants are well qualified for their position as principal. All five participants have certification from the provincial government. Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth Certification Unit recognizes two levels of certification for school administrators, the Level 1 School Administrator’s Certificate and the Level 2 Principal’s certificate. The two levels can be achieved by completing university courses, professional development activities

and work experience (Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth, Education Administration Services Branch Professional Certification Unit, Guidelines [Http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca)). In addition to the certification, all of the participants have their Bachelor of Education degree and four are either in the process of completing their Masters degree or have completed their degree.

Laura did not go into teaching until later in life. From the time she finished high school to when she went to train as a teacher, it was seventeen years. Laura started a family shortly after high school. After seventeen years of working in various positions, an opportunity to go into the BUNTEP program in Laura's community came up so she applied to go and was accepted. She did not decide on education as a career but instead took the opportunity for further education when it came to her community. Hers was not a choice of teaching as a career but more a matter of seizing an opportunity of receiving training in a community based program that would be convenient for her and her family. When I asked her if she decided that she wanted to be a teacher, her response was:

When BUNTEP came into our community and they were calling for applications for the program I went in to find more information on it and they told me it was a teacher training program. I thought, "I don't know if I really want to be a teacher. Well then, I thought I will go for it. It was an opportunity that just couldn't be passed so . . . I wrote the whole application and went through the whole process and got accepted and away I went.

Laura successfully completed the BUNTEP program and graduated. After graduation she and her sister decided that she wanted to work out of the province so she applied out of

province and got a position as a Special Education teacher at a band-controlled school.

They decided to work out of province for a while because they thought that teaching in their home community might be difficult. She comments on the process of deciding where to work:

Well, anyhow, she and I decided that after we graduated together in '89 from BUNTEP, we would apply somewhere else. We did and we applied different places. We both kind of decided that we didn't want to teach at home yet because our family, our friends and people we knew would be at that school. It was their kids and our kids that would be going to that school and we would have to teach them... so we thought we would go away for a few years, get some years of experience and then think about returning.

Myra worked as a teacher assistant for a few years she eventually went to university to get a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her motivation to go to university was partly to get away from a bad family situation. She finished her Bachelor of Arts degree and took a bookkeeping course at college. This training got her a bookkeeping and secretary position in an adult education program. She became involved in running a literacy program which led her going back to university to take education. She graduated with a Certificate in Education and she came back to her home community to teach at the primary level. She taught for five years before becoming a principal.

It just happened that way, I think it was meant to be that way, I never thought I'd go into education. I never really had any plans back then. I was just trying to survive with my three kids that I have and trying to make life better for them.

She did not really made a deliberate decision to go into education but because of economic considerations and opportunity she went to work as a teacher assistant. After teaching in an adult literacy program she realized that if she was going to be teaching, then she had better get some training:

I have my BA. It took me four years to get that in 1980 and I stayed for another year and I took a bookkeeping course at ACC (Assiniboine Community College). It really helped me in my career. I came back to my community. There was really nothing here for people that have BA's so I took a job at a literacy project. They were doing a literacy program. I started off as a secretary and a bookkeeper then I evolved to running the program... the education component. Then I thought. "I am in education and I don't have the teaching certificate and I am trying to teach the elderly and these middle age people how to read and how to do Math". So I went back to university to take education.

Myra also completed her level one and two administration certification from the province.

Arlen was encouraged to apply for a teacher training program at Brandon University which she did even though her confidence level was very low and she did not think that she would be able to do it. She comments on the experience and her response still reflected the uncertainty that she felt at the time:

I did not have very much confidence in myself at the time. I wasn't sure if I could do it because going to university you know? To have to deal with the high standards and expectations; a lot of expectations and responsibilities. Coming from a reserve and not

having proper training and not being involved in anything like that before I really thought that it would be too much for me.

She completed her degrees and is continuing on with her post-graduate studies.

I enrolled in a teacher's training at Brandon University from 1974 until 1978 when I graduated with a Bachelor of Teaching degree. I went back to university in 1980 to complete the 5 year Bachelor of Education degree. I am currently in the Master's of Education program right now.

Sheryl completed her Bachelor of Education degree and then continued on for her Master's degree. She is currently working part time on her doctorate. She hopes to complete her PhD in 2004.

When Darian received her Bachelor of Teaching degree she was somehow not satisfied with it. The Bachelor of Teaching degree was a three year teacher education program that was introduced in 1969 at Brandon University. It was discontinued in 1981 and those who had received the Bachelor of Teaching had to return to university to complete two more years to receive a Bachelor of Education. In another part of her interview she refers to her "little" Bachelor of Teaching degree minimizing that value of it and she comments:

When I received the Bachelor of Teaching, to me it was not enough, I think I still had this whole notion that so what? I had taken three years of university, condensed into two and half, did I really prove anything? I still didn't feel good enough about myself. I felt, I had this but I am just really . . . just an Indian. It didn't feel right. I almost didn't believe this was possible. I didn't tell anybody that I felt that way but so what I had a degree but am I any smarter? So I went into teaching elementary school



but I still had to get over this feeling that this BT wasn't enough so I started taking evening classes because I could not take them during the day because I started working. I went on, slowly taking evening courses and built them until I received my Bachelor of Education which I did in the fall of 1983. I graduated with the fall class and I received my five year Bachelor of Education. Then I finally started to believe in myself. I did it! Now I have two degrees. Yes, I really can do it! I had already been teaching for four years before I finally received a Special Education certificate. So now I had a Bachelor of Teaching, a Bachelor of Education and a Special Education certificate and my teaching certificate. It just went from there. I went into the labour force. I was working and in the fall of 1980, I went to work in my home reserve. I was hired as a resource teacher because of my Special Ed. Certificate. Then I just continued going and I had my pre-masters then, by that time I had my fifth year and I went for another year. I thought I was so close to my masters and I was just doing it at that night, these were night classes. I didn't really set myself up to do this but it just happened that way.

Darian also went to the United States to get some training in native language teaching and received a specialist degree. It seemed that Darian continued to strive for more education until she was satisfied that the degrees meant that she had accomplished something but what meant the most to her was receiving a specialist degree from the University of Arizona:

I started going to the University of Arizona. It had a really good program for training people at the American Language Development Institute so I went here for the summer and I just kept going back every year for three years. I was working at the

same time and going to summer school at the University of Arizona, working with the linguists over there. I received a specialist degree in Language Reading and Culture. Out of all the degrees I have had, that meant the most to me and I am having it framed and putting it on my office wall because I really feel that degree puts the icing on the cake. I am really proud of that degree and it was really hard work.

The participants in this study not only show a passion and a commitment to their work as principals but also a commitment to learning. The participants acquired their training while raising their families and pursued their post graduate studies, for the most part, while working full time. Darian and Myra did take some time off work to go to university to receive more training. The women in this study all stressed the importance of continuing to learn and all were involved in post graduate training of some kind. All of them were involved in graduate studies during the course of the study. All of them were determined to pursue further studies although they frequently mentioned the difficulty of fitting in their studies into their already busy lives. At the same time they all believed in the value of continuing to learn and to build up their credentials for administrative work. All received their provincial certification and either had earned a Master's degree or in the process of completing it, while maintaining jobs and families. The participants all expressed the value that they had for learning and their motivation to go back to school was primarily for professional growth and to increase their skill level and knowledge so that they continue to provide the best possible service for the children in their schools.

**Table 2 - Positions Held Prior to Becoming a Principal**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Teaching Positions held prior to becoming principal ( ) years in position</b>
Laura	Native Studies (1989–1991) – Vice-Principal (1989–1990 as well as teaching responsibilities) – Special Education (1991–1993) – Physical Education (1993–1994) – Principal/Coordinator (1990–1997 as well as teaching responsibilities) – Director/Principal (1997–1999) – Principal (1999–2003)
Myra	Counselor (1984– 1987) – Grade 2 (1987-1988) – Grade 7 (1988-1989) – Principal (1989-1995) – Director (1998-1999) – Cooperative Ed. (1999-2000) Principal/Director (2000-2003)
Arlen	Primary grades teacher (1978-1984) – Vice-Principal (1984-1985) – Acting Principal (1985-1986) – Counselor (1987-1990) – Director (1990-1992) – Management Facilitator (1992-1994) – Principal (1994-2003)
Sheryl	Counselor (1980-1983) – Director of College (1983 – 1992) – Primary teacher (1992-1994) – Principal (1994 – present)
Darian	Teacher Assistant Elementary teacher (1969 – 1983) Special Education (1980 – 1984) – Language Teacher (1984- 1988) – Principal (1988 - 1990) – Program Coordinator (1991 - 1994) – Director (1994 - 1996) - Director/Principal - (1997 - Present)

After Laura and her sister graduated from BUNTEP they applied for a few jobs and the most attractive was a position in another province. They decided not to work at home for the first years of their teaching career. She describes their first teaching job as:

It was a fly in community and it was just what we were looking for. When we got the information on it and the way the director talked about the community the culture was very much alive there, we thought well okay and we were there for eight years. I was hired as a special education teacher and she was hired as a grade three teacher and so we went up there with those positions in mind.

Laura worked as a special education teacher for only four months. At Christmas time she was approached to take on the principal's position. During the time that she was working as a principal/coordinator she did some part time teaching Native Studies and Special Education.

After Laura came back to Manitoba, she received the position of principal/director which she held for four years.

Myra went back to university to get her Certificate in Education after she received a Bachelor of Arts degree. After she received her Certificate in Education she went back to her home community to teach in grade two. She wanted to go home to teach and she was offered a job even before she graduated from the university.

I chose to come back here. I could have gotten a job elsewhere if I chose to but I wanted to be here. This is where my heart is, my family, my mom is still alive. I came back here and I taught for a couple of years. You had to teach for two years before you got your permanent certificate. You had to have your provisional before you got your permanent. I taught for two years. That was the last time I was in the classroom. After that I was in social counselling.

Arlen received her training from Brandon University and after receiving her teaching degree she went to work in northern Manitoba. She taught for six years before becoming a principal.

In my current position I have been here since August 25, 2001. I also held an education director position, education counsellor position and a management facilitator position.

Sheryl worked as post-secondary counsellor after graduating from university and worked as a classroom teacher and counsellor for three years before going back to complete her Master's degree. She worked as a director of a college for nine years before returning to

the classroom. She taught for two years out of province before returning to her home community to become a principal.

Darian has a long and varied career with many different positions, roles and life experiences. She began her career working as an educational assistant and after receiving her degree, she went to work in her home community as a Special Education teacher and a Native language teacher. After three years of teaching, she was appointed to principal in her home community.

When I went to work on my home reserve as a resource teacher, they also wanted to teach the language, the native language in the school. So when I was asked to do the language that was fine. Now I didn't know everything there was to know about teaching the language, the methodology that was expected but I went into it teaching the language and I really enjoyed it. So I served as a resource teacher and also as a language teacher and that's years already. I had years of doing that type of work too. I was able to receive my masters of education in the spring of 1997. As far as education goes and I've used everything I have learned to work wherever I can.

Darian left under difficult circumstances when she was fired from her job in her home community. Immediately after this she was hired by the university to coordinate a teacher training program which she did for three years. She was rehired in her home community where she worked as the director of education for two years. She then went to work for another southern reserve as a principal/director and this is where she currently works.

