

Teacher Self-Location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of
Aboriginal Social Work Students Enrolled in Social Work Education

By

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Abstract

The voices of eleven Aboriginal and ten non-Aboriginal adult social work educators who volunteered to participate in this qualitative research study represent a diverse range of practice and teaching experiences. Participants with experience teaching social work courses that included the enrollment of Aboriginal students were interviewed to gain knowledge about their self location, lived experiences, their insight, and their perceptions of the ways in which they have and continue to support and influence the retention of Aboriginal post-secondary students who enroll in social work education. When educators retire often the extent of their experiences is never shared. Educators spend the most face time with students and the study reveals the many ways in which they provide support that extends beyond their regular teaching responsibilities.

The views brought forward by the participants, based on their lived experiences, will serve to contribute to and inform social work knowledge and practice in the further preparation of students for the challenges inherent in the social work profession. This study utilized phenomenology as a philosophical approach. The interview process is guided by a phenomenological investigation to identify and explore themes that emerge from the data. The participants in this study were recruited from universities with a First Nations social work specialization in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario. The data obtained in this study revealed many facets to the social work educator-student relationship. The major findings of the study revealed the ways social work educators, with experience teaching Aboriginal social work students from northern and remote communities, are involved in providing personal and academic support. Examples of the support provided includes the daily maintenance of an open door policy, reaching out and providing offers of help to students, and assuming roles as advocates, resource brokers, mentors, advisors and counsellors.

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this work to two very strong women who were my role models and mentors many years ago. The late Jean Sternig, my high school principal, would figuratively move mountains to advocate for, problem-solve with, and support students to reach their goals by exploring other ways of doing things without compromising standards. The other strong woman is the late Doreen Wilson, my first social work supervisor. Her guidance, perseverance, critical thinking and support resonate with me to this day. I also dedicate this work to all the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in this study who graciously gave their time to share their experiences and wisdom. I thank my former instructors, my employers, Indigenous students and esteemed colleagues, and all those whom I have met, past and present, who have encouraged me to keep going and to persist in my journey to pay it forward.

Seldom was any knowledge given to keep, but to impart;
The grace of this rich jewel is lost in concealment.

Wendell Phillips (1811-1884)

Table of Contents

Title page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
List of Tables.....	xi
List of figures.....	xi
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
Research Purpose and Question.....	1
Researcher’s Perspective.....	2
Rationale for Thesis Study.....	5
Theoretical-Conceptual Framework.....	7
Explanation of Terms.....	9
Summary.....	9
Chapter 2 – Literature Review	12
History.....	12
Retention.....	14
Andragogy.....	18
Transformative Learning.....	19
Cultural Safety.....	21
Summary.....	22
Chapter 3 – Research Methods and Design	24

Phenomenology.....	24
Research Methods.....	26
Ethics Approval.....	26
Research Design.....	28
Planned Steps	28
The Interview Process.....	32
Data Analysis Processes.....	35
Coding For Themes.....	36
Triangulation.....	39
Interpretation of Findings.....	39
Limitations.....	40
Summary.....	40
Chapter 4 – Description of Study Participants	42
Profile of Interview Respondents.....	42
Self-Location.....	47
Values and Integrity.....	50
Influential People and Role Models.....	53
Lived Experiences.....	56
Affirmations, Transitions and Transformations.....	59
Personally Meaningful Teaching Experiences.....	61
i. Honoring Elders and Indigenous Teachings.....	64
ii. Sharing and Discussing.....	62
iii. Making Connections.....	63
iv. Normalizing Experiences.....	66

v. Empathy.....	66
vi. Mentorships.....	67
vii. Successes.....	68
Summary.....	68
Chapter 5 – Learning Environment	71
Educational Milieu.....	72
Knowledge Contributions.....	72
Physical Environment.....	74
Safety.....	74
Instructional Methodologies.....	76
Co-Learning.....	77
Instructor Influence.....	79
Student Demographic	82
Student Motivation.....	83
Teaching Preparation	86
Curriculum Design and Content.....	87
Impact of Curriculum	91
Ways of Learning.....	91
Valuing Differences.....	92
Accommodation and Flexibility.....	94
Summary.....	96
Chapter 6 – Challenges	98
Issues.....	98

Resource Underdevelopment	99
Elective Course Selection.....	100
Decolonizing Dialogues.....	100
Assignment Due Dates.....	100
Classroom Dynamics.....	101
Evaluating Academic Work.....	101
Teaching Venues in Rural and Remote Communities.....	101
New Environment.....	102
Familial and Community Responsibilities.....	102
Lack of Support.....	102
Value and Cultural Conflicts	104
Student Life.....	105
Support for Faculty.....	106
Students Employed in Child Welfare Work.....	106
Issues of Power and Role Conflicts.....	107
Growth.....	107
Summary.....	107
Chapter 7 – External and Internal Barriers	109
External Barriers.....	109
Internal Barriers.....	112
Observations.....	114
Support.....	117
Advocacy.....	121
Sharing Personal Experiences.....	121
Providing Alternative Methods of Evaluation in Course Work.....	121

Empowering through Educator-Student Relationship.....	121
Reaffirming Student Goals.....	122
Re-establishing Student Motivation.....	123
Self-Care.....	124
Summary.....	124
Chapter 8 – Discussion	126
Subjective Experiences and Perceptions.....	127
Respondent’s Perceptions of the Needs of Adult Learners.....	128
Various Support Roles.....	129
Inclusive, Anti-oppressive and Safe Environment.....	130
Perspectives on Knowledge Contributions to Social Work.....	131
Themes.....	133
Curriculum.....	133
Safety.....	136
Cultural Sensitivity.....	137
Open Door Policy.....	139
Going the Extra Mile.....	140
Relationships.....	141
Challenges and Barriers.....	143
Suggestions for Consultation	144
Summary.....	146
Chapter 9 – Recommendations and Conclusion	148
Value Conflicts.....	150

Recommendation for Further Study.....151
Contributions to Social Work Knowledge.....155
Conclusion.....157

List of References.....161

Appendices.....172

List of Tables

Table 3.1 - Thesis Inquiry Questions.....	34
Table 3.2 – Descriptive Coding.....	37
Table 3.3 – Three-Dimensional Time Line.....	37
Table 3.4 – Researcher Situational and Brought Selves.....	38
Table 4.1 – Ancestry/Gender and Educational Level of Respondents.....	44
Table 4.2 – Practice Experience of Respondents.....	44
Table 4.3 - Respondent Recollection of Self and First Teaching Experience.....	49
Table 7.1 - Respondent Provision of Personal and Academic Support.....	119
Table 8.1 – Transformative Processes for Instruction.....	135

List of Figures

Figure 4A – Personally Meaningful Teaching Experiences	61
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Chapter I: Introduction

As a former social worker and adult educator, I was intrigued to learn about the contributions of social work educators and their perceptions of their influence in the development of the social work professional. I chose to look deeper into the lived experience of a population of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators. Through the process of interviews in conducting this study, I heard the voices of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators who described their experiences teaching Aboriginal students enrolled in social work. I had the privilege of learning about their support, insights, observations, and recommendations in helping students persist in the social work program and meet the goals they set out for themselves. Eleven Aboriginal and ten non-Aboriginal social work educators volunteered to be interviewed in this qualitative study. This sample represented social work educators who have experience teaching Aboriginal social work students and who have experience teaching in post-secondary institutions with a First Nation social work specialization in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario.

In the following sections, this introductory chapter presents the research purpose and question, followed by the researcher's perspective, followed by the rationale for the thesis study, the theoretical-conceptual framework, and the explanation of terms used in the study for the information of the reader.

Research Purpose and Question

I conducted this research in order to learn about what social work educators bring to the social work learning environment in terms of qualities, ways and means. The voices of social work educators were studied to explore their perceptions, lived experience, self-awareness, personal insights, values and motivation. Social work educators spend the most face time with

students and have the most potential to influence student persistence in their social work program. However, there is a dearth of research in the social work literature on the voices of social work educators relating to their self-location, their insights and contributions, and the valuing of their life personal life experiences that serve to influence the student in the teaching context. Many educators retire without having the opportunity to share their stories.

The main research question is: What do Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal adult educators bring to the learning environment to influence the retention of Aboriginal students in social work education? The following questions relate to the main research question as follows: (1) In what ways do the subjective experiences and perceptions of social work educators inform their teaching practice? (2) What are the respondents' perceptions of the needs of adult learners? (3) What are the varied roles of social work educators in providing support to retain Aboriginal students? (4) What is the role of the respondents in providing an inclusive, anti-oppressive and safe environment for the students to learn? (5) What are social work educators' perspectives on knowledge contributions to social work education?

Researcher's Perspective

It is important to situate myself in the research by stating who I am. I am the primary researcher in this qualitative study and I come from a position of privilege. I am a White, English speaking older than average student, and an older middle-aged woman of British ancestry. My grandparents on my father's side emigrated from England as adults and established a homestead in rural west central Saskatchewan in 1905. My mother's family is of Scottish, Irish and British ancestry, the majority of whom emigrated from Northern Europe and settled in Canada during the 1800s.

I was raised on a farm in rural west central Saskatchewan and attended an isolated one room country school for seven and one half years before being transported by school bus to the closest town to attend high school. My parents had very little money; however, education was promoted as a very strong value in my home and it was expected that I would attend university.

I began my career as a social worker in rural child welfare in Saskatchewan in 1970. As a mother of young children, and following a family move to Manitoba in 1981, I was hired as a social worker in a First Nation child caring agency in southwestern Manitoba in 1982. I continued to work solely within First Nations communities until 2001. During that time, I was appointed as a field instructor to students enrolled in the BSW Cohort offered in Dauphin, Manitoba in 1996. I was also hired as a sessional instructor to teach specific courses through the Distance Education Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba. In 2001, I was hired as a full-time instructor at Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, Manitoba. I was accepted into the doctoral program in 2009 in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba. Over a period of 12 years and while employed at Assiniboine Community College, I taught a range of community development courses to Aboriginal adult learners in the Aboriginal Community Development Program until my retirement from teaching in June of 2013.

In bracketing myself, I am cognizant of the fact that I was able to relate personally to some of the stories shared by the study participants. My experience working as a social worker in First Nation communities for 19 years and my experience teaching Aboriginal students for a total of 17 years, from 1996 to 2013, trigger memories for me and led me to think about experiences of my own. In this regard, I maintained a journal to assist me in self-monitoring my frame of mind as I was conducting interviews and examining the data.

As a non-Aboriginal woman conducting this qualitative research thesis study, I am familiar with and acknowledge the importance of the information contained in the First Nations Centre Publication (2005) entitled *Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) or Self-Determination Applied to Research*. In addition, the Government of Canada Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) publication entitled *TCPS 2 – Chapter 9* <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca> describes the importance of collaboration in research (article 9.13, p. 15). In my literature review, I have familiarized myself with publications by Indigenous scholars pertaining to my research including Dr. Marlene Brant Castellano's 2004 publication entitled *Ethics of Aboriginal Research*; Dr. Shawn Wilson's book published in 2008 entitled *Research is Ceremony*, and Dr. Margaret Kovach's book published in 2009 entitled *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. I acknowledge the importance of collaboration and I consulted with Aboriginal instructors and educational administrators prior to beginning my research. I will strongly support access to my research data in the hope that it will contribute to knowledge for Aboriginal communities as they address pressing issues in the area of post-secondary education.

In identifying and interpreting the findings in this study, it is also important for me to acknowledge the Aboriginal rights provision in s.35 of the *Constitution Act* of 1982, which raises important issues in understanding the duty to consult with Aboriginal peoples, thus providing the opportunity to reflect on relevant developments which affect "Aboriginal communities and organizations, governments, industry stakeholders and all Canadians" (Newman, 2009, p. 9-10). I understand that the duty to consult is a personal ethical responsibility, a legislative responsibility, and a firm reminder to individuals, governments, and institutions of a decolonized approach in all areas of decision-making.

Rationale for Thesis Study

There is a dearth of research on the personal contributions of social work educators in the social work literature. Similarly, the lack of research on the contributions of educators in the education literature was identified by Cortazzi (1993) who wrote, “their thoughts, perceptions, beliefs and experiences are probably undervalued and certainly under researched” (p. 1). In addition, the many ways that educators provide support to students, and the outcomes that result, are not always acknowledged nor tracked. The research conducted by Wilson and Campbell (2013) in the UK highlighted the importance of looking into the role of social work academics because there are gaps in knowledge and little investigation of their perceptions of their work (p. 1005).

Creswell (2008) described the personal accounts of teachers as a “popular form of narrative in education” (p. 514). Cortazzi (1993) cited in Creswell (2008) explained that the current interest in acknowledging teacher reflection and teacher knowledge points to what they know, how they think, how they develop professionally, and how they make decisions in the classroom. Educators have the ability to influence students in many different ways because they spend the most face time with students. Abraham and Gram (2008) wrote that many researchers indicate that teacher quality is the single most important factor in improving student success for Aboriginal students and that the capabilities, dedication, and work ethic of good teachers go beyond culture (p. 7).

The ways in which educators provide support to students may often go unnoticed; therefore, without having these conversations with educators on a regular basis, it is difficult to capture fully the nature of the time spent with students. In many areas, educators may be assuming complex social work roles such as counselling, resource brokering, and advocacy

which extend beyond their regular teaching load. In sum, unless educators share this information, it is not known how many hours are spent with students providing additional support.

There is a need to recognize, develop, and support Aboriginal social workers in the social work profession, because Child and Family services agencies continue to be very involved in the lives of Aboriginal people. In a July, 2015 report prepared for Canada's premiers by the Aboriginal Children in Care working group, it is stated that "Aboriginal children are over-represented in child welfare systems across Canada" (p. 1). In addition, the findings of the sector study, Part 3 of the Aboriginal overview in the Canadian Association of Social Workers publication included the following: "There is a lack of recognition, respect and validation for the profession of social work and the role of Aboriginal social workers even though they are making a difference in the communities they serve" (p. 175).

The social work profession involves not only the academic piece; there is also a whole professional side (#19). The process of developing a professional self in social work is stressful. Additionally, learners are often not fully aware of what they will be facing as practitioners (Urdang, 2010, p. 523).

Research studies conducted by O'Brien (2010) and Urdang (2010, respectively, identified teacher effectiveness and link their personal life experience to their teaching practice. The research conducted by O'Brien (2010) with 33 female teachers in the state of Arizona revealed that what teachers know about teaching derives from the links between their personal life history and their professional career (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; O'Brien & Schillaci, 2002 and cited in O'Brien, 2010, p. 2). Many educators retire without fully sharing the depth, wisdom, and richness of their experiences with the transformative potential to contribute to knowledge in the development of the professional in social work.

Urdang (2010) identified social work educators as being ideal role models who can stress the value of self-awareness and share their professional experiences as well as difficulties and successes. The modeling of first person narratives by social work educators are also described by Urdang (2010) as ways for students to be mentored in order to further their self-reflection. This self-reflection has the potential to enhance student self-confidence in knowing what to do when a situation emerges.

In the words of Barsky (2010) a foundation for education is to be introspective about one's own values and social work values in order to "attend to and appreciate the values of others" (p. 9). Ortiz and Jani (2010) described the recognition of social-location within institutions as an important paradigm among researchers, teachers, learners and clients in order to respond to the changing nature of diversity (p. 176). Hermans and Dimaggio (2004) described the dialogical self and the role in teaching practice. The ability to stimulate dialogue within the self plays an important role in the stimulation of dialogue between groups and cultures. Wasserfall (1997) explained the importance of teachers monitoring their own subjectivity and bearing the responsibility of developing an atmosphere of trust through exploring issues relating to the learner's perceptions of differences and power (pp. 152-153).

The role of social work educators in preparing learners for the field of social work practice is examined in this study. Urdang (2010) also pointed out that unless learners are provided the opportunity to engage in self-reflection in the learning environment, regarding what they will be facing in practice, they are at high risk for burnout and boundary violations.

Theoretical - Conceptual Framework

The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings for analyzing the findings in this qualitative study are guided by postmodern critical theory approaches (Agger, 2006; Payne,

2005), Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Haynes Writer, 2008), structural theory (Mullaly, 1997), feminist theory (Creswell, 1998; Kovach, 2009; Payne, 2005) and standpoint theory (Beebe, Beebe, Redmond & Geerinck, 2011; Oleson, 2008; Payne, 2005).

Haynes Writer (2008) described Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as useful tools in telling the stories of historical and contemporary issues affecting Indigenous peoples “among complex intersections and re-centering Indigenous knowledge, experience and perspectives” (pp. 9-10). In addition, Mullaly (1997) wrote about “the importance of all groups having the right to speak for themselves and to have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate” (p. 113). Critical social theory is examined from the structural perspective of domination and the “larger social institutions” that affect the lives of people (Agger, 2006, p. 4).

As cited in Payne (2005), “feminist practice takes place in a dialogic, egalitarian relationship” (p. 252), which provides the opportunity to listen and validate the world view of others through empathy and consciousness-raising. The interviewing of educators in this thesis study reveals the manner in which a feminist theoretical orientation is demonstrated in the classroom through the use of narratives, teaching methodologies, and the nature of support provided to students. The feminist research framework purports a “collaborative and non-exploitive relationship placing the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 1998, p. 253). The strength of feminism is captured by Wharf and McKenzie (2004) to indicate that it applies not only to women, but also reveals the oppression of many by uncovering the conditions that perpetuate inequity.

Standpoint theory aligns with the philosophy of this research study because it describes the importance of interpreting women’s views and experiences (Payne, 2005, p. 266) and

“foregrounding women’s knowledge as emergent from their situated experiences” (Oleson, 2008, p. 321). This theory provides an understanding of the reasons why each respondent in the study may view a situation differently. The application of standpoint theory is helpful in examining the uniqueness and complexity of experienced educators; their value stances, and their identification with and/or knowledge of particular cultural and linguistic groups. Beebe, Beebe, Redmond, and Geerinck (2011) expanded on these points by stating that standpoint theory serves to provide an explanation of “why people with differing cultural backgrounds see the world differently” (p. 77).

The relevant theory and approaches chosen in this thesis study incorporate a literature review of qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 1998, 2008; Kim, 2010; Schwandt, 2007; Willis, 2007), followed by a review of the phenomenological research approach, and the importance of the researcher locating herself in the research. Phenomenology is an approach that has proven to be a useful methodology for Indigenous researchers in “making meaning from story” (Kovach, 2009, p. 27).

Explanation of Terms

For the information of the reader and in this study, the terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* are used interchangeably to reflect First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Four Aboriginal participants in this study specifically self-identified as Métis. *Non-Aboriginal* defines all participants who did not self-identify as *Aboriginal* or *Indigenous*. The term *respondent* will be used consistently throughout this thesis to identify the contributions of the study participants.

Summary

In chapter one the discussion described the research setting, the research purpose and question, the researcher’s perspective, the rationale for the study, the theoretical-conceptual

framework, and the explanation of terms. When conducting research with Aboriginal people, it is essential to be consultative, and to do so with respect and integrity. In a qualitative study, the researcher and the respondents are both situated in the research; therefore, I dedicated the initial portion of chapter one to describe my perspective.

Chapter two provides an overview of the history of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. In addition, an examination of the literature on retention, andragogy, transformative learning, and cultural safety provides context pertaining to the field of teaching adults. Chapter three provides a description of the research methods and design, the planned steps in conducting the research, the processes of data collection, coding for themes, and the interpretation of findings.

Chapters four, five, six and seven present the findings in this study. Chapter four is focused on getting to know the respondents by learning about their early lived experiences regarding their first experience teaching and their insights and influences when working with, and teaching, Aboriginal peoples. The content of chapter four contains personal quotes that capture the essential nature of the privileging of Indigenous teachings and the honoring of Elders.

Chapter five provides a description of the respondent's teaching philosophy, observations of the learning environment; the establishment of safety; observations of students, and the curricula. These contributions include the respondents' observations, experiences, impressions and insights regarding the teaching environment. The respondents' impressions of safety issues pertain to the identification, development, and implementation of a physically and psychologically safe learning environment. The respondents identified the need for the ongoing introduction and development of curricula that legitimizes Indigenous knowledge, reflects the

lived experiences of Aboriginal students past and present, and fosters a co-learning environment where Aboriginal students feel safe in sharing their truth.

Chapter six presents the challenges faced by both Aboriginal students and social work educators. The challenges faced by Aboriginal students from remote communities expose many areas such as, resource underdevelopment resulting in limited access to supports, interrupted prior education, competing responsibilities to family and community, and unfamiliarity with the foreign terrain of academe. The description of the co-existing challenges faced by social work educators (the respondents) who participated in this study include their identification of the inner conflict of social worker versus academic as they worked with students. The respondents were faced with weighty decisions regarding the best way to meet the needs of the student without compromising academic standards.

Chapter seven presents the findings on external and internal barriers. The external barriers include matters of funding, physical geography, and the nature of the responsibilities of the student outside of the academy. Examples include the difficulty of travel, the expense of moving oneself and family to a new location, and the responsibilities to one's family and community.

Chapter eight provides a discussion of the findings as they relate to the main research question. The relevant literature is integrated in the discussion of findings. Internal and external barriers are often interrelated. The inner emotions and feelings experienced by the student may be as a result of a student feeling overwhelmed due to external stresses. This may be compounded by feelings of loneliness and disconnection in a new environment. Chapter nine provides a description of the implications of the research, the knowledge contributions to social work, the directions for further research, and the conclusion.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In order to provide a context for this study, I have chosen to begin this chapter by providing an overview of the historical influences and policies affecting the post-secondary education of Aboriginal people in Canada. Retention efforts pertaining to Aboriginal students enrolled in post-secondary education is also examined. The first two sections of this chapter provide a review of the literature on the topics of (1) Aboriginal Post-secondary education in Canada and (2) student retention. The opportunity for Aboriginal people to attend a post-secondary institution is a new field of endeavour in the history of Canada. It is commonly known that issues identified by Malatest and Associates (2002, 2004) and Mendelson (2006) concerning access, barriers and insufficient funding continue to impede the ability of Aboriginal students to complete their post-secondary education.

History

In contemporary times there are more Aboriginal students graduating from colleges and universities in Canada. The incidences of Aboriginal students attending a postsecondary institution in Canada were relatively rare before the 1960s. In the research conducted by Frideres and Gadacz (2012), it was reported that “200 status Indians attended college or university in 1950 and by 2001, this number increased to almost 30,000” (p. 116).

In Canada, the *British North America (BNA) Act* of 1867 since referred to as the *Constitution Act* of 1867, gave the federal government the power to administer Aboriginal affairs including education (Kirkness, 1999). First Nation people faced significant restrictions in accessing educational opportunities to further their education and these restrictions were not removed until 1951 (Wilson & Battiste, 2011, p. 11). Up to that point, First Nation students who pursued post-secondary education were forced to give up their “identity in law” (Assembly of

First Nations, 2012). In 1876, the Indian Act provided the legal basis for the federal administration of Indian education and “declared that any status Indians who joined a profession or attended postsecondary education would lose their status and could no longer live on a reserve” (Indian Act, 1876, S.C. 1876, c.18, s.86 (1) in Wilson & Battiste, 2011, *Assimilation and Enfranchisement Model*, p. 11).

The importance of access to education for Indian people is reflected in the political history of Indian leaders in the the Province of Manitoba. The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (MIB) and 53 representatives from the four Indian tribes of Manitoba; the Cree; Ojibway; Chipewyan and Sioux were signatories to the publication *Wahbung* (October, 1971) which described low levels of education, high unemployment and dire poverty. The education of Indian people was referred to as a “monumental failure” (p. 104) by the MIB because of the disregard of the essential feature of education which is a “total experience” (p. 106), that requires relevance and commitment.

Indian control of education emerged from the political lobbying by Indian leaders during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973 the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) produced a document entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* which was later accepted by the federal government and adopted as official educational policy for Aboriginals (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012, p.111). Prior to 1987 in Canada, funding for post-secondary education was provided in accordance with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Post-Secondary Education Assistance Program (PSEAP) which made funds available for all Aboriginal students who wished to pursue post-secondary education. According to Kirkness (1999), signs of improvement had resulted in many more students graduating from university since the policy of Indian Control

of Education was introduced; however, a serious attrition rate continued to exist at every level of education.

The Multicultural Act, which continues to be interpreted by Aboriginal groups as distracting from the recognition and redress of Indigenous groups was passed in Canada under the Conservative government in 1988 (St. Denis, 2011, pp. 307-308). The passing of this Act has resulted in the inclusion of all minority groups and less monetary resources are available for Indigenous groups specifically. In the same year the Postsecondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) guidelines replaced PSEAP whereby restrictions were placed on eligibility, and day care and rent subsidies were removed (Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 24).

The Grand Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), respectively, continue to advocate for the recognition of Aboriginal education as a legal right rather than a social policy budget item which must be negotiated from year to year. Advocacy at a political level is necessary to revisit Aboriginal rights in the Constitution Act of 1982, and to examine the 2010 document on Indigenous Human Rights which was ratified by Canada. Funding levels that are not sufficient to provide for Aboriginal post-secondary students while they are enrolled in courses at a post-secondary level contribute to the factors that impede the completion of their education. The following section will examine the literature pertaining to the retention of Aboriginal post-secondary students.

Retention

Retention is a widely studied and complex subject in the field of post-secondary education (Braxton & Hirshy, 2005; Tinto, 2005). It is commonly known that colleges and universities continue to be involved in ambitious outreach efforts to recruit students. There is a growing body of knowledge regarding the unique needs of Aboriginal adult learners. Their

circumstances and academic preparation often vary from the circumstances of sequential students who graduate from urban mainstream secondary schools, and then enroll in a post-secondary institution the following term. Some key factors influencing the retention of Aboriginal students include their personal history, and the various systems and circumstances affecting each student prior to and at the time of enrollment. These factors may then contribute to the ways that Aboriginal students respond to the learning environment and the operation of the institution as a whole.

The ability to recruit and retain post-secondary Aboriginal students hinges on a complex interplay of structural, administrative, and economic factors. Aboriginal students are recruited; however, other factors come into play when students may not have been fully prepared for the rigour of the academy. Many studies have been conducted describing the range of barriers that impede the ability of Aboriginal students to complete their post-secondary education (Malatest & Associates, 2004; Mendelson, 2006).

In institutions where mainstream values and culture dominate, Aboriginal understandings and worldviews are often excluded from notions of student success, and the corresponding retention theories in higher education (Jensen, 2011, p. 1, Pidgeon, 2008, p. 339). The research of Bean and Metzner (1985) cited in Braxton and Hirshy (2005) indicated that environmental variables (such as finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, and family responsibilities) had a greater impact on the departure decisions of adult students than academic variables. The researchers concluded that environmental factors that influence persistence can compensate for weak academic support (p. 65).

Geographical challenges and availability of resources impact on student retention. The research by Bonnycastle and Prentice (2011) identified overlooked barriers to higher education

for Aboriginal students in the northern area of Manitoba. These overlooked barriers identified a lack of child care and a lack of care giving supports.

Further, the researchers, Bonnycastle and Prentice (2011), identified that the average age of women learners is approximately ten years older than their southern counterparts and seven times as many women in the north have children (pp. 8-9). Paziuk (2006) identified family care giving responsibilities in the North among the factors underlying female Aboriginal student's decisions to take a leave of absence from their studies. By comparison, in the City of Winnipeg, the Inner City Social Work Program (ICSWP) identified key success areas in the retention of students as a result of "low teacher to student ratios and extended times spent with students" (Clare, 2013, p. 71).

Tinto's theory on student departure (1975, 1986, 1993) holds a predominant position in the literature as indexed in numerous citations (Braxton et al, 2004 cited in Seidman, 2005). In 1975, Tinto identified that the ability of the student to integrate into the educational setting was affected by structural and normative dimensions. From a structural perspective, the student may have a number of difficulties meeting the explicit standards of the college or university if the student has had no prior experience or knowledge of the environment. The normative perspective is affected by the nature of the students' identification with the subcultures of the institution which may, but not be limited to, the development of communities of learning, the composition of the student body, and the organizational culture and climate. A critique of Tinto's work identified by Jensen (2011) highlighted a contrary view to his expectation that the student should be able to independently navigate the system. Jensen (2011) asserted that Tinto did not consider that many students are first generation learners who may require additional support.

The rates of Post Secondary Education (PSE) enrolment are increasing as mentioned earlier in this chapter. More students are graduating from a range of post-secondary programs; however, the completion rates for Aboriginal students are not proportional to population growth (Axworthy, 2013; Timmons, 2009; Wilson & Battiste, 2011). In the *Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada* (AUCC) 2013 report, it is stated that the population of young Aboriginal youth is growing 30 times faster than non-Aboriginal youth. Less than 10% of the Aboriginal population between the ages of 25 and 64 has a university degree, which is about one-third of non-Aboriginal youth. The implications of not completing a post-secondary education contribute to the likelihood that one “will earn less on the job; be under-represented in managerial and professional occupations, and be more likely to be unemployed” (p. 6).

Many students live in deep poverty and Silver (2013) described the combined and devastating effects of poverty, racism and colonization on Aboriginal peoples’ success in the mainstream educational system (p. 14). On a more positive note, the advantages of higher education for Aboriginal peoples are cited in the literature. For example, Battiste (2005) wrote in her paper entitled *National Dialogue on Aboriginal Learning* that new skills, knowledge and participation are essential as Aboriginal people view education as an area for holistic and lifelong learning for the transformation of their economic livelihood (p. 4).

In addition, *The Canadian Council on Learning* (CCL) research report presented a holistic approach to measuring success, and also affirmed a correlate between higher levels of education and community wellbeing (2009, p. 51). The impact on social work practice, and the rationale for the study, incorporates the importance of education in enhancing quality of life. In the following sections, the terms andragogy, transformative learning and cultural safety are researched as they pertain to adult education.

