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Dropping Out of School:
Exploring the Narratives of Aboriginal People in One Manitoba Community
through Lederach's Conflict Transformation Framework

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Abstract

Why do seventy percent of Canadian Aboriginal students drop out of school? Although the literature focuses on reform to schools, school systems, and to the formal relationships that govern Aboriginal education, there is, as yet, a lack of empirically-based evidence from the perspectives of the people who have dropped out. The research was conducted in an adult education centre located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and combines semi-structured interviews with an innovative Bead Workshop field-tested in other areas of identity conflict. The study asked 22 Aboriginal people how they make sense of their education experiences, inquired about why they dropped out of school, and invited them to share their hopes for the future. The trans-disciplinary nature of peace and conflict studies offers a new analysis when data were applied to Lederach's (2003) conflict transformation framework. The findings showed that the participants quit school in the midst of very difficult and strikingly similar life circumstances, and they did not attribute dropping out to inadequacies in education or schooling, or to the effects of colonialism.

The study expands the peace and conflict literature into the Canadian Aboriginal context while establishing a new research design and methodology. The study respects Indigenous research principles and combines them with conflict transformation principles to provide empirical evidence about why Aboriginal students drop out of school, and then extends the theoretical literature with a framework for exploring the role of deeper beliefs like love, courage, and hope in personal conflict transformation. Future research can be undertaken with larger groups of Aboriginal people to better understand their experiences

in education and in other important areas of life, and to inform and advise Aboriginal policy and practice.

Dedication

For my mother, Audrey Pariseau Wilson,
and my father, Edgar Burleigh Wilson

My Mom died unexpectedly during the final months of writing this dissertation, but in many ways, she was one of the reasons I undertook this study in the first place. She was energetic, smart, and proud of her French, Métis, and Scots-Irish heritage. She took a particular interest in my research as it connected her to her history and she loved to tell anyone that would listen about her ancestors. Her great legacy was to live life full of passion, to accept people without reservation and to live each day guided by her abundant faith. She was lots of fun and one of my greatest champions. I'd give anything for one more coffee on the deck at the cottage.

My Dad grew up in circumstances not dissimilar to some of the stories contained on the pages of this dissertation, and so he, too, is in the origins of this study. Despite his childhood, he became a respected leader in the business world and in the Navy League community, a great father and one of the finest men I have known. As he has walked the dark road grieving the loss of "his Audrey," I have seen him allow the power of God's love sustain his broken heart, and ours. His deep commitment to family continues to anchor us all.

It is only fitting to dedicate this work to Mom and Dad, from whom I first learned about nurturing peace and navigating conflict, always in the context of love.

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It has been my honour to be guided in this doctoral endeavor by my Professor and now friend, Dr. John Stapleton. My appreciation for his scholarship, wisdom, and belief in the goodness of people is beyond words. I thank him for demanding nothing less than my best, and for the encouragement he so readily bestowed. My Advisory team of Dr. Jessica Senehi, Dr. Rod Clifton, and Dr. Brian Rice took turns encouraging me and challenging me, and their contributions have made this a much finer dissertation than it might have been without them. I also want to thank Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart, my External Examiner, whose knowledge of Canadian law and heart for the struggles of Aboriginal people has strengthened this dissertation.

I also want to acknowledge Mrs. Maureen Hetherington of The Junction in Northern Ireland, who first invited me to her emerald island. Under her wisdom, I learned about and experienced the Irish Bead Workshop, and was privileged to share in some of the healing taking place in Northern Ireland.

The people who shared their stories for this dissertation are some of the bravest people I have met, and I thank them for trusting me and letting me see into their world. I wish each of them life's best as they pursue their dream to finish high school.

Of course, no undertaking such as that required for a Ph D happens without the ongoing and hearty support of one's family. I am grateful to my children, Graham,

Jayne, Jill, Jenna, and my new daughter-in-law Danielle for their constant love and generous supply of hugs, Tim's and Starbucks. Thanks to Dad and Mom for cheering me on and embarrassingly expressing your pride in my adventures to anyone that would listen, to Jim and Margo for the lifelong friendships that only siblings navigate (and for coming to my Oral Defence!), and to Audrey and Tim, for walking this road with all of us.

Finally, I must acknowledge the tremendous support of my husband, Rick, who is and always has been my modern day knight. Thank you for your great love, for our wonderful life together, and for continuously rescuing me from myself.

You know I could never have done this without each of you.

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Prologue



Figure 1: Shyanne's Bracelet. This was created December, 2011 in the Bead Workshop held at Bison Park.

This little black bead here next to the clasp represents...I don't wanna cry. Okay. This represents when I was raped as a little girl. I had to deal with being raped by my dad's brother multiple times when I was like two years old. I was raped by a really close family friend... and this one is being taken away from my mom at such a young age... that was really hard for me and my little sister 'cause we were separated for 15 years. I just like, lost a lot of my life. I can only remember the really bad times. I have no

memories of anything good in my life. This represents me being taken away from my mom. Um, this one right here represents a lot of my life I don't remember. I was run over by a car when I was 5; almost lost my life. That's the significance of this one. This one is all the bad people who have done wrong in my life. This one is just a separation from everything that's here, and from school. This star one is my son. Yeah. He was the light of my life when I had him. I had to give him up for adoption when he was very young 'cause I had an abusive boyfriend. Um, this is another separation because I lost 4 years of my life to hard drugs. I didn't smoke crack, but I did a lot of coke, E, and stuff, so... That's the separation, that's what these two beads represent. Two years each. This is for two lives, this represents my sister's life, and her son. I delivered my sister's little boy on my grandma's bathroom floor. Yeah, she was smoking crack and I delivered her little boy on my grandma's bathroom floor. So this is her life, and this is his life. This is for my son, Chance, he got a blue heart because my son is my life. He was my second born. This one is my daughter, Alia. This one is for my mom. She got the biggest rock because my mom... she is my rock. You don't even know....My mom is my rock. This one is separation between me and my kids' dad 'cause we fight a lot, and I'm trying to distance myself from him right now. I'm having a lot of issues right now because the more I'm trying to bury all this, the more it's coming out (*sobs*). So it's, like, really hard for me to cope with all this stuff. And I'm really happy that you came here and did this bracelet stuff for us, 'cause like, you don't know how hard it has been to fight to get to where I am now. And that's why I guess this is an awesome workshop. I can't thank you enough, you know? And it is healing, 'cause like, God, let me tell you, it's been a hard, hard life. These ones I just put on there are my sister; my two sisters, my two older brothers, and

my dad. That's our family. And these two represent where I am in my life right now. I am very happy where I am. I'm in school, both my kids are in daycare, and this little ball represents the future for me and my children. One side of the bracelet is really dark - it just comes out - like the black makes the colors stand out. It does, 'cause there was a lot of dark times in my life, and I put a lot of work into putting myself into where I am, and being the mom that I am. I'm not the perfect mom but I work hard to be a mom, and work hard to go to school and stuff, so....so that's my sad story. That's my sad, sad story....

Chapter 1

Introduction

*Conflict transformation helps us see purpose and direction.
Without it, we can easily find ourselves responding to a myriad
of issues, crises, and energy-filled anxieties (Lederach, 2003, p. 28).*

This research began with a genuine curiosity about why the majority of Aboriginal¹ people seem to respond to school by dropping out, and how peace and conflict studies, with its transdisciplinary nature, might contribute new ways for understanding this disturbing trend in Aboriginal life. The research was designed with careful attention to Indigenous research, and included two narrative methods, one of which was adapted from post-Troubles peace-building work in Northern Ireland (Hetherington, 2008; O'Hagan, 2008b). Both methods invite people to share their stories as they are comfortable, and both respect entire systems of relationships to build meaning and understanding. The primary purposes of the research are to understand what had happened that resulted in Aboriginal people dropping out of school, and to determine if there were structural or cultural changes that could be made to schools to improve education for Aboriginal people. The analysis required a fluid and dynamic framework that removed researcher bias as much as possible and let the stories of the participants remain in context.

¹ Canada's Indigenous people are recognized collectively as Aboriginal people. 'Indigenous' is an international reference to people groups acknowledged as original inhabitants of a land mass. 'Aboriginal' includes several nations in Canada, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and non-Status Indians. These are explained and differentiated more fully in the Definition of Terms later in this chapter.

Lederach's (2003) conflict transformation principles constitute an holistic model that recognizes that conflict is embedded in relationships. It was logical, then, for the data, in the form of stories, to be applied to Lederach's (2003) lenses of conflict transformation for analysis. The findings were somewhat surprising and did not generate anticipated cultural or structural changes to be made in school. According to the participants, they did not associate dropping out of school with deficiencies in education. Instead, the data produced belief systems of courage, hope, and love that guided the participants through many complicated conflicts surrounding their departure from school, and their later return to school as adults. This dissertation explores their stories.

Dropping out of school is evidence of a long-standing conflict between Aboriginal people and the institutions and cultures that have shaped the development of Canada. Although it has been an inter-group conflict, it has also greatly affected individuals. According to 2011 statistics, approximately 70% of Canada's Aboriginal people drop out of school without graduating (Standing Senate Committee, 2011, p. 1). Although "Aboriginal education in Canada has been described as historically ineffective" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 27), there are few empirical answers to explain why this is so, and not many studies asking Aboriginal people how they have perceived their own educational experiences, especially in the context of the many cultural, structural, and personal relationships that characterize education for Aboriginal people in Canada. Arguably, the situation is overwhelming, and there are many people and many efforts targeted at improving education for Aboriginal people.

The larger conflict in which this study takes place may be described as an identity conflict by students of peace and conflict studies, but the current state of Aboriginal people

is barely recognized among Canada's general population (Clarkson, 1994; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Standing Senate Committee, 2011). Understanding the conflict correctly is critical for the conflict to be transformed, and to ensure that social institutions and other service providers deliver relevant support. They must also be careful to not respond to the myriad of issues, crises, and energy-filled anxieties that may not be the real problems, as referenced in the quote at the beginning of this section. During preliminary research for this study and as the literature was reviewed for the study (Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Battiste, 2002; Denis, 2007; Kirkness, 1999; Milke, 2013; Silver, 2006; Silver & Mallett, 2002), questions arose about whether or not the challenges in education for Aboriginal people may be due, in part, to a policy focus on structural matters, rather than responding to the personal or relational reasons given by Aboriginal individuals to explain why they dropped out of school.² In this context, the research questions began to take shape.

Preliminary research also included an exploration of conflict transformation as a concept, and as a framework for understanding the contexts in which Aboriginal people go to school in Canada. Prescriptively, conflict transformation maximizes mutual understanding which includes "trying to bring to the surface explicitly the relational fears, hopes, and goals of the people involved" (Lederach, 2003, p. 25). As a framework for understanding conflict, conflict transformation also represents deliberate intervention in order to minimize the destructive effects of conflict, while maximizing the potential for

² 'School' refers to the formal Kindergarten to Grade 12 public and private education in which attendance is mandated by law between ages 7 and 16 in Canada. Goodlad (1984) described the longstanding purpose of schools as "the traditional job of assuring literacy and eradicating ignorance" (p. 2).

growth in individuals at all levels (Lederach, 2003, p. 24). Burton (1990), Volkan (1998), and Zartman (1995) stress the importance of attention to fears, perceptions, basic human needs and expectations, and other attitudes that may emerge over time as a result of conflict and in response to life, in order to build understanding. As a result, conflict transformation principles seemed to suggest a new way of understanding how Aboriginal people in one Manitoba community have made sense of the many relationships that have shaped their educational experiences (Lederach, 2003, p. 28).

It is important to acknowledge that conflict transformation principles recognize that responses to conflict are usually gradual, and are situated within the web and flow of relationships (Lederach, 1998; Lederach, 2003; Miall, 2004). Due to its complex and relational nature, a transforming conflict is rarely easy to identify until the process is complete (Lederach, 2003, p. 39). In this way, conflict transformation is an appropriate framework for understanding long-term situations for which there are no quick solutions, like the Aboriginal dropout trends (Lederach, 2003, p. 39; Ryan, 2009, p. 305). Furthermore, conflict transformation recognizes that a decision like quitting school is not one event, but rather the result of a series of contributing events, or responses to conflict. In this study, participants quit school and then returned, but a conflict transformation analysis allows for the broader consideration of the structural, cultural, personal and relational responses that shaped both decisions. While it is evident that the participants' relationship with education transformed from negative to positive, the conflict transformation model suggests that no transformation is simple, and this is confirmed by the study findings.

“Consider the baleful history that [Aboriginal] people have had to live; consider the almost total ignorance in Canada about that history and about their present situation” (Clarkson, 2004, p. 5). Acknowledging this history, and that conflict transformation is inherently a narrative process (Kellett, 2010, p. 311), the study used narrative research methods that are respectful of Indigenous people in order to provide a platform of understanding upon which to consider the responses of Aboriginal people to education. The major research questions of the study are “What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future, and what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?” The transformation explored in the pages of this dissertation reflects how the participants are moving toward “more sustainable, peaceful relationships” personally, and within their educational experiences (Lederach, 2003, p. x).

Once the data were collected, the findings were initially organized by themes and then explored according to Lederach’s Conflict Transformation framework (Lederach, 2003). Although Lederach uses ‘principles of conflict transformation’ to describe his conceptual framework, which he calls *The Big Picture of Conflict Transformation*, the term ‘model’ is used interchangeably with ‘framework’ and ‘principles’ throughout this dissertation for ease of reference, especially when referring to Lederach’s (2003) diagrammatic rendering of the conflict transformation process. Important to the context of this study, the model allows for simultaneous exploration of the immediate situation, the underlying patterns and context of conflicts, and how people’s desires for their future influences the choices they make (Lederach, 2003, p. 7). In other words, conflict transformation is a framework that recognizes that while the participants’ responses to

conflict transformed from negative to more positive and sustainable responses, this was not a simple process. Although the research question focused on school experiences, the research provided a larger window into Canadian Aboriginal experiences, as illustrated in the story told in the Prologue.

This chapter introduces the dissertation. The purpose of the study is explained in the following section. This is followed by an explanation of the significance and limitations of the study. A definition of terms is then provided, as is a brief overview of the history of education for Aboriginal people in Canada. The chapter concludes with a section outlining the organization of the dissertation.

Purposes of the Study

There are several purposes of the study. First, the purpose of the study is to better understand the experiences of Aboriginal people, and specifically to explore why the participants dropped out of school. Second, the design of the study purposefully respects the criteria for Indigenous research with Aboriginal people, as outlined by many Indigenous scholars. In this way, the perspectives of the participants may inform constructive change. The third purpose of the study is to apply the principles of Lederach's conflict transformation model (2003) to the Canadian Aboriginal context and explore data that to date, have not been identified for theory, research, and practice. This also expands the literature about conflict transformation and merges the field of peace and conflict studies with Aboriginal education. Finally, the purpose of the study is to make recommendations arising from the findings of the research in order to potentially effect both policy and practice. These purposes are fulfilled by answers to the primary research questions, which are: "What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school

experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future, and what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?”

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several important ways. Indigenous knowledge “suggests that the knowledge of a person in the setting becomes a useful tool when it interacts with others from the setting, with a focus on the realities and problems they face” (Lederach, 1998, p. 29). There is very little literature about the education experiences of urban Aboriginal people. Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission has listened to the stories of students who attended Residential Schools as a means of reconciliation with the non-Aboriginal society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012, p. 1). While there is a growing research and literature base focused on the experiences and outcomes of education during the Canadian Residential School era, even this does not explore the general educational experiences of Aboriginal people who have attended public and private schools. Friere (1970) emphasized that everyday knowledge must be acknowledged and trusted. He stated that “we must never merely discourse on the present situation, [and] must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupation, doubts, hopes, and fears” (p. 96). When everyday experience is acknowledged, it may be used carefully to inform policy choices. This study is significant because it seeks to understand the “doubts, hopes, and fears” of Aboriginal people and in this way, both expand the Aboriginal education literature, and also provide research to inform the design and delivery of Aboriginal education policy and practice.

In Canada, statistics indicate that more than seven out of ten Aboriginal people drop out of school but we do not really know why. Why is it that a staggering number of

Aboriginal people leave schools long before they are eligible for graduation and why is there a lack of empirical evidence to account for this trend? It seems that to better understand this long-standing pattern, at least some of these people should be asked. The identification and appropriate implementation of effective schooling for Aboriginal people has animated Canadian public policy discourse for a long time, and so this study is significant in several important ways.

The study is significant because it provides empirical evidence about why Aboriginal people quit school. The academic practice of theory building advances when conceptual debates are confronted by empirical evidence (Gartzke & Gleditsch, 2006, p. 54), and this study is significant in this way. Appropriate research can make a positive difference to future generations and facilitate research-based policy (Christensen, 2012, p. 231, 233; Holcomb, 1999, p. xiii). Canadian governments and Aboriginal leaders continue to explore effective ways to remediate the drop out rate³ of Aboriginal people from schools. In Manitoba, where the field work took place, high school completion rates for the Aboriginal population are the lowest in comparison to the other Canadian provinces, and so this study seeks to understand this, too (Richards, 2008, p. 4). Without doubt, Aboriginal people have not fared well in Canadian education systems. In a 2002 report to the Government of Canada, Canadian Indigenous scholar Dr. Marie Battiste stated “educators who acknowledge the continuing problems of Aboriginal retention and recidivism in Eurocentric schools have been trying to determine why Eurocentric educational systems fail Aboriginal students” (Battiste, 2002, p. 16). Overall, Aboriginal people are approximately 25 per cent behind non-Aboriginal Canadians in terms of

³ Drop out refers to those students who are eligible to be in school, but who are not attending school and who have not graduated from high school.

academic achievement, and continue to leave school prior to graduation in large numbers (Standing Senate Committee, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2012).

There are numerous indications in official documents that Canada is currently in a context of reconciliation and that there are sincere efforts to address the disparities between Aboriginal people and others, including in education, although efforts continue to have many challenges (Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Government of Canada, 2008; Government of Canada's *Economic Action Plan*, 2013; National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve, 2012; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). Challenges to peaceful reconciliation and sometimes even the perception of stagnation are not unusual in conflict (Lederach, 2003, p.42). According to the principles of conflict transformation, the processes of change are not smooth:

Sometimes we feel as if desired change is happening, as if there is progress. Things are moving forward in a desired direction, toward the goals or aspirations we hold for ourselves and our relationships. At other times we feel as if we have reached an impasse. A wall has been erected that blocks and stops everything. There are times when the change processes seem to be going backwards...All these experiences are normal parts of the change circle (Lederach, 2003, p. 42).

In this context of change, education research that analyzes "what is and is not working to improve student learning" can have an impact on achievement levels (Holcomb, 1999, p. xiii). There is a consensus in the literature about Aboriginal people that education can be the vehicle to lead Aboriginal people in a steady progression out of the current state of "gridlock" (Paquette, Fallon & Mangan, 2009, p. 267), "struggle"

(Turner, 2008, p. 3) and “dependency” (Helin, 2006, p. 2). Education research that analyzes “what is and is not working to improve student learning” can have an impact on achievement levels (Holcomb, 1999, p. xiii). Some recent literature does, in fact, explore life challenges among urban Aboriginal people but not specifically inquire about their school experiences (Gibson, 2009; Richards, 2010; Silver, 2006). This study provides primary research that might inform the policies and practices of education for Aboriginal people. Therefore, an inquiry into why Aboriginal people quit school, based on their own perspectives, is both timely and important.

The study is also significant because it merges the principles of conflict transformation with the core principles of Indigenous research. Research involving Aboriginal people would be more helpful if it were designed as Indigenous research, with an acknowledgement of the spiritual level, including virtues or deeply held beliefs, in order to appropriately explore Indigenous (Aboriginal) knowledge, what Aboriginal people know, and how they have given meaning to their experiences (Absolon, 2011; Denis, 1997; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), and so this study strives to do so. To explain the significance of this merger, Battiste (2002) says:

Indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. As a concept, Indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory—its methodology, evidence, and conclusions—reconceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of Indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes. Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship (p. 5).

This is an important perspective, and so the study is significant because it honours and incorporates Indigenous research principles into the methodology and the general research design of an academic research study (Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2002; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). By designing research that embraces Indigenous research principles and analyzing that research with the conflict transformation framework, the study contributes significantly by broadening our understandings of the complex contexts and relationships in which Aboriginal people live out their daily lives, and in which many quit school.

Significantly, this study expands the identity conflict literature into a protracted conflict situation in Canada, a literature that to date, has not included Canada and Aboriginal people. Understanding the way that people process or normalize their experiences is critical to working through the past for those in intractable conflicts (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, p. 3), and this study provides a new perspective on the life experiences of Aboriginal people in Canada, and in particular, their school experiences.

The study is significant because it applies conflict transformation as a conceptual framework for understanding how people perceive their school experience. Building on previous research about how people make sense of their life experiences in conflict situations (Bar-On, 2008; Byrne, 1997; Hetherington, 2008), the study explores the educational experiences of adult Aboriginal students through the application of Lederach's Conflict Transformation framework (2003) to the data, and in this way extends the literature about conflict transformation. Although Lederach's model is intended to explain a wide variety of conflict situations, it has not been tested, and prior to this study, conflict transformation has not been used to better understand Aboriginal issues in Canada.

In summary, the study is significant for four reasons: 1) it contributes empirical research to our understandings of why Aboriginal people drop out of school 2) it merges conflict transformation principles with Indigenous research principles; 3) it expands the identity conflict literature about people who have lived in a protracted conflict situation in Canada, and 4) it extends Lederach's conflict transformation framework (2003) into the Canadian Aboriginal education context.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited in several important ways. The principle areas of limitation were the location of the study, the size and selection of the participant group, the general awareness of the participant group, the researcher, and in some ways, the methodology and the selection of the conceptual model after the data were collected.

The study is limited by the location in an Aboriginal adult learning center in Winnipeg, Canada. Among the national population of 34 million people, Canada has an identified Aboriginal community of nearly 1.1 million people (Statistics Canada, 2013). The general population for the study was limited to those who returned to high school, and there are no national or publicly available statistics that track how many Aboriginal drop outs return to school. It is likely from graduation rates that the number is extremely low (Statistics Canada, 2012). Winnipeg is home to almost 70,000 Aboriginal people, who are primarily from just three Aboriginal communities: Cree (Nihiyaw), Ojibwe (Anishinaabe), and Métis (Statistics Canada, 2012). This cautiously limits the generalizability of the study, although Winnipeg is home to the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The school that the participants attended is designed specifically for Aboriginal adults living in Winnipeg who wished to earn high school diplomas, and so the structure and location of the school may have shaped the findings. The study is further limited because the students from the school, called Maskotew Kiskin (a pseudonym meaning Prairie School in Plains Cree) in this study, may represent other characteristics that were not controlled for and that influenced their return to school (such as financial incentives, for example). Regardless, the focus of the study remains an exploration of perceptions and experiences in education and joins other ethnographic studies that explore the perceptions and experiences of relatively small groups (See, for example, Liebow, 1967; Silver, 2006; Silver & Mallett, 2002).

Related to potential limitations regarding Maskotew Kiskin was the general awareness of the participants about the structural and cultural factors that likely affected their educational stories. The findings will show that they overall they did not consciously associate structural or cultural factors with their reasons for dropping out of school, and when they did so, they projected those reasons on to others but did not attribute the reasons to their own decisions. In this way, the general awareness of the participants about such matters must be included as a limitation of the study. It is also possible that the nature of the methodology, which invited people to share their personal stories, may have limited information about historical, structural, or cultural factors. Finally, there may be potential limitation in the narrative methodology of the study, which may have pre-ordained the findings to emphasize personal and relational factors.

The study was also limited by the people who were willing and able to leave their classes and their other responsibilities to spend about two hours with the researcher for

interviews. The study sample was not random, and it was somewhat self-selecting. The teachers assisted in the selection of the participants according to criteria established by the researcher in order to obtain variation by gender, age, Aboriginal identity, and attendance at both public and First Nations schools. A second data collection method took place but it was limited to those potential participants who were available at 1pm on one Friday afternoon. The date and times were chosen by the teachers in the school, not by the researcher. The participation was possibly reduced by a surprise decision by one of the teachers to turn the workshop into an assignment, which she announced to the students during the morning classes on the same day. She offered that the participants could write their stories and their perceptions of the study for grading, which had not been anticipated by the researcher. This may have limited the number of participants who were then willing to tell the story of their beads to the researcher, since they could instead write for the teacher. Those stories submitted to the teacher were not included in the study findings due to their exclusion from the research ethics permissions.

The study was intended to include a larger population but for reasons outlined later in the dissertation, the study is ultimately a sample of 22 individuals in an urban adult learning centre in Winnipeg. Although the principles of conflict transformation and the method of the study may be applicable to Aboriginal people in other cities, further research will be required to improve the reliability and the generalizability of the findings. Potential future research is discussed in Chapter 5. The people who participated in this study are unique, and it is critical to recognize that Aboriginal people are not one people group or one language group or culture, even though considerable research and legislation

has historically assumed homogeneity⁴. Despite the collective reference to Aboriginal peoples, each group has respective value systems, histories, traditions, languages, cultures, geographies, and Indigenous knowledge, and these may have affected the perceptions and even the telling of the stories.

Finally, the intentionally broad and general design of the Lederach model was, in some ways, a limitation for the study. The model was chosen after the data were collected because it most aligned with the findings and allowed for the inclusion of historical, cultural, and structural information, along with the narrative data. Since Lederach approaches conflict “from the standpoint of a practitioner rather than a theorist” with peacebuilding experiences “across five continents” (Lederach 1997, p. xvi), he uses terminology that has multiple interpretations. As a result, the application of the data to the numerous systems and dimensions within the model presented some challenges. For example, the findings addressed primarily the personal and relational subcomponents of Lederach’s conflict transformation, (though not exclusively these two), and emphasized them much more than the model does. Although this may be considered a limitation, it also suggests that the findings of the study might sharpen our understandings of conflict and conflict transformation, and provide a platform for a complementary theoretical framework to build upon Lederach’s work in the “search for greater understanding in human relationships” (Lederach, 2003, p. 6).

⁴ For a more extensive discussion of Canada’s distinct Aboriginal people, cultures and traditions, see *Aboriginal Peoples and Communities* at the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website, <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013785/1304467449155>

As with all qualitative research, the researcher has particular biases that limit the study. Interviews and the bead workshop were conducted in English, which may be a limitation. In addition, during her high school experience, the researcher dropped out of school and then returned a year later to complete high school. So, her personal experiences in leaving and returning to school are noted. The researcher also had experience with the neighbourhood where these people lived, called Bison Park in the study. She had been a tutor at Bison Park for two of five years prior to the study. Although she was acquainted with only one of the participants, her reputation as a tutor and as a member of the university research community was known to a number of people in the Maskotew Kiskin community. The researcher's genealogy predates European contact in Canada on both sides of her family, but also includes British, French, and Irish heritage. As a result, the researcher considers herself a Canadian, a hybrid of these ancestries which include Cree, Métis, and likely Mohawk relatives. She is interested and proud of this heritage. The researcher bias also includes a tender heart and compassion, and so the researcher's tears and heartfelt empathetic response to some of the stories may have in some ways influenced the narratives of the participants. Regardless of the biases the researcher may have brought to the study, the conduct of inquiry means "having an open mind, not an empty one" (Kaplan, 1963, p. 375), and so the design of the study was part of a deliberate effort to minimize bias.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation and are defined here for reference:

*Aboriginal*⁵. Section 35(2) of Canada's *Constitution Act 1982* says Aboriginal peoples of Canada includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. Together there are 1,172,785 people who identify as Aboriginal in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2012). In 2012, the Government of Canada renamed the *Department of Indian and Northern Affairs* (INAC) as *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada* (AANDC). Generally, Canadian Aboriginal people prefer to be identified by the name of their own tribe or nation such as Cree, Ojibwe, Anishnawbe, or Rotinonshonni (Ledoux, 2006, p. 265).

Aboriginal identity. This term refers to those persons who identify with at least one Aboriginal ancestry.

First Nations. First Nations is a contemporary term to refer to Canada's Indigenous people and to what the law has identified as Indian Bands or groups of people. According to legislation, First Nations are people defined and registered as 'Indians' who usually reside on territories of land called Reserves, which are lands held in trust by the federal government. Although there is no legal definition for the term, it came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the term "Indian," which had become offensive to many people. According to the 2006 Census, the First Nations population in Canada numbered 698,025, but 57% live in urban areas, off their

⁵ For additional definitions and legal terminology regarding Aboriginal people in Canada not used in this dissertation, see also *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Terminology*, available at <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/>

Reserves (Milke, 2013, p. 18). First Nations are often identified as “North American Indian” in non-legislative Canadian government documents, including Statistics Canada.

Indian. This is a legal term in use in the Canadian *Indian Act* but replaced with Aboriginal in recent federal and provincial documents. “Indian” is any person of Indian ancestry reputed to belong to a particular band, and any child of such a person. The legal definition of the term “Indian” has brought with it certain “status” or benefits and eligibility for federal and provincial programs.

Indian Act. The *Constitution Act, 1867* (formerly called the *British North America Act*) identified Indigenous people as Indians. The legislation defined and continues to define the individual and collective relationship with the Canadian state. Under the authority of the *Constitution*, the Canadian Parliament consolidated existing colonial/provincial and British legislation into the *Indian Act* of 1876. The Act establishes federal government jurisdiction over Indians and lands reserved for the Indians, including in matters of education.

Indigenous⁶ people. This is a global term referring to the original inhabitants of the land prior to contact with inhabitants of other continents. There is a common myth that Columbus believed he was in India when he reached North America and so called the Indigenous people he encountered ‘Indians,’ although at the time India was called ‘Hindustan,’ not ‘India,’ as is commonly understood (Alfred, 1999, p. xxvi).

⁶ Smith (1999) cautions that “the term ‘Indigenous’ is problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different” (p. 6).

'Indigenous peoples' is a relatively recent term which emerged out of the rights-based struggles of 1970s among the American Indian Movement in the United States, and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood (Smith, 1999, p. 7). In Canada, Indigenous people are legally identified as 'Indian' if they are members of the First Nations community, but are recognized in the larger population as 'Aboriginal.'

Métis. The Métis are people who trace their heritage to 17th century unions between First Nations people and people of European descent, most commonly French. The 2006 Census identified 404,000 members of the Métis nation (Statistics Canada, 2013). Most Métis people live in urban areas and formally identify as Métis rather than Aboriginal on official documents like the Canadian Census. The Métis are one of three Aboriginal groups recognized in the Canadian Constitution. Métis people do not live on Reserves and are educated under the provisions for public education of the Canadian provinces and territories⁷.

Native. This broad term means North American Indigenous people, usually those living in the United States, and is sometimes used in reference to Indigenous cultural matters.

Reserve. A Reserve is specified by the Canadian *Indian Act* as a "tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band." There are over 3,000 parcels of land called Reserves (Canada, 2012).

⁷ In early 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Métis are legally Indians according to the *Constitution Act*. See *Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2013 SCC 14.

Status Indian. Status Indian refers to persons who are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada. They are persons who belong to First Nations or Indian bands. Status or Treaty Indians are also called 'Registered Indians.' According to the 2006 Canadian census, there were 785,000 registered Indians in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Treaty. The Government of Canada and the courts recognize treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations, and benefits for both parties. Treaties were signed to define the respective rights of Aboriginal people and the various governments in Canada to use lands that Aboriginal people traditionally occupied. Pre-Confederation Treaties are binding on today's governments and First Nations (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012).

Urban Aboriginal. This is an emerging, unofficial descriptor of both a people group and a community (Silver, 2006, p. 13). Urban Aboriginal people may identify with any of the above groups but their primary place of residence is in a city.

Approximately 75% of Canada's status Indians live in urban centers (Gibson, 2008).

The research questions explored in this study were presented to people identified in Canada as Aboriginal, but may be recognized in literature and in legislation as Indigenous, Indian, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, North American Indian, and urban Aboriginal people.

Education and Aboriginal People in Canada

This section presents a brief history of education and Aboriginal people in Canada, then introduces the current structure and statistical outcomes of education for Aboriginal people, and concludes with the major themes in the literature about why Aboriginal people

drop out of school early, in order to establish the historical and contemporary context for the study.

The educational history of Aboriginal people in Canada is much older than the country itself. The goal of education in Canadian society might be summarized as the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and values required for moral self-governance toward the ultimate betterment of society as defined by those who lead society (Miller, 1996, p. 15; Reimer, 2008, p. 7). In this way, education socializes people so that they share the knowledge and values of the community, provide for its needs, and defend its existence.

