Community Development and Adult Education:

A Symbiotic Relationship

By

Jana Katarina McKee

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Recreation Studies Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management
University of Manitoba

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore if an integrated approach can help mothers living in low SES achieve personal and academic success. The research objectives focused on two areas. One was exploring the development and impact of a community of learners who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success. The other focus was students' engagement in a community service credit and how this impacts the student. A qualitative research methodology was used. Five female participants participated in journaling, interviews and a focus group. The Circle of Courage® (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002) was the theoretical framework used in this study. The key findings illustrate how the community of learners supports students with personal and academic success. The women in this study experienced challenges when it came to the community service experience, but when time, childcare and resources worked out the experience was valuable and rewarding. The findings inform our understanding of the symbiotic relationship between community development and adult education.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

*Community Development and Education – Uncovering a Connection*

For the past ten years I have worked in education and community development (CD) in marginalized, low income communities, both in a small urban town in New Zealand and more recently in Winnipeg, Canada. Over this time I have seen how education and CD share some common elements of practice. For example, I have found that without building relationships and trust with people living in low income communities you cannot work collaboratively to move forward or to create a common goal or vision. I have come to see how ideas in CD and education have the potential to support each other when working with low income communities to empower people and families to live fulfilling and healthy lives. I enter the research process with two key questions: what role does education play in community development and what role does community development play in adult education? Stated differently, how do community development and education support or enhance the other? I first became interested in investigating questions of this nature when living and working overseas.

In my first two years in New Zealand I worked with a small group of 10 to 12 mostly Maori students who were 16-17 years of age; my role was to help them attain credits towards their high school diploma and pathway them to further education and training, or employment.[1] The full-time education program operated four days a week from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and focused on social and life skills and academics. Students who participated in the program earned credits. Students would be in my class or program from six to twelve months at a time. As is often the case with academic programs for

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[1] Maori are the indigenous peoples in New Zealand.

marginalized youth (Bell & Carrillo, 2007) the class I taught was not typical. Before I was able to "teach" the students, I needed to know and understand who they were as people and individuals and try to break down some of the walls these students had put up. I built relationships through adventure-based learning activities. This included taking students on overnight tramps on the mountain where there was no access to cell phones and the like, and evenings were spent playing cards by candle light and sharing conversations and stories about life. It was on the mountain where I learned much about the students, their values and beliefs, their homes and community lives, their dreams and fears.

Over time many students became engaged, started participating and sharing, and I had earned the students' trust where they were willing to participate in more formal learning (i.e., engaging in numeracy and literacy activities). As students worked to earn credits toward their high school credentials, I started to notice that there was a cycle to their wellbeing and ability to learn. By week's end students were optimistic and excited about their future. They were talking, planning and dreaming about what lay ahead for them. For example, students would talk about continuing their training or education after graduating from the course. By the start of the next week, it was as if the previous week's progress never occurred. On Monday I would see tears of frustration and hopelessness because over the weekend a student was witness to or experienced violence in his or her family home or community; drugs and alcohol were often involved. Brad[2], a white boy living in the poorest area of the city with his mother, was one such student.

When I first started working with Brad he was private and didn't talk much unless it was a colourful story about some wild party over the weekend. Over time he began to

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[2] Pseudonyms are used for all individuals I mention in this thesis.

participate in group activities, shared stories and suggestions, and sometimes took the leadership role to complete a task. One group activity that I facilitated required six students at a time to walk in unison on very large skis made out of two 2x4s, called "sloosh" boards. These "sloosh" boards had foot straps to hold their feet to the wooden ski as they attempted to walk together. This task proved very challenging and many students were frustrated and angry. Brad had the courage to take the lead, and the patience to motivate the group to keep trying until they succeeded, which required walking a distance of ten metres over a rolling and bumpy terrain.

At the start of any new course there is a lot of support required to have all the students engaged and committed. For the first three weeks with Brad, I picked him up from his home on Mondays, and gradually he made his own way to school after that. About six weeks into the course, I noticed that he was arriving later and later on Mondays and it would take one on one time with him, up to one hour at times, to engage and motivate him to be part of the class. By the end of the week he was arriving on time and completing units, thus earning credits towards the high school equivalent. Eventually he stopped coming regularly on Mondays, but would find his way to class as the week rolled on. On Sunday nights I would feel very stressed and wondered whether I would see Brad on Monday, or at least be able to find him to pick him up and bring him to class. I had little control over what happens out of school and it was frustrating because Brad was very smart and capable of completing the program with credits.

During this time I learned a lot about Brad's home and community life. He was being raised by a single parent who needed to work two jobs to make ends meet. They lived in a low income neighbourhood in the city. On Fridays he and his friends would scrounge up money and buy alcohol and drugs and party all weekend. He would stay over

at friends' houses over the weekend; sometimes this included Sunday nights. He was pressured to join a local youth gang as some of his friends, who were not in school, started hanging out with criminal gang members in the area. I watched, feeling powerless, as his conversations about what he was going to do once he graduated shifted to gang discourse. I knew that if Brad was going to graduate, he needed to be there, in class with us, whether it was on the mountain or inside the classroom. And in this case, I realized that education, on its own, was not a strong enough pull for youth who are challenged by many other compelling issues.

Brad was affected by his mother`s poverty; as a family, they not only struggled to make enough money to get by, but lived in a low-income community that was marginalized from the larger populace. He was surrounded by violence, bullying, drugs and gangs. There are significant inequalities associated with low socioeconomic status (SES); these include inadequate living environments that fail to promote healthy lifestyles, limited resources in meeting nutritional needs, disadvantages in housing and employment, childcare and recreation, reduced capacity to access transportation, and discrimination (Glover, Hetzel & Tennant, 2004; Hughes, 1995; Bunting, Walks & Filion, 2004). Outcomes experienced due to living in low SES can include developmental problems, psychological distress, school dropout or low levels of educational attainment, adolescent pregnancies and lone parent families, increased illness, and a lack of social supports (Auger & Alix, 2009). Families living in poverty have significantly fewer resources, choices and developmental opportunities available to them, and are affected negatively in terms of health, employment and educational achievement. Outcomes experienced due to living in poverty can include school dropout or low levels of educational attainment (Glover, Hetzel & Tennant, 2004). Despite all my efforts, I could

see how Brad was about to become one of the statistics of educational failure, reinforcing poverty's legacy of negative outcomes. This earlier experience with Brad shaped the concerns that I carry with me in my more recent work in adult education in Canada: that is, the need to understand the effects of poverty on academic success and find supports and resources that can extend beyond the classroom.