Andragogy

The field of adult education and the importance of identifying the unique needs and learning styles of adult learners are captured by the term andragogy (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998). A basic premise of the adult learning model is that the adult learner is internally motivated, autonomous, and self-directed. In the process of conducting this thesis study, some of the principles may be challenged. The changing student demographic evidenced by an increase in non-sequential (mature) students suggests the need for more support as well as the search for additional approaches to encourage students to persist in their area of study. Mature students may not have had the opportunity to progress directly from high school graduation to post-secondary educational programs for many reasons, such as additional familial responsibilities and lack of resources. It is commonly known that for mature students, without a high school diploma, many years may have elapsed from the time they last attended school.

In the context of andragogy, researcher Daloz (1986) cited in Dirkx (1998) explained that our ability to make sense of our experiences is related to the developmental movement of our lives (p. 5). In the process of interviewing the respondents, this is important to consider in view of the relative importance each respondent may attribute to particular life events. A perspective on teacher motivation may be captured in developmental theory. Erikson (1950) cited in Berk (2004) identified the term *generativity* which was intended to encompass everything generated that can outlive the self and ensure society's continuity and improvement (p. 512). The research of McAdam (1997,2001, 2003), and cited in Berk (2004), revealed that highly generative people, who generally fall within the age range of mid to late adulthood had not all chosen the teaching profession but felt called or "committed" to help others.

In McAdam's research, the stories of highly generative people were analyzed for story lines and themes in order to understand the relationship between pivotal points in their lives and their worldview in order to interpret "how people imbue their lives with meaning and purpose" and in a way that fosters "a caring, compassionate approach to others" (p. 514). In this study, the majority of the respondents fell within the mid to late adulthood age range and many expressed the desire to give back to students by teaching useful skills (#8,#16) that are transferable to daily living and practice. In the next section, the discussion of transformative learning describes the importance of teachers and their process of reflecting upon themselves in their teaching role.

Transformative Learning

The process of transformative education is explored as central to the diverse nature of social work and the exposure to many different types of people, situations and settings. The literature on transformative learning is explored as a framework for understanding how adults learn (Kitchenham, 2008). Dirkx (1998) described the best teachers of transformative learning as being ourselves as educators – our own lives in community with others. He discussed the best way to learn about fostering transformation among our learners is to begin this profound work with ourselves (pp. 11-12).

Mezirow (1997) emphasized the importance of critical reflection and identified three types of reflection and roles in transforming meaning schemes, namely content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. Examples of questions for exploration in the meaning types include questions which refer to thinking back to what was done. This process might involve the development of a meaning scheme by teachers asking themselves the questions "how can I teach this concept in class given my knowledge and past experience?" and "why is this

concept so important to me right now when I could simply be reverting to earlier ideas?” (p. 114).

In a recent study completed by Blunt-Williams et al (2011), the findings revealed that transformative educators become co-learners who engage in self-reflection in the teaching process by assisting learners with alternate ways of interpreting his/her experiences. The findings in the study also revealed that transformative and culturally competent educators are important to college students. The findings also revealed that “the transformative paradigm enables social work educators to develop and produce better social work students” (p. 775).

Fitznor (2005) described the transformative experience of students as they learn. History, in particular, is important which includes lived and contextualized experiences with treaty making, oppressive policies and colonialism. This places strong importance on social justice education in the transmission of knowledge and the personal investment in exploring matters of social justice.

Mahoney (1992) cited in Dirkx (1998) explained that the meaning of what is learned closely relates to what is already known and accepted (p. 2). The work of Aronowitz and Giroux (1993) cited in Chizhik and Chizhik (2009) identified that the maintenance of the status quo; the re-creation of an existing educational environment, and the re-creation of social classes of students is the antithesis of transformative education. Educators who engage in transformative learning have many opportunities to model transformative learning through the exploration of alternate paradigms and the resistance of social hegemony. The work of Mezirow (1997) further describes transformative education as learning how to think critically through opportunities to participate and reflect upon previously held assumptions and interpretations (pp. 10-11).

Cleary and Peacock (1998) cited in Battiste (2013) identified that teachers must use a variety of styles of participation and information exchanges and adapt their teaching methods to Aboriginal styles in learning (p. 176). To enrich the experiences of Aboriginal students, Tisdell (2003) cited in Battiste (2013) describes “spirited epistemology” that is transformative (p. 184) and the ways that can be explored to indigenize the curriculum, such as the use of storytelling, in order to facilitate engagement with the spirit. He describes the processes for learning that are transformational. This includes the cognitive, affective and symbolic domains which when engaged make meaning. The processes of “engaged pedagogy” (bell hooks, 1994,2003), as cited in Battiste, 2013, p. 183), describe engaging the mind, body and spirit and teaching must involve all three.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is examined from the perspective of providing an opportunity for students to establish a sense of identity and resilience in a transformative learning environment, and a way to help students take the power of education into their own hands (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2009). Cultural safety encompasses a holistic approach. The student and other participants in this model are allowed to be themselves in a respectful environment that enhances the opportunity to share and learn with others without connotations of special treatment.

According to Milliken (2012), the student is the one who is the most vulnerable and should be the one who defines what feels safe (Ramsden & Spooney, 1993 cited in Milliken, 2012, p. 103). This process involves the teacher having unconditional positive regard for the student which helps “to widen the circle to other systems and sustain the helping relationships and conversation” (p. 113). In the process of creating a culturally safe environment, and to facilitate transformative learning, important questions for exploration will include how students

are informed of intersecting oppressions, and how the process of critiquing, decolonizing and deconstructing dominant paradigms of taken for granted knowledge occurs (Kovach, 2009; McLaren, 1989; Oldenski, 2010; Tuhwai Smith, 1999). In addition, De Anda (1984) described the importance of learning opportunities being facilitated for the purpose of students being able to describe and process their experiences of oppression and marginalization, while having the opportunity to gain a heightened awareness of behaviours, and responses that may be self-limiting.

Summary

In summary, chapter two provided an overview of the history and the long standing challenges that Aboriginal students have encountered in attaining a post-secondary education. A literature review of other topics including retention, andragogy, transformative learning, and cultural safety are also provided. The specific importance of these concepts is interrelated. Andragogy is included in the literature review to gain an understanding of the variables confronting adult learners to contextualize the delivery of curriculum that is relevant to their lived experience.

In particular, the creation of an environment of safety for learners is introduced for its relevance to transformative learning where views can be expressed and validated in a moderated environment. The ability to connect to the content of what is being taught involves the ability to question, and to challenge previously held assumptions, which is at the basis of transformative learning as new insights develop. Cultural safety is examined as an important and necessary feature in the facilitation of transformative learning, while providing an opportunity for the adult learner to determine what he/she chooses to discuss and what feels safe (Milliken, 2012).

The beginning of chapter three provides the presentation of a review of the literature pertaining to the theoretical, methodological and analytic approaches chosen for this thesis inquiry. This is followed by an explanation of the research materials; the methods of data collection, and the processes for the interpretation of findings. Tables **3.1**, **3.2**, **3.3** and **3.4** illustrate the data as follows: Table **3.1** presents the thesis inquiry questions asked of all respondents; Table **3.2** presents an example of descriptive coding; Table **3.3** presents a three-dimensional time line and, Table **3.4** presents an example of the researcher situational and brought selves.

Chapter III: Research Materials and Methods

. The steps taken in completing this research are described in this chapter beginning with obtaining approval through the Psychology Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) at the University of Manitoba which appears as Appendix A following the list of references at the end of this study. In addition, this chapter provides an overview of the literature on life story research and phenomenology. Subsequently, the steps are explained in this chapter as follows : research methods; ethics approval in conducting the study; research design; planned steps in data collection; the interview process; data analysis processes; coding for themes; interpretation of findings; limitations of the study, and summary.

Phenomenology

The choice of the phenomenological research approach was intended so the respondent, within the educational setting, was provided with the opportunity to explain his/her experience in a way that is personally meaningful (Moustakas, 1994). According to Flood (2010), phenomenology is the experience of “revealing meaning rather than on arguing a point or developing an abstract theory” (p. 7). Further, the focus of phenomenology for this study was to explore lived experience and what it is like to find oneself in relation to others, for example, educators in relation to students (Vagle, 2014, p. 20).

In contemporary qualitative research, phenomenology is defined as the identification and description of everyday life from the subjective point of view of individuals (Giorgi cited in Willis, 2007, p. 173; Schwandt, 2007, p. 226) who have all experienced the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994 cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 14).

The term *epoche* is explored (Ihde, 2007, p. 29) as it is one of the operational exclusionary rules in phenomenology. The researcher engaged in bracketing to mitigate

preconceived notions and value stances (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). Due diligence was necessary, on the part of the researcher, to ensure that literature review themes, completed after the data collection and analysis, were not appearing in the research findings without evidence from the data.

In the phenomenological approach, the processes of interviewing and questioning were used as they are the primary means of obtaining data (Willis, 2007). The trustworthiness of the data depended on accurate interpretations gained through skilful interviewing techniques. In addition, I (the researcher) self-monitored in order to ensure that I was in the same frame of mind (bracketing oneself) and level of preparedness, without making assumptions, when approaching the participants (Creswell, 1998, p. 77).

The phenomenon is described as “what appears in consciousness” and which “provides the impetus for generating and experiencing new knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). The identification of the problem requiring further study is the self-location of educators. The researcher wished to know about the perceptions and reflections of the respondents which described their experiences and the range of circumstances when they are in contact with Aboriginal students. The phenomenological approach is a valuable methodology to gain this first person point of view.

According to Schwandt (2007), intentionality is defined as “a central principle to all phenomenological processes of human inquiry” (p. 156). Intention relates to the conscious process of determining what we, as humans, choose to select within our environment, and the associated feelings and meanings that result.

Research Methods

The following sections in this chapter will explain the steps that were taken in completing this research and how the steps were carried out.

In this qualitative study, the researcher wished to learn more about the nature of the respondent's teaching experience and the nature of the support that educators provide in preparing Aboriginal post-secondary students to graduate from the social work program and enter the social work profession. Many social work educators retire without fully sharing the depth, wisdom and richness of their experiences and influence as practitioners and educators.

It is important to identify the history of qualitative research in the field of education as well as in social work. Qualitative research in education is shaped by three themes which include "philosophical ideas, procedural developments, and participatory and advocacy practices" (Creswell, 2008, p. 49). Qualitative research is an "inclusive place" (Kovach, 2009, p. 27) and is increasingly used in the field of social work research as a means to harness and explore the lived experiences of the participant (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 80). Qualitative research stresses the importance of individuals in the creation of the social world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Creswell (2008) described qualitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher conducts the inquiry in a subjective and biased manner.

Ethics Approval

The researcher completed and submitted the ethics proposal to the Psychology Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB) at the University of Manitoba to conduct the research entitled: *Teacher Self-Location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence in the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students Enrolled in Social Work Education.*

The PSREB approval was granted on March 19, 2015, Subsequent to the initial PSREB approval, the researcher requested a single change to the recruitment criteria to be inclusive of social work educators with a minimum of five years experience. The amendment reflecting this change was issued on March 31, 2015. The start date of the study was April 1, 2015, and the end date was October 1, 2015. A minimum sample of ten Aboriginal and ten non-Aboriginal experienced social work educators from institutions with a First Nations social work specialization was desired. Upon receiving ethics approval through the University of Manitoba ethics board, the researcher began taking steps to obtain ethics approval and permission from institutions in Canada outside of the province of Manitoba for the purpose of interviewing social work faculty prior to beginning the study.

The researcher identified institutions with a First Nations social work specialization through conducting an online search and consulted with Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal educators before choosing a research site. This was followed up by the researcher initiating telephone calls and sending follow-up emails to the executive assistant of the dean of social work requesting guidance in following proper procedure in their institution in order to obtain ethics approval to contact social work faculty at their publicly available websites. A sample of the recruitment letter addressed to deans and directors of outside institutions introducing the researcher and the study is indicated in Appendix A. The letter was sent with an attachment of the ethics certificate, a description of the study and a recruitment poster. The researcher obtained permission to contact social work faculty and was granted ethics approval as required from universities with a First Nations social work specialization in Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Ontario. Once institutional approval was granted

and the researcher was given approval to contact faculty at their publicly available websites, an abstract and an Invitation to Participants (Appendix E) was distributed.

Research Design

There are several factors that were considered by the researcher in choosing the design while establishing a role as a qualitative researcher. These factors considered include the type of research problem, the audience for the report and the personal training and experiences of the researcher. In this study, the concern was to acquire in-depth information from those who have experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 157); therefore, a purposeful sampling approach was chosen to recruit Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants with experience teaching Aboriginal social work students.

Planned Steps

Between April 1, 2015 and October 1, 2015, the researcher awaited replies from social work educator participants (hereby referred to as respondents) by email volunteering to participate in the study. When the researcher received an email from a respondent then the researcher responded to their email at the first opportunity within the same day. Arrangements were made by telephone followed up by email to schedule the first introductory and screening interview at a time and place convenient for the respondent. The time scheduled for the initial interview and screening questions was 40 minutes to allow sufficient time, if required, to review the study, the informed consent and to answer any additional questions. To begin, each respondent was asked three screening questions as follows: (1) Do you self-identify as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal? (2) How many years of experience do you have teaching social work courses at a post-secondary level? (3) How many social work courses under your instruction included the enrollment of Aboriginal students?

Prior to proceeding with the second interview each respondent was provided with an abstract of the study, the informed consent form and the thesis inquiry questions by email for their review. The researcher advised each respondent that the second interview would take place only if the respondent was willing to proceed and comfortable with the information provided. The informed consent was signed by each respondent and the researcher and both the researcher and the respondents had signed copies to keep. The respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at anytime. For those living at a distance, an initial meeting was set up by telephone or on Skype. For others, a face to face interview was arranged based on respondent preference and availability.

The data for this study was obtained through interviews. Twenty-one respondents volunteered to participate in the study, and signed individual informed consent forms. Interviews were scheduled between each respondent and the researcher at a mutually agreeable date, time and place. Eleven respondents self-identified as Aboriginal which included four respondents who declared Métis heritage. Ten respondents self-identified as non-Aboriginal. In this study, three respondents were interviewed by Skype, seven respondents were interviewed by telephone and eleven respondents were interviewed face to face. Although gender was not specified in the research invitation poster, there were nine male respondents and twelve female respondents out of the total number of respondents who volunteered to participate.

The interview data was typed in Arial 12 font, double-spaced and emailed to each respondent by the principal researcher within ten days of completing the interview. Each respondent was invited to member-check the data within a period of three weeks, and to make any changes, additions or deletions to its contents and to respond to the researcher by email. The data collection from interviews for the entire study was completed by September 8, 2015. A

preliminary summary report, as promised to the respondents in the informed consent form, was provided to all the respondents on November 30, 2015 by email.

The planned steps in conducting this research are described in Creswell (2008) and the seven steps procedure were carried out in this study as follows (pp. 523-525): Step I involved two things. First of all, a phenomenon was identified for exploration to examine an educational problem. In this study the focus was the opportunity to interview social work educators and to explore their experiences, observations and insights into the practice of teaching and their provision of support to students. Secondly, the educational problem was the retention of social work students to graduation.

Step II required the purposeful selection of a person(s) who could provide a perspective on the problem of keeping students in school. This study used a *purposeful sampling process* to recruit individuals teaching in social work educational sites with a First Nation social work specialization. The educators who volunteered to participate in this study were chosen “to intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). Step III involved the collection of stories through interviewing. Step IV involved *re-storying* which was the “process in which the researcher gathered stories, analyzed them to identify key elements and provided a causal link among ideas within the story” (p. 519).

Step V involved collaborating with the respondent-storyteller by member checking (Creswell, 2008, p. 267; Schwandt, 2007, p. 187) to verify the accuracy of the content which was completed. Step VI involved writing a story about the respondents and to highlight themes that emerged. Step VII involved member checking and triangulation (Creswell, 1998, p. 202; Creswell, 2008, p. 266) to seek corroborating evidence from the teacher respondents and the identification of overarching themes and subthemes.

The researcher explored both the personal experiences of the respondents and their perceptions and observations of adult learners within the format of semi-structured open-ended interview questions. In the words of Holley and Colyar (2009), the term *focalization* is defined as the process of shifting between internal and external points of view. This process applied to the principal researcher and the respondents in this study. In this regard, the researcher shifted between the internal and external points of view while engaging in reflexivity, observation and retelling the story in the process of data analysis. Similarly, the respondents were provided the opportunity to voice their own experiences from an internal point of view or from an external point of view as narrators of their stories (p. 683).

The researcher maintained field notes and a journal throughout this study to reflect upon her thoughts and the process of data collection. The researchers' ability to be *reflexive* (Creswell, 2008, p. 58) was very important. The researcher, based on her own teaching experience, was able to acknowledge and identify with the experiences of the teacher respondents in many areas of teaching.

As it was difficult to protect confidentiality in qualitative research in the interviews conducted face to face and by Skype, the ethical focus involved a check in with the respondents following the completion of each of the parts A, B and C during the interview process, to ensure they were feeling comfortable with the research content, purpose and procedure. The respondents were asked by the researcher if they had anything to add to their response. They were also informed that confidentiality regarding the information they provided was assured as the researcher would carefully re-read each transcript and delete information which might be identifiable to others. In this study, fifteen out of twenty-one respondents replied with

clarifications and revisions. These changes were incorporated by the researcher prior to analyzing the data. Six respondents did not make a request for any changes to the data.

Respondents were encouraged to debrief with the researcher following the interviews in the manner of discussing the process, content and feelings evoked in the interview. This information was also provided with the thesis inquiry questions which were provided to the respondents prior to the interview. All data is kept in a locked filing cabinet in the private home of the researcher. No one else has access to the information. All email correspondence is password protected on the researcher's personal computer. For the purposes of grouping results, and respecting confidentiality, individual files were created and each respondent was given a pseudonym. Informed consent forms are stored separately (and in a different order) from the interview transcripts.

The Interview Process

Prior to conducting each interview, the researcher engaged in the *epoche* (bracketing) process to start afresh. The breakdown of this process reflected the work of Moustakas (1994) who stated that “the process of *epoche* requires sustained attention, concentration, and presence” (p. 88). Kvale (1983, 1994 & 2009 with Brinkmann) and cited in Englander (2012, p. 13), state that “the interview has become the main collection process closely associated with qualitative, human scientific research” (p. 13). Moustakas (1994) describes “presence” as the process of entering into the dialogue by preparing internally and being internally aware of space, setting the tone and being attuned to actively listen while conveying engagement, alertness and responsiveness (p. 122).

In the selection of the location for the in-person interviews, the researcher requested that a particular location be identified that respected the privacy of the respondents. The respondents

had the option of identifying an interview area of their choosing; however, if the respondents' first choice was not available, then the researcher made other arrangements for a meeting room within the meeting facility where voices could not be overheard.

The researcher followed the same interview protocol for each respondent in each interview category. As indicated in the informed consent, the respondents agreed to the interview being audio-taped with the data being supplemented by the researcher's hand written notes. The qualitative research interviews "attempted to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3).

As indicated previously, and in accordance with the preference and availability of the respondents, it was possible to conduct eleven interviews on a face to face basis. Geographical distance did present a challenge; therefore, the researcher accommodated some respondents by arranging interviews by Skype and by telephone. For all the interviews, the researcher established a comfort level with the participants by making introductions, engaging in light conversation, and attending to the comfort of the respondents by asking them questions regarding whether they would like to take a break, if they had any questions, if they had anything they wished to add to their responses, or if they had any time constraints. Although the interview format was consistently used for all respondents as indicated in **Table 3.1**, the researcher facilitated the one-on-one interviews flexibly, with the understanding that one open-ended question may elicit a response that is relevant to another question.

The researcher explained the process of the interview to each respondent. In order to be facilitative, the researcher demonstrated courtesy and respect for the participant's personal space by sitting at a medium sized table or a desk across from the respondent. The researcher

demonstrated active listening through being attentive, and focusing on the respondent through the demonstration of timely and appropriate responses. In addition, the respondents were reminded and reassured that they would not be pressured into answering questions they did not feel comfortable with. The researcher thanked each respondent for agreeing to participate in the study. A thank you card and gift card were provided to each respondent in appreciation. The respondents were advised in the Informed Consent form that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and could withdraw their consent at any time.

The stage outline for the interviews as described in Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) in framing the thesis inquiry questions (temporal units) were utilized in this study are displayed in **Table 3.1** in parts A, B and C.

Table 3.1 Thesis Inquiry Questions (these questions also appear in Appendix C)

Part A	Part B	Part C
(1) Tell me about your first teaching experience, (2) How did that teaching opportunity come about? (3) How would you describe yourself at that stage? (4) Tell me about the influential people in your life at that time. (5) What did you learn about yourself?	(1) Tell me about your first experience teaching social work courses that included the enrolment of Aboriginal students, (2) How did that teaching opportunity happen? (3) How would you describe yourself at that stage in your life and in your career? (4) Tell me about the influential people in your life at that time, (5) What teaching experiences were personally meaningful for you in the instruction of Aboriginal social work students?	(1) Describe your observations regarding Aboriginal social work students at the time of enrolment in the social work program. (2) In your view, what contributes to the motivation and determination of Aboriginal social work students to continue their studies? (3) In what ways have you provided support to Aboriginal social work students. (4) In what ways do you see yourself influencing Aboriginal social work students to persist in the social work program and graduate? (5) What have you learned about teaching social work students that will contribute to social work knowledge in preparing students for the field?

In part A the stage outline questions focused on the personal experiences of the respondents. In part B the stage outline questions moved along to inquire about the respondents' first experience teaching social work courses to adult learners and the teaching experiences that were personally meaningful. The researcher explained to the respondents that, depending on their unique experience, it was possible that questions (1) to (4) posed in part B might overlap with

questions covered in part A. When areas of overlap were identified then the respondents were provided the opportunity to add to their responses.

In part C, the respondents are invited to begin by describing their observations regarding Aboriginal social work students at the time of enrolment; the students' response to the learning environment, and the contributing factors to the student staying in school. The two final questions in part C related to personal and professional points of view to encourage the respondents to share their views of the ways in which they influence the students, and the learning that has taken place that will contribute to social work knowledge.

Data Analysis Processes

The researcher conducted the interviews during the months of April, May, June, July, August and September, 2015. The researcher chose to manually transcribe all the interviews on her own and chose this method in order to become intimate and conversant with the data. All the interview data and all respondents were organized by category and site. The researcher detailed the individual statements of the respondents through the use of quotes from the data about their experiences with the phenomenon before moving to meanings and clusters of meanings. The data was then clustered into common areas or themes by eliminating overlapping or repetitive statements. The researcher then examined the respondent's individual experiences which were integrated into the construction of the meaning of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994, p. 119).

The holistic-content perspective of analysis is chosen from the work of Lieblich (1998). The holistic portion refers to the opportunity for participants to share stages of their life and teaching career in chronological order. In this study, data collection began with open-ended questions about the respondents' first teaching experience. Subsequent questions followed

chronologically up to the present. The content generated from the data distinguished what happened; why it happened, and who was there. This is all from the respondents' viewpoint.

The organization and the analysis of data involved the researcher placing the transcribed interviews in front of her and *horizontalizing* the data in order to describe every statement as having equal value while being open to everything that each respondent had shared.

Coding for Themes

The researcher used the manual data analysis process. The researcher used the selected general analytic strategies in qualitative inquiry that are identified by Bogdan and Bilken (1992), Huberman and Miles (1994) and Wolcott (1994b) and are cited in Creswell (1998). The “sketching ideas” and “displaying data” strategies of Wolcott (1994b) and cited in Creswell (1998) were utilized by highlighting certain information in the description and displaying of the findings in tables” (p.141). The researcher integrated the strategy of “identifying codes” by Bogdan and Bilken (1992) in “developing coding categories and reducing information by sorting material into categories” (p. 141). In addition, the researcher used the “taking notes” strategy of Huberman and Miles (1994) by “writing reflective passages” and “reducing information by noting patterns and themes” (p. 141).

The process of analyzing the data began with reading the material five times then placing the researcher's initial and overall impression in writing, identifying themes that emerged from the data from beginning to end, and then examining the content for any indications of variation in mood or evaluation by the respondents (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 62-63; Creswell, 2008, p. 521).

As a beginning step in the analysis of the data, the following **Table 3.2** provides examples of the emergence of descriptive coding from questions in Parts A, B and C. Examples of the format for descriptive coding are illustrated in **Table 3.2**.

Table 3.2 Descriptive Coding

Descriptive Coding Part A	Descriptive Coding Part B	Descriptive Coding Part C
Feelings, memories about first teaching experience	Feelings, insights about teaching adults	Perceptions of own influence on adult learners at the time of enrolment
Description of self at that initial teaching stage	Self-discovery, transitions and learning	Identification of next steps in responding to learners and the outcomes

1. The raw data from the interview transcripts with each of the participants were re-transcribed and re-storied (Creswell, 2008, p. 520). In the re-transcription process the complete data is recorded from a selected piece of text. In the re-storying process the key points and themes from the text were listed in bullet form based on the re-transcription.
2. For the following **Table 3.3**, the researcher chose the *continuity aspect of the three-dimensional time line* (Creswell, 2008, p. 521) as a format for specifying past, present and future. The researcher continued to use this format in the other portions of each respondent's data for related themes.

Table 3.3 Three-dimensional time line

Past	Present	Future
Data from past experience (Self-location, education and lessons learned)	How personal past experience and related themes inform the present teaching environment.	Goal setting for the future based on past and present experience. (contributions to social work)

3. The researcher identified her *situationally-based self and brought self* to this study. This provides additional information to her disclosure described under Researcher’s Perspective in chapter one of this thesis. In the analysis of the data the following points illustrated in **Table 3.4** mirror some examples that were shared by the respondents in the data thus declaring the importance of bracketing in researcher notes:

Table 3.4 Researcher Situational and Brought Selves

Situationally-based Self	Brought Self
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural child welfare experience • Experience working in First Nation Communities • Post-secondary teaching experience • Experience teaching First Nation Post-Secondary Students • Experience in Program development and coordination • Community and Resource Development experience • Curriculum Development experience • Field Instruction experience • Retired social worker and educator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother • Spouse • Grandmother • Raised in an isolated rural area with limited resources • Elder care-giving responsibilities • Strong spiritual beliefs • Community participant and supporter • Education is a strong value

The data was coded for themes to include open, axial and selective themes. In vivo coding revealed the words that were repeated and the themes that emerged. The number of codes overall ranged from 30 – 40; however, the codes were reduced to four so there is no redundancy or overlap (Creswell, 2008, p. 521).

The researcher faced the challenge of determining when categories were saturated or when the data was sufficiently detailed. Colored markers were used as a form of identifying the themes while examining these areas separately from beginning to end to determine the number of times a particular topic seemed to reappear; the context of the theme, and the parts of the themes

that stood out. The content was examined for any episodes that tended to indicate variations in mood or evaluation by the participant (Creswell, 2008, p. 521; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, pp. 62-63).

The researcher proceeded with open coding by developing categories to sort the information (Creswell, 2008, p. 561). For example, in the axial coding phase, two open coding categories entitled **support** and **curriculum** were identified as core phenomena. In the selective coding phase the theory that applied to the interrelationship of the categories was identified as well as the themes that emerged in the axial coding model.

Triangulation

The triangulation of the data occurred through the process of data collection as a result of the researcher conducting the interviews and the examination of different standpoints of the respondents in being asked the same questions. The data collection involved the process of audio recorded interviews, handwritten notes, typed transcriptions of the interviews and the respondent's opportunities to member check the transcriptions and make corrections, additions and/or deletions.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the findings described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and cited in Creswell (2008) involved "making sense of the data or the lessons learned" (p. 264). In the development of a report of the findings, the data was reviewed five times. The purpose in doing so was to look for further descriptions and emergent themes that contributed to knowledge regarding the depth of social work educator influence and the impact on the retention of adult learners in social work education. Examples of dialogue and quotes are provided to support themes.

Limitations

The limitations of this qualitative thesis study include issues of generalizability. Drisko (1997) also pointed out that “the lack of explicit analysis of the transferability of study findings” (p. 189) may leave stakeholders and consumers of the report to their own devices to interpret how the findings may be generalized.

Summary

In this chapter the development and value of phenomenology as a philosophical approach was chosen to provide the frame work for the process of data collection by developing interview questions and to explore their features and assumptions. The main features of phenomenology indicate a long developmental history, and the emergence of a methodological framework that evokes the richness of individual lived experience. This process served to enhance the rigour of this form of research.

The interviews took place in a private location of the respondent’s choosing. Respondents were provided with interview questions in advance to allow them to review the questions. They were invited to ask questions about the study before participating, or at any time during the study. In addition, respondents were provided with the opportunity to “member-check” the transcripts of their interviews to ensure the accuracy of recording, and to make any desired additions, deletions or changes. There were no known issues that were encountered nor identified during the process of data collection. The data was analyzed manually by the researcher. The data was protected through the process of assigning pseudonyms to the respondents; maintaining the data in a locked filing cabinet; and ensuring that email correspondence was stored in the researcher’s password protected personal computer.

The process of analysis began with horizontalizing the data. In addition, using tables to illustrate descriptive coding, the three-dimensional time line and the researcher situational and brought self. Further, the process involved coding for themes, and engaging in open, axial and selective coding to reduce the number of themes so there is no redundancy or overlap.

The study focus for chapter four is to learn about the respondents in this study and their responses to students and the learning environment. Chapter four will provide a profile of the twenty-one respondents in this study to include the influence of their attributes and experience they bring. Their profile, personal sharing and personally meaningful teaching experiences will be shared in tables **4.1, 4.2, 4.3**, and Figure **4A**.

Chapter IV – Description of Study Respondents

This chapter will present the major research findings pertaining to the respondents which includes the respondent profile and personal sharing which is organized under the subtitles of self-location; values and integrity; influences and role models; lived experiences; affirmations and transitions; and personally meaningful teaching experiences.