This study shows that these women who work in First Nations communities in school administration are not there as a result of a neatly planned career path. There is no

common career path for the women participants in this study and all of the women initially took the position of principal either because of encouragement from others or they were asked or appointed to take the position after years of working in other roles in education. None of the participants made a deliberate plan to become principals. They may not have chosen to become principals if they had not been specifically asked or appointed. Generally, the women learned “on the job”, the skills needed to do their work as principals. Laura had only been teaching for four months before she was asked to become a principal. Arlen was an acting principal before she received her position. Most of the women have gone through the community-based teacher training programs and have worked as elementary school teachers for a few years prior to becoming school administrators. The participants in this study taught for a relatively short time prior to receiving an administrative position. The range for time taught is four months for Laura when she was unexpectedly asked to fill in as a vice-principal and Arlen who taught for six years prior to becoming a vice-principal and acting principal.

### **Initial Appointment as Principal**

After three months of working in a school in another province, Laura was asked by the chief and a board member to take on the vice-principal position after only a few months of teaching. Laura’s response:

I was taken by surprise because I was only there for three months and I questioned in my mind, “What did they see in me that made them want me to be vice-principal?”

Well . . . I never ever thought I would want to be an administrator because teaching was what I had in mind so I remember thinking about those things, what were they thinking? What did they see in me? What did they want done? I was flattered and

then I started asking myself could I do that kind of a job? How would . . . I mean I am a first year teacher and there are teachers on staff that have more years of experience than me and I am going into this position. How are they going to feel? Oh . . . all those thoughts were going through my mind. Well . . . they kept popping by and . . . “Well are you still thinking about it? We would really like you to give it a try. We will be supportive we will give you the help and all the rest of it. We’ll help.” They were making all kinds of promises and I thought, “Okay, I’ll give it a try and I walked into that position in January of that year.

Laura had to decide over the Christmas holidays as to whether or not she would accept the position. She would not have considered accepting the position if she had not been promised the support from the leaders in the community. Laura worked as a vice-principal for the rest of that year and the following year she became a principal/coordinator, a position she held for seven years in the same school. In describing this position Laura states:

So the director at that time was coming up with different ideas and different things you know that would work. Maybe two principals, maybe this model, all this kind of stuff, eventually they came up with this model . . . they called it coordinators. There were three of us who were appointed; there were two other people who were hired that were already on staff. The three of us became the administrators of the school. They wanted to come up with a name that implied that someone was there to help and support and facilitate and all the rest of it. So they ended up with the name coordinators. (Laughter)

I asked Laura if the coordinator was the same work as the principal and she indicated that she did the work of a principal but was not called a principal. During this time when she

worked as a coordinator, she worked closely with other people so this made it easier for her to get used to the work of administration. She was able to acquire the experience and knowledge that helped her in later work in administration. The support of the other coordinators made the position enjoyable and helped her to learn skills from the people that she worked with. For most of the seven years, she worked with one man and one other woman and after five years another male coordinator was hired. She was also able to teach part time during this time. The system of coordinators provided stability for the school because the administration stayed the same for the seven years that she was there.

Well throughout those years I worked as coordinator, there were three of us and because there were three of us we were able to have some teaching time. I kind of stuck with special education, one year I did Native Studies. I really enjoyed working with the junior high and high school. I really enjoyed it. In fact I probably would have still been there if the situation at the end would have turned out a little bit more to what we were hoping for. The contract that they were offering us wasn't acceptable for us. So at that time there were eight of us that left.

Myra's entry into administration happened because, there was some "political stuff" going on (her words) and she was approached to take on the position of principal. Her reaction was one of surprise:

In August he (the director) tells me asks me about taking the position of principal!  
And school is supposed to start . . . like at the end of the month, "Oh I don't know . . . I don't know if I can do that!" You know, I am not into that... and he said, "Well think about it". I talked to my mom and dad. They were still alive. I talked to my



family, my brothers and sisters and some of my relatives and asked them, "What do you think? Should I take it?" They said, "Oh yeah." After all that . . . okay. . . I'll give it a shot and I said, "Okay sure". . . He said get as many people back, tribal members, people who had left . . . teachers. So I did. Within a couple of weeks I got it all together. He (the director) got a financial person. Within a couple of weeks I had it all together and I started off that year.

Later in the interview, I asked Myra if she had planned to go into administration and her response was:

Well, I really didn't want to but I was appointed so I figured, "What the hell, I might as well. Let's be first here" so I went ahead.

Arlen was asked to be a vice-principal and was an acting principal before being appointed to the principal's position. When asked if she wanted to become a principal her response was:

I wanted to be a principal because I wanted the children to have the best education possible and as a leader of the school I thought I might be able to make changes for the better.

Arlen was confident about becoming a principal but felt uncertain about whether or not she would make a good principal. However, because she felt strongly that she wanted to make a difference, she decided to become a principal.

When Sheryl was asked if she had planned on becoming a principal, she indicated that she had really not made a plan to go into administration. She also stated that she had not

expected to stay as the principal for so long, as she had wanted to move to a post-secondary institution. She says:

It just sort of happened. All I wanted to do was become a teacher, teach for awhile then I really enjoyed my experience, like working with adults and I always thought I would go back to a post-secondary institution. I only planned on being there for maybe a couple of years, and then I planned on moving on. Then one of the kids says something that makes you want to stay. Like one of the kids said, when I graduate from grade 12, I am going to invite you to come to the grad. Little things like that and you know you can't leave them. It's their way of saying . . . it's their way of showing they care. They can't just come out and say, "thank you" because they don't really know what they are thanking you for. But it's their way of showing that you have become an important part of their lives.

Darian was teaching in her home community when she was appointed as the principal. She comments:

I was given the position of being the principal of that school without having to apply for the position. The position came up and the director of education who was from the outside had come from BC somewhere... and when he was leaving he said, "Look you don't need to go and advertise for this position you have somebody right here in your own community that can fill this position and will do the job well and that is Mrs. Persey" (Darian). So the school board heard him and I was put in that position and I held that position for five and a half years

All of the participants in the study attained their administrative positions by chance or appointment. Laura, Myra, Sheryl and Darian were unexpectedly given the opportunity to become the principal because of circumstances that came up in the schools where they were teaching. "Taken by surprise", "I'll give it a shot", "it just sort of happened", "I was given the job with out applying", all of these phrases describe the participant's experience in their initial appointment as principal. Laura indicates that she never thought she would want to be an administrator. She was surprised that she was the one that was first asked to become a vice-principal when there were others on staff on had more experience than she did. She was flattered and makes the point that many questions ran through her mind when she was offered the position. She had to decide over the Christmas holidays whether or not to accept the position. She did accept and this eventually led to a position as principal/coordinator and then director/principal. Myra was offered the position of principal because some "political stuff" was happening. Again she had to decide very quickly as to whether or not to accept the position as principal as school was about to begin. Darian was appointed as principal without having to apply after the director of education recommended her to the school board. Sheryl had not made plans to become an administrator but instead had wanted to teach in a post secondary institution. The participants did not have aspirations to become principals and had not contemplated a move beyond their teaching positions. However when the opportunity came up, they accepted the challenge. Their sense of commitment to education in their community was a factor in helping them to decide to accept the responsibility of working as principals and in giving them the motivation to accept the challenge with enthusiasm and the determination to succeed.

## Working as Principals

Laura decided to leave the position of facilitator in a school in another province partly because of an unacceptable contract offer but also because she wanted to be closer to home. After seven years of working in another province, Laura decided to move back home to Manitoba. Her plans were to take some time off work and possibly go back to school to complete her Master's degree. However, her sister told her about a position that was being advertised for principal/director in the school where she was teaching and convinced Laura to apply for it. I asked Laura about how she felt about accepting the position of director/principal:

Well I was pretty confident at that point that I could do a principal's job. The director's job was the one that I was really kind of frightened of because I had worked with the director in \_\_\_\_\_. I knew what some of his responsibilities were. I thought the combination of the principal's director's job was, wow, going to be a lot of hard work. But I did it for two years. A new chief and council came in and they wanted to hire a local person for the position so I was glad to let that part of it go. I didn't have to worry about it. So that was good and I have been in the principal's position for four years.

Laura was in this position when I approached her about participating in the study.

Myra initially held the position of principal for six years in her home community and during this time she completed her B.Ed. After six years in this position, some "political stuff" happened and she forced to leave. She worked for adult education in a community college, as an education director and a cooperative education teacher before returning to her

home community as a principal. She spoke about what happened at the school during this time:

There was a bunch of turnover; they had three principals in one year that time. They had a non-Native first, then another teacher after that. Then he left and another band member came on. That was awful! It was just a political thing, the chief and council were into the daily stuff. That is when I came on after that in '98. I still had to look after the school, but kind of arm's length. I had to change the administration, because if the council doesn't want them in there, then I as director have to get rid of them and put someone else in. That has repercussions for me too going down the line, because then that person's husband gets in for council next time round. It was nerve wracking year but I just do as I am told because if I don't do as I am told then there is the door. Out you go! Within reason, I mean I wouldn't do anything to intentionally hurt people but you do what you are asked to do and you do it.

Myra was hurt by some of the things that happened in her home community that caused her to leave. However, after a couple of years, she chose to come back when she was asked by one of the band councillors:

She asked me (the councillor), "You know? We need you there". You know what? I came and fixed things once, I was going good, and I got kicked in the face. I don't know if I could handle it a second time. It wasn't anything I did. You know. . . I do a good job. And she said, "Well, we need you back". I had this other job. I was working, in a school. I was getting provincial money so I said, "Find someone who doesn't have a job." But . . . I figured I might as well and then I said, "Okay I'll come

back". I didn't really want to go back because I didn't know if I really wanted to go through that again. But they just said, "You are the one to do it. You were there before".

Myra decided to come back to the school because of the turmoil that had been going on at the school during her absence. She spoke about the turnover of principals who had come and gone and in particular about a young female principal who had been the principal just before Myra returned to the school. Myra spoke about some of the things that this principal did that really messed up the school:

There were so many parents barred from there by the previous principal that was there. They had seven or eight parents barred from the school. They couldn't come to the school even though their kids attended there. They couldn't attend the building.

I asked her about what might have helped this young female principal do a better job.

Myra's response was that in order to be a good principal you have to have some life experiences:

She was younger than 30, so she was pretty young. She had no kids and no experience. No life experience, you got to have some living behind you. You got to have had kids, to me anyway that is the way I look at it. I can look back at junior high and say, "That's the way my kid was!" and then you can understand because you have been through it with your own kids. Now, it's my grand kids. Yeah . . . she (the young principal) had already been there for three years. She is the one that banned all those parents from the school. She had never lived in the community. She had been raised and educated somewhere out there and then comes back in to do this job. She

was doing it the provincial way instead of working with the community. If she met with any opposition, then out the door they go. Then she is leaving the school and that is when I get talked into coming back. And I said, "Naw, I don't want to". That is when this new council got in, two years ago and the council asked me to come back. So then I said, "Okay I'll come back and clean up again".

Even though Arlen is working in a northern isolated community she is content to do the best work that she can as a principal and is quite happy to be able to put in the time and energy required for the work as principal.

But right now I am focusing on my career and doing the best job that I can as a principal. I can just go home and rest (laughter) and then do some homework, but I do spend a lot of time at the school. I am here at 8:00 and often don't go home until 6:00 7:00 or 8:00. But I don't do anything on Saturdays. I dedicate that day for myself. Being in an isolated place, this is how I kill time. It makes time go faster. I can't just go to the city anytime.

Arlen still questions her ability to do the work of a principal:

At different times I feel I am being too hard on myself. At times I feel that I am too compassionate. Sometimes I feel like I let the staff get away with things.