*Poverty*

There are a number of ways poverty can be defined. The Canadian Council of Social Development [CCSD] (2001) pointed out that even "popular and expert opinions *apparently* clash on whether and to what extent poverty should be defined in *absolute* terms - inability to meet very basic needs - or in *relative* terms - distance from the community norm" (p. 2). Canada doesn't have an official government mandated poverty line, but often Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) is used (CCSD, 1994). According to Statistics Canada (2005), the LICO measurement is an attempt to illustrate the income level at which a family may be in "strained circumstances" because a larger portion of their income is spent on the basics, such as food, clothing and shelter, than the "average" family of similar size.

Food, clothing and shelter are often used to determine what basic needs are. Access to education, recreation or culture isn't typically considered when defining basic needs.  Measuring poverty using income alone will not take into account the social aspects of poverty such as social deprivation and social capital (Auger & Alix, 2009). In most countries, income-based approaches have been used to measure poverty; conversely, subjective measures have hardly been used in official or academic research (Bradshaw & Finch, 2003). For the purpose of this study I will use a relative and subjective definition of poverty, in line with the CCSD (2001), which asserts: "that to be poor is to be distant

from the mainstream of society and to be excluded from the resources, opportunities and sources of subjective and objective well-being which are readily available to others" (p. 2).

Poverty is not simply about a shortage of income, it is complicated as it has non-material attributes that include social, cultural, and psychological dimensions such as inadequate housing, poor health, discrimination, fear, mistrust, powerlessness, low self-esteem and shame (Silver, 2013a; Van der Veen & Preece, 2005; Canadian Centre Policy Alternatives, 2006; Bok, 2004). To make matters worse, "those experiencing long-term and intergenerational poverty, often come to believe that there is little hope for a better future" (Canadian Centre Policy Alternatives, 2006, p. 1), where many have internalized the effects of poverty and have developed low levels of self-confidence (Silver, 2013a).

In 2000 the United Nations declared one of the Millennium Development Goals was to reduce the population of people living in extreme poverty by half, by the year 2015, and identified adult education as playing a key role toward achieving this goal (Van der Veen & Preece, 2005). Education is linked to and correlated with increased social capacity, economic independence and mobility, and poverty reduction (Bok, 2004; Rich & Kim, 1999; Canadian Centre Policy Alternatives, 2006; Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, 2008). In the book, *Streets of Hope* (Medoff & Sklar, 1994), a successful long-term community based organization, which was located in a low SES community, asked themselves and their community members what they felt was the most important issue to address. The unanimous answer was education. Not only is education linked with security and well-paid jobs, but also it is critical in helping people to face and overcome the challenges related to poverty. Education and training provides a person an enlightened and broader view of their world, community and circumstances (Canadian

Centre Policy Alternatives, 2006). Education is also a central determinant of an individual's income in later life (Raphael, 2009).

*Connecting to Community Development*

As teachers in New Zealand, a few of us felt that there must be something more we could do to support our learners who lived in low SES. We started engaging with police members of the local gang unit to see if we could learn anything that could help us working with our youth. While we were learning how the challenges facing some low income communities are much greater than what two or three teachers can individually help overcome, we did play a small part in addressing some of the residual effects of poverty. Many students learned to surround themselves with positive influences and to trust the group to share some of their stories and find support outside of the classroom. For example, I remember one group of three Maori girls, who created strategies to support one another in and out of the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to this group support from fellow students as a "community of learners" (p. 163): this will be an idea that I will explore later in this chapter. These girls would take turns having sleepovers at each other's houses on the week-end. When one of the girls would learn that there was a party being planned at her house that weekend, she would stay at another girl's home that was not going to have gatherings with drugs and alcohol involved. They did this in order to keep themselves safe and motivated to continue with their educational goals. Sadly, Brad did not develop or have the support systems the three girls had and just disappeared one day. No matter how hard we tried to connect with him, it wasn't enough and he did not complete the program. His memory stays with me today.

At the time I was realizing how I might be able to control what is happening in the classroom to create a safe place of learning, but as the literature suggests, the

environmental factors of a child living in poverty have very powerful influences. Educationally, I was able to work with these students during the week day but the conditions affecting their family and community circumstances, or "environmental conditions", for the most part remained the same (Halas & Hanson, 2001). I was unable to change or affect the community Brad lived in. I was unable to protect him from peer pressure experienced on the streets, nor limit his exposure to violence and drugs. I did meet his mother one morning in an effort to see what more I could do to support Brad, but I couldn't change the fact that she was a single mother who needed to work two jobs in order to pay the bills and he was left to his own accord a lot of the time. As an educator I agree with Halas and Hanson (2001) who ask whether our jobs are "properly" done even if we did the best we could with the resources we had when I consider Brad's circumstances. Despite my many successes, as an educator in the community I often felt powerless knowing that there was something missing in our programs. It was at this time I started reflecting on how community development can have a positive impact on education.

In my first year living in this New Zealand town I was invited to volunteer and participate for the town's community development trust (CDT) at a large community meeting that was having a conversation regarding the town's issues, challenges, and potential solutions. This large community meeting was a result of a tragic loss of one of its young Maori male members, a friend of my family, who was shot dead by a white off-duty police officer in a case of mistaken identity. The town was shaken to its core and everyone was affected by this tragedy in some form. For me, the loss of a family friend made me start thinking about the community I just moved into. Was this going to be a safe place for me to raise my future children? When I learned about the community

meeting I made a commitment to attend, and to this day I am very grateful I did. My journey into community development began at this meeting.

Community development plays a special role in overcoming poverty (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). Community development is the planned process or evolution of community well-being that includes the social, environmental, economic and cultural aspects (Frank & Smith, 1999). It is a holistic and inclusive process that uses an approach based on the principles of respect and relationship building with stakeholders and community members. The goal is to create healthy communities. Community development strives to improve the quality of life for individuals and their community. According to the second edition of the *Social Determinants of Health*, Raphael (2009) highlights that only 25% of the health of a people can be ascribed to the health care system; meanwhile at least 50% is determined by the economic and social conditions people live in.

Paramount in the CD process is appreciating and supporting cultural differences and similarities, and building the capacity of people and community to respond to diverse needs, while building upon the strengths, resources, beliefs and interests of the community and individuals (Frank & Smith, 1999; Hutchison & Nogradi, 1996; Arai, 1996; Aboriginal Peoples Collection, 1996). Even when various resources are available in a community, if an individual does not possess the confidence and belief in one's abilities to take advantage of the opportunity he or she may continue to lack or go without various supports and resources (Raphael, 2009). Working through a CD lens people are seen to have the solutions. Community development workers build on peoples' and organizational strengths, skills, gifts, passions and talents.