Profile of Interview Respondents

An area of interest for the researcher is to learn more about the person in the teaching role, what they value, and the qualities and the skills they bring to the learning environment. The ancestry of respondents was specified in the Invitation for Participants poster; however, the gender of respondents was not. The invitation to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators to participate in this study was intended to be inclusive and to reflect a representative sample of social work educators who have experience teaching Aboriginal social work students. The voluntary responses to the research invitation resulted in an approximate gender balance. The respondents included six Aboriginal female participants, six non-Aboriginal female participants; five Aboriginal male participants and four non-Aboriginal male participants. Out of eleven Aboriginal participants, four self-identified as Métis.

The respondents who volunteered gained their experience as social work educators on campuses with a First Nations social work specialization located in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, Manitoba and Ontario. In the Invitation for Participants poster the criteria included the requirement that the respondents have a minimum of five years experience teaching social work courses at a post-secondary level. The five year minimum social work teaching requirement was intended to be inclusive of social work educators who had, for example, attended graduate school later in life and/or had spent a number of years in practice prior to teaching social work courses to Aboriginal social work students. The

other requirement was to include both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal instructors who both represent experience teaching Aboriginal social work students.

The voices of eleven Aboriginal and ten non-Aboriginal adult social work educators who volunteered to participate in this qualitative research study possess graduate degrees and represent a diverse range of life experience, practice and teaching experiences. The opportunity to explore different perspectives and worldviews from Indigenous and non-Indigenous social work educators is intended to contribute to knowledge in a manner that moves beyond awareness to implementation in practice (Sinclair, 2004). It is important to remember that the focus on social work educators and Indigenous students remains central to the findings and discussion in this study.

The respondents described their teaching experience which included teaching face to face or through distance education in northern, rural, remote and urban geographical locations. In addition, the respondents came from a variety of professional backgrounds prior to being social work educators. Respondents represented the following: experience teaching junior high and high school prior to teaching at a community college and university level (#19, #8); practitioners in the social work profession including areas of clinical social work, mental health, psychology, psychiatry, child welfare, child protection and generalist social work (#15, #12,#3, #2, #4, #18, #21, #7, #1); community development and advocacy, life skills and vocational training, program management, supervision and coordination (#11, #10, #17, #14, #9, #20, #13), and the field of corrections and probation (#16, #5). In **Table 4.1**, the ancestry and gender and educational level of respondents are presented. In **Table 4.2**, the respondents volunteered to share portions of their experience and the information is displayed for the purposes of reflecting some of the additional ways they have been influenced through practice. The respondents in this study included a

range of teaching experience from a minimum of six years to a maximum of thirty-seven years teaching social work courses that included the enrolment of Aboriginal students. The respondents were interviewed to gain knowledge about their self-location, lived experiences, and their perceptions of the ways in which they have and continue to support and influence the retention of Aboriginal post-secondary students who enroll in social work education.

Table 4.1: Ancestry/Gender and Educational Level of Respondents

Ancestry/Gender	Education
Métis Male – 2; First Nations Males - 3	Ph.D. – Métis – 1; Ph.D. – First Nation – 2 MSW – Métis – 1; MSW – First Nation - 1
Non-Aboriginal Males - 4	Ph.D. – 3; MSW - 1
First Nation Females – 4; Métis Females - 2	Ph.D. – First Nation – 2; Ph.D. – Métis – 1 MSW (Ph.D. Candidates)- First Nation – 2; MSW (Ph.D. Candidate) – Métis - 1
Non-Aboriginal Female - 6	Ph.D. – 1; MSW - 5

Table 4.2: Practice Experience of Respondents

Experience
Clinical Social Work (includes therapy, assessments, counseling, supervision, field instruction)
First Nation Child Welfare and Child Protection
Community Mental Health (counseling and education, life skills instruction, forensic assessments)
Community Development (social action initiatives, research, education and outreach, advocacy, program and resource development)
Facilitation of First Nation Social Work Agency Training
Indigenous Curriculum Development
Program and Policy Development; Program Management and Supervision
Corrections and Probation
Thesis Advising
Local Government
Representation on volunteer boards locally, provincially and nationally

Respondents in this study revealed a high regard for the social work profession, and a commitment to the empowerment of students by working collaboratively and respectfully in a student-centered environment (#17, #10, #15). In addition, respondents described the influences they had experienced in their own lives that led them to the opportunity to teach and their

process of self-discovery during that time (#6, #2). Respondents pointed out their love for, and commitment to, the students and the richness of learning that was shared by students through their stories (#15, #14). A respondent stated, “I learned as much from the students as the students learned from me” (#17). Others acknowledged the opportunity to give back by assisting in many ways to help students believe in themselves (#10, #11), and to “learn skills that are useful personally and in practice, and achieve the goals they had set out for themselves” (#16). In summary, the researcher discovered through interviewing respondents that there are many facets to the educator-student relationship of a supportive nature which have yet to be explored.

Eight respondents in this study recalled their first teaching opportunity as a result of being approached and encouraged to apply to teach specific social work courses by colleagues and/or professors (#1, #11, #19, #21, #12, #18, #9, #6). One respondent described his entry into academia as the result of “the personal mentorship of another academic” that recognized his aptitude in the academy and scholarship in particular (#13). Two respondents described gaining experience as teaching assistants before applying for sessional teaching positions (#7, #10). Four Aboriginal respondents personally shared that Aboriginal students were very happy to be taught by an Aboriginal instructor (#15, #7, #11, #12).

Three respondents in this study had prior experience of more than a decade in direct social work practice or a related field while enrolled in graduate studies, raising their children, and maintaining employment (#3, #6, #20). Fourteen respondents indicated experience teaching in urban settings (#13, #10, #6, #20, #7, #16, #18, #17, #19, #9, #10, #4, #15, #14) and eleven respondents indicated having taught in Northern communities (#13, #2, #3, #21, #4, #5, #8, #16, #12, #17, #19, #18). All the participants described having experience that included teaching Aboriginal students from northern rural or remote communities. Four respondents

described their experience teaching distance education courses (#15, #9, #13, #14). Two respondents (#21, #12) had experience teaching students of Inuit ancestry and one Indigenous professor described his experience teaching Inuit students as the “highlight of his teaching career.” In his experience, the students engaged with the material and regarded him as an ally in the interpretation of theory that linked to their lived experience (#12).

Social work educators are rarely trained as teachers in the Faculty of Education; however, it is important to point out exceptions. Out of twenty-one participants, three had teacher training (#8, #19, #6) and two had previous experience teaching at the middle and/or high school levels (#19, #8) prior to entering social work. Respondents indicated the importance of communicating experience that connected to the lived experiences of the students (#16, #12, #17, #15).

Respondents described the value of learning from students and clients and also acknowledged various involvements and research opportunities, while involving students in the community with various agencies and volunteer boards. Respondents also indicated that their practice examples provided in class are enriched by their ongoing community involvement and research (#5, #8, #15, #10).

The respondents largely drew upon their personal experiences as learners and their intuition as social work educators when adapting to the teacher role. One respondent shared: “At that time, I didn’t have a great deal of knowledge about adult education so I think that a lot of my techniques were intuitive” (#18). The respondent also acknowledged the value of life experience and an awareness of how students learned and stated: “I had some life experience at 28 and had some sense of how I learned; that sort of informed me and I knew that people (the students) liked to be respected for the knowledge they bring” (#18).

Self-Location

Respondents described their self-location then discussed their values, integrity, influential people and role models, lived experiences, affirmations, transitions and transformations, and personally meaningful teaching experiences. There is evidence of how the professional growth, the personal growth and the connections began to develop from those first teaching experiences in the lives of the respondents. One respondent shared: “I was asked if I wanted to teach an Aboriginal specific course; it wasn’t difficult to teach as I was in practice at that time so it was quite easy to talk about Aboriginal social work” (#12). Another respondent shared: “I developed my love of teaching from that first experience and I thought it was such a privilege to be involved in student life that way – so getting to know the students and what they were going through – Indigenous students in particular” (#15). Another respondent described: “The experience was enriching. It allowed me to be exposed to all fly in communities. I gained a better understanding of where people come from, what people are like, the issues, how political organizations work, social issues, inequality between men and women” (#2).

One respondent summed up her thoughts by sharing: “I bring with me a wealth of knowledge; a wealth of experience, and academics. It’s about the potential. It’s not about how smart you are; it’s about how hard you work; it is your persistence and believing in yourself and your love for the students” (#10). A respondent shared the experience of being a professor in a rural or remote community and that it means “way more than just the professor in the classroom; it requires a higher level of involvement in the student’s lives whether you like it or whether you don’t like it” (#13). Another respondent shared: “I am pretty well-liked by the students. I am pretty tough but pretty fair. If I see potential in someone then I will move heaven and earth and go out of my way to help but you have to do the work” (#4).

For some respondents the experiences of recalling events from many years ago became very clear as they talked about teachers they admired and wished to emulate. Among other influences were family members (#11, #17, #9, #21, #19, #1, #4) colleagues, social work educators (#11, #18, #3, #2), practicum supervisors, (#18, #15, #21, #11, #6), Elders, (#15, #14, #11), and community role models and mentors (#17, #13, #18).

The opportunity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents to share their experiences began with the initial broad open-ended question: *tell me about your first teaching experience?* Additionally, and in the process of situating the self and becoming more self-aware while engaging in the teaching environment, respondents are interviewed in order to provide an opportunity for them to voluntarily share parts of their personal and professional lives that they see as integral to their teaching practice. One respondent replied “teaching is labor intensive” (#10). Another respondent added “it is much more than technique, style, management systems and teaching strategies and I learned that teaching colleges couldn’t teach someone how to teach; like an artist you have to have a certain gift – you either have it or you don’t” (#19).

Table 4.3 presented on page 49 reflects the respondent’s recollections of those first teaching experiences.

Table 4.3 Respondent Recollection of Self and First Teaching Experience

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was eager to legitimize my experience working with Aboriginal people and social workers in communities” (#8). • “Just being offered the opportunity to teach and making connections with the students when going into the classrooms was very affirming; seeing them learn and open up was very rewarding (#11). • “Even though I lacked confidence it seemed that once I gained my footing I was a very good facilitator” (#14). • “I was unsure of my abilities but that changed over time with experience” (#2). • “I was young and naive believe me, but I also realized very quickly the impact that teaching has on the communities” (#16). • “The learning curve was incredibly steep” (#20). • “I was 23 years old, a quick, bright and a good student and a good study but very naive in terms of the academy and in terms of teaching”(#13). • “I was young, full of energy and pretty keen” (#21). • “I had done child welfare for a long time and wanted to see what else was out there. My first day of teaching I was sweating and green as grass” (#4). • “I did have a fairly extensive knowledge base but it was a bit of a challenge for me” (#10). • “I learned about time management requirements and extra organizational responsibilities” (#9). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was totally unprepared to teach; I read from the book a lot” (#5). • “I hadn’t planned at all in those days to ever become an academic. The joy and rewards of teaching in a university came only later; it wasn’t my first choice” (#7). • “I was happy to have the opportunity to teach and I loved learning” (#3). • “Although I had practiced social work for 16 years I had wanted to be a teacher since I was five” (#6). • “Given the content area required some research, it was an opportunity to learn from students and an opportunity to determine from experience as to what worked well” (#18). • “I wanted to teach more and more and continue with my education and work with graduate students” (#15). • “I was fairly young in starting to do university instruction. I had developed practice experience in social work working in the North and in a cross-cultural context which was probably career changing and life changing for me” (#17). • “I was extremely keen. I literally had no full time complete course teaching experience” (#1). • “I loved teaching; I would have taught any class and I knew I was good” (#19). • “I was moving up in the management levels in social work. I was thinking that teaching was something that I would try out” (#12).
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There were additional stories told by the respondents regarding their personal reactions to their first teaching experience. Respondents talked about their personal reaction when walking into a classroom for the first time. These reactions involved a mixture of feeling excited and full of anticipation (#8, #1, #3), while others looked at the teaching experience as an opportunity to try something different (#4, #12, #17, #10). Other respondents experienced personal affirmation through the development of additional skills and realized how they could help students (#9, #11, #16, #15). Another respondent also shared “I agreed to teach the course then I became very overwhelmed over what I had agreed to do. I was generally at that time a very shy person and didn’t like public speaking that much. It was a challenge; however, I was really happy I did it” (#11). Another example leading up to the respondent’s first teaching experiences included working with a variety of social services programs, and finding that the transition to the North was easier based on experience growing up in a small rural community rather than in an urban centre (#17).

Values and Integrity

An understanding of the value of honesty and maintaining professional integrity in practice are echoed in the words of an Indigenous respondent who shared “there are all kinds of wonderful professions in this world. It is not fair to lead people in this direction if it is not meant for them. We try to be very up front with them. Sometimes students have been passed along; sometimes sessional instructors may want students to like them so they give them a good grade. Sometimes people are set up for failure; you have to have some integrity” (#10).

Other questions that were not specifically asked about but were generated from the data raised the question regarding the appropriateness of non-Aboriginal faculty being approached to teach Indigenous courses or the appropriateness of males teaching courses on feminist theory. In

the words of a respondent: “I think having Indigenous faculty has helped a lot. In the same way, I was influenced by feminist thought in my younger years and, despite my male privileged family background, it helped me, but I will not teach the course” (#5).

A respondent described her personal experience and knowledge of Indigenous values by stating that values are not just something learned about in class; they are something to be applied throughout all aspects of life. The respondent shared the following:

I believe I am teaching social work for a reason. A lot of the values and our teachings are sharing and gifting – by using that approach in teaching it helps them (the students) to think about their values. One of my goals is trying to help them to identify with the professionalism (not the distancing by social service workers) of social work and personalizing it. The clients absolutely know when a person is not being authentic. (#11)

In addition to the values of honesty, sharing and gifting, the values that were explained by the respondents in this study included respect, congruence and non-interference. There is an expectation that self and others be respected; true selves are represented across all situations (#10) and that non-interference applies by “understanding that students are adults and they have the right to make their own decisions” (#9).

Three respondents in this study (#11, #10, #18) specifically described their methods of showing respect toward students by encouraging them, inviting their input, and respecting their knowledge. In addition, valuing their lived experience that they bring to the content; inviting opinions and views, and not becoming defensive when people disagree. A respondent added “I think these are ways in which you can influence the student and say you belong here; you are not an outsider” (#18).

An Indigenous respondent shared that congruence is really important in teaching social work courses and it is expected that social work educators will bring all of themselves to the teaching environment and not just the academic piece.

When we have sweat lodge ceremonies we invite people; that congruence is important for the students. If you are not congruent, it is a reflection of you as a human being if you can't represent yourself across all situations. It is important to have some congruence in our lives, there has to be. For us here within the Faculty of Social Work in of itself there are a number of Indigenous faculty members who have created a caucus. We want a faculty to represent all of us. We bring our cultural ways of being to the campus. When non-Indigenous instructors teach Indigenous students there is an expectation that non-Indigenous instructors will participate in the cultural aspects of the program and will continue to increase their knowledge about colonization and decolonization on an ongoing basis. (#10)

In the data there are examples of respondents who weigh the options prior to considering teaching social work courses based on what they know about themselves and what they are asked to do. A respondent of Métis ancestry described her hesitancy when asked to teach a First Nation required course by saying “people see us as the same but we're not. I was worried I might say something politically incorrect. I felt a little bit overwhelmed and I probably had students 15 years younger than I who know more through lived experience than I do through my academic background...it was humbling” (#6).

An Indigenous respondent described the value of non-interference as something social work could really benefit from in a lot of ways. In the words of the respondent “ Institutions talk about non-interference as a practice but sometimes it isn't always modelled so well; it is working face to face in those discussions and sitting across the circle from one another” (#9).

The respondent added that another important aspect of non-interference is to treat students as adults and not push them.

It is important to understand everyone has their own path – they will make their own decisions. I will give the students information around the parameters of what they can expect from certain choices they make; I don't discourage them from making those choices. I let them know they will be welcome back as their circumstances change; One of the key kinds of supportive approaches for educators is to try to work with students around that at the graduate level and the undergraduate level. (#9)

A respondent shared his experience working with students who viewed coming into program and becoming a social worker as a lifelong dream; however, due to circumstances they were not able to continue in the program. The respondent responded to students by saying “if you need to do what you need to do then go ahead; you are always welcome back when the crisis is over and you are healthy” (#5). The respondent indicated the manner in which he provided support to the student was by trying to help the student work through that feeling of being a failure to a point of seeing the opportunity to come back when he/she had worked through their issue (#5).

Influential People and Role Models

In this section respondents described influential people, role models and “good solid mentors” (#11) and provided their views on the ways they personally had been influenced in practice and in teaching. As described in an earlier section, the respondents identified their influences at the beginning of their career which included family, students, colleagues, faculty, clients and programs. Respondents shared examples of the ways they were influenced. A respondent indicated the helpfulness of the *Four Worlds Development Project* (#5) and authors such as Paulo Friere (#7, #12). Other influences included a senior trainer, Native Elders and the opportunity to attend ceremonies locally and around the country (#20). Two respondents shared that they were inspired by other women, in similar circumstances as they, who were also working full time, raising a family and attending graduate school (#20, #3). Chief Dan George is revered by a respondent who indicated that throughout his years of teaching he continues to read Chief George’s 1967 speech in class (#2).

The respondents in this study also identified a range of influences further on in the development of their careers in adult education that included colleagues, family members and

academics. A respondent described her Masters' program and Ph.D. program supervisors as being inspirational, encouraging and validating by building upon the respondent's skills in teaching:

I was inspired to continue to use a lot of experiential methods in class, and to be tolerant and nurturing while encouraging students to express themselves in a variety of ways such as arts-based methods, poetic writing and expression. At the same time, maintaining a high level of accountability to the community, and to each other as practitioners. I learned more about community-based research and that whole loop back system of community accountability in academic work. I express admiration for the students; I admire their resilience and persistence in setting goals to assist their families and communities. (#15)

Influential people resonate with respondents as they share stories about those who impacted their teaching practice. One respondent shared that there were many who were very helpful during the beginning stages of teaching resulting in the desire to give to others by "providing an education that was useful for the student in many areas of their life" (#16).

Another respondent shared the positive influence from family and friends and shared: "my role models were strong women and my mother was one of them" (#11).

A respondent identified three people who were *incredibly influential* in her earlier career in psychology prior to entering social work:

One was a psychiatrist who taught me about balance to lead a healthy life while working in an emotionally and physically challenging environment when dealing with trauma. Another was a psychiatrist who was grounded, genuine and personable. The third influence was a social work colleague who brought in information about the person, the family and their social environment. What she brought to the room was right for the person and their environment. I was practicing in psychology and she had a different lens. (#21)

An Indigenous respondent shared the experience of working with Ann Charter who understood the professional relationship between students and professors by saying:

The person that really influenced me in the academic world was Ann Charter. We had long conversations; I used to visit with her in her home, and she would come out to our place to pick Saskatoon berries. It was a friendship that I had never experienced with any

of my other instructors. Ann understood that professional relationship between students and professors. She was role modelling what she was teaching but also living life in a good way by demonstrating honesty and respect and all those good values that really resonated with me and reminded me of all of the teachings that my mother had shared with me. (#11)

Another respondent described early experiences working in Indigenous communities and identified a former work colleague, the late Ron P., who became a lifelong friend and who was very influential in teaching and teaching approaches. He had started off working as a minister in Indigenous communities and he had a very holistic perspective on learning, and life, and support and the importance of relationships in communities. The respondent shared that “his influence focused on a commitment to social change, and working alongside rather than in front of people who are less fortunate, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people”(#17).

The importance of “empowering students through encouragement” (#10, #16), being “truthful about the ways they could help” (#19) and knowing when to “identify and intercede” (#14) with additional resources to provide needed support was stressed by respondents. At the same time, the importance of maintaining the integrity of the instruction provided was identified so that the student’s degree is recognized and respected (#16, #5, #6, #7) and the student is prepared for challenges and expectations in the field (#18, #9). The importance of support was identified with a caution that the provision of too much support on the part of the instructor may be an indication of “paternalism” (#5). Another respondent described the drawbacks of “infantilizing” the student to the point where the instructor is not being helpful in preparing the student with the prerequisite skills for university (#13).

Maintaining a standard of academic performance is valued so that earning a social work degree is a recognized credential based on competency. Another respondent also held Ann Charter in high esteem. Ann, a former Indigenous director of the Northern Social Work

program, was described as being very influential in the lives of educators and students. The respondent shared:

Ann was firm about student competency in the field of practice and stressed that we have to have a level of flexibility without changing standards when we work with people so that the degree attained is recognizable as a professional degree. There is always a tendency to focus on trying to get the student through no matter what the cost; the danger is a watered down standard. (#18)

In this section, respondents described other role models who were very influential and prominent in their lives. A predominant theme supported by quotes stressed the importance of the maintenance of personal and professional integrity in working with, and teaching, social work students. The next section under the title *lived experiences* reflects other aspects that respondents chose to share about their personal and professional lives.

Lived Experiences

A respondent described her own experiences of “identity displacement” as a result of being separated from her culture, home, family and familiar environment. Through her observations, her experience alerted her to students who wished to connect to an Indigenous person. The respondent acknowledged empathy and sensitivity for Indigenous students who are experiencing those challenges (#15). The educator’s opportunity to share stories about her own struggles, challenges and journey piqued the interest of Indigenous students. Respondents noted that the students were interested in “what their experiences had been” (#15, #2) and the “sharing of experiences” (#12), and “intersections” in their own lives (#14). The experiences shared with students placed the respondents in good stead to relate to students through personal experience, thereby helping students make connections to the curriculum (#14, #12). It was stressed that there is a “mutuality of exchange” (#15); however, what is being shared is to be helpful to the

course content, and focused on the student and their learning, so the instructor is not the one to be doing all the talking (#14).

Respondents disclosed other parts of their own lived experiences that contributed to their understanding of the challenges facing Indigenous students. For example: “being the first in their family to attend a university” (#16, #14); and “growing up in a single parent home with younger siblings; one disabled” (#13); “going to school, working and raising children as a single parent “(#20); “being raised in a rural area in relative poverty” (#17); “being very poor and being the first in the family to receive an education”(#16); “experiencing oppression and non-validation by classmates and instructors because of ethnic background” (#1).

The manner in which lived experiences influenced teaching was described. A respondent also described his first teaching experience by “drawing on practice and personal experience from growing up in a rural area rather than drawing from a wealth of theoretical knowledge” (#17). Another respondent described a colleague as a “cultural guide in academia” (#12) who was very helpful with guidance navigating the pace and expectations in academe. Others took their lead from more experienced colleagues, role models, mentors and academic guides (#16, #17, #7, #11). After gaining more experience in teaching adult learners, a respondent discussed the development of their own teaching style which included the ways in which they were taught or learned best, and the identification of mentors “who led the way” (#16). Another respondent described valued opportunities to observe other instructors and to learn from their experience in enhancing her methods of course delivery (#3).

Affirmations, Transitions and Transformations

Two of the respondents stated that they always wanted to be a teacher. “I wanted to be a teacher since I was five” (#6) and another shared “I was making up classes when I was eight or nine years old and I would have taught any class” (#19). Two respondents indicated that they developed a love for teaching and experience, for example “gaining their footing as they became more confident” (#14) and becoming more “circumspect” through gaining an understanding of the challenges that students faced and the effect on their response to the classroom environment (#18). A respondent described finding “social work as a good fit” (#21). Another respondent described initially not wanting to be a teacher but developing a “love and enthusiasm” (#7) for teaching through experience.

The opportunity to receive supportive feedback was a meaningful experience for respondents. Three respondents described their personal affirmations through receiving “positive student feedback” (#15, #11, #1) and one respondent shared her experience of “being nominated twice for a teacher excellence award” (#15). In the words of a respondent: “What is meaningful for me too, is that every once in a while I will run into a student who I have taught and they will tell me about how powerful the course was that I taught; It’s probably good for us to get that feedback” (#11). Another respondent shared that a former student called out to him and said: “you are one of the best teachers I ever had; you got me involved” (#19).

Respondents described their experiences of transitions and transformations when moving from practice into teaching courses which influenced their love for teaching (#6, #19, #17, #16, #3). Respondents who came directly from a social work practice background into academia indicated that they valued their experience; however, it did not prepare them for the expectations of academia (#18, #17, #12). In this regard, a respondent shared his early experience:

My teaching I suppose lacked the publishing and researching accomplishments of academic life at that stage. In terms of describing myself at this stage I was drawing on practice and personal experience growing up in a rural area rather than on a wealth of theoretical knowledge. (#17)

A respondent with prior experience working in the ACCESS program reflected upon his teaching practice and the support he provided. The respondent described that he had provided a lot of one on one counselling support through working with students who had not come through the regular school system.

On a personal level because of the nature of the program, I came away without really understanding academia. My experiences had been around teaching and not research. I was teaching mature students and you were expected to provide personal support to students; this often placed you in an awkward dual relationship. (#18)

An Indigenous respondent shared his experience of the transition from social work practice into academia and shared:

I was trying to write papers with the idea that it is going out somewhere in time and space. Whereas in social work practice you know who you are talking to and you are able to contextualize what you are going to say and what is going on in their life and your life. It was difficult to make that transition. Writing is abstract and impersonal. Learning how to think that way was very difficult because of the removal of the personal. The cues and intuition used in social work practice are just beyond conscious awareness (subconscious) while writing and research have to be explicit; a kind of hyperawareness. (#12)

Personally Meaningful Teaching Experiences

Respondents described examples of teaching experiences that were personally meaningful for them. One respondent observed that when Indigenous students engage in education it is not all about themselves; it greatly and positively impacts their family and community. The respondent stated that it is personally meaningful “to witness the resilience and the capacity of Indigenous students to make change in their lives and to involve their community” (#15).

A respondent shared that it is so important for Aboriginal people to be involved in educational programs as it gives Aboriginal people an opportunity to challenge some of the thinking which is detrimental to some of the trauma and the healing (#20). A respondent recalled a discussion with a former work colleague who described Aboriginal culture as the culture of poverty. The respondent knew this was wrong. In her words:

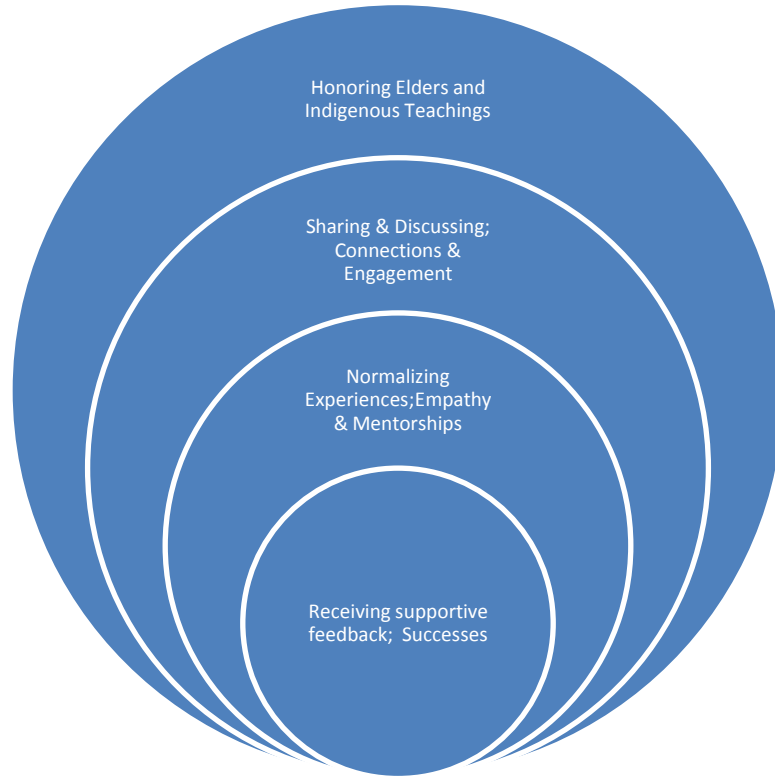
It was a prevailing thinking (referring to the Culture of Poverty), not that poverty wasn't and isn't an issue, but it entirely negates the rights of Aboriginal people to have an education and to affirm cultural values and world view; the deficit model thinking about Aboriginal concerns; it is not OK to do that. (#20)

Other personally meaningful teaching experiences that stood out were described by the respondents and reflected in the following sections. The experiences are supported by quotes under the headings of connections, developing empathy, honoring Elders and Indigenous teachings, normalizing experiences, engagement, sharing and discussing, receiving supportive feedback, and mentorships and successes.

Figure 4A utilizes a Stacked Venn template provided in Word to display the researcher's creation of a visual representation of the themes that arose from the respondents' disclosure of personally meaningful teaching experiences on page 61. A discussion around each theme of what was personally meaningful is provided.

Figure 4A – Personally Meaningful Teaching Experiences

Figure 4A Personally Meaningful Teaching Experiences



Honoring Elders and Indigenous Teachings

Respect for Elders and the practice of cultural teachings are described as powerful (#11, #14, #21, #6) as reflected in the following quotes from respondents. A respondent described the experience of working with an Elder in the delivery of a land based course entitled Cultural Camp in the month of May. In her words,

What was the most meaningful for me was seeing strengths and shining moments for students who struggled academically. They were continuing with the program. It was good to see them in this setting - it was just so lovely. I think it was a relief to see them succeeding. (#21)

A respondent described the opportunity to invite an Elder to her class who talked about his experience in a residential school. In the words of the respondent:

His story was so powerful. When students have taken part in that particular class then they are much more open to learning about Indigenous people's experiences in society and it was a good time to reach students through their hearts. Hopefully when they do social work, they will be working and understanding from their hearts, rather than working from some theory they are familiar with. (#11)

A respondent described her experience facilitating a course:

We did a check in every morning, a prayer, a circle, and passing the feather around. The topics included colonialism, poverty, residential schools and sometimes those check ins and topics would go on all morning just because people needed to share and were sometimes being triggered. The circles were healing, valuable, powerful and a strong teaching practice to bring in experiences, share stories and learn from each other. (#14)

The use of journal assignments and sharing is identified by respondents (#6, #3) as a useful teaching methodology for students to be able to identify with the course content.