Out of all the participants, Sheryl was the one who spoke most of her school and her students and her daily work as principal. This was her main focus during the interview, her compassion and love for the children was evident:

We practically clothe the kids in the winter time. They come in without caps or mitts.

They are not properly dressed. We provide them with as much as we can. Like I go to

these thrift shops and buy ski pants, go to Red Cross and ask for toques and mitts and scarves. Like you become more than an educator. I have compassion. One of the male teachers says, "Yeah let's get back to our job of teaching." But how can you teach when the kids are hungry? How can you send the kids outside, when they don't have boots, and its freezing outside? I can't be like that. It's not all there is to it. You see, there was a time when you did not have to worry about that. But in today's society, you have to worry about it. Their basic needs are not being met so what do you do? Do you ignore them? You can't!

She also talks about the Special Needs students that are in her school and how they make her want to continue to stay as principal as they are the ones that need stability.

Especially the kids . . . those children who have FAS . . . the special needs, those are the children that need that stability. Yeah those are the ones . . . it's so important that I be there. I have to be there every day. For one of them . . . he comes into my office and takes his Ritalin in front of me. So that's become routine and if I'm not there, what will he do?

She describes how much more respect parents and students show her when she speaks to them in their language:

Some of those teachers those kids had, our parents and grandparents, the experiences that they had. It's so important to have that respect. Sometimes I think that that is one of the reasons why I stay in administration. I went to residential school too. I went to residential school all the way up to grade twelve so I know what that is like. So they've always seen me in a positive light, they've never seen me in a negative light



so I've always had their respect and I still have their respect. I can talk to them and I can switch back and forth to our own language to emphasize the point. If they are coming at me over something and I when I switch to our own language to emphasize the point, they back down, they listen better. So I have those two things going for me; the respect in the community and the fact that I speak their language. I've lived among them and I don't put myself above anybody. I don't go around and put on airs in the community. I can sit down with every one of them and talk to every one of them. I don't place myself above anybody. The other thing too is that. ..everybody sees that I am there for the kids, so they know and they come to realize how much I care for those kids It's just like ah ... I treat them the way I want my grandchildren to be treated. That's how I look at it. I don't want my children to be treated with disrespect in any school. I'd be livid if I found out they were treated with disrespect. Darian is currently the principal at a reserve that is not her home community where she has been for three years. She talks about her work;

So I went to work for Wind River and I have been there since August of 1999. I finished my year, my second with \_\_\_\_\_ on July 31<sup>st</sup> of that year and I immediately went to work for Wind River. It was challenging but at the same time it was a new thing, and I just loved it, actually I love my work here at Wind River. I have the same resource teacher that I have worked with for thirty years. She and I are friends. I have known her for a long time. She came to help me here; I got a team to help with this little organization to get our new school running. We had a building with two or three classrooms and not much else. We started there and we built it up and in the fall of

2003 in September we are opening the doors to a brand new school and now we

have all kinds of things going on. There are lots of things, lots of good things

happening in that reserve. I am proud of that! I am proud to have been a part of that.

All of the participants are quite comfortable in their work as principals as all of them are experienced and on the whole feel competent and confident in their ability to do their work. As principals, they are enthusiastic about their work. At the time of the first interview, Laura had worked in her position as principal for four years and was enjoying the work. Her work outside the province had given her some experience in administration and she felt confident that she could do the job of principal. At the end of the study, Laura had moved to work in a provincial division and indicated that she was disappointed in the division that she was working for and wanted to move back to working in a band-controlled school, which she eventually did. Myra returned to work as principal in her home community after a few years. She talks about a period of healing and forgiving her community after she had been asked to leave and then a few years later asked to return she indicates that she loves what she is doing and is appreciative of where she is in her life. She was concerned about the turnover of principals was affecting the progress of the school in her community and wanted to come and “clean up” the situation that an inexperienced principal had made in the school. Arlen is working away from her family which is giving her the opportunity to focus on her work. Sheryl has been in her position for fourteen years and is concentrating on meeting the needs of her students. She had planned to stay in her position for a short while but is still there after fourteen years. Darian was focussed on planning for a new school. She indicates that she loves working for the people in the community and enjoys the exciting work of planning for

a new school. In their work as principals the participants are clearly focussed on their work and have a tremendous commitment to their work. The data from the interviews offer these revelations concerning their perceptions as Aboriginal women who are working in band-controlled schools as principals.

### **Advice and Looking Back**

Laura left the position of principal towards the end of my study. She took a term position as vice-principal in a provincial division and indicated in her interview that if she ever left administration she would return to Special Ed because “it is her first love”. When I contacted her after her move she spoke of the difference in working in a band-controlled school and a provincial school division:

One of things that I found surprising is that I think the band controlled schools are further ahead than the schools in this division. I was really, really surprised by the academic levels of the majority of kids in this school. This division has so many consultants, all these resources thousands and thousands of dollars in their budget and I think that on the reserve we had our kids academically further ahead. If you wanted a new program, if you wanted to try something new you could do it. You went wild with those kids with the new program, if you got them really turned on to it. In technology our kids in the band-controlled school were miles ahead. Even in our school on the reserve, we didn't have a library within there own classes but the love of reading was there. So I was actually kind of disappointed in this division. I would like to go back to a band-controlled school. I was always working in band-controlled schools for the past fourteen years and I heard a lot about this school division when

my sister in law was on the board. I had a lot higher expectations of the school division as opposed to band operated schools. So that was one of the things and I became a vice-principal because I thought I could sit down for a while and take a little bit of a break, maybe get some new ideas, get refreshed, have a little rest. I am finding the work load is much more and, oh harder!! Paperwork seems to be never ending. I thought I was going to get away from it all.

Her advice is to look at the way decision making should be done in the schools. She comments:

I always think that with decision making, we should share the decision making. For me, it is not just my thing. Not "this is going to be the way it is and that's it".

Whatever it is, it is not just my decision. I share the decision making. I'd like to get the input of the staff as well. I think they feel that their input is valued and it works a lot better that way.

Myra enjoys her position as principal and talks about the way that she does her job and the role that she has in her community:

I put my heart and soul into it, that's the way I do my job. I put my heart and soul into it, if I am not happy doing what I am doing then what am I doing here? I have to love what I am doing. I guess we are supposed to have our own roles in this life in our community and then you are a threat when you jump out of the role you are supposed to be in. That is what we are doing; we are jumping out of the role we are supposed to be in. When we go beyond that you hear, "Hey! Get back to the role where you are supposed to be". No I am not! All of my kids are working or going to school so at least I am presenting that to my kids because my parents did that for me. So at least

in my family, I am doing that. My husband does not do that but that is where he chooses to be, that is what it is all! It is all about choices, where we choose to be, where we go with all our lives. Things happen for a reason; this is the path that the Creator has chosen for us. I really strongly believe that now that I am getting on in years. I didn't know if I would ever get to this place but it is better than where I was and where I started off. I can help my kids, because my parents always did that for me my parents were always there and as the mother of my kids I am there for them. Those are my kids I love them, my grand kids I will do that for them, as long as I can and as long as I am able, I will do that for them.

Myra concludes her experience of working in her home community:

Yes I am healed now and I can come back and do a job. I still have it .... That I can still put my heart into it but I can also live somewhere else. I proved that . . . I am 52 now and I am a grandma and I am okay. I can leave again and I can be okay. I would like to prepare someone from the community because I have a lot of knowledge (laughter). Ahh I am somebody!

Myra's future aspirations are:

My future goals are probably ... I would like to continue as a principal and possibly go back to university and take more courses. I am trying to work on my Masters. I still need some credit hours. I don't want to do a thesis though. It must be a lot of work. Tell me some more about it.

Myra expressed the importance of having "some living behind you" if you are going to be a good administrator. She also speaks about the importance of training successors.

I have built up all this other stuff, like my knowledge, my knowledge in the finance area that has really helped me. The previous principal didn't have any of that. So I have learned to deal with different things in different ways. How I view things is different and being grounded in my traditional ways. I am into my own culture. You learn to be respectful to people and you don't intentionally hurt anybody. You have to look at the good of the community and the good of the kids. They are the ones that are going to look after us when we are old. We want them to be nice. I sit on the Credit Union Board and it gives me a whole different picture, it is a financial picture but it also helps me in what I am doing because I learn how they are doing things out there. We do annual retreats and planning. We plan how we are going to do things. We don't just say we are going to do this, we sit down and plan. We also do succession planning. The general manager is not always going to be there, what if he has a heart attack tomorrow, who in the organization can fit that role? So we do some planning and build that in to your plans, including training. Say for example, I don't plan to be there for the rest of my life. I can be there for the rest of my life but I don't want to be. I have to build that in, I have to think who on my staff can actively replace me, and I also have to give them some of that power and they don't go crazy with it. That it doesn't go to their head that even if I am around, they say I am still the boss. You have to be able to work with that person. You know what? We should be doing succession planning, with some really good people. We are not always going to be here.

Arlen is working in an isolated community and is living by herself because her husband is working in the south and her children are grown so she feels that she has the time to concentrate on her job as a principal. When asked about what advice she would give new or aspiring administrators, her response was:

What advice would I give them? I would tell them to believe in themselves, to do the best they can, to be the best leader and work with the staff. Give the staff your support; give support to the staff because without support for the staff from the principal, they would not get anywhere. I would advise women to take administrative training to prepare themselves as well as self-exploration workshops and other courses. They should talk to other women principals and ask them their experiences, talk to other women principals and ask them how they got to be where they are at now. Take some training if that is the route they want to take. Even do volunteer work and work with a principal to see how things are done. Work with the principal and see what good days are like and the bad days. Find out what the principal's job is all about.

Arlen seemed to be content in that situation and feels that she has the time for herself that she may not have had before.

But right now I am focusing on my career and doing the best job that I can as a principal.

At the time that I first approached Sheryl about participating in this study, she had been asked to take on the director of education position as soon as a suitable principal could be hired for the school. She was also enrolled in a doctorate program which she was

completing part time. At the time of the interview, Sheryl was working part time on her PhD and was expecting to complete it within the year. Sheryl was very confident in her interviews and out of all the participants was the one who had a planned career path and worked to achieve the goals that she had set.

Darian is nearing retirement. She is satisfied with the work she has done at Wind River and feels that she has accomplished much in her career.

I have been in education doing all these other things and all these things have helped me greatly now that I am in retirement year. Yeah, I keep saying that every year but I feel like I can wear almost any hat in education and still be able to do a good job and do it successfully. So all these little things, although I didn't really set anything up that way but I did have one underlying problem . . . my own way of thinking. I had my own feelings from residential school I always felt that one of the supervisors really affected me. She always told us that we were Indians, we were trash, and I didn't even know what trash meant. I grew up but within me I always felt I had to show everyone, I had to do something to show, not to myself but to the outside world that Native people could get educated and be educated. We had been disadvantaged so badly that how could we be like everybody in the outside world. So that too was always in the back of my mind so I had to prove that as Aboriginal Indian people we could do these things too. We could and that pushed me on. I didn't really purposely say that I am going to just go to school every year for every year for five years. No, most of those degrees happened, I did them in my spare time, evening classes, summer classes. All of a sudden I was there, I took a year off, and I needed a year to



get the Master's, when you do a Masters you need to do a lot of research. I did that and I was able to receive my Master of Education in the spring of 1997. I said, "Well I did it late in life but I mean that we are under something they talk about life long learning. That's very true so it doesn't matter what age you are, you can go to school and still do something with your life and show it. It doesn't have anything to do with age. My only regret is I could have done these earlier but of course the system was set up against our people really doing these things years ago. I only regret that I didn't have opportunity when I was very young, when I was 16, 17, 18 thereabouts to do a lot of the things I did later on. But it's still doesn't matter, I think I have done enough. As far as education goes and I've used everything I have learned to work wherever I can. I guess the negative things that I have had to face in my life was first of all going into these teacher training programs not really feeling that great about it. I always felt can I do this . . . maybe I am dumb, maybe we are just trash, maybe we will never get anywhere but I just set out to prove that this is just one person who is going to do it and I did.