In the early years, missionaries and fur traders had direct contact with Aboriginal people, who practiced a traditional and self-sufficient way of life. Elders and parents educated the children with land-based learning to reflect local context and generational memory. As Rice (2005) explains, “Aboriginal peoples have unique perspectives on their lives and their place in the cosmos” and have “unique patterns of thinking and identifying Aboriginal worldviews” (p.1). Learning this belief system about “relationships, and all the things in their existence in ways that are unique to their own cultural understandings” formed the basis of all teaching (Rice, 2005, p. 1). Social structures, including education, regulated the societies, and provided the educational paradigm of Aboriginal communities across the continent (Barnhardt, 2010; Helin, 2006; Miller, 2009).

In New France (now Quebec) in the early 1700s, schools for settler children and for Aboriginal children were provided by the Catholic Church (Frideres, 1988, p. 30). The British *Royal Proclamation of 1763* established the legal foundation for the administration of all programs relating to Aboriginal people as recognized in the common law traditions of England. The military, acting for the British Crown, controlled the education of

Aboriginal people (Frideres, 1988, p. 172). By 1840 there were 1.6 million immigrants just from the British Isles in British North America, meaning that there were at least ten non-Natives for each Aboriginal person (Axelrod, 1997, p. 6-8). After Canadian Confederation in 1867, the responsibility for non-Aboriginal education stayed with the provinces and territories and not Canada's central government (Frideres, 1988, p. 172).

Also important to the story of education and Aboriginal people is the educational history of the Métis, which began during the fur-trading era in Western Canada. Prior to 1800 the Hudson's Bay Company provided "a European type of education for people of native ancestry...to meet the needs of the children of employees of the Hudson's Bay Company" (Chartrand, Logan & Daniels, 2006, p. 113). The company provided the children at its posts with education in French or English rather than in their own language, and reading, writing, arithmetic and religious (usually Catholic) instruction (Chartrand et al, 2006, p. 113-114). There was also a trend to send Métis sons to school in Upper and Lower Canada or to Britain (p. 113). However, by the late 1800s, "the Métis generally fell outside any plans or provisions made by the federal government for either the new settlers or the First Nations" (Chartrand et al, 2006, p. 114).

By the time of Canadian Confederation (1867), schools had been established in Quebec and the British colonies for more than a century and the cultural diversity of Canada was extensive. With the many cultural traditions that arrived with the European immigrants, schooling continued to be regarded an important instrument of education and acculturation, important to the training of youth to prosper in the rapidly growing settler society (Axelrod, 1997, p. 25; Frideres, 1988, p. 173; Gibson, 2009, p. 81). Historical literature indicates that during this time a number of Aboriginal Chiefs recognized that

their traditional world would be replaced by an agricultural economy and looked to formal education as an assurance of prosperity for their nations into the future (Carr-Stewart, 2001; Gibson, 2009; Helin, 2006; Jenish, 1999; Miller, 1996).

Some of the Chiefs supported the policy choices of the Canadian government to educate children in Residential Schools, which had originally been established in New France, believing that in this way, future generations would be well prepared to live and prosper together in the new society (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 126; Miller, 1996, p. 81). Historian J. Miller (1996) writes that within ten years of the ascension of Queen Victoria to the British throne, the “Indian education policy enjoyed the support of all the principal actors. [Aboriginal leaders] acquiesced in the schooling of their young as the way to acquire the skills needed to deal with the invading society and to survive economically alongside it” (p. 84).

As Canada developed, First Nations educational practices were replaced by western educational beliefs (Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 7). Schools and hostels for Indian children were established by religious orders (Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 7). This policy also applied to the Métis children (Chartrand et al, 2006, p. 114). During this era, Residential Schools were built for Aboriginal students in which one author claims that “contact between Native children and their parents was minimized. The schools were highly regimented and insisted on strict conformity,” as was the nature of European Residential Schools (Frideres, 1988, p. 174). Because the Métis children were not the responsibility of the federal government at the time, there were many fewer Métis children involved in the Residential Schools project (Chartrand et al, 2006, p. 114). However, in small communities in the north, all children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, went to Residential Schools.

The traditional Aboriginal worldview was quite different from that developing in Canada as settlers arrived and the country expanded geographically. The conflict between the two became apparent in education. The Aboriginal worldview emerges from a sense of identity in which elements are intimately related, and spirituality is entwined relationally with other elements of life like land, family, education, and health (Rice, 2005; Wilson, 2008). The bureaucracy that shaped and governed Canada lacked a similar spiritual emphasis, and imposed structure, hierarchy, economic need and military power on the developing country. Also at this time, the Darwinian theory of evolution influenced British colonial practices, and as part of evolutionary theory, “it became a very powerful belief that indigenous people were inherently weak and therefore, at some point, would die out” (Smith, 1999, p. 62). As agents of social change, schools were implicit in perpetuating these, and other, colonization practices (Battiste, 2002, p. 4; Smith, 1999, p. 33).

Critical to the complexities of education and Aboriginal people in Canada are the Treaties in western Canada, the *Indian Act* and Canada’s federal political system, in which there are two Constitutionally recognized levels of government. Carr-Stewart (2001) identifies one of the early conflicts in this way: “two distinct societies, each with its own language and culture, met and negotiated treaties, each believing that the other had fully understood the intent and purpose of the negotiations. The treaties would, however, be as much a symbol of misunderstanding as of mutual agreement” (p. 127). This is particularly acute in education, and there is no evidence that the signatories believed they were surrendering education entirely to the Canadian government (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 126). The federal *Indian Act*, and the educational provisions within it, only applies to First Nations people registered with the Canadian government, and not to all Aboriginal groups

(Justice Canada, 2012b). The central and provincial governments have different jurisdictional responsibilities, and according to the Canadian *Constitution*, important social issues, including education, fall within the jurisdiction of the provincial governments, while all issues pertaining to Status Indians, including social services remain federal responsibilities⁸ (Inwood, 2006, p. 103; Justice Canada, 2012a, Sec. 91, 92).

The long-term purposes and the benefits of western education were acknowledged and embraced by the Chiefs during the Treaty formations in western Canada, and as a result, Canadian legislation guarantees the provision of education for descendants of the Treaty signatories (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 125; Justice Canada, 2012a; Miller, 1996, p. 79). Research indicates that the First Nation representatives who negotiated the Treaties understood formal education and intended that their members, and future generations, would supplement traditional educational practices in their communities and share in the prosperity emerging in the new economy (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 127; Miller, 1996, p. 86).

Also important to detecting the gradual development of identity crisis and in the story of Aboriginal education was the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857).⁹ As the 1800s drew

⁸ Sections 91 and 92 of Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982* divide jurisdictional power in Canada between the central government and the provincial/territorial governments. In short, the federal (central) government retains the power to construct and maintain the national economy according to Section 91. In Section 92, provinces are given power and authority to safeguard social and cultural issues. (Section 95 designates agriculture and immigration as shared powers, but in the circumstance of a dispute, federal law prevails). Conflict between the two levels of government is "endemic" in Canadian federalism (Inwood, 2006, p. 104) and often an issue for Aboriginal people requiring services from the government. Section 93 assigns the responsibility for making laws pertaining to education to the provinces, but it was not unlimited responsibility. The two important exceptions are the education of Indians and the protection of certain denominational rights.

⁹ The *Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to Amend the Laws Relating to Indians* (commonly known as the *Gradual Civilization Act*)

to a close, colonization was popular among world powers and Canada established the *Indian Act* (1876), which controlled all aspects of Aboriginal life, including education. In contradiction to the Treaties, the original and official purpose of government-controlled education for Aboriginal people was assimilation, which sits at the core of modern discourse about education for Aboriginal people, and may be acknowledged as the first evidence of an emerging identity conflict in Canada (Taras & Ganguly, 2010; Wolff, 2006). The *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*, 1876, states:

Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the state...It is clearly our wisdom and/or duty, through education and other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2004, n.p.).

Despite several Canadian Royal Commissions and thousands of articles, books, and formal reports since the formation of the country, satisfactory resolution of the conflicts initiated by the *Indian Act*, including education matters, remain animated, controversial, and elusive.

Later, the *Indian Act*, established structures to remove traditional education and ceremonial practices from Aboriginal communities and mandated the Chief and Band Council system. Other coincidental legislative decisions also shaped the education of Aboriginal people and contributed to the development of the identity conflict: the banning of traditional ceremonies, and the socialization of Aboriginal people into European-style

was passed by the 5th Parliament of the Province of Canada, consisting of Canada East and Canada West in 1857.

society through education. For Aboriginal individuals, traditional life changed as a result of the official changes to Aboriginal society¹⁰.

The history of Aboriginal education in Canada and of the conflicts that developed with it includes the governments of the provinces. The provinces began to regulate school models for settler children that had originally been provided by various churches (Axelrod, 1997, p. 25; Reimer, 2008, p. 35). The role of schools was recognized as critical to the establishment of an educated citizenship and to strengthen democracy (Axelrod, 1997, p. 25; Gibson, 2009, p. 81). As a result, in 1945 Canada entered the “open door policy” toward education for Aboriginal people, so that settler children and Aboriginal children were educated together in schools. During this era, education policy encouraged “integrated education in the full realization of the benefits that the Indian child gains by close association at an impressionable age with non-Indian children” (McCaskill, 1987, p. 153). The integrated schools were and continue to be perceived by some as a threat to Aboriginal identity (Battiste, 2002).

¹⁰ *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) claims that the purpose of the residential school policy was to extinguish the language and culture of Canada’s Aboriginal population, as was the practice across the British Commonwealth during that era. This policy direction was halted entirely in the 1980s. However, it was not until June, 2008, that the Canadian government responded with remorse and reconciliation for the undoubted severity and cruelty that characterized most of the Residential Schools, and for the specious education policy in general. In 2008 Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper rose in the House of Commons (the Canadian seat of government) and issued an official statement recognizing that the long-standing “policy of assimilation was wrong” and asking forgiveness from the residential school survivors and all Aboriginal people in Canada. Seated before the Prime Minister were leaders of Canada’s Aboriginal groups in full ceremonial dress, who accepted the Apology on behalf of their peoples.

In 1972, First Nations people submitted the Indian Brotherhood document entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education*¹¹ to Canada's federal government in order to take back their control of education (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 127). In response, the federal government made modest changes to the legislation and it became possible for education to be devolved from the federal government to the Bands so that schools could be governed by an education authority similar to a school board, elected or appointed by the Reserve residents. In an important distinction in education, prior to the Band system, Aboriginal leadership was traditionally accountable to the community for results and their track record was readily visible for judgment (Allard, 2002; Boldt, 1980; Helin, 2006; Jenish, 1999). Education, however, was personal and relational (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 130). Education and leadership were entwined and assured that the values, stories, and traditions of the people were preserved. Today, however, Aboriginal students are eligible to attend provincial schools and often do. More than 70% of the First Nations students are enrolled in provincial schools outside their home communities (Gibson, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2012). Completion rates are relatively low (Gibson, 2009; Standing Senate Committee, 2011; White & Beavon, 2009; White, Peters & Beavon, 2009), and drop out rates are high (Senate Standing Committee, 2011, p. 1).

Although much of the research and government activity over the past 25 years has focused on the First Nations, education achievement gaps are evident across all Aboriginal groups (Standing Senate Committee, 2011, p. 16; Richards, 2008, p. 7). Statistical

¹¹ This document was reaffirmed by Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Shaun Atleo in Winnipeg in 2011 and may be read as a full document as one chapter of *First Nations Control of First Nations Education, 2010*, accessible at http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/3._2010_july_afn_first_nations_control_of_first_nations_education_final_eng.pdf

evidence demonstrates that drop-out rates continue to be almost three times higher than they are for non-Aboriginal people (Composite Learning Index, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2007). There is, in fact, a 30% -50% difference between the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who do not complete high school (Standing Senate Committee, 2011, p. 16).

Despite discouraging statistics, the Canadian government has stated that it is committed to a new and positive era for First Nations and Aboriginal students. According to the federal government website:

In *Economic Action Plan 2012*, the Government committed to work with willing partners to introduce a *First Nation Education Act* that will establish the structures and standards to support strong and accountable education systems on reserve.

Budget 2012 invested \$100 million over three years to help ensure readiness for the new First Nations education system to be outlined in legislation by September 2014. The budget also committed \$175 million to new school projects. Following the Crown-First Nations Gathering, and as part of Economic Action Plan 2012, the Government committed to develop new legislation for First Nation elementary and secondary education on reserve (AANDC, 2012).

In short, Canadian governments are now officially committed to improving educational provisions for Aboriginal students (AANDC, 2012; Assembly of First Nations, 2011; Canada, 2012; First Nations Schools Association, 2010; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011).

The literature provides many likely explanations for the low academic achievement of Aboriginal people in the provincial/First Nations federal school systems, and each of

these themes represent primarily structural or cultural responses to the evidence of educational crisis among Aboriginal people. One explanation is that much of the literature on education for Aboriginal people in Canada uses the critical, analytical research paradigm, which some Indigenous scholars explain is foreign to understanding Indigenous people (Absolon, 2011; Denis, 1997; Smith, 1999). Wilson (2008) explains the difficulty of inappropriate research methods this way: “an analysis from a western perspective breaks everything down to look at it...and then look[s] at those small pieces...an Indigenous style of analysis has to look at all those relations as a whole instead of breaking it down, ‘cause it just won’t work” or “make any sense” if findings are taken out of context or without consideration of other relationships (p. 119).

Explanations about how Aboriginal people experience school and ultimately, why the response to those circumstances is to drop out, fall into several themes in the literature. These are presented here because they provide a foundation for comparing the study’s findings with the reasons provided in the literature for why Aboriginal people have not fared well in Canadian educational institutions. Although these themes were not addressed by the study participants, it does not mean that they are not factors, and are presented as part of the context in which we understand why Aboriginal education has not been effective.

The first theme is that education in Canadian schools is considered to be primarily Eurocentric in orientation, and therefore Aboriginal student successes would be more assured through First Nations control of educational administration and delivery for First Nations students (Alfred, 1999, 2009; Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Battiste, 2002; Flanagan, 2000; Paquette, Fallon, & Mangan, 2009; Stonechild, 2006; Turner, 2008). The

second theme argues that the remnants of colonialism and the intergenerational effects of the Residential Schools policy have combined and taken away Aboriginal people's identity. According to this literature, it is this intergenerational pain and trauma that has directly produced low achievement (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009; Alfred, 2002; Deer, 2008; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Standing Senate Committee, 2011). The third theme contends that schools are not properly designed to respect Aboriginal culture, which has a negative effect on Aboriginal student learning. According to this literature, schools represent the culmination of inappropriate curriculum, hierarchical structure, inappropriate funding, and education practices that do not recognize Indigenous knowledges (Alfred, 1999, 2009; Battiste, 2002; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Deer, 2008; Denis, 2007; Kirkness, 1999; Ledoux, 2006; Miller, 1996; Nelson, 2008; Smith, 1999; Turner, 2008). Finally, poor performance is perceived in some of the literature to be the result of lowered standards and expectations for Aboriginal students. According to this literature, when Aboriginal students are held to standard of academics through nurturing teaching and professional differentiated learning, there is evidence that they perform as well as non-Aboriginal students in Canadian schools (Clifton, 2009; First Nations School Association, 2010; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Gibson, 2009; Helin, 2006; Paquette, Fallon, & Mangan, 2009; Richards, 2011). This is a growing literature but many of the assertions are not based on empirical research.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 is the Introduction and outlines the purpose and nature of the study. The significance and limitations of the study are presented and a definition of terms relevant to the study of Aboriginal people in Canada is

Processes is Lederach's title for Inquiry 3, and these findings are presented in sections according to the themes of Courage, Hope and Love.

Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the research model in analyzing the findings. The chapter discusses implications and recommendations of the study for theory, research, and practice and includes the presentation of a complementary theoretical model that emerged from the study findings. At the end of the dissertation the last part of Shyanne's story, which was introduced in the Prologue, is presented as the Postscript.

Chapter 2

Conceptualization of the Problem

Conflict transformation lenses suggest we look...to see the context of the relationship that is involved...Not satisfied with a quick solution that may seem to solve the immediate problem, transformation seeks to create a framework to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship....Those processes provide opportunity to learn about patterns and to address relationship structures (Lederach, 2003, p. 12).

Conflict transformation provides the conceptual framework for this study. In this study, the conflict appears to be between the Aboriginal people who have dropped out of school, and the collective experiences and structures we recognize as education. The conflict, and the transformation, or changing nature of the conflict, may be understood through the exploration of the relationships between the two. As stated in the quotation above, conflict transformation refers to the patterns, relationships, historical context, and immediate situations that shape the way people respond to the many types of conflict that affect their lives, including, in the context of this study, those conflicts that resulted in the overt response of dropping out of the school system. However, conflict transformation is dynamic and not just one response to one conflict, and so pinpointing a precise transformation is difficult. Rather, conflict transformation, according to Lederach, is an examination of the ongoing changes, in context, that illuminate the causes of conflict, the responses to conflict, and how these, considered in relationship to each other, might contain elements required for peace. In order to reinforce that conflict transformation does

not identify one specific point in time, Lederach refers to conflict transformation as principles (Lederach, 2003, p. 12). This study explores the ongoing changes and conflicts that ultimately led to the participants dropping out of school.

This chapter presents the concepts of conflict and conflict transformation. It begins with identity conflict in order to provide some of the relational context referenced in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter. Then, John Paul Lederach's Model of Conflict Transformation (2003) is presented. Lederach has three main components to the model, which he calls Inquiries, and the conceptual definitions of the Inquiries are explained in the chapter. For reference, Inquiry 1 is called The Presenting Situation and contains three subcomponents, called Issues, Patterns, and History. Inquiry 2 is called The Horizon of the Future and contains three subcomponents called Solutions, Relationships, and Systems. Inquiry 3 is called The Development of Change Processes and contains six subcomponents, Structural, Cultural, Relational, Personal, Episode, and Epicenter. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of how Lederach's model allows for the contextual consideration of relationship patterns at all levels of conflict, and why this is important for this study, which asks "What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future, and what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?"

Conflict and Conflict Transformation

Although there are many interpretations of the term conflict, at its simplest, a conflict is a disagreement through which one or more parties involved in a specified situation perceive threats to their needs, interests, or concerns (Schellenberg, 1996; Taras & Ganguly, 2010). However, "neither conflicts nor their effects can be measured

uniformly...using the same indicators or metrics. In fact, it is not always clear how one operationalizes or measures these concepts at any level” (Pearson & Olson Lounsbery, 2009, p. 71). Each conflict encountered by an individual or by a group results in a choice or response that results in positive or negative change. This is recognized in the field as conflict transformation (Lederach, 1995, 2003; Ryan, 2009). Conflict, then, according to Lederach, is “a normal and continuous dynamic in human relationships” that “brings with it the potential for constructive change,” and it is in this context that conflict is referenced throughout this thesis (Lederach, 2003, p. 15). Many conflicts can be transformed peacefully, and understanding conflict, especially as it is understood in relation to the principles of conflict transformation, can explain and guide transformations toward more sustainable and peaceful relationships (Diamond, 1994; Kriesberg, Northrup & Thorson, 1989; Lederach, 1995, 2003; 2005; Miall, 2004; Ryan, 2009).

Identity Conflict

The larger contextual conflict for this study is an identity conflict. In this study, Terrell Northrup’s (1989) definition of identity is used in the context of explaining identity conflict:

Identity is defined as an abiding sense of the self and of the relationship of the self to the world. It is a system of beliefs or a way of construing the world that makes life predictable rather than random. In order to function, human beings must have a reasonable level of ability to predict how their behavior will affect what happens to them...defined this way, [identity] is extended to encompass a sense of self-in-relation-to-the-world (p. 55).

Relating identity to understanding conflict and conflict analysis, Lederach (2003) says “at the deepest level, identity is lodged in the narratives of how people see themselves, who they are, where they have come from, and what they fear they will become or lose. Thus, identity is deeply rooted in a person’s or a group’s sense of how that person or group is in relationship with others” (p. 55). Identity refers to the “set of meanings that individuals impute to their membership in a community, including those attributes that bind them to that collectivity and that distinguish it from others” (Taras & Ganguly, 2010, p. 3). Sennehi et al (2009) state that “identities encompass many ideas, values, styles, and perceptions that shape the way we interact with others and intervene in conflicts” (p. 95). According to Cook-Huffman (2009), “research suggests the interaction between identity and conflict is multifaceted and multilayered. Conflicts are triggered and inflamed by identity concerns and identities are created and transformed in the waging of conflicts. In conflict, identity matters” (p. 25). Identity is fundamental to how individuals, and in this study, Aboriginal individuals, see themselves and perceive and respond to conflict (Cook-Huffman, 2009, p. 101). Lederach (2003) states “identity is also best understood as relational” (p. 55), and it is in the context of many relationships that identity conflict can best be understood.

Identity conflicts typically take place between groups. Identity conflict is an “increasingly important and identifiable class of conflict, with patterns and characteristics that run within and among all levels of social organization.... These conflicts are often destructive” (Rothman, 1997, p. 7). Identity conflicts are difficult to understand and to mitigate in part because they are long, complex and multi-causal (Black, 2003; Cook-Huffman, 2008; Rothman, 1997; Taras & Ganguly, 2010; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007; Wolff,

2006), and “rest on underlying needs that cannot be compromised” (Korostelina, 2009, p. 101). Rothman (1997) says “identity-driven conflicts are rooted in the articulation of, and the threats or frustrations to, people’s collective need for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose and efficacy” (p. 7). When the goals of at least one party are defined in identity terms, history plays a much larger role in the conflict than it may in other types of conflict (Wolff, 2006, p. 64). At the collective level, minority and majority groups often struggle over land, resources and power (Black, 2003, p. 119; Carter, Irani & Volkan, 2009, p. 1; Wolff, 2006, p. 2). Referring to Azar (1990), Korostelina (2009) says that within the struggle, identity conflict is not based on the competition around economics and power issues, but, instead, ‘revolves around questions of communal identity’” (p. 100). In this way, the symbols of identity contribute to the intractability of the conflict, as some parties insist that their identities are primordial, or biological, and so must not be ignored or altered (Black, 2003, p. 125; Taras & Ganguly, 2010, p. 4; Smith, 1986, p. 52). Intractability means that “some conflicts seem never to get resolved. They just go on and on and on” (Schellenberg, 1996, p. 76).

Identity conflicts are often based on the fear of extinction, grounded in history (Korostelina, 2009, p. 100; Wolff, 2006, p. 26). Threats to culture, beliefs and values are an integral part of identity conflict because they are core elements of identity (Azar, 1990; Carter, Irani & Volkan, 2009, p. 1; Cook-Huffman, 2009). There was, in fact, an acknowledged Darwinian assumption prior to the Cold War (1947-1990) that minority groups would assimilate, creating a common identity and thereby eliminate sources of conflict through changes and impositions to the social structures of the minority groups (Taras & Ganguly, 2010, p. 25). In this way, the Aboriginal perspective within identity

conflict is readily recognized. Intractable identity conflicts extend beyond the individual. Kriesberg (1989, p. 211; 2003a, 2003b) acknowledges the importance of collective histories to intractable conflicts.

One of the contributions of conflict analysis is the determination of how identity conflicts are interlocked with other conflicts (Kriesberg, 1980, 1982; Sandole, 1998). “Context, relationships, and memories are all part of the tissue connecting the contradictions, attitudes and behaviours in the conflict formations, within the wider background in space and time” (Miall, 2004, p. 8). Large-group identities are based on an historical continuity, geographical reality, a myth explaining the common beginning of the group, and other shared events that combine to describe identity, making resolution very difficult (Northrup, 1989, p. 55; Volkan, 1997, p. 19).

An identity conflict exists between Aboriginal people and Canada. For Aboriginal people, the identity conflict may best be recognized in the struggle for self-determination, whether at the individual or at the collective level (Black, 2003, p. 119; Wolff, 2006, p. 64; Boulding, 1989, p. X). Conflicts tied to identity usually have a long history and include education, and this has been true in Aboriginal Canada (Senehi, 2000, p. 98; Taras & Ganguly, 2010, p. 19). Although identity conflict has a growing literature, there is little exploring how these conflicts are borne by individuals. Where other studies have focused on power, politics, economics and/or historical record, this study adds to the identity conflict literature specifically about Aboriginal people in Canada, and about how identity conflict has shaped the educational experiences of those individuals.

As with most sites of identity conflict, the identity conflict in Canada has been primarily hidden or undetected by the larger population. The 1996 *Report of the Royal*

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples acknowledged that the story has simply not been a part of common Canadian history and most Canadians are unaware of how the relationship developed or its current status (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). How the origins of identity conflict are perceived or acknowledged greatly influences how conflict is responded to, especially in the policy arena (Cook-Huffman, 2008, p. 17; Hauss, 2002, p. 21). Unfortunately, identity conflict can be ignored by those who are not living it, and the consequences of the conflict flourish when mainstream society keeps “themselves uninformed” (Opatow, 2003, p. 523). In matters of Aboriginal education, there is a connection between identity conflict and schools. According to Smith (1999), “[t]he fact that indigenous societies had their own systems of order was dismissed” in the establishment of schools, and for the most part continues to be dismissed in the education literature (p. 28). This is a characteristic of colonization (Memmi, 1965) that some scholars say must be acknowledged by western paradigms before it can be addressed or dismantled (Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2008; Fanon, 1963; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Upon elements hidden to the general population such as these, identity conflict emerges and flourishes.

In summary, identity conflict threatens culture, beliefs, and values, and it affects people’s dignity, safety, and purpose. Many of the multiple relationships between the governments of Canada and Aboriginal people demonstrate the traits of identity conflicts. Identity conflicts are protracted and difficult to mitigate because there are many causes, and the role of history, especially in struggles over land and resources and history that is painful to one of the parties, plays a much larger and important role than it does in other forms of conflict. This has been true of the Canadian relationship. There is a long-standing assumption in historical public policy that identity can be reshaped and fundamentally

altered through social structures. In this way, schools have played a part in Canada's identity conflict.

Despite the difficult and complicated character of protracted identity conflict, the situation in Canada can be understood and changed constructively, in part through the narratives of the people who have experienced identity conflict. "Where there are significant past relationships and history, [and] where there are likely to be significant future relationships...the potential for change can be raised" through the processes of positive conflict transformation (Lederach, 2003, p. 69). Rothman (1997) says that "with the right analysis and approach, [identity conflicts] may become enormously creative and transformative" (p. 7).

This section briefly introduced identity conflict and its relationship with conflict transformation. The following section outlines conflict transformation, and then Lederach's model is explained.

Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation offers hope that constructive change can result from conflict, including seemingly intractable ones (Lederach, 2003, p. 15). Dr. John Paul Lederach is recognized as one of the major contributors to the establishment and development of conflict transformation as a core concept in peace and conflict studies (Galtung, 2000, p. 5; Kriesberg, 1989, p.119; Ryan, 2009, p. 304). Dr. Lederach has been working for several decades as both a practitioner and an academic researcher. He has authored or edited more than 16 books and manuals in peace and conflict studies (see for example, Lederach, 1997; Lederach, 1995; Lederach, 1999; Lederach, 2003; Lederach, 2005). He is the co-founder of the Center for Justice & Peacebuilding at Eastern

Mennonite University in the United States, and is currently the Professor of International Peacebuilding at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, as well as a Distinguished Scholar at Eastern Mennonite University (Lederach, 2012a). Professor Lederach's experiences include practical peace work designing and conducting training programs in more than 25 countries around the world (Lederach, 2012b). Out of this vast experience as an academic and as a peace practitioner Lederach developed his definitions of conflict and his principles of conflict transformation.

According to Lederach (2003), it is through conflict that response, innovation, and change take place (p. 18). While conflict is a normal part of life and can "increase understanding of ourselves, of others, and of our social structures" (Lederach, 2003, p. 18), it is relationally based. According to Lederach (1997), conflict is "expressive, dynamic, and dialectical in nature....born in the world of human meaning and perception" (p. 63). Conflict transformation, then, is about relationships. He says, "At the hub of the transformational approach is a convergence of the relational context, a view of conflict-as-opportunity, and the encouragement of creative change processes" (Lederach, 2003, p. 19). The recognition of the many relationships inherent in conflict is the core of conflict transformation principles and allows the examination of complex situations, like identity conflict, to be explored in the context of wider relationships. In this way, conflict is viewed within the "flow and web" of relationships (Lederach, 2003, p. 19). Lederach (1995) says "relationships are at the heart of transformation" (p. 64).

Conflict transformation also recognizes that conflict affects change at structural, cultural, personal and relational levels. The relationship between and among these levels is critical to building understanding how conflict grows, how people respond to it, and how

positive or negative responses to conflict are developed (Lederach, 1997, p. 64; Lederach, 2003, p. 27). As a framework for conflict analysis, conflict transformation identifies root causes of conflict in the context of other potential causes, by explicitly recognizing and exploring the context of relationships surrounding difficult or negative responses to conflict, like quitting school, and exploring how such responses may turn into positive, or more peaceful, responses to conflict (Lederach, 2003, p. 30).

Conflict transformation is both a framework for understanding, and a description of responses to conflict, or processes. There is power in the broad nature and flexibility of conflict transformation as a framework for understanding how change takes place. With the focus on relationships inherent in conflict transformation, the unarticulated conflicts built into institutions and organizations like governments, corporations, and even civil society itself are relevant to study. History can be considered and individual narratives can be included in a conflict transformation analysis in order to understand or to shape change (Lederach, 2003, p. 69). In this way conflict transformation provides a framework for understanding the relationships between group conflicts and individual or personal experiences.

Lederach identifies four ways that conflict transformation may be considered prescriptive for positive change. As a way to understand how individuals are affected by conflict in both positive and negative ways, conflict transformation can acknowledge personal effects at the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels (2003, p. 24). As an intentional intervention to minimize misunderstanding and to maximize mutual understanding, conflict transformation can bring relational fears, hopes, and goals of individuals to the surface (2003, p. 35). Conflict transformation also represents

intervention in order to gain insight into underlying social structural conditions and causes of conflict (2003, p. 25). Finally, he says that as a framework for understanding, conflict transformation can help people in conflict understand cultural patterns that contribute to their setting, and to build upon resources that can help them constructively respond to conflict (2003, p. 26). In this way, the changing nature of conflict, or the transformation of the conflict, can influence positive change in personal, relational, structural, and cultural ways.

Basic concepts, complex relationships and patterns can be more readily mapped and contextualized within an appropriate conceptual framework (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 135; McMillan, 2004, p. 258). Given this situation, a key contribution of peace and conflict research is to explore “various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present” (Lederach, 1997, p. 35). In this way and in relation to this study, school experiences can be better understood when Lederach’s model of conflict transformation is used to better understand the many relationships inherent in people’s school experiences.

According to Lederach, conflict transformation is a “comprehensive orientation or framework” that includes “constructive change efforts that go beyond the resolution of specific problems” toward the goal of deep and lasting change (Lederach, 2003, pp. 4-5). Conflict transformation stresses that conflicts “flow and return to relationships” (Lederach, 2003, p. 17), and that it is important to focus on the less visible dimensions of relationships. It is, in Lederach’s words, “a way of looking as well as seeing” (Lederach, 2003, p. 9). While some may be inclined to view conflict transformation as a goal, an

event, or even a theory, it is in fact a framework developed through praxis for understanding and transforming conflict. Conflict transformation describes the process and development of a response to any conflict, including conflicts that do not demonstrate clearly identifiable sides or adversaries (Lederach, 2003, p. 9). In fact, “what counts as transformation will vary from case to case” (Ryan, 2009, p. 311).

Conflict transformation is relational and peacebuilding. According to Lederach, peace is embedded in justice, which emphasizes the importance of building respectful relationships between people (Lederach 2003, p. 3). Justice happens when the multiple components and relationships of conflict are explored and understood, and then social structures are created that sustain strong and healthy relationships (Galtung, 2000, p. 26; Lederach, 2003, p. 3). Conflict transformation, then, describes the responses to conflict of people in conflict, and is also a framework for analyzing conflict (Ryan, 2009, p. 306).

As a framework particularly appropriate for this study, conflict transformation approaches the complexities of identity conflict and emphasizes multiple levels of relationships, while recognizing that individuals are affected by, and respond to conflict, in a number of ways (Lederach, 2003, p. 3). When quitting school is recognized as a multi-faceted response to cumulative conflicts, including the larger identity conflict, rather than as responses only to particular shortcomings within educational systems, the conflict transformation model provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of Aboriginal school experiences toward peace-building, and potentially inform better policy and practice.