The use of a journal is helpful to see some of the thoughts of students; when students learned about colonization it was quite humbling. I have a soft spot for Aboriginal students in the classroom. Knowing that they are involved in academia doesn't always work well for them. I like to think that the students know I am there for them and easy to talk to. (#6)

You could see they were really connecting with the content. Many of them were sharing and I had really good attendance for every class! When we were able to journal and do topics it really influences the students personally and there is the shedding of tears; this knowledge and raised awareness is going to influence their practice. (#3)

Sharing and Discussing

The opportunity to discuss topics and to share with one another is identified by the respondents as contributing to learning. A respondent shared his experience:

I learned Indigenous ways of doing things; building my knowledge in ways that I could incorporate, and establishing legitimacy as students shared their notions of culture. They shared experiences and I believe that I learned as much from them as they learned from me. (#17)

In the words of a respondent: "Teaching is a competency that goes beyond course content" (#1). The respondent remembered the first class when the students were not quite as

engaged and more reserved, and then remembered how the second class changed the dynamic – it was early on. In her words:

The class became more of a seminar...it was a pivotal moment; an incredibly rich level of discussion and learning on both parts. What ended up happening was that the students were engaged instead of just going through the motions. People started asking questions. What I noticed was a lot more acceptance of discussion from other students, discussion of issues, more cross talk and more laughter; discussing relevancy in real life; authentically and meaningfully engaging with each other. (#1)

The challenges when engaging with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were described by a respondent as follows:

You learn as you go along. More Aboriginal students are more engaged with this kind of stuff and disclose more readily than non-Aboriginals. The non-Aboriginal students are more reserved; non-Aboriginal students will talk about academic plans but not so much about what is personal. (#2)

Making Connections

The process of making connections, the teaching methods, how the respondents are affected, and the growth that respondents have observed in students is captured in the following quotes. A respondent shared:

In my class I encourage discussing and sharing – bringing it from theory to a lot more personal level. I think if anything what I find inspiring is when I see a lot of growth in students – certainly that happens – seeing that connection when the light bulb goes on. The knowledge and raised awareness is going to influence their practice. In the social work program, and among the students, I see not only professional development but tons of personal development; tremendous growth. (#3)

Another respondent described that “when experiencing those connections and light bulb moments, people are getting it” (#2). The respondent described the following:

In two classes of students there were 500 years of experience, some had child welfare experience and others were mature students with not the same formal education or experience as the child welfare workers. For those students without formal education we talk about interaction among family and friends. In the Interpersonal Communication course, it is more about becoming self-aware in the beginning stages of an interview. (#2)

A respondent described asking a series of questions in class:

Who do you think you are? How do you think others see you? How do you see yourself? This is a big challenge for students. Now students are given the opportunity to give a ten minute presentation. This is when the students really start sharing and they are told: *you choose to disclose what you want*. Once one tells their story then others' stories trickle in. I ask: what is motivating you to do this and tell the group this? It is taking a big risk. It is self-therapeutic – it also brings the group closer – we see a lot of this which is really good. (#2)

A respondent spoke about having teaching experience with a class of all Inuit students.

He expressed how meaningful the experience was for him:

I taught in Labrador one semester. The class was comprised of all Inuit students – it was probably the highlight of my teaching career. A class of three hours flew by in minutes – because they asked a lot of questions; they read the book; they were trying to relate their values to the material they were covering. I was seen as an ally and interpreter and translator for these outside theories in the Inuit world view. When you become engaged in the material it is different because the students are becoming personally invested. (#12)

Another respondent shared the meaningful experience of making connections with students and stated:

Students seek you out if you are approachable. An open door policy definitely influences people. I have had students thank me for pushing them along, giving guidance, and providing role modelling. You can make some good connections by providing some role modelling for people. I definitely feel connected. I make good connections with the students and when I see them blossom and to have a part in it then that is good. (#4)

The connections made in the learning environment include those times when students are able to connect with the educator and with the content.

I learned that I loved teaching; it was very gratifying and personally rewarding particularly if you were able to form a connection with students and they were interested in what you were discussing, and you saw the change and the growth; it was something I learned about myself; I liked it. (#18)

A story shared by a respondent involves one young client who talked about a social worker and the compassion he had shown when he worked with her and how he made the

connection between her circumstances and what he had learned in the faculty. The respondent shared: “For me as his former instructor that is what makes the work rewarding” (#11).

Social work educators talked about the ways in which students inspire them, particularly the growth in students when the connection happens:

At that time I had that freshness of practice experience and that was meaningful for the students; it allowed me to make connections between practice and theory which is always a struggle in social work. (#18)

The connecting is about the learning – making the most out of their university education. A respondent shared: “As students gain more education the situations that face their communities come into focus and there is a desire to help” (#5).

A lot of people really want change if not only in their family but also in the community. They see the heartache and the atrocities and the things that people are continuing to experience. They say this is wrong. They can start to grapple with it to see why and they want to change the future for themselves, families and communities. It is that determination of wanting to change self-family-community. They realize that life can be better – inspiring Aboriginal youth . (#3)

A respondent spoke about a discussion he had participated in with a former instructor from the Northern Social Work Program with many years of teaching experience. In his words, “the program tends to lose students in the first year. A retired faculty member, with thirty years experience, shared with me that if the students really connected and bonded in the first year then that tended to last right through to the 4th year” (#5).

A respondent pointed out that the students also benefit from making good connections with each other and with their instructors by getting involved in different activities and events such as community education and putting on workshops. One participant pointed out that” part of making these connections is to educate about what we do and how it connects to them. It is a two-way street; every student is different” (#3).

Normalizing Experiences

An Indigenous respondent shared his experience of introducing resources to Indigenous and rural students enrolled in distance education and holding discussions in face to face environments to provide another dimension in creating safe spaces for students and shared:

One of the key things was just to be able to normalize the perspectives and the experiences of Indigenous and rural students. I provided opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to be able to explore lots of the complicating issues that they would be running into practice in the field – so they would be better prepared as practitioners for the work lying ahead of them – especially those who weren't living in larger urban settings. These experiences were provided because much of the curriculum is based on urban-based social work. (#9)

An Indigenous respondent described studying the work of Paulo Friere and how he normalizes whatever idea is foreign to adult learners. In this process the respondent described a means of teaching all students, particularly Aboriginal students, ways to demystify logic and ways of thinking at the university level; it is the process that they are already familiar with (#12). The respondent described implementing this in his teaching practice through the process of being able to teach in areas that he was familiar with like social welfare, family counseling and some crisis work. He was able to relate personal experiences with what is happening in Aboriginal communities or with Aboriginal people, then saying to students: “you know when you decided to go to university; you had to analyze and weigh decisions so essentially you were critically thinking without assigning a label to it” (#12).

Empathy

A respondent described her experience and pointed out the importance of sensitivity and empathy in understanding the student's situation by stating:

I have been able to incorporate experience. I have been able to incorporate examples because I work with homelessness. This incorporates elements in social work that helps to understand their situations – where people are coming from – conditions of the

reserves; the power of the reserve and the isolation; I can include the experiences of the students into my classes. (#8)

Two respondents added a cautionary note regarding the total impact of sensitive and traumatic curriculum topic areas that may trigger students:

The stuff that we teach in social work we have to be extra sensitive – we know the statistics and the possibility is great that the students have experienced trauma. We ethically and morally have to be able to process that. We can't just teach the information and leave it there. It is something that we really need to be in tune with when teaching Aboriginal students and newcomers. Those are the kinds of things we have to really start thinking about when giving a course and impact of not doing anything with it. (#16)

When you are talking about the history and the issues – these issues are their issues, that is their life and it is not resolved. It may be one of their family members; it may be one of their friends. I think that is really important when you are talking about social work education for Aboriginal social workers. (#14)

Mentorships

In the process of students identifying mentors, respondents (#8, #19) shared the following:

I have a good example of this. I started working with a student who took nine years in the program and wished to graduate. She had big challenges as she had run out of time and was going to be asked to leave the program. She asked me to help her. I worked with her mentoring and so on. One day she graduated. A man who came from the same community spoke to her following her presentation on homelessness. He said to her, I trust what you are saying because I see how far you have come and the person you are today. (#8)

They all were meaningful (the teaching/mentoring experiences). “They all were. On a personal level, the way I teach, it sets up a relationship between me and the classroom. It is not a downward submissive relationship. It is also not a completely equal relationship because I know things they don't, but on a personal level it is. (#19)

The experience of identifying with students and giving back was identified by an Aboriginal respondent who shared:

I feel particularly drawn to Aboriginal students, because their story and mine is the same; their difficulties are the same as mine was. I've been blessed to participate in a number of mentoring relationships with Aboriginal students, and I'm always happy to do so; It makes me feel like I'm giving back to those people who helped me when I was a student. (#7)

Successes

Respondents described that their strong feelings culminate when students succeed and graduate from the social work programs:

Many students have endured challenging barriers right from the time of coming from very difficult life circumstances and not having been in school for many years; this was a foreign environment; the language and the culture of academia was different. And so seeing the students' success is very gratifying; Seeing them succeed while walking through this foreign terrain was very personally meaningful. (#18)

An Indigenous respondent described her experiences of student success and her respect for their ability to overcome many challenges in meeting their goals:

There is a huge change over 4 years... (gentle tears)...Nothing gives me greater joy than to see the students walk across the stage to receive their diploma. You see them when they come in; who they are; what their challenges are. You see them stumble and you see them fall, and they pick themselves up and they are just amazing human beings when they are done. I cry every time I say that. It's a reflection of what you believe, who you see when they come in; the capacity that they have, and the growth that they undergo when they are here. (#10)

Summary

Chapter four presented the findings that described the social work educator respondents who volunteered to participate in this study. The discussion included their self-location, values and integrity, influences and role models, lived experiences, affirmations, transitions, transformations and personally meaningful teaching experiences.

The main findings in this chapter underline values that the respondents identify as integral to their teaching practice which include respect, integrity, inclusion, congruence, sharing and discussing, flexibility, authenticity, honesty, and non-interference. The values demonstrated and shared by the respondents send strong messages to students in preparation for the social work profession. The message to students that illustrates the value of inclusion is "you belong

here; you are not an outsider” (#18). This message is communicated through respect for, and the validation of, the contributions of students as they discuss their lived experiences.

The value of non-interference is not avoidance; it is a different approach. Students are given a voice as adults when making decisions, such as whether to remain in the social work program or to leave. The data collected in this chapter on the value of non-interference allows difficult discussions to take place in an honest and forthright manner inviting opportunities for students and faculty to sit across the table from one another to have open discussions. Students are given a voice and an opportunity to understand and process the options and the consequences of the decisions they make.

The meaningful experiences as quoted reflect the views of the respondents in discussing their experience teaching Aboriginal students. The topics reflected those “light bulb moments” that evolved from making those connections between theory and practice. They supported a feeling of safety where course content could be processed thoughtfully and talked about openly. A respondent identified the process that occurs when “the thoughts and contributions of the students are given legitimacy” (#17). Another respondent shared that “the process where course content can be processed thoughtfully and talked about openly has a decolonizing type of aim” (#9).

The process of sharing and discussing highlights the mutual understanding that occurs when students are provided the opportunity to interact and connect with one another. The quotes from the data that relate to the experiences of social work educators working with Elders reflect their appreciation and respect for their teachings. The process of normalizing experiences

described by the respondents is to point out realities in practice and to help students prepare prior to entering the social work field.

When instructors receive supportive feedback it is remembered as evidenced by the quotes provided. Mentoring relationships are identified as evolving from both personal and professional relationships. These relationships often develop with members of one's own family as well as with colleagues, other professionals, supervisors and academic advisors, community activists and supporters who model values in support of empowering individuals, families and communities.

Chapter five will present the findings describing components of the learning environment which include the physical environment and the establishment of physical and personal safety. The instructional methodologies include teaching preparation, ways of learning and choices of teaching venues. The knowledge contributions of the respondents, and the students, provide co-learning opportunities. Connections are made when both respondents and students are invested and engaged in the material. Other key considerations include looking at each student as an individual which enhances opportunities for each student to explore, learn and discuss value and cultural differences in a moderated environment. The design and delivery of the curriculum is explored for its potential in reflecting the lived experience of the student. A student-focused curriculum is one that is relevant and sufficiently flexible to integrate learning, while respecting and accommodating cultural practices, traditions and life circumstances as revealed in the data.

Chapter V – Learning Environment

A description of the learning environment, and areas that take precedence, is addressed from the varied perspectives coming from the data. An Indigenous respondent shared:

We were always concerned when hiring instructors (because of the needs of Aboriginal students) who were willing to go above and beyond; Instructors who are sensitive to what the students are saying and are getting as much as they can from students. The question is: *how do we offer this program within the stated values?* It was the instructors who suggested additional supports. Quite a few of our instructors continue to be advocates for students after they have graduated. There really is a clear set of values that we hold, in the way that we continue to try to develop relevant programs. We can't ignore that there is a plan regarding their family and in their community. (#20)

In this chapter, the presentation of findings will begin with a discussion of the educational environment. In the words of an Indigenous respondent: “Access to and success in the learning environment means to be able to show grandchildren, show children and show family that we can succeed in education – we can do alright in this system” (#9).

In particular, the information generated from the data reveals the importance of establishing safety in the learning environment. Safety encompasses the broad spectrum of how a safe physical and interpersonal environment is created to enhance the development and delivery of a curriculum that embraces the lived experience of Aboriginal students. The teaching methodology, curriculum development and course delivery involve an added level of awareness and responsibility on the part of the social work educator to work collaboratively and to invest in meeting the needs of students. The statement “we are all treaty people” resonates as a reminder (#20) as the learning environment is examined.

Educational Milieu

The personal and professional experience of working in an educational environment that promotes and values Indigenous education contributes to success in social work. A respondent described her experience:

I was in a milieu where Indigenous education was valued and promoted early on. Having an Indigenous pedagogy as an integral part of our school mission is essential. We have Indigenous faculty, Indigenous staff and Indigenous programming. I think those are some of the key elements of success in social work. (#15)

A commitment to teaching and to students and the importance of building a trust relationship is reflected in the following quotes:

Most of our faculty has been here over two to three decades. We have lots of experience and we know what we are talking about. We have a tight bond. It is important for us to support one another; we all convey the same message. (#10)

Key areas in the teaching environment are having good support, and where people can trust. You say what you mean, mean what you say; where the educators are sensitive to their (the students) life experiences, where they are coming from, and having an awareness. (#3)

Knowledge Contributions

In the experience of the respondents in teaching Aboriginal students, three key perspectives were identified in the data and are supported by quotes. The first perspective relates to the responsibility to teach subject matter concerning what the students will be facing in the field. The second perspective describes the influence of policy and the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The third perspective underlines the importance of teaching about colonization.

The aspect of preparing students for what they will be facing in the field is supported in the data (#12, #18, #2). Respondents also clarified that students may be triggered depending on the subject matter taught in social work courses (#6, #16, #11, #14). In these situations an

educator has a role in being able to provide a perspective on what may be happening for the student. In the following quote a respondent shared his experience and response:

Working in child welfare I had an awareness of issues of abuse, violence in families, sexual abuse, intergenerational abuse, connections with substance abuse and things of that nature. With a background in mental health, I think I also brought some understanding of the context of the issues that the students were facing, and rather than reacting to the reactivity of the students, I was able to put it in a context and respond with a bit more depth. (#18)

A respondent shared that her area of interest in teaching was around policy and the history of colonization and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Through those processes in terms of my teaching then, my teaching ensures that I try to offer a perspective that is more balanced than from what we see. I encourage my students to look below the surface of policy, how decisions were made, who sits at the table, and who benefits from those decisions; trying to educate about the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people always has a place in whatever course I am teaching. All of these teachings are important as it provides a context. It relieves students of the burden of being colonized. It educates students about how that colonization process occurs, and how that affects them as a human being. When we are working in social work in particular it is important to know this. Non-Indigenous people don't understand they have also been colonized and they owe a lot. We try to convey that message. They don't realize they, too, are affected by colonization. They need to be in a relationship (with Indigenous people) to work toward equity and equality. We are doing our part and that happens on many different levels" (#10).

Three respondents described the ongoing importance of teaching about the history of colonization and the impact on Aboriginal people as follows:

A respondent shared that "through working with Aboriginal people in social work I was becoming more aware of colonialism and the impact on Aboriginal people and why it was significant and I gained an understanding of the disadvantages with reading the literature on colonialism and learning the theory. (#17)

If you are going to do a course on Aboriginal people...students had to learn about the history of colonization first. I bring information from around the world. Examples are France controlling Algeria; and the British controlling India. I enjoyed brushing up on contextual knowledge and delivering it conscientiously and respectfully. (#7)

The courses I teach in social work are very provocative and all the courses I teach in social work are very helpful for the students to see their situation ...critical thinking for Aboriginal people. I am able to include in theory what is happening with Aboriginal

people's colonization...exploring critical theories; the content in the feminist course covers the circumstances and the situations of Aboriginal women and how that changed after the colonizer came. (#8)

Physical Environment

The choice of a setting where classes are held was identified by a respondent to add to the understanding of the meaning attached to a location and how this may affect the students' learning. In the process of delivering classes to students enrolled in cohorts in northern rural and remote communities, classroom resources may be limited.

A situation that relates to the choice of a venue for classes to be held was shared by a respondent who taught a course to Aboriginal students in an old residential school and described the situation as follows:

We had a vote and everyone agreed it was OK to use that facility so we did. As I was teaching the course, *Feminist Perspectives*, the topic of the environment came up. The students didn't talk about it until that day and talked about how horrible they felt; the triggers they had, and how difficult it was to come to that environment, and how they were afraid to go to the upstairs bathroom; some of the students had attended that school. (#16)

The respondent went on to explain that the structure had been remodeled; however, it was still an old residential school. In her words: "First it reminded me how resilient the students are and number two – it also taught me that we as administrators and we as teachers need to be aware to try to give the students a voice somehow; and because of that I will always try to give them a safer environment" (#16).

Safety

In addition to the importance of the physical environment as described by an experience shared under the previous section, the data also pointed to the importance of developing learning environments that are psychologically safe. Creating a safe place for students to learn is

explained from different perspectives and experiences. A respondent shared her experience based on working with cohorts in the New Careers program and stated:

I believe modularized learning and the context it offered gave them a feeling of safety. The Northern Social Work Program and the Inner City Social Work Program do a lot of things to create a learning environment that encourages students to support each other. I think programs like New Careers were certainly influential. (#20)

In an effort to enhance the students' ability to engage and feel safe, a respondent placed importance on allowing students to get to know her from the very first day and for the educator to be clear on the expectations. A non-Aboriginal respondent shared her observations on the first day of class and acknowledged:

My responsibility is to be incredibly reflexive and to establish that first and foremost. If I can't do that then I am making it incredibly difficult for Indigenous students to participate in any kind of meaningful way. I knew that if I didn't attend to safety issues then I was in danger of replicating the residential school experience, albeit without the beatings and the starvation diet and I was being emotionally and psychologically oppressive. (#1)

The advantage of small classes in creating a safe classroom climate that enhances the students' ability to share with one another was described by respondents:

I find it meaningful when students are able to share. We try to set up a trusting type of classroom climate. We may have about a dozen students and the small class size allows for students to get to know each other. (#3)

Other perspectives shared by the respondents on creating a safe environment for students involved "making the connection with students – trying to be personable and to be fair but also being sensitive and making yourself available when people need to talk and making them feel that you are kind of a safe place" (#3).

The respondents highlighted the need for the establishment of a physically and personally safe environment. The key points involved contributing to the establishment of a foundation of

support and stability through establishing connections with students, and being clear on expectations.

Instructional Methodologies

The effects on the community through the initiative taken by respondents are explored by looking at examples of instructional methodologies in the institutional learning environment, and the learning environment created for students outside of the institution. As one respondent shared:

I have become very involved and invested in the community; and it is beyond just being a professor in the faculty and teaching courses. I have taken the opportunity to go outside of the classroom, to go further and do a lot of research; this involves outreach to people and the community resulting in the opportunity to build trusting relationships and partnerships with agencies. (#8)

Two respondents described their experiences in the development of partnerships resulting in agencies and organizations requesting to work jointly with students in the social work program on specific community-based projects. The students were able to develop and implement community-based projects such as the “Red Dress Project” to raise public awareness on missing and murdered Aboriginal women (#5,#8).

As a follow-up to this project and as an example of the learning that takes place outside of the classroom, a respondent described what occurred:

After the course was over we did the same event at the initiative of the students in one of the communities. Families of two of the murdered women came forward. Families of missing and murdered women were able to connect with them, being together in another way to provide support to students; the community responded very well. (#8)

The respondents described other teaching experiences and teaching methods that involved more than the transmission of theory. A respondent shared “Students are moved when an instructor is committed to their teaching and learning. It is far more effective than a teacher who just talks about theory; the students love to hear stories to help them connect with the

theory/topic” (#11). A respondent shared his observations of the corresponding processes occurring while learning was taking place in the classroom by saying:

There is this amorphous mass of faces. By traversing the room with your eyes you get to know the students in that relationship. This is stuff I have tried to get down on paper. A thing happens and you work with it. You can tell if you are on top of the class. A quizzical look on their faces indicates that something needs to be explained further. Your experience teaches you where they may have lost it along the way. So you pick it up. Be aware of your surroundings. Plan your stories if you will. This is what I have tried to put down on paper as to forming a relationship. It may sound extemporaneous but it is not. (#19)

In addition to learning taking place in the classroom and in the community, social work courses are delivered by distance education. Two respondents stated that distance education was difficult for many students (#5, #4) because there is not the opportunity to be in a classroom on campus to get to know other students and the instructor through face to face contact (#5). Regardless of the complications, the opportunity to teach courses by distance was regarded as an “epiphany” (#13) for students who face issues preventing them from moving or travelling to an urban setting for their education. Other advantages of distance education delivery indicate the opportunity for instructors and students to interact with a diverse learning community from all across Canada (#15, #9, #14, #13).

Co-learning

In the context of co-learning, the exchange of information is described by a respondent as follows: “my teaching has always been pretty student-focused with a strong exchange of ideas and experiences where I consider myself as a learner as well as a teacher and there is mutuality of exchange” (#15). Other respondents described their experience as co-learners (#17, #18) and a respondent shared: “it was an opportunity to learn from students and an opportunity to determine

from experience as to what worked well and so on” (#18). A respondent shared her experiences working with youth and stated:

When I was working with youth I was always inspired by their energy and ability to overcome the pain and obstacles they were facing in spite of everything...they still have that youthful spirit. I think something we overlook in social work is that ability for young people to do that; making the connection with youth is so important. I love the energy of young people. So in many ways they are good teachers. (#11)

The opportunities for students and social work educators to learn from one another are explored in the data. The opportunity to become more aware of the lived experiences of both students and instructors is examined in a co-learning environment. A respondent shared: “our students have a wealth of experience about what is going on in the contemporary world, and, as many experiences as I have had, I’m quite naive about what is going on out there today; I learn that from our students” (#10). Two respondents shared:

Lots of students have tons of experience; you can never write a textbook on that and the honesty and the wisdom they have are rich and meaningful and add to the learning environment. I encourage students to share stuff. If someone isn’t making a connection and you share then that may be very helpful for everyone; It is meaningful for me. (#3)

I have had wonderful experiences talking to students early in my career. I was naive about what was happening in the community. It was the people who taught me what was going on in the community. Students provide a tremendous amount through their experiences; clients also taught me a lot about what was going on. (#5)

The importance of developing working relationships with clients is supported in the following quote: “As a social worker up there in the community, all the theories won’t mean a thing if you don’t have a relationship with the clients. I ask the question in class, “What do you know about your people – their talents, interests, et cetera over and above child welfare involvement?” (#2).

The value of experience teaching an Aboriginal practice course and working with students was expressed by respondents:

One experience when I was teaching was having Aboriginal students with quite a bit of experience in the Aboriginal practice course. I learned Indigenous ways of doing things; building my knowledge in ways that I could incorporate, and establishing legitimacy of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing things. They shared experiences and I believe that I learned as much from them as they learned from me. (#17)

I think that one of the biggest challenges when preparing them for field is never to assume things when working with clients. With Aboriginal students they teach me more than I do them. When they are doing their assessments whether they are traditional or non-traditional they have to ask the right questions. We talk a lot about communication so they are taught a lot about how to communicate effectively in their own culture. (#16)

Instructor Influence

Educators experience the most face time with students as noted in chapter one. This then presents the possibility that they will have the most influence on the education that the student receives. An Indigenous respondent described her perceptions of that influence through “Indigenous family and community involvement, Elder involvement, relevant practicum, in class delivery and land-based experiences within course work; In particular, Indigenous students were quite happy to have an Indigenous person teaching the course” (#15).

A respondent also shared her experiences and responsibilities that exceed the regular teaching load by describing the following:

We serve multiple roles. We serve as counsellors; we serve as advisors, and as educators. We all have a common foundation about what we believe about ourselves and what we believe about the potential that human beings are born with and can access; This certainly comes from my own experience as a Dakota person raised in a non-Aboriginal community. (#10)

A respondent posed and answered her question: “Where would I be without an education? Her response to the question was: “I wouldn’t be a voracious reader or a community activist!” The respondent described her activism which started in the 9th grade and went on to say that her community activism spoke to the importance of public education and that education is a way out of poverty and shared: “I wanted to do more; School was the promised land” (#4).

A respondent shared that students are moved when an instructor is committed to their teaching and learning (#11). Another respondent described:

People need to value themselves and move forward. It is important for the students here to know that I'm here; they know the length of time I have worked in this program; my commitment to them as students, and my commitment to education; It is about believing in them because they don't always believe in themselves. (#10)

The views of a respondent based on years of experience described his perceptions of the ways in which educators are influential in a good way:

Respecting students; encouraging students; inviting their input; respecting their knowledge; their lived experience that they bring to the content; inviting opinions and views and not becoming defensive when people disagree. I think these are ways that you can influence the student and say you belong here; you are not an outsider. (#18)

Respondents described having an added level of understanding regarding the students' situation through their experiences and the opportunity to share with one another and advocate for the students. In the words of a respondent "My life hadn't always been easy either and I had managed to overcome a few things through receiving a lot of support from people and that I think was encouraging" (#15). Another respondent shared: "It is important for students to know that I have had many of the experiences they have had. I am a role model, I'm a mother; I'm a grandmother, and many of the students see me in that way as well" (#10).

In addition, a respondent stated "I have to do a lot of advocating. Many students are single moms who have struggles; I have children and that has allowed me to advocate for and have things in common with the students and be a bit of a voice" (#3).

A respondent described her training and teaching in competency-based and experiential education and stated "I look back now and I'm not sure how I did all of that at the time. I was a single mom with three children. I was passionate about what I was doing and what I was

reading; It was a very intense time and at the same time I was actively involved on a personal level in pursuing learning from Elders in the Aboriginal community” (20).

When respondents recognize the power they have to advocate for students in a good way, this contributes to the ability to communicate with other faculty and administration to look further into a student’s situation. Students are aware of the power that educators have (#16) which may impede their ability to take risks in class. An Indigenous respondent shared his experience of encouraging three Indigenous students out of a class of 50 non-Indigenous students. He stated: “During three hour classes students who didn’t feel comfortable sharing during class would share during break time or at the end of class. They tended to feel more comfortable at that time rather than sharing in front of the larger class especially when there are two or three Aboriginal students in a class of 50 and they don’t feel safe enough to speak up” (#12).

Another respondent shared “I find that using my power within the institution as a tenured faculty and to be able to meet and to have discussions with other faculty and other administrators to enable students to be able to come back and continue when possible. Keeping the door open for students and to continue working with students over the years – don’t give up. When the student is ready to come back, they can come back. I don’t spend a lot of time if students need to leave, students need to leave” (#9).

The opportunities for respondents to influence students to remain in the social work program was through allowing students to get to know them and to send a message that the students life experience is valued. Other opportunities involve the respondents using their

legitimate power and influence to effect change as agreed upon and desired by the student in meeting their goals.

Student Demographic

The findings reflect the respondents experience teaching students that represent a wide age and experiential range “from students who are 21 years of age to grandmothers who are in their 50s and 60s who have been away from school for a long time” (#5). There are different “levels of maturity” (#2) and “ability” (#3). Mature students face challenges as prior education may not have been “of the highest calibre” (#19), and is “minimal or lacking” (#5); however, the ACCESS program focuses on mature students to provide an educational opportunity for academic achievement. In the Northern Social Work program in Manitoba, “the average age of mature students is 33 years; single, with two children” (#5). Another respondent shared that there are increasing numbers of Indigenous males enrolling in social work courses in urban settings “which is good to see” (#15); however, Indigenous women are predominantly in the majority in social work classes in Northern and remote communities (#5,#2, #8).

The Inner City Social Work Program has worked with students to accommodate their family responsibilities and assist students who have children. Structural changes were made in the delivery of the program from the time of its inauguration to address issues of poverty and to build a more supportive network in order to make education more accessible for mature students (#17). For example, classes begin at 9:30 a.m. which allows parents to accompany their children to school or day care. Classes end at 3:30 p.m. which allows students to be at home when their children come home from school. Spring break is scheduled to align with the school division rather than the university so that parents can be at home during that time with their children

(#10). The course of events during the school year that affect oneself, family and/or the community may take the student away from their studies for variable periods of time. The realities of the students' situation are accepted and accommodated whenever possible.

Student Motivation

It is difficult to pinpoint any one area that motivates Indigenous students to attend a postsecondary institution. Several explanations are revealed in the information shared by the respondents. Many Indigenous students who enroll in social work have had experience in the child welfare system that was either positive or negative (#18, #10, #12, #20). A respondent shared: "when we have brand new students coming in the first year, most of us come into social work for a purpose. Most of us had social workers in our lives. We come to social work because we want to be like a compassionate, gentle, nurturing and understanding worker we had, or because we had a really negative experience and we don't want to be like that" (10).