Darian was very introspective during her interview. She has been thinking of retirement for a few years already but is quite sure that this year will be her last year. She feels that she has done much for education and accomplished the goals that she had set for herself. The participants were asked about what advice they would give to new principals. Laura's advice is to share the decision making in schools. She indicates that things work better when there is input from staff when it comes to making decisions. Arlen advises women who aspire to administration to believe in themselves and take administration training and to seek mentors

and role models. Myra stresses the important to training successors and for the communities to be prepared for the administration vacancies that will come up in their schools. Darian speaks about the importance of making connections through networking and advises new or aspiring administrators to seek help which is always available.

It was very clear in this section of the interviews that the five participants had high expectations for themselves in their work as principals. Myra speaks about putting her “heart and soul” into her work and this can describe all the participants in the approach that they have to their work. Each of the participants, in their own way, exhibit a passion and love for their work and are committed to doing the best possible job. Though they face many challenges, the women exhibit determination and self-efficacy in their career path.

### **Challenges**

The five participants agreed that the demands of marriage and families, lack of role models and supports, isolation, societal attitudes, lack of acceptance and discrimination as some of the challenges that they faced. There were similarities in their experiences and some significant differences, in particular one participant seemed to have a less challenging experience than the others. The challenges identified by the participants indicate areas where work can be done to eliminate impediments that prevent women from acquiring administrative positions. There were career barriers prior to entry into administration as well as challenges in their work in educational administration. The challenges that the women faced are organized according to the main themes that emerged out of the data. These are: earlier challenges prior to post secondary education, challenges faced while training as

teachers, challenges faced at initial appointment as principal and during administrative practice, family and role conflict and societal attitudes.

### **Earlier Challenges Prior to Post-Secondary Education**

Laura had to leave home to go to school and she found it difficult to leave her parents to go to school in town. She was not able to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse as the opportunity was not there. She worked at a variety of different jobs in order to support her family. The opportunity to become a teacher came up and she saw this as way to get into a career that would provide some economic stability.

Myra was on welfare (Social Assistance) and she says that she did not want to go through life being on welfare. She wanted a better life for her children and she wanted to be able to support her family and buy them the things that they needed. She has a mentally handicapped son and this was one of her motivations to go into teaching.

Arlen felt that she had little opportunity in her impoverished community which had high unemployment and she did not have much self-confidence in her ability.

Sheryl did not mention any challenges that she faced in her early life. Although she did indicate that she went to residential school throughout her school life but she did not talk about this experience.

Darian mentioned that she thought that many of the problems that Aboriginal people face is from the residential school experience

Some of the problems we have stem from residential school. Young children, children should be with their parents. Young children need to be nurtured emotionally and mentally. Now when they are taken by force which I consider as legalized

kidnapping, what the churches and the federal government did. They took the children. Reservations were devoid of children. A community should have children, who are they going to look after if there aren't children there? Those parents were just sitting there. They could not parent because their children were taken away; the children in turn were not nurtured. At the end of the day, there may be days when a child doesn't feel good because there is no mommy there to put her arms around her. There is a no daddy there to hold her on his lap. We didn't have that. We didn't have those things which are so necessary and are part of growth and development, to make a person whole and have confidence. You need to feel good about yourself, someone there telling you all along. You know in spite of everything as a child your parents always should love you, at the end of the day your mother should be putting you to bed. We didn't have that. It was such an artificial setting. No wonder we all grew up with so little confidence in ourselves, in anything and it is very quickly shot down. Now you go out there and when the trials and tribulations come it easy to say I give up. The experience has been that you just haven't had all that; emotional nurturing, the psychological nurturing that should be there but wasn't there. That's why you're weak. You are not just strong to be able to say hey I can. Inwardly I felt that I could do anything.

The participants indicate that there were some challenges that they faced in seeking to get some training and to provide a better life for themselves and their families. The residential schools, poverty and lack of opportunity were barriers that were there initially and may have prevented the women from moving ahead.

### **Challenges Faced while Training as Teachers**

Laura had a difficult time when she went back to university because she had been out of school for seventeen years and her family was young.

It was really difficult because at the time I had a young family. My youngest daughter was only three/four years old so I had to leave them behind at home for a week or two at a time and I had to come home and be a weekend mom. That was the biggest struggle. But it was really hard when we had the three kids at home to balance work and spend some time with them. It was a very demanding job.

Myra had young children when she went back to school and at one point she is put down by one of the band councillors who calls her degrees “just pieces of paper”. Myra is indignant about the remark and informs him that she suffered for those pieces of paper. She had a very difficult time going to school with her children being so young and her husband not being supportive. Arlen had very low self-confidence and was fearful about going to university.

Oh, my confidence level was very low, it wasn't much ... it wasn't very high ... I still wasn't sure if I could do it because going to university you know to have to deal with the high standards and expectations a lot of expectations and responsibilities and coming from a reserve and not having proper training and not being involved in something like that that I thought it would be too much for me?

Darian was glad for the opportunity to go into a teacher training program although her initial application for university did not work out. Although she was apprehensive about going to university, her determination saw her through:

I was determined, at that point I was so determined that I would get something because an opportunity like that doesn't come all the time so I was really going to do something with it so I did. I went through the first summer just trying to do it, it was kind of scary. I took introductory psych I didn't know anything about it. You had to take the labs and I had never finished high school so it was a difficult course but nevertheless I just went all out.

The participants found challenges in going to university for their training as teachers. Laura had young children and had to leave them for lengths of time to complete her training. Arlen, Myra and Darian all experienced some challenges in completing their training. However, their motivation and determination allowed them to successfully complete their education degrees. Darian and Sheryl attended residential school. Darian spoke at length about her own experience and about residential schools in general and how the experience of residential schools resulted in lack of nurturing for children in their younger years and how this has affected the confidence level of Aboriginal women. She does indicate that discrimination against women is lessening and women are starting to be seen as people "who can run a ship." Myra as well indicates that at time she has to struggle against the attitude that women should be, in her words, "at home, barefoot and pregnant". She points out that some men that she works with in her community are threatened because they feel that that she is treading in their "territory". The participants indicate that through their struggles and even though their confidence level was low, they persevered to complete their education and survive and thrive in the roles that they have.

## **Challenges Faced at Initial Appointment as Principal and in Administrative Practice**

Laura was given position of being both a director and a principal and she found this difficult. She worked in the director/principal position for two years before becoming a principal. Laura has had a fairly good experience working in band controlled schools outside as well as inside the province but mentions some political interference:

But the last chief and council that were here, there was a lot of political interference, just in some kind of petty things. That was really uncalled for and not necessary. At that time there was a younger Chief and Council that might have something to do with it, I don't know.

Laura mentions that the staff was the most challenging to work with probably because many of them had been there at the school longer than she was before she became a principal:

The most challenging as the principal was working with staff. Trying to make sure that they were happy, making sure that they had a lot of resources and things that they would need. I think in the first years, when I think back to when I came here, we sat down together as a staff and made some goals and objectives of things that they felt ... because some of them were there for years ... needed to happen. That was one of the first of the big challenges and the other challenge was just working through with some of the pettiness that you do with staff. I mean when you work with students who have conflicts with each other that's one thing but when you are working with staff who are supposed to be professional. . Oh. . That just used to upset me.

Her coping mechanism is to sometimes just to retreat to the classroom. She says:

There are some days when I am having a really bad day there are some classrooms I just go in and sit and hide out.

Arlen was very uncertain about becoming a principal. She spoke about the difficulties that she encountered when she first became a principal.

I had a difficult time with the staff and their resistance to changes. I remember at the beginning . . . I was actually scared at first. I wasn't able to communicate well with the staff. I wasn't able to put things across to them, my communication skills were weak and I wasn't able to communicate well. I was unsure of myself and wasn't sure if I would be a good principal, if I would be able to be a good principal, not knowing that. It was a kind of like a fear.

Myra had the support of the council but had a difficult time with the parents

When I first came on? I knew I had the support of the council that was in anyway . . . but the parents were so rough on me, they were just . . . . It took me a couple of years for me . . . I see it now, looking back, it took a couple of years because they didn't think I could do the job. There was just something, that first year was so hard, just trying to adjust to everything by the second year it was finally changing, my first year coming back year its going to take me a couple of years, my first year I am just getting back into it by next year the behavior will be a little bit better. Students have changed too in seven years (laughter) in seven years; they have many more issues.

Myra talks about the difficulty that she had in trying to "clean up" after a few principals had passed through the school and the difficulty of returning after she had been let go from the band previously:



It's a tough job I don't think I can do it alone. There were so many students barred from here. At that time and the way it happened you know, it just hurt me so much it just hurt me right to my core you know, right to my heart I guess it was like an attack on me personally, spiritually and everything. I just really had a hard time with it.

Sheryl talks about the changing times and how things are different now from when she first started:

Times change ... I am really noticing the change. I find that the parents, the parents that are sending their kids to school, young parents that are sending their kids to school there is more neglect more irresponsible parents and I find that that what goes on in the home filters into the school. Four or five years, I can safely say that they (the parents and the community) valued good behaviour, they valued success, being successful in school, and they were concerned. Nowadays, I find that the parents of today, there is much more drug and alcohol abuse and (the values are not being taught as much) and it shows through the kids. The kids are not receiving the kind of care that they should be receiving from the home. Times are changing it's affecting the schools, very much so.

Darian talks about the critics who are always there:

There were so many critics. When I went in as a principal, I vowed to myself that I would do the best job I could do as a principal which I done also as resource teacher. I had people on the school board who did not like to see any changes. You know our people are new to all these different things; they don't like to hear the truth. I believe that if we are going to bring about good change in our communities we can't be

afraid. A leader can not be afraid. A leader has to have backbone to say, to stand up for what they believe to be right. That is the kind of leader I am, I am not going to beat around the bush. I am not going to be nasty about it but I will say this is how it is. I have never been afraid to do that even though I stand alone.

### **Societal Attitudes and Discrimination**

Myra faces negative attitudes from people in her community because she does not fit into their stereotype of what a woman should do:

I guess being a Native person and being a woman! Women aren't supposed to be in power here you know you are supposed to be at home with your kids, being a wife and being a mother. They just don't see a woman being in power out here. Especially with this one councilor, I don't know if he even has his grade twelve. He has the mentality that women should be "barefoot and pregnant" and at home. He says, "They should not try to come on our territory. You bring the white man's education here you bring the white man's way of thinking into our community. You should have that out of here this is First Nations education here". I say, "Well they still have to learn that. That is what he says, what a negative person, I wouldn't want to be his wife!

Myra mentions a band councilor who has a sexist attitude who makes comments reflecting his attitude:

We still have one; there is one particular member on council made the comment about my wage. We did the budget about how I am supposed to be getting paid and he said, "Wow, you make more than the chief here". So I said, "Yeah but I have the papers to

back me up and my credentials”. “Pieces of paper”, he said, “Those are just pieces of paper that you come and throw in our face”. I suffered long for those pieces of paper.