It was my third year on this community development trust when a community of various stakeholders came together to discuss the extremely high numbers of youth not attending school; some youth were as young as 12 years old. The stakeholders included community residents, representatives from the local high school, funders, and various other groups and agencies working with and in the community. A result of this meeting was the initial steps towards the establishment of a youth education program that would be built around and incorporate the community's strengths and passions. For example, a commitment was made to work with community elders, parents, leaders and youth. In recognition of the demographics of this community, the youth education program added a strong Maori cultural perspective in its day to day operation. Community residents and leaders were regularly engaged in the classroom, and students also volunteered in their community. I recall being at a community celebration and observing the students in the program sharing conversations with other community residents about some concerns they had about increased graffiti on the boardwalk. At one point the conversation shifted toward the potential role the youth program could have in identifying a solution to the increased graffiti in the town. Ideas included collaborating with local artists and developing art classes that would be available to the wider community after school hours. It was participating in this process where I experienced how education has the potential to enhance community development.

While I hold on to my memories and connections to Brad, my focus and passion has changed in the last few years to working with the parents of the youth living in low income communities. There is a natural overlap and interconnectedness with adult education and community development. Adult education is viewed as a mechanism to help people out of poverty and plays a role in social change, community development and

building capacity at personal and collective levels (Silver, 2006; Freire, 1970; Manglitz, 2003; Guo, 2006; Van der Veen & Preece, 2005). It is apparent that education is important and critical for a person's health and wellness, yet many who live in poverty experience lower levels of success in high school graduation, and according to Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007), "low SES is one of the most frequently cited predictors of school dropout" (p. 196). Adult education provides the opportunity for many adults who did not complete high school to attain grade 12, which is a foundation for further academic and personal success.

*Research Questions: Understanding the Education and CD Relationship*

As a community development practitioner my work informs my research direction; conversely, my research also informs my practice. According to Graham and Jones (1992), "you cannot have a research problem that is independent of the communities you are working with. The research problem must be generated by people living in these communities reflecting on their own experiences" (p. 236). If a research problem is not generated by the people or community you run the risk of assuming there is a problem. For example, I might think that smoking a pack of cigarettes a day is problem because is costs too much. From the perspective of a person who smokes cigarettes, and whose family and community smoke, perhaps smoking a pack a day can be viewed as normal behavior and is accommodated for within their household budget, therefore no problem is perceived by the person or community regarding the cost of smoking. If any suggestions or recommendations are offered to remedy the assumed problem, it may not be applicable or relevant to the community because there is no perceived problem relating to an individual's experience regarding the cost of smoking. In Chapter two I discuss how I will learn from the participants' perspectives regarding

their experiences on their journey to personal and academic success while enrolled in adult education.

I have written about my experiences as an integral part of the process of interpretive inquiry (Ellis, 1998). I began by reflecting on my role as both an educator and a community development practitioner. As an expression of "concerned engagement" in the research process (Ellis, 1998, p. 30), I am interested in the connection between education and community development and how this connection can support academic success for adult learners. For this research study I worked with five mothers who live in subsidized housing in a low SES community, and who are students in an adult education program working towards a mature diploma.

*Context of the Study*

Since returning to Winnipeg in 2006, I have worked in the same low income community in the capacity as a community development practitioner where I act as a liaison between the institution of education at an adult learning centre and the community. A relatively new phenomenon in Manitoba, by 1996/97, Manitoba adult learning centres (ALC) were offering adult learners' high school credits mainly in the form of a mature diploma.[3] ALCs were created to meet the needs and demands of adults unable to succeed in regular or mainstream classrooms (Silver, 2006). These centres were developed based on the community need and offer a range of models and service deliveries; ALCs are "entirely consistent with a community development model" (Silver, 2006, p.72).

Many of the adult learners at the ALCs are women and mothers who are Aboriginal. As of 2001 53% of all Aboriginal women in Canada completed their high

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[3] A mature diploma requires students to complete eight credits, four of which must be at the grade 12 level and two of the grade 12 credits must be English and Math

school diploma compared to 70% of non-Aboriginal women (Smylie, 2009).The negative educational outcomes for Aboriginal students can be traced to the residual effects of colonial history and policy on Aboriginal peoples in this province, particularly the impact of the residential school system on how the educational institution is viewed. As the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (2008) explains, "The legacy of residential schooling created devastating and negative perceptions about formal education, along with a high degree of mistrust and dislike for predominantly euro-centric, middle class educational institutions with predominantly non-Aboriginal teachers" (p. 50). The core of the colonization process was a deliberate effort to destroy the indigenous people's culture, religion, and the economic and political systems. This was done in part by taking land and confining the Aboriginal people to reserves, forced participation in residential schools and ultimately the *Indian Act* of 1876. Many people have internalized the oppression which leads to feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and self confidence (Silver, 2006). Thus, the intersection of SES and Aboriginal cultural identity adds to the challenges faced by adult learners, given this socio-historical context.

Over five years ago the school division I work for, in partnership with a second school division, embarked on a journey to address some of the barriers faced by mothers living in low SES communities in attaining their grade 12 or a Mature Diploma. Two of the identified barriers were transportation and childcare. The idea was to have adult education located within the low SES community to address the issue of transportation. However, the local community did not have the capacity to accommodate a learning centre. In response, the school division put the adult learning centre (ALC) in an already existing high school, located just outside the geographic boundary for the low SES neighbourhood. The ALC is approximately a 15 to 20 minute walk from the students'

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homes, and outside of winter conditions it is considered within walking distance. Three years ago the school division started providing free on-site childcare for the students attending the ALC who also live in the local subsidized housing complex.

Additionally, students are given financial supports for transportation by Employment Income Assistance (EIA) if they meet the course load requirements. This financial resource is provided monthly so the student can purchase a monthly bus pass. Theoretically, by providing free education, free childcare and the financial support for a bus pass, key supports are in place for the residents living in this subsidized housing complex to capitalize on the opportunity to achieve their grade 12 diploma. Unfortunately it is not as easy as prescribed in theory. Attrition rates proved to be high, as demonstrated by the decrease in the number of children in the day care program at the start of the program as compared with the few remaining children after a few months. While there were some success stories, only a small percentage of students from the subsidized housing unit who received transportation and childcare supports found success at the ALC. These outcomes are distressing.