The motivation of Indigenous students varies (#18, #21). For example, there are students who have had experiences with social work either as a child or an adult and that experience may factor into their socialization to become a social worker. "Some are characterized as politically aware of structural barriers – poverty, racism, and marginalization and so on. They see social work as a vehicle to make structural changes to deal with aspects of social justice. There are some who sometimes are religiously motivated; others who may be culturally motivated" (#18).

Respondents also described their perceptions of student motivation to pursue social work as a career and shared the following:

I was struck by the interest of the students in being social workers. Sometimes their contact with social workers had been both positive and negative. In their communities they saw negative things and wished to work with other Aboriginal people in these kinds of roles to make changes. (#5)

A strong motivating factor was to be a model to their children. A respondent shared the belief in education as a way of getting ahead – that being a social worker provided a needed service to the community. (#3)

Seeking knowledge as a goal in of itself was also identified by respondents as important.

Aboriginal students came with a sense of wishing to learn more (#20). In addition to the desire to be a role model for their own children, other reasons included pursuing a career opportunity, financial stability, and some wish to become financially independent so they can leave a bad relationship” (#3, #2). For others the motivation may be a way out of poverty especially in outlying communities with a lot of unemployment and very few job opportunities and “this is a big step getting a career going” (#3).

An Aboriginal respondent shared his views and experience to say that Aboriginal students are personally motivated:

They are personally motivated, perhaps even more than “regular” students, because of their “lived” backgrounds; their “lived” stories. With Aboriginal students I think there’s often a feeling (or a wondering at least) whether they really belong here; whether they’re really smart enough or good enough to go to university. Of course they ARE, totally...but they might not FEEL that, or BELIEVE it. For that reason, I go out of my way to help the Aboriginal students feel better about themselves and about their being here. I think the Aboriginal students feel the “ordinary” mix of nervousness more poignantly. I think the pride is sometimes there like any other student; however, it is often sadly punctuated by their misgivings; their wondering if they really belong here. (#7)

There are situations identified where it is possible that a social work student is not personally ready for the learning challenges that lie ahead. A respondent shared:

We end up with a certain number of people who are in social work to validate that they are OK or can get cured vicariously. It is not a nice thing to say but some are so fragile they are not going to have it together to differentiate between their own and the needs of the clients. When their life is so chaotic they can’t concentrate on their studies and their professional practice. It happens everywhere but particularly with students who have troubling backgrounds; University is not a place to work out trauma. (#13)

A respondent described that the instructors at the Inner City social work program place a strong emphasis on “being well and for students to be psychologically healthy and approach the

social work profession without causing more pain than already exists; If we look at the situation honestly we come to social work for a purpose” (#10).

The connection to community and the desire to help the community and make a better life for their children is a very strong motivator for Indigenous students to pursue social work education; however, other motivators may involve negative experiences that students may have faced in their family of origin. A respondent identified his observations based on his experiences of teaching two streams of students. He described one stream as motivated by their personal experiences, such as overcoming or having lived in trying circumstances “such as poverty, overcoming addiction or whatever the case may be ; the student in this circumstance was invested in not wanting to repeat the life they came from. The other stream of students wanted to give back; they wanted to help their community and members that they know to have a better life” (#12).

Subsequent to identifying the two streams of students and their motivation it is important to stress that the respondent also pointed out the implications for their learning. He qualified that:

For those who are personally motivated in the sense of trying to overcome their own history, some of the theories may not seem relevant to them and they find the material more difficult to grasp. With those who want to give back they are perhaps more inclined to be open to other ideas and all the theories. All in all their orientation affects how much interest they take in the subject matter. (#12)

A respondent identified mentoring and role modeling as motivational for Indigenous students, particularly if somebody they know has been able to go to university and has been able to achieve. In his words: “What is so cutting edge is that some of the students I have taught are now teaching my courses; it makes it possible to say that one day I can be a professor. I think

that besides being born with an aptitude; it is having a role model. It is a role model from your community who has gone on to get an education!” (#13).

The perceptions of the respondents pertaining to student motivation reveal an array of reasons which may include being a role model to one’s children while being responsible to oneself as well as the family and the community. Other reasons may be more self-focused as students are grappling with some personal life issues. The personal and professional reasons may involve the desire to improve the quality of life for themselves, their family and their community.

Teaching Preparation

Respondents described their own experiences and those types of things they desired to pass on to students. Respondents described their preparation to teach involved their reliance on their own experience; the way they learned best, and also their intuition.

One respondent described feeling more confident after gaining experience and after receiving positive feedback from students. One respondent shared “When you go into teaching social work courses, you don’t go to university first to get a teaching degree; you just jump right into it” (#11). In the initial stages of teaching personal examples were shared about drawing on experience “I incorporated teaching methods that really helped me to learn when I was a student. For example I used the experiential knowledge building, overheads, group work and the talking circle” (#1).

To add to this discussion, the respondents frequently draw from their experience and the various methodologies that helped them to learn. One respondent who divides her time between student counseling and teaching shared that all of her teaching included the instruction of Aboriginal students. In her words: “I observed poor teaching and I didn’t want to repeat those

mistakes; When I interact with other faculty and sessional instructors – it is always neat to observe different teaching styles and abilities – integrate and also make the course your own”

(#3). The respondent also shared her experience with another level of responsibility beyond the regular teaching load as follows:

With our program we have dual roles. We're not just wearing one hat. If students need to talk to us it is (1) being available for students, (2) knowing community resources, (3) how to network and (4) that we actually care. I'm not saying others don't care but the way we are set up allows us to know our students. I know when somebody is missing from class – and all the instructors do and the student will be getting a phone call. You have to have a genuine desire if you're in this profession to really want to help. In this process, we always ask and talk about family supports to see if the family is behind them and can help out...without that it is a tougher road to go. (#3)

The preparation for teaching as explained by the respondents was situational and heavily influenced by their circumstances and experience.

Curriculum Design and Content

The topic of relevant curriculum is explained by an Indigenous respondent who describes that one of the key functions for Indigenous people is through curricular design (#9). The respondent described his expertise in curriculum development and his creation of assignments to allow individuals to connect with community, older people, and the local knowledge holders across generations. In his words:

The design then provides the opportunity for assignments to be developed with resources that reflect Indigenous peoples' reality. So much of the curriculum was really urban based curriculum – a lot of the curricular resources available hold assumptions that people would be living and working in urban settings that didn't have the same type of connection to communities. (#9)

The recommendations concerning the design and the content of curriculum is identified and generated from the data. Social work educators have a responsibility to be good relatives to students. In the words of a respondent:

I take the expression very seriously *all my relations*. I say that a lot to my students at the end of a presentation and in my curriculum. I say to my students that there are

boundaries everywhere. In our way of being we are relational in our approaches. There is always the conflict of these boundaries; we have to push past these boundaries very, very often to be a good relative to our students (#15).

A respondent shared “It is making changes in knowledge and content so it respects Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing and I also think that it is important to have Indigenous instructors and teachers teaching social work. This is equally important for non-Indigenous students. We are all treaty people and reconciliation happens at many different levels” (#17).

In the development of the design and the delivery of curriculum it was pointed out by a respondent that Aboriginal female students from the North represent diverse backgrounds and “different approaches are needed because student diversity involves coming from different reserves; and students vary in age. There is no universal range of skills; some students have been away from school for many years” (#8).

The importance of the delivery of relevant and timely curriculum through the articulation of Indigenous practice is identified as a need by non-Indigenous and Indigenous faculty. “It is important for them to have one’s Aboriginalness represented; not only with the staff and students, but also the faculty going to, and taking part in ceremonies” (#10).

In addition, a respondent stated his views regarding the life experiences of the student and expressed empathy for their circumstances:

Their experiences are to be seen as normal. If they want to take time off for personal and cultural reasons then these are viewed as legitimate and not questioned. Understanding that students are at different life stages and that circumstances come up from time to time – sometimes quite tragic – being understanding and being patient. I have power and authority in the system. I work with alternate ways of working around time frames and if I need to work with deferrals of due dates then I will do that whenever possible; building this into curriculum design is really important. (#9)

The opportunity for Indigenous students to see themselves in the curriculum and feeling safe to talk to one another and interact reflects what they will be facing in practice. Respondents shared the importance of “building upon the process of legitimizing student experiences” (#17) and “teaching students how to be prepared for those difficult conversations by providing the opportunity to practice skills in a safe/moderated environment where they won’t be silenced, and their views will be respected” (#9).

Another respondent described her philosophy based on her experience: “We generate and we regenerate; We always work with the same philosophy of believing in the student and believing that they have the ability to be successful” (#10).

A respondent contributed to the discussion regarding curriculum content through her experiences by stating: “What I was doing in my life and in my work was striving to have an Anishinaabe world view in my work and in my teaching; I was beginning to learn about residential schools and how they had operated and how that experience was still influencing their (the students’) attitude toward higher education” (#20).

One respondent shared his experience concerning the delivery of an existing social work course: “the content itself is helpful for the Indigenous students. It exudes a sense of respect because there is a lot of Indigenous content in the course. We also have Indigenous faculty. I think all those things help” (#18).

A respondent shared her experiences to say there are distinctions between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students and how they react to the material being presented in class which has implications for course delivery. The students were affected differently. The respondent observed a much deeper emotional reaction to a documentary shown in class for those who have experienced trauma than from people who are not able to connect at that level.

The respondent described the experience of showing the film *Oka: Two Hundred and Seventy Years of Resistance* and shared:

That video and the topic definitely impact a mixed group but I find with a group of Indigenous students it brings out a lot of emotions relating to what happened to their families and their ancestors. It takes sensitivity to guide them through this because they are basically grieving. It is important to be aware of these issues when teaching Indigenous students and recognize how painful it is for them; the idea of teaching about colonization is not to get people stuck in their anger but to be able to help them determine how to make changes. (#11)

Another respondent shared her recommendations from practice and teaching to raise the topic of spirituality being introduced in the curriculum. The respondent stated that “at this point in my life and in my work with people nine out of ten times people want to talk about it. The opportunity for Aboriginal students to talk about this will bring a richness of understanding that embraces their spirituality; their tremendous connection to the land and to nature and to the North (#3). The respondent went on to describe her experience as follows:

Work with families and the community will involve grappling with the same kind of thing and so it is important for educators to be aware and not to be afraid to bring it into the classroom without being offensive. Educators can see when things get talked about and how people react; it is an opportunity to have healthy discussions to gain an understanding. (#3)

It is understood that students will have different experiences and worldviews. In the process of introducing complex topics, educators are placed in the position of examining their own value stances to facilitate sharing when these topics are introduced. The lived experience of the students and an appreciation for their diversity is reflected by the need to validate the contributions of the student.

Impact of Curriculum

The findings generated from the data concerning curriculum delivery raise important points. A respondent explained her concern when students leave the classroom, particularly following a heavy topic in class. The respondent explained:

When they leave your classroom you hope that they will be OK and that is why it is important to have a closing circle to check in with everyone. For non-Aboriginal students I find a lot of them express guilt concerning the behaviour of their ancestors, and so you have to deal with that as well; It is not for them to carry that guilt but rather to become allies and to make changes. (#11)

The impact of the curriculum, as a result of the content, requires instructor availability and attention to provide support. A respondent shared her perceptions of the impact of the curriculum and stated “if a student is struggling I feel that sometimes the classroom content re-traumatizes people” (#6). The respondent then indicated the need for added student support: “If I’m going to be talking about this stuff I need to be available” (#6).

Another respondent shared the following regarding the decisions and changes that student’s have made based on their response to the learning environment:

Because of the courses I teach I get to know the students very well and so I see divorces happening; I see women and men having the strength to leave violent relationships because of the education they have received. I see parenting changes as a result; relationship improving as a result of education; I see community changes as a result of students going out there and advocating. (#16)

Ways of Learning

An Indigenous respondent spoke about ways of learning and recognized that “the way of learning is different for Indigenous students” (#12). He went on to explain that there are cultural scripts that are prescribed within one’s culture and information is given to be used in the immediate problem-solving context. When students come from a First Nation community, the challenge is that the teaching of theory has to relate to the lived experience of the student in order for it to be understood. When it has no relevance to the student in their daily lives it may be

easily forgotten. The respondent shared ways to assist students in thinking critically by explaining that when trying to make those links whether it is structural social work, CBT or narrative therapy – it involves trying to show a thread as part of their being able to relate to their personal experience. It is important to linking ideas and elements of what they already know and what they have already experienced so they can tether some of these ideas to the theory, so that it does not seem so foreign. (#12)

A respondent also acknowledged that there are different ways of learning and the respondent used experiential methods of teaching that were personally helpful such as the talking circle from the very beginning. The respondent stated:

For some of the students it is a bit of a struggle using the circle and they are not comfortable facing each other to talk about who they are. It is an important part of learning to reach inside. After a while they see that it is very powerful – once they get used to sitting in the circle. (#11)

Valuing Differences

A respondent shared that some mainstream research is being done on how memory is carried down through generations – that is also how our Elders talk about that memory, and how we carry the pain of our ancestors” (#11). Another respondent also pointed out the influence of “collective memory” saying that it is wise to learn about historical events and cultural meaning from individual tribes prior to introducing Indigenous curriculum topics and concepts (#18).

Personal experiences when working with a multitude of nations were shared by a respondent. The respondent observed that there is cultural appropriation that happens through *pan-Indianism* and that was learned through his personal experience teaching Indigenous students (#18). In particular, the respondent stressed that one size does not fit all, and people and particular nations are unique. There are cultural nuances and cultural differences to be aware of in teaching and practice. First of all, the historical animosity between tribes; and secondly, how

these historic relationships may continue to affect people within a group and a group context. It is still part of the *collective memory*. The respondent highlighted two other related areas of caution in the delivery of curriculum and these are: “re-colonization” and “homogenizing” concepts” (#18).

In the words of the respondent, “The medicine wheel is really a Plains Cree concept; and it is a foreign concept for the Gitksan and the Chilcotin Nations; if you are going to use a device like this you have to be very, very cautious. I have seen both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people use this device and draw a reaction; Indigenous people said it is *re-colonization* and that as a non-Indigenous person teaching you have to be very cognizant of that” (#18).

The data reveals the importance of not assuming that all students of Aboriginal ancestry follow traditional teachings. Further it was pointed out by a respondent: “We as teachers have to understand that not everyone is interested in smudging or in the traditional, just as people are not interested in the non-traditional. I have seen through watching how helpful smudging can be but I have also seen it as segregating students who do not see it as being useful, helpful or real” (#16).

A respondent shared the importance of recognizing that there are different belief systems with many students from the North. “If students are in a supported program such as the Inner City and Thompson programs there can be a lot of culturally appropriate behaviors presented. For students from the North some cultural practices do not register with them. A lot are Pentecostal Christian. Some are First Nation, Métis and Inuit; it is a complex thing” (#19).

There are meaningful events observed by other students of other cultures. The timing of events may conflict with the schedule of classes which in turn will affect the organization of the learning environment to accommodate those times.

Accommodation and Flexibility

A respondent shared his key objective which is to get students through and have them understand the material. If he is teaching an Aboriginal studies course he wants students to have a good grasp of the basics, to be involved, and to be empathetic (#19). Other accommodations include the meeting of deadlines and due dates which are handled flexibly depending on what is happening in the life of the student.

A respondent shared “Another part of my flexibility with assignments is contractual things. If students come to me and they can’t get something done, I provide options such as handing it in now with the possibility of losing marks on an incomplete assignment, or taking an extra couple of days to work on it with a two mark penalty for being late. I try to make it their choice. The contract stuff comes out of probation – what you need to do...what I need to do. I am hoping that in some ways that is the way they may do work with clients” (#5).

Indigenous respondents described their responses to students unable to meet assignment deadlines which included “the ability to be flexible with some of the policies, for example, giving them a deferred mark; encouraging them as much as possible; postponing some of the deadlines, and by writing emails and so forth to remind them that deadlines are coming up” (#12).

When students who have a paper due and cannot get it in because of family circumstances then accommodations are made (#15). A respondent expressed her experience to say: “I don’t buy into the philosophy of survival of the fittest. I’m flexible on due dates if something comes up and you can’t make the deadline; I extend deadlines sometimes longer if that is what they need” (#11).

For distance education students, a respondent shared, “there is online support; it is pretty straight forward because there are not a lot of options. The online course involves posting and assignments. I’m not one to get all hung up on due dates. If someone is two days late then I don’t necessarily follow the policy around with a certain percentage off for this. I don’t really believe in that. If I can get the assignment in before the course ends then I can make accommodations there ” (#14).

Respondents also added to the ways in which they are flexible around due dates in consideration of the fact that there are students that are at different life stages with family and community commitments. There are circumstances that necessitate the student to be present in the community but away from class. An Indigenous participant shared “I work with alternate ways of working around time frames and if I need to work with deferrals of due dates then I will do that whenever possible; the design is important in order to build this into the curriculum” (#9). Other respondents related their flexibility around deadlines (#14, #11, #7). A respondent described the importance of realizing the difference between institutional administrative goals and the goals and situations affecting the student (#9).

A respondent shared “If I hear of these stories and circumstances, I give extensions to assignments pretty liberally; I might even go out on quite a limb for the students just to give them a chance to get it all done. I don’t really relax the requirements of learning much (I think that is wrong; they need to know the stuff like anyone), but I will relax the time lines frequently, and perhaps adjust the media of communicating content; I do that” (#7).

Another respondent shared: “Students often talk about wanting the same education as everyone else. They want to be proud of their degree – they don’t want a watered down course.

Over the years there have been different attempts at looking at ways of balancing, and having enough flexibility to consider individual needs while meeting academic requirements” (#5).

Summary

The most important findings in this chapter incorporate establishing an environment of physical and personal safety. The other findings included the importance of re-examining the curriculum and incorporating and accommodating an acceptance of the layers of life demands faced by Aboriginal students. The development of curriculum is intended to reflect ways to accommodate students without compromising standards, learning, education or their culture.

A decolonizing type of aim points to an understanding that education can be delivered and evaluated in alternate ways while meeting the course requirements. A decolonizing aim is to be open to lived experiences, other belief structures, the history of particular tribes, the collective memory, understanding the impact of curriculum, follow up with students, working to ensure the health of students, and providing more support than already exists. In this study it was pointed out that administrative goals often conflict with the ability to process the lived experiences and the hardships of Aboriginal students.

The student accommodations involve flexibility around teaching and evaluation, the timing of assignments, trying to accommodate cultural events, working around schedules for students who have children, and providing extra tutorial supports. Chapter seven identifies the range of challenges faced by both students and respondents in the delivery of social work courses. The issues encompass a range of matters which require extra effort to address. Resource underdevelopment in northern, rural and remote communities contribute to greater levels of difficulty and can further impact the type of education that students are able to receive. For distance education students there are often difficulties accessing elective courses that the

student wishes to take. Other challenges encompass the type of support that the student is able to access and in some cases family may not be all that supportive. When students face challenges, educators feel the strain and identify areas where they require extra support as well.

Chapter VI - Challenges

In this chapter, it is pointed out that educators and the students face a spectrum of challenges which may or may not be anticipated yet require extra effort to address. From the respondent's perspective there are challenges reflecting many of the conditions in northern and remote communities that impede the students' ability to complete their schooling. These challenges are compounded by the existing familial, socioeconomic and political environments and attitudes.

Issues

The following issues identified have implications for teaching and in practice. A respondent shared:

For Aboriginal students, a big dynamic in social work – is feeling so empowered – learning a lot about anti-colonization, colonialism and decolonization and then you get into practice and then you meet non-Indigenous individuals who are so entrenched and say this is the way we have always done it. You try to address some of the issues with non-Indigenous workers and you just get shut down. There are non-Indigenous colleagues who understand and speak to the issues but they are shut down as well; this is a big issue. (#14)

The “elephant in the room” (#6) was identified to indicate that things are not working very well and Indigenous students are not adequately prepared for the rigour of university. The importance of access is acknowledged and promoted by colleges, but as one respondent stated, “this is one half of the equation; however, the other half involves properly assessing and supporting the needs of students once they are there” (#13). In some cases the skill deficits are concerning to the point that an instructor would have to go over an assignment line by line. This is not possible for instructors to do.

In addition to strong support for providing access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, there are other concerns expressed concerning the prior preparation of the

student for entry into the social work program and the community expectations for the student following the completion of the program:

I think it is unconscionable to take them in if they're not ready. A couple of students I recall – they're not ready, not ready, and not ready. You don't show up at hockey camp if you don't know how to skate. Sending them to college prep would be more helpful. We had one student who wasn't ready and he had Fs all over the place. He has failed everything and went home. What are we doing to him? (#4)

“One thing that I found very curious is that one of the intentions of the program was for students to go back to their home community to work. The reality was there were very few who were able to manage that. They talked about the difficult demands and the difficulty providing services to family, friends and neighbors because many of the communities are very small. It was very difficult, people are on call, all kinds of expectations, one student stated that it just consumed all my life and I couldn't manage that” (#18).

Resource Underdevelopment

The value placed on education by Indigenous people is very high; however the prior education of students in rural and remote communities is not strong (#13). There is an issue of resource underdevelopment (#9) and the inability to retain teachers in northern and remote communities (#21). As a result, students during the earlier years of their education may have missed blocks of time away from school, or may have not had the opportunity attend certain grade levels at all. These areas will be further discussed in chapter seven on internal and external barriers. A respondent further described: “The main causes that prevent students from completing their courses include personal challenges. It could be in different ways, not doing well at university, medical issues, dealing with funding issues and family issues. Financial issues are one of the biggest challenges” (#8).

Elective Course Selection

In rural and remote communities, social work students do not have much choice in elective courses (#8,#13). “Students have restrictions in taking elective courses...they are restricted to take a course that the university is offering. Sometimes they don’t want to take the course but they must take it because it is the only option” (#8). In addition, another respondent shared:

Students who receive band funding are already carrying a heavy course load and do poorly having to take elective courses such as *Medieval Dance Appreciation* that are of no relevance or interest to them in the completion of their social work degree. Strong students then start to appear to be poor students because the course load is daunting and students are trading academic success and doing poorly by acquiescing to the band funding requirements for eligibility. (#13)

Decolonizing Dialogues

A respondent described the following:

We need to create an atmosphere for ongoing discussions and decolonizing dialogues – for health and wellness it would be very helpful. It is always going to be there. So subtle and pervasive and it is the elephant in the room. Also, to be supportive to non-Indigenous people you have to create opportunities for professional development so they can get ongoing learning regarding the colonized mindset; to enact it. Its ongoing; its life long. Often you take it in theory and leave it behind; to enact it you need ongoing opportunities to unlearn. (#14)

Assignment Due Dates

The issue of firm due dates for assignments is identified in the data as an “administrative goal” (#9). One respondent shared: “The biggest thing that I did when students approached me about challenges they had – I tried not to put them in a position of having to justify why they are experiencing struggles” (#11). The respondent shared that an effort was made to normalize their experience and problem-solve together. Questions such as: What can I do so that you can be successful? What would be a deadline that would work for you? One of the really important aspects was to try to deconstruct the barriers. The respondent recalled processing the

information and asking herself, “What do I need to do as an instructor to make the playing field equitable? Many Indigenous students are left to figure it out for themselves”(#11).

Classroom dynamics

The dynamics operating within the classroom were identified in situations where there is a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. A respondent observed:

We are still dealing with issues of racism in the classroom; we are still involved in a number of issues dealing with peer activities – experiences of racism and what another classmate has said or done. It is still surprising even to this day that we have instructors who don’t even realize how they are still engaging in racism and they don’t realize how they are impacting the Indigenous students. (#15)

Evaluating Academic Work

Other challenges for respondents include the evaluation and teaching of a diverse group of students. A respondent shared:

When students relate stories of personal trauma and you have a developed a relationship with them then the challenge is how not to let the students personal circumstances influence the grading of their academic work. When this happens I will go to a nursing instructor and ask for an objective opinion; When the spread is great between students, the challenge is trying to assess the level of understanding so that everyone can take it in. (#21)

Teaching Venues in Rural and Remote Communities

The setting can present very real challenges for cohorts when there are not dedicated learning environments. A respondent shared her experiences:

For example, with distance education cohorts, courses have been taught in First Nation communities where chairs are broken; where the heat doesn’t work; where we will teach anywhere we possibly can to allow the education to get there. They are always so happy to get the education that nobody bothers to look for another chair. I have taught *Feminist Perspectives* in a catholic church but the students are so excited to be getting an education. We haven’t always found viable places to hold classes outside of the university. It is just amazing. The environment is a big part of the education as to how they learn and how they process and all those kinds of things. That is a very interesting process and the decisions are made by program administrators where the classes will be held. (#16)

New Environment

The challenge of navigating a new environment and the immensity of an urban campus is daunting for students who come from rural and remote communities. In the words of a respondent:

I always tell the students that on the first day of class there are as many people waiting to get on the elevator in the Fletcher Argue building than there are people in the communities where many of the students come from. In a First Nation community you know everyone. They are all you. On the first day of class there is a totally foreign world. It would be like you (the researcher) were being tossed into a town hall meeting on reserve – you put it in perspective. (#19)

Familial and Community Responsibilities

Indigenous students from rural and remote communities have high expectations placed on them and one respondent shared: “Distance students have a lot of responsibility in the community with younger people, older people, other community members and traditional responsibilities which requires them to be paying attention – it’s a need and not an option” (#9). Another respondent shared: “Issues often arise with regard to care-giving responsibilities, such as reliable day care support and ongoing familial responsibilities with aging relatives that require students to be away from their classes; they often have no choice” (#5).

There are cultural events that compel students to be away from class:

There are some who will be gone for a period of time – it is a struggle – they play a lot of roles. I can think of one couple here together. They were used as healers in their home community so there was almost a demand for them to be back in the community for a variety of events not only for their own family but in the community. They were students here and we tried to take into consideration the other part of their lives. Once they are out there a lot of people are depending on them. The system and families are reliant on them and judges and courts will not accept incomplete reports. (#5)

Lack of Support

It is very helpful for students to have the support of partners and families in completing their education; however, this is not always the case. One respondent shared a situation that came

to her attention as follows: “In one extreme circumstance, one of the students was very saddened to find out that her partner had burned her books” (#4).

A respondent shared: “Sometimes you know who is going to make it or not – whether they’re interested or whether they have the ability to do the work. Attendance is usually the most blatant and family – sometimes the partner is not supportive. Other issues are day care; housing; money not being received from bands and other funding sources. We are not getting as many students from outside of the city because of the lack of affordable housing. Places are available but students can’t afford them” (#5).

Students have such a difficult time when they cannot access support. A respondent shared from her experience:

They often have very little support from spouses; they often don’t have a lot of agency support; they have no money or they get cut off from funding; they are shunned by the community because they chose to come to school; they can’t get into the program or their books aren’t purchased; I try to compensate for some of the structural limitations by lending textbooks. (#16)

A respondent shared “in the program many years ago, students were expected to get passing grades and that was it, full stop” (#18). Another respondent shared: “Educational background makes a difference regarding the amount of support students require and sometimes you can see they are a little behind the eight ball; a little bit more mature and not so good past experiences in school and overwhelmed by that first big move out of the community” (#3).

An Indigenous respondent described the following: “Often I hear from Aboriginal students the hard stories that *us Indians* know only too well; the violence at home; the depression in individuals; the PTSD, the addictions, the suicides followed by a wave of suicides at home – stories they trust me with because I am Aboriginal. There is a bond there” (#7).

As revealed in the data, there are many students facing difficulties with writing, reading and research and a respondent stated:

Students who come from remote communities do not have the same types of supports afforded students in urban settings. Because English is a second language for some students and some students come with very poor skills – there are problems with reading, writing, understanding and critical thinking. It becomes a challenge when you are an instructor who has the goal of delivering the content of the course. It is assumed that skills can be strengthened; one of the biggest challenges is the lack of support. (#8)

A respondent described her personal social work experience prior to her thirteen years of teaching and shared “It was a first taste of many of the challenges of many of the northern communities and the northern people particularly with the fly in communities. It allowed me to be able to see how tough life is when you are more remote and some of the barriers and challenges which totally led me into my current job; Now I see challenges full scale” (#3).

Value and Cultural Conflicts

Students have occasion to grapple with value and cultural conflicts in practice. When students value the privacy of individuals and do not want to interfere in their daily lives then the challenge of completing assessments by formulating and asking personal questions can be daunting. There is the obligation to perform the assessment yet the student experiences significant inner conflict with not knowing how to proceed. In the words of a respondent, “one of the things I have seen with our students is that assessment in social work is very difficult; it is invasive and intrusive and a lot of Indigenous students find that very difficult” (#18). The respondent shared: “When I teach assessment, I always preface it with comments like this: There are aspects of social work that are intrusive. I ask how you manage that so it is less invasive and less intrusive” (#18).

It is fully acknowledged that preparation is important for all social work students prior to their entry into practice. A respondent stressed the importance of teaching courses that prepare

students for what they will face in the community. The respondent described his preparation of the content in courses in micro practice. The course covers topics such as multiple relationships, high accessibility and high visibility. These elements are important. The respondent reiterated that this level of preparation is important for all students. He has former students who have shared feedback by saying: “Thank you, we were prepared” (#18). The respondent identified the ways that his situation differs from those of his students. He stressed that “I was really an outsider going in, and it is a lot less difficult than an insider going back; It is completely different” (#18).

Differing worldviews and traditions may be difficult to comprehend from time to time. Students coming from First Nation communities have other responsibilities. In the words of a respondent:

I’m guessing that some of the students that come in are already natural social workers. They were already providing supports and services in their community. Their experience of community and family may be interpreted very differently than our experience. Some students may be away for weeks at a time when there has been a death; In my own situation I was away for three days when my mother died. (#5)

Student Life

Another important point is to identify that students’ lives are busy. Students taking distance education courses are “very busy people” (#14). “The acknowledgement of student realities is key...a student is already working hard and they are told they need to focus on their studies when they are already juggling parenting, working, studying, living with racism, et cetera” (#1). A respondent shared: “Many Indigenous students have so many family responsibilities that others don’t have, and so they end up doing homework at midnight; sometimes they don’t have a lot of support, for example, from family of origin or from partners” (#4). An Indigenous respondent shared: “We have many women who have babies while they are

in the program; We don't encourage people to get pregnant while they are coming to university but we try to support them" (#10).