Myra mentions the chief who values her work and how she faces both an accepting attitude and the sexist attitude of a band council member:

So you have sides on council, one valuing what I do and one demoralizing me actually. He is always putting down women and saying those are just pieces of paper, you guys went and got. Yeah right they give them out like this (motions with her hands.) I don't think so yeah you slave away for those things. These old school people. I get that mentality once in a while, especially about First Nations women. When you go to a white society, I have worked in the white society, but worked with them. A white male to value us as First Nations women and what we could bring to a program is totally different. It's a totally different kind and level of support than what we would get from our own guys. Honestly! And the way they treat you, they give you better support. They make you feel that you are a very wonderful person. I get treated this way, with respect and dignity. In really simple things, like can I move this chair for you, our guys would never do that.

Myra talks about trying to change the attitudes of the people in her own community to be more supportive:

You would think that the support would come from your own community; they should be encouraging you instead of tearing you down. So I am trying to change the way I deal with people, trying to present that to people that you are okay, or what a

good way of doing that or good way to go, always trying to do that the way I deal with people. So in the hopes that some of it will rub off. If you came to the school, compared to the way it used to be when they were yelling and screaming down the hall at each other. Mind you there is still some, everybody likes to talk about each other. I crack the whip once in a while. That's life.

Arlen relates her experiences of discrimination and the negative attitudes that she faced working in her home community.

The barriers that I faced are being a woman working in a male dominant community and also being educated. I also face jealousy from the community and felt rejected because I was educated and had different ideas of life. I think also... they treated me differently because I had many ideas and I wanted to ... I wanted to ... change my community for better, and the men in the community that were leaders didn't like that because they didn't want a women telling them ... a women giving them ideas about the way things should be done. I heard some comments like women should not be you know? ... Should not be working and they should be staying home and having babies and doing the cooking and all that. I think they felt that way because they sure didn't want to hear what I had to say. I think also that there was jealousy because I was educated because I knew more than they did. Like I was ... higher in learning than they were and I went to school and they were not educated. They didn't want me to do things better than they do.

Arlen also felt that she was not accepted in her home community. She faced negative attitudes from both the male leadership and women in her community.

My experience is that I am not accepted in my own community not only by the men leaders but also by the women in my community. They did not accept me either. People needed to be educated at the leadership level. They don't understand. They always say that we need our own people to come back and work in our community but that is not true. They don't hold up to their promise. They always say that we need our own people. They don't listen to our own people; they prefer to listen outside people. People here need to be more educated here too, to follow policy and to have better communication. You know the local teachers; they are at the learning stage. But it is better than at my home. I talk to people about the support for the school and support for the teachers and that their support would make the school better. To try to change one person at a time, at home (her home reserve). I always felt that there was not enough support there for me. I was never invited anywhere except for school events. Sometimes I felt isolated. You know how there are sometimes events happening in the community to be a judge of some event or something, or to be a speaker or to be part of an activity that is going on in the community you know ... I was never invited to do that. I am wondering why that is. It probably had to do with my position and probably had something to do with not being accepted. That was another challenge. Teachers could be friends with each other but sometimes that don't include the principal in their friendship circles. That is my experience; you know it is like ... it is lonely being at the top. It's another challenge.

Darian talks about the attitude toward women and how things are changing for the better:

I think that is why we as Aboriginal women that we have been feeling that we are less than or what ever But I think that is changing now because there are a lot of chiefs that are women. Women making a difference....where it counts, in leadership roles. Its changing and I feel that I broke trail in many of those areas because in my home community because I was one of the first ones to get that little Bachelor of Teaching degree. Discrimination against women is lessening a bit because we have had some advances. Women are starting to be seen as people that can run a ship too in whatever area it might be. I think when I look back at Link Lake there are a lot of women who are in different areas before they had to endure much of what I did. Women are very strong in the Dakota community so that is what I have to say. Men were traditionally always the ones in education and you know when you are a woman, it is hard, because they think that women can't make good decisions. Who knows what motivates their criticism or whatever and you know, human nature being what it is there is that whole thing about being jealous. When you have something, education is something I guess to be jealous of, and rightfully so. It is something that doesn't come by easy. You work hard to get it and when you do get it, maybe people are not going to be all that happy because they wish they had it too. So those are the challenges that I faced.

Darian talks about the lack of acceptance from her own people:

Sometime we are not accepted by our own people. I said it lots of times!!! A missionary always goes out into the outside world. You never see a missionary in his own area. I believe that. I think this is so. You see, where I am at now is not my home

community. Wind River is a Dakota community but it is not there it is over there.

It is not my home community and I have done lots of work there. I love working for those people. And those people don't bother me. They don't say anything bad to me.

In their work as principals, the participants face the challenges of a heavy work load, difficulty working with staff and parents, facing criticism and sexism and not being accepted as leaders. Myra indicates that she faces negative attitudes because people perceive her as not being in the role that she is supposed to be in. Laura indicated that people were more likely to approach her male colleague who also worked as a principal/coordinator, as the administrator when they came into the school. Arlen indicates that she faced discrimination, jealousy and sexism from the people in her own community and she ended up leaving. She indicates that often people talk about having our own people get educated and to come home and work in their home community but when they do they are not treated with respect. Myra also spoke about the people in her own community "tearing her down" and not being supportive but indicates that she working to change that attitude. Myra makes the point that she is more respected in "white society" and she is valued by the people that she has worked with who are not on the reserve. She indicates that the support that she receives from others than her own people is totally different and that kind of support does not exist from "our own guys". She feels that she is treated with respect and dignity in the non-First Nations community. Darian also mentions lack of acceptance from her own people and the support that she has received is not from her own community. She indicates that it is really an unfortunate reality that she has to work outside her own community in order to be treated

with respect. She sums it up to say that it is still a “fight” to be accepted and respected but feels that there is progress as more women get into leadership positions.

### **Family and Role Conflict**

Laura’s husband was threatened when she decided to go to university to get a degree.

It took us awhile to get to that because we did go through one of the hardest time in our marriage, going to university. In his mind, the male ego got in the way for awhile and we had to overcome that and that was tough so when I got to the last year and I had to go away that was hard as well but it all paid off in the end.

She talks about the difficulties that she had when she the children were younger:

But it was really hard when we had the three kids at home to balance work and spend some time with them. It was a very demanding job. I was talking to my girls about it last time it last time we were together. One of them jokingly said, “You were never home a lot of the time.” That kind of hurt, even though she was kind of joking about it and I knew she was right and I wasn’t there a lot of the time. I was at work.

Laura and her husband are at home alone now as all the children are grown up but she has to make an effort to spend more time at home. She says:

I’m rarely at home in the evening because I don’t get a lot of stuff off my desk during the day I go back in the evening and I usually get carried away and I usually don’t get home until about ten o’clock. Although I have really been trying to make an effort this year to say okay stay at the school until five or six and come home for the evening. But I find that I am staying there until five or six but there is still people needing time to talk. People needing help with this and not getting my work done yet.



Myra thinks that she still works too hard, although she only has her mentally handicapped son and her husband at home, she thinks about trying to balance her work and home life. She comments:

Yeah you got to balance your personal and professional life. I just think I work too hard sometimes. I shouldn't be working weekends but then I take off some time at the end of the month and the thing is not to feel guilty. Not to feel guilty and say it is time for me to have a good trip away. I am going to Alberta for this spring break because if I am here I am going to be at the school. At Christmas I stayed away for a week and then I was back in. I am also a traditional person, I carry a pipe and carry a drum and that has kept me whole inside to help me handle this. And I also have a mentally handicapped son and having him around for these past twenty-two years has helped me, has helped me to be grounded . . . strong and if it wasn't for him, I would not be here. .. I mean I have to buy him things you know the money aspect.

Myra talks about her husband who she is still with after 35 years and some difficulty in the marriage:

Maybe he felt that because I was getting more educated and maybe he felt that he and I would no longer be a couple. Maybe he felt that it would be a threat and after a while he realized that he couldn't beat it out of me. We've been together 35 years, we have evolved to that. If he wants me he has to let me do what I want. We are very independent.

Myra feels that the difficulty that she has had in her marriage and that her marriage has survived all the years that it has, has given her some strength, which helps in her position that she has:

He (her husband) is in my life for a reason, to give me strength to face what I am encountering sometimes these days. It gives me strength and it doesn't bother me what people say, things just roll off my back. Of course some days you are feeling like everything affects you. I have a good sense of humor. I just laugh off stuff. Its lots of fun, every day is just lots of fun!

Arlen is also home alone as both of her children are grown

I have two grown children. Well right now my kids are grown up. Right now in terms of balancing, my husband is not here with me. I am here by myself. The kids are on their own. It is much easier. When my kids were younger, I was actually doing two jobs Working at school the full day and going home after school and doing more work. It was very difficult, frustrating, very difficult life.

In summary, the participants faced many challenges in their lives and throughout their careers. Two participants (Laura and Myra) indicate that marital tensions occurred at some point due to their careers. Laura had to leave home at a young age to go to school and then felt that she had to work away from her community once she was trained as a teacher. Myra struggled on social assistance before going to university with a young family and faces sexist attitudes and lack of acceptance in her home community. Arlen came from a community where there was high unemployment and lack of opportunity only to face lack of acceptance from the same community after she went to work there to try to make things better. Sheryl

went to residential school, faces irresponsible parents but finds acceptance and support from her community in her pursuit to make things better for the students in her school. Darian also attended residential school and faces critics, jealousy and lack of acceptance from her own people.

### **Role Models and Mentors and Supports**

This section tells about who the people were who inspired the participants, gave guidance and encouragement to them to go into their positions of leadership. The information from the data is organized around the main themes that emerged from this research questions. These are: support and encouragement received in their early life experiences and through family influences, mentor and role models during training and initial teaching positions, supports and encouragement to enter into administration and during administrative practice.

#### **Support and Encouragement (Early Life Experiences)**

Laura's parents and grandparents had a high respect for education and encouraged her to do well in school. When I asked her if her parents valued education, her response was:

Yes my grandparents, more so... they were the one who were really the push behind me from day one. They said education is important, get as much education as you can because that is the future; education is your future was what they said.

Myra mentions her father as being a positive influence on her "to be always working and always be doing something". Her father modeled a good work ethic which inspired to get to work and do the best job that she could do. I observed a very strong sense of family in Myra's interviews. She spoke of family several times and quite often there were references

to the close relationships that she has with her family. Myra was influenced by her father and he was a role model for her because he was a self-taught man and successful.

You know I'm the oldest of 12 kids so I am really a very bossy person (Laughter)

They used to look up to me because my dad used to work for CN and he was away most of the time. My mom never got past getting her education. My dad went from being a laborer to being a road master. And he only had a grade five and I might have picked up some of his brains or something! So he was a role model for me like he wasn't there most of the time but worked for us all the time. We had money I picked up from there to be always working, to always be doing something, like most of my family is now.

Arlen mentions that her husband was her source of support throughout her years in university and after and that he showed his support by encouraging her and believing in her, that she could succeed.

Sheryl mentions her father several times and it is clear the he was the motivating force who encouraged education and instilled in her ambition and to do the best in every effort. She comments that there was not much fanfare when she graduated because it was expected. I asked her about the encouragement and the pressure that she received to excel and to continue with her education "right to the top".

They knew that I found it easy. I found it challenging and I keep at it until I get it right. I won't give up, I don't give up. I don't walk away from any thing I start. And they knew that, they knew that if I didn't succeed I would try again and I would keep trying until I did succeed. That's perseverance and determination. My father expected

that of me. He raised me to believe that you are the smartest girl on this reserve; you are going to go to the end. That has always influenced me to keep on going.