Conflict transformation focuses on systems of relationships, including the relationships between personal troubles and public concerns (Azar and Burton, 1986, p. 1;

Bathmaker, 2010, p. 1; Miall, 2004, p. 4; Mills, 1970, p. 248). This is appropriate for this study, in which the personal troubles of individual Aboriginal people are linked to public concerns about Aboriginal people and school achievement. Cycles of relationships like these can be studied using narrative methods on a framework of conflict transformation, in order to build understanding about the significance of history and the historical evolution of relationships at the individual and at the collective levels (Black, 2003, p. 119; Wilmot & Hockett, 2007, p. 8; Wolff, 2006, p. 33). By considering historical relationships, opposing circumstances, values, power, resources, and other relationships, the narratives of people in conflict can be explored to improve understanding and to identify opportunities for potential positive or constructive change. Such change is conflict transformation.

Conflict transformation was selected as the conceptual framework for this dissertation because of its capacity to build greater understanding of an immediate situation, and because it promotes the recognition of relationship patterns that surround and influence conflict situations (Lederach, 2003, p. 5, 10, 11). In Lederach's (2003) words, "conflict transformation is a way of looking as well as seeing" (p. 5).

Lederach's Model of Conflict Transformation

Lederach's model provides a framework for inquiry into how human relationships are and can be transformed by conflict. He says that the conflict transformation framework "emphasizes the challenge of how to *end* something not desired and how to *build* something that is desired (*italics his*)...and ... requires a capacity to see through and beyond the presenting issues to the deeper patterns, while seeking creative responses that address real-life issues in real time" (p. 39). Lederach says "conflict changes

relationships” and so his model of conflict transformation focuses specifically on the interconnectedness of patterns and relationships (Lederach, 2003, p. 31).

The use of Lederach’s conflict transformation framework in this study seems to be the first application of the model to analyze and understand the outcomes of identity conflict¹². The framework is presented as Figure 2 on page 48. The components of the model are a set of causal relationships arranged in a circle. Lederach stresses that circularity “reminds us that change, like life, is never static” (Lederach, 2003, p. 43).

¹² There appear to be a lack of reviews of *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (2003) in the academic literature, though three reader reviews available on Google are generally favourable to the concept of conflict transformation as described by Lederach.

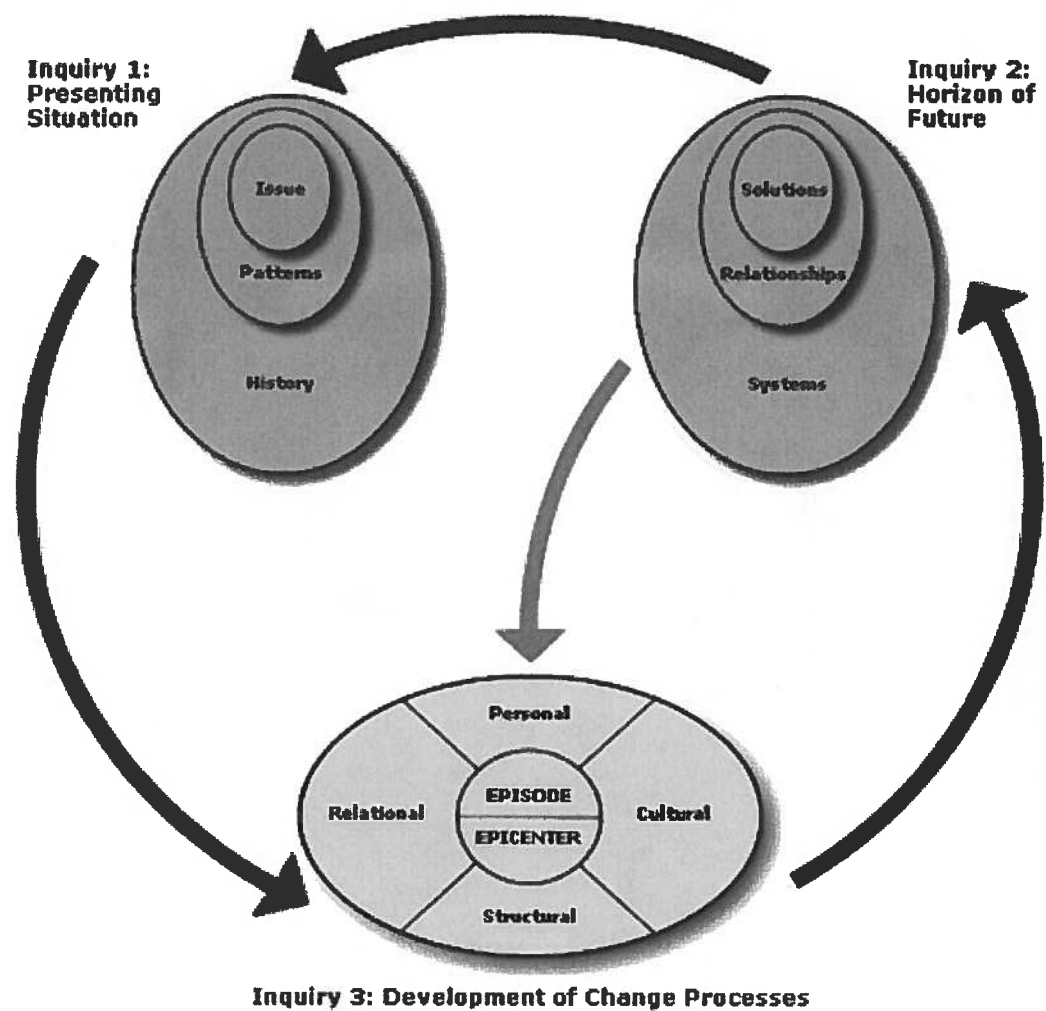


Figure 2. Lederach Framework of Conflict Transformation (Lederach, 2003, p. 35).

The Inquiries

Lederach's model explores the nature of conflict in three components called Inquiries. Inquiry 1 is called the Presenting Situation and contains three subcomponents: Issue, Patterns, and History. This Inquiry represents how immediate issues are rooted in relationships and structures that are embedded in an historical context. Within it "lies our ability to recognize, understand, and redress what has happened" (Lederach, 2003, p. 35). In this way, Inquiry 1 establishes an historical understanding of the conflictual situation. Lederach describes the subcomponents of Inquiry 1 as follows. Issue is the situation, or

perhaps the conflict, that prompts the inquiry. Patterns are those recurring events relevant to the issue. History includes factors, relationships, and events that provide context. In this way, Inquiry 1 represents how an issue is rooted in its context and history. The relationships between these three subcomponents “help us think about spaces of exploration, meaning, and action” (Lederach, 2003, p. 34).

According to the conflict transformation model, the perspectives of the participants within an historical record assist the recognition of how conflict develops. In this way, Inquiry 1 creates an avenue for exploring the structural, cultural and relational conflicts and relationships that may have influenced the contemporary trend of poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in Canada. Important to conflict transformation is the recognition that all of these subcomponents work in relationship to and with each other to facilitate better understanding and identification of those conflicts for which one response was to drop out of school.

Inquiry 2 is called *The Horizon of the Future* and has three subcomponents called Solutions, Relationships, and Systems. Solutions encompass responses to conflict that are considered to be one or more answers to the problem. Relationships are any relationships between people, institutions, and/or organizations that constitute part of the desired future. Systems are the social groupings or networks of organizations and institutions that form part of the desired future. This Inquiry captures the influences of an open and evolving future (p. 36) and “possible avenues for dealing with the immediate presenting issues, as well as processes that address relational and structural patterns” (p. 36). Inquiry 2 helps one to recognize that social systems like education, health, and social welfare are in relationship with people, both collectively and individually. It is important to acknowledge

that their desires for the future provide an important orientation for people as they respond to conflict and that knowledge and information illuminate the full context of what influences change.

Exploring the subcomponents of Inquiry 2 allows the consideration of a larger breadth of acquired information and prompts more questions. During the data collection phase of this study, participants talked about experiences that linked the past and the present. For example, for what problems is quitting school the Solution? What are the Relationships at home, in society and with broader Systems that support this? The model helps a researcher ask questions that lead to broader and potentially more accurate explanations of why someone quit school. Such explanations provide a deeper understanding of potential positive solutions. Since the model is an “interconnected circle” (p. 37) Inquiries 1 and 2 create a “push to do something” about conflicts that people encounter (p. 37). In this way, this study suggests that responding to conflict by quitting school is not a simple response.

Inquiry 3 is called the Development of Change Processes, and according to Lederach, this component helps to define “what we hope to build” (p. 37). Change processes are defined by Lederach (2003) as “the transformational component and the foundation of how conflict can move from being destructive toward being constructive” (p. 19). This means that “this movement can only be done by cultivating the capacity to see, understand, and respond to the presenting issues in the context of relationships” (p. 19). Inquiry 3 is more complicated than Inquiry 1 or Inquiry 2, and has six subcomponents instead of three: Personal, Relational, Cultural, Structural, Episode, and Epicenter. Lederach refers to these as “aspects”, “perspectives”, and “dimensions” of change

(Lederach, 2003, pp. 24-26). These six subcomponents represent the complexities of conflict transformation and how change is both developed and supported. In the paragraphs below, the first four subcomponents are explored in counter-clockwise order according to the model, and so that the descriptions are presented from the most specific to the most general. Then, the Episode and the Epicenter are explained.

Personal involves the cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual aspects of change. Specifically, “the *personal* aspect of conflict refers to changes affected in and desired for the individual” (Lederach, 2003, p. 24). This is one of the important links between identity and conflict. Lederach says “conflict requires us to address our understandings of identity and relationship” (p. 57). He stresses that it is through the individual’s voice that concern is expressed and conflict understood. This aspect “is an appeal to a sense of self, to identity, and to how a relationship is being experienced and defined” (p. 56). In order to explore the personal, however, there must be “spaces and processes that encourage people to address and articulate a positive sense of identity in relationship to other people and groups” (p. 56).

Relational is the second subcomponent that helps researchers and practitioners explore the interactional patterns underlying conflict transformation. Lederach’s (2003) definition of relational means “changes in face-to-face relationships...the relational affectivity, power, and interdependence, and the expressive, communicative and interactive aspects of conflict” (p. 24). Conflicts and changes in conflicts must be considered through the lenses of relationships between people and other conflicts.

Structural is the third subcomponent in the model. Lederach (2003) says this “dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict and the patterns and changes it

brings about in social, political and economic structures” (p. 25). Structural focuses attention on the influences of institutions or organizations to transform conflict from one state to another by meeting basic human needs, providing access to resources, and the making of decisions that affect groups, communities and societies (Botes, 2003, p. 269; Jeong, 2003; Lederach, 2003, p.25, p. 27; Miller & King, 2005, p. 19; Schellenberg, 1996, p. 86).

Cultural is the fourth subcomponent and focuses on changes produced by conflict among the broadest patterns of group life. This includes identity “and the ways that culture affects patterns of response and conflict” (Lederach, 2003, p. 26). Conflict is rooted in culture because culture is meaning (Lederach, 1995, p. 8). Kornhauser (1978) defines the distinct nature of culture:

Culture...is restricted to the realm of meaning; it refers to the shared meanings by which a people give order, expression, and value to common experiences...the distinctively cultural refers to those symbols by which a people apprehend and endow experience with ultimate human significance (pp. 6-7).

Although identity is neither rigid nor fixed (Lederach, 2003, p. 58), the cultural dimension of the model “permits ongoing learning about self and other, while at the same time pursuing decisions about particular issues that symbolize the deeper negotiations surrounding identity” (p. 59). Culture is about understanding meaning.

At the center of this inquiry are the Episode and Epicenter. Episode of conflict is the term Lederach uses to describe the visible conflicts that take place within a distinct time frame. Epicenter of conflict situates issues and crises within a framework of social context and relationships. Specifically, the epicenter reflects the relevance and

accountability of all relationships surrounding conflict and what might be useful to shape the future. Together, the epicenter and the episode create a figurative platform for responses to conflict.

As seen in the Figure 2, Inquiry 3 is influenced by both the other Inquiries and captures “the web of interconnected needs, relationships, and patterns on all four levels: personal, relational, cultural, and structural” (Lederach, 2003, p. 38). The model invites close examination of what is involved in changing conflict from negative to positive. For example, during the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked: “What are some of your early memories of going to school?” Since there is a dynamic relationship between Inquiry 1, Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3, together they form a conceptual model for examining all the factors and relationships for understanding the responses of the participants to the research questions. However, Inquiry 3 also allows complex contradictions within personal stories and public concerns to be a manageable part of the analysis. Inquiry 3 emphasizes the “web of interconnected needs, relationships and patterns” considered within structures, relationships, culture in its various forms, and within the personal dimension (Lederach, 2003, p. 38). Inquiry 3 is where the processes of change interact on multiple levels and as multiple types of change, so that while transformation must address solutions for immediate problems, it also acknowledges that some problems cannot be resolved or addressed within the model, or in real situations.

The three Inquiries are connected by arrows. Lederach explains that the arrows represent

... a kind of social energy creating an impulse toward change, depicted as the arrow moving forward. On the other side, the horizon of the future harnesses an

impulse that points toward possibilities of what could be constructed and built. The horizon represents a social energy that informs and creates orientation. Here the arrow points both back toward the immediate situation and forward to the range of change processes that may emerge. The combination of arrows provides an overall circle (p. 37).

The depiction of conflict transformation as circular underscores the continuous nature of conflict. In the model, the arrows point away from Inquiry 2 toward Inquiry 1 and Inquiry 3. Although the lighter font of the central arrow suggests a lesser significance, Lederach does not explain the lighter arrow between Inquiry 2 and Inquiry 3. He also does not address if it is plausible for conflict transformation to omit Inquiry 1 in its cycle.

The Inquiry system of interrelated components is how the model is applied to understand conflict transformation. This understanding “requires a capacity to see through and beyond the presenting issues to the deeper patterns, while seeking creative responses that address real-life issues in real time” (Lederach, 2003, p. 39). Part of the potential confusion in understanding the model is based in Lederach’s efforts to place the energy of real life into a static model.

A significant feature of this model is that the Inquiries provide a context for insight into personal experiences that take place within documented histories and relationships. In this way, educational decisions taken at high levels of public leadership can potentially be understood in the context of the daily activities, feelings, and perceptions of the individuals whose lives have been affected by those broader impersonal public decisions. This response may be more fully understood by recognizing that the presenting situation also includes the patterns and histories that may be related to the presenting situation

according to the narratives or literature from which they were sourced. By segregating the components and relationships that influence the conflict into nested or interdependent components in order for people to understand change (Lederach, 2003, p. 4), the model includes influences and complexities that allow personal narratives to stand alongside research documentation and historical resources to provide a fuller picture of conflict, and of how people have experienced, and responded to, conflict.

Constructive change, according to Lederach, is developed within the context of both a process and a structure, which he calls a “process-structure” (Lederach, 2003, p.44). He describes a process-structure as “a web of dynamic circles creating an overall momentum and direction” (Lederach 2003, p. 44). Since models are static, combining the concepts of process and structure is Lederach’s effort to capture the energy and web of relationships that characterize conflict change in order to demonstrate that transformation is not just one circumstance or one moment in time; it is not one relationship or one event (Lederach, 2003, p. 40). Lederach (2003) combines two interdependent characteristics (adaptability and purpose) to capture the principle that “process-structures are dynamic, adaptive, and changing” but at the same time maintain a functional and recognizable form (pp. 40, 41). In this way, Inquiry 3 captures the multi-directional essence of change as a response to conflict, represented by its many subcomponents.

Lederach’s model centers on the contexts of relationship patterns at all levels. The model allows for analysis and potential understanding of the complicated conflicts by mapping the conflict and creating opportunities to consider how responses to conflict are developed, and what guides them through change. Inquiry 1 allows the researcher to identify and move through the presenting issue toward relational and historical patterns,

which illuminate the epicenter of conflict (the web of relational contexts), which in turn “is capable of generating new episodes [visible expression of conflict], either on similar or different issues” (Lederach, 2003, p. 36). Identifying episodes and epicenters (which are subcomponents of Inquiry 3) from the content of Inquiry 1 leads the researcher to Inquiry 3 but also requires the consideration of Inquiry 2 subcomponents, which both informs and guides conflict transformation. As a result of these complex and dynamic causal relationships, Lederach’s model links Inquiry 2 to both of the other Inquiries. The dynamic nature of conflict and conflict transformation requires that Inquiry 1 be considered in the context of the other Inquiries, as indicated and reinforced by the directions of the arrows.

The model is appropriate to accommodate the complexities of Canadian Aboriginal life, including historical information and personal experiences, and was used to explore the data. The major research questions that supplied the data ask: “What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes and wishes for the future? What are their fears and worries for themselves, for their families?” The dissertation explores how these perceptions have developed and evolved. The conflict transformation framework grounds personal experiences in the wider social and historical context of relationships. Because of the lack of clarity in the definitions of the Lederach model, some of the concepts have been renamed and described for the purposes of this study. In effect, the data were analyzed according to a modified Lederach model. This discussion is amplified in the coding section of Chapter 3 and in the findings, presented in Chapter 4.

We must understand how conflict has affected Aboriginal students. Although each story from the participants is unique, there are notably common themes in the life stories,

and in this study, findings applicable to personal and relational far exceeded the other subcomponents of the Lederach model, which may, in fact, be due to the narrative nature of the methodology. For example, although all the participants have quit school they have also returned to school, and their explanations provide a broad window into personal and relational elements of conflict and their responses to conflict. Among other reasons, the provision of appropriate education for Aboriginal people in Canada is important for better social and economic outcomes for individuals, which has also captured the attention of educational and government leaders and resources for a long time (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2011, 2012; Assembly of First Nations, 2005, 2011, 2013; Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1987; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1966, 1996, 2008). While some policies have met with moderate success, the search continues to understand why an alarming percentage of Aboriginal people do not complete their formal educations.

The Inquiries in the Lederach model promote the inclusion of literature, legislation, and practice. Considered in the context of one another, these provide a much broader understanding and recognition of the complexity of the conflict explored in this study, which on the surface seems to be simply a matter of Aboriginal people quitting school. However, if quitting school is considered a response exclusively to conflict with social structures, Canada's long history of school reform would have found the appropriate solution with widespread success. History and statistics indicate that examining problems with school only provide an inadequate analysis. Perhaps the conflict is best understood by expanding outside of the view that the conflict is between Aboriginal students and the school system. In fact, the transformational approach requires that the conflict be

recognized as a pattern of circles that includes the history and the future, and the public and private domains, not just the immediate problem of statistical dropout rates. In this way, both literature and research findings may be mapped to provide a more comprehensive understanding of conflict, of the nature of the personal experience of identity conflict, and of responses to conflict.

Conflict transformation is particularly helpful for understanding identity conflict because it also acknowledges that change moves forward, backwards, stands still, and sometimes even seems to collapse, but that there is always a steady march forward through time (Lederach, 2003, p. 42). In this way, the Lederach model provides a relevant framework for gaining new understanding into why school has been ineffective for Aboriginal people.

The multi-dimensionality and interrelationships of Lederach's model are particularly conducive to, and respectful of, the Indigenous research paradigm and the Aboriginal worldview described in Chapter 1. In the model, as in the Aboriginal worldview, there is a dynamic relationship and interconnectedness among the relational structural, cultural, and personal components of conflict with the inclusion of history, issues, systems, structures, and relational patterns identified in Chapter 1. The model provides an important bridge between academic analysis and respectful attention to the Aboriginal worldview, and as required by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Research involving First Nations and Métis people in Canada* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010, p. 105; Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Integral to the model is an ongoing and adaptive foundation for understanding that

provides a way to approach immediate problems and conflicts, a way to develop a vision for the future, and potentially to create a plan for change that will move the circumstances and relationships of the conflict in the direction of the desired future. However, as Chapter 4 will show, the application of the model to the specific situation of the study required adaptation to some of the characteristics.

Through the lenses of the Lederach model, conflict is understood to be a process that is transforming through a series of responses and choices, so that people move from an undesired state to a more desired future, physically, emotionally, and/ or at the spirit level. How responses to smaller conflicts combine to transform conflict becomes particularly evident in Chapter 4 where the findings are explored.

Summary

This chapter began with brief introductions to the concepts of conflict and conflict transformation, which included a presentation of identity conflict. These provided the relational context of the study. Then, Lederach's model of conflict transformation was explained. Then, the Inquiries were presented, and the conceptual definitions of these main components of Lederach's conflict transformation framework were explained. These are redefined in Chapter 4 where the model is applied to the findings. The chapter concluded by briefly relating the usefulness of the model for this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The stories themselves are transitory as it is acknowledged that they transform over time....Although the story remains intact, the point of view changes drastically; so, too, with all stories. Researchers, informants/participants can never really make a truth claim. Recalled stories are always susceptible; they are recollections of past events in the present (Norris and Sawyer, 2012, p. 20)

In this chapter, the research design is presented. In order to better understand the methodological choices for the study, the chapter begins with an explanation of Indigenous Research, followed by Storytelling as a narrative method. Then, the research question is presented. After this, the research methods are described in detail. Then, the participants are introduced. The chapter concludes with the way the data were coded and interpreted, and how the conflict transformation framework was applied to the data in order to answer the research question, which was “What are the perceptions of the school experiences of urban Aboriginal adults, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future? And what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?”

Indigenous Research

This section describes the distinctive nature of Indigenous¹³ research, and presents the literature that explains Indigenous research. Then, four necessary and recognizable

¹³ Canadian Aboriginal academics are increasingly replacing ‘Aboriginal’ with ‘Indigenous’. In this section, discussions about research methods transcend geographic borders and so the terms are used interchangeably.

elements of Indigenous research culled from the literature are presented. After this, highlights from the Canadian federal *Tri-Council Policy Statement*¹⁴ guiding ethical research with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada conclude the section.

The research process is described as “a disciplined way of coming to know something about our world and ourselves” (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 6). In the pursuit of this quest, research studies traditionally fall within two cultures, recognized as quantitative and qualitative research (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006, p. 227). Quantitative research is usually aligned with a deductive model that addresses problem solving, and is typically used for measurement, or, as the name infers, to quantify (Bouma & Ling, 2006, p. 167). Quantitative data are usually gathered through surveys or through laboratory experiments to ensure objective testing of hypotheses. Qualitative research is based on induction, investigates topics in “all of their complexity, in context,” and are “also concerned with understanding behavior from the subject’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 2). An example of qualitative research is narrative research and analysis (Moen, 2006; Potter, 2006), which provides a forum for stories and for testimonies (Smith, 1999). In this type of research, conclusions emerge inductively from data.

A special category for Indigenous research is emerging in response to negative, disrespectful qualitative research practices by some scholars. As Castellano (2004, p. 98) states, conventional “research acquired a bad name among Aboriginal Peoples because the purposes and meanings associated with its practice by academics were usually alien to the people themselves and the outcomes were, as often as not, misguided and harmful.” Consequently, scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), credited with

¹⁴ The full policy may be accessed at www.pre.ethics.gc.ca.

initiating the discourse of Indigenous research with the launch of her groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, are hesitant to validate qualitative research as appropriate Indigenous research. The researcher's control over the findings and conclusions in qualitative research is a problematic feature for some Indigenous scholars (Absolon, 2011; Druckman, 2005; Smith, 1999, p. 24). Conventional research has been associated with struggle by Indigenous people (p. 2).

The polarization of research into just two categories is an increasingly contested area, and some Indigenous scholars are suggesting that Indigenous research, with its own research culture, is a third category (Absolon, 2011; Christensen, 2012; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Battiste (2002) states that "whether or not it has been acknowledged by the Eurocentric mainstream, Indigenous knowledge has always existed" (p. 4). The Indigenous worldview assumes the primacy of relationships, and so research that qualifies as Indigenous flows from this worldview.

Although some might argue that Indigenous research is essentially qualitative research, the unwavering analytical emphasis on relationships and on entire systems of relationships is one of the key differences of Indigenous research. According to Wilson (2008), the style of logic used by the researcher distinguishes Indigenous research. He explains:

...the data and the analysis are like a circular fishing net. You could try to examine each of the knots in the net to see what holds it together, but it's the strings between the knots that have to work in conjunction in order for the net to function. So any analysis must examine all of the relationships or strings between particular events or knots of data as a whole before it will make any sense (p. 120).

In this way, Indigenous research is reflective of conflict transformation, which Lederach (2003) describes as an “entire mountain range” rather than a single peak or valley, or as “an understanding of the greater patterns, the ebb and flow of energies, times, and even whole seasons, in the great sea of relationships” (p. 16).

Indigenous authors offer four general criteria to guide research pertaining to Indigenous people, and much of the criteria is supported officially by the joint research ethics policy statement of Canada’s federal research agencies (TCPS2, 2010). The four primary elements that distinguish Indigenous research are situated in the Aboriginal worldview, and although some argue that they are essentially qualitative research, they are subtly but importantly different, given the emphasis on relationships in context: 1) relational accountability throughout the research process, 2) the recognition of the diversity and complexity of the whole being in the research design and conclusions, 3) the inclusion of spiritual and relational dimensions in research, and 4) creation of safe spaces for people to express themselves (Absolon, 2011; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Turner, 2008). The Indigenous scholars say that understanding Aboriginal people’s needs and perceptions requires a methodology that meets these four criteria while being inductive, dynamic, and fluid in ways that are somewhat unique.

Understandably, the Indigenous scholars maintain that generally, Indigenous research is incompatible with the objective and detached nature of conventional academic research in which observer effect and observer bias must be declared (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 35). It is a common theme across the Indigenous literature that contemporary western research can be seen to exclude relationship. Absolon (2011) emphasizes the effects of this context on the potentially inaccurate interpretation of findings when she

writes that “Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are connected to the nature of our existence, just as Eurowestern researchers are guided by colonialist beliefs and values” (p. 22). Unlike the detached objectivity of academic research, Wilson (2008) stresses relationships, integration, and that “things need to be in context” (p. 97). Static methods are inappropriate for research with Aboriginal people, just as they do not work with conflict transformation (Lederach, 2003, p. 16).

Wilson (2008), for example, has identified the Indigenous research process as ‘ceremony,’ which is integral to Aboriginal epistemology, and contrary to the “analytic questions” of Western methods (Bodgan & Biklen, 2006, p. 149). The relationships among the research, the researcher and those who are being researched is paramount for Indigenous research (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) says “one of the major complaints that Indigenous people have about the social sciences – [is] that researchers come from outside the community to ‘study’ Indigenous problems” (p. 16).

All research is a search for knowledge. In turn, Indigenous research encompasses “those re-search methods, practices, approaches that are guided by Indigenous worldviews, beliefs, values, principles, processes and contexts. Indigenous methodologies are wholistic, relational, interrelational and interdependent with Indigenous philosophies, beliefs and ways of life” (Absolon, 2011, p. 22). Atkinson (in Wilson, 2008) has attempted a respectful comparison with a list of described features of Indigenous research. The list is provided in full as Appendix A. Some of the key statements in Atkinson’s description include ways of relating and acting within community with an understanding of the principles of reciprocity and responsibility; a respectful environment where the participants feel safe and issues of confidentiality are respected; a reflective non-

judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard; and an awareness and connection between logic of the mind and the feelings of the heart (Wilson, 2008, p. 59).

Wilson, who quotes Atkinson, says research that incorporates these principles “honours the worldviews of Aboriginal people with ethical responsibility and sensitivity” (Wilson, 2008, p. 59). Rice (2005) presents the broader foundation in his work, providing a context for understanding that Indigenous research “encompasses traditional sources of Aboriginal world views and spiritual understandings; paths that Aboriginal people take in their search for truths in Aboriginal teachings...traditional teachings that influence the meaning of contemporary society’s life and provide new directions; and commonalities in ways of knowing shared by diverse Aboriginal cultures” (p. xii). In this way, Wilson (2008) says that “research is ceremony....the knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected” (p. 61).

It seems that a significant characteristic of Indigenous research identified in the literature is personal experience and how people have made sense of their experiences. Although Bar-on & Kassem (2004) called this the process of “working through,” and ethnographic research explores personal experiences (Liebow, 2003; Neill, 2007), Indigenous research is considered to be different by Indigenous scholars. Overall, much of the Indigenous literature describes research as a search for knowledge. Newer scholars like Absolon (2011) highlight that there is the distinction between qualitative and Indigenous research. In describing Indigenous research, Absolon (2011) renames it “re-search” and describes “knowledge quests and knowledge seekers” (p. 23) rather than using the more traditional terms research and researcher. Absolon’s thesis is that when Atkinson’s values and principles are incorporated, there are situations of uniquely indigenous research.

Recent scholarship (Absolon, 2011; Turner, 2006) states that Indigenous research can and must be recognized as different from qualitative or quantitative research.

Wilson explains that the choice of research topic is also a difference. He says that qualitative research tends to focus on problems and external solutions rather than general understanding, and “often imposes outside solutions, rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities” (Wilson, 2003, p. 16). Wilson also states that one commonality across traditional research approaches to Indigenous matters is “that they look at social, historical and economic factors to explain the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and then make recommendations that are intended to adapt the dominant system to the needs of Indigenous people...and the conditions and issues being studied get worse, rather than improving, after the research has been done” (2008, p. 20).

Perhaps this is most powerfully articulated by Kathleen Absolon (2011), whose doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto examined the methodologies of Indigenous graduate researchers:

Compromising who we are, what we know, and where we come from is unacceptable. We are not alternative...when we describe our methodologies as ‘alternative’ we consent to becoming ‘other.’...if the methods are Indigenous, within an Indigenous context and for Indigenous purposes, then it is normal and the mainstay of knowledge collection. The sooner the academy recognizes the existence and vitality of Indigenous methodologies, the closer the academy comes to creating a welcoming environment for Indigenous scholars, who can then focus their energy on all areas of Indigenous knowledge production (p. 47).

Absolon's point is that there are distinguishing features of Indigenous research that distinguish it from qualitative research.

Indigenous data are expressly described by Indigenous scholars in relation to collection and interpretation. There is compelling literature claiming that if education research (and other social research) involving Aboriginal people were conducted according to the integrated, relational worldview of Aboriginal people, and the criteria for Indigenous research, it would produce relevant and meaningful findings that might be applied to social problems (Absolon, 2011, p. Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2002; Wilson, 2008, p. 107). One of the major criticisms from Indigenous researchers is that most data about Aboriginal affairs have been collected through non-Indigenous methods based on document searches about culture rather than by talking to people (Kirkness, 2004; McGovern, 2000). Absolon (2011) described this research as "caught in the context of colonial theories and methodologies" (p. 23). For example, Aboriginal scholars recognize and emphasize the role of the colonization experience in the collection and interpretation of data (Alfred, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Absolon (2011) emphasizes the effects of this context on the potentially inaccurate interpretation of findings when she writes that "Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are connected to the nature of our existence, just as Eurowestern researchers are guided by colonialist beliefs and values" (p. 22).

Aboriginal scholars are striving to establish a distinction between Indigenous research paradigms and qualitative research (Battiste, 2002, 2004; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The literature addresses the relevance of Indigenous research to practice, and suggests that policy involving Aboriginal people can be transformed with appropriate research, defined by the literature as Indigenous, or as literature that reflects the values of

Indigenous research. The impact of research that has allegedly misrepresented Aboriginal people has had great implications for social policy like education, which, according to statistics has not met the needs of Aboriginal people despite the positive outcomes planned and the intended merit of such policy (Absolon, 2011; Alfred, 2009; Sanders, 2010; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011; Smith, 1999).

The Indigenous scholars do not seem to be suggesting that all research by non-Indigenous scholars should be discarded, but rather that it must meet reasonable requirements, the least of which is to consider the relational nature of research. Shawn Wilson (2008) explains that “an Indigenous paradigm should aim to be authentic or credible. By that I mean that the research must accurately reflect and build upon the relationships between the ideas and the participants. The analysis must be true to the voice of the participants and reflect their understanding of the topic” (2008, p. 101). He calls this “relational accountability” (2008, p. 101).

The recognition of specific features or requirements for Indigenous research and for research with Indigenous people has been embraced and supported by research councils in Canada. In 2010, the second *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)* replaced the 1998 first document and included a full chapter, Chapter 9, devoted to guiding research involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people of Canada. The document represents an effort to recognize subtle but important differences for the conduct of research, and to ensure ethical research in Aboriginal terms. Specifically, *TCPS2* is an effort to address and to overcome the “certain apprehension and mistrust” (p. 105) that Aboriginal people have historically associated with qualitative research among Aboriginal people. While the 2010 policy maintains the underlying value

of respect for human dignity as the basis for the core principles, the new policy clarifies ethical roles and responsibilities and “provides guidance to researchers on the ethical conduct of research involving Aboriginal peoples” (p. 106). In many ways, Chapter 9 of the policy recognizes and safeguards the elements of Indigenous research highlighted by Aboriginal scholars. That is, the policy ensures that, like other research is assumed to be, research with Indigenous people is premised on respectful relationships and trust, respect for persons, and “extends to the interconnection between humans and the natural world” (p. 109). The policy also emphasizes ethical respect and consideration for the whole individual and the community and states that “Concern for Welfare in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis contexts may therefore place strong emphasis on collective welfare as a complement to individual well-being” (p. 109).