In 2009 I started working at the ALC where I now support the adult learners in attaining their mature diplomas. My job includes calling and visiting the students, and if they are absent from school for two or more days, finding out why and, if possible, where to deliver homework assignments. Beyond the official job description I have additional interactions with the participants. For example, upon recognizing the value of providing a study time on Friday mornings where child-minding is in place to allow the students quiet

time to study, I arranged for a space for study groups of this nature to be made available. This was possible because there are no classes for the program scheduled on Fridays.[4]

Outside of the school setting, I have had multiple interactions with the participants as well; similar to my experiences I had getting to know the students on a mountain in New Zealand. For example, I have on occasion driven a student to an appointment, and I have had cups of coffee inside people's kitchens where I learned the realities of being a mother living in poverty. For these parents there would be good days and bad days. A bad day is when the flu or another sickness had spread through the house over the week, going from child to child and eventually the mother would get sick. If she didn't have friends or family to help this could be a very lonely and overwhelming time. I have heard the frustration and sadness from not being able to get to the store to buy milk, or not being able to take children to school because the mom in so much pain she needed to stay in bed. Hearing these stories gave me additional insight into the lived experiences of the participants in the program.

I remember my first winter at the ALC; I was anxiously waiting for a particular mother to arrive one day as it had snowed for the first time that season. This mother had three children all under five years old. It was 9:30 am and she still had not arrived so I decided to call her. In answering my call, she explained how she had managed to put the snow boots, ski pants and jacket, hats, mitts and scarves on all three children. She had managed to walk out the door and trudge through the snow carrying her younger child because her stroller wasn't equipped to move through six centimeters of snow. When she

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[4] This study time was accomplished by establishing a partnership with the ALC and the area's resource centre. The ALC and the resource centre collaborated to provide the space, computers and child-minding for two hours every Friday. Occasionally guest speakers were invited during this time so the students can learn about career, post-secondary and funding options, as well as other resources that are available.

arrived at the bus stop, she waited five to ten minutes when her smallest one started

crying, while her middle aged child kept trying to walk on the road. It was at this point

she broke down in tears and said she couldn't do it today and turned around to make her

way back home. Eventually, she and her three children did make it to school that day

because I came by and drove them in my car; as it happened I had three car seats and was

able to do it. That experience made me realize that the desire to go to school may not be

enough some days, and fueled my interest in learning more about what it takes to achieve

success for mothers in these circumstances.

According to feminist research, it is important to acknowledge contextuality, or

the conditions and circumstances that are relevant to a situation when working with

women (Joyappa & Miartin, 1996). Defining academic success when working with

mothers should not only consider the quantitative outcomes such as days present at school

or credits earned. Academic success needs to be measured in quantitative and qualitative

terms.  Credits and diploma earned are the quantitative component. Qualitative outcomes

include increased confidence, self-esteem, and social capital, which incorporate

surrounding yourself with a positive social network. Qualitative gains also include an

enlightened worldview and coping skills to deal with personal, family and community

life, responsibilities and challenges (Silver, 2006; Raphael, 2009; Canadian Centre Policy

Alternatives, 2006).

Through regular contact with the women at the ALC, either by phone or home

visits, I try to facilitate the supports they need. Clegg and McNulty (2002) found that

community based education was successful when using a community development model

where the "community worker was able to engage with women through routine

encounters in their own social space" and was able to learn about their strengths, passions

and learning styles (p. 572). In addition to learning about the women, through my CD practice I learned to understand how the welfare system can provide additional support. I did this by making an effort to meet Employment Income Assistance officials who work with the students attending the ALC to learn about the Employment Income Assistance program requirements as well as inform the Employment Income Assistance staff of the history, development and role of the ALC.[5]

In summary, a mother must learn to live in poverty, and manage what little finances she has while providing safety and security in a low income neighbourhood known to be a dangerous place for children. The experience of living in poverty is intensified for women who are a visible minority, such as Aboriginal and immigrant women (Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, 2004). Prins, Toso and Schaft (2009) report that "poverty, racism, and gender inequality erode women's social support, while increasing the likelihood of isolation, depression, and other manifestations of social exclusion" (p. 348). A defining characteristic for the urban Aboriginal experience is "social exclusion"; poverty is not the only issue as it does not take into account how Aboriginal peoples "are unique in their historical circumstances" (Silver, 2009, p. 36). It is within this context that I remain committed to community development and education in supporting mothers in achieving academic success.

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[5] For example: In order for an adult student on assistance to receive the financial resources to pay for a bus pass, they need to be taking a 60% course load. Taking morning classes constitutes a 50% course load. For the mothers who have children under the age of 12 who are in elementary school, they need to be home by 3:30 pm. This inhibits their ability to take afternoon courses because they would need to leave the education centre by 3:00 pm and because courses run until 4:00 pm they would not be permitted to join that class. As a solution to this dilemma we have introduced a community service credit which serves to top up their course load to 60%. For this credit the students are expected to volunteer from five to ten hours a month. The challenge is for these mothers to find volunteer experiences where they can take their children. In the low SES community I work in there is a resource centre and a community centre that provides opportunities for these women to volunteer with their children.

*Pilot Study and the Entry Questions for the Research*

Ellis (1998) refers to the initial query of an interpretive research study as an "entry question". After reflecting on the concerned engagement that motivates my desire to undertake the research project, the first question I wanted to address in this study was what challenges and obstacles adult learners who are mothers need to overcome in order to achieve success in school. As mentioned, I have been very fortunate to have been welcomed into the homes of many residents, where they have learned as much about me as I did about them. I, too, am a mother of two young children, as well as a part-time student. Over a cup of coffee we would share stories of being a mother and talk about the joys and tribulations of raising children. We talked about balancing all of our responsibilities, including managing a household and being a student at the same time. We shared that our priorities would change regularly. Some days our families would live out of laundry baskets because we just didn't find the time or energy to put the clothes away, but were happy we did manage to launder them. Some weeks were better than others, in that we would manage to clean the kitchen before visitors came; other days we would feel the need to apologize for the "mess" because we had other situations that needed our attention first. I have learned that mothers in this community do the best with what they have, but ultimately want more for their children and themselves.

Given my white middle class background, I am becoming increasingly aware of both the earned and unearned privileges of my position in life as a member of the racialized majority within Canadian society. I recognize the majority of students I work with may not have had the same advantages or privileges based on their position in life. It was challenging for me to use and understand the term racialized because growing up I was witness to racism and felt if I can describe people by characteristics other than their

skin colour or ethnic group they belong to I was being fair or non-racist. Racialization is a process that gives meaning to our experiences and understanding of how we fit in this world. In fact, who we are, the colour of our skin, and the community or ethnic group we belong to is part of the fabric of our identity. We need to acknowledge that white is also a colour and a racialized identity (Dyer, 2003) and that not naming and identifying an individual by their racial identity can potentially imply there is something to hide or not be proud of, or that racialized privilege does not exist. I hope by recognizing and naming the privilege that came along with my racialized position I can start to interrupt the power relations that inequality and racial privilege rely on (Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Dewar, 1993).