Some students do not believe they can achieve and a respondent described students "almost self-sabotaging" (#16) depending on their past circumstances. The respondent stated:

I was aware of how students can almost self-sabotage by convincing themselves that they cannot do the work if you are not watching for it. I think a lot of it is how they view who we are and also their previous experiences; I think I was much more in tune with that at this (later) stage of my career. (#16)

Students are handling many responsibilities and situations in their lives which can be overwhelming. In the words of a respondent: "So much drama is going on in their lives. I tell students from the get go to keep the drama and the distractions to an absolute minimum for the six months they are completing their practicum" (#4).

Support for Faculty

Sometimes the nature of courses trigger emotional reactions from students that may present a challenge for faculty knowing how to respond. A respondent shared: "When you are teaching courses like *Interpersonal Communication skills* and *Human Behavior* it is different from teaching Math. You hear a lot about the personal journeys that people take; you hear about the struggles and some of the trauma that students have experienced; I personally found that I needed some help to process the information" (#16).

Students Employed in Child Welfare Work

It is difficult for students to manage the demands of a full time job in child welfare and attend university. A respondent stated:

I think it is a real struggle for a lot of Indigenous students to complete a degree because a lot of them are in very stressful child welfare work. Often there has been a history of residential school in the family. A lot of families live in deep poverty. So often they are hard on themselves or don't believe in themselves. We lose a lot of students in the first year. There are challenges of working in the program and with the cohorts without

adequate student supports – on one hand they are pushed from the agency level to get a degree or they will lose their job – and yet they may not be prepared for post-secondary education. As many, if not more than 1/3 will drop out or don't get past the 1st year” (#11).

Issues of Power and Role Conflicts

A respondent described her heightened awareness through their experience teaching, particularly around the issue of power.

I was much more aware, I think, of just not being the oppressor; I was much more aware of the power and of the amount of power that the students see us as having. Women really struggle especially after the *Human Behaviour* and the *Feminist Perspective* courses. The women really struggle with how to present themselves as an advocate in the field once they are practicing because of some of the roles they have been put in, in their communities. It is important to teach them about the barriers in their practice already and to teach them how they can teach clients so that they can see change happening. (#16)

Growth

In spite of the challenges, life changes were identified as opportunities for growth.

Education facilitated the growth in students and a respondent shared the following:

The growth could and in some cases, proved to be really, really painful. The changes are seen in relationships when men and women had the strength to leave violent relationships because of the education they received. Parenting changes occur with relationships improving because of the education the students had received; community changes also occur because students are going out into the community and advocating. (#16)

Summary

In chapter six, areas of challenge were identified from the data. The challenges cover a wide range of issues that are personal compounded by poverty, lack of resources and competing familial and community demands. For students who were able to remain in their program there was growth and change identified and improved as a result of access to education.

The most important findings in chapter six relate to the pervasive nature of conflicting worldviews, racism and how they play out in the classroom. These conflicts present challenges for students of diverse backgrounds, and sometimes faculty are challenged by not being sure of

how to respond when students are triggered by the course content. Other issues surface as a result of resource underdevelopment, particularly in Northern rural and remote communities thus compromising the student's ability to be prepared for the rigour of post-secondary education. Distance education elective courses offered are often not relevant, useful or desired which creates additional challenges for students in the completion of their education. Recruitment and access are given priority; however, in many cases, the lack of preparation for university often results in the support component not being adequate when academic or personal difficulties are encountered. In chapter seven the external and internal barriers will be explored that examine funding issues, geographical barriers, observations and retention. The discussion will progress to an exploration of the supports that are provided at the instructor level in an attempt to mitigate barriers.

Chapter VII – External and Internal Barriers

The external and internal barriers that impact on the retention of Aboriginal post-secondary students are complex and interrelated. The respondents in this study described institutional, social and economic policies and the administrative goals that conflict with the familial, cultural and community responsibilities of Aboriginal students. Education is underfunded in First Nations. Respondents that are invested in seeing students fulfill the goals they have set for themselves, recognize the importance of assuming advocacy roles in their relative positions of power to help the student. This chapter will explore the findings that relate to external and internal barriers, and the observations of Aboriginal students made by the respondents in this study. In the conclusion of this chapter there will be an exploration of the extent of personal and academic support provided by educators to help students succeed.

External Barriers

External barriers that are not of the students making and outside of his/her control are explored. One respondent shared that with education “the students were learning about colonialism and how that affected individuals and families in communities as well as themselves. They were learning that barriers and disadvantages were structural and not just individual. It was quite informative for them and this was a motivating factor for seeking more knowledge” (#17).

The certification that comes with the attainment of a social work degree is essential for Aboriginal students in order to be recognized as a social worker and to get work with agencies.

“Indigenous students without a social work degree are excluded from agencies that do not value or compensate individuals for traditional forms of help and knowledge; It is because of these barriers people want to become professional helpers in the eyes of the western world – that is particularly important” (#9).

Based on the data gathered from the respondents in this study, external barriers run the gamut from physical geography to educational and administrative policies, thus creating

obstacles that impede or prevent Aboriginal students having access to a post-secondary education. One respondent described that over the years there have been different attempts at having enough flexibility to consider individual needs while meeting academic requirements; however, “the university computer system is still *“the tail wagging the dog”* – if it doesn’t fit the computer program you can’t do it if you don’t fit in” (#5). If the sponsoring band hasn’t paid the student registration and tuition fee by a certain date then the social work program administrator is placed in the position of having to tell the student, *“I’m sorry”* (#5).

In circumstances such as these, there is an inner struggle between being a social worker and an educator. The search and challenge for the social worker versus the educator is to find the balance between looking at the student through the eyes of a social worker versus the demands as an academic. When describing the circumstances affecting a particular student, one respondent described barriers when meeting with certain professors. He described: “At times, I speak to professors with very different backgrounds and they are very ... (closed fist gesture) thump, thump, thump about the rules. On the other hand, this program provides a lot of flexibility for good or for bad and we set monthly meetings to go through the issues with each student” (#5).

The value of distance education delivery is a boon to communities and an “epiphany for students” (#13) when geographical barriers impede access to university. As a respondent went on to explain: “in the northwest area of this province there are landslides, floods, and mountains; you can’t change geography. People who have been marginalized are entitled to receiving an education. In the northwest area of British Columbia, it is simply not an option for some students to move inland to attend university” (#13). In addition, another respondent shared that the implications of a move involve “all things that must be considered when moving into

someone else's territory" (#9). A respondent also shared her experiences working in northern and remote communities and stated that "the isolation and geography of this country influences a lot" (#8).

At a macro level, universities represent the whole neoliberal corporate agenda (#20). Business people are sitting on university and college boards across Canada (#20). As a result, "other priorities have resulted in a lot of infrastructure being developed at the expense of the common good and clearly this impacts a community development focus for First Nations concerning money and student enrolment" (#20). As shared by a respondent, "particularly in the field of social work, the question is asked *what is the general good that we are trying to serve here?* – You are trying to bring education to people who have been marginalized" (#13).

When organizations work in isolation they lose touch. It is determined from the data that the organizational structure, philosophy and the climate of the educational institution, the fiscal priorities, and the strict adherence to deadlines, and the organizational goals (#9) present enormous difficulties for Indigenous students. In particular, the hardships are great and those students who are responsible to their families and communities are needed and expected to be there at specific times during the year (#13).

Indigenous students hold education in high regard, yet the realities of their lives are out of sync with the operation of the university. A respondent shared the following experience as a result of his geographical move from an urban setting to a remote area of the province teaching Indigenous students from different nations:

Why I relate this is the ebbs and flows that I brought here from the academic year were not in sync with those of my students. They have hunting and gathering times; collecting seaweed; sockeye salmon season; moose hunting season and things of that nature. It makes a big difference in First Nation student's lives. Either they have family responsibilities; they are looking after children while others engage in traditional hunting and gathering activities, or they themselves are engaged in the traditional activities. If

they are in class during this time, they are incredibly distracted not being involved in those activities. I need to adjust the academic year to some degree to accommodate the fact that other students of other cultures have equally meaningful events; it's not only the hunting and gathering aspects. (#13)

Other issues involve the difficulty in retaining teachers in rural and remote communities.

This has implications for students who have been recruited and apply to attend university. They are unlikely to have the pre-requisite skills to keep pace with the expectations of university. A respondent identified "resource underdevelopment" (#9) in rural and remote communities. It was also pointed out that "the retention of teachers in Northern communities is really difficult" (#21). In addition, the respondent described her experience as follows:

The classroom settings are challenging. From my experience visiting schools, students are in the hallways during class time and another number of students were lined up in the principal's office. At times I would see the students rolling in at 11:00...Just hearing from the students themselves that this is not uncommon from where they were attending school and then going to an academy where the program is consistent, balanced and there is a supportive staff. (#21)

Internal Barriers

There are layers of extra barriers faced by Indigenous students who come from rural and remote communities. Internal barriers relate to, but are not limited to, the students' emotions, psychological response, hidden disabilities such as mental health issues (#8,#15), oppression, and experiences of racism and identity displacement (#15). In addition, a respondent pointed out that some students may not have "that much confidence" (#19) which can create added difficulties in adjusting to a new environment.

It is possible that a portion of these barriers may be pre-existing and/or related to the external barriers that are beyond the ability of the student to address. Internalized oppression may evolve over a period of time exacerbated by hearing negative messages about oneself and the group with whom one identifies. An Indigenous respondent stated "there are individuals in mainstream society that do not believe that Aboriginal people deserve success" (#10).

An Indigenous respondent shared that internalized oppression is a human being dynamic and not just native. In his words:

“I share personal examples. I live in both worlds and I share personal experiences and oppressions. They have BEEN oppressed, they continue to BE oppressed. They don’t just read about it; it has happened to them; is happening to them. Racism and oppression is not a theoretical thing to them. Often Aboriginal students wonder whether they belong in university: Although they do belong their feelings result in them questioning themselves” (#7).

A respondent shared the reality that Aboriginal students often face when entering university to say that their prior education may not prepare them for university, also their knowledge of what university is about may be minimal. In the experience of a respondent:

A lot of students have great expectations and then the reality of how much work is involved hits them and then they disappear. So equal proportions of great expectations and terror. They are really vulnerable at this point; you can lose them quickly. (#19)

It seems reasonable to say that circumstances external to the student to which they have no familiarity will affect their internal responses to events. A respondent described the following regarding her observations of a student:

You could see how anxious she was. She had come from Nunavut and travelled to Iqaluit. You could see the tears in her eyes. She was so intimidated by the city, the housing, living in a big apartment building and the formal setting. She lasted one hour and was already heading home, some students feel so utterly overwhelmed. (#21)

A respondent described the added responsibilities of older students and the impact on their academic performance. The respondent went on to describe students, not just Aboriginal students, having a really difficult time just “hanging in there.” Because students are older, such as distance education students, the sandwich generation responsibilities are really playing havoc on students as well as the whole Post Traumatic Stress Disorder piece. There are not as many social services workers within agencies” (#16). The respondent described the following: “That is all students across the board. I’m seeing more and more requests for extensions; going on

mental health leave, and authorized educational withdrawals. It is the whole retention piece and the economy drives the stress” (#16).

In the previous sections, the respondents shared their perceptions of external and internal barriers based on their experience. In the following section, respondent observations are examined which assist in identifying areas where existing support may need to be increased.

Observations

The respondents describe their perceptions and observations of students at the point of entering the social work program. Data was generated that was not specifically asked about; however, areas of strength, and skills that need to be strengthened, are identified. The areas of strength observed in students by the respondents included a high regard for education (#13) and a high expectation in becoming a student. There was the excitement of coming to university and “engaging with a peer group; being a role model” (#17).

An Aboriginal respondent shared that some students are “really keen and excited to start and others are not and are unsure” (#2). A respondent noted that generally “all the students are overwhelmed by what they are getting into and while sitting in a formal setting the students are generally anxious, quiet and look a bit shocked but also excited” (#21).

An Aboriginal respondent shared his observations when students are uncertain as follows:

I think the Aboriginal students feel the “ordinary” mix of nervousness more poignantly. I think the pride is sometimes there like any other student; however, it is often sadly punctuated by their misgivings; they are wondering if they really belong here. (#7)

A respondent of Métis ancestry also shared his observations of students who are fearful at the beginning of the term:

It is a mixture of great expectations and abject terror. They are also scared stiff of the whole system and some students don't have that much self-confidence; If students have moved from rural and remote communities to an urban university they are sort of an amorphous population; they are sort of lost. (# 19)

A respondent spoke about having difficulty assessing students at this point because “there is a real range of experiences, confidence, trauma, support and ability” (#21). In order to assess student readiness and motivation to enter the program, an Indigenous respondent spoke about the process that students are required to complete in her institution. Students who apply to the social work program have to go through a selection process (#10). Another respondent spoke about his work with students coming into the program:

You can't expect students to be able to walk in being a product with all the pieces put together. You have to be very keen to recognize strengths and weaknesses in order to help them develop personally and professionally for their academic careers. The first course that I do – I do a survey. Doing something on line; doing an exam; doing a presentation, things of that nature so I can see where their strengths and weaknesses are; Most times they are not prepared. (#13)

Out of twenty-one respondents in this study, six respondents specifically observed the areas that needed special attention and extra support which included writing; reading comprehension and critical thinking skills and one respondent noted that: “First Nation students were less prepared academically for university life and writing skills were generally not as good” (#6). Another respondent pointed out that: “English is the second language for some and some students came with very poor skills in reading, writing, understanding and critical thinking” (#8).

A respondent stated “students at the time of enrolment are often nervous, test phobia which often doesn't improve, difficulties with writing skills and the whole I don't think I can do it philosophy” (#16). A respondent noted that “in the program you need to know how to write – this is university; Aboriginal students are as eager and willing to work as anyone else if they are ready” (#4). A respondent described his observations to say: “It strikes me that many of the

students are not particularly prepared to attend university. Their academic skills are not what I would expect. I don't know if that is just a function of a rural and remote setting" (#13). A respondent also noted that "the skill levels in writing; reading and so on needed additional support" (#17). Also, a respondent noted: "there is a real mix of students because age is often a factor, and educational background makes a difference as well as not so good past experiences with school" (#3).

It is noted that "there is a great need for a variety of supports for Indigenous students (#15) and a respondent shared that "sometimes you know who is going to make it or not...attendance is usually the most blatant and family....sometimes the partner is not supportive" (#5). Also, a respondent stated: "More with the mature students you have to be cognizant of their life instability challenges and provide supports" (#18).

A respondent observed: "my perception was that the Aboriginal students were bringing in a lot of their own knowledge and they were very committed to the learning practice that would help them to do better. There was a high commitment" (#20). Other considerations shared by an Indigenous respondent included Indigenous students and their "cultural responsibilities, and in addition to that, family responsibilities that extend beyond the nuclear. There is extended family and inevitably they are dealing with loss because their families are so large. There are also other issues; I find that a constant thread" (#14).

A respondent shared his observations to say that "often what I see is they already bring in lots of experience and lots of learning with them – a lot of experience that has brought them forward so they have made a career choice to enter social work. They have thought about the complications of social work and about entering the profession with Indigenous people – which is typically not a profession with a really good history" (#9). Another respondent shared the

perspective that “on campus you get a lot of younger students, middle class, and non-Aboriginal students” (#11).

Some come with a lot of life experience and social work related experience but a lot of times not. The teaching is very different so you need to build that foundation at the beginning of the course” (#11). Another respondent shared: “I don’t have first year undergraduate students. I teach 4th year courses to students further along in the program. In the first year probably 80% of students are right out of high school. The students take the social welfare course about CPP, OAS, health and education which is required learning but is hard to relate to on a personal level. I don’t think it matters whether students are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal at this point” (#12).

Technology accessibility in remote communities can present problems. Other considerations include the fact that many students are first generation learners who have not had prior experience navigating the school system when they arrive in a post-secondary setting. Other students who are older may not be as acquainted with the technology due to the years spent out of school, remoteness of their community and irregular access of these services (#2; #3).

Support

As a follow up to identifying challenges and barriers, then observations, the identification of support that is being provided was generated from the data. The theme of support is a constant thread to mitigate struggles faced by students in order to help them meet their educational goals. The provision of personal and academic support was described by the respondents in this study. It was indicated previously that having family on board to provide support contributes to student success (#3). On the downside, even though the student wants to

be in university, sometimes the family doesn't support the student. A respondent stated: "we have to be really aware of these things with students with a little more life going on" (#3).

The points in **Table 7.1** highlight the key findings from the data that reflect the spectrum of respondents' involvement in providing support to students. It was pointed out by a respondent that the amount of educator time spent with students plays a role in their success (#5). In the words of the respondent: "the forced tenure positions with a Ph.D. changes the amount of time educators can spend with the students. The program is breaking down as we move more and more to tenure. Tenured staff still has to do research every year. Those who are tenured are still teaching the same amount of classes as those who are not" (#5).

Table 7.1 entitled Respondent Provision of Personal and Academic Support presented on page 122 reflects the range of assistance provided to students. The examples reflect the focus on students, and the activities extend far beyond the requirements of the teaching position.

Table 7.1 Respondent Provision of Personal and Academic Support

Personal Support	Academic Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very open door policy (#21, #5,#4, #3,#2, #16, #12, #19). • Inviting students to come in and please ask questions (#21). • Providing a place for students to go (#15). • Being respectful personable and approachable (#3). • Cheerleading (#3). • Campus wide projects (food bank) (#21). • Making sure food is available at student centres (#21). • Personal Counseling (#5). • Promotion of cultural traditions (#20). • Providing on line support (#14). • Going the extra mile (#4). • Bringing in traditional helpers, Elders and Counselors (#14). • Being open to listening and reaching out to students (#17). • Networking with community resources (#3). • Being a good relative to students – example: going for coffee, being a shoulder to lean on, supporting students during and after surgery, making food available for students, going to ceremonies with students, taking students to ceremonies, going to funerals, raising money, doing fundraisers when students, for example, have experienced loss through fire (#15,#13, #10). • Demonstrating empathy and sensitivity to the students life experiences and developing an awareness (#3). • Normalizing students experiences (#1, #9). • Advocating for students (#18). • Identifying and reinforcing a student’s ability to handle things (#17). • Giving students ideas to think outside of the box (#16). • Providing informal support and respecting student confidences (#7). • Lending books to students (#16) • Problem-solving – asking if they have thought about..... (#3). • Providing a place of safety (#9). • Answering emails and telephone calls in the evenings and on weekends (#6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very open door policy (#21, #5, #4, #2, #3, #16, #12, #19). • Inviting students to come in and please ask questions (#21). • Academic Counseling (#5). • Promotion of cultural traditions (#20). • Providing on line support (#14). • Implementing programmatic and structural changes (#17). • Going the extra mile to help a student (#4). • Added class time to discuss issues further; taking personal issues into account and providing support (#17). • Giving students alternate opportunities to share at break time and after class (#12). • Curricular design – creating and reflecting a place where Indigenous students can see themselves in the curriculum (#9). • Being flexible on due dates (#11, #7, #14, #9, #15, #12). • Aligning the academic program with what is going on in their lives (#10, #13). • Co-creating academic goals and standards of performance (#17). • Reflecting and respecting the views of Indigenous students in safe and moderated environments (#9). • Keeping an ear out for their stories (#7). • Creating useful assignments to help students connect with their lives (#8). • Advocating for students (#18). • Reinforcing a student’s ability to handle things (#17). • Giving students study tips and skills, lessons in speed reading and APA, writing papers and study skills (#13, #6). • Hiring tutors for specific purposes (#10). • Printing and photocopying for students and access to computer labs (#3; #16). • Lending books (#16). • Providing a place of safety (#9). • Providing contact numbers for students; accepting telephone calls after hours and on weekends (#6; #4). • Providing multiple opportunities for students to succeed (#18).

Poverty affects a large proportion of post-secondary students and the supports provided as indicated in table 7.1 reflect particular areas where respondents are compensating for funding and basic need shortfalls. Examples are lending textbooks; advocating for students; making food available; organizing fundraisers; doing printing and photocopying; teaching writing and reading skills, and organizing campus wide food bank projects. A respondent shared “It is a daily grind and struggle which challenges the students’ ability to live with dignity” (#8). A respondent shared that some of the bigger projects that she led on campus have recognized the level of poverty. A lot of the students are single moms. The respondent started up a program entitled *Christmas on Campus* with donations from faculty and the union. They put together food hampers with no questions regarding eligibility. They also do angels so if the students have children, the respondent puts out a notice to all staff to contribute anonymously. “A food bank has been established on campus and students are so grateful for that support and the respondent pointed out that “the extra support helps the students academically” (#21). Respondents shared other ways in which support is provided:

We encourage students to bring in their partners and their children. We take them on a tour of the facility. We have students from the second, third and fourth years to talk and tell students what they can expect. Students have access to computers during the evenings and on Saturdays, and can come in to do their work when it is quiet. (#10)

I text, email, talk on the phone and provide extra feedback on papers. I provide a little more instruction above and beyond teaching course content to discussing APA and formatting papers. I say to the students *if no one has taught you this stuff I can teach you this stuff*. There are lots of real intangibles – things like me being on a journey, to ponder, to think about different ways of being, responding to hugs from students and hugging back. The other thing on my mind more recently – is there something more that I need to do to help students feel safe? (#6)

The additional forms of support involved respondents advocating for students; sharing personal experiences; giving extensions and alternate ways of completing an assignment; and

empowering the student through the teacher-student relationship to keep going. The quotes appear as follows from respondents and under headings:

Advocacy

I help when I can and I am involved in advocating for students, also trying to bring understanding to the situation when working with another colleague. If the colleague is not aware of some of the circumstances the student faces then I am trying to give that understanding in the reconsideration of whatever decisions are made. Also I advocate for students at the administrative level of the university; I am involved in talking to registrars and accounting people. (#12)

Sharing Personal Experiences

The students are interested in my stories I talk about my experiences – I was a kid with an attitude. I ran away from home. Concepts within self are explored and I share my experiences dropping out of school. I say I was there ...the turning point for me was at age 28 and I have never regretted it working with different types of professors. (#2)

Providing Alternative Methods of Evaluation of Course Work

If a student can't make a due date then we give extensions; alternative ways to addressing an assignment. I've had students with a paper due who obviously couldn't get the paper in because of family circumstances. I've allowed them to make a verbal presentation to me on Skype. I don't like the word accommodation but I cannot think of a better word right now; we do use a lot of accommodations to address those family situations that can arise quite suddenly and unexpectedly. (#15)

Empowering through Educator – Student Relationship

In the process of meeting students I think through the relationship that I develop with the students is something that keeps them going. I hope that to empower through relationship as their instructor helps them to continue their academic journey – not everyone sees themselves as good. Many are hopeful that they will graduate. If students have a lot of responsibilities I encourage students to slow it down if they can; take the course in three years instead of two while recognizing their current circumstances. (#21)

The biggest thing for students is keeping the line of communication open to instructors; to be open to getting help; The students are encouraged to participate in discussions about the importance of sharing their situation in order to receive appropriate supports. (#2)

The existence of an open door policy is a common theme for respondents as they share the ways in which they provide support to students. Respondents provide encouragement for

students to continue with their studies; they help students by providing their knowledge of resources and also take the opportunity to do outreach by connecting with students beyond academic requirements to providing needed support. Other areas of support involve being flexible on due dates when something happens to a student suddenly or unexpectedly. In addition, the support provided by the respondents involves “being a good relative” (#15) to students by supporting them in areas of their personal life such as going to ceremonies, attending family funerals, becoming involved in fundraisers, developing campus programs, making sure there is food available at the resource centre, and the list goes on.

The other area of support is providing contact information for students to call if something should happen or they need assistance. The ability to go above and beyond by investing in students throughout the program is a recurring theme. An opportunity is provided for students in the form of being able to talk to a counselor. The willingness of respondents to develop a relationship with students that goes beyond the contact in the classroom is encouraged in order to fortify a sense of connectedness and belonging; this is generated from the data in this study.

Reaffirming Student Goals

Respondents shared their experiences and outreach to students to support them in meeting their goals and not to give up:

I encourage the students at every opportunity and I emphasize to them over and over again that their goal is to graduate, get a job and provide for their family and they need to remember they must feel that helping people is their calling or their passion or they wouldn't be here to begin with. I tell them that it feels good to achieve something that you have worked for. When you pass your courses, do your practicum and graduate then your persistence will pay off. There are some rewards. It is all about credentials today; Jobs come available. (#16)

People often don't see the light at the end of the tunnel. You remind them that it is there and it will pay off. I have not been one to give up in my life and I tell the students that. I

try to teach them that it is hard and it can be really ugly at times. We are not watering down the course. It may be delivered in a different way; we may take a little more time. I tell them their degree is real. I think that kick starts the process to help them feel good about being in the program. That big picture sometimes is way too big; that is when we lose students. If it is not achievable for students in their eyes: I do it in small chunks. (#16)

“I had a practicum student this past year who tended to get overwhelmed. I helped them piece it out rather than looking at the bigger picture and all the things, the question became *what do I have to do this week?* chunk it down and make it less daunting; providing the encouragement, giving them the space to have time to vent if they need to do so. (#14)

Re-establishing Student Motivation

The respondents describe working with students who become discouraged and the ways that they try to encourage them as reflected in the following quotes:

I will work with students who are having struggles if a student can demonstrate a certain level of credible academic acumen. If you want to work hard you can get through. I will fill in the gaps. For some students it is just too big; the holes are just too big. If a student comes with a certain level of competence, I make them believe that it is possible for them to graduate. I make them believe if they do graduate that they will have a better life. First Nation students have esteem for education as compared to non-Aboriginal students. It is a huge emancipator for themselves, families and communities. I say, if you demonstrate some fundamental competency I guarantee you will get through. They almost look with disbelief. You also have to have the motivation to get it done. We make it so they see that it is possible. (#13)

I work with students and look at their course load. I think that in my teaching style I try to help them see goals whether it is applying theory or completing the course and social work degrees. For example, there are particular times of the year when students become especially exhausted. On the first day of class I sit down with them to look at all their assignments and then schedule assignments for the courses I teach so they don't have all their assignments due on the same date; that way you get better quality research and writing. (#11)

Self-Care

The issue of self care is addressed by an Indigenous respondent who shared:

Self-care is something we really concentrate on during particular times of the year. Using the circle, we focus on self-care as we are getting into the last part of the first and second terms. We talk about how many of them are graduating. I want people to talk about how they feel about that. For some of them they feel kind of sad, especially if they have another year to go, others share their excitement – the circle helps them to see that they can get over that hill and I think a lot of it is the realization that we are here for a purpose and we are here for a reason which is part of my philosophy. (#11)

Summary

The major findings in this chapter result from an identification of external and internal barriers that focused on structural, financial and geographical issues. Upon identifying external and internal barriers, the data also revealed the observations of the respondents and their efforts to mitigate these barriers by supporting students. The most significant findings in this chapter identify issues of resource underdevelopment in rural and remote communities; the lack of prior preparation for the rigour of post-secondary education which applies to reading, writing, comprehension and research skills, and widespread poverty among the student population.

Indigenous students face barriers becoming social work practitioners because they need the certification of a social work degree to show they have the skills and qualifications required to practice social work. Traditional knowledge is not identified nor respected when working in mainstream institutions. Financial issues affect the students' ability to pay tuition on time or acquire the required books and material to fully participate in class or remain in university. The geographical issues include issues of accessibility for students living in rural and remote communities due to impassable terrain, long distances to travel to a university campus, and the implications, responsibilities and expense of moving away from one's family and community into someone else's territory.

The range of supports provided by instructors based on their observations and experience working with students applies not only to helping students strengthen their reading, writing and comprehension skills in mastering the academic material, but also to empower and help students problem-solve in other areas of their lives. The respondents identified the many ways that they have provided support to students as evidenced in the data displayed in **Table 7.1**. The respondents recognize the value in their experience of receiving support through the development of collegial relationships in teaching while working together to meet the needs of students (#10, #16, #11). An Indigenous respondent shared: “We, as instructors, get to know a lot of things – intimate things that are going on with students. What are they facing? We get to know them not just as students, but as human beings” (#2).

Chapter VIII – Discussion

The focus for this study was the desire to learn about the perceptions and experiences of social work educators (respondents), and how they see themselves contributing to the retention of Aboriginal students enrolled in a social work program from a first person point of view. This was an opportunity for the respondents, in this study, to share their contributions to knowledge in the development of the social work professional. Social work educators often are the first people on campus to connect with the student in the classroom setting. The respondents in this study describe their connections and actions in supporting Indigenous students in ways that will help them achieve their goals through personal and academic support. The respondents revealed the extent of their open door policy which is often very helpful in learning about the student's situation.

Resource underdevelopment often affecting students from remote and rural communities, places social work educators (respondents) in the position of trying to fill in large gaps in skill development to prepare the student for university. Sometimes the holes are too large (#13) and the respondent does not have the time available to provide what the student needs in terms of academic support. Furthermore, respondents identify that the intense remedial work is not their job (#13) and they do not have the time (#19) along with their regular teaching duties to provide this level of academic support (#19, #13); however, if the student is in agreement then they assume the role of advocates to assist the student in securing the help required. If the students are not prepared for university then this discussion does beg the question regarding to what extent social work educators weigh in on the issue of student retention. By default, educators may feel there is something more they could have done to assist the student in completing their program without lowering standards.

The main research question in this study is: What do Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal adult educators bring to the learning environment to influence the retention of Aboriginal students in social work education? The questions in related to the main research question are listed below to guide the discussion and identify examples of what the literature has to say.