There is careful attention to relationship, trust, justice, and respect for persons and for community in TCPS2, and an acknowledgement that “when a serious imbalance of power prevails between the researcher and participants...Resulting harms are seldom intentional, but nonetheless real for the participants” and may include the misrepresentation or stigmatization of entire communities (p. 109). The Preamble to Chapter 9 establishes the foundational principles for the research relationship involving all Aboriginal people, and states in part that the chapter is

...designed to serve as a framework for the ethical conduct of research involving Aboriginal peoples. It is offered in a spirit of respect. It is not intended to override or replace ethical guidance offered by Aboriginal peoples themselves. Its purpose is to ensure, to the extent possible, that research involving Aboriginal peoples is premised

on respectful relationships. It also encourages the collaboration and engagement between researchers and participants (p. 105).

The purpose of the new chapter is to establish ethical dialogue on common interests and points of difference between Aboriginal peoples and researchers. It responds to many of the ethical issues raised in the literature that are addressed by Indigenous research.

Throughout the research process, the design of the study outlined in this dissertation abided by the principles of Indigenous research. Through mindful consideration of the relationship between the participants, the researcher and the research, the study was designed to reflect the relational nature of the elements of the study.

This section explained the elements of Indigenous research, which are summarized as 1) relational accountability throughout the research process; 2) the recognition of the diversity and complexity of the whole being in the research design and conclusions; 3) the inclusion of spiritual and relational dimensions in research; and 4) the creation of safe spaces for people to express themselves. The section also demonstrated how Indigenous research and conflict transformation share an intense relationship focus. Finally, it concluded with a summary of the *Tri-Council Policy, 2010*, guiding ethical research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada. The next section outlines Storytelling as it relates to the methodology of the study.

Storytelling as a Narrative Method

This section briefly explains storytelling, which is defined as “someone relating to someone else what has happened” (Senehi, Flaherty, Kirupakaran, Kornelson, Matenge, & Skarlato, 2009, p. 92). As a narrative research method, storytelling is a way for understanding how people have experienced and responded to conflict, which can facilitate

conflict transformation, and for the purposes of this study, improve understanding about how Aboriginal people make sense of their school experiences.

Increasingly, narrative methods like storytelling are found in research literature and recognized as a way to construct knowledge and conduct research (for example, Burton, 1972; Carter & Byrne, 2000; Senehi, 2000, 2002, 2008; Senehi, et al., 2009). Hendry (2010) asserts that narrative is not one form of inquiry, but rather that all research is narrative. Narrative methods provide understanding into the ways people live with their losses and feelings and help people to understand one another (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, pp. 3-4; Kellett, 2010, p. 312; Senehi, 2000, p. 97; Senehi et al., 2009, p. 94). The telling of these 'stories' in turn can have tremendous practical implications to promote peace-building and social justice and for research (Senehi, 2000, p. 98). Another scholar has said that "at its heart, research is storytelling" (Christensen, 2012, p. 232). Extending storytelling as research to the Indigenous context, "can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things" (Smith, 1999; p. 34).

Through narratives, people communicate and express how they make sense of their lives and their experiences. They also express "how we would like to see our past, what we think we are doing in the present, and how we fantasize it will be in the future." (Simms, 2011, p. 21). However, "[w]e do not necessarily have to find heroes/heroines or victims in our past, but rather shape the story of our lives so that we have the potential to be heroines/heroes ourselves within a larger social process of discovery and social change" (Senehi et al., 2009, p. 97).

Stories connect people with their lives and with the lives of other people. Senehi et al. (2009) maintain that in the story is an "integrity of self and a vision to our lives and our

work... to recognize the ways in which we have been resilient and strong can be a move toward de-colonization, de-silencing, self-respect, dignity, a sense of truth and justice, and a de-atomization of our lives and our aims” (p. 91). In this interpretation of storytelling, one shares one’s personal experiences. But storytelling is much more than just the sharing of experiences. As Senehi et al. (2009) explain,

...stories are not discrete objects transferred uncritically from person to person. They are selected, framed, and constructed by individuals in a particular context and with particular considerations, such as how they will be received by the group. They are not pure reflections of experience or culture; that is, storytelling can be an exercise in human agency. The narratives are interpretive and often unverifiable, but they also reference actual events, for example, wars, social conflicts, and geographic relocations that have affected people’s lives. While interpretive, these narratives reveal how people make sense of their experiences, history, and identity, and such interpretations impact situations insofar as they affect people’s behaviors and emotional states....Speakers may be consciously or unconsciously striving to make certain connections or put things in a good light (p. 92).

By being invited to tell their stories, people can make sense of their lives, perceptions and experiences, both in the past and in the future.

Stories complement written histories, which is relevant for the transformation of identity conflicts. Stories can provide valuable material to supplement written records and can assist researchers identify aspects of the research area that were not apparent in written sources – like motivations, relationships, the construction of cultural meaning, and the experience of policy implementation (McMillan, 2004, p. 260). Storytelling allows for

study of the recent past through the perceptions of participants with firsthand experience (Gormand & Clayton (2005, 2008; Schwartzstein, 1996, p. 423). Storytelling is a powerful way of understanding how people experience identity conflict because it allows people to “tell and hear personal stories” (O’Hagan, 2008a, p. 11). It is in this sense that storytelling also contributes relationships to the experiential perspective as an important foundation to narrative as a research methodology (Bochner, 2001, p. 142; Vansina, 1996, p. 121).

Stories can also provide seeds of hope, make sense of what people have been feeling, and generate an avenue for change (Hetherington, 2008, p. 51; Senehi, 2000, p. 103). Cook-Huffman (2008) explains that

...people use the raw materials of their lives to “make” themselves, thus social identities are projects whereby individuals come to a narrative sense of self by creating an integrated whole of their past, present, and future (p. 20).

People do not easily or spontaneously ‘open up’ about their past pains or traumas (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, p.4) and storytelling workshops provide those opportunities for people to express their experiences and “make sense” or “work through” them. Lederach (2003) says “at the deepest level, identity is lodged in the narratives of how people see themselves, who they are, where they have come from, and what they fear they will become or lose. Thus, identity is deeply rooted in a person’s...sense of how that person or group is in relationship with others and what effect that relationship has on its participants’ sense of self and group” (p. 55).

Narrative methods like storytelling reflect the essence of Aboriginal relationality. Stories reflect respect, reciprocity and responsibility (Wilson, 2008, p. 99). According to Bogdan & Biklen (2006, p. 199), such research “relies on people’s own words, both to

understand a social problem and to convince others to remedy it” and it facilitates recognition of relationships between problems:

Knowledge doesn’t pertain only to the academy but to all realms of our lived existence; and knowledge isn’t something that’s tested only against the standards of scientific inquiry. Each of us judges our lived experiences against the ethical, emotional, practical, and fateful demands of life as we come to understand them (Bochner, 1997, p. 135).

In this way, narrative research is grounded research, which means that findings are derived from “bits of data being organized together by similarities or remaining apart because of singularities....Theory can then be generated from an understanding of the categories and the links or overlaps between them” (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 194). Grounded research does not require an hypothesis, though it may discover or generate one (McMillan, 2004, p. 275). It also reflects genuine concern for the subjects (Baker, 1994, p. 4). New understandings derive from results that are “denser descriptions of information, new or enhanced concepts to explain data” (p. 194).

According to conflict transformation literature and consistent with Indigenous scholarship (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), the Aboriginal identity conflict in Canada requires research methods that emphasize relationships, as storytelling does (Lederach, 1997, p. 24; Lederach, 2003). There is a natural relationship between the two. Kellett (2010) says, “interpretive analysis...can lead to understanding and deeper critique that can result in changes” at both the individual and the community levels (p. 312). Christensen (2012) states that “research storytelling is particularly well suited to community based research” (p. 231). Telling one’s story produces dynamic and relational results that provide

a means for self-exploration and self-understanding; for some, it is a means to stability and to resolution (McLean, 2008, p. 262; O'Hagan, 2008a, p. 15). Narrative methods reinforce relationships, in particular, those between the researcher, the researched, and the research. Furthermore, "it is through collaborative, participatory efforts that the real potential of research storytelling as an Indigenous methodology may be realized (Christensen, 2012, p. 239).

Storytelling is a universal way that people deal with knowledge (Senehi, 2008) and from storytelling the journey toward reconciliation can take place (Lederach, 1999), and potential alternatives for policies like education may emerge. Although issues and images or perceptions change over time, narratives provide an opportunity for researchers to understand personal perspectives as data, within the context of conflict and conflict transformation (Kellett, 2010, p. 317).

This section explained storytelling as a narrative research method, which concludes the literature reviews of the research methods that shaped the research questions presented next.

The Research Design

The research question explores the relationships and potential relationships between the experiences of the participants and implications for research, theory, and practice. The primary research enquiries addressed in the dissertation are: "What are the perceptions of the school experiences of urban Aboriginal adults, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future? And what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?" One of the purposes of this study was to locate the answers to these questions within the stories of the participants. While referencing people

living in situations of protracted identity conflict, Rothman (1997) says, “similar roots and existential concerns can be apparent in the needs and frustrations, the hopes and fears, of groups at almost any level.” The research question and the literature review guided decisions regarding an appropriate research methodology. The design of the study included respectful inclusion of Indigenous research principles, two narrative methods, two data collection periods, and the application of the data to Lederach’s conflict transformation framework for analysis.

Semi-structured interviews, and peace building workshops that have been field-tested outside of Canada and encourage storytelling, were the two narrative methods used in the research design (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Byrne, 1997; Lederach 1995; Hetherington, 2008; O’Hagan, 2008a; Wilson, 2008). “Personal storytelling can facilitate working through processes in intractable conflicts” (Bar-On, 2008, p. 3). Northrup (1989, p. 57) notes that conflicts change over time due to the multiple issues affecting relationships, different systems of thought, and due to the impact of social, historical and political factors occurring within the larger context of identity conflict,” and so it was important to the study to use methods that would capture common events or relationships while accommodating changes in perceptions over time. The design included respectful dialogue, empathetic listening without interruption, relational accountability, and storytelling, which have the capacity to assist people in making sense of their life circumstances (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, p. 5; Senehi, 2000, p.97). As a result, the research used semi-structured interviews and one Bead Workshop to elicit data to answer the research questions.

Winnipeg was chosen as the research location in part because it is home to the majority of Canada's urban Aboriginal population, and close to 10% of the city's 700,000 person population claim Aboriginal identity (Statistics Canada, 2013). Within Winnipeg's core is a small community identified in this research by its pseudonym, Bison Park. A number of demographic variables including age, gender, income levels, education achievement, and mix of First Nations, Métis, non-status and urban Aboriginal people, indicate that Bison Park is representative of the larger Aboriginal population in Canada's urban centers (Statistics Canada, 2007; Winnipeg, 2008). Bison Park is an area of low education levels, high poverty, high crime and a transient population that balances life between home in the city and family responsibilities and relational ties on rural Reserves (Silver, 2006; Silver & Mallett, 2002).

Low levels of education, unemployment, and poverty are also disproportionately high in the community, especially for men and women over age 25 (Helin, 2006; Gibson, 2009; Sharpe and Arsenault, 2010, iii; Statistics Canada 2012, Winnipeg, 2008). Approximately one-half of the residents of Bison Park are single parents. Almost nine in every ten of the Bison Park households have incomes below the low-income cut off, and most of those households (68.2%) reported incomes under \$15,552 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Research shows that within such levels of poverty are many adults with inadequate levels of skill and formal education to improve their circumstances (Levin, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2008), and census data affirm that this is also true in Bison Park.

In the center of the Bison Park community is an adult high school called Maskotew Kiskin. Maskotew Kiskin was established to provide education for Aboriginal residents of the community to include the longer term goal of reducing urban poverty (Silver, 2006).

There is also an important historical and structural base that makes the research site unique. During the 1990s, public pressure encouraged the provincial Progressive Conservative government of the day to establish a community based infrastructure that would respond to the demand for alternative schooling for adults who had not been successful in mainstream schools (Silver, 2006). The *Adult Learning Centers Act* was passed by the New Democratic Party government on July 1, 2003, providing a legitimate framework for educating adults, including the Aboriginal population living in Bison Park, and providing researchers with a rare opportunity to access a small but fairly representative Aboriginal sample group.

The school was created in response to Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) supported research spearheaded by Canadian economist John Loxley during the early 2000s. Loxley's team determined that Aboriginal people in Bison Park agreed that they could find their way out of poverty if they could finish high school (Silver, 2006). The school is part of a community revitalization initiative established to challenge structural barriers that Aboriginal people face in education, including transportation, climate challenges and child care (Malatest & Associates, 2004; Silver, 2006). As a result, researchers from the University of Winnipeg championed an unconventional adult high school located in the heart of the community that met the identified barriers head on. The school, named Maskotew Kiskin, opened in 2007.

Although there are an expanding number of alternative schools in Canada, this research site is to date Canada's only alternative adult learning center designed specifically for urban Aboriginal people to pursue the completion of their high school diplomas, in their own neighbourhood, while childcare is provided, on a schedule that reflects the

complicated life of the urban Aboriginal adult population. Thus, it provides a particularly relevant and unique field for exploring Aboriginal educational experiences. The population for the study was selected from among the students enrolled at Maskotew Kiskin.

The Research Methods

This section presents and explains the research methods. Narrative methodology was the logical choice for the study based on the literature review, the research question and the purposes of the study. Narrative methods best met the criteria to better understand the experiences of Aboriginal people and specifically to explore why they dropped out of school, and to respect Indigenous research principles as much as possible. The needs most salient to an understanding of identity conflicts are those for identity, recognition, security, and personal development, and so the design was mindful of this as well (Cavanaugh, 2000, p. 66; Rubenstein, 2001, para.4). Identity needs may be accessed and protected through storytelling, where people talk about what they are comfortable sharing, and can make sense of the conflicts they have lived by talking about experiences that might have otherwise been denied, dismissed or misrepresented (Senehi, 2000, p. 96).

In order to prepare for the later analysis of narratives, recording equipment was purchased in advance of the data collection period. Teachers and the Community Liaison Officer in Bison Park recommended the library in the Maskotew Kiskin building as the interview site and the Round Room (which serves as the English classroom and lunchroom) as the site for the Bead Workshop. To minimize researcher bias and to ensure a balanced sample, potential participants were identified by the two teachers at Maskotew Kiskin in Bison Park and by the Community Liaison Officer who worked with the Maskotew Kiskin community daily. Two members of this team are Aboriginal, and the

third has had experience teaching and living with adult learners in Africa; all have been working in the community for at least three years. Each staff member is well-acquainted with the population and they facilitated the selection of the intentional, and somewhat self-selected sample. The Bison Park educators identified 25 potential candidates who were willing to participate in open-ended interviews. Since they have a daily relationship with the participants, the educators approached potential candidates, taking into account the request for balance in age, gender, Status and attendance at Reserve and public schools to assure a fair representation of the Aboriginal community. For the interviews, each candidate was required to share his or her story, to speak English, and to be relied upon to fulfil the expectations of the research process, including confidentiality. Candidates were invited to place their names at their chosen time on one of two sign-up sheets.

The common experience of Maskotew Kiskin also reinforced the relational element between the participants, the research and the researcher, which is important to the integrity of Indigenous research and the Aboriginal worldview, and as an element of trust in the storytelling methodology (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; O'Hagan, 2008a; Wilson, 2008).

The first phase of data collection involved interviews, conducted over five days in Bison Park, during December, 2011. These were semi-structured, private interviews that invited uninterrupted narrative responses from the participants. The interview questions were intended to answer the research question while providing an opportunity for the participants to speak as broadly about their experiences as they felt comfortable. The questions and their order were also designed to create an environment in which the participants felt comfortable with the researcher. Through the answers, the researcher

hoped to learn about how the participants perceived and remembered their school experiences, to find out why they left school, and also to learn about what kind of school might have retained them as a student. The remaining purpose in the question design was to provide opportunities for the participants to share their hopes and dreams for the future.

As typical in qualitative research, probe questions were created that “focus[ed] on what happened to individuals, why they believe it happened as it did, and what it mean[t] to them” (McMillan, 2004, p. 274). Understanding the ways people have chosen to live with their unresolved pain or anger is important to exploring the answers to the research question, and important to understanding conflict transformation (Bar-On, 2008, p. 2). The semi-structured interview questions reflect the interconnections among the literatures about education and Aboriginal people in Canada, identity conflict, conflict transformation, and storytelling. The questions were approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board prior to the data collection phase, and are presented in Appendix B. The questions were used as guidelines rather than asked to each participant in order to encourage storytelling. After each interview, participants were invited to attend a Bead Workshop, which was the second phase of data collection.

According to Indigenous research, participants must feel safe and be safe. The workshop and the interviews provided such a context. The two methods also reinforced the mandate within Indigenous research that participants must feel that they have been heard “with more than the ear” (Wilson, 2008, p. 59). In this way, the research instruments reflect the positive implications of connection and relationship, while acknowledging the fact that change, and the recollections of life experiences, are not one-directional (Lederach, 2003, p. 41).

In order to explore the perceptions of school and the hopes and fears of the participants, the researcher sought to establish and conduct the field work within the trust environment specified by Indigenous scholars as critical to effective research with Aboriginal people (Wilson, 2008). Mindful of establishing some preliminary relationships, the researcher made four visits to Bison Park specifically related to the study. The initial visit was to select the interview setting and to leave interview sign-up sheets with the teachers. The other three visits related directly to data collection: twice to conduct interviews, and once to facilitate the Bead Workshop.

Respectful of how the participants dressed during the data collection activities, the researcher wore jeans and a sweater, running shoes and no jewelry. During earlier visits to Bison Park, the researcher had overheard negative comments from some of the students regarding the difference in attire between them and some of the student tutors from the nearby university, and so the researcher was careful to physically reflect the culture of the Maskotew Kiskin in order to minimize distractions while collecting data. In this way, the researcher was making an effort to be sensitive to the Bison Park culture and to be continuously guided by the formation of relationships, as required by Indigenous research principles (see page 70). When approaching the campus, the researcher observed some of the participants sharing a cigarette outside the school building and, after greeting those she knew by name, stopped and visited a little with them. Participants and other students, who recognized the researcher from her time as a tutor in Bison Park, made the researcher feel welcome to the community.

In total, fifteen interviews were conducted during the first data collection period. The original intent of the study was to interview at least 25 individuals. The teachers had

suggested participation to more than 25, and there were a total of 25 individuals signed up to participate, but during the week of data collection they did not all keep their appointments. Of the 15 that were interviewed, four were not on the original list. The face-to-face interviews with eight women and seven men took place within the library at Maskotew Kiskin. According to Druckman (2005, p. 154) personal interviews can yield significant benefits. The interviews were scheduled but they were flexible. When it was time for the interviews, the researcher waited at the door of the interview room just prior to the appointment in order to greet each participant by name, introduce herself and thank them for participating in the study. Together, the researcher and the participant walked into the interview room and selected a seat at the table near the south-facing window. The interviewer and one participant at a time sat face-to-face alone in the library, the tape recorder placed to one side to record the information. The semi-structured interviews resembled conversations more than interviews. The beginning of each interview offered a common invitation to the participants to tell their story, but the researcher also ensured that the questions in Appendix B were addressed in substance by each of the participants, which sometimes required her to ask a more specific question.

A significant portion of the early moments of each interview was allocated to establishing a relationship with each participant through a statement of introduction, and family heritage of the researcher, which includes Aboriginal ancestry. The study itself was described and its purposes stated clearly and positively to each participant. Any general questions they had were answered and the researcher ensured that they were comfortable where they were seated. Complete anonymity was promised to every participant; one participant was particularly concerned about his/her identity and although the permission

forms were signed, the individual insisted that no photographs be taken. The common introduction for the semi-structured interviews is replicated at the back of the dissertation as Appendix C.

Something curious happened in regard to the formal permission processes. The participants had seemed a little surprised by the request for written permission. Some shrugged their shoulders, then signed, others said, "Why not?" and two lowered their eyebrows when the documents were produced. This may be explained in Wilson's (2008) book about Indigenous research, which states "the consent was, they talked to me. That was consent. And they trusted me, but they didn't trust the form and they didn't trust the university" (p. 116). They signed willingly, but their pause has prompted a lot of thinking about the apparent intrusion of the official processes of university research into the early stages of the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

After this, the researcher commended the participants for their courageous decision to return to school, and that each one represents hope because of their decision. During this time, a second curious, or notable, development took place in the relationship between the participant and the researcher. At first the participants rarely looked at the researcher (most looked out the window) until the researcher said the word "hope," and with that, they turned and faced her directly and maintained eye contact throughout the interview. After the initial question inviting participants to share their school experiences, the participants did most of the talking. There was eye contact, smiling, and most participants sat back in the chair and seemed increasingly relaxed as they told their stories. Comments from the respondents sometimes led to probing questions that led to additional information about their family, school, and personal lives. The participants described isolation, conflict, and

pain; but they also described love, hope and courage in profound measures, and these are also explored further in the next chapter and in the final chapter of the dissertation.

Although the participants were asked to talk about their school experiences, it was immediately apparent that the stories were intensely relational, and the researcher began to consider Lederach's transformation model as a suitable framework for the analysis that would follow.

In order to acquire answers to the research question, the researcher ensured during the semi-structured interviews the participants addressed the questions developed for the interviews. The interviews were of different lengths, depending on the stories told by the participants. The shortest interview was 17 minutes and the longest 79 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants were given \$20 cash for their time and their choice of one of three gifts (chocolates, candies or cookies). The participants seemed more delighted with the gifts than with the \$20 and one took an extra gift for her grandson. After the participants had selected a gift and been thanked for their participation, they were invited to the Bead Workshop scheduled to take place on the Maskotew Kiskin premises two weeks later.

The participants were identified only by letters and numbers (A1, A2, B1, B2 etc.) on a recording device. At the end of the week, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher over a period of four months. There are no personal identifiers on the recording device or on the interview transcripts. Both the device and the transcripts were stored within a keyed box in the locked office of the researcher first at Menno Simons College, University of Winnipeg and after May, 2012, in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at St. John's College, University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, Canada. The transcripts were

stored in the locked box until the Bead Workshop transcriptions were completed. Then they were all put together, for a total of 104 single spaced pages of transcription. These were then expanded to double spaced, and line numbers were entered for ease of analysis.

Two weeks later, in the same location but a different room in the Maskotew Kiskin Adult Learning Centre, the second data collection activity took place. This is identified in this chapter and throughout the dissertation as “the Bead Workshop.” The Bead Workshop is a peace-building model that follows the reciprocity and relational principles of Indigenous research while facilitating individuals’ opportunities to make sense of their life circumstances and the potential role of the school and education policy in why the participants left school. Furthermore, data are collected in the form of stories through the eyes of the storyteller. Field-tested in other protracted conflicts, the workshop has proven to be a peacebuilding, conflict transforming methodology that promotes deeper understanding and healing in individuals and among communities (Bar-On, 2008; Hetherington, 2008; O’Hagan, 2008b). Prior to designing the study, the researcher travelled to Londonderry, Northern Ireland for training in facilitating narrative-based peace-building workshops.

The Bead Workshop was developed by researchers in Israel (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004) as a culturally appropriate model¹⁵ through which people could structure their thoughts around their personal experiences of loss and trauma. It was then modified by the Irish Peace Processes where the bead component was added (Hetherington, 2008). In Northern Ireland, the workshop is currently conducted “to help people tell and hear

¹⁵ For a full discussion of *To Reflect and Trust*, see Bar-On, 2008, and Bar-On & Kassem, 2004).

personal experiences of the [Northern Ireland identity] conflict” (O’Neill, TUH website). It was particularly appropriate for this study because like its name, it promotes healing and understanding within the context of protracted conflict. The workshop assists people to make sense of one’s life circumstances; it is a service, not a counseling session (Hetherington, 2008). The TUH website states that community healing begins with individual healing, but “...how do you get to the truth when one of the most important things is the admission that ‘my truth’ is not ‘your truth’?” (O’Neill, TUH website). This is a similar challenge for Canada’s Aboriginal people and so the Bead Workshop seemed like a good, transferable and appropriate second research tool (Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2002; Turner, 2008).

The workshop design was modified by the researcher from a portion of a three day voluntary residential weekend into a voluntary two hour workshop in a day-school setting that seemed more suited for the study. The adaptation is based on the researcher’s experiences with the workshop and her training. As a doctoral student at the University of Manitoba, the researcher experienced the power of associating the beads with one’s perceptions of circumstances and feelings in a class conducted by Dr. Jessica Senehi. During facilitator training in 2010 and 2011 in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, the researcher was a participant and an observer in several Bead Workshops and witnessed the power of the workshop to help people talk about their stories and to make sense of what they had experienced. While a contract faculty member at two universities in Winnipeg, the researcher conducted a total of six Bead Workshops with undergraduate students in preparation for the field work for this study.

The workshop itself is interactive and creates a safe space where individuals can begin to think about their stories. Bracelets or key chains are formed through the personal selection of beads, which are selected to represent significant moments, people or events which have shaped the lives of the participants to date, and others to represent hopes and dreams into the future.

The Bead Workshop follows the reciprocity and relational accountability principles of Indigenous research while creating a safe space that facilitates opportunities for individuals to make sense of their life circumstances and for this study, why the participants left school. Although it is not used in Northern Ireland to collect data, the Bead Workshop allowed data for this study to be collected in the form of stories through the eyes of the storyteller, which is one of the key elements of Indigenous research. Eighteen people and one teacher attended and participated. Three of the Bead Workshop participants had also been part of the Interview phase.

During the workshop, participants were invited to select beads to represent their experience. They made and kept bead jewelry representing significant events, people and memories in their life stories. This helps people make sense of what has happened in their lives. At the end of the workshop, participants were left with a self-created expression of their stories in the form of a bracelet or key chain. The Bead Workshop provided an opportunity to leave a tangible and significant gift in the form of a personal bracelet or lanyard for the people of the Bison Park community who participated in the research project. Tokens like this are respectful, important cultural reflections (Schirch, 2005;

Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). After they had beaded their stories, seven of the participants shared them with the researcher¹⁶. Photographs were taken of the bracelets and key chains.

The Bead Workshop for this study took place at 1pm on a Friday afternoon in the main classroom of Maskotew Kiskin, which is round and a favourite room within the school community. Six tables with four chairs each were set around the perimeter of the room. In the center of the room, three tables were placed in a row and 48 small containers of beads were arranged on the table tops. At one end, wires the length of bracelets and lanyards were placed on a paper plate so that the participants could choose one or the other. Next to the wires was a stack of 30 paper bowls that were intended for use by the participants to select the beads that represent the significant people, places, circumstances or events in their story that they wanted placed on their bracelet or lanyard. The students arrived between 12:45 and 1pm and chose seats at the tables arranged around the room. They were welcomed by the teacher, who then introduced the researcher. Some of the participants smiled; most did not look at the researcher at the beginning of the workshop. The Letters of Consent for Adult Participants (Interviews) were explained and the participants who agreed to be part of the study signed them (Appendix D). Then, the Promise of Confidentiality was explained (Appendix E) and all of the participants signed these. The researcher thanked the participants for their attendance, and then briefly

¹⁶ Geographic locations have been renamed to protect the identities of the participants and are from the public commons. Pseudonyms for geographic locations have been drawn from the novels of J. J. R. Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*), Ken Follett (*Pillars of the Earth*), Shannon Hale (*Books of Bayern*), and Christopher Paolini (*Inheritance Cycle*), and from the television series, *Dr. Who*.

introduced the workshop, since most of the participants had not learned about the workshop at the interview stage¹⁷.

At the commencement of the Bead Workshop, the researcher explained that the participants would have an opportunity to think about their lives from their earliest memory and into their future, with attention to significant people or events that surrounded each memory. The look into the future is important to take participants forward toward their hopes and dreams. After a five minute reflection period during which participants were encouraged to keep their eyes open but to remain silent, they were invited to approach the beads and select those that represented the memories, events, and people who had come to their mind during the reflection period. Participants selected approximately 15-20 beads onto a paper plate and then returned to their tables of four, where they threaded them onto lanyards or bracelets to hold their stories. After approximately twenty minutes, and after they had strung the beads, participants were invited to share their stories with the others at their table, and then with the group. Those who offered to have their stories recorded indicated so, and the researcher photographed their beads and recorded their stories at their tables. In this way, the methodology met the requirement of Indigenous research that listeners to the stories can draw their own conclusions and gain life lessons from the personal perspectives of the stories¹⁸.

The stories resonated with profound love and courage, and yet many of the circumstances and events were deeply tragic. On the recordings, one can hear the

¹⁷ The Common Introduction to the Bead Workshop and the explanation given to the participants is provided as Appendix F.

¹⁸ The four primary characteristics of Indigenous research used to guide this study are summarized on page 70 of this dissertation.

researcher sobbing with the storyteller. One female participant, who is a known gang member (named Diane in this study), startled the researcher after the workshop by reaching out an arm as the researcher passed the kitchen in the Maskotew facility, pulling her into the kitchen, and closing and locking the door! Diane wanted to share her bracelet with the researcher and agreed to have her story recorded in a profound moment of trust, but did not want the others to hear her story. After her story, she wiped her eyes on her T-shirt, stated, "That's 32 years in a couple of beads. It's scary. Enough of this sh*t." She smiled broadly at the researcher through her tears and left the kitchen with her head held high. The researcher was stunned at the horrors Diane had endured, but was also deeply moved by the tremendous love and courage in Diane's story. Much of this is shared in the next chapter.

During the Bead Workshop, most of the participants were actively engaged in the reflection process, but one woman, identified as Annie in this study, took many, many deep breaths and although she did thread a bracelet, she would not share her story. After the workshop, she approached the researcher after the room was empty of participants and said:

ANNIE: "I was scared to do this, but my bracelet is ...like there's more good things...see all the sparkles and all the nice beads?...so thanks, eh."

After the workshop, seven participants were willing to share their stories and/or have photographs taken of their bracelets. Three of these had been interviewed. The Workshop participants had signed permission forms so that the stories and the pictures could be shared with the readers of this report.

The researcher functioned primarily as a facilitator/ participant observer during the workshop. One purpose of the workshop, stated above, was to leave a gift with each participant in the Indigenous spirit of respect and to acknowledge the relationships that had been established. Rich data emerged from the stories that provided sobering yet inspiring windows into the hardships of life for the participants and promoted greater understanding about how they perceived conflict. As the stories were shared, they were recorded. The recordings were catalogued in the same way that the interviews had been, by letter and number (A1, B1, C1, D1, etc.). Then they were transcribed and printed with double line spacing, and placed in the locked box with the interview transcripts.

The bracelets and lanyards are a kind of peace building ritual, which “empowers people to be free even while in the grips of [different levels of] conflict” (Schirch, 2005, p. 161). This empowerment comes from the way that stories are held in the meanings associated with each of the beads selected by the participant. The workshop formally acknowledged the participants, who left the community with a tangible representation of their stories and experiences (O’Hagan, 2008; Schirch, 2005). Although the bead workshop produced data, it was important and respectful to provide a forum for participants to create and keep a bracelet that reflects their educational experiences and hopes. After the Bead Workshop, the researcher shared coffee with the participants in the common hall. They invited her to attend their graduation ceremony in June. The researcher did attend the ceremony and watched with admiration as seven of the participants received their high school diplomas.

After the Bead Workshop transcripts had been printed and stored in the locked box with the interview transcripts, they were all retrieved and read, along with the interview

transcripts. The researcher looked for common themes among the stories. The coding and interpretation processes of the data are explained at the end of this chapter. Below, the participants are introduced.

The Participants

This study focused on a small adult population associated with an alternative adult high school situated in the community of Bison Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Although there has been some recent research enquiring about life trends and social issues with the Bison Park community, none specifically ask the population about their own school experiences (Silver, 2006; Silver & Mallett, 2002). Bison Park is not a homogenous population, but it is a poor, urban population with representation from a number of Reserves and is home to people who identify as Aboriginal, including non-status, Métis and urban Aboriginal people (Winnipeg, 2006).