I found success in education and, for the most part, enjoyed the experience, which can largely be based on the fact that whiteness was the dominant practice when I was going to school. In other words, I fit in. I shared similar backgrounds, social class and assumptions as the teachers and administrators in my school years (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). I cannot pretend to live in a world in which my privilege, earned and unearned, is not based on others' disadvantage. When recognizing my own white privilege, I also accept the responsibility to ask what I will do to reduce or end its effects (McIntosh, 1990). One way is to continuously reflect on and analyze how I may unknowingly work under an assumption that everyone has equal opportunity, both in my practice and research. I must continue to make an effort not to work on the assumption that the social world is governed by laws that are uniform and "non-conflictual" (Halas & Hanson, 2001; Manglitz, 2003).

When working with Aboriginal women I need to recognize my limitations. I am not Aboriginal, I am white and of European decent and did not grow up in poverty. I need

to be able to learn, and if necessary change in order to better understand and support the people with whom I work. I am not only a listener to these women's stories and experiences but a "re-teller", and as a white middle class educated woman there will be many variables that might cause me to 'get it' wrong. While my positionality is a limitation, that is, I am not a single mother or living in poverty, it motivates me to undertake this study. The relationship between teller and listener is but one variable (Belzer, 2004). Understanding and declaring my white privilege is a form of reflexivity (Jensen, 2005), and in doing so, I hope to better represent the voices and experiences of the parents in my study.

In 2010, I had an opportunity, through a qualitative research methods course in education at the University of Manitoba, to explore my initial research interest and to put this reflexivity into practice. As a pilot to my eventual study, I was interested in learning about the perspectives of mothers in completing their education. The study explored my entry questions, which were to identify the challenges and obstacles that mothers face and/or overcome in order to achieve success in education. Alternatively, I was also interested to learn about any challenges or obstacles that prevented the mothers from succeeding in school.

The small qualitative case study used interpretive inquiry and consisted of an in-depth, semi-structured interview with three participants (Ellis, 1998). The interviews were completed individually and were approximately one hour in duration. The participants were identified and recruited from the ALC's childcare centre. All participants were enrolled at the ALC at the time of the study and lived in subsidized housing. All three participants identified with being First Nations and were mothers. Two were single parents.

When I began my pilot research I made the assumption that balancing all their responsibilities, such as shopping, budgeting, paying bills, cooking, cleaning, playing with their children and doing homework, would be an obstacle. I learned that this was not the case. For the most part the women I interviewed explained that they simply accepted these myriad responsibilities as part of their roles as a mother and they find ways to cope, such as establishing a routine and setting priorities.

Three key findings emerged from the pilot study. These findings included: motivations behind the decision to go to school, the challenges they experience, and the supports they need in order to achieve success. What motivated the participants to succeed in school included their children and the intrinsic rewards they felt by going to school. Their children were their biggest motivator; these mothers wanted a better life for their family and they felt education was a key to attaining this vision. My findings resonated with results of other researchers' studies, including Silver (2006) and Coker (2003).

Some of the challenges identified by the participants in the pilot study included managing their responsibilities as a parent and a student, and finding time to study without children around. The supports that helped these women achieve success in school included childcare, surrounding themselves with positive influences, support from a group of learners whose membership included other adult students living in the same community, and the welcoming and supportive environment of the ALC. These initial findings provided guidance with regard to the design of the overall research project, and as I will show in the final section of the chapter, have helped me to reframe (Ellis, 1998) the specific focus of the overall study.

*Reframed research questions*

At the start of the 2010-2011 academic year, about one week prior to when classes commenced at the adult learning centre, I invited all the students registered for school that lived in subsidized housing for a "Meet and Eat" meeting. At this gathering I reminded students who wanted to explore a community service credit to top up their course load to 60% (in order to receive transportation funding from EIA) how to do so. I also used this time to have all the adult students meet each other and learn what classes they have in common. I briefly introduced ways the students can potentially support each other and gave examples such as study groups and arranging to deliver homework and class notes to fellow students who were  absent from school.

What I learned from the pilot study and through my role as a community development practitioner led me to reframe my question and change the direction of my research interest (Ellis, 1998). My interest evolved to want to understand how community development and education can support or enhance each other, and if there are benefits for the students, their families and the community they live in. My research focused on two areas; one is exploring the development of a "community of learners" or a group of students who live in the same low income community with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The other area is students' engagement in a community service credit and the impacts of this experience on the student and her family or community.

In Ladson-Billings (1995) article on culturally relevant pedagogy the teachers in her study insist that creating a community of learners must be a priority. The students in such a group encourage each other and learn collaboratively. In a community of learners

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students are also responsible for each other's learning and create cooperative strategies to support one another. This community of learners can be initiated by a staff person. Using Ladson-Billings' notion of the community of learners, I set out to explore its potential to build a social support network for the mothers in adult education along their journey to academic success. From a social determinant of health perspective, Raphael (2009) recognized that the "social safety net" is increasingly important when looking at healthy people and communities. Creating a social support for a mother going to school can prove to be an additional motivator in times of stress, low motivation, and doubt. For women, interpersonal relationships are a key source of identity and personal development (Hayes & Smith, 1994). Research indicates that women not only benefit on a personal level, but also at an academic level when they are surrounded by peers that can provide supportive social relationships (Prins et al., 2009). Supporting and researching the effects of a community of learners to provide a social safety net is of great interest in my work with women and education.

Early in 2011, equipped with a deeper understanding of social safety nets and the importance of supportive social relationships for women, I facilitated a second Meet and Eat for the students registered in school that live in subsidized housing and/or have children in our child care program. At this Meet and Eat I elaborated on how a community of learners can provide support for each other by providing various examples, as well as providing a working definition of the term community of learners. For the purpose of this study I will define a community of learners as a group of learners, or students with similar goals and experiences. The students in such a group encourage each other and learn collaboratively and provide a social support network (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

*Delimitations and Limitations*

      A delimitation in this study was that I chose to invite students who are mothers living in low income, who are attending one adult learning centre and whose children participate in the school's infant and toddler lab program. The results may not resonate or be applicable to a male student or someone who does not have children. The results are specific to the women in this study, but might compare to other women in other adult learning centres who have their children in other daycare arrangements.