In what ways do the subjective experiences and perceptions of social work educators inform their teaching practice?

The interview process focused on the self-location of social work educators; their motivation, and how they became involved in teaching Aboriginal students at a post-secondary level. In this study, the respondents recalled their first teaching experiences. Two respondents had previously taught in the school system, three had experience as teaching assistants, and others were approached to see if they might be interested in teaching a social work course. The circumstances between respondents varied at the time of their first teaching experience. Some were already employed; and, others were trying out the opportunity to see if they might like teaching. All in all, the educators interviewed had practice experience of varying lengths in areas of social work and related fields.

The respondents spoke about mentors and family members who inspired them. Three respondents (#5,#7, #20), in particular pointed out particular programs and authors who were helpful, for example, *The Four Worlds Development Project*, and the work of Friere (1972) and Tuhwai Smith (1999). Without having a teaching degree, respondents described the reliance on their own learning experiences, their values, their intuition, and the opportunity to observe other instructors who mentored them. The respondents identified their knowledge of different learning styles and the importance of embracing those in teaching practice. With experience, the respondents described their role in the development of a co-learning environment. Further, they

described the investment shown by Aboriginal students when the contributions of the students were valued and integrated in the learning process (#17, #8, #11, #18).

What are the respondent's perceptions of the needs of adult learners?

The focus of this discussion will identify two main areas when examining the respondents' perceptions of the needs of adult learners, namely, academic needs and secondly, personal needs. First of all, it is important to point out from the data that access to university is promoted; however, the extent of the supports required to keep learners in school are not adequate when there have been gaps in prior education (#13).

In the academic realm, there are similarities and differences in the academic needs of Aboriginal learners depending on the resources available in their community of origin; prior school experience; their aptitude, and the time that has elapsed since they attended school. A recurring theme in the data indicates the need for mature Aboriginal learners to upgrade and/or refresh their skills in writing, reading comprehension and research in order to be prepared for the academic side of university. Preparation for the academic side is essential. In addition, there is a whole professional and personal side. The question is whether we are confusing intervention with goals? For instance, the intervention of facilitating access without recognizing whether it is possible to provide the plethora of resources required in supporting the varied needs of students requires further examination.

Secondly, in the personal realm, and in addition to struggles to meet the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, there are additional costs in the role of a student which include time sensitive tuition payments, and the purchase of required textbooks and related materials to actively participate in class. Poverty among the student population is widespread (#8, #21). In addition to the challenges of their academic life, many students cannot meet their basic needs,

pay their tuition, purchase their books (#16), or find reliable day care. Educators, as revealed in this study, provide a range of supports for students which include, but are not limited to, participating in fundraisers when a student has faced hard times (#15); lend textbooks to students when they are unable to purchase their own (#16); contribute to food banks (#21); and provide personal and academic counseling (#15, #10, #3, #2, #8, #16, #15, #14).

For Aboriginal students there are additional layers of responsibility which honour and respect connections to family and community. These responsibilities are expected (#3, #15, #14); they are non-negotiable and they take priority. The challenge is how to accommodate Aboriginal students so that they can fully participate in their culture, and the responsibilities in “being a good relative” (#15) to their family and community, but not at the expense of their education or vice versa (#20). A respondent in this study described the importance of curriculum development that reflects the reality of Aboriginal students lived experience (#9) and the necessary curricular accommodations that embrace cultural and personal events where attendance is required.

What are the varied roles of social work educators in providing support to retain Aboriginal students?

Support is identified as an overarching theme in the data. As discovered in this study, the respondents “go over and above and then some” (#10) to provide support to students. Social work educators wear many hats (#3) and the varied support roles are wide reaching. Each respondent in the study identified the desire to support student success by assisting students to stay in school and complete their program. The nature and the extent to which respondents provide support to adult learners are individual and ongoing. **Table 7.1** identifies examples of

the types of support provided. Faculty members have autonomy over how much they wish to invest in supporting students.

The overall investment of time providing support for students among faculty is not tracked and therefore invisible in the literature. A respondent shared her view of the support provided personally by saying “it goes with the territory” (#4). There is always a need for more student support as indicated in the data. Systemic and structural variables demand more research, deficit theorizing continues to be on the table, and there is a growing need for the provision of more student support.

In conducting this study, the compassion and caring fully described by the respondents, for the students, is palpable. An article written by Gorski (2008) acknowledged that much of the literature available described current practice in intercultural education which focused on supports rather than delving into the “challenges, dominant hegemony, prevailing social hierarchies and inequitable distribution of power and privilege” (p. 515). Apart from the planning, administrative and teaching responsibilities of their positions, the respondents in this study described their roles as advocates, mentors, role models, advisors, surrogate parents, caregivers, helpmates, resource brokers, community advocates and being a good relative to “All my relations”. There is evidence from the data that the educators are responsive in all domains and the extent of their work both on campus and off campus in support of students is not fully known.

What is the role of the respondents in providing an inclusive, anti-oppressive and safe environment for the students to learn?

Curriculum is identified as a major theme in the data. The learning environment involves the investment and commitment of each respondent in establishing and facilitating a sense of

safety first in the learning environment. A respondent described the importance of educators “not becoming defensive when people disagree” (#18) and that the contributions and knowledge of Aboriginal students be treated as legitimate (#17) and validated in a safe/moderated environment (#9) where everyone’s contribution is valued. Further, it is revealed in the data that in an anti-oppressive environment, the Aboriginal student should not be put on the spot to answer for all Aboriginal people (#9).

The development and delivery of the curriculum also involves establishing a safe physical environment through developing relationships with students to help them determine what feels safe. It also involves personalizing the curriculum so that people learn how to talk to each other and how to treat each other (#9). It is important to examine the content of the curriculum to determine in what ways it is inclusive, representative and respectful of the lived experience of Aboriginal people. The identification of developing relationships, co-learning opportunities and support systems within the classroom environment are revisited in the data; they are building blocks to the development of social support networks in the community as students are reminded of the loop back process to ensure that learning opportunities involve the community (#8, #5, #15).

What are social work educators’ perspectives on the knowledge contributions to social work practice?

The knowledge contributions indicate that articulating Indigenous practice in curriculum development involves more Indigenous content and courses that reflect balance. Furthermore, instruction and practice on how to do Indigenous social work in Indigenous communities is needed (#11). There is also a need for more Indigenous instructors. Sinclair (2004) described “for Aboriginal students, accurate reflection of Aboriginal history and epistemology provides

accurate frameworks to reflect their personal experiences in the classroom setting” (p. 53). It is observed in the data that the literature on healthy Indigenous families is valuable; however, it seems to have disappeared from the literature (#20) and there has been more focus on the deficit perspective or what Aboriginal people don’t have (#11). This in no way suggests lowering standards; the content needs to be taught in a way that reflects lived experience that is relatable to the theoretical concepts (#12).

The curriculum requires expansion to reflect, respect and accommodate cultural traditions pertaining to one’s nation and the responsibilities to family and community. A respondent described building accommodations into the curriculum to respect times that Aboriginal students must be away to attend cultural events and support their families and their community (#9). Aboriginal students are responsible to their family and their community; it is priority.

The learning environment must establish trust and Sinclair (2004) stated “both the educator and the student must involve themselves in the process of healing, learning and developing along a path guided by Aboriginal epistemology” (p. 55). Furthermore, Katz (2001) cited in Sinclair (2004, p. 55) used the phrase “walking the talk.” The features of the physical environment and establishing a place of psychological safety were identified. In the literature, Milliken (2012) describes the importance of students identifying what feels safe. Once this safety is established, the teaching preparation, the instructional methodologies and the teaching philosophy are positioned to interconnect with the development of the curriculum design and content.

Themes

Drawing from the findings chapters, the overarching theme is support and the major themes are curriculum, safety, cultural sensitivity, open door policy, going the extra mile and relationships. Examples of quotes to support each of these themes are provided in this chapter. The data reveals that the investment of the respondents in the success of the adult learner far exceeds the responsibilities of their teaching position.

The information gathered from the data reveals that in addition to widespread poverty among the student population (#21, #17) more support is needed to strengthen student success in the learning environment through establishing a milieu that is safe, relevant and inclusive. In addition to this, more support is required to help students upgrade the pre-requisite skills of reading, writing, comprehension and research to be prepared for the rigour of academic work.

Curriculum

Curriculum is identified as a major theme in the data. The learning environment involves the commitment and investment of each respondent in establishing and facilitating a sense of safety first in the learning environment, and contributions to social work knowledge that are relevant to Aboriginal students. The respondents in this study stressed the importance of incorporating Elders and making the curriculum teachings relevant (#11, #14, #15), the establishment of content that reflects “All My Relations”, how to be a good relative with the support provided, the continual loop back to the community (#15), and learning how to treat one another (#9) as a foundation. The data revealed the importance of incorporating the lived experiences of students, accommodating their personal and academic responsibilities, and their ways of learning. For example, a curriculum that can address the times that Aboriginal students

are required to be away for personal or cultural events without having to justify their absence (#9) and to be able to show flexibility in accommodations.

In the literature, the central criticism of curriculum that is delivered in mainstream post-secondary educational institutions is the privileging of western ideology, language, hierarchical structures, and systems (Battiste, 2013; Brown, 1992; Maina, 1997; St. Denis, 2011). The curriculum does not altogether reflect any part of the lived experience of Aboriginal students. Furthermore, Battiste (2013) points out that “Aboriginal languages are irreplaceable resources in any educational reforms” (p. 178).

Focusing on Aboriginal students, an Aboriginal respondent in this study described ways in which he worked with Aboriginal students to demystify theory and to give it meaning through using practical examples and modeling critical thinking skills (#12). Cleary and Peacock (1998) cited in Battiste (2013) identify that teachers must use a variety of styles of participation and information exchanges and adapt their teaching methods to Aboriginal styles in learning (p. 176). To enrich the experiences of Aboriginal students, Tisdell cited in Battiste (2013) describes “spirited epistemology” that is transformative (p. 184) and ways that can be explored to indigenize the curriculum such as the use of storytelling in order to facilitate engagement with the spirit. He describes processes for learning that are transformational which include the affective, cognitive and symbolic domains. The information in the data recommended many areas of teaching in these domains. In **Table 8.1** the preliminary steps in teaching was created by the researcher to reflect Tisdell’s domains while incorporating data from the respondents.

Table 8.1 Transformative Processes for Instruction

Affective	Cognitive	Symbolic
Building an atmosphere of trust and safety through trust building exercises, mutuality of exchange (#15), sharing and guided discussions and check ins and check outs (#14, #11, #16, #3, #2).	Demonstrating group skills; sharing (#11; #10) providing feedback on building collaborative relationships.	Assigning in class journal exercises – free writing with the opportunity to share. Students invited to identify a metaphor to describe lived experience. (#6).
Checking in on the comfort level of students by asking questions about how they feel about the process and the classroom environment (#16, #14).	A demonstration of the privileging of information that the students wishes to share by posing open-ended questions and validating all responses (#2, #9).	Journal exercise. Creative art activity, poetry and short stories (#15) to share voluntarily.
Facilitate narratives, storytelling and journaling in the pursuit of goals (#11, #3).	Introduce topics on current events and relevant socio-political issues (#7, #10, #16) such as policy.	Complete a journal entry on a problem that was solved and how that occurred.
Students are invited to voluntarily describe the extent of the problem and the feelings associated.	The assignment of a problem-solving exercise using problem-based learning models (#18).	Create a discussion question
Provide oral and/or written feedback based on the student’s preference.	Review the problem solving solution with others.	Invite fellow students to participate and receive their oral and/or written feedback for follow-up.
Write a reflective journal on the anticipated experience meeting a practicum supervisor.	Write a journal on what you hope to be an outcome of the meeting.	Meeting employees and managers in departments within the university to demystify power hierarchies.

The adherence to curriculum standards was supported by respondents for the reasons that a degree conferred is to be held to standard; however, the means of evaluating assignments, establishing deadlines and achieving course outcomes were afforded flexibility. It is understood through the path of life that things can happen tragically and unexpectedly (#9; #15). Also, many adult learners are older members of the “sandwich generation”; they have no choice in the

matter. The curriculum design and delivery then must reflect, whenever possible, the realities of life, particularly for the student, in order to enhance their opportunities for participation and success.

The role of Elders, the privileging of their knowledge and seeking their consultation in all aspects of curriculum development is essential. The following quotes reflect the critical importance of their involvement in all aspects of curriculum development.

Incorporating Elders, the teachings and making the curriculum really relevant. For too many years the focus has been on what Aboriginal people don't have. They need to have more courses on Indigenous social work and Indigenous people. There needs to be more research done to articulate the needs of students and Indigenous practice. Students go out into the field often feeling unprepared and they need something in the curriculum that covers domestic violence, suicide and sexual abuse and how to work with clients especially as they relate to Indigenous peoples. Social work is a lot more complex. The emotional and spiritual part is very important in addition to the physical care that needs to be taken. I think that is really missing with many courses and mainstream social work. (#11)

I think my last point on this is I really believe that "with mainstream institutionalized education in the Province of Manitoba there is only so far we can go with education before we encourage students to go back to our communities and talk to the Elders. (#20)

Safety

The establishment of a place that is physically and psychologically safe for the student is identified by the respondents as a major theme. The student identifies what feels safe (Milliken, 2012; Eckerman et al, 2009) and this safety is fundamental to learning. The definition of cultural safety is defined as "an environment that is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need; It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together" (Williams, 1999, p. 213 cited in Bin-Sallik, p. 21). The following quotes from respondents reflect the essential nature of safety in the personal and academic realm:

Students need a safe place to learn – it helps them to be motivated and determined; Sometimes the students are coming into the program for stability – they are looking for a stable place to get some reprieve and they are learning personally. (#21)

We like to create a safe environment. Most of us will set up class room rules in terms of confidentiality and sharing; honoring someone's story. We don't want to hear personal things repeated outside of class. We are here for social work; our clients expect that of us. (#3)

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is defined as a major theme in the development and delivery of cultural teachings and Indigenous ways of knowing. Eckerman, Dowd and Jeffs (2009) described cultural sensitivity as acknowledging difference, and engaging in a process of self-exploration in order to understand the impact of thoughts and actions (p.118). The following quotes reflect the recommendations of respondents:

We need to focus on walking the walk rather than talking the talk. Competencies about Indigenous issues need to happen with all faculty. There is a concern about the ghettoization of Indigenous courses and Indigenous instructors teaching all the courses which can result in non-Indigenous instructors becoming less involved. (#1)

More cultural sensitivity is required in teaching courses to Aboriginal students.” For example, a teepee for teaching, more Aboriginal instructors, more Aboriginal counselors, helping Aboriginal students understand and deal with racism; In addition, more promotion of integration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. There is a need for long term support for Aboriginal people; Aboriginal language instruction and learning to integrate into the culture. Also, learning about the process of integration and learning about living in a community. (#8)

Theory becomes the whole practice across cultures with little attention to the need for balance in all areas of life – the physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional. The practical application of what we talked about earlier is important to the learning process. For example, what is social work with Indigenous people? How do you do that? How is it different? Of course it is different, but that is another whole conversation. (#11)

Introducing spirituality and the connection to the land into the content; nine out of ten times people want to talk about it. (#3)

Learning about those kinds of teachings about how to treat one another; Learning from different places along the way. How to learn about the work we have in a good way. (#9)

A respondent shared that in adult education it is also important to co-create standards as teachers do have something to offer. In the words of a respondent it is stressed that together we can become reflective learners and become more effective and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will be better social workers to the people they serve (#17).

“Respecting diversity; learning about all forms of oppression. Being able to express self in the way they want in a respectful and safe way; Supporting them in who they are; ways of knowing, learning and marrying this with that academic world. The uptake of the academy – education is up to them. It is not lowering the standard; it is maintaining the level of standard and expectation” (#21).

The desire to move away from negative theorizing to what is working well is an important contribution to knowledge as indicated in the following quotes:

Re-introducing the literature on healthy Indigenous cultures; when you look at social work there is a lot of research done of people around the world. Some of the best practice is actually drawn from research on healthy Indigenous cultures; That origin has disappeared from the literature. (#20)

It is about being well; Teaching about you how can't be an effective social worker unless you deal with your own stuff and to make that a consistent part of your life.(#10)

When you start working with families look to the research that was done on healthy families and best practice; even just making some of this an intentional part of the learning. (#20)

An Indigenous respondent shared that the banking system does not work for Indigenous students. It is important for education to be relevant and practical for Indigenous students today rather than putting information on the shelf in case it may be useful someday (#12). In the words of a respondent of Métis ancestry: “There is no critical analysis going on. One thing that is extremely helpful is to analyze what you are learning and ask if there are other ways of approaching this topic? There is also a need for student support with individuals who have clinical experience to work with students” (#19). Sensitivity to the introduction of topics and the

debriefing afterwards require closer scrutiny, and it is important for educators to consider the impact of certain topics (#16,#14).

A respondent shared that when following cultural scripts and being immersed in one's own world or culture then "a lot of things were prescribed for you so that being culturally immersed you just did what was prescribed within your culture and then you did fine" (#12). Students from rural and remote communities are trying to navigate in a world that is foreign; therefore, there is need for support in making a transition from home community where everything is familiar.

Open Door Policy

Under the overarching theme of support, the open door policy is a major theme reflected by the respondents. The open door policy allows students to connect directly with faculty and to feel safe disclosing information in the process of getting to know each other. The open door policy often results in an expansion of the support role to "being a good relative" (#15) as indicated in the following quotes which clearly express the thoughts of the respondents:

I can think of many, many things in this regard, going out for coffee, providing a shoulder to lean on. At our centre we make sure that there is food there for students. I go to ceremonies with students and I take them to ceremonies. I go to funerals, we raise money, we have had students experience fires, we do fundraisers – the list goes on. (#15)

We have an open door policy. Our university is small enough. When they see an open door they pop in. That is probably the most used way of students popping in to talk about something they are struggling with or don't understand, or on personal matters. I have dealt with personal stories, personal tragedies and for students having to be excused for missing a class here and there; those are regular experiences for many students, not only Aboriginal students. (#12)

I have a soft spot for Aboriginal students in the classroom. Knowing that they are involved in academia doesn't always work well for them. I like to think that the students know I am there for them and easy to talk to. (#6)

I make sure that I let students know that they can approach me and talk to me. I always try to make it sound friendly. *I say I'm willing to work with you.* If you are having personal problems or academic difficulty I can't sit down with you to teach you basic grammar because I don't have time for that, but I can put you in touch with people who can help you. I do a lot at the beginning of a class. When I'm in the office the door is open. The open door policy is to be expressive of a lot of things – make yourself available to the student and be specific about how you can help! The only time I close the door is when the student has a personal problem where confidentiality is required. (#19)

I think there is a lot of one on one support. I have a very open door policy. The door is physically open. I encourage students to please come and ask questions. I want to be approachable where they can come with any type of questions; none are wrong. A lot of that is presented at faculty development includes relationships with students. Through the Faculty of social work at the University of Regina we are all faculty advisors for assigned students to look at their program success as to how to support and direct them in reaching their goals. I do think the relationships we developed at the culture camp are great; we're more accessible to students. (#21)

The way we have it set up here is with counselling and academic advising built into the program; accessible faculty with an open door policy from 8:30 to 4:30. It is important that there is someplace that students can go; It is good to have someone here to work with the program if there is something that the student is struggling with. (#5)

Going the Extra Mile

Another major theme under the umbrella of support is aptly described as “going the extra mile” (#4). Examples of the provision of support above and beyond what is expected in the teaching role are reflected in the following quotes:

I always go the extra mile and have always gone the extra mile no matter what it is. I respond after hours to students. My number is on all my course outlines. I don't consider it to be an extra – it is just part of the territory. (#4)

In a rural setting it becomes an expanded role, you are all things. It creates some difficulties regarding maintaining healthy boundaries. Students are very good but sometimes students become very dependent on you; It just takes some time and some help along the way. (#13)

I sat in a hospital room with a student following surgery; I've taken her home and sat with her there. I sat with a student whose uncle was not well and dying. There is not

much that we won't do within the context of the law. They know that; they know that we are there for them. (#10)

We now have the student success centre and we have one food bank. There is a really big gap for people facing poverty and the food bank is a very much needed service for students; The extra support helps them academically. (#21)

I provide support every way. The reality of teaching on a small campus lends itself to the opportunity to know every students spouse, children, parents, where they work, what they are going to do for the holidays. I have provided meals, and I even look after people's children. I take them fishing. Also, the barriers between the academy and local government tend to be fluid; they tend to be permeable. (#13)

In terms of providing support I assist with budgets, working on time management, supporting them who are trying to upgrade their skills by going to the YMCA or to UCN to take courses in English or math to upgrade their skills. Trying to open up possibilities and helping them with options. Sometimes they have problems with children – I try to encourage them – I'm not the advisor of the student but I help in many ways. I help them to look at other options such as B, C and D, and try to find other support. I have been able to find computers for the students to lend to them when they are trying to do assignments at 4:00 in the morning – different issues like that. On occasion, we allow students to bring their children if they cannot find someone to care for them. (#8)

In the above quotes, the respondents shared their personal experiences and express the ways they take action and go over and above just teaching the current curriculum. The gestures shown reflect an awareness of where the student is at and the willingness to form working relationships that will benefit the student.

Relationships

A major theme of relationships connects to the learning environment and relationships formed with social work educators (respondents). Other important relationships incorporate the involvements of the individual; the family, the loop back to the community, honoring the wisdom of Elders and the wider world. A respondent shared: "I really do believe in the Treaty Commission statement when former AMC Grand Chief Dennis White Bird in his subsequent

position as treaty commissioner coined the phrase “we are all treaty people”, it expresses the hope of leading us to better solutions” (#20).

Accountability to all your relations” speaks to the value of relationships and being flexible. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students have different learning styles and different world views and experience and this can come to play out in the classroom. (#15)

The mentoring relationship involves the effort to provide students with information that is useful and transferable. As described in the quotes, the respondents participate in mentoring students through listening, helping with academic work, and guidance on steps in problem-solving. The commitment on the part of the respondents to connect to the students in a meaningful way is revealed as follows:

I try to give them ideas to think outside of the box and to provide resources and to provide other ways of teaching, and to try to interpret that social work is more than counselling. With discussion the students said they learned far more than they thought they were going to. I try hard to do that. Also, we try to have lunches; eat together; do something that isn't classroom-based. (#16)

I tried to provide added support. Some of the changes were structural and programmatic; added class time to discuss issues further; trying to be available to provide support. This applies to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Being open to listening and reaching out and identifying what kind of supports could be provided and just trying to take the personal issues into account; providing a supportive level of counseling and being open to that. Trying to reinforce one's (the students') ability to handle things; It is important to note that by providing added support and assisting students in accessing resources did not mean lowering the standards. (#17)

In northern Manitoba it was direct counselling. In northern B.C. it is advocacy for students; sometimes giving students multiple chances to succeed. It is also showing respect for students in class. Respecting their experience and the knowledge they bring to class, all of those things are ways to provide support. It is also true as well for non-Indigenous students but important as Indigenous students. (#18)

In addition to having an open door policy, the importance of accessibility after hours and when away from campus is indicated in the following quotes:

With our program many of us have dual roles. We're not wearing just one hat. If students need to talk to us it is being available for the students; knowing community resources, and knowing how to network and we actually care; The way we are set up allows us to know our students. (#3)

For all my students I am very good about responding to emails. I check emails all the time, on evenings and on weekends. I am very on top of that for all my students and I definitely would say it doesn't result in burn out for me. I lend a listening ear and I have had students come and tell me about what is going on in their life. (#6)

There is a sharing of information through appropriate self-disclosure on the part of the respondents in order to gain a better understanding of what is going on with the student (#2; #7).

I learned that I have a lot to give to students. I spoke about my experiences. My experiences complemented what the literature says. (#8)

Through guidance, *nagging when required*, connecting, being approachable. I'll give you an example: I made accommodations on weekends to accept a student assignment. It is all totally extra but I wanted to get her through. (#4)

A lot of the support provided is informal. Sometimes students provide me with personal stories and I am privy to a lot of information. I try to be understanding and I don't say anything to anybody. I'm careful about that. (#7)

The mentoring relationship also reflects the ways in which respondents enhanced learning by "providing other ways of teaching" (#16) and "trying to reinforce the students' ability to handle things" (#17).

Challenges and Barriers

In chapters six and seven the respondents described the various situations that require attention. Efforts to address these areas, on the part of the respondents, potentially mitigate the layers that present challenges for students through awareness, support, advocacy and empowering students to address them. The gradients of challenge and barriers vary between students. There is no "one size fits all" (#18) formula which addresses all the needs of students. As revealed in the data there are many differences and we have much to learn. There is a need

to personalize the support provided to students in order to make it relevant. The lack of preparation required to attend a post-secondary institution reveals a lack of attention to the planning stage and the long term effects. With social work it is not just being a student; there is a whole professional side (#19). There is also the ability to meet basic needs, the establishment of the support system and the supplies needed for enrollment in courses. Results are strived for in recruiting students at the expense of process, and consultation with the communities, which is time-consuming and painstakingly slow but very necessary.

When students cannot complete their education it is disheartening because for many being a social worker, for example, has been “a lifelong dream” (#5). When the student has not had the opportunity to develop the academic skills required to be in university, the struggle can be daunting and disappointing.

Suggestions for Consultation

The suggestions for consultation involve an integrated approach to problem-solving to address the needs of Indigenous students with the opportunity for stakeholders to meet. It is understood that when portions of western ideology in curriculum are foreign to Aboriginal students it can be difficult to grasp. The privileging of western ideology in teaching Aboriginal students has resulted in many Aboriginal students experiencing the “pain of disconnection” (#15) which is a lack of kinship with the subject matter (Battiste, 2013, p. 183).

The respondents in this study described the difficulties that students face when they are not prepared for university. This impacts the retention of students and places additional pressure on social work educators in their commitment to helping students to succeed in meeting their goals. The data suggests that the type of support provided to students once they are enrolled in social work courses is at the discretion of individual social work educators to decide and there

are limits to what individual social work educators are able to do to compensate for gaps in earlier education (#13). This area requires consultation to determine various ways in which skills can be strengthened.

The study of Danaher et al (2008) acknowledged that institutions have a responsibility to the students; however, the students and the communities also have a responsibility to be a part of the solution (p. 278). Political contexts, and the development of educational policies, do dramatically affect the ability of many Aboriginal students to obtain an education. The loop back to the community (#15) in research endeavours, the building of social support networks, and the consultation and involvement of Elders (#14) are identified as points for consultation and further research. A respondent shared that it is important to meet with Elders to communicate what is happening in the area of education (#2). The following suggestions for consultation reflect the need for the following:

1. That a process may be established for key personnel (this refers to personnel who have the power and authority to make decisions) from educational institutions to invite and to consult with Elders and Chiefs and Councils and Education Directors and Counselors from First Nation Communities with regularity. The establishment of collaborative, consultative and trusting relationships is the starting point. Elders, Chiefs and Councils and Education Directors and Counsellors will be asked to share their views on education and what they would like to see happen in their community.
2. That once a working relationship has been established with Elders, Chiefs and councils then discussions may take place surrounding the grade level in which preparations should begin to prepare students for post-secondary education.

3. That planning discussions take place to consult with Chief and council regarding recommendations for curriculum content and the required support to start the process of developing a curriculum module that includes Elders and focuses on study skills, writing and reading comprehension.
4. That once the curriculum has been agreed to then consultation will occur to consult with the Department of Education to ensure that standards are adhered to and to gain approval to integrate the proposed enhanced curriculum at a particular grade level as a pilot (grade 6, for example).

The data from this study identifies the high regard that Aboriginal students have for education. The above suggestions are a starting point for consideration for those youth in particular who do not have role models who have attended university. A preparation period for youth who are wishing to attend a post-secondary institution is recommended to become acquainted with study skills, and to become more proficient in writing and reading comprehension.

Summary

The information generated from the data in this chapter reflected a discussion of the findings by answering the questions that relate to the main research question in detail. The themes in this research are identified and supported by quotes and what appeared in the literature. The overarching theme is support because it is woven throughout the data. The major themes identified are curriculum, safety, cultural sensitivity, open door policy, going the extra mile, and relationships. The need for more support was identified by the respondents. The ways in which support is provided now is displayed in the data. The challenges and barriers were explained. The suggestions for consultation stress the main issue of a lack of student preparation

for post-secondary education which impacts on the ability for post-secondary educators to deliver all the learning outcomes in a course. This issue is recommended for consultation to be implemented early in the student's education. It is surmised that the ability to address the strengthening of pre-requisite skills by involving the community early on will have a significant impact on student success.

Chapter IX - Recommendations and Conclusion

The recommendations in this study pertain to the expansion of curriculum development to embrace the reality of the lived experiences of Indigenous students. In the literature, Sinclair (2004) described “the Aboriginal approach to education is more than a difference in perspective” (p. 55). This provides a strong message about the necessity to create curriculum that incorporates Indigenous values and ways of knowing at its very foundation.

The other recommendations encompass the realities of what social work students must face in their practicum experience and once they are employed in the field of social work. The curriculum must have the flexibility to meet the students where they are at (#13). This study is important as it gathered additional information for the purposes of informing teaching practice to a population of students who will benefit from being prepared for the realities in the field of social work practice. It was stated at the beginning of this study that Aboriginal children are overrepresented in child welfare all across Canada which highlights the need for Aboriginal social workers.

The respondents made recommendations to enhance awareness that the banking system of teaching doesn't work with Aboriginal students. The teaching methods require an emphasis on practical application and relevance in the present (#12). Another respondent indicated the lack of critical analysis that is going on and the need to ask questions such as: “*Are there other ways of approaching this topic?*” (#19).

The recommendation of re-introducing the literature on healthy Indigenous cultures reveals that in social work there is a lot of research done of people around the world. An Indigenous respondent shared, “Some of the best practice is actually drawn from research on healthy Indigenous cultures” (#20).