There were twenty-two (22) participants in the study, from which nineteen (19) transcripts were produced, fifteen (15) from the semi-structured interviews and four (4) from the Bead Workshop. The ages of the participants ranged from 17-57. Seven men and eight women (15) were interviewed, 18 (six men and 12 women) participated in the bead workshop and one female teacher participated in the workshop. Eleven of the subjects are Status Indians; twelve started school on Reserves, and six started school off Reserve (two of these in the city of Winnipeg, where the study is situated, but then moved to attend Reserve schools). One participant identifies as Aboriginal, because his mother married two different Aboriginal men and he was raised on reserves with Aboriginal step siblings. There was a fairly even distribution of the study participants in the interview phase and in the Bead Workshop phase of the research study, controlling for age, gender and Status.

According to peace research (O'Hagan, 2008, p. 25), eighteen participants are within the ideal range for the workshop. The Bead Workshop had eighteen (18) participants, but just seven (7) gave permission for their beads to be photographed, and four (4) gave permission to record their stories. Three (3) of the bead workshop participants were among those who were interviewed, and the data in the stories provided some new information, and included much more personal detail than the interviews did. Appendix G presents the participants with pseudonym names and one piece of information in order to make it easier for readers to follow their stories. In summary, there were 22 participants, but 19 transcripts for analysis.

Towards Understanding and Healing outlines ethical considerations for participants in the storytelling processes, which are similar to those reflected in the research literature in education, Indigenous research, peace and conflict studies, and TCPS2 (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Druckman, 2005). These were satisfied in the attached Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Interviews) (Appendix H). Participants were offered an executive summary of the final report, and 12 signed to receive the executive summary after the dissertation receives final approval. Participants were provided with a copy of the letter of information and permissions for their personal records. They were assured that pseudonyms are used in the study, including geographic and ethnic pseudonyms. All recordings, note cards and computer records were reviewed only by the researcher, maintained in a locked briefcase or home office to which only the researcher has the keys. They shall be destroyed after a reasonable time period after the completion of the research study and successful defense of the researcher's dissertation.

Briefly stated, the goal of the methodology was to respect the integrity of Indigenous research and use creativity to explore the experiences and attitudes of a small sample of Aboriginal people who had quit school and returned, in order to answer the research question. The interviews provided an opportunity for storytelling about life experiences, and the Bead Workshop provided an opportunity for participants to make sense of their experiences by telling the stories of significant people, events and circumstances in their lives. The Bead Workshop also complemented the data from the interviews, and provided more data, and also a much deeper window into the affective side and the experiential side of the participants' stories. The longer term goal for the interviews and the Bead Workshop was to provide relevant empirical research for the design of relevant, sustainable and peaceful policy outcomes for Aboriginal education (Byrne, 1997; Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1995, 1999, 2003).

Coding and Interpreting the Data

Careful data management is critical to a successful research report (Creswell, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Druckman, 2005). The researcher maintained a computerized and handwritten data journal throughout the project, commencing with the Ethics and Committee approval of the University of Manitoba in late 2011. All communication with participants and interview coordinators (identified by code rather than actual names or titles) was recorded in this journal with corresponding dates and the subject of the communication. Observations and field notes were made in the journal after the interviews and after the Bead Workshop. Attention to detail during the collection and recording phase of the research project facilitated data analysis (Bouma & Ling, 2004). This research follows qualitative methods but more specifically the Indigenous research requirements.

Wilson (2008) is careful to caution that respect and relationship must lead any form of research, especially oral research, and this was built into the study design. At the completion of the interviews, recordings were transcribed by the researcher. Pseudonyms were developed for all of the participants and for the educators and community liaison officer; no surnames are mentioned in the analysis. Except for the city of Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada, all geographic references are also pseudonyms. One of the purposes of the study was to analyze the findings with Lederach's conflict transformation model in order to better understand how Aboriginal people have made sense of school, why the participants dropped out of school, and what the fears and hopes of the participants are for themselves and for their families.

As described above, interviews (15) were recorded and inventoried by letters and numbers (for example, A1, A2, B1, B2) on a recording device and then transcribed by the researcher. Recorded stories from the Bead Workshop (4) were transcribed and the corresponding photograph of the participants' creative bracelet or lanyard was attached. The remaining photographs (3) were filed with the transcripts. There are no other identifiers on the recording device or interview transcripts. In total, 19 transcripts and seven photographs were stored within a keyed box in the locked office of the researcher in St. John's College, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, with a spare copy on one computer flash drive locked in the researcher's safety deposit box at a chartered Canadian bank.

After the semi-structured interviews and the stories from the Bead Workshop were transcribed, they were line-numbered and printed. The transcripts were read several times, as the researcher looked for themes. A concept map was drawn which led to coding the themes in the contexts of home, school, and dropping out. Originally, ten common themes

were identified in the transcripts, which were later reduced to six when they were applied to the Lederach model. Before application of themes to the model, however, theme sheets were designed and direct quotations from the participants were placed into the columns and coded according to themes like “peer influences” and “loss,” which had come directly out of the narratives.

Once again, all of the theme sheets were read with the words of the participants organized into them, and then Lederach’s model of conflict transformation was reproduced in a column of concepts to allow the themed data to be placed within the components of the model, according to his subcomponents. This was a challenge because Lederach’s definitions are intentionally broad, and so the researcher honed the definitions of each component and subcomponent of the model to ensure that data would be properly grouped according to the narratives of the participants. For example, Inquiry 1, which has Issue, Patterns, History as Lederach’s subcomponents, was changed in response to the data, so that the Inquiry 1 subcomponents became Family Life, School Life, and Loss. This exercise adapted the model more specifically to the context of the study and aligned the findings with the primary research questions of the study. It also became apparent that the literature review for the study contributed significantly to the analysis, as it provided the historical context important to understanding the current state of Aboriginal education, and contextualized characteristics of identity conflict evident in the historical foundations of the study.

Although the themes from the transcripts were initially placed into the three Inquiries of the Lederach model, the subcomponents were renamed in order to more closely reflect the themes within the narratives. With the subcomponents renamed, the

transcripts were explored to identify conflicts, circumstances or individuals that caused the participants to leave school, and then were explored for the reasons they gave for their return, since this piece of information was in every transcript. Careful attention to the data and the relationships within the data meant that at this stage of interpreting the data, three affective themes, or deeply held beliefs, emerged prominently, and this will be shown in the findings. Then, the transcripts were reread for specific identification of what seemed to motivate the participants, which seemed to be deeper, or affective, themes. Courage, hope and love were readily recognized as particularly dominant in the narratives, and the researcher began to ponder the significance of these three in conflict transformation, and whether or not their role in the narratives of the participants might be larger than the model suggests.

When the themes in the semi-structured interviews were coordinated with the Bead Workshop themes, the parallels in the experiences of the participants were very obvious, as were the affective themes, which appeared to have the strength of belief systems, and were even stronger than emotions or motivations. Many of the circumstances and events were nearly identical in all of the data. The transcripts were then printed again and words were highlighted and sorted again into three time frames: before the participants began school, while they were in school, and the critical period just before they quit school. The similarities across the experiences were once again highly evident. This led to another read of the original transcripts, in order to re-identify the explanations for returning to school. The reasons were clearly just two, but the same for all the participants.

In the end, the themes from the transcripts were placed within the original Lederach framework but with reassigned names on the subcomponents. These form the

framework for how the findings are presented in the next chapter. The cyclical process of change and the circumstances and situations that prompted responses (the conflict transformation) were fairly simple to identify once the narratives had been coded and sorted. Through the three lenses of conflict transformation, the research questions were answered and the writing of the thesis began.

The goals of the methodology blended conflict transformation themes with Indigenous research. At the personal level, the study used creativity to explore the experiences and attitudes of a small sample of Aboriginal people according to their own narratives and stories. The interviews provided an opportunity for storytelling about school experiences, and the Bead Workshop provided an opportunity for participants to tell the stories of significant people, events and circumstances in their lives. This is relational information that is not prevalent in the literatures that informed the study, but was readily identifiable and understandable as part of the conflict transformation cycle when the data were applied to the Lederach framework.

The methodology adhered to the Aboriginal worldview and paid careful attention to relational accountability with a goal to empirical findings that extended our understandings of the Aboriginal perspectives on educational experiences and on conflict and conflict transformation. The bead workshop and the interview methods were selected as demonstrations of respect for Indigenous research, and in narrative, to utilize methods that meet the Indigenous research criteria identified by Indigenous scholars. The empirical findings were expected to provide a working example of the interrelated and interwoven themes and relationships of conflict and conflict transformation while presenting evidence for analysis.

Summary

The chapter began with a presentation of Indigenous Research. There are four general principles for Indigenous research outlined by Indigenous scholars. These are: 1) relational accountability throughout the research process, 2) the recognition of the diversity and complexity of the whole being in the research design and conclusions, 3) the inclusion of spiritual and relational dimensions in research, and 4) the creation of spaces for people to express themselves safely. Then, storytelling as a narrative research method was presented in relation to the study. Then, the research question was presented. In response to the literature, and the evidence that Bead Workshops are contributing to healing and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, the study was designed to collect data through the narrative methods of semi-structured interviews and a peace-building Bead Workshop. This combination balanced the requirements of the university with the researcher's desire to conform to Indigenous research principles outlined by Indigenous scholars and by the TCPS2, and to test the Irish methods in the Canadian context. Conflict transformation provides the framework for analysis of the narratives because it leverages the power of storytelling and "relationships—visible and invisible immediate and long-term—are the heart of transformational processes" (Lederach, 2003, p. 17).

The research design for this study of conflict transformation was carefully constructed on the literature about identity conflict, conflict and conflict transformation literature, Indigenous research, and narrative methodologies. Data were collected through two vehicles: semi-structured interviews and a Bead Workshop. The research question, the methods, and how the data were coded and interpreted were detailed as the last section of the chapter. The findings of the study are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Findings

The people who come to us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is their story (Bochner, 2001 p. 132).

This chapter presents the research findings of this study, which, as referenced in the quote above, were collected as stories, or narratives. The study asked “What are the perceptions of the school experiences of urban Aboriginal adults, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes and wishes for the future? And what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?” The stories contain the patterns and web of relationships that characterize both identity conflict (Rothman, 1997) and conflict transformation (Lederach, 2003). The research instruments are faithful to, and respectful of, the attention to relationships inherent in conflict transformation and in the Aboriginal worldview, and to the criteria outlined in Chapter 3, page 70, for Indigenous research (Absolon, 2011; Rice, 2005; Wilson, 2008).

The findings of the study provide substantial evidence that the participants left school in the context of many relationships, and that they did not directly associate dropping out of school with the reasons presented in the literature. According to the participants, they left school in the context of severe life difficulties. The findings will show the highly relational nature of their lives, and how the conflicts they encountered

demanding responses that are both constructive and destructive, and demonstrate Lederach's (2003) conflict transformation thesis that "conflict changes things" (p. 25). Ultimately, as youth, they dropped out of school. However, it is also evident in the findings that great love was also a significant factor in their responses to conflict. Because of this love, and the associated grief, loss of loved ones is related to dropping out of school. Later, the findings show that great love for their children and a sense of self-worth are related to their return to high school.

There are patterns, common circumstances and similar relationships in the narratives presented in this chapter. The quotations on the following pages give examples of the early lives of the participants, which are noticeably parallel: frequent moving, the absence of a nurturing parent, staggering losses, painful school experiences in the Reserve schools and public schools, bullying by other students, and a sense of personal insignificance and inferiority. These findings are consistent across the data, indicating that the conflict transformation analysis provides a major contribution to understanding the broader relational context from which this group of Aboriginal people left school.

The findings are presented in this chapter, integrated and thematically organized according to Lederach's conflict transformation model. The full model is complex and is meant to cover a variety of situations, but as the findings will show, this study demonstrates the personal and relational dimensions of conflict transformation, and further amplifies certain elements of the Lederach model.

The first section is called Inquiry 1, the Presenting Situation. As explained in Chapter 3, data were sorted within the Lederach Inquiries according to common themes: Family Life, School Life, and Loss. The second section of the chapter is called the Horizon

of the Future and the findings are similarly organized by themes and called Critical Periods, Quitting School, and Future Plans. The third section is called the Development of Change Processes, as it is in the Lederach model, but due to the prominence of the affective domain in the findings, the categories are named after the themes of Love, Courage and Hope.

The Presenting Situation

According to Lederach (2003), the Presenting Situation “reminds us that the immediate issues are rooted in a context—in patterns of relationships and structures, all with a history” (p. 34). The Presenting Situation is best understood in the relational context. Lederach explains that “the patterns of ‘how things have been’ provide the context from which the immediate issues of dispute rise to the surface” (p. 35). However, it became apparent quickly during the interviews and the Bead Workshop that the Presenting Situation was difficult to discern, in the way that Lederach said that transforming conflicts are difficult to identify (Lederach, 2003, p. 39). However, the participants began with stories about their childhoods, and then their school experiences, and so these were placed into the model as the subcomponents of the Presenting Situation.

The findings for analysis in Lederach’s first Inquiry are presented below under the headings of Family Life, School Life, and Loss, and tell the stories about the common experiences and relationships that characterized the home lives of the participants in relation to their school experiences.

Family Life

The family environments in which the participants grew up were characterized by frequent moving, a lack of importance on education as a family value, violence and

poverty, a sense of insignificance or isolation on the part of the participant, and the absence of at least one parent figure. Lederach (2003) explains that in conflict transformation, relational and historical patterns generate more issues and conflicts as people begin to respond to conflict in this context (p. 36). Interestingly, when asked about their school experiences, they talked about other issues that they associated with dropping out of school. When they were asked to share information about their early school experiences, each of the participants spoke first of their childhood family life, and so responses about family life are presented before the findings about school life.

All of the participants grew up in families that moved “a lot.” In the responses to questions about family life and the early school years, relocation appeared in fourteen of fifteen interviews (93.3%) and in the workshop transcripts.

RESEARCHER: Would you tell me about your early school experience?

SANDY: [We] moved lots. I was always like the new kid in school. Get settled, ya, get settled- you’d go to a new school, get acclimated [*sic*], start making new friends and then once you made new friends it’s like ‘Okay it’s time to move’ ...it was just moving around a lot... moving midyear- it always affected the learning.

FRED: When I was younger, well, we moved around lots.Always different kinds of schools. We were roaming around ‘cause my mother got a divorce from my dad.

GISELLE: Um... good question... um...[I went to school] somewhere here in Manitoba. I couldn’t really tell you where. Well, actually we were all over the place...all over down Almida way.

DORIS: I didn't thrive while in school...I...I...I don't know...because I was always moving. Ya. It really affected my learning and everything right?

CYRIL: I been all over this Manitoba for schooling.

The participants associated family moves with having to change schools frequently. For Kate, the memories of frequently changing schools were obviously significant to her story, and remained vivid:

KATE: The first four years of my life I went to residential school in Tamost. And then Grade 5 I did it in Rivendell, Saskatchewan, near Waymeet Lake. Grade 6, I did back home near Waymeet Lake. But I only did one week in Grade 6 then they upped me to Grade 7. Then Grade 8, I did that back home too. By Grade 9, I went to school in the States. So I went there for one year but it was kinda lonesome 'cause I didn't know anybody there...I think I got married just before I turned 17.

Charlie's memories are similar:

CHARLIE: We did a lot of moving. The family was dysfunctional, so I uh, moved a lot. Gallifrey, Manitoba, Angmar, Manitoba, til I was about four, and then I came to Winnipeg... Lord Valinor, uh, Lorien Creek... Knightsbridge, and I quit at Knightsbridge.

Frequent moving is a major finding toward understanding the family lives of the participants, and represents one of the many relationships to schooling identified by the participants.

According to the narratives, families and communities did not encourage high school completion. The participants did not feel conflict with regard to leaving school early, and indicated that they knew their family members would not challenge them. All

but one study participant specifically indicated that completing their schooling was not a priority in their homes; the final participant did not address this matter. This represents 93.3% of the research participants.

DONALD: I didn't have to go to school; my Grandpa didn't force me to go to school, so I didn't want to go to school.

SANDY: Our learning- it wasn't really pushed to do good in school and stay in school, and so I dropped out, like, early.

At the time that they stopped attending school, the study participants were not challenged. None of the participants referenced repercussions or consequences to quitting school. The participants spoke often of the fact that school and education were not valued in their families:

CHARLIE: School wasn't pushed a lot in our family....I dunno why.

GISELLE: It wasn't really pushed to stay in school, so I dropped out early.

SANDY: My dad pulled me aside, says like, 'If you don't wanna go further, like, you know, don't beat yourself up.'

Related to this theme is a sense that the participants felt uncared for.

DONALD: I dropped out of school at that age. Thirteen. I did nothing. I didn't go to school I just stayed home...turned into an alcoholic at a young age. Ya, it was bad. I went through a rough patch. And at 17 I was drinking too much- when I was living alone on the Reserve. My house was basically party central because I was alone... nobody really did anything or cared.

GISELLE: I think you have to have somebody who can identify with you and who is smart enough to make, I dunno, suggestions and like- decisions.... I dunno, I dunno.

SANDY: I just didn't have that, um, conducive environment that would- uh- encourage me.

The participants suggested that they might have been receptive to adult intervention regarding education. Six of the participants (40%) expressed an expectation for encouragement or guidance from an adult regarding the importance of completing school.

PHOEBE: I dropped out at the beginning of grade seven....I probably would have went back, ya, if they woulda came looking for me.

DORIS: Families should encourage kids to come to school.

The non-support for education seemed to disappoint the participants when they reflected on their family environment, and is apparent in their suggestions of what adults should have done to encourage education. It seems that this contributed to their sense of feeling unimportant.

In many cases, one parent had died or abandoned the family, and so the remaining parent was left with the responsibilities of raising the children. Fourteen of nineteen participants (66%) specifically referenced a home with one parent figure and three said they had not had parents. Seventeen of the 19 participants, or 77.2%, identified the physical absence of at least one parent and expressed regret at the loss or absence of that relationship.

There were mentions of violence at home in 100% of the narratives. Some examples are repeated below:

DIANE: I was taken to [the child welfare agency] and uh, my dad had assaulted my mom so badly that she was like covered in blood...so he beat her pretty bad...the only thing I can really remember aside from [the child welfare agency] as a kid was when I was four or five, my mom being in a hospital. She was, uh, raped and she jumped out of a 2nd story window and I remember her in a stretcher, and that neck brace, and uh, cast, and the only thing they would give her was ice chips – that's the only thing I can remember.

FLOYD: I was beaten by my grandmother [for 13 years of my life]....my father came to take me away from my grandmother.

LISA: There was a grey period of like nothing but fighting and drinking and oh, lots of crap. Lots of violence, lots of alcohol, lots of strangers. Around that time I was messed up by my uncle for a good couple of years.

SHYANNE: [I was] taken away from my mom ata young age...I can only remember the really bad times, like, I have no memories of anything good in my life.

FRED: I was down and out. When I was young I found it very difficult to concentrate in school because of fear.

The participants also related their family life as children with poverty:

DONALD: I grew up in a poor family, didn't have clothes, I was embarrassed to go to school 'cause wearing the same clothes all the time...you know...little things like that.

KATE: It was hard 'cause we didn't have electricity. We didn't have running water. Nothing. We had candles, oil lamps; had to get the water from the lake. Stuff like that. Cut your own wood.

NORBERT: My family got separated when I was fourteen...at times I found it very difficult to concentrate in school because of fear...there was a lot of times I had to go to school, you know, hungry, because we didn't have enough food.

The rather shocking hardships of life and relationships emanating from environments of frequent moving, absent parents, and poverty are a common pattern in every narrative describing family life.

A sense of isolation is an implied finding in nineteen of the nineteen transcripts. Fred said "Always have to do it yourself to get it done." Floyd stated twice that he had been "down and out" and very alone. Diane said, "After my brother was born, I was forgotten." Shyanne said, "Nobody really listens." All of the participants related their memories of family life with feelings of isolation and devaluation.

The family environment is an important finding, and provides a relational context that was readily associated with education for the participants. Nineteen of the nineteen participants talked about their childhoods in similar terms. They related their childhoods to moving frequently, little to no value placed on formal education, atmospheres of poverty, and feelings of isolation and insignificance. They also spoke about the absence of a nurturing or supportive parent, especially in the context of guidance regarding education. The patterns, relationships, and common characteristics of family life were constant across all of the narratives and then recurred when the participants talked about school life.

School Life

School life began positively for most of the participants, but then became associated with feelings of inferiority and embarrassment, which included falling behind academically, encountering lowered academic standards that the participants thought were only for Aboriginal students, bullying, and friends whose values did not include education. Most of the school experiences referenced by the participants took place in Reserve schools, though they all attended public schools, if only briefly. These are clearly differentiated in the excerpts below.

Sixty per cent of the participants in the interviews talked about having “loved” school when they began. Those that mentioned the start of their school lives spoke with smiles when they described their initial feelings about attending school as children:

RESEARCHER: *Did you like school?*

LEONARD: Oh yeah. I loved it...well, I just, I dunno I just loved it...at about maybe 8, 10 years old.

KATE: I like going to school. Even when I was younger. I had the highest average in the school. Even the teachers said I was the teachers’ pet (laughs)...oh, I just loved it there...I liked school. I was pretty smart.

NORBERT: I used to like going to school when I was a kid, eh?

RON: I used to go to a little school house. That’s where we went to school.

DAVID: We used to go to school, and me and the Treaty boys, we’d all skip school together. Six, seven of us, we’d go hiding in the old fish factory that we used to have there, when it was too cold to walk to school. We’d go play.

While nine of the fifteen, or 60.0% of the respondents, mentioned that they had originally liked school very much, fourteen of the interviewees (93.3%) said that sentiment began to change when they had to move frequently, and they fell behind.

As they left the primary years and moved into elementary school, the participants remembered being bullied¹⁹. Thirteen participants (86.7%) spoke of having experienced bullying in their Reserve schools. Although seven of the fifteen also attended city public schools for some period of time, just one mentioned experiencing bullying in a Winnipeg city high school. Significantly, these stories are responses to the question “*Please tell me about your early school experiences.*” The participants described cruel actions and words from others that made them feel different, insignificant, and powerless.

DORIS: We felt like we were outsiders in the other Reserve [school]. I guess we must have been like outsiders to the Reserve people because, uh, they used to pick on us. We used to get picked on because we weren't from their Reserve. The [people on the] other side of the river weren't all Treaty people, and we were all Treaty people on the Reserve that I used to live.

JAMES: I got teased definitely a lot, because I was the only white guy. I think there was one other [non-Aboriginal] kid in my school and he was the son of, like, the Principal right? So nobody really picked on him, 'cause his dad was the

¹⁹ The participants in this study describe bullying in terms that conform closely to the definition of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2013): “Leading researchers in the field of bullying appear to agree on the definition of bullying as deliberate, repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized.” For further information, see www.ccpa-accp.ca.

Principal obviously. And I had two step brothers that were like, Aboriginal so they actually kinda helped me out a lot in school with not getting picked on.

PHOEBE: When I was eight I went back to the Reserve. School was hard because there was a lot of bullying.

Bullying and teasing took place within the schools related to a negative education experience. Only one of the nineteen people identified white-Native bullying, while the rest are between Aboriginal students. There are references to adult bullies by two who attended school in the 1960s:

KATE: Our teacher used to pull our ears and take us out in the hallway (*said twice*). She'd only pick on about six of us. Some of them would cry...the other kids would do nothing...just laugh or be quiet. They figured they would get the same thing but they never did when they did something bad...ya.

The actions of a Kindergarten teacher played a significant role in Doris' school experience. Rather than blaming the school, Doris recognized that the teacher's actions were not condoned or allowed by the school administration. Doris shared these perceptions of her early school life:

DORIS: They are all communities around each other. It's a town. The town would be where the whites live, no offense, and in the outskirts they would put all the Natives. Ya, ya. 'Cause it was a mining town. My dad went to work in the mines. My dad moved to Ontario by himself, and my mom was carrying me in her belly when she left with her first child. She'd had her first born in a log cabin in the woods, in the bush. I was the only one who was born in the Reserve and then she took me to Ontario. My dad was a miner there. I grew up there.... I went to school,

nursery, I don't know. Some of the teachers were nice, some of them didn't care.

There's only this one that I remember, she was a nursery or kindergarten teacher she used to, uh, I don't know ... a lot of us kids were Natives and our parents were miners... and I don't know... if we would misbehave us she would smack us in the hand without the principal knowing, but she wasn't allowed to do it. She would pull us by the ear and take us out in the hall and make us sit there, she would make us sit in the corner. But half of the time none of us did anything wrong, but I think she just wanted to pick on us.

RESEARCHER: *(sympathetic sound)*

DORIS: She used to be real mean, that teacher. She used to pick on us Native kids all the time. I still remember her name.....So, but then, uh, like, we never told. I never told my parent about all the stuff that was going on with our students at school from nursery to kindergarten, 'cause we were always in the same class. I don't think any of us ever said anything. Eventually we went to grade one. [The grade one] teacher, she was nice. It was just that one class... most of teachers were nice to us but not that first.

For Doris, who was in her early 50's when she was interviewed, recalling her early school experiences and cruel treatment from the teacher significantly shaped her memories of school. Doris' perceptions are consistent with the general findings that in the early school years of the participants bullying was tolerated (86.7%) and in at least two situations, embodied in the teachers. However, there were also accounts of caring, supportive teachers who inspired and affirmed the participants (19.7%).

LEONARD: We had to walk through the bush for two or three miles...but we went every day, even when it was storming. Our teacher was from our community...I just loved to go.

CYRIL: They were real nice teachers. But the thing was the school was so far and we had to walk.

NORBERT: We had one teacher, eh, that used to make us cookies. That was good because we were always hungry at school.

Despite the kindness of some teachers, bullying is a consistent theme in the study findings. Many of the participants (86.7%) described memories of being bullied by students:

KATE: But as soon as we got into grade six or seven it was the other students that started bullying us. After we went into the other grades, in grade five or four the other kids would start, like... 'cause we moved from one town to the other town because my dad had switched mines and then we went to *[inaudible]*...and there we faced the same thing but not with the teachers—it was the students, the other kids. And ...eventually we started fighting back. It was off school grounds some of them would try to fight us, but it was always our older brothers or older friends that *[would]* come and help us. And then we would go back to school for lunch. Then they would rat out on us. And when it was off of school grounds we would try to say it didn't happen on school grounds. And then they would all stick up for the ones who would pick on us all the time. So then after that we came out here, moved from there... we moved from the community... the village was always like that around of those town schools. Some of those Native women are married to

white guys... I guess they're half... their kids were treated not like us Natives, they were treated like whites, with respect, I guess you could say. But not us, we were always put down, called down, called names, bullying and all that. And then, uh, we moved from there and came to Winnipeg.

Kate's experiences with bullying did not end when she moved to Winnipeg. Bullying played significantly in the school experiences of 86.7% of the study participants.

The respondents also spoke of feeling insignificant in school. Thirteen of fifteen study participants (86.7%) referenced overcrowded classrooms and run-down buildings, which reinforced their feelings of insignificance and unimportance. These were also some of the very few references to structural issues in the data. Interestingly, these were not the reasons that these particular participants gave for their own early departure from school.

RESEARCHER: Why do you think Aboriginal students quit school?

PHOEBE: The classes are oversized and they don't get enough of the teacher's help to help them one on one. They probably get discouraged 'cause they're not getting the help that they need, or they don't wanna ask for it 'cause the teacher's helping somebody else.

NORBERT: There's too many students... failing... no assistance or help with work.

MARY: Over there, there were gaps in that school.

Another structural finding was unsatisfactorily low and lowered academic standards for Aboriginal students. Ten of fifteen (66.6%) respondents said they believed that standards are lowered for Aboriginal students, and they felt this negatively affected school retention levels, and their own desire to stay in school.

JAMES: The Reserve schools make it easier on the children I think...on Aboriginal children, I guess. And then when they go to the public schools they're not that ready for it.

SANDY: There's a really free flowing structure of the school in my Reserve because over there they would hire people who weren't, um, educated enough to teach the grade level that they were teaching... so I mean....My Reserve is up north – it's like 3 hours up north. I know that the learning there was really behind. Um. I can remember playing mostly (laughs) rather than learning.

DONALD: In the high school environment everybody is kinda doing their own thing, kinda chaotic. That kinda screwed me up a little bit there cause they were learning levels like, a lot lower than any other school that I was at... when I actually [left the Reserve school] I really, really struggled and then ended up moving back to Winnipeg to go to the last couple of years of high school, but I was just so far behind that I just kinda... quit.

PHOEBE: I dropped out when I was thirteen... was in grade seven and that was basically grade six level from city standards.

LEONARD: I moved on to grade seven, but it was at a level of grade six. They would have you skip grades depending on your age. If you're fourteen you're going to grade 9. That was at the Reserve school.

CHARLIE: Ya. I was like...I felt stupid when they [made me skip grades].

The association between lower academic standards for Aboriginal students and their negative school experience contributed to the context in which they quit school.

Most of the participants identified lower standards as a factor in why they quit school, but Donald was the only participant to explain why lowered academic standards for Aboriginal students were a broader problem. He said, "I don't think [lowered standards are] necessary. No.... Like.... Well, you would think that when people are finishing school they will want to go into post-secondary education and into the work force at the same level than everybody in the work force, right? So no need for modification."

In summary, school life was characterized by bullying, students feeling insignificant or unimportant to the school community, and by lowered academic standards for Aboriginal students that embarrassed the students. Although nearly half of the participants said that they initially "loved" school, they did eventually withdraw in the context of difficult experiences that affected their attendance. For 93.3% of the respondents, changing schools frequently changed their positive association with school. Six, or 40.0%, said that they dropped out of school rather than changing schools when they were teens. Bullies were primarily students, although two of the participants did report bullying from teachers. Together, these common perceptions of school life provide a context of relationships and patterns characterized by bullying (86.7%), feelings of insignificance and unimportance, lowered academic standards for Aboriginal students, and frequently changing schools. The participants explained their school experiences in relation to their home life, and these were both affected by loss and grief.

Loss

Frequent and persistent loss in the young lives of the participants is a common experience among the participants. When asked to describe their early school experiences, nineteen participants provided 46 references to significant losses; most losses were the

deaths of family members, or at least the end of a very important familial relationship. This is important to the research because when people have “experienced numerous, repeated losses, most of which have never been healed,” they look for different ways to cope with the pain of their losses (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2008, p. 90), and the findings indicate that dropping out of school was related to these losses. The losses are many, and include the loss of a parent or parent figure; the loss of home (usually this involved being taken from the home by the provincial child welfare agency) and the additional loss of community through moving; the loss of health; loss of friends and family members; the loss of the school community; and the loss of personal safety. Tangible losses are always accompanied by intangible emotional and psychological losses, which include loss of respect, of dignity, of hope and voice, compounded by feelings of devaluation related to the absence of parents or parent figures (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2008, p. 80, 81). The narratives indicate that for this sample group, quitting school took place in relation to broken hearts.

The most common losses referenced by the participants were abandonment and separation from a parent or parent figure usually by death. Fourteen participants made twenty references to these two types of loss. They recognized that this had a profoundly negative effect on their schooling.

NORBERT: I grew up without my parents when I was fourteen. My family got separated when I was fourteen because my mother and my father were arguing... that's why they got separated. I probably would [have] finished school if my parents would not have separated.

PHOEBE: My Dad left us and I guess I just couldn't take it. Like I was a good student and everything, like, I was... I would go do my patrolling²⁰ and then bring my stuff back and then I'll sneak away from school (laughs). Then I'll come do the same thing at lunch time, do my patrolling and then sneak off after I'm done patrolling (sniffs). Ya. That's when I quit...it was just me... I guess I just couldn't handle my dad leaving us.

DONALD: My grampa raised me my whole life, I never had parents. So going to school was hard. He passed away and pretty much since then... I inherited the house when I was like fifteen years old. So I didn't go to school.

James' school experience was directly shaped by loss and in his story the themes found in this study overlap. He shared about the multiple losses of both parents, of his step siblings, and the toll of frequently changing communities under a cloud of shame. His losses include family, community and dignity. James experienced a prolonged period of living in women's shelters with his mother and eventually they both relocated to Winnipeg. Shortly after the relocation to Winnipeg, when James was 14, his mother abandoned him and he left school.

JAMES: I stayed like at the [family shelter] for a while there and ya...and my mom kinda met some guy on the internet and I was 14 and she kinda just moved to [another country] and married this guy ...I didn't talk to her for a long time [over

²⁰ Phoebe was a school crossing guard, a voluntary position. Crossing guards are responsible for "patrolling" traffic. In Manitoba, it is common for older elementary-aged students to serve as crossing guards for younger elementary students. This involves wearing a bright vest and holding a bright flag so that the patrol may control the flow of traffic at intersections where pedestrian students wish to cross.

eight years]....My Mom doesn't...say too much about the whole abandonment thing, right?