      A limitation of this study is that the women grew up in racialized poverty but I did not. They currently live in low SES and I do not. Through reflection and support, I hope I represented their experiences and re-told their stories accurately and not out of context.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

*Theoretical framework*

The theoretical lens I am using to connect and analyze my two research questions

is the Circle of Courage® (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002).[6] As mentioned

previously, one research area is exploring the development of a community of learners or

a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together

to support each other in their journey to academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The

other research area is a students' engagement in a community service credit and the

impacts of this experience on the student and her family or community. The Circle of

Courage® philosophy provides a conceptual framework that utilizes the medicine wheel.

It is a well-established theoretical framework that communities, schools, agencies or

organizations, students and families can work with. Refer to Appendix A for copyright

approval.

The Canadian Research Institute of the Advancement of Women [CRIAW] (2008)

asserted that many mainstream approaches place poverty into compartments and treat the

various aspects of poverty as separate and even different issues. Conversely, "the

medicine wheel approach provides a much more accurate reflection of the multi-

dimensional and cyclical dynamics of poverty" (CRIAW, 2008, p. 3). The medicine

wheel has roots in Aboriginal traditions and is a symbolic representation of the world

based on balance and interconnectedness and can be adapted and reinterpreted in many

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[6] The Circle of Courage® is a registered trademark of Starr Global Learning Network of which Reclaiming Youth International is a corporate division. The Circle of Courage® was first described in the book Reclaiming Youth at Risk by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern. Reclaiming Youth International is responsible for teaching, training, implementation, and oversight of programs employing or referencing the Circle of Courage®. For further information see www.reclaiming.com.

ways to help restore balance and harmony in relationships. The medicine wheel has been adapted as a tool that can be used by various ages, groups and genders, including Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (CRIAW, 2008; Grigas, 1995).

The medicine wheel is divided into four quadrants and represents the Aboriginal worldview that suggests the interconnectedness of life that supports the emotional, spiritual, mental and physical realms which foster balance (Kakakaway, n.d.). Typically when we talk about the medicine wheel we start in the east, representing the sun rise, and move clock wise to the north (Kakakaway, n.d.; CRIAW, 2008, Reclaiming Youth International, n.d.).

The Circle of Courage® philosophy or model provides an alternative approach in education. In this philosophy, fostering self-esteem is a primary goal, and according to Brendtro et al. (2002), "lacking a sense of self-worth [one] is vulnerable to a host of social, psychological, and learning problems" (p. 44). The Circle of Courage® framework's central values are built around four basic components of self esteem: significance, competence, power and virtue. I will show how the central values of the Circle of Courage® support the basic components of self-esteem when I elaborate on each of the four values.

Each quadrant of the Circle of Courage® represents a central value. Starting in the east is belonging, and then moving clockwise, mastery, independence and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2002). The community of learners will be analyzed and discussed in all four quadrants. The community service will be analyzed and discussed in the last two quadrants, independence and mastery. The Circle of Courage® medicine wheel logo is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Circle of Courage® medicine wheel logo



*Belonging.*

The first quadrant (yellow) of the Circle of Courage® philosophy is belonging, which must start with relationships and acceptance. For an individual to have significance or feel valued, one needs to feel accepted by others. Relationships based on mutual trust and respect must be nurtured by adults, schools and community. To help create a sense of belonging it is important that people feel accepted for who they are and appreciated for what they bring to the group, program or community.

Isolation or social exclusion is often a product of poverty. Social exclusion can create unhealthy levels of stress and have a negative impact on health, in an individual and at a community level. Women and Aboriginal people are two out of the four groups in Canada that have been identified as having a higher risk of experiencing social exclusion (Galabuzi, 2009). Social exclusion is a result of the inequalities faced by people living in poverty due to unequal opportunities and distribution of resources in society.

According to Silver (2009), "a disproportionate number of Aboriginal families live with low incomes and are engaged in a daily survival in a world from which they feel socially...excluded" (p. 70). One of the principles of the Circle of Courage® is that everyone wants to belong and feel accepted and loved.

*Mastery.*

Mastery is the white quadrant as shown in Figure 1. To develop competence one needs to master one's environment. Success brings internal satisfaction and the belief that one is capable of attaining certain goals (Brendtro et al., 2002). Providing opportunities and the supports where students can experience, explore, practice and reflect without fear of failure is mastery in the Circle of Courage®. This is where skill and competency are learned and developed. Brendtro et al. (2002) state that success, and ultimately mastery, produce external social recognition through family members, teachers and other classmates, as well as internal satisfaction.

In the principle of mastery, the innate desire for learning is cultivated through learning how to cope with many demands, such as being a student and mother. The spirit of mastery also teaches people to take responsibility for failure or success, but most importantly it speaks to the motivation to set and attain goals (Brendtro et al., 2002). Success can become motivation for even more achievement. It is here one can say, "I can succeed" (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 137).

*Independence.*

Moving in a clockwise direction on the Circle of Courage® wheel we are at independence (black quadrant). It is here the sense of responsibility and empowerment comes to fruition. When one recognizes how we can control our behaviours, power is demonstrated and respect is earned (Brendtro et al., 2002). Achievement and success are

produced through mastery, and in turn, students can start internalizing the idea they have the ability to make decisions, set priorities, solve problems, set goals and demonstrate a sense of responsibility to their own and others' learning.

In the third principle of the Circle of Courage® lies the spirit of independence and through responsibility where free will is nurtured. It is in this stage that one can say, "I have the power to make decisions'" (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 138).

*Generosity.*

Generosity is the red quadrant as shown in Figure 1. It is through giving of one's self, or sharing one's gifts, where the spirit of generosity in the Circle of Courage® comes to a full circle. Through the spirit of giving, volunteering, or community service, one develops a sense of purpose and is exposed to further learning allowing the Circle of Courage® to continue in a cyclical manner.

The fourth component of self-esteem is virtue, which is judged by the values of significant others and is "reflected in the value of generosity" (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 45). Students who have mastered skills and competencies, and learned about their power to make choices and demonstrate a sense of responsibility towards their learning, are the best role models and mentors for other students or community members who may feel disengaged or alienated. This illustrates the beauty of the circle or medicine wheel and its interconnectedness and ability to restore balance. The last principle in the Circle of Courage® is the spirit of generosity where "character is cultivated by concern for others so that [one] can say, 'I have a purpose for my life'" (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 138).