When I graduated, he said, "It's about time". It was expected, there was no fanfare, there was no big celebration, they said, "Well, it's about time".

Darian mentions several mentors who influenced her in her career and the choices that she made throughout her career. Darian began her career at a time when role models that she could relate to were virtually non-existent. She refers to herself as a pioneer and a trail blazer because at the time that she went into teaching, there were no Aboriginal women that she knew who were in administration and very few who had degrees in education. However, she mentions several people who provided encouragement, support and guidance before she became a principal as well as during her practice. She begins with when she first went out to work as a very young girl at the age of seventeen. She went to help to a farm to help prepare food during the harvest and it was the woman that she worked for who told her that she was intelligent and should continue with her schooling. The farm where she worked was a non-Aboriginal family and woman encouraged her to go to school. This was significant to her because she was able to talk about it so clearly although it had occurred many years before. When the farm woman suggested to her that she go to school, her response was:

She said that and I thought, "Where will I begin and what school will I go to? I have already been to school at home. Is there something beyond this?" But she told me, "You should go into something else because you are a very clever girl", she said. She just made that assumption based on my ability to converse with people and maybe it looked like was portraying that I had a lot of confidence, I really didn't. But I was

comfortable with them and I could talk to them and I could always speak my mind . . . in English. This lady said, "Why don't you go to school, Darian? Because you know what? You are not no normal Indian". Imagine her telling me that! That kind of hurt me. She said, "I can tell that you can really get somewhere, you should go to school". Well, I believed her but I didn't really know what she meant by school so I just kind of left it. She told me that and every one of those white people that I worked for, told me, "You've got something you can make it . . . you can be more than just a cleaner or a cook". I never really did anything about it until '71.

The participants were able to make the choices that they made because of the support, encouragement and guidance from several people. Their career "planning" began for them at an early age, only because they received the necessary support and encouragement in their early years. Myra consulted with her family when she was faced with the decision to accept a position as principal. They had supported her throughout her life and it was no surprise when they told her to "go for it". The participants were inclined to go into a helping profession such as teaching and school administration because they wanted to help their communities. They had the necessary support and influence that enabled them to have the self-confidence to accept the position of principal.

### **Supports and Encouragement during Training and Initial Teaching Positions**

Laura went through the BUNTEP program and went to her first job with her sister who was a good support for her:

My sister and I graduated together. We went through the BUNTEP program together.

We kind of actually pulled each other through. She was a few years younger than me and

I had been out of high school for a number of years and she had not been out of high school for too long so some of the things were still fresh in her mind and she helped me when I needed it. But the first few months there was a lot of just sort of bringing you up to speed as where you should be at in your writing and your reading skills.

Laura was uncertain about her career choice of education in her first year of student teaching. She worked at a variety of jobs and positions by the time the opportunity came up to go into a teacher training program. Her first student teaching experience provided her with a role model who inspired her and influenced her to commit to teaching as a career. In her words, she “lucked out” in her student teaching when she was placed with “an awesome teacher” who made her want to think seriously about teaching as a career:

It seemed like she could do so many things at one time (her cooperating teacher). She could have a learning center going on in one corner, she could be teaching another group a specific concept that they needed to learn that the others already knew. Like she could have three or four things going on at one time, like her classroom management was good. Like they just knew ... I was just in awe of watching her and how she did it and how the kids just loved her and I thought ... Wow!

Myra had a long time friend who was her mentor and role model:

Well this person that came and got me into this position, she was away from the reserve for about 20 years and she encouraged me to stay and I said well I don't know, I have such a hard time and she says Oh don't worry I will be here. She's been so good and it is good to have that support and the support and she's been the buffer with the rest of the council not like before it's good to have that. I didn't have that

before. I had the board after me; I had the council after me. It happened before that it wasn't even part of my job; it was just a stupid little thing between me and another staff person. And blew it all up and it became a political issue and that's why I left and I said no I don't want to go back there The person that got me out is now the chief (laughter)

Family support helped her to choose to become a principal and was an on going source of support throughout the ups and downs of her career. When Myra was first asked to take the principal's position, she spoke to her family about it.

"Well think about it", they said. I know I talked to my mom and dad. They were still alive at the time. I talked to my family, my brothers and sisters and some of my relatives and asked them, "What do you think? Should I take it?" They said, "Oh yeah". So I did.

Family support also helped Myra to maintain a focus on her career and her sister provided advice by offering a different perspective on problems that she faced. She mentions one of her sisters who played an important role in supporting her throughout the years.

I am really close to one of my sisters; she really helped me to focus in that way in terms of career in terms of my work. We would always talk about career and work, not really about personal things. Except she always told me to leave him (my husband) and I never did. She was one of the ones who supported me. I run things by her. She is really a more grounded person in one way. I tend to want to do things ... go off the deep end and do things in a rash way. She calms me down she gives me a different perspective. She's got a lot of years of experience in administration... a



different perspective on how to handle it and I say, "Oh yeah, that's right and she tells me, "Don't go crazy over there!"

Arlen had a difficult time going to university and completed her degree. Her husband and girlfriend supported her through her university studies:

They supported me by encouraging me that I could do it and by helping me with my homework, finding resources for me and things like that; encouragement and unconditional support.

Sheryl indicates that she relies on her husband when she needs support:

Emotionally, if I've had a really rough day or if I've had a really bad experience, I just talk to my husband. He sets me straight, he's very blunt. He sets me straight and lots of times that's all I need. You know when you get knocked flat on your butt by somebody or by some event, you get up and you go again. So he's good at doing that. When I get knocked flat on my butt, when I'm feeling totally rejected or dejected. He says you get up and you go again, you don't have time to be wallowing in self-pity

Darian mentions that she did not get much encouragement from her own people.

And so all these people that encouraged me and said you can do something, were all white people. They were all white people that told me. So I have to tell it that way it is. They were all white people that encouraged me. . . And told me that I could do it! That I had it! That I could make it! And this one man that was on the school board who had been in the military . . . He told me, "Darian, you have the ability to really get somewhere in education. You know what? You can be the principal of the school at \_\_\_\_\_ here somewhere down the road". What he told me became reality. So

if you want to say who encouraged me and who really believed in me, it was all these people that I worked for and him. I remembered him for that.

### **Supports and Encouragement during Administrative Practice**

In her first year as principal, Laura also mentions her director of education who was a big help to her and one who provided her with encouragement and modeled for her a commitment to achieve.

Just an excellent kind of resource person, with any kind of problem to solve. Or if there were different kind of programs that we needed advice on, he was just always willing to help. He was encouraging. There were a lot of times when I just questioned my ability and my confidence. After talking to him, I said to myself, "Oh I could do this!" He was hardworking and dedicated to the kids.

Her director was a good role model who demonstrated a positive attitude and gave her good advice.

He was one of the most positive people that I ever met. He always looked at the positive in everything. You know . . . it almost seemed like he couldn't be negative. And that amazed me. He was very, very much a people person. And he always used to say, "You know you always have a lot of paperwork but when somebody comes in, a parent, a student or a staff member, make the time. The paper work will take care of itself".

Working together with other people in the principal/coordinator model helped her gain experience and skills with the support of others who were in the same positions and the same location.

It made the administration part of things a lot easier because there was a real working together. Even though, near the end we had two men and two women. There were times though that we had things to work out because sometimes . . . for some reason men have this ultimate authority. They think that they have to be the ultimate authority so there was a little bit of a power struggle.

She also comments on the support that she received from the chief and council:

The two chiefs and councils that I worked with were very supportive. They very rarely interfered with anything that was happening at the school. They were always like if they had someone call and complain about something specific, they would always come and check it out and were very nice about it and help work it through to make them happy. . For the very first year I had a lot, I had the director of education who was a really big help and mentor for me and the chief and council were really good for education. They were super! I think a lot of it was just because they believed in me.

In addition to finding support from the people around her, Laura learned on the job and asked questions so that she would be better able to handle her responsibilities:

Learning on the job, just asking a lot of questions and taking every opportunity to get into workshops and watching professional videos on different topics . . . so I appear to have a little bit more knowledge (laughter).

Myra finds confidence and strength from learning and always trying to get more training to improve her administrative skills.

So I say yeah Learn! Learn! So I just learned from scratch to take in each day as it comes. That was it! It was a challenge. The behavior of the students wasn't that good and trying to not do it alone but trying to get the parents involved and CFS and trying to work with other committees and trying to get involved in that way.

Friends were also an important source of support. She mentions a tribal administrator, as being one of her long time friends and mentors who provided guidance to her throughout her career:

I always needed to really have somebody there, someone who would just listen. And she would hold me up a little bit when I'm really down and she was always there for me. She came and got me into this position, she was away from the reserve for about 20 years and she encouraged me to stay. I said, Well, I don't know. I have such a hard time." She says, "Oh don't worry! I will be here". She's been so good and it is good to have that support. Good to have the support and she's been the buffer with the rest of the council, not like the way it was before. It's good to have that. I didn't have that before.

Myra realized early in her career that she needed support and needed to rely on others for wisdom and advice.

Some of the elders are my source of support. One of the elders is my uncle Aaron. He's kind of like my dad. I run some of my problems by him. Having those kinds of supports really help . . . like my family. Aaron helps with different things, in terms of political things I guess having him there to sound off and he gives advice. "Should I do this? Should I do that? What road should I walk? Should I walk this way or that

way?” So it is good to have that kind of help. I can’t do this alone. I don’t always have to be wallowing in my own self pity. I can go to someone, just like you, you listen. I just need to off steam, just get it off my chest because if I keep it in here then it is just too hard to take sometimes. If you have that support and you have certain people that you go to that aren’t even in education. That is the key. But sometimes you need to network too. Like Myrna, she is a friend and colleague who is married into my community. I have relied on Myrna. I run things by her and she says, “Why not try this”. I say, “Okay, that makes sense”. Sometimes it is just my own way of thinking and dealing with things and sometimes it may just not be the right way. I rely on my education people too like the Resource Center (MFNERC). They are experts there.

She also says that she depends on her staff and they are a source of support that helps to make her job easier.

I need the professional staff to be supportive too. I start off by telling them at the beginning of the year that if anything happens, we are in this together, and we are a team here. If anything happens to let me know and if I know something I will tell you. What I can tell you, of course there are some things that I can’t tell them. I bend every which way. I am flexible. That’s what it is. Delegation! You are just busy making sure of things and other people do the work. Like I got rid of my transportation to someone else. I have to do budgets and an annual report. Yet being here every day I have to this and that yet I could never sit in my office for even an hour. This is nice here, talking (laughter). But other than that there is always something coming in, you

got to deal with this and that. I guess it was because when I first came here I was shaping the atmosphere, the environment of the school. I found the students and the staff, the parents and that they were all supportive.

Myra spoke about spirituality being important and being a source of strength for her:

I think that kind of spiritual stuff really helped me. Feeling kind of sluggish at the beginning of the year like I don't even want to be here and I went to a ceremony and it really helped me. It's a tough job I don't think I can do it alone. There were so many students barred from here. Being in the sun dance and doing that. I think that is what has made me stronger. Yes I am healed now and I can come back and do a job. I still have that I can still put my heart into it. I have two of my kids in the sun dance. My boy, my oldest boy has been into it for about a year. When I was leaving that year, he started sun dancing. I didn't even know he was sun dancing! I started supporting him a bit, going where he goes. Going for four days to \_\_\_\_\_ and he had to do that for four years. We went down to the States. Ever since then, if anything happens I am there for them. My girl, my youngest one is now sun dancing. She is having lots of problems along the way, always falling down and going into drinking now and then. I think that kind of spiritual stuff really helped me.