Kate experienced a number of personal losses that affected her dream of becoming a teacher. Her mother died when she was five. Kate quit school at 16 due to an arranged marriage with a man who refused to allow her to complete high school. Like the other respondents, Kate associated her losses with her educational experiences.

KATE: My real mother's name was Saniyah. That's an old Indian name. She died when I was 5 years old. They say my mom was beautiful...when I did an assignment I did something about her.

Others reference how the absence of a nurturing parent affected their school life:

KERRY: I raised two of my brothers by myself while I was in elementary school; [and] while my mom was drinking.

In this section, findings pertaining to the presenting situation were grouped as associations with home life, school life, and losses. According to the Lederach (2003) model, "immediate issues embedded in the sphere of history... are rooted in a context – in patterns of relationships and structures" (p. 34), which are both described eloquently in the narratives, and shared with the reader in the section above.

The Horizon of the Future

According to the Lederach model, the Horizon of the Future provides an orientation, or preferred state that shapes how people respond to conflict. He says the Horizon of the Future includes the "immediate solutions, relationships, structures – that involve possible avenues for dealing with the immediate presenting issues" (p. 36). In other words, choices are based, in part, on a desired future state.

The findings presented in this situation link the past and the future and provide another context that influenced quitting school. The excerpts from the participant narratives in this section are organized as Critical Periods, Quitting School, and Future Plans.

Critical Periods

The participants identified critical periods in their school-aged years that preceded dropping out of school. The participants associated critical circumstances, people, and events with their school experiences, and especially with dropping out. The findings in this section are chronologically associated with the time period leading up to their departure from school. The participants said that these critical periods were characterized by alcohol abuse; peers for whom education had no purpose or appeal; the absence of an adult who encouraged them to remain in school; feelings of isolation, insignificance, and inferiority; and the prospects of more moving and changing schools. These are called Critical Periods because the participants themselves described them as the events, relationships and circumstances that they directly associated with their departure from school.

The participants identify alcohol and substance abuse as a significant memory associated their school experiences. Alcohol abuse was mentioned in thirteen of fifteen interviews (86.7%) and then is related to quitting school.

LEONARD: I think alcohol had a lot to do with it, too. So, I mean I moved out here [Winnipeg]... a month before I turned 18, got my own place, and then just kind of drank, and just didn't... I don't know, I guess I just didn't apply myself as much in high school and didn't think it was important and you know, just kind of floated.

MARY: Ya, I was partying.

DONALD: I turned to drinking.... Ya, well, it was all personal problems....like financial issues, things like that. Those were the main reasons why alcohol played a big role.

NORBERT: I stayed until I was 16 and half, seventeen; I was in grade twelve and, uh, I got a job in a nearby town so I just dropped out of grade twelve and went to work...First time I had my license I was eager a little bit to get out on my own, you know. That's what I did... then, uh, got into bad stuff, you know, alcohol and stuff...never went back to school.

SANDY: I think alcohol had a lot to do with it, too...I got my own place [before I was 18] and then just drank and just...I just didn't think [school] was important.

The influence of peers is also significant.

CHARLIE: Well, it was basically the wrong crowds. I was into it with the gangs. I was more into my friends. Smoking dope was more important and getting girlfriends and what not, and school work just didn't appeal to me.

JAMES: It was the cool thing to do [to drink and smoke]... you just kinda followed the crowd. And a lot of it was just following other people.

DONALD: ...it was mainly the crowds of people. Like, other people joining the gangs or like, in the wrong crowd and going smoking and stuff like that, right?

All of the respondents (15 of 15) indicated that leaving school was not a conflict for them. For the most part, they did not formally withdraw, they just stopped attending school.

RESEARCHER: *Would you tell me why you quit school?*

JAMES: People didn't really care, school was just... whatever. I started getting into drugs and drinking and then my mom left and I went to severe depression... and I just said f*** it all. Then I just left. So it was pretty intense.

PHOEBE: I was kinda shy to ask for help or anything or talk to anybody...so I just gave up.

LEONARD: I ...can't remember why...just to try to do something different, I guess. Didn't really feel like going to school, so [I] just dropped out.

BRIAN: I went to school at [a nearby alternative high school]... went to grade nine, then I stayed there for one year but I ended up dropping out from there, too.

RESEARCHER: *Do you know why?*

BRIAN: Nah... I guess I didn't feel like I wanted to go back to school anymore. I wanted to go look for work with my friends, so I ended up looking for work and that's what I ended up doing.

The participants indicated that leaving school was a response to other conflicts in life, and so the findings emphasize how quitting school was part of a web of related issues.

The participants also expressed sentiments of feeling alone in their school environments when life circumstances were difficult. Eleven of fifteen expressed feeling alone or insignificant in the school environment (73.3%), which compounded with their other experiences. For example, when asked what the school could have done to retain her, Phoebe said,

PHOEBE: Mm, I don't think it would have mattered. Not for me anyways.

Similarly, Fred and Norbert shared that they did not feel included in the school environment.

FRED: Ya I left school, I left home I was about fourteen years old. Well, uh, I went to live with my aunt in Trout River and went to school in Eagle-town. But I didn't stay too long in that school, I stayed maybe a month in there, cause... well... uh... I was the only Native in there, and they were all white people. I just didn't feel comfortable, so I dropped out. Then after that ... I came to Winnipeg, came to live with my aunt.

NORBERT: I think it was my first time away from home in school... I didn't like it....Everyone was like older you know... and I was the only Native guy there. So I dropped out of that.

This sense of disconnection from community was echoed by Martha, who felt alienated from her school friends which also contributed to her negative school experiences.

MARTHA: We used to go to school at a little school house. We had to walk through the bush. And it was like, uh... a little house. I would say there were about maybe twenty five or twenty students I guess, from our little community. And we all got together. We would all meet in the mornings. We would all gang up (laughter), tracking down through the bush to go to school.... Our school was closed down. I was about eight or ten years old I think. And then we got transferred. Yup, yup...in that Reserve school they were separated by grades. Ya, they had different classes with different grades; it was not like how we went to school back home. Then when we were transferred to the Reserve school we all got separated into different classes, different grades, so that was big change for us.

James and Phoebe felt isolated at school.

JAMES: It's just being... weird, you know? Being the white guy in a lot of those schools.

RESEARCHER: *So what was that like?*

JAMES: Being that white guy? Ya, some people are fine with it, definitely, but some other people, like, they give you a hard time about it for sure. 'Specially being red headed white... can't even pass as a Métis or anything like that, so they know I'm the white guy.... People didn't really care, it was just like, whatever.

Charlie wanted to work:

RESEARCHER: *Was there anything to do with school that made you leave?*

CHARLIE: No... when I quit school... I went to work.

FLOYD: We were poor. Work was more important than my education.

Four participants indicated that school personnel could have provided positive influences during the critical period just prior to their quitting school. Although their responses represent only 26.7% of the sample, the participants suggested that although their families were not overly supportive of them staying in school, perhaps they would not have quit school if they had felt that it mattered.

DONALD: I tried to go back when I was fifteen or sixteen and I talked to an education director, but I don't know... she didn't really seem like she wanted to help me. She said well you're out of grade six, and the school didn't like to take older students...so I felt like giving up right there. I was like, ok you guys can't help me then...I kinda stepped away.

GISELLE: I got into fights...teachers didn't even like me. I was the oddball in school with a kid. Mmmm...I just...pfft...wasn't for me.

PHOEBE: I skipped seventeen and a half days of school before the principal went and told my mom that I wasn't in school. That's a month of school. Seventeen and a half days before the principal or the teacher went and told my mom I wasn't in school. That is a long time (laughs).

NORBERT: You know, um, myself growing up... uh... I used to have a lot of teacher aides to try and help me, and when I hit the high school that wasn't around. Um, basically that was one of the... uhh... another reason why I quit.... Um, I think students and kids could learn a lot better than just sitting in the class with forty other students going 'Huh? I didn't hear that' or 'I didn't see that' or 'I'm not getting the help that I need.'

The participants had to change schools for several reasons in addition to family relocations. Some schools were closed, or the participant reached the top grade offered by the school. It was at this point (grade nine, age 14) that six (40.0%) stated that they decided to leave school rather than change schools again. Fourteen of the fifteen interview participants spoke about the negative effect attending different schools had on their experiences (93.3%). Changing schools was typically moving several times back and forth from the city to the Reserve, or moving from their neighbourhood school to another nearby school, often several times during the school year. Doris explained how the change affected her:

DORIS: After our school was closed down...I was eight or ten years old, I think...we had to go across the bridge and then onto the Reserve school there...I kinda guess that changed things a little bit...I wasn't really interested in school

after that... I kinda slacked off in school after that. I went to school until grade nine, I guess....I left school; I left home. I was about fourteen years old.

There was a common sense of aloneness and isolation in the stories of the participants, and most (73.3%) talked about early life experiences that resulted in a sense that no one particularly cared about them. Floyd, a 52 year old male, spent most of his life in Winnipeg. He answered questions about his schooling by instead describing his family heritage, suggesting a desire to belong somewhere.

RESEARCHER: *I'm just going to ask you a few questions that have to do with going to school. Mostly, I'm here to listen. So my first question is what are some of your memories of going to school and where did you go to school initially?*

FLOYD: My mom, my mom was French but my dad was Cree. Ya. So that puts me in the Métis I guess... classification. Ya. My real... my biological father, like, I know he's full blooded Native and my mom is—she was French, and... Ya, my mother and, and my step father wasn't my real, my real, my—it wasn't my biological father, it was my stepfather. I never, I've never even really thought about... no I never, ever... I never thought about it. I thought about it later on when I got older, but when I was young, I didn't really think about that. But when I got older, I thought about it a lot.

He maintained almost steady eye contact with the researcher but never once smiled.

RESEARCHER: *Floyd, how would you describe your school experience before coming to Maskotew Kiskin?*

FLOYD: Sometimes it was a positive experience and sometimes it was a negative experience. Uh, I guess because... from... like, the background that I came from.

RESEARCHER: Would you tell me a bit more about that?

FLOYD: Uhh... well, it wasn't a very nice background. Therethere was a lot of drinking and violence.... so that's sort ofkind of the background... that I came from. And, uh, that had a negative impact on my school, on my schooling... as a kid.

RESEARCHER: That would make it very difficult.

FLOYD: Yeah, sometimes I found it very difficult to concentrate in school.....

Because of fear.... Things like that, you know?

RESEARCHER: *Mmmmmmm.*

(Long silence)

RESEARCHER: Do you think school could have been different for you?

FLOYD: I think...my experience would have been a lot better I believe... if I never experienced that kind of stuff. I think it would have been better for me. I probably woulda liked it a lot more, you know?

Despite gentle questioning, Floyd did not clarify what he meant by "that kind of stuff" in his childhood home. He was from a very poor home, though, and said "there was a lot of times I had to go to school hungry because we didn't have enough food."

In addition to the perceptions of personal insignificance and lack of adult guidance about the value of education, negative school experiences were associated with the period before they dropped out of school. Importantly, this factored significantly into how the research participants made sense of quitting school early. These are called Critical Periods because they are not one event but rather together created a context that preceded the time they actually quit school, and included excessive alcohol use, peer influences, feeling

isolated and alone, no important adult encouraging school, and the prospects of more frequent relocations and therefore new schools.

Quitting School

When the participants were asked directly and specifically about when and why they quit school, they had a number of different answers, which suggests that the contexts and relationships in the critical period leading up to quitting school were more important than any particular circumstance or reasons. However, their words indicate that they made the choice alone and they did not seem to blame anybody. None of them weighed the consequences of the decisions, but nearly all (93.2%) mentioned that education was irrelevant in their community.

MARY: I just took a different path.

LEONARD: I quit school.

PHOEBE: I dropped out of it early.

DONALD: In grade nine I dropped right out of it.

JAMES: ...didn't really feel like going to school, so just dropped out.

NORBERT: I got into fights. I started skipping school and then I dropped out.

MEGAN: I had a baby at 12 or 13.

GISELLE: Ya, I dropped out of school in grade seven, well, I completed grade six and I dropped out at the beginning of grade seven.

KATE: I got married (at 16).

FRED: I wanted to get away from the Reserve.

DORIS: When I was in [*a Winnipeg high school during her youth*] some of the courses were easy. Some of them I couldn't understand anything and I was kinda

shy to ask for help or anything or talk to anybody...So I did what I could... got frustrated with some of those courses, and I just gave up.

The participants did not blame school or other people for their decision to quit school; it was their choice and they acted upon it.

LEONARD: I dunno I just loved [school]...then we got transferred to Erebor School on the Reserve [but] we were Métis people...that kind of, I guess, kind of changed things a little bit. I wasn't really interested in school after that. I kinda slacked off in school after that.

PHOEBE: Like I was a good student and everything but...like, my dad left us. They tried to get me to stay but...ya, that's when I quit.

NORBERT: I used to like school when I was a kid, eh? Teachers were good....One year I was back in the Reserve...then we had to go to Bayern so I buggered up there...I didn't like it. But then I got left behind and there is so much work, there was no hope in catching up. After that I got into trouble.

GISELLE: When I first started I really don't know, but I remember like, really liking going to school here in Winnipeg...when I left school I had already had a kid like I was pregnant at 13 or 12.

JAMES: Well, I liked school but then we moved (to three provinces in one year) and that kinda screwed me up a little bit there 'cause they were learning levels like a lot lower than any other school that I was at.

When they were asked initially about why they quit school, the participants provided long stories about their family life and their school experiences. When probed

specifically, the participants gave various reasons. For the most part these are brief statements containing seemingly unrelated reasons.

FRED: I was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

FLOYD: I went to school 'til I was sixteen. Then at sixteen I quit and I thought I should be working 'cause we were poor and working was, uh, more important than my education because we were poor.

MARY: I had to go to a French school in high school. It was a challenge and that's pretty much, just, like, I cut out at fifteen or sixteen.

CYRIL: When I quit school believe it or not I was dating seven girls and two were in the same class (laughs)... and one got pregnant...

RESEARCHER: How come you left school?

KATE: I got married. I just turned 16 at the time. I've known him since I was 13. I think I got married just before I turned 17, but what I didn't know was that it was arranged. My parents used to drink and my in-laws used to drink together....I guess my in-laws saw me among a group of girls.... They said, "Oh, that's gonna be the mother of my grandchildren."

RESEARCHER: So when you got married you had to stop schooling?

KATE: Yeah.

It is important to include that two respondents referenced Residential Schools²¹ in their stories. Their comments are included here because the effects of Residential Schools

²¹ A discussion about Residential Schools policy, the potential or non-recognized influences of colonialism, and intergenerational and blood memory is beyond the scope of

have been identified across much literature as an explanation for low Aboriginal school retention rates.

FLOYD: I think some Aboriginal people like [school] and I believe some don't.

Because of the Residential Schools; their Residential School experience. I think that has a lot to do with it why some Aboriginals like school and why some don't...

Ya, I believe that's got a lot to do with it.

This response qualifies as an outlier. Floyd did not attend a Residential School nor did any of his family members, and yet Residential Schools are part of his story. Kate is the sole respondent who attended a Residential School.

KATE: When I was young we had to go to a Residential School

RESEARCHER: Are you comfortable talking about that a little bit?

KATE: I'm okay. Nothing happened to me there. I had- like, they taught me good stuff. I remember all the good stuff. I really don't remember anything bad. Not like my sister, my family - my other family, the older ones. They were abused. The only abuse I remember is getting strapped (laughs)

RESEARCHER: Had you done something?

KATE: (laughs) Yeah. Of course. I'm the instigator!

Other than these two references, the participants did not mention Residential Schools.

Future Plans

Conflict transformation theory includes how people think about the future.

Lederach (2003) says that consideration of the future makes a practical appeal that results

this study, which explores the narratives of Aboriginal people who have quit school. Had the participants raised the matters, they would have been more fully explored.

in change (p. 43). Consequently, a consideration of the participants' fears and worries for themselves, and their families, is an important perspective to understand because the participants all shared the common response to conflict by quitting school. However, at the time of the study, each participant had already made the active decision to return to school and complete their high school diplomas. Consequently, when asked directly to share their concerns or fears for the future, fourteen of the fifteen interview participants in this study answered with definite plans that include completing high school, and all of the bead workshop participants spoke hopefully and positively about their futures.

The participants had specific fears that they said either were influencing the future, or that they feared would negatively influence the future. Their fears manifested as general failure and a sense of inadequacy that included fear of being disrespected and treated accordingly, and the fear that poor health could damage their opportunities for employment.

The fear of failure is related to a sense of inadequacy.

MARTHA: It was scary when I first got [to Masketow Kiskin]...I was so down in the dumps or whatever... like, you know... wasn't sure of myself...I have problems with school sometimes...like, they can explain it and then you know, it won't...I can't like comprehend it or it just won't click.

FLOYD: Um, I just started here. It's my first time here at Bison Park and I like it.

Ya....takes a lot of courage to come back to school you know. It's kind of scary for me in the beginning; it does take a lot of courage. Uh, I guess I was scared of how I was gonna get along with people. That was the part that scared me the most I

guess. How I interact with the students and the teachers ... because I thought at times... I thought I wasn't smart enough to be in the same room with them.

DORIS: They should encourage [students who are struggling] to come to school, see what kinda problems they have and try to help them anyway they can...some of these schools could have resource rooms where mothers could meet with each other, talk about- I don't know, have coffee I guess...

The participants associated fear with the disrespect they might receive from other people. This manifested in several ways and was found in 60.0% of the interview responses. According to research, "respect is a rare commodity that is highly valued and difficult to secure for those who have suffered from high doses of devaluation" (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2008, p. 46). Disrespect emerged in stories of being poorly treated and in expressions of concern about being judged inadequate by others. Speaking about the education experience in general, Mary said:

MARY: Treat me like an adult, don't treat me like a ten year old.

Kate made frequent references to being treated disrespectfully at work by two different employers:

KATE (working in a cafeteria): They worked me to death.

KATE (working in a university): That's where they worked me to death, running around here and there. I just got sick.

Kate also shared her response to how her husband treated her, which contains subtle references to the relationship between fears and the choices she felt she had to make that are part of her education story:

KATE: I fell in love with [my husband] at first but I didn't like him after he tried to kill me a few times. The last time he tried to kill me he tried to shoot me with his [work]gun. We were fighting over the gun and my thumb got stuck on the hammer. That's when I left him finally. I couldn't take my kids. My two boys, I had to leave them behind cuz my father-in-law was [an influential community member] too.... He wouldn't let me see my kids for the longest time...Now one of them's dead.

General fears about the future was the third theme. Fears about the future were expressed by 46.7% of the respondents.

FLOYD: I do have a lot of worries and things like that about my future because I'm not educated ...I don't like having to depend on, uh, social assistance you know, for help... now I have to educate myself.

NORBERT: I don't know. The thing about it is getting the money to pay for it [more education].

Norbert also expressed his sense of inadequacy and referenced a structural issue when he said:

NORBERT:...my Reserve sponsors students, say... they always say, every time I phone them they're like oh, there's a big waiting list. Like sometimes students that have graduated grade twelve they don't get sponsored for some reason....ya, there's lots of people who get turned away.

Five (33.3%) of the participants mentioned mental or physical health concerns.

Three of the men (42.8%) referenced physical concerns that could hamper the fulfillment of the dreams they hold for after graduation.

NORBERT: Well, ya, but, uh... the thing is I have arthritis in my hands and wrists so they probably won't hire people with that kind of disability.

LEONARD: I'm getting crippled up in my legs. I used to be a welder before. That was my trade. Now I can't stand for two or three hours.

Donald has a history of alcoholism, and he worries that it could thwart his plans.

DONALD: I can see myself graduating. Hopefully no personal issues will get in the way.

Mary suffers from depression; Doris thinks she might collapse and die. The participants are afraid of failure, of being disrespected, of poor health, and of not achieving the dreams that have launched inside of them. Despite these fears, the respondents are hopeful for their futures. Their attendance in school suggest that the strength of their hopes and dreams are outweighing the influences of fear.

The participants stated clearly that they have hopes and dreams they are pursuing. Thirteen of the fifteen (86.7%) of the participants have concrete plans that pertain to employment. The remaining two participants have their sights on the goal of high school completion. Eight of the thirteen (61.5%) have specific plans for further schooling. Their plans are presented below; confidence and hope are evident in their words

RESEARCHER: What do you plan to do after this?

PHOEBE: I [want to] go into ECE, early childhood education....It's always been one of my dreams. My family's been trying to get me to change and go into nursing but why be something I don't [want to] be? I've always wanted to be an ECE worker, so that's where my goal is and I'm sticking to it!

NORBERT: I [want to] get into designing websites. But I could probably do that online eh? Most of it?...School is good, but right now I have my morning open cause I already got my grade twelve math, so now I'm just taking afternoon courses. Computer courses start downtown. The one [downtown] will be starting sometime in January. I'm thinking of taking this one over here, too.

LEONARD: Well, I'm planning on being a family counselor....I had an interview in October, an orientation, so...now I'm just waiting this month to finalize to see if I'm accepted there to start on January 24th. It's a ten month to one year program and I felt like, uh, well, I want to work with families and I feel like I want to work with children because I want to talk with people, that's what I want to do...uh, I thought maybe that would be a good field that I would be good at cause I went through a lot of problems in my life with my parents, and I went through a lot of things in my life...so I thought that would be a good field.

JAMES: As soon as I'm done school I'm joining the military. Ya, I wanna go to either air force or actual army...haven't really decided yet. I done some research on it but not much, gotten down there a few times, ya...and they always try and push you toward infantry and like the ground stuff, but I have a couple of friends that I worked with at the bar. They were in the army, so they told me don't let them push you towards that, like, ground positions 'cause you really can't advance in those and once you do get out of the army you don't really have a trade to do with. I'm gonna go with some kind of specialty. They put you through university and stuff...so I'm gonna go down there and find out if I need any extra classes...maybe an extra math or an extra science and then maybe that will help me get something

better in the military right? Ya, I'll have to find out about that....Once I actually have a full time career I'll be able to support my family right?...So hopefully this whole army thing pans out.

GISELLE: Ummm, I want to go to culinary arts school. I want to become a cook so I'm really looking forward to that....Ummmm it's, uh, it's supposed to be at Red River College, like, it's a two year course for that thing....They show you everything from scratch.... I really didn't know, but when we went to that, um, career symposium and whatever, and the guy, like, you know, 'cause I like to cook like, it takes away all my stress, so it's kinda the perfect thing, you know, and...anyways you get 16 weeks, like, in a place to actually do that, plus....I'm just looking forward to it now (laughs).

MARY: I want to move a little forward. Do some youth recreation or some outreach work for homeless or women or prostitutes. You know, just helping out in that line. So I'm just going to get this grade twelve and go and see some other stuff I can do.

LISA: I look forward to the future and finishing school and having that good job to live comfortably.

CHARLIE: Hopefully I'll be the second [*states his last name*] in my family to get their grade 12....I already have a structured plan for after I finish school. I got two years of, uh, small business for my bachelors... after this at U of W, and go from there, start my own business....I mean, I know I can start my own business now but I don't have the know how to deal with all the paper work and what not that comes

with it soand half the stuff that I know that you can write off certain things, but knowing my luck I'd write off the wrong thing and get audited right? (laughs)

NORBERT: I [want to] go back to school after I graduate.

It is significant that these people, who dropped out of the secondary school system, plan to attend post-secondary education.

For two other participants, plans involve direct entry into the workforce.

DONALD: I have experience with fiber optic cable and, uh, communication and that type of work...so I'm really striving to get that type of work and jump back in there...I'm trying to structure a future for me.

FRED: I got to find out what you go into after grade 12, to get in to employment services and what credits you need.

For these men, plans for the future is important.

Each of the participants voiced their future plans, and several referred to "structuring" their futures. The clear articulation of future plans included family, gainful employment and fulfilment. This section, which Lederach identifies as Horizon of the Future, shows how the relational nature of conflict and of responses to conflict, and the connection between the themes in the Inquiries. When talking about the future, many participants were forthcoming about what they feared might negatively influence the future, but they also focused on a desired future that is both appealing and compelling, and for many, motivated by love, which is explored in the next section.

The findings indicate that the decision to leave school was the result of a process involving several personal and relational factors, and the participants put more emphasis on the time leading up to leaving school than on the actual event. In fact, they had to be

asked directly about the precise time that they stopped attending school. Lederach (2003) emphasizes that “the development of strategy and response to conflict” (p. 34) is critical to conflict transformation, and quitting school emerged in the data as part of a larger story about family and life influences. Specifically, at the time they quit school 93.2% of the participants recalled that schooling was irrelevant to family and friends; alcohol and substance abuse was a regular part of the participants’ lives; and they each felt insignificant.

The Development of Change Processes

The third component of the Lederach Conflict Transformation model is called the Development of Change Processes, which links the Presenting Situation and the Horizon of the Future and according to Lederach, is the field of change. Lederach (2003) says that we are required to “think about response to conflict as the development of processes of change that attend to the web of interconnected needs, relationships, and patterns on all four levels: personal, relational, cultural, and structural” (p. 38). The prevalence of three dominant attributes in the findings are presented in this section. First, findings are presented under the category title Courage. Then the next section after Courage is Hope, followed by Love.

Courage

Courage is defined as the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, or pain. According to this definition, courage is readily identifiable in the narratives. The participants resisted bullies; they overcame great physical and emotional hardship; they changed their focus from fear and despair to hope, and took action to make those hopes into reality. Specifically, courage is evident throughout the

responses to conflict of the participants; when confronted with conflict, most of them took action to change or in some way address the conflict.

The participants' responded to grave life experiences with courageous action, despite their ready acknowledgement of fear. Courage was evident in the participants even as they responded to conflict in their youth. For example, Kate and her sister set boundaries against taunting classmates; Fred decided to make friends with potential adversaries.

KATE: That school [*city school*] I found different. Prejudiced, too. We used to get into fights there, in the washroom, me and my sister. My sister is bigger than me she took, uh, oh... I don't think I should mention this... she was in the washroom... I was walking by the washroom one day and I heard a big banging sound, and I walk in there and she was taking on six of those little white chicks! Just throwing them around the washroom so I helped her and we walked out... just left them hanging there.... We never got harassed or anything at that school after my sister did that.

FRED: When I was younger, well we moved around lots. Always different kinds of schools. The Indians would call us white guys, and white guys would call us Indians. There were a lot of fights. I always ended up making friends with both of them; it didn't really matter.

DIANE: I broke my fist punching a mailbox 'cause I didn't wanna hit nobody. I hit a mailbox and broke my hand, go figure. But, ya....

The participants demonstrated courage when their children were threatened, and although they were teenaged parents, left abusive situations.

GISELLE: After I had my daughter, and then she was 6 months old and I left him. I just couldn't put up with him no more.....He was abusive.

SHYANNE: This [bead] is separation, from me and my kids' dad. 'Cause we fight a lot and I'm trying to distance myself from him right now.

The participants also demonstrated courage and tenacity in their efforts to build a good home life for their children, and to change the patterns of the past.

DIANE: I was in foster care, pretty much off and on my whole entire life. And I would never wish that on any of my nieces or nephews. Or my stepson. He was in [the provincial welfare agency] and it killed me and I hated my ex for that, for losing my stepson.

The participants desired to be good role models for their children:

SHYANNE: I put a lot of work into putting myself into where I am and being the mom that I am. I'm not the perfect mom but I work hard to be....

LEONARD: I find that school is very, very important. That's something I have always pushed my boys, eh?...When I looked at myself I said 'no' I'm not gonna let my sons go what I went through and drop out of school because I didn't have my parent to help me do that. So I want to make sure my sons had their education and I thought that was very important in their life that they have their education....I will be a counsellor.

PHOEBE: I want my daughter to have somebody to look up to.

Courage extended from home to the school environment. Returning to high school as an adult is a courageous decision undertaken and acted upon by each of the study participants. In returning to school, each participant is required to do homework, attend

classes every day, submit all assignments, and write tests and provincial examinations. Seventeen of the nineteen also mentioned family obligations, and so returning to school is complicated and requires courage, organization, discipline and managing other commitments. Floyd said, "I'm gonna try and do my best. Ya....takes a lot of courage to come back to school, you know. It's, it's kind of scary for me...it does take a lot of courage."

For James, the decision to return to school required a significant amount of courage, as it evidently involved some level of change or overcoming obstacles that were not shared with the researcher. The courage behind the decision is evident:

JAMES: This summer I was out in Saskatchewan working in the oil patch...and I just, I was just like, 'I wanna go back to school.'

RESEARCHER: What do you think has made the difference?

JAMES: I'm not sure...maybe just actually wanting to go to school...wanting to finish it, wanting to get my life started.....ya, I'm actually pretty proud of myself that I came back to school.

Finally, the participants lived in violent homes and there is a vulnerability or trust in sharing their stories, which may be recognized as courageous. Each of the excerpts below are from stories associated with the beads.

DIANE: This blue one is like, a representation of my parents, when they had first met. They met in a bar—go figure. My dad was actually an adult, my mom was seventeen. He kicked her out, 'cause legal age is eighteen, when I was born. They—She hated my dad so much. She despised him. But they ended up getting married. I was conceived and [I am the] lovely end to the story. They didn't have

no bottles of rye beads, so [this one is me]. And then the black ones were, um, these black ones are from when I was taken from them to CFS. And, uh, my dad had assaulted my mom so badly that she was like covered in blood. And she wouldn't wash up, she just sat there, covered in blood.

SHYANNE: This little black bead here by the clasp represents...I don't wanna cry. Okay. This represents when I was raped as a little girl. This represents me being taken away from my mom. Um this one right here represents a lot of my life I don't remember. Um I was run over by a car when I was 5... Almost lost my life. That's the significance of this one. This one is all the bad people who have done wrong in my life.

Repeating these stories took courage. When confronted with conflict in situations that included bullying, abusive home lives, protecting their children, designing the culture of their homes, and sharing the stories and perceptions of their school experiences, each of the participants demonstrated courageous decisions and actions. In this section, the development of change, or conflict transformation, can be recognized as the participants courageously responded to conflict in their lives.

Hope

Lederach (1995; 2003; 2004) has defined hope as the ability to be grounded in the real world but to be able to imagine a better world, and Hardy and Laszloffy (2008) say that hope is an indicator of psychological and emotional restoration, or healing. This definition of hope is evident in the study findings. The research population has definite and clearly articulated hopes and dreams for the future; they can imagine a better world for themselves and for their families. All of the participants shared their plans with the

researcher with positive voices, eye contact and in some cases, a smile. The better world imagined by the participants include further education, clearly described career paths and for some, the immediate goal of completing grade twelve. The participants are hoping and planning for their futures.

One of the strong attributes in the stories is hope for the future. According to “considerable empirical research...hope is directly related to adjustment and well-being (Ong, Edwards & Bergeman, 2006, p. 1263). Additionally, “many researchers agree that hope is characterized by an expectation that a desired goal will be attained” (Tong, Fredrickson, Chang, & Lin, 2010, p. 1207). Hope is mentioned or referenced in thirteen of the nineteen transcripts analyzed for the study. In the quotes below, the participants relate hope with healing.

DIANE: And this one? It’s for healing, ‘cause somewhere along the line, [my father] did love me. He just didn’t know how to show it, and it scared me.

BRIAN: And another reason I picked purple ‘cause purple is a healing colour. As far as I know, in native culture, it’s supposed to be a healing colour.

However, others healed physically, which gave them hope to pursue a better life.

DONALD: A lot of things went wrong in my life....I almost died. I got stabbed innumerable times in my neck, as you can see, and stabbed a couple of times in my back through my heart. It went through my chest and I nearly died. It was bad, a really bad situation and I came out of it...and here I am.

In the examples above, participants shared some of their personal hopes.

All of the participants are adult students, and graduation from high school is one of their common hopes and dreams. Seven of the eight women (87.5%) equated grade twelve completions with better opportunities in life, as did the men.

PHOEBE: In general, um, well, pretty much you need it [grade 12] for practically everything. If you wanna continue your education you gotta keep going and even if you want a job now, you ...stuff is, most of the places want you to at least have grade 12 and if you don't have that, well then, you're SOL²².

MARY: You can't really find a job even... if you don't have your grade twelve. I mean, you have to have that to show in your applications that you have grade twelve or they're not even going to look at you. So I thought it was important.

SANDY: You know if you try you can do it, so I think self-esteem is a big one that... you know, knowing that you can actually do it and get 'er done.