According to Brendtro et al. (2002), the four elements of the Circle of Courage® are with us from birth, but as we grow and mature the elements acquire more complexity through practice. The cyclical nature of the medicine wheel allows students to ebb and

flow between quadrants. It does not mean that one must move through the wheel only in one direction. If circumstances change in a student's life, she can continue on her journey wherever her experiences and skills are at, at that particular point in time. Individuals can continue developing the four elements, building on what they have learned and developed, with the goal of creating balance of all elements. For my research I explored the students' journeys in education and analyzed their experiences through the Circle of Courage®.

It is by working with the day-to-day experiences and realities of the mothers attending adult education that we can explore and learn what individual, group and community needs, challenges, strengths and skills are. It is through collaboration with all stakeholders that we can work together to find and explore common goals, and the systems, supports and resources needed for these women to achieve success on their academic journey. The Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence [PWHCE] (2008) report suggests, "The notion of community involvement and familial relationships could also be explored further to gain an adequate understanding of the variables at hand and how they are linked to…educational attainment" (p. 55). Research of this nature can help develop a better understanding of what variables are linked to mothers finding success in education, particularly through social supports and a community service credit.

*Methods*

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore how community development and education can enhance each other through the experiences of mothers, living in a low SES neighbourhood, and going to school at an adult learning centre. Qualitative research questions are concerned with understanding participants' experiences from their own frames of reference or perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I used an interpretive and naturalistic approach because of my interest in studying in a

natural setting with a goal to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the

point of view of those who live it" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.118). I used a multi-

method approach in an attempt to gain a deeper and in depth understanding of the

experiences of mothers on their journey to academic success. My data collection activities

included journaling, one on one interviews and a focus group. Due to my interest in

learning 1) how community development and education can support or enhance each

other, and 2) if there are benefits not only for the students, but their families and

potentially the low income community they live in, my research objectives focused on

two areas: one explored the development of a community of learners, and the other

analyzed students' engagement in a community service credit. The Circle of Courage®

framework (Brendtro et al., 2002) guided my questions. To analyze the data I worked

within the Circle of Courage® framework and utilized Ellis's (1998) hermeneutic spiral.

The hermeneutic spiral will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter in the analysis

section.

*Research Participants*

Five participants were recruited, all of whom are mothers attending an adult

learning centre and living in subsidized housing. The participants were recruited using the

enrolment records at the ALC and also include those students who are utilizing the

childcare provided by the ALC. The participants in this study have special characteristics,

in that, trust is a significant issue with mothers living in subsidized housing and there is a

need for the person inviting them to participate in the research study to have a familiarity

with the participants. The ALC secretary had registered and supported the students with

administrative concerns and over time developed a familiarity with the participants. An

information letter (see Appendix B) was given to potential participants by the secretary of

the ALC. The secretary was provided with a written text (see Appendix C) on how to

inform the students regarding the purpose of the research study and the commitment

required by the participants throughout their participation in the study. The secretary was

able to answer questions the invited participants may have had and forward questions to

me that needed more clarifying.

The secretary and I did not use our familiarity with the participants to coerce

subjects; they were free and comfortable to decline to participate. In fact, two invited

participants did decline. Once I received a list of interested participants, I provided further

information in person about the purpose of the research study and the commitment

expected by the participants and answered any questions prior to receiving written

consent (see Appendix D) from the five participants.

*Data Collection Methods*

Data collection started with the participants engaging in journaling for four weeks.

The participants were asked to share their experiences of going to school and managing

their many roles and responsibilities as a mother, student, family and community

member. After the journaling I conducted one hour, one-on-one interviews with each of

the five participants. These interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended

questions. The study finished with a one and a half hour focus group involving three out

of the five participants.

The purpose of journaling was to try to capture the ups and downs of the

participants' day-to-day cultural landscapes over a period of time that should allow them

to have good and bad weeks. This time period of four weeks enabled the participants to

work through day-to-day challenges and successes related to school, parenting and life in general, as well as any issues that were longer in duration.

Each participant was given a journal and a pen to use for the study. Each participant was also given a ten dollar gift certificate in a mug as a small token in recognition of their time and contributions to the research. The participants were encouraged to journal three to four times a week for four weeks. It was expected that journaling would take between half an hour and an hour each week. I was also journaling weekly, reflecting on my own experiences and observations related to supporting and advocating for students. Once a week on a Monday or Tuesday I collected the journals, read and photocopied their entries. At this time I also shared some reflective comments or questions in their journals and returned it for another week of entry. For example, Lisa wrote in her journal a number of entries about cleaning the house and that she "just can't seem to keep up". I wanted to learn more about that experience, and wrote a response in her journal, "Why is housework so important, please explain?" and "When do you do your homework typically?" This was done for four out of the five participants; one participant had family health issues at the time but continued to journal her own experiences without prompts or reflective comments from me. For this participant, I focused on ensuring she was able to balance school, family and life outside of school. This participant did manage to write in her journal for four weeks and produced detailed experiences of her going to school, managing her family and regular visits to the hospital over this time period.

Suggested or guiding questions were provided for each week of journaling. The questions asked followed the Circle of Courage® framework using the four central values: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. I started the inquiry with

questions that help explore the sense of belonging and mastery (Brendtro et al., 2002) with questions about their school experience, their supports, challenges and success stories. These were typed up and attached to the journal as a guide for the participants to start journaling.

*Sample Journal Topics and Questions.*

Week One and Two:

- Reflect on your school experiences: Teachers, students, school work, exams and tests, study time, etc.

- Talk about the supports around you: childcare, other students, staff, family members. Who are these supports? What role do they play?

- Share some of the challenges you experience as a mother, student and community member. Talk about your day to day experiences as well as the recurring moments in your life.

In weeks three and four I continued to build on the success stories, asking clarifying or reflective questions. It was in weeks three and four of the journal writing where my inquiry was guided by the last two values in the Circle of Courage®: independence and generosity. I asked about the community of learners, which was defined for the participants prior to signing the consent letter and again defined in their journal. I also asked questions about the community service credit.

Week Three and Four:

- *Definition: community of learners. A community of learners for this research is defined as a group of learners, or students with similar goals and experiences.*

*The students in such a group encourage each other and learn collaboratively and provide a social support network.*

- Reflect on your social support network (the people you surround yourself with to help you achieve success in school and at home).

- *Community service credit.* Where are you volunteering? What are some of the things you are doing or learning? How does giving back or volunteering make you feel?

In sum, the participants were encouraged to use this journal to celebrate their success, to vent frustrations, to share stories and experiences (good or bad). They were instructed that they can also draw pictures, clip out articles, etc., to attach to their journal. For a complete list of journal prompts, please see Appendix E.