Myra mentions her husband as playing an important role in her life, as a listener:

My husband turned from not being supportive of me, after being in the relationship all these years, you evolve in the relationship. So I tell him, "All I need is to tell you things in one ear and out the other, just to get it off my chest . . . each day".

Myra is committed to life long learning and keeps up with community involvement and to

developing skills that will help her in her position. She comments on her involvement with community organizations.

I try to sit on whichever committees that I can have the whole picture and not just education. I am on the Credit Union board of directors. That will be my seventh year for that too I had to go speak before 200 people I also took the Dale Carnegie public speaking course just to build up my self-confidence. I knew I had a hard time getting up and speaking in front of people. I went to speak in front of the 200 people and I said my piece and got voted in. I've been there ever since. I also serve as a trustee for our land entitlement. Those kinds of different roles and wearing those different hats have really helped me to get ahead. I keep busy. All my kids are all grown up.

Arlen is currently working in an isolated community in the north and talks about the mentors and supports that she counts on. She mentions networking as being important and the resource center personnel as being a source of support:

I have some colleagues... I have a mentor in \_\_\_\_\_. Whenever I need help or I call other principals I know and talk to them, if they have the same experience, how do they deal with it? Networking . . . A principal who understands quite a bit. Manitoba First Nations Education Resource center is a source of support. Whenever I need research or need to talk, because many of them are former principals, I call them and ask them how can I do this better? Where should I go for help and can you help? And they give me some ways how I can do it. It's important for principals to have a source of support and mentoring. Very important

Sheryl came across as a strong and independent woman who was very focussed on her students in her school. She is a residential school survivor and indicates that this experience helped to make her strong and committed to make the best possible educational experience for her students in her school. She does some volunteer work with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and this helps to keep her going to do what is best for the students in her school. There were several comments throughout her interview where any kind of answer she gave always went back to the students. She gets her strength and support from her students and it was clearly evident that they are the driving force in her life. She did not provide much information about mentors and other supports. When I asked her about her supports her response was:

Actually I can't really think of any right now. I go ahead and do what needs to be done I don't wait around. That's why; I really can't say I have any supports. I do what needs to be done.

Darian received her Special Education certificate and she strived to learn as much as she could about working this area and she found a mentor who helped her in this area.

I had very little training in special needs because my first experience as a teacher was with \_\_\_\_\_ school division. It was under the direction with the first teacher I had worked with as TA. Her name was Miss King. She became my good friend.

Everything I needed to know about special education, how to teach them, where you can access all these materials, how you go about evaluating them and what kind of materials to look for, she taught me everything. Right to this very day, I have all that information. She and I are still friends. Now as an administrator in the school, she



often comes and gives me support and gives in-services with my staff when we need to. She has been a good help to me over the years because that was her field that she worked in. It's been thirty some odd years since I met her. I made sure that as a resource teacher I knew who all that was in special education. I knew which people were in the know about everything that had to do with special education. One of my greatest supporters at the university level was Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. She taught all the special Ed courses at the university and I took all of those special education courses in order to have a special ed degree. So I was always keeping in touch with these people that knew that area. I always wanted to do my best as a resource teacher, to do my best as a principal. I wanted to do the best. I never let my employer know but I joined the Manitoba Association of School principals. So I made sure that I had all that . . . because the thing was it just seemed like you are always . . . you're . . . within myself, (pause) I knew that I could do all these things. I also wanted the paper there to back me that I had done everything I could as an administrator or as a specialized teacher in these areas. The same with teaching the Native Language, I wanted to do my best, so I went for more training. So if you want to say who encouraged me and who really believed in me was all these people that I worked for.

Darian made a point of getting to know other principals and getting support and advice from them and also made sure that she continued with her training and involvement with professional organizations:

I just went from there and different principals they had respect for me. I would phone them and say I have a situation here, my decision is this, and how I am going to do it?

Am I right? Or is there another way? What do you think? Tell me what you would do if you were in my shoes. I joined the Manitoba Association of School principals. So I was part of MAP, I went to all their workshops and through that I received my level one administrator's certificate from the province. Then I went to get my principal's certificate. It just didn't happen overnight. I just kept going to all the workshops that Manitoba Teacher's society put out, fall and winter, whenever because you can go and take ten hour training . . . it just adds up. Anytime I need to know something ... If I don't know there is somebody out there and I think this organization had been out there for years. It is not new. If anyone can help me it is these people. So I connect with these people, the people that are in those areas.

Darian mentions her faith and spirituality as being a source of strength for her:

But you know through it all . . . I just have to tell you that I am a person that really believes in prayer. I believe I have a very good connection with the God I serve. And daily I ask for guidance in everything I do. I believe He is there. The road on earth is not an easy one and maybe that through these things I can overcome them At the beginning of the day I can say, I will do my best, I will do my job good that you've set out for me. I will need you there. It is not going to be easy. That's where I get my source of strength. Because I am a believer there is a greater power than us that put us there for a purpose. So even when these things happen, I just pray to God that I can overcome, there must be a reason for this. That's why I know, I know that there is an Almighty up there that hears your prayer. If you are doing things the best you can for your fellow man, He is going to take care of you.

The women in this study showed resiliency and strength through the difficulties and challenges that they faced in their careers. The support of family members, superiors, colleagues and friends kept them going through difficult times. Their commitment to continually develop their skills through professional development, academic training and perseverance in the face of adversity helped them to stick to the job. Networking with others, role models and mentors and an underlying faith and spirituality are other significant sources of support.

One of the research questions has to do with identifying each of the women's role models, mentors and supports that helped them along the way. All five of the participants in this study indicated that the supports and encouragement that they received were very important in their career paths. They talked about significant people in their lives who influenced them in different ways at different times in their lives. From their early childhood experiences the participants emphasized the importance of the support that they received from their families to pursue education. Four of the five participants indicate that their father was an important role model and influence in the career path that they took. Four of the five participants also mention supportive husbands who encouraged them in their administrative careers as they struggled to find a balance with their careers, personal needs and family responsibilities. For Laura, her grandparents, her father, her sister, her cooperating from her student teaching and her education director were important sources of support and encouragement. Myra cites her family, a friend, elders, her staff and her spirituality as sources of support. She also mentions that the Resource Center and continuous learning as important supports in her position as principal. Arlen mentions her husband, a friend, other

principals and the Resource Center as her supports. Sheryl mentions her father and her husband as her supports. Darian points out that although she did not get much support from her own people she was able to find the support from a white family who encouraged and supported her to continue with education. She also lists colleagues, friends, professional associations, other principals and her faith and spirituality as her supports.

The information gathered from the five participants in regards to their supports indicates that it would have been very difficult for them to enter administration and continue if they did not have their supports. From their families who supported them at the various stages of their careers to the mentors and role models who encouraged them in their work, the participants were provided with the support they needed to be able to overcome the challenges involved in administration. Two of the five participants comment on how their faith and spirituality is their source of strength and how the ceremonies and prayer has helped them to cope. All the participants conclude that supports, role models and mentors are important for women to be able to acquire administrative positions and to cope with the many challenges that they face in these roles.

## CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I will present some reflection on the research findings and suggest some recommendations for action and further research.

Aboriginal women are assuming more positions in leadership in education and other areas. Perhaps this had to do with the greater recognition of the need for effective leadership in the Aboriginal communities which continue to be plagued with social ills and issues and problems that need immediate attention and resolution. School evaluations, statistics and various reports and studies all indicate that more progress has to be made in academic achievement for students in band-controlled schools. The high school graduation rate continues to be significantly lower than the rest of the Canadian population and, generally, their success rate continues to lag behind provincial schools. Various factors may account for this and certainly, as research has shown; effective school leadership is one of the factors that can have a critical role in the success of the school. The women in this study chose to become educational leaders in their communities. Although most of the participants are not working in their home communities for one reason or another, their motivation is to try to make things better for Aboriginal people. More Aboriginal men and women are taking a proactive approach to try to work with their own people, as they strive to improve the prospects for the next generation. More women are taking leadership roles and the male leader, the male chief as the stereotypical ideal is falling by the wayside and women who have long been ignored are finally assuming leadership and influencing the Aboriginal community to move forward in a positive way.

The women in this study were not trained as principals prior to entry into

administration. Consequently, their initial success and effectiveness as school administrators was, very likely, less than it should have been. It is a fact that most people in leadership positions in Aboriginal communities do not have the leadership training prior to assuming important positions in their communities. This is the situation for chiefs, councilors, directors of education and school principals. Consequently, the leaders that are so critical in helping to move First Nations communities forward are often lacking in skills that would help them to do a more effective job. For school vice- principals and principals, the opportunity is there to receive certification from Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth. This program is for the provincials schools although it is open to administration personnel from band-controlled schools. The women in this study and many other administrators in the band-controlled schools acquire their provincial certification while working as principals.

One of the recommendations from this study is that there needs to be training programs set up for women who aspire to become principals. Some school divisions have administration pools where potential administrators are trained and mentored for any administration positions that make come up in the divisions. Too many administrators “flounder around” on the job, initially with no prior experience or training in leadership. Often this is at the expense of the students and staff in the schools as they wait for the principal to establish their leadership style, gain confidence or learn administration skills that are necessary to run an effective school. They learn by trial and error, reliance on mentors or professional organizations, networking, on going professional development and course work. A training program would help women and others develop confidence by giving them the skills needed for administrative work. Training would encompass such topics such as

leadership style, communication, administrative planning, evaluation techniques, personnel management, and conflict mediation stress and time management. Women who desire to become principals should know how to plan, organize, coordinate and evaluate the activities that occur in their schools. Other likely topics would be leadership styles, writing proposals, leadership development, planning, evaluation techniques and personnel management. Training in these areas would enable the principals to be more effective in their work.

An ideal training program would consist of on site support and in service training that would enable the women to continue with their work without having to take the time off work to attend the training sessions. It would mean first of all identifying what the needs would be for women who aspire to or are already in the position of administration. The identified needed skills would then determine the nature of the content of the training program. The information would then be presented either in one-day workshops or in training modules that the administrator would do at their own pace. Mentorship programs would also benefit women who are already in positions of leadership. There is a good pool of administrators who may be in retirement or close to retirement who can provide mentoring for new and aspiring administrators. Through this type of formal training, women would have the opportunity to learn the concepts and principles of leadership that would give them the skills to be more confident to do their work as principals more effectively.

There also should be more opportunities for informal training as well as the programs for leadership training. Other topics may have to do with personal development such as assertiveness and image building to enable then women to be more self-assured and confident

I mentioned earlier that one of the advantages of programs such as BUNTEP is that the program provides opportunities for women to receive training which they may not otherwise have access to if the program was not community based. Often it is not feasible for women and others to leave their home communities to go for training on campus at the universities. More First Nations communities are taking this route by providing training in cooperation with the universities and colleges in the community. This has been happening in several areas as many community members are being trained as early childhood educators, health care aides, community health representatives and carpentry to mention a few. BUNTEP and PENT continue to provide training within First Nations communities and continue to graduate teachers with Bachelor of Education degrees. Despite, credibility issues, the benefits of these programs far out weigh any criticism of the programs. In the past there has also been discussion on working with the universities and other post-secondary institutions to incorporate more Aboriginal perspectives in their teacher training programs. This is critical that this continues to happen because of the fast growing population of Aboriginal people who will be filling schools and post-secondary institutions who will require teachers and leaders who are aware of the issues concerning Aboriginal people.