Another Indigenous respondent shared, “the programs that are in place need careful thought because they don’t seem to be working very well. There is a fear to name problems and we should not be scared – we still cannot name the elephant in the room. Many times students are overwhelmed and in crisis and facing a steep learning curve; Once students hit the field people don’t respect them and this perpetuates racism and colonizing. (#6)

A focus on working with the feedback from practicum sites is identified to find out more about what can be incorporated into the curriculum. There is a need to “help students learn about the real world, and putting it into an orientation, so that the students are aware of what can interfere with their schooling; there is also a need to work with Elders so they understand what is happening with students” (#2).

Social work is a lot more complex. “The emotional and spiritual part is very important in addition to the physical care that needs to be taken. I think that is really missing with many courses and mainstream social work” (#11).

It is revealed in the data that the knowledge contribution for further research also identifies a need to develop and expand the curriculum to loop back to the community and to consult with Elders. The importance of building relationships, making connections and nurturing those connections to community are integral to promoting student success. There is also a need for the mutuality of exchange to keep all stakeholders informed about what is actually happening. This exchange must involve Elders in the development of curriculum that is relevant to what is actually happening in the lived experiences of the students, and with the people who will receive services. Curriculum development and delivery are foundational pieces of the learning environment. In the development of the social work professional, there is a need to be

clear and direct on what practitioners will be facing in the field, as well as a concentration on the development of curriculum that reflects realities in the field of social work.

Education has to become a key element of community development “by developing facilities and changing the ways things are done” (#8). In developing recommendations, one respondent shared ways of making education more accessible:

I wish to have more online teaching; other types of approaches...explore more teaching approaches such as blending and diversity in the delivery of education in communities. In terms of challenges and barriers, some students come from the reserve and cannot find a place to live. Some students are homeless without family support and they have children. They have to deal with different issues. The support seems to be very limited. For example, some seem to need to have mental health support –I wish to have the possibility to use other kinds of assessments to see other ways of providing different kinds of support. (#8)

Value Conflicts

The disconnection between what an individual does and how he/she feels about it can create difficulty when action in a particular area is desired. When students face a dilemma like this, and do not want to complete an assessment, then it is helpful to consider the following as shared by a respondent:

The recommendation would be to consider the presentation of different scenarios using different assessment models such as problem-based learning – asking students what they would do when faced with a particular situation. (#18)

It is important to reiterate other areas that may present value conflicts concerning the experience of Aboriginal students when they return to their home community to practice social work, therefore two respondents shared their experiences delivering curriculum to help prepare Aboriginal students for the field of practice:

Including curriculum that addresses micro practice around multiple relationships is very important where there is high accessibility and high visibility. These elements are very important. I have had students say “thank you we were prepared. (#18)

When you are talking about the history and the issues – those issues are their issues and it is not resolved. It may be one of their family members; it may be one of their friends. I think that is really important when you are talking about social work education for Aboriginal social workers. (#14)

Recommendations for Further Study

The following areas are generated from the data and are identified for curriculum development and further study. Questions include: what is the process and how do we do this? As these areas affect the community then the following points require consultation with Elders and community leadership.

1. Identifying cultural teachings and Aboriginal language while distinguishing particular nations in curriculum development rather than adding on to existing courses (#11, #8, #18).
2. Identifying courses and teachings that apply to situations requiring social work intervention within Aboriginal communities. Examples of these may be family violence, sexual abuse, and child abuse. Implementing a debriefing process to address trauma and triggers in response to the material being taught, and the situations that may occur in actual social work practice (#11, #16, #14, #18).
3. Developing a module to introduce content that prepares students for university. Examples: reading, writing, comprehension and research skills as well as particular preparatory knowledge and skills of the resources required when moving into a new environment (#8, #9, #6).
4. Identifying and developing different venues as learning environments in addition to the classroom (#8, #21, #15).
5. Accepting that Aboriginal students will be away for extended periods of time attending to cultural, family and community responsibilities. Consultation on how to

- build and accommodate this cultural piece into the curriculum by building in alternative forms of evaluation and flexible time frames without lowering standards (#9,#13).
6. Consulting with sister disciplines i.e. nursing and education to review courses on health and wellness to examine and build upon the knowledge of healthy Indigenous cultures (#9).
 7. Researching and promoting more opportunities for Indigenous instructors to teach Indigenous courses (#1, #5, #8). Exploring the option of non-Aboriginal instructors to be brought in to provide different perspectives about their own lived experiences but not to teach these courses. There is more educating to be done with faculty to reinforce an environment of anti-oppression and inclusivity.

A respondent indicated that there are still reported incidents of inappropriate remarks being made in class by fellow students. In addition, a respondent described incidences of non-Aboriginal instructors making racist statements in the classroom (#15). Baskin (2006) stated:

“my dream, however, is that although I firmly support the naming of racism and other oppressions, I do not want to be constantly focusing on them in the teaching of social work. Rather, I want to move beyond this to a place of acceptance and Indigenous ways of knowing within the education and practice of the profession” (p. 4).

The self-location of the respondents, their investment in the lives of students, and their success is demonstrated by the examples of support given. The lived experiences of the respondents and the students are important to talk about to facilitate learning; however, there is also an element of the unknown regarding the level of trauma individuals may have experienced and the ways the student, in particular, may be triggered in response to the course content (#16, #11, #14). Although it is not helpful to overestimate the fragility of students, or gloss over the

truth, there are important questions to consider. The ability of the respondents to build and model collaborative relationships in the learning environment is an important aspect to be brought to a conscious level and shared to process the course content and inform teaching practice in social work.

What do we know about Aboriginal social work students? The face of the student body is changing and a growing number of students no longer fit the norm of graduating from high school and then advancing to higher education within the same year. The market driven economy is placing increasing pressure on institutions to compete for students. The research completed by Simpkins and Bonnycastle (2014) identified students who take longer completing a program and they are consequently invisible in the statistics. We know that retention is a widely studied subject which is affected by many variables including individual student motivation, prior learning and pre-requisite skills, familial influence, economic status, employment status, number of dependents, gender, relevance of curriculum, level of support, ability to meet basic needs, and distance from an institution. As indicated in the data, people who take courses by distance education are busy people (#14). Other data from this study indicates that students are having a harder and harder time “just hanging in there” (#16). Other findings reveal that when prior education has been compromised through various circumstances including the inability to retain teachers in remote communities (#21), students are not prepared for the expectations of a post-secondary education.

The development of curriculum that is relevant and reflects the lived experiences of students revealed in this study promotes an environment of safety where the voices of Aboriginal students are legitimized and their experiences are valued (#17). From a structural perspective, Mullaly (1997) described all groups having a right to speak for themselves and to have that voice

accepted as authentic and legitimate (p. 113). Aboriginal students have been placed on the margins and access to education has been denied to them previously (#13). Critical theory is committed to change by focusing on those on the margins of society. In this thesis study, the data reveals that an alternative vision for the development of curriculum that is representative of Aboriginal people is consistent with social work values.

Hart (2002) stated that “consciousness and action should be sought at all levels, individual, family, community and nation” (p.32). He describes the need for validation at an emotional level for colonized peoples and that people must be able to express emotions on their own terms. The opportunity for Aboriginal students to have a voice and to be heard in a safe/moderated environment (#9), for example, the learning environment, is consistent with the Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Ortiz and Jani (2010) described the opportunity to utilize the CRT framework when sharing complex lived experiences. The concept of intersectionality generated from a respondent in this study (#14) is applied within the CRT framework which also describes ways of informing teaching techniques while contextualizing discussions. The CRT framework also critically analyzes assumptions, and focuses on transformations.

According to Deyhle (1995) cited in Brayboy (2005), individual success in academics for Indigenous people is contingent in the maintenance of a strong sense of Indigenous identity as distinctive and a source of pride (p. 13). Spirituality and respect for Indigenous peoples’ connection to the land is recommended for incorporation into the curriculum (#3, #21, #15). Kovach (2009) explains the descriptive words that are associated with Indigenous epistemologies. These include “interactional and interrelational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid and spiritual” (p. 56). A respondent shared that her classroom lectures

conclude with saying “All my relations” as a reminder to be a good relative and role model (#15). Sinclair (2004) describes two of the key concepts that underpin Aboriginal worldview are the concept of “All my relations” and the concept of the sacred. Baskin (2002) shared her views from her paper written fourteen years past “As a spirituality in education advocate, I would like to see social work programs including this topic throughout core courses in practice, policy and research; Currently no such program exists” (p. 5).

Contributions to Social Work Knowledge

The following recommendations speak poignantly to the contributions to social work knowledge. The history and the issues taught in social work reflect the trauma that many Indigenous students have encountered. The collective memory and the effects of intergenerational trauma are contributing factors. As explored earlier in this thesis study, the following quotes reflect examples of building this awareness which are important areas requiring further exploration:

We have to think about what we are teaching and the possible impact by getting to know our students. The stuff that we teach in social work we have to be extra sensitive – a lot with Aboriginal students in particular. (#16)

When you are talking about the history and the issues – those issues are their issues – that is their life it is not resolved; it may be one of their family members; it may be one of their friends. I think that is really important when you are talking about social work education for Aboriginal social workers. (#14)

We ethically and morally have to be able to process that. We can’t just teach the information and leave it there. It is something we really need to be in tune with when teaching Aboriginal students and newcomers; Those are the kinds of things we have to really start thinking about when giving a course and the impact of not doing anything with it. (#16)

The contributions to social work knowledge also stress the importance of the development of curricula that is relevant to the lived experience of Indigenous people. The respondents provided insights based on their perceptions of the processes that occur day to day

combined with their years of experience teaching Indigenous social work students. The key points from respondents are described regarding recommendations for the enhancement of the curriculum. There is a decolonizing type of aim (#9) which includes the process of “suspending preconceived notions...suspending that judgment and deconstructing and confronting those preconceptions while examining your own cultural orientation and preconceptions” (#13). A respondent also shared his experience to relay the importance of recognizing that different cultures follow different cycles and the timing of events (#13). In addition one has to be very keen to recognize strengths and weaknesses in order to help them (students) develop personally and professionally (#13). As previously noted in this thesis study, a respondent shared the following words which stress the importance of suspending one’s preconceptions:

Why I relate this is the ebbs and flows that I brought here from the academic year were not in sync with those of my students. They have hunting and gathering times. It has a big difference in First Nation student’s lives. Either they have family responsibilities; they are looking after children while others engage in traditional hunting and gathering activities, or they themselves are engaged in the traditional activities. If they are in class during this time, they are incredibly distracted by not being involved in those activities. I need to adjust the academic year to some degree to accommodate the fact that other students of other cultures have equally meaningful events; it’s not only the hunting and gathering aspects. (#13)

There is a knowledge gap regarding how the exploration of preconceived ideas, attitudes, values and beliefs of Aboriginal students, and the privileging of western knowledge, is addressed within the classroom. The area for further study is the development of the curriculum to learn about the lived experiences, traditions and uniqueness of Aboriginal people and their nations and to gain a voice for those who have been oppressed. The recommendation is to move away entirely from deficit theorizing to a strength-based model. Although deficit theorizing is familiar in the literature; it is not helpful in the way forward.

A respondent stated that there is a lot that is shared about what First Nations people don't have" (#11), and another respondent concurred with this to state that the deficit theorizing undermines the strengths and the cultural teachings that exist within individuals, families and communities. The respondent identified the strengths of healthy Indigenous cultures around the world. The history of healthy Indigenous cultures has disappeared from the literature (#20).

The contributions of the respondents included creating a safe learning environment enhanced by their openness in sharing their hearts, investment, experiences and perceptions of who they are. The respondents also described what they do, the individuals who influenced, helped and mentored them, and the ways in which they, in turn, influence and support Indigenous students both inside and outside of the classroom. They also talked about what they see as important in the creation of a safe, interactive and positive learning environment and their part in it. Another important feature of this conversation was the opportunity to experience both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators having the courage to disclose pieces of their own lived experience that relate to particular circumstances shared by Indigenous students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I had little idea of what to expect in my thesis journey. My contributions to knowledge included the valued opportunity to interview respondents, transcribe the data and analyze the results as the respondents shared their history, perspectives, observations and recommendations for social work that will contribute to the retention of students. I was given the impression by respondents that they had not shared personal information of this nature in the same way in the past. I wanted to hear about what social work educators think and the extent of what they do. I was curious to learn about their teaching style, philosophy of teaching and the time they spend supporting students. In this study I did not find out how many hours they spend

supporting students; it was not specifically asked about nor generated from the data. I can guess that during the course of a regular work week, and on weekends, the hours providing support to students accrue quickly. The relationships that are forged and the stability of an environment with structure are helpful in the effort to retain students. When students do not have the prerequisite skills to cope with the demands of university then the dynamic it creates may reverberate throughout the system beginning with their own situation, the effect on their families, and the effect on their classmates; instructors and others. On the other hand, the effect could be equally as powerful if students had the opportunity to be well prepared for the challenge of university.

I learned that the development of culturally appropriate curriculum will involve concentrated work and requires development by a committed group of educators as issues are introduced. The process that took place in the interviews conducted in this study provided an opportunity for the respondents to shift from a student-centered focus to their personal sharing during the initial parts of the interview.

In the final stage of the interview it was, once again, an opportunity to take a student-centered focus. From my perspective, it was enlightening and enjoyable to learn about their process and their history as they went back in time to describe their first teaching experience and their entry into social work. Respondents shared comments with me such as “I thought about this in a new way” (#6) or “I haven’t thought about this for a long time” (#19,#13). I knew it was going to be challenging to analyze the data as I wanted to include everything I heard in its entirety.

From my perspective, my role models, early on, were teachers who went the extra mile to provide encouragement and impressed upon me never to give up. In the back of my mind,

when entering the Ph.D. program, my key interest was the topic of student retention in the completion of a post-secondary education. The opportunity to complete my thesis in this area of study has been very enlightening.

Through my years of experience in social work practice and in teaching I was aware of the extra layers of struggles that Indigenous students face. I was also aware of the good work, and other duties as assigned, that is made possible by teachers and doesn't make the news; the nights of losing sleep worrying about students, and the tears of joy when a student completes their program. In this journey I had the privilege of interviewing twenty-one brilliant, dedicated, kind and compassionate social work educators. I learned from my interviews that I was merely touching the surface in discovering the breadth and depth of their wisdom, and the support they provide to students.

There is so much to be shared. The educators in this study revealed a high regard for the social work profession, and a commitment to the empowerment of students by working collaboratively and respectfully in a student-centered environment. Educators indicated having a sense of the strength of their influence based on occasional feedback they received from students. In addition, educators described the influences they had experienced in their own lives that led them to the opportunity to teach and their process of self-discovery during that time. Many of the educators pointed out their love for and commitment to the students and the richness of learning that occurred when students felt safe, and shared their own lived experiences and their desire to pay it forward. The valued aspects of their teaching career were acknowledged. The opportunity to give back by providing support in many ways helped students believe in themselves, persist in the program, learn skills that are useful personally and in practice, and to achieve the goals they had set for themselves. Some of the major learning also involved the

realization that the barriers facing Aboriginal students have not changed; the process of moving forward is painstakingly slow. Attention to this issue is required at higher levels of authority.

It is through consciousness-raising and advocacy that we recognize and promote education as a basic human right. Education should be accessible to everyone. It is hoped that one day there will be sufficient funding for Indigenous students to be empowered and truly live with dignity while embracing life as a student.

The following quote is cited in Kirkness (1995, p. 31) from one of Chief Dan George's famous soliloquies entitled "A Talk to Teachers":

Can we talk of integration until there is integration of hearts and minds?
Unless you have this, you only have a physical presence,
And the walls between us are as high as the mountain range.

Chief Dan George (1899 – 1981)

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Appendices

Appendix A	Sample of Recruitment Letter	172
Appendix B	Summary of Thesis Study	173
Appendix C	Thesis Inquiry Questions.....	175
Appendix D	Informed Consent Form.....	178
Appendix E	Listing of Outside Institutions Contacted.....	184

Sample of Recruitment Letter to Outside Institutions – Appendix A



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Dear _____:

Re: Teacher Self location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education -Invitation for Interview Participants

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Linda Dustan Selinger and I am a doctoral candidate enrolled in my sixth year of study in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. I am the principal researcher in the above research study. My faculty research supervisor is Dr. Don Fuchs. My contact information and the contact information of my research supervisor are listed as follows:

Principal Researcher

Linda Dustan Selinger
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Research Supervisor

Dr. Don Fuchs
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

I am searching for experienced social work educators of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal ancestry to participate in this study. I have received ethics approval from the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba to conduct this qualitative research thesis study. As you offer programs with a First Nation Social Work specialization, I wish to request your permission allowing me to invite faculty from your university to be interviewed. I, the principal researcher will conduct the interviews. I understand that prior to conducting any portion of this research that your permission is required and ethics approval is required from your institution. I will need your assistance in advising me of the persons to contact required procedure and protocol for ethics approval at your institution. In addition to the approval certificate, I am attaching a summary of the research and a recruitment poster for your review. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Linda Dustan Selinger, Ph.D. Candidate

Summary of Research Study – Appendix B

Research Project Title: Teacher Self-Location; Experience, and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Students Enrolled in Social Work Education

Principal Researcher:

Linda Dustan Selinger
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Don Fuchs
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

In this qualitative research study, a purposeful sample of ten Aboriginal and ten non-Aboriginal adult educators with a minimum of five years experience teaching social work courses that included the enrolment of Aboriginal students is desired. I (the principal researcher) wish to learn more about the skills and qualities of experienced social work educators; and the extent of their personal involvement and influence in supporting and inspiring Aboriginal students to persist in the social work program. The main research question is: “What do Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators bring to the learning environment to influence the retention of Aboriginal social work students?”

This study will utilize phenomenology as a philosophical approach to explore and complement the life story narrative research design in guiding the interview process. The proposed settings to invite participants for this study will include campuses that offer programs with a First Nation social work specialization in western Canada including, but not limited to, the University of Manitoba Northern Social Work program located in Thompson, Manitoba; the University of Northern British Columbia main campus located in Prince George, B.C. and affiliated sites.

The proposed length of the study will be for a period of six months beginning April 1, 2015 through to October 1, 2015 to allow for the ability of me (the principal researcher), a resident of Manitoba, to coordinate personal travel arrangements in order to meet with potential participants who prefer and consent to be interviewed face to face. The data for the study will be collected through the process of face to face interviews, via Skype and by telephone. The interview data will be recorded through the process of handwritten notes and audio recording.

The initial screening and introductory interview will be approximately 40 minutes in length and conducted by telephone. The second interview will be two hours in length and conducted face to face via Skype or by telephone.

Confidentiality will be ensured through the arrangement of a mutually agreeable private location; free from interruptions, where voices cannot be overheard. Within seven to ten days, the principal researcher will provide each participant with an email transcript of his/her interview for review. The participant is invited to respond to the researcher within ten days if there are any additions, deletions or changes. Pseudonyms will be assigned to research participants and data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and on the principal researcher's personal computer with password protection. Once all the data is collected, I will prepare a report and distribute it to the participants with their consent. I will demonstrate reflexivity by maintaining research memos, logs and journals to assist me in the research reflection and data analysis.

My name is Linda Dustan Selinger and I am a doctoral candidate enrolled in my sixth year of study in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. I am the principal researcher in the above research thesis study entitled “Teacher Self Location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence in the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education. My faculty research supervisor is Dr. Don Fuchs. My contact information and the contact information of my research supervisor are listed as follows:

Principal Researcher:

Linda Dustan Selinger
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Don Fuchs
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

The Initial Interview (40 minutes by telephone)

The questions involved in the initial interview will include the following screening questions:

- (1) Do you self-identify as Aboriginal or Non-Aboriginal?
- (2) How many years of experience do you have teaching social work courses at a post-secondary level?
- (3) How many social work courses under your instruction included the enrolment of Aboriginal students?

The Second Interview (Two hours)

The interview questions in the second interview are organized into three parts A, B and C and pertain to the main research question which is: “What do Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal social work educators bring to the learning environment to influence the retention of Aboriginal social work students?”

Part A:

The following broad open-ended questions posed in this first portion of the interview process focuses on the experiences and self location of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators:

(1) Tell me about your first teaching experience, (2) How did that teaching opportunity come about? (3) How would you describe yourself at that stage? (4) Tell me about the influential people in your life at that time. (5) What did you learn about yourself?

Following the Part A portion of the interview, I will pose the question to each participants and ask “are there any points that you would like to add? On the other hand, are there any points that you would like to modify or delete? Prior to moving on to Part B with the interview questions, are you feeling comfortable or would you like to take a break?”

Part B:

In part B these broad open-ended questions are focused on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators reflecting on their career in the area of adult education and the experience of teaching Aboriginal social work students. The questions are similar to part A and they are listed as follows:

(1) Tell me about your first experience teaching social work courses that included Aboriginal social work students, (2) How did that teaching opportunity happen? (3) How would you describe yourself at that stage in your life and in your career? (4) Tell me about the influential people in your life at that time, (5) What teaching experiences were personally meaningful for you in the instruction of Aboriginal social work students?

Following this portion of the interview I will say to the participant, “I invite you to ask questions and indicate any points that you would like to add, modify or delete. Prior to moving on to Part C with the interview questions, are you feeling comfortable or would you like to take a break?”

Part C:

In part C, the participants are invited to begin by describing their perceptions regarding Aboriginal social work students at the time of enrolment; the students’ response to the learning environment; the contributing factors to the student staying in school, and the participants’ perceptions of the ways in which they have influenced the retention of Aboriginal students and the learning that has taken place. The questions in part C are as follows: (1) Describe your observations regarding social work students at the time of enrolment in the social work program. (2) In your view, what contributes to the motivation and determination of Aboriginal students to

continue their studies? (3) In what ways have you provided support to Aboriginal social work students? (4) In what ways do you see yourself influencing Aboriginal social work students to persist in the social work program and graduate? (5) What have you learned about teaching Aboriginal social work students that will contribute to social work knowledge in preparing students for the field?

Following this final portion of the second interview, I will speak to each participant to encourage him/her to debrief regarding the content and the process of the interview and the feelings evoked by saying “As our interview today draws to a close, how are you feeling about the interview process? Do you have any further questions? If you have any questions, I encourage you to approach me. Also, before you leave this interview today, you may choose to jot down some of your thoughts and feelings or you may consider reflecting upon what we have discussed by writing in a personal journal at a later time. I will email the transcript of our interview to you within seven days and I welcome your feedback if you have any additions, deletions or changes.”



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Social Work

Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title: Teacher Self location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education.

Principal Investigator and Contact Information:

Linda Dustan Selinger
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Research Supervisor and Contact Information:

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This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information. The study will be conducted as per the ethics research protocol approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board.

My name is Linda Dustan Selinger and I am a doctoral student enrolled in my sixth year of study in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The qualitative thesis research study entitled “*Teacher Self location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education*” invites twenty experienced Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social work educators to volunteer to be interviewed. The criteria for participation includes: (1) Ten adult educators of Aboriginal ancestry and ten adult educators of non-Aboriginal ancestry with a minimum of five years experience teaching courses in social work that included the enrolment of Aboriginal students; (2) The ability to be available for an initial interview of 40 minutes and a second interview of two hours to be scheduled between April 1 and October 1, 2015; (3) The willingness to be interviewed face to face; via Skype, and by telephone; (4) The willingness to have your interviews audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

The main purpose of this research study is to examine your experiences teaching Aboriginal post-secondary social work students and your perceptions of your influence on the retention of Aboriginal students. I, as the principal investigator, will collect and record the data for the study from you by the following means: face to face interviews, Skype, telephone, email, handwritten notes and audio-recording.

Confidentiality regarding the information that you provide will be assured as a private location for interviewing will be chosen where our voices cannot be overheard. I will carefully re-read each interview transcript and I will delete information which might be identifiable to others.

Once you have indicated your interest in the study by sending an email to me, I will respond to you within 24 hours. In accordance with your schedule and convenience, I (the researcher) will schedule an initial telephone interview of approximately 40 minutes with you to affirm the criteria for participation by asking you the following screening questions: (a) Do you self-identify as Aboriginal or Non-Aboriginal? (b) How many years of experience do you have teaching social work courses at a post-secondary level? (c) How many social work courses under your instruction included the enrolment of Aboriginal social work students? In addition, the initial interview will involve a discussion regarding the process of the research; any questions you may have; the interview questions; explanations of how confidentiality will be safeguarded;

the dissemination of the results, and the signing of the informed consent with your copy to keep if you agree to participate in the research.

A second interview of two hours will consist of open-ended questions and will be conducted face-to-face, via Skype or by telephone in accordance with your preference and availability.

The following is a summary of the questions that I (the researcher) will ask you in the second interview are divided into parts A, B and C. In part A, the questions you will be asked relate to your self-location by asking questions about your first experiences teaching; your description of what you learned about yourself and your description of influential people in your life. In part B, the questions will focus on your reflections on the experience of teaching Aboriginal social work students. You will be invited to describe your self-location and the experiences that were personally meaningful and influential at that stage of your teaching career. In part C, you will be invited to describe your perceptions regarding Aboriginal social work students at the time of enrolment in the social work program. You will be invited to describe your perceptions of how you have supported Aboriginal students and what other factors have influenced Aboriginal students to persist in the social work program and graduate. You will also be invited to describe what you have learned about teaching Aboriginal social work students that will contribute to social work knowledge in preparing students for the field.

After the interviews have taken place, I (the researcher) will carefully re-read the content of the interviews and deleting any information that I think may identify you, I will provide you with a typed transcript of our interviews by email once the interviews are completed. In that way, you will be able to review your interview and add, revise or delete content as you desire and email the changes to me. If revisions are necessary then I will email you a copy of your interview content that reflects the changes.

If you are agreeable to participating in the study and sign this consent form then you will be provided with your copy of the signed informed consent form and the interview questions. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating, or at any time during the study.

All data will be kept in a locked, secure location and I (the researcher) will be the only individual with access to the data. For the purposes of grouping results, all data will be separated by

participant, and each participant will be given a pseudonym that protects the confidentiality of individual participants. Informed consent forms will be stored separately in a separate locked filing cabinet (and in a different order) from the personal documents and interview transcripts. All typed interview transcripts will be kept on Linda Dustan Selinger's (the researcher) computer with password protection. The researcher is the only person who will have access to this data. The data will be stored until December, 2017 then destroyed. All materials will be shredded and discarded while electronic data i.e. typed transcripts and audiotapes will be deleted.

If during the course of the interviews, the abuse and/or neglect of children or persons in care are discovered; or there is the disclosure regarding an individual who may be in danger of harming him/herself or others, then I (the principal researcher) have a legal duty to report to the appropriate legal authority. In this regard, examples of my obligation to report to the appropriate legal authorities refer to the child and family services agency of jurisdiction in the case of abuse and/or neglect of children or of children at risk of being abused or neglected. If it is learned that an individual may be in danger of harming him/herself or others then I (the principal researcher) have the legal obligation to file a report with the police in the area of jurisdiction.

There are no known risks to a third party with this study. On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that the topics discussed in the interviews may trigger memories that evoke strong feelings. I encourage you to identify sources of social support and counselling that are known to you prior to beginning the study. I, as the principal researcher, will conduct an ongoing assessment of your level of comfort with the topic by checking in with you at each step during the interview process for feedback. The expected benefits with your participation are to provide unique and valuable insights contributing to the retention of Aboriginal social work students and to the social work profession.

You will receive a \$25.00 gift card and a thank you note for your participation in this study.

I, as the researcher, will require your consent for the right to publish the data in a dissertation, scholarly journals and other publications. The dissemination of results of the study will ensure that no names or other identifying information is included without the consent of the participants or unless the participants have explicitly waived this right.

You are invited to sign this consent form with the full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings, please indicate so in the space below. Please also indicate in what form you wish to receive the research findings (email, fax, surface mail).

____ Yes, I would like to receive the report paper by ____ email ____ fax ____ surface mail. Please send the findings to:

If you choose *yes* to receive the research summary, it will be provided to you after the data collection is completed by November 30, 2015.

Consent

I _____ (First and Family Name) have read the above information on the study, *Teacher Self location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education*.

I agree to be interviewed face to face. _____ Yes _____ No

I agree to be interviewed via Skype. _____ Yes _____ No

I acknowledge there is a (admittedly minor) risk of data transmitted and/or intercepted via the Internet (example: Skype). _____ Yes _____ No

I agree to be interviewed on the telephone. _____ Yes _____ No

I will allow my interview to be recorded on Linda Dustan Selinger's audio recorder (Please note your interview will be recorded to verify my handwritten notes) _____ Yes _____ No

I give permission for my words to be used in research reports and publications. _____ Yes
_____ No

I understand that I will receive a gift card of \$25.00 and a thank you note for participating in this study _____ Yes _____ No

Having read the information, I have understood the nature of this study and I consent to participate in the study, *Teacher Self location, Experience and Perceptions of Influence on the Retention of Aboriginal Social Work Students enrolled in Social Work Education* conducted by Linda Dustan Selinger _____ Yes _____ No.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. The research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Name of Participant (Please Print)

(Signature of Participant)

Date

Principal Researcher

Appendix E

Listing of institutions with a First Nations social work specialization outside of the University of Manitoba – institutional approval granted for researcher to contact faculty at their publicly available websites:

- University of Northern British Columbia main campus and sites – Email approval in appendix
- Vancouver Island University – Full ethics review – Approval certificate in appendix
- University of Victoria – Permission granted – Executive Assistant contacted faculty
- Thompson Rivers University – Permission granted – Executive Assistant contacted social work faculty
- University of the Fraser Valley – Ethics review – Approval certificate included in appendix
- Laurentian University – Executive Assistant contacted social work faculty
- University of Calgary and Lethbridge and Edmonton Campuses – Program Director contacted social work faculty
- University of Regina and Saskatoon and Aurora University NT Campuses – Executive Assistant contacted all social work faculty