JAMES: Hopefully this whole army thing pans out. So far this school thing is.... good.

FRED: When I left school, I started working for [*identifies former employer*]... 'til I went broke...[I am] figuring I might as well get my grade 12 while I can.

CHARLIE: A lot of the jobs now they need a grade 12.

NORBERT: My P[arole] O[fficer] said I should go back to school – it would keep me out of trouble so I came here, but I still gotta come here anyway 'cause I gotta get my credits.

DONALD: Ya, well, I've always wanted to come back to school because to get into anywhere you need to have grade 12 equivalent education, right?

²² This is a vernacular acronym, meaning that one is blocked from good fortune.

FLOYD: I have to educate myself and you know so I can get a decent paying job, light duty; a light duty paying job. But I know I have to educate myself a lot more and get more of an educational backgroundya I wanna get my grade 12 and I gotta really... uhhh, I gotta really work at it. I wish I would have stayed in school, got my education...I'd have a decent paying job. I wouldn't have to work so hard, you know, breaking my back for peanuts.

Almost all of the participants returned to school with recognition that their employment opportunities and even some of their hopes and dreams for themselves would be achieved through returning to school and their subsequent grade 12 graduations.

For some of the participants, their hopes which were less structured but were personal:

FLOYD: I'm gonna try and do my best. That's about it.

DORIS: Right now I'm just doing my grade ten. So I will probably keep going 'til I'm done.

MARTHA: I just want to get my grade twelve and see where it leads me from there.

The findings show that hope for the future outlined is closely related to courage, and these are in the context of the findings outlined earlier in the chapter. Lederach (2003) says that in the process of change, people need to address "interconnected needs, relationships, and patterns on all four levels" and through hope, we see one way that the participants have responded to conflict and undertaken the process of change. The section below explores the role of another intangible but prevalent theme in the life stories of the participants: love.

Love

The love theme runs throughout the findings, and seems to be one of the most powerful forces in the narratives. The narratives suggest it is the primary motivation (19 of 19 transcripts) that engaged with courage to pursue hope and their plans for the future. Lederach (2003) says that the processes of change require people to “hold together” (p. 38) initiatives that are different but not incompatible, and according to the findings, this is love. This section concludes the exploration of the findings.

There is a prevalent theme of recognition that’s one’s personhood has intrinsic value that the participants did not recognize until they were adults. This suggests that the participants may have left school because they did not know the value of their own selves, and so education was perhaps irrelevant. In each case, the findings show that the participants recognize their own value, or that their opinions matter.

DIANA: My mom came to the bus depot, cussed me out in front of everybody, told me if I got on the bus I was being disowned. And I turned around and I was like, I gotta do this for me. I have to learn on my own....it was my turn to be a grownup, it was my turn to go out and find me. Not because she told me not to, but because I wanted to see for myself if it was worth it.....[I] came back, and that’s when my life became clear [as to] who I needed in my life and what really mattered to me.

DAVID: This is supposed to be later on when I – ‘cause it’s [the bead] so kinda, intricate, that it represents when I was diagnosed with schizophrenia [*David smiled broadly. The bead is large, and bright, indicating that the diagnosis was a positive moment in his life*]... And then this one is supposed to represent when I... got

engaged to my fiancée. And then this one is supposed to represent my going back to school.

The power of love as self-worth to overcome pain is also evident in the stories.

DIANE: And this one, it's for healing. ..'cause I realized somewhere along the line, [my father] did love me.

CYRIL: And then this one is supposed to represent me overcoming schizophrenia.

MEGAN: And these two represent where I am in my life right now. I am very happy where I am. And it is healing, 'cause like, God, let me tell you, it's been a hard, hard life....I just have to let it go. I have to let a lot of things go.

This recognition of self-worth is represented in fourteen of the fifteen interview narratives and among all the bead stories.

Most of the participants spoke of a fierce love and loyalty for their families; nine referenced their mother or mother figure.

BRIAN: The middle bead represents my Mom.

LISA: My bracelet has a lot to do with my family and friends. Without them in my life I honestly don't know where I would be. I have three beads shaped as hearts [to represent them]

SHYANNE: My mother is my rock. I thought I had a hard life but my mom, she had it a lot worse.

DIANE: My mother raised me through hell and back. I'd kill for that woman.

FRED: I lived with my mother. She's passed away now.

MARY: I'm my mom's pet. I was a spoiled kid.

FLOYD: This represents the [medicine] woman that I cared deeply about [who raised me]...and uh, when she passed on I sort of, uh, had a hard time to deal with that 'cause I was connected to her...and was very close to her...She would help me when I was down and out.

There are references to other family members loved deeply by the participants, including sisters, brothers, grandmothers, nieces and nephews.

The parent participants expressed very deep love for their children and the intention to provide better futures for them.

CHARLIE: I've decided to come back to better myself, and at least now my kids can see that you can get your grade 12, even at my age.

PHOEBE: I'm doing it because of my daughter.

GISELLE: If I would [have] known now what I did back then, you know, it would have been... I would have stayed in school... even brought my baby there.

KATE: You've gotta tell your kids, education is more important than anything else, 'cause it'll get you ahead in your life.

Seven of the eight parents in the study and seven said they were motivated to return to school to be better role models so that their children would recognize the importance of a completed high school education. This is recognized as an act of love because the participants spoke affectionately and proudly of their children. Doris is a grandmother with similar hopes for her daughter and grandson:

DORIS: Look at all the trouble these young kids are in nowadays. They... have no education... always going in and out of jail... Some of these kids are young nowadays and having babies....They rely on the welfare system. Nowadays, like,

my daughter she has a son... I think she's thinking about going back to school; she wants to provide a better life for her son.

The findings indicate overwhelmingly (93.3%) that the primary two reasons for returning to school were the hope for a brighter future with improved employment opportunities as high school graduates, and to be positive role models for the children that the participants love. However, it is important that these be recognized in the context of the love that motivated their return to school –love for their children, their families, and for themselves as worthy of a different life from the one that characterized the events that led to them quitting school.

Finally, the participants saved and protected the lives of the people they love. It seems that this is best understood in the context of love and in the relationships and responsibilities evident in the findings. For example, Shyanne saved two lives: "This represents my sister's life and her son. I delivered my sister's little boy on my grandma's bathroom floor." In order to protect her mother's life, Diane "beat up my uncle's girlfriend...and I almost killed her...I don't care if I gotta spend the rest of my life in jail protecting my mother. I would do anything for my mom." There were other examples of their love:

SHYANNE: I have a lot of love for my children. Ya. You've just gotta keep reminding your kids of how much you love them.

DONALD: I'm trying to make a life for my daughter.

SANDY: I'm trying to stress on my daughter's life that like, you can be anything you wanna be and, you know, so I'm trying to push that and instill it in her life....if you want a decent life, you have to go to school and then you gotta get a job.

Lederach (2003) explains that understanding the ‘big picture’ of how people respond to conflict must include recognizing immediate problems, and must include their vision for the future (p. 45). This is particularly evident when the theme of love is explored. The participants either directly stated or strongly inferred their love for their children and family members, and they recognized that their own lives have value and worth. According to Lederach, actions are required to create change, but it seems that the impetus for change came from within (p. 45). Based on the narratives of the participants, it might be argued that love, as a motivator of heroic action, is also a recognized platform for transformation and for change. The study participants demonstrated personal courage, exhibited hope, and acted upon their love, in relation to school, toward their families, and, in an apparent transformation from their earlier feelings of insignificance, toward themselves.

Summary

This chapter explored and presented the findings of the study and answered the research questions. The participants did not quit school for the reasons outlined in the literature, but the remarkable similarities in their childhoods suggest that these patterns explain why they quit. The answer to the question “What are the perceptions of the school experiences of urban Aboriginal adults, and why did they drop out of school?” explained that their early years were characterized by frequent moving, unengaged or absent parents, staggering losses including deaths, bullying and a profound sense of personal insignificance and inferiority. The answer to “What are their hopes for the future?” emphasized their love for their children and a desire to complete school so that they could have better jobs to provide for their families, and to be good role models. Within the

narratives, the “fears and worries for themselves, and for their families” indicated concerns about health, completing their studies, being able to fulfill their plans for the future, and that their children would stay in school and have better lives than the participants had had. Common themes in the stories were presented according to the main components of the Lederach model, but since some of these are attributes, or virtues, rather than mechanistic processes, the names of the subcomponents were altered in order to better categorize the themes. The themes highlighted the personal and relational parts of the Lederach model, and there was a particular emphasis on the attributes of courage, hope, and love. In the following chapter, the conclusions of the study and the implications and recommendations for theory, research, and practice are presented.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The traditional narrative of the history of Aboriginal peoples confirms that we read their story through our systems of understanding....What we need to work on is finding new ways – after more than four hundred years of living together – to hear each other's stories anew. (Griffiths, 2004, p. 2)

In this chapter, the findings of the research are discussed. The research design and the conflict transformation framework have provided a new way to hear, or as Lederach says, to see the stories. After the discussion, the four conclusions of the study are presented. Then, the chapter turns to the considerations of implications and recommendations for theory, research, and practice. The theory component of this includes an expansion and complement to Lederach's model and is called the Belief Systems and Conflict Transformation model, designed out of the research findings in order to develop more understanding about the personal and relational subcomponents of conflict transformation, and to potentially provide another new way of hearing peoples' stories, as the quote above advocates. The Postscript completes Shyanne's story, which was introduced in the Prologue.

Conflict is a natural part of human experience, embedded in immediate issues and in greater patterns with a fluid, dynamic nature. The framework of conflict transformation explicitly focuses on the relationships that explain responses to conflict, and recognizes the gradual nature of conflict. Conflict transformation also recognizes that the potentially

positive and transformative qualities of conflict may be found in the webs of patterns and relationships within conflict, that is, by looking at the entire systems of relationships rather than focusing on an end product or on a specific period in time. This is also the perspective of Indigenous research, which looks at research within the context of entire systems of relationships as a whole. This dissertation deliberately merges the conflict transformation framework and Indigenous research in its design in order to better understand why Aboriginal people drop out of school.

Lederach stresses that relationships form the very heart of the transformation process. Since conflict transformation promotes the recognition, acknowledgement, and analysis of responses to conflict within the context of relationships, the stories from individual participants about why they dropped out of school can be contextualized within Canada's broader Aboriginal identity conflict and the history of Aboriginal education. This study expands the conflict transformation literature into Aboriginal education through the research question: "What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future, and what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?" Despite the intention of the study to explore school experiences, the participants spoke about much more than school and provided a wider relational perspective for understanding how Aboriginal people drop out of school. The conflict transformation lenses discovered that according to the participants, quitting school was a response to a myriad of similar circumstances and experiences, and not an immediate response to inadequacies in education or schooling.

Historically and currently, Aboriginal education has been ineffective, and so the retention and effective education of Aboriginal people is one of the current priorities of Aboriginal and government leadership. As set out in Chapter 1, Aboriginal education takes place in the context of a quiet identity conflict that is rooted in Canadian history, policy and legislation, and social structures. Rothman (1997) says that group identity conflicts have identifiable patterns. This study has discovered that these identifiable patterns extend into the reasons for quitting school. The participants left school in the context of relationships so that no one simple explanation emerged from the data. Although the literature posits that culturally relevant Aboriginal education legislation, increased funding, and more effective schools will contribute significantly to remedy dropout rates, the people who participated in this research for the most part did not associate dropping out of school with the reasons given in the general literature. This does not mean that those reasons are not factors, but they were not articulated by the participants. However, the conflict transformation analysis also discovered that as the participants endured common traumas and other very difficult life circumstances, school attendance was affected and they eventually just stopped attending school.

For the people who participated in this research, the remedies outlined in the literature to improve Aboriginal education may not have improved their participation or achievement because their departure from school was not a direct response to inadequacies in the school. Though the study provides empirical evidence that class sizes and funding may be structural changes to be addressed in Aboriginal education, the majority of the findings indicate that according to their own life stories, the participants suggested that changes in the structure and delivery of education would not have stopped them from

quitting school. However, the study does indicate that the individual participants embraced the conflicts or challenges they encountered, perhaps unwittingly, as a potential catalysts for growth. This is identified by Lederach as a key to conflict transformation. Importantly, this is also a way to contribute to individual peacebuilding, and ultimately, one way to address the individual consequences of identity conflict, one person at a time.

Lederach's Conflict Transformation framework (2003) extends the analysis of what has been essentially regarded as an Aboriginal policy issue at the structural and cultural levels outlined in the literature, to the relational and personal levels. The model evolved from Lederach's broad experiences in peace building in a wide variety of social and identity conflicts, and so not all of the characteristics of the model may be evident in a particular conflict. Lederach stresses that in the context of relationships, conflict transformation means that conflict moves in either constructive or destructive directions. In this study, the findings amplified the personal and relational dimensions of the Lederach model in both negative and positive directions, as the data were explored for answers to the research question.

As a model, conflict transformation suggests that the subcomponents of personal, relational, structural and cultural are equally emphasized and this did not seem to be supported in the data. Most of the findings were appropriately categorized according to Lederach's descriptions of the personal and relational subcomponents of conflict transformation, although the participants did refer to some structural or cultural elements of conflict transformation. This may have been a function of the research question, or of the methodology, but the study did produce data that did not seem to align with Lederach's model evenly. This germinated the idea that perhaps the relationships within conflict

transformation at the levels of personal and relational bear more attention than the Lederach model suggests. Like Indigenous research, Lederach stresses that human community and relationships are dynamic and constantly changing, and so in many ways, the nature of conflict transformation allows for adjustment to Lederach's model.

In order to better understand the relationships and conflict transformation within the data, Lederach's model was adapted in a way that also reflects the importance of considering the data within the context of all the relationships affecting that data. Inquiry 1, which Lederach calls the Presenting Situation, was presented as Family Life, School Life, and Loss, to represent the way that the participants provided information about their educational experiences. Family life, school life, and loss were very closely related in each of the stories, and seemed to naturally reflect the way Indigenous research considers systems of relationships as a whole, and the way conflict transformation concentrates on relationships. Then, Inquiry 2, the Horizon of the Future, was presented in the findings chapter as Critical Periods, Quitting School, and Future Plans because according to the narratives, each of these contained important elements that shaped the participants' responses to conflict. Just as Lederach's model indicates a relationship between the Inquiries, the relationship between the data in Inquiry 2 and the data in Inquiry 1 was very evident, which made it somewhat challenging to separate. This is reminiscent of Wilson's (2008) explanations of how any Indigenous analysis must examine all of the relationships between particular events, and among the data as a whole, before it will make sense. The third Inquiry, the Development of Change Processes, was presented according to the affective themes that were prominent in the narratives. Courage, Hope, and Love seemed to be the pieces that held the other parts of the stories together, and so it seemed

appropriate to place them as headings for the findings. The use of three separate Inquiries was somewhat of a challenge because of the relational nature of the findings, though Lederach himself acknowledges that conflict transformation is multi-relational and web-like, rather than linear and static as a model must be. Together, the findings that emerged through the lens of each Inquiry emphasized relationships and provided evidence of how conflict transformation resulted in both positive and negative change.

As stated, this study analyzed personal stories. As the data were pondered and explored, the conflict transformation framework encouraged an Indigenous style of analysis that considered all data in relationship to the other data. It became readily apparent that a complexity of relationships combined at home and at school to result in the participants dropping out of school. The research findings indicate that for those interviewed, leaving school seemed to be an uncontested response to broader, yet very similar life difficulties, some of which were associated with schooling but were not recognized by the participants as school problems. This may be interpreted as a negative response to conflict on a personal level, but it also reflects the cultures of home and school in which the participants lived, and in analytical terms, in which they responded to conflict. It seems that the relationship between the personal and cultural (which Lederach describes as the broad patterns of group life), within the context of the structural elements of their lives, might be the main explanation of why the participants dropped out of school, and, for that matter, why they returned to school as adults.

Since conflict changes relationships, the similarity among the stories is a significant finding and leads to the conclusion that dropping out of school takes place in the context of many relationships and is not a response to one issue or event. In the

findings, Lederach's subcomponents seemed to contain many relationships that merge into the shared relational reality of which Indigenous research speaks. The study showed that the childhood homes of the research participants were characterized by frequent relocation (86.7%), a perception of isolation or insignificance due to the lack of a nurturing relationship with a parent figure (93.3%), and a perception that leaving school did not pose a conflict with family or community values. There were multiple references to a loss (46 references by 19 people), usually the death of a loved one, that precipitated the departure of the study participant from school. Other losses included loss of health, home, safety, friends, and of a familiar school community. The conflict transformation analysis suggests that some of these are cultural and structural matters. The commonality of loss might also be considered as part of cultural, because loss is a common part of the larger group living in the context of identity conflict. Other experiences common to the larger group included peers who over-consumed alcohol and for whom graduation was not a priority. However, the relationship of these to the personal experiences of the participants makes them difficult to separate, and underscores how important it is to explore the significance of these losses in relationship to the whole life experience provided in the narratives. In the context of understanding conflict transformation and of understanding why the participants quit school, one is reminded that conflict changes relationships. For the participants, it changed and reshaped many of their relationships, which in turn changed their official relationship with the school system.

The participants spoke with love about their families, but their childhoods were difficult and characterized by many upheavals in relationships that are not unusual in situations of protracted identity conflict. In describing their childhoods, the participants

gave evidence of the complexities and relational nature of conflict as they lived with their families, communities, and peers, as they, too, responded to conflict. The participants talked about traumatic and very difficult life circumstances that affected their school attendance. According to the literature, the triggers for some of these circumstances and feelings likely originate in identity conflict, but regardless of their origins, they represent very real challenges and painful circumstances that have now been identified, and can be addressed.

All of the participants were raised in families that moved many times. They talked about how their schooling was disrupted and they fell behind in school, which made them feel, as Charlie said, “stupid.” Loss of community due to multiple moves compounded their sense of isolation. Also common for the participants was the absence of a nurturing parent or guardian, and they talked about feeling isolated and unimportant. Notably, all Bead Workshop participants included at least one bead in their bracelets to represent painful childhood experiences, and one to represent broken parental relationships. All of the participants mentioned the loss of at least one person they loved in the immediate period just before they dropped out of school. According to the conceptual framework of the study, these would be considered negative, or destructive changes that contextualize conflict transformation in relationships, while increasing our understanding of how people sometimes make apparently negative decisions that affect their lives. In fact, when the emphasis is on the relationships rather than on the decision to drop out of school, it becomes evident that in many ways, dropping out of school made sense.

Difficulties with relationships at school were also common among the participants. Although some of the participants had “loved” school, and especially primary school, they

talked about the humiliation of what they perceived to be lowered academic standards for them as Aboriginal students. They said this compounded their feelings of “stupidity,” which they first considered to be a result of frequent moving. Education was not encouraged or supported by their families, peers, or their communities and so leaving school did not represent immediate conflict, yet took place within a web of other conflicts. Specifically, their sense of isolation and at least one tangible loss at a young age shaped every participants’ school story. They described their time at school with instances of bullying, and feeling unimportant or insignificant to adults, as they did at home. They also said that their peers, whose stories might potentially be very similar to those of the participants, did not consider education important or beneficial. Since the relational dimension of conflict transformation includes the interdependence and interactive aspects of conflict, it is evident that the findings are best understood as a whole. In the analysis of why the participants dropped out of school, their school life and family life need to be considered in relationship with each other. Although dropping out of school would be considered a destructive response to conflict in terms of the goals and benefits of education and social and economic outcomes, the dynamic understanding of change that is advanced by the conflict transformation perspective suggests that, as one of the participants stated, “It took a lot of courage.” In this way, the findings indicate that the students quit school for reasons that are rooted in many relationships.

As they described their personal relationships and shared their memories, courage, hope, and especially love, resonated from the stories of the participants. This suggests that deeply held beliefs may have a larger role in conflict transformation than Lederach’s model suggests. Certainly, for Aboriginal people who have dropped out of school,

courage, hope, and love seem to be important elements that sustained the participants as they navigated life and life's conflicts.

The power of love seemed to be the central factor that unified the conflict transformation process, and might be the most powerful factor in conflict transformation, according to the findings of this study. Despite the difficulties of their childhoods, the participants spoke of their love for their parents, especially for their mothers, and for their children. Some also spoke of deep love and respect for their siblings and of how they were inspired by their siblings. Shyanne delivered her sister's baby on the bathroom floor; Dianne admired her brothers as fathers. Of the many relationships evident in the data, the most prevalent ones were grounded in love. Although the role of love in conflict transformation is not readily apparent in the Lederach model, the love expressed by the participants for the people who cared for them and for those they care about is so prevalent in the narratives, that it must indeed be one of the most powerful forces at work in how they are transforming their lives. Personal conflict transformation, then, takes place in the context of love. In this way, the findings confirm a much more important role for personal and relational subcomponents (and especially love) in responses to conflict than the conflict transformation diagram suggests.

As constructive conflict responses transform what is undesired to what is desired, the power of love seemed to work with courage and hope throughout the relationships described by the participants. They all indicated an acceptance and resolution with their own histories and their painful childhoods. They spoke specifically about healing and focused on the likely potential for positive futures ahead of them. The findings also show that hopes for the future were shared: each of the participants returned to school with a

vision for a better future, which they expressed with confidence and a sense of pride. They anticipated improved employment opportunities, and they wanted to be positive role models for their children. This is very significant and means that through the lens of conflict transformation, the potential for positive change within conflict can be recognized in the animated narratives of the participants, as they talked about their love. Conflict changes relationships, and for the participants, it was love that responded to conflict and moved them toward something constructive and desired, and included the fulfilment of their hopes and dreams. This leads one to conclude that although Lederach is certainly not wrong, the application of his model to this particular identity conflict requires more attention to the level of the heart than the model provides.

As we have seen in this study, the conflict transformation approach stresses that conflict is normal and continuous in human relationships. But the stories of the participants, analyzed through a conflict transformation approach, made the potential for constructive change much more evident. At the time of the study, the participants clearly believed that education would fulfill their intention to become better role models for their children and would assist in the attainment of better jobs, and so demonstrates how one response to conflict transformed from something negative (quitting school) into something positive, or desired (returning to school). Several participants referred to the positive potential inherent in conflicts when they talked about “structuring” their own futures. In many ways, the participants put aside the past and were deliberately pursuing a better life, but with a careful focus on their relationships with the children and family members they love. Relationships are, as Lederach has argued, the very heart of transformational processes. The participants returned to school for the same reasons: in order to reshape

their future with employment opportunities, and to be positive role models for the children they all said they loved. Although the participants returned to complete their high school diplomas for personal and relational reasons, they have also inadvertently built peace by addressing and overcoming both identity conflict and personal pain to some degree.

As this dissertation has established, the relational environments in which the participants quit school are similar and are reviewed here. These included highly transient families, many losses that included death and abandonment, the absence of a nurturing parent, a social environment that disregarded the value of school, and a deep sense of insignificance and devaluation. The similarities also included peer and family influences to leave school, alcohol abuse, and bullying. In the context of these communities and relationships, the participants quit school. When explaining their thoughts about the future, some participants expressed concern about their health, about possibly being treated disrespectfully, and they feared they might fail to fulfill their dreams. Although they expressed worry for the future for their children if the children did not stay in school, the participants explained that to be inspiring role models for their children was one of the reasons they were finishing high school. They spoke of great love for their children and for their parents, which together with their courage, seemed to fuel their plans for the future. Presented in relationship to each other, the findings reflect the power of Lederach's framework to identify the relational nature of conflict transformation.

In the process of collecting the data, there were many expressions of appreciation by the participants for what were essentially the research methods. Several thanked the researcher directly for asking to hear their stories, and there was great support and appreciation for the Bead Workshop. According to Wilson, "methodology is simply the

building of more relations” (2008, p. 79). Almost 90% of the people who attended the Bead Workshop thanked the researcher, and said they had appreciated the experience. There was no negative feedback to the researcher or to the Maskotew Kiskin teachers, and two participants suggested to the researcher that the workshop be offered again. The workshop facilitated the expressions of healing through sharing and storytelling. For example, several explained that the workshop helped them understand what they had been through in their lives, others said it helped them heal, while others expressed surprise at the number of good things in their lives that were represented by their bead selections. Others expressed that they appreciated the relationship between the beads and the significance of specific events and people in their lives. The eloquent and heartfelt expressions of healing and hope are evidence that the semi-structured interviews, and especially the Bead Workshop, were positive experiences for the participants.

The study findings suggest that the merging of conflict transformation principles with Indigenous research criteria and examining the issue of Aboriginal dropout rates in the context of relationships is a methodology that has the potential to transform Aboriginal education in Canada. Creating the time and space for hurting people to share their stories provided an important contribution to the literature about conflict transformation and about Aboriginal education. The participants said and demonstrated clearly that they appreciated the invitation to tell their stories and to have their perspectives acknowledged, and so another of the purposes of the study was fulfilled.

As Lederach says, conflict can be transformed peacefully when it is correctly understood, and the conflict transformation circle is completed when responses to conflict create constructive, or desired, change, which the participants demonstrated when they

returned to school. The reasons the Aboriginal people in this study attributed to dropping out of school are relationally based and more personal and inter-related than perhaps is represented in the current literature. Just as Indigenous research recognizes systems of relationships, the conflict transformation framework facilitated understanding how conflict shapes relationships. In this way, the relational hopes, fears, and goals of the participants were recognized, and the strength of their courage, hope and love explains, at least in part, their journey away from school and back. Their stories, analyzed within conflict transformation's system of relationships, provided the answers to the research question, which was "What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school? What are their hopes for the future? And what are their fears and worries for themselves, and for their families?"

In summary, the major research questions have been answered. The first part of the research question was "What are the perceptions of Aboriginal adults of their school experiences, and why did they drop out of school?" In response, the participants talked about their childhood in general, with narratives that indicated that their early years were characterized by frequent moving, unengaged or absent parents, staggering losses including deaths, bullying, and a profound sense of personal insignificance and inferiority. Like the framework of conflict transformation, Indigenous research analyzes findings like these within the context of the entire system of relationships. When quitting school is recognized as a response to cumulative conflicts, rather than as the outcome of particular facets within educational systems, a new perspective into why Aboriginal people drop out of school is added to the literature. This study provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of Aboriginal school experiences, and perhaps chart brighter futures for

Aboriginal students. In answer to “What are their hopes for the future?” the findings reflected and emphasized the great love the participants hold for their children, which influenced and shaped their plans. Their hopes for the future include a desire to complete school so that they can have better jobs to provide for their families, and to be good role models.” Within the narratives, the “fears and worries for themselves, and for their families” included concerns about health, completing their studies, and being able to fulfill their plans for the future. The participants were also concerned that their children would stay in school and thereby enjoy a higher quality of life than the participants did. Notably, courage, hope, and love were prominent findings and seemed to be common attributes among all the participants.

Since conflict occurs in all the relationships of life and provides opportunities to increase understanding of ourselves, of others, and of social structures, conflict transformation is rooted in relationships. Similarly, Indigenous research emphasizes relationships and does not analyze any data out of the context of other data. Indigenous research is complemented by the principles of conflict transformation because it also recognizes complexity, includes spiritual and relational dimensions in research, and creates safe spaces for people to express themselves. However, Lederach stresses in the conflict transformation approach that although conflict has the potential for positive change, it often results in long-standing cycles of hurt and destruction, cycles that are recognized in the story of Aboriginal education in Canada.

The combination of conflict transformation with the incorporation of Indigenous research principles in this research study led to interesting findings among the data that reveal the factors that contributed to quitting school. Study participants shared similar

stories of painful relationships, but they also spoke of great love, and it seems that this love, more than pain, moved them through conflict toward positive change. The interconnected nature of conflict transformation is closely reflected in the narratives, which did not separate home and school experiences, and evidenced a strong relationship between the two. Examined through the lens of conflict transformation, the data suggest that, as the quote that commences this chapter requests, we have found a new way of hearing the stories of why Aboriginal people quit school.

The current situation in Canadian Aboriginal education can change. Future education policies and the many policies and regulations that govern life for Aboriginal people in Canada may be broadly informed and established to meet genuine need, provide accountable and measurable results for government, and most importantly, restore or maintain individual human dignity. One will recall from the literature that one of the goals of Indigenous scholars is to address injustice, trauma and racism endured by Aboriginal people. The courage and dignity of the participants who shared their stories for this study have added significantly to our understandings of how a small group of urban Aboriginal people have made sense of their school experiences. As the Postscript will portray, the stories explored in this study speak to hope and the power of transformation, suggesting that for those immersed in Canada's protracted conflict, there is a way forward.

The conclusions of the study are presented next, followed by the implications and recommendations of the study for theory, research, and practice.

Conclusions of the Study

The selection of the Lederach Conflict Transformation principles in order to analyze the data provided a respectful complement to the highly relational nature of Indigenous research, and resulted in four conclusions of the study.

- 1) For the participants of this study, dropping out of school took place in the context of many relationships and not in response to one issue.
- 2) Research designed and analyzed with the conflict transformation perspective and with adherence to the principles of Indigenous research has the potential to positively transform Aboriginal education in Canada.
- 3) The power of love is the strongest force in conflict transformation.
- 4) The participants appreciated being asked to share their stories, and they especially appreciated the Bead Workshop.

The conclusions emerging from the study can potentially be transformed into policy language to improve education on and off Reserve while promoting peace and effectiveness in matters of Aboriginal education and in other matters of public administration. It is important to note that this study did not explore the institution of education, but rather the experiences of people. The findings and conclusions present knowledge and insight into how ordinary people who have experienced Aboriginal education in Canada have perceived and responded to the conflicts they have encountered. These participants did not attribute dropping out of school directly with problems in their schools; they left in response to a widespread system of relationships in which an accumulation of difficult life circumstances resulted in feelings of devaluation, insignificance and loss.

Implications and Recommendations

This study and its conclusions have a number of important implications and recommendations²³ for theory, research, and practice, especially peace and conflict literature, since the study is one of the first applications of Lederach's model to the Canadian Aboriginal education context.

Theory

Finding a suitable conceptual framework to understand people in conflict experience is important to peace work, and particularly important for people living in areas of protracted identity conflict. As a conceptual framework, Lederach's model is complex and intended for many different situations. However, when applying the model to the data of the study, there seemed to be an opportunity to expand the model in order to make sense of the prevalence of personal and relational subcomponents in the stories of the participants. As outlined in the Discussion section, the findings seemed to emphasize a deeper power that was driving or motivating change. In many ways, it seemed to be love, hope, and courage within the participants. These seemed so deeply rooted within the stories that they seemed to suggest that they, and especially love, played a much more critical drive in positive conflict transformation than mere change or the potential of a better future might warrant. As a result, the Lederach Conflict Transformation model became the foundation for a complementary model that allows for the identification and inclusion of belief systems (deeper thoughts) in the processes of personal conflict transformation. Deeper thoughts, which can be called belief systems because of their capacity to influence thought and behavior, emerged much more prominently in the

²³ The Recommendations of the Study are duplicated as Appendix I.

findings than the other subcomponents of Lederach's model. These belief systems seemed to be the driving force for intentional change.

The product is a theoretical framework intended for future research among people living in conflict that allows the discovery of how, or perhaps why, people endure the conflicts they do, and what it is that motivates the changes that they do make. For simple reference, Table 1, called Labels, shows the headings in the Lederach model and the similar parts of the complementary model. For example, Inquiry 1 is relabeled 'The Current Context,' Inquiry 2 is relabeled 'The Imagined Tomorrow' and Inquiry 3 is relabeled 'The Field of Change' in an effort to more closely reflect how findings might be applied to the model.

Table 1

Comparison of the Two Models

Conflict Transformation Model

Belief Systems and

Conflict Transformation Model

<i>Inquiry 1: The Presenting Situation</i>	The Current Context
Issue	Common Ground
Patterns	Life Patterns
History	Historical Influences
<i>Inquiry 2: The Horizon of the Future</i>	The Imagined Tomorrow
Solutions	Desired State
Relationships	Prioritized Relationships
Systems	Institutions and Organizations
<i>Inquiry 3: The Development of Change Processes</i>	The Field of Change
Cultural, Structural, Personal, Relational	Web of Lived Conflicts
Episode	Visible Conflict
Epicenter	Change of Focus
(Directional arrows)	(Pathways circulating through the model)

The complementary model, called Belief Systems and Conflict Transformation Model, is presented on page 173 as Figure 3. This is meant to complement the Lederach model, and to explain the progression through conflict toward positive change. The arrow

at the top left of Figure 3 indicates that Current Context is the starting point for understanding the processes of personal conflict transformation. From the Current Context, the model flows to the Field of Change, and to the Imagined Tomorrow. Depicted is a circular pathway from the Current Context, through the Field of Change, and the Imagined Tomorrow, back to the Current Context. These are the Belief Systems, or attributes that operate deep within individuals and move them toward positive change; by implication, the model suggests that negative attributes or Belief Systems (nurtured to maturity in the Field of Change) move people toward negative change.