In much of the research of minority women in educational leadership, the women are more likely to be elementary school principals. As with the women in Edson's (1988) study, they chose to become principals because of frustration with the constant turnover of school administrators who work in the band-controlled schools. They may have been frustrated with the inadequacy of the administrators who did not have the commitment or the understanding of the First Nations people and the community. Although the increase in numbers is



minuscule in some areas, there are more women working in the area of educational leadership. Women, in general, now have more opportunities to choose careers where they have some authority and influence. For the women in this study, the satisfaction and the commitment that they had in their jobs outweighed the challenges and stress that they face as Aboriginal women working in band-controlled schools. We need to learn from their experiences so that others who aspire to become educational leaders are better prepared to be the successors and continue with the work that not only these women are doing but also all the work that is being done by others in band-controlled schools. It is obvious that it would take strong motivation for women to succeed and they need to be optimistic and persistent.

Mindorff and Reynolds (2002) present the notion of “crossing borders” in reference to women in school leadership. Women are crossing the borders and the lines that have been drawn for them over the years. All women and particularly Aboriginal women and other minority women have to step outside the box and limitations that society and the culture of their communities has drawn for them. Women have to rethink “comfortable perspectives” and traditionally prescribed roles and confidently assert themselves as capable leaders. Mindorff and Reynolds (2002) point out women need to be more aware of the importance of looking at where they have come from in order to understand where they are going. This has to do with increased understanding and awareness of studies such as this which describe women’s common experiences and attempts to make suggestions and present ideas as to what can make the road an easier one for others to follow. The women who are in school leadership each have a unique life history but it is evident that in this context of band-controlled schools and with this small representation that they share some commonalities. It

is worth it to note that absent from the data are the more common explanations of why most individuals pursue leadership positions, namely; the need for personal prestige and status. These women were influenced by others to take leadership positions so that they could have the power to affect change. They felt that they had something to offer and felt that they needed the power to influence and affect change. They desired the power to be able to make decisions that would be better for the children and not for their personal reputation. Their primary motivation is to be in a position to be able to influence the educational environment of children in a positive way. They are not guaranteed that they will change the system, the attitudes, overcome limitations and find solutions to the myriad of problems that exist. They may have the desire to transform the schools but they are realistic in understanding that they may not fulfill their goals and but their passion drives them to persevere. They have often felt powerless and frustrated when they have seen inadequate administrators already in positions of power.

Women often accept the position of principal when the opportunity arose because they had seen the revolving door of principals coming and going in the communities that they were in. They realized that the importance of the principal and continuity of leadership and they felt compelled to accept the challenge not only to make changes but for their own personal and professional growth. Women who are working as teachers in the band-controlled school are very much aware of how critical it is to have an effective principal and consistent and capable leadership if the school is going to get the work done that needs to be done. Many of the teachers who have graduated from the teacher training programs are working in the their home communities despair at the constant revolving door of the

principalship in their communities and they are cognizant of the fact that effective principals have a significant impact on how well the school functions.

It would be interesting to study the statistics of administration retention and turnover of principals and directors of education in band-controlled schools and how this has obviously had a significant negative impact on the schools ability to progress. From the perspective of the five participants in this study, they offered some stability in the administration of their schools. More than any other factor, the instability of leadership in the schools has been the most detrimental in terms of the progress of the band-controlled school. Without the stability of leadership, the vision is not achieved and the best laid plans are not carried out and effective programs and practices are not sustained. Although they encountered problems in being accepted and moved to different positions because of political interference, unacceptable contract terms and termination of their employment, the length of time that they stayed as principals in a particular school was likely longer than others prior to them. The fact that a band school can have the same principal for fourteen years is a very significant fact as most terms are more likely in the one to three year range. As principals of band-controlled schools, the participants in this study have the opportunity to make changes that are more long-lasting by virtue of the fact that they can stay in the position for more than two years. It takes time to make the changes needed in a school where there has not been consistent leadership for a number of years. Quite often, inconsistent leadership in the schools is compounded by the reality that band-controlled schools often suffer from inadequate physical facilities, lack of appropriate curricular materials, inadequate funding and lack of parental and community support. For these reasons, it is of paramount

importance that the leaders we do have in the band-controlled schools have the courage, the insight, the commitment and the ability to envision a change where the schools can become transforming institutions where students graduate from and succeed.

The participants are involved in administration because they care about the children in their communities. They emphasize throughout the interviews the needs of the children and the needs of their communities rather than their own career goals. Career goals and career planning tend to be secondary to the work that they feel needs to be accomplished.

Aboriginal women need to understand that a more systematic approach in career planning will help them to be more effective administrators. They accepted the positions of leadership because they believed that they can do the job better than the current or past principals in the schools. They realized that they had the potential to be principals and were able to acquire the skills that they needed through professional development activities and on-going graduate work. Initially, they were not entirely confident in their knowledge and skills in administration but through ongoing training and in service professional development they became more confident and capable. More women need to realize that without administrative authority, they will never wield the power necessary to help the individual students and communities flourish and gain the strength that they need to become vibrant communities.

The five women in the study exemplified resiliency, heart felt caring and depth of understanding as capable leaders who were committed to the work that needed to be done. As women, as the nurturers and care givers, as well-trained and qualified educators, the need to ensure the safety of the future of their communities was a theme throughout the interviews.

There was a sense of selflessness in their administrative work; it was not about them but about the needs of the children and the community. They are aware of the experiences of their people in their community with the educational system in the past and the negative impact schooling historically has had on the people in the community. They feel that there needs to be a healing taking place where there has to be a process of reconciliation with the people in the community that education can be a source of power rather than a source of destruction as it had been in the past.

Recommendations for actions include: (a) develop training programs for Aboriginal teachers who work in band controlled schools who aspire to be administrators (b) begin to build an administration pool for potential school administrators (c) establish a formal networking group for principals of band-controlled schools, and (d) provide a support system for current principals of band-controlled schools.

Recommendations for further study include: (a) conduct a similar study of principals of band-controlled schools including both men and women, possibly relating their experiences or career paths to turnover of school administration and how this has affected the progress of band-controlled schools (b) conduct a similar study with a larger sample of Aboriginal women (c) conduct a life history interview study of an Aboriginal woman who has been in education for many years in Manitoba (d) do a longitudinal study about women in Aboriginal education (e) conduct a study about leadership for Aboriginal schools, what works best, possibly servant leadership model. These are some of the suggestions for further study but the list can be greatly extended, as there are many areas in Aboriginal education that need further research.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Interview Protocol

#### First Interview:

The questions for the initial interview will be based on getting information from the participants about their background and training.

Tell me about your background.

Tell me about your training.

How did you become a principal?

How long have you been in your current position?

How many years have you been a principal?

How many years did you teach before becoming a principal?

What other positions did you have prior to becoming a principal?

What factors did you consider prior to becoming a principal?

How did you prepare yourself to become a principal?

What were some of the other things you considered before becoming a principal?

#### Second Interview:

The questions for the second interview will be based on getting information from the participants about the barriers and challenges they faced in aspiring to become principals or as principals of band-controlled schools and the strategies that they used to overcome challenges.

Thank you for agreeing to this second interview. From the first interview, you gave information about yourself and your background and training. For this interview, we will be

focusing on some of the barriers and challenges you face prior to becoming a principal and as you work as a principal. I would also like to know about some of the things that helped you along the way.

Tell me about some of the experiences that you faced before you became a principal..

Did you receive encouragement from others?

What are some of the challenges that you face as a principal?

What are some other supports that you have?

What is the most difficult aspect of your job?

What ways does being a woman affect your ability to do your job?

What are some of the supports or resources that you have that make your job easier?

How do you balance the demands of your personal and professional life?

Third Interview:

The questions for the third interview will be based on getting the participants to reflect upon their careers and the choices that they have made to get them to where they are now, to think about their future and where they want to go from here. Some questions will also be asked in regards to common themes emerging from interviews from other participants or questions of clarification from the first two interviews.

You have told me your story about some of the experiences that you have had, is there anything that you would have done differently in terms of your career?

What advice would you give to women who want to become principals early in their career?

What advice would you give to other women in terms of preparing to become a principal?

Tell me about your future goals.

Are there any other comments that you would like to make?



### Appendix B - Request to Participate in the Study

Dear

Hi! My name is Nora Murdock. I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am currently working on a thesis entitled: The Career Path of Aboriginal Women Principals of Band-Controlled Schools. I wish to conduct a research study to complete the thesis as a requirement for my master's degree. My advisor is Dr. Jon Young, telephone number 474-9017.

I wish to focus on the career paths of women who are Aboriginal and working as principals in band-controlled schools. I am writing this letter to see if you would be available and interested in participating in the study. I would like to interview five Aboriginal women principals who have at least two years of experience as principals and who are currently working as a principal of a band-controlled school.

There will be an initial interview and two follow up interviews. Each interview will be approximately one hour in length. Interviews will be arranged at your convenience. All information will be treated with confidence and will be reported in the thesis in a manner that ensures anonymity for all the participants. I will provide you with further information, if you are available to participate in the study.

If you are available to participate in the study and are interested in doing so, please return the attached form and return to me in the stamped self-addressed envelope or you may call me at work at 645-2206 or at home . You may also fax me the form at or email at \_\_\_\_\_

I hope that you will be interested in participating in this study which will give voice to Aboriginal women's experiences in educational administration. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nora Murdock

## Appendix C – Research Proposal

### *Summary of Project:*

This study will explore the career paths of five First Nations women who work in band-controlled schools as principals. An important part of the study is on the barriers that they face prior to entry into school administration and as practicing school principals. The study will explore the issues and future challenges of Aboriginal women who aspire to or work as principals of band-controlled schools.

### *Methodology:*

The methodology used will be qualitative research. I will interview five Aboriginal women who currently work as principals of band-controlled schools. I will interview the women three times for about one hour each time. The interviews will be transcribed. The participants will be asked questions related to the topic as listed in the interview protocol (attached).

### *Recruitment of Participants:*

The names of all principals of band-controlled schools are printed in a directory available to the public from Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Center entitled: *First Nations Operated Schools Directory 2002 – 2003*.

From this list I will contact by letter all the twenty six women who are listed to see if they are willing to participate and also if they meet the criteria of having more than two years of experience and if they are Aboriginal. Aboriginal for the purpose of this study are those who are registered as treaty under the Indian Act.

From those who are interested in participating, I will select five women to interview using the following criteria:

1. They are Aboriginal.
2. They have at least two years of experience.
3. If possible, the women will be selected so that there is at least one from the north, one from central Manitoba.
4. If possible, there will be at least one Cree and one Ojibway woman.

### *Informed Consent:*

Consent in writing will be obtained from all participants (attached). The names of the potential participants will be obtained from the directory.

### *Feedback*

All the participants will be given a summary of the results of the study after the study is complete.

*Confidentiality/Anonymity*

All participants will be given a pseudonym.

Any indentifying characteristics received in the interviews will be changed to ensure anonymity i.e. name of people, schools or communities.

Interviews will be conducted away from the work setting so that confidentiality is maintained.

Consent will not be requested from the school board or the chief and council as the data collected will be personal information of the participants and will not be about the specific school or community. Also if permission has to be obtained from the school board or the chief and council, then anonymity may not be preserved.

Any data collected will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. This includes all transcripts and tapes.

Also because the pool of participants is relatively small, in the writing of the thesis the data from specific participants will be written up as themes rather than as individual case studies.

*Compensation:*

The participants in the study will not be compensated other than a cup of coffee or a snack or lunch.

**Appendix D – Ethics Approval**