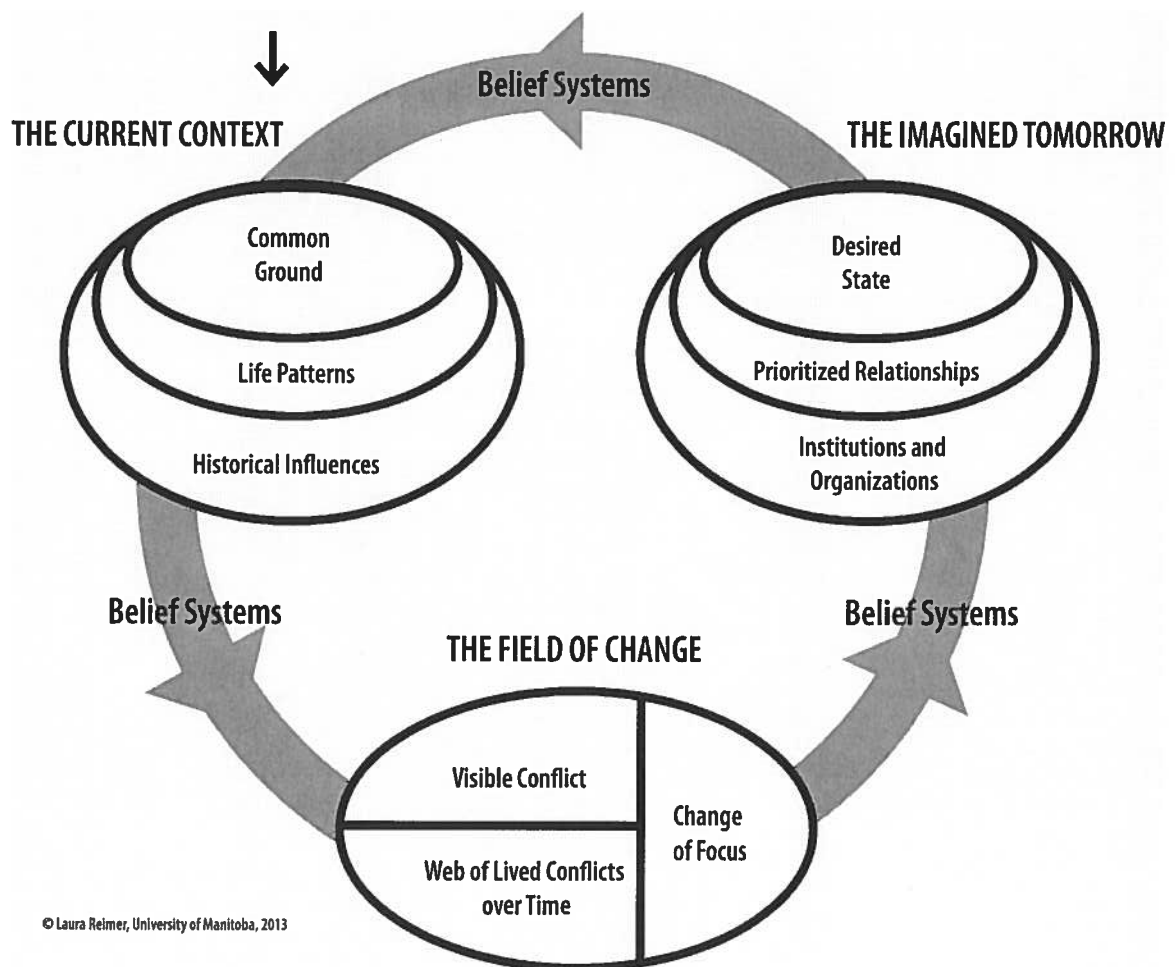


Figure 3: Belief Systems and Conflict Transformation Model.

Just as the Inquiries must be considered together in the Lederach model, and just as Indigenous research requires a recognition of entire relational systems, the three components called The Current Context, The Imagined Tomorrow, and The Field of Change, are equally important in understanding the cycle of conflict transformation. Note that the three components are situated on a light ring with directional arrows. This is intended to represent the integral attributes of personal conflict transformation. In this complementary model, the arrows in the original model (Figure 2, page 48) are replaced with broad pathways in a continuous and fluid cycle beneath the components in order to represent the driving force of these belief systems in conflict transformation. The belief systems, or attributes, may differ depending on the people and the conflict settings.

The starting point in the model is the Current Context. The three subcomponents of the Current Context are Common Ground, Life Patterns and Historical Influences. Common Ground simply identifies the reason for the research or analysis, such as why groups of people drop out of school. Life Patterns refers to those incidents, circumstances or occurrences in the lives of the participants that form a pattern in their lives and that influence the Common Ground. In turn, Life Patterns are the habits of their life and school lives. The third subcomponent is called the Historical Influences, and refers to the longer term influences from both the public and the personal spheres. Historical influences are an important part of understanding The Current Context and creates “an opportunity to remember and recognize... the connection between the present and the past” (Lederach, 2003, p. 35). Importantly, the Current Context is also influenced by the belief systems of the individual who is living in conflict.

In thinking seriously about the findings, the six subcomponents in Lederach's Inquiry 3 were regrouped as Visible Conflict, Web of Lived Conflicts over Time, and Change of Focus to better capture the commonalities in the study narratives and to complement the model as it has been designed by Lederach. Visible Conflict refers to evident conflict, and Web of Lived Conflicts refers to those conflicts which have characterized an individual's story over a longer period of time. There is an important difference in this component of the model, and so it also bears a different shape. The vertical line between the Conflicts and the Change of Focus is the bulkhead at which conflict may not be transformed according to one's vision of the future (one's focus). If people do not move into Change of Focus, conflict is not transformed positively and they remain at this stage, and do not move through to fulfil their 'imagined tomorrow.' The vertical line separating the subcomponents captures the linear sequence. When conflict is in the process of personal transformation, an individual begins to address conflicts with more focus on an Imagined Tomorrow. The study findings demonstrated that everyone who changed their focus toward a hope-filled future moved through the bulkhead. They pursued constructive change despite no communication of real address or remedy of their earlier circumstances, and with no apparent other reason than a change in how they looked at themselves and their future. However, percolating below the surface of the findings were the prevalence of love, courage, and hope, which are identified as deep matters of the heart, or belief systems. These belief systems either push people through toward positive conflict transformation and the pursuit of their Imagined Tomorrow, or they return back toward the Current Context.

The Imagined Tomorrow identifies how people are thinking about the future. The Imagined Tomorrow encompasses the Desired State, Prioritized Relationships, and Institutions and Organizations and as such, this is where reality and hope overlap. The Desired State is the cognitive solution to a conflict. In many ways, the Desired State is what shapes concrete plans for change. For example, the desire of the participants to be a positive role model is a Desired State. This develops in the context of Prioritized Relationships, which were identified by the study participants as priorities in their imagined future. Based on the importance of these relationships and their deeply held beliefs, people in conflict re-organize and manage their lives in order to support an Imagined Future.

The third subcomponent influencing the Imagined Tomorrow is called Institutions and Organizations, which reflects the hope participants identified when thinking about their future, such as completing their education. Together, the Desired State, Prioritized Relationships and Institutions and Organizations comprise the Imagined Tomorrow that, like Lederach's Inquiry 2, provide orientation for the emotional, mental and physical preparations required for someone in conflict to think about a future they desire (Lederach, 2003, p. 36).

This adaptation to and complement for the Lederach model is meant to explain more fully and specifically the affective dimension of conflict transformation, because the findings of the study emphasized attributes to a much greater degree than they are explained in the broader and perhaps more generally applicable Lederach model. The model has retained the circularity of Lederach's model, because it is meant to complement it and because conflict transformation is circular. As Lederach says, circularity "reminds

us that things are connected and in relationship” and that “the processes of change are not one-directional” or linear (Lederach, 2003, p. 41). The three components, The Current Context, the Imagined Tomorrow, and the Field of Change, are connected by the belief systems that shape how people think about themselves and their potential, and that compel the transformation cycle. This model is an effort to depict the cycle of personal conflict transformation and the shared reality that was powerfully evident in the narratives of the Aboriginal participants in this study. As a potential contribution to the literature, the model expands two components of the Lederach model to reflect that the emphasis on the personal and relational subcomponents, especially belief systems, in the process of personal conflict transformation.

The principles of conflict transformation illuminated relationships that provided new information about how people living in situations of identity conflict respond to conflict, both positively and negatively. There is one recommendation for theory:

Recommendation 1: That the Belief Systems and Conflict Transformation model be tested.

Research

This study took place in one Manitoba urban community but it would be beneficial for Aboriginal people in general, and for education policy makers, to examine a larger sample of Aboriginal people, including those who did not return to school in order to validate the findings. Future research should also examine the time between dropping out of school and returning, in an effort to determine what took place during the intervening years, and how those relationships and experiences shaped conflict transformation.

Similarly, further research ought to determine who, if anyone, influenced the desire these people had to return to school. While it is clear that the participants returned to school to improve their employment opportunities and to present better role models for their children, it is not evident which other issues, patterns or relationships also affected their decision to return to school. For example, there may be other experiences common among the participants. While there is a growing body of literature about the barriers to Aboriginal students encounter in post-secondary education, future research should examine the barriers people face to completing their secondary education.

Also, future research might explore how Aboriginal people have made sense of their experiences in broader society, including their relationship with other social services that have poor results for Aboriginal people. Such research, designed to respect Indigenous research and guided by the principles of conflict transformation, would elicit findings that are based on the real life experiences of people who live with the outcomes of poor or inappropriate policy. This suggests that focused research, energy, and resources to better understand the hopes and dreams of potentially successful Aboriginal people could improve their academic and economic success in other cities and provinces. The findings could influence future discourse and policy, and arguably change things.

According to Lederach (1995) the major contribution of peace and conflict research "is to seek innovative ways to create a time and a place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present" (p. 35). This research has examined the educational experiences of Aboriginal students in one community living in protracted identity conflict, but most likely, Lederach's model would work in other areas

of the world. The findings could be compared and provide powerful insight into conflict transformation, but also potentially illuminate new ways to help groups of people that want to heal and pursue their hopes and dreams.

The role of Maskotew Kiskin and the availability of further high school education for the participants is an important variable of the study and one that was not addressed by the participants. The model of the school and its role in the participants' decision to return to school is further research that ought to be undertaken in the search for improving Aboriginal high school graduation.

Similarly, these students' hopes stand out among the findings, and warrant further exploration. While conflict transformation may explain why the participants quit school, there are many examples of the importance of hope as an important reason in returning to school. It seems that the hope these participants demonstrated included considerable personal strength directed at goals. Future research could explore the role that hope plays in other peoples' experiences. In this respect, "[a]n adequate understanding of hope is still elusive and future studies should more thoroughly explore the nature of hope" (Tong, Fredrickson, Chang, & Lim, 2010, p. 1214).

This study provides empirical evidence that conflict transformation is a good analytical model for understanding Aboriginal conflicts in Canada, and it merges comfortably with Indigenous research. The methodology is relevant and may guide future research in order to help leaders make sense of what Aboriginal people need. This is where conflict transformation research can bridge the western and Indigenous worldviews and bring understanding, help people, and expand the literature. The methodology not only was a powerful and positive process that assisted in generating an increased understanding

of the experiences of the research participants and why they dropped out of school, but has also demonstrated that it is respectful and qualifies as important Indigenous research that might be used and adapted in other areas of Aboriginal life. Therefore, the following are five (5) recommendations for research:

Recommendation 2: That the research study be expanded to a larger Aboriginal population that has dropped out of school to provide broader empirical evidence, and thereby maximize the allocation of resources and address the real problems behind the Aboriginal dropout rates.

Recommendation 3: That the study be expanded to explore the narratives of many more ordinary Aboriginal people through the hopeful framework of conflict transformation in order to maximize understanding, transform the consequences of identity conflict, and assist government and Aboriginal leaders facilitate the achievement of a better future.

Recommendation 4: That more research be conducted with a conflict transformation framework to understand the years between dropping out of school and coming back with firm plans for the future, and the role of love in this transformation.

Recommendation 5: That Lederach's conflict transformation model be tested with other people who live in situations of protracted identity conflict with the goal of nurturing personal and community peacebuilding through the principles of conflict transformation.

Recommendation 6: That research designed with Indigenous research and conflict transformation principles explore the reasons for the effectiveness of Maskotew

Kiskin, and be funded by the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, and/or the Assembly of First Nations, the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Treaty Relations Commissioners, and/or the Manitoba Aboriginal Education Directorate, for the potential duplication of the project in other areas.

Practice

For practitioners in the field of peace and conflict studies and in those areas pertaining to Aboriginal affairs, the principles of conflict transformation offer a valuable opportunity to more realistically understand the experiential dimension of Aboriginal life in Canada. The use of narrative methods respects Aboriginal cultural traditions and, as heavily supported in the literature, means that personal stories may contribute importantly to research and to practice; the Bead Workshop is particularly conducive to this effort. When acknowledged and placed within a conflict transformation perspective, personal narratives may change practice and increase our understandings about other areas that are not working for people in living in conflict. Conflict transformation encourages and is conducive to mapping conflict within the circular fluidity and relational accountability that are the hallmarks of Indigenous research and the Aboriginal worldview.

One of the key roles of research is to inform change and better practice. It is important for researchers to provide empirical research for current government policy initiatives at the federal, provincial, band and local levels to assure that the goals of public policy are most effectively experienced by the individuals those policies are intended to serve. Peace and conflict research remind leaders and policy makers in Aboriginal affairs and in educational administration that conflict takes many forms and has far reaching repercussions, when it is understood, and when it is misunderstood. In this way, conflict

transformation as a conceptual form and as a practical application, has great potential to inform better policy decisions, especially for Aboriginal education.

The study is intentionally mindful of the potential policy influences of the findings and conclusions, which are presented so that official responses to the education of Aboriginal people by leaders and educators might not be made “regardless of the implications for the people who experience them” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 217). While exploring oppression and privilege extends beyond the parameters of this particular thesis, the research discussed here begins to get at that navigation and suggests that individual and ordinary people, rather than just leadership, can contribute powerfully to defining their imagined tomorrow.

The policy initiatives and responses of the Government of Canada to education issues for Aboriginal people have been structural, and are directed specifically for First Nations people, as opposed to all Aboriginal people. This makes sense because most of the conflict management, resolution efforts and interventions pertaining to Aboriginal education have been undertaken primarily by the federal government, or by elected First Nations leaders. However, the other governments, with Constitutional responsibility for education, are also working hard within their jurisdictions to address the disparities in Aboriginal education. As the literature stresses, structural responses are not unusual responses to protracted identity conflict. However, statistics continue to indicate that structural responses are not meeting the educational needs and goals of the majority of Canada’s Aboriginal people despite the many efforts and sincere intentions to rectify the wrongs. Toward this end, conflict transformation can assist all levels of government and

leadership in determining where public resources can best be directed, and in particular to address the drop out trend in education.

In practical terms, Canadian statistics indicate that many Aboriginal people who have abandoned their education are eligible to complete grade twelve. The results and findings of this study provide critical information about the reasons that they likely left school in the first place, and potentially facilitate the completion of education for these many people. With 100% of the participants expressing hope and clearly structured plans for their future, the study contributes significant understanding that the participants have transformed conflict in their lives, made sense of their school experiences, and turned the negative experiences of life into positive futures. The hope of these conclusions extends far beyond the study participants.

According to this study, there is an entire system of relationships at the core of why Aboriginal people drop out of school, and the individual people involved require healing, hope, courage, and love in order to transform the conflict. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders can contribute significantly to this in terms of funding and support. The research processes undertaken in this study are built upon the effective, field-tested and meaningful peace-building practices of *To Respect and Trust* (Bar-on & Kassem, 2004) and *Towards Understanding and Healing* (Hetherington, 2008), which reflect the principles of conflict transformation and Indigenous research. There is one (1) recommendation for practice:

Recommendation 7: That Government and Aboriginal leaders be deliberate in their endeavors for effective change by engaging peace-building practices like the Bead Workshop, conducted by qualified researchers, with many Aboriginal people, as an

intervention to facilitate their healing and toward maximized understanding of how public resources can best provide what Aboriginal people identify that they need to fulfil their hopes and dreams for themselves, and for their families.

Postscript

Thank you for listening. It's really good that you come around. I heard a lot of people talking amongst themselves at the tables, and you don't hear people talk like that. Like, you brought a lot out in our class. Like, a lot, so that's really good. And it gets people to thinking, you know. I think that's why I liked it, and I think that's also why my mom was so depressed—because it opened a wide range of doors for her... 'cause my mom [*pause*] I thought I had a hard life—and I've seen what my mom was into and doing—and she had it a lot worse. So this is really great. Thank you so much. I have a lot of guilt and other things I've done to people and I just... I have to let it go. I have to let a lot of things go. I never cry. I just have a lot of guilt, a lot of pain. I just have to find a way to let it go. It's really hard for me 'cause I don't talk about my feelings and I don't cry. I just like hold everything in... hold it all in.

I'm happy I met you. Even when we did the interviews, it was really nice just to talk to you. Now with the healing workshop, like, it's really nice like. You know because you understand struggle. Most people don't understand struggle. They don't know what it means to have a struggle, I just, I dunno, I can't even explain it 'cause like it's so hard for me. And this bracelet represents so much... like, a lot of weight has been lifted off my shoulders, just today. It's just a really... it's a positive thing and I'm happy that I got to make this. These beads are more than beads. They're a whole life story. They're more than just beads.

-Shyanne, Bison Park, Manitoba

December, 2011

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Appendix A:

Guiding Principles for Indigenous Research

“Aboriginal people themselves approve the research and research methods;

A knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to the community;

Ways of relating and acting within the community with an understanding of the principles of reciprocity and responsibility;

Research participants must feel safe and be safe, including respecting issues of confidentiality;

A non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching;

A deep listening and hearing with more than the ears;

A reflective, non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard;

Having learnt from the listening a purposeful plan to act with actions informed by learning, wisdom, and acquired knowledge;

Responsibility to act with fidelity in relationship to what has been heard, observed, and learnt;

An awareness and connection between logic of mind and the feelings of the heart;

Listening and observing the self as well as in relationship to others;

Acknowledgement that the researcher brings to the research his or her subjective self.”

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Appendix B:

Approved Semi-Structured Interview Questions



Research Project Title: Dropping Out of School: Exploring Conflict Transformation in the Narratives of One Community of Urban Aboriginal People

Researcher: Laura Reimer

(Laura Reimer): Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate the time you have given me to review the consent forms and thank you for your signature on the consent forms. Do you have any further questions? I will now switch on the tape recorder. I will also be taking notes (on this computer/in my journal) as you talk.

I have about 15 questions that I would like to have answered. I may ask you questions like, why was that? Or, how did that happen? Or, please tell me more about that. In order to ensure that I am representing your views and perceptions accurately I will also take notes. Please feel free to respond to the questions as you feel comfortable. I will not interrupt you. Is that agreeable to you?

1. Would you tell me your name and what it means?
2. Would you tell me about the family you grew up with?
3. Could you describe the community you grew up in? How did/do you feel about that?
4. Where did the children in your community go to school? Please describe where you went to school?
5. Tell me what it was like for you to go to school. How long did you go to school?
6. Would you tell me why you left school?
7. How would you describe your school experiences?
8. What were some of your hopes and dreams when you were a youth?
9. What were your hopes and dreams when you enrolled at (Maskotew Kiskin)?
10. What are some of the real benefits you think are associated with school?
11. What do you worry about for yourself for the future?
12. What do you worry about for your children and the children in (Bison Park) for the future?
13. What are your hopes and dreams for yourself for the future?
14. What are your hopes and dreams for your children and the children in (Bison Park) for the future?
15. How would you describe an ideal school?

Appendix C:

Common Introduction for Semi- Structured Interviews

Common Introduction:

(Researcher says) “Thank you for meeting with me today. As I explained with the Consent Forms, I am interested to know why Aboriginal people quit school. I particularly wanted to listen to your story because of the hope you represent – you left school, but now you have decided to come back and graduate from high school. As I indicated before, your participation is voluntary and what you have to say will be attributed anonymously. The questions are open-ended, so that you can say whatever you think or as much as you wish; I am mostly here to listen. I invite you to share whatever you like, but only what you are comfortable sharing. Would you tell me about your early years in school, why you left, and why you came back to high school, and what hopes and dreams you have for your future?”

Appendix D:

Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Bead Workshop)



Research Project Title: Dropping Out of School: Exploring Conflict Transformation in the Narratives of One Community of Urban Aboriginal People

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. This letter should help you to understand what the research is about, and how you can be involved. If something here is unclear to you, please be sure to ask the researcher or the researcher's Supervisor. Please take the time to read this carefully because you will be asked to sign that you have read it.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to listen to how Aboriginal people think of their school experiences and to learn about their hopes and dreams, fears and worries.

Procedure Involving Participants: If you decide that you would like to participate in a Bead Workshop with me (Laura Reimer) and approximately 24 other people from [Bison Park], it will take place in a safe and private room in [Bison Park] Community Centre. The workshop will take about 2 hours. You will need to come without your children. If you need childcare, I can work with the Executive Director of [the local day care] to provide childcare for you at no cost to you. During the workshop, I will ask you to reflect on your education, where you went to school, and about your hopes, fears and worries for yourself and for your family. After about 15 minutes, I will invite you to choose from a large selection of beads to make a bracelet that represents important memories and experiences that influenced you, from your life. The last part of the bracelet will represent your views for the future. After you have threaded your bracelet, you will have an opportunity to share your story with a small group of four people, and then with the larger group. With your permission, I will record your story with a tape recorder as you talk.

Recording and Transcription: I will tape record some of the workshop and I will transcribe the information for later analysis. In my final report, I may use direct quotations from you to support my findings, or to illustrate a point. I would also like to take photographs of your bracelet so that I may use the photographs in my final report to illustrate some of points in the stories.

Confidentiality of Information: Due to the fact that all of the participants are from [Bison Park] and are in some way associated with [Mastekow Kiskin], it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. However, I will make every effort to keep your involvement in this study confidential. I will assign you a different name (a pseudonym) on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for [Bison Park], for [Mastekow Kiskin] and for anywhere or anyone else that you reference in your interview. This way, your privacy and the privacy of your home and family are protected. I will keep all of my notes and the tapes in a locked file cabinet

in my office. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a backup drive, which are both protected with a password known only to me. The tapes and notes will be destroyed by burning those three years after the completion of the study.

Feedback about the Study: If you would like, I will send you a copy of the study when it is complete. There is a spot at the end of this document you can mark if you would like a copy. You will be able to pick it up from the Teachers or the Community Liaison Officer in the school office of [Bison Park] Community Centre.

General Comments: Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand what you will be asked to do regarding participation in the research study and that you agree to participate. It is important that you know that this doesn't waive any of your legal rights and freedoms, or release me from my legal, ethical and professional responsibilities as a researcher.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to not answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with. If you wish to withdraw, you may contact me at any stage of the study to say that you wish to withdraw and I will destroy all the notes and recordings I have made of your stories and answers. I will be leaving you with a small token of appreciation after the interview, a symbol of respect to you and to Aboriginal customs.

Researcher's Contact Information:

Laura Reimer

Cell Phone and Text Number: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Researcher's Supervisor Information:

Dr. John Stapleton

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the people named above, or the Human Ethics Secretariat at [REDACTED], or email [REDACTED].

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I agree that my participation in the bead workshop may be recorded on photographs and on a tape recorder. YES NO

I understand that I can withdraw at any time. YES NO

I may receive a final copy of the research report if I request one. YES NO

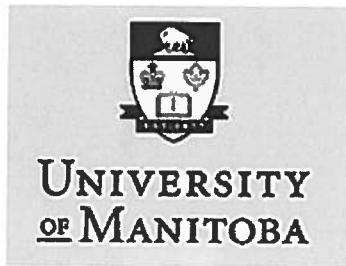
I agree to participate in the Bead Workshop. YES NO

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date : _____

I would like a copy of the final research project. Please keep a copy for me in the school office. Please print your name here. _____

Appendix E:
Promise of Confidentiality



Research Project Title: Dropping Out of School: Exploring Conflict Transformation in the Narratives of One Community of Urban Aboriginal People

Researcher: Laura Reimer

_____ I agree that telling my story is not about scoring political points.

_____ I will not engage in selective listening and ignore other participants.

_____ I will strive to respectfully hear when others are speaking.

_____ I will genuinely engage in the workshop.

_____ I agree that I will NOT disclose the identity of other participants in the Bead Workshop, or their opinions, or their stories.

_____ I will not divulge information about other participants that I received at the Bead Workshop.

_____ I will not interrupt other speakers.

_____ I will show respect for other people's different opinions, truths, and stories.

_____ I am coming to the workshop as an individual, not representing a group, or a gang, or a political cause.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F:

Common Introduction to Bead Workshop

The workshop took place after lunch on a Friday afternoon, and so participants were already in the room eating when the Researcher arrived. Before the workshop the Teacher introduced the Researcher by taking her to meet each Participant, and the Participants introduced themselves. After lunch and when participants were seated at tables of four, and the Consent Forms and Promise of Confidentiality have been explained and were signed, the Workshop began.

(Researcher says): “Thank you for welcoming me to your school, and for taking the time to participate today. The Bead Workshop that you have agreed to attend was originally designed in Ireland and is still being used there to help people make sense of things that have happened in their lives. As you can see, there are tables here with many different beads on them. In about half an hour, you will be invited to come and select the beads of your choosing to make a bracelet or a key chain that commemorates your life story. If you have any questions or need anything to do with the beads, I am available to you. As you know, this is part of a study exploring how Aboriginal people make sense of school experiences, and especially why people quit school. I was particularly interested in meeting you and working with you because you people have done something quite remarkable – you have come back to school as adults and I am very interested in your story. I am going to walk you through a process of remembering, allowing about 3 minutes for you to think about your earliest memories, and then invite you to spend about 5 minutes thinking about starting school, and then 5 minutes or so thinking about what school was like for you, what people, circumstances and events were significant to you, and then provide about 5 more minutes for you to think about high school and about when you quit school. Then, I will invite you to spend about 5 more minutes thinking about your future and what you hope your future will hold for you. I encourage you to keep your eyes open throughout the workshop, but please stay silent until the end so that we may be respectful of one another as we think through the people, circumstances, and experiences that have been significant in our lives. When everyone has strung their beads, I will invite you to share your stories with one another, and if you would let me hear your story, I would like that very much. If you decide to share your story with me, I will hold the tape recorder near you but out of sight so that we can both focus on the story of your beads. When that is done, I will ask if I can take a picture of your story. Are there any questions? Again, thank you for being here. Shall we begin?”

Appendix G:

Brief Introduction to the Participants

Note: Great effort has been taken to obscure and protect the identities of the participants for their own safety, resulting in potential but intentional confusion about the stories and the participants. Those participants who participated in both the interviews and the Bead Workshop have been given two names, resulting in 22 names here, although there were 19 participants. The Memory Tags below are offered to assist the reader despite this intentional obfuscation.

Women's Pseudonym	Memory Tag	Men's Pseudonym	Memory Tag
Kate	Really loved school and loved to be "the instigator" of mischief	Floyd	Working more important than school because of extreme poverty
Giselle	Felt like the "oddball" at school	Cyril	Plans to be second in family to complete school
Sandy	Father encouraged her to drop out of she didn't want to go further in school	Charlie	Felt "Stupid"
Phoebe	Missed a month of school before anyone told her mother	Leonard	Walked several miles through the bush to school
Doris	First home was in the bush	Donald	Raised by Grandfather
Lisa	Brother at university	Norbert	Father went to South America
Mary	Curled hair	Fred	Mentions fear often
Diane	Raised her brothers	Brian	Bead for his Mom
Megan	Baby at 12 or 13	David	Lots of girlfriends
Shyanne	Story in Prologue and Postscript	James	Mother went to US
Martha	Attended "a little school house"	Ron	One room school

Appendix H:

Letter of Consent for Adult Participants (Interviews)



Research Project Title: Dropping Out of School: Exploring Conflict Transformation in the Narratives of One Community of Urban Aboriginal People

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. This letter should help you to understand what the research is about, and how you can be involved. If something here is unclear to you, please be sure to ask the researcher or the researcher's Supervisor. Please take the time to read this carefully because you will be asked to sign that you have read it. *Purpose of the Research:* The purpose of this study is to listen to how Aboriginal people think of their school experiences and to learn about their hopes and dreams, fears and worries for the future.

Procedure Involving Participants: If you decide that you would like to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by me (Laura Reimer) on one occasion for approximately 60 minutes, but not longer than 90 minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be arranged at your convenience, but they will likely be at the [Bison Park] Community Centre. During the interview, I will ask you questions about people and events that are significant to your school experiences and perceptions, and I will ask you about your hopes and dreams, fears and worries, for yourself and for your family.

Recording and Transcription: I will tape record the interview and I will transcribe the information for later analysis. In my final report, I may use direct quotations from you to support my findings, or to illustrate a point.

Confidentiality of Information: Due to the fact that all of the participants are from [Bison Park] and are in some way associated with [Mastekow Kiskin], it will not be possible to remain completely anonymous. However, I will make every effort to keep your involvement in this study confidential. I will assign you a different name (a pseudonym) on all transcripts, field notes, or written reports and summaries of the study. I will also use a fictional name for [Bison Park], for [Mastekow Kiskin] and for anywhere or anyone else that you reference in your interview. This way, your privacy and the privacy of your home and family are protected. I will keep all of my notes and the tapes in a locked file cabinet in my office. Any typed documents will be stored on my computer and a backup drive, which are both protected with a password known only to me. The tapes and notes will be destroyed by burning those three years after the completion of the study.

Feedback about the Study: If you would like, I will send you a copy of the study when it is complete. There is a spot at the end of this document you can mark if you would like a

copy. You will be able to pick it up from the Teachers or the Community Liaison Officer in the school office of [Bison Park] Community Centre.

General Comments: Your signature at the bottom of this letter indicates that you understand what you will be asked to do regarding participation in the research study and that you agree to participate. It is important that you know that this doesn't waive any of your legal rights and freedoms, or release me from my legal, ethical and professional responsibilities as a researcher.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to not answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with. If you wish to withdraw, you may contact me at any stage of the study to say that you wish to withdraw and I will destroy all the notes and recordings I have made of your stories and answers.

I will be leaving you with a small token of appreciation after the interview, a symbol of respect to you and to Aboriginal customs.

Researcher's Contact Information:

Laura Reimer

Cell Phone and Text Number: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Researcher's Supervisor Information:

Dr. John Stapleton

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the people named above, or the Human Ethics Secretariat at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I understand and I agree to participate.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date : _____

I would like a copy of the final research project. Please keep a copy for me in the school office.

Please print your name here. _____

Appendix I:

Recommendations of the Study

Recommendation 1: That the complementary Belief Systems and Conflict Transformation model be tested.

Recommendation 2: That the research study be expanded to a larger Aboriginal population that has dropped out of school to provide broader empirical evidence, and thereby maximize the allocation of resources and address the real problems behind the Aboriginal dropout rates.

Recommendation 3: That the study be expanded to explore the narratives of many more ordinary Aboriginal people through the hopeful framework of conflict transformation in order to maximize understanding, transform the consequences of identity conflict, and assist government and Aboriginal leaders facilitate the achievement of a better future.

Recommendation 4: That more research be conducted with a conflict transformation framework to understand the years between dropping out of school and coming back with firm plans for the future, and the role of love in this transformation.

Recommendation 5: That Lederach's conflict transformation model be tested and compared with other people who live in situations of protracted identity conflict with the goal of nurturing personal and community peacebuilding through the principles of conflict transformation.

Recommendation 6: That research designed with Indigenous research and conflict transformation principles explore the reasons for the effectiveness of

Maskotew Kiskin, and be funded by the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, and/or the Assembly of First Nations, and/or the Manitoba Aboriginal Education Directorate, for the potential duplication of the project in other areas.

Recommendation 7: That Government and Aboriginal leaders be deliberate in their endeavors for effective change by engaging peace-building practices like the Bead Workshop, conducted by qualified researchers, with many Aboriginal people, as an intervention to facilitate healing and toward maximized understanding of how public resources can best provide what Aboriginal people identify that they need to fulfil their hopes and dreams for themselves, and for their families.