I wrote in my journal about my experiences in supporting the development of a community of learners and the community service credit from a community development practitioner perspective. I wrote about frustrations I experienced with Employment Income Assistance, and concerns I had for students. I documented my role in supporting the students and community development, that is, I recorded various actions or conversations I had in my day to day work as it related to supporting the students in their journey to academic success. I used this journal to share success stories and vent frustrations. In recording my observations, I was sure to use pseudonyms for all students, and removed any identifying features from the data, both from my own journals and from the journals of the students.

Interviews were conducted with each participant in an effort to clarify some of the themes and experiences collected through journaling. Interviews were conducted in week

six or seven, which was about one to two weeks after the journaling was completed,

allowing me enough time to review and analyze the data collected through journaling.

The interviews were semi-structured, open ended and one hour in duration and were

audio recorded. The interviews took place in a private office in the library of the school.

Child-minding was provided for all participants during the interview process. The

questions asked in the individual interviews were guided in part by the data collected and

emerging themes found in the journaling (Ellis, 1998). The questions were framed using

the Circle of Courage® four central values, starting with belonging.  For a complete

interview protocol, see Appendix F.

*Sample Interview questions*.

Background information:

- Tell me a bit about yourself and your educational experiences. What was your
  high school experience like? What was your childhood experience like? What do
  you remember about family and community life? (background and context)

(Belonging) One of the principles of the Circle of Courage® is that everyone wants to

belong and feel accepted and loved and that when you feel you belong you act like you

belong (Brendtro et al., 2002).

- Do you feel like you belong at the ALC? Explain. What contributes to students
  feeling welcome? What makes a student feel unwelcome?

(Mastery) Success brings internal satisfaction and the belief that one is capable of

attaining certain goals (Brendtro et al., 2002).

- Talk about your supports. What supports/resources do you use to succeed academically? (Community, school, community of learners, family, friends, other)?

- Talk about your successes and challenges. Where do you feel you have achieved in the academic sense? Where do you feel challenged?

(Independence & Generosity) The spirit of independence also teaches people to take responsibility for failure or success, but most importantly it speaks to the motivation to attain set goals. Through generosity one develops a sense of purpose and is exposed to further learning, "helping others improves self-esteem" (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 59).

- Did you participate in the community service credit?
    - If yes, describe how you got started, that is, describe the process of participating. Did you feel welcome and comfortable where you volunteered? Explain.

- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the community service credit is organized?

The purpose of the focus group was to clarify, confirm and elaborate on the findings and themes that evolved from the first two methods. The focus group was conducted in a classroom at the ALC and was audio recorded. We conducted the focus group on a Friday when there were no other students or staff around. The focus group was 90 minutes in duration and involved three research participants. Child-minding was provided for the participants in attendance. The focus group was planned two weeks in advance, allowing enough time for everyone involved to work this into their schedules, but unfortunately two were unable to attend for personal reasons.

At the start of the focus group I thanked them for sharing their stories and then I discussed the emerging findings or themes from the journaling and interviews. The focus group allowed participants to elaborate and share experiences of going to school and balancing all the responsibilities, as well as discussing the experiences with the community of learners, the community service credit, Employment Income Assistance and subsidized housing. The focus group expanded and enriched the vocabulary of understanding, like a hermeneutic dialogue. Hermeneutics means the interpretation and understanding of social events by analyzing their meanings from the perspective of the participants within their environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The conversation and storytelling started with the journaling; from there the conversation and exploration continued with the interviews. The focus group was the first opportunity for the participants to be together in one gathering discussing their experiences, challenges, successes and recommendations as they relate to the initial findings.

*Sample focus group questions.*

- Discuss the "community of learners" and how this has impacted you.

- Discuss some of the challenges and successes with the community service credit and any recommendations to improve this experience.

- What else can be provided or improved upon to enhance your academic success?

*Analysis*

The data from the journaling, interviews and focus group was transcribed and saved electronically. All identifying features were changed (e.g., by the use of pseudonyms). A printed version was created that had a six centimeter wide right indentation for marking notes and themes. As themes re-occur they were coded and then sub-themes were created

and coded to help organize the analysis (Lutfiyya, Z.M., personal communication, March 2010).

The data was analyzed using Ellis' hermeneutic spiral to track the evolution of this interpretive inquiry (Ellis, 1998). If you can imagine a series of loops that spiral around, and each loop represents a data collection activity or reflection, what you learn in one loop provides more insight as you head to the next. The loops in this research study included the journaling, interviews and focus group; each of these loops "represents a different attempt to get closer to what one hopes to understand" (Ellis, 1998, p. 20). I attempted to gain a better understanding of how education and community development, including my role as a CD practitioner, can be mutually supportive. Each loop of data collection, reflection and analysis, influenced the next research method. Throughout this process I, the researcher, also documented weekly my reflections, observations, analysis and interpretations as field notes in my journal while collecting the data as part of this qualitative inquiry (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). As mentioned, the journaling informed and provided direction for the interviews. If a participant shared a story in her journal that I wanted to learn more about, I would ask her to elaborate in the one-on-one interview. The journaling and the interviews guided the direction of the focus group by providing rich data, including themes and experiences that the five participants shared. Once all data was collected, the hermeneutic spiral started again. I reviewed and re-analyzed the journal entries, interviews and focus group as a whole.

Authentication of the data was done by evaluating my interpretive inquiry to see if my research findings were able to reveal any solutions to my initial concern or if new knowledge has been advanced. Ellis (1998) argues that it is not good enough to simply describe or understand a human phenomenon, but one needs to be able to bring practical

solutions to a problem or concern. I will use six questions offered by Ellis (1998) to

evaluate the value of the findings:

1.  Is it believable and convincing?

2.  Do the findings corroborate or support other material or research?

3.  Does it have the power to change or influence practice?

4.  Has the researcher been impacted and transformed?

5.  Have solutions been uncovered?

6.  Have new possibilities been revealed for the researcher and for the research

    participants?

Findings are presented as themes in narrative form in chapters three and four.

*Reflexive Narrative*

Through out the thesis I share with the reader my experiences and perspectives as

a form of critical reflection. I did this in an effort to help the reader better understand how

the research developed and to allow the reader a better understanding of my beliefs and

worldview. According the Wilson (2008) the importance of the reflexive narratives

enables to reader to see how the research developed in relation to the people involved in

the research and how the ideas emerged as a result of the study. Wilson (2008) refers to

this notion as relational accountability and states that "an idea cannot be taken out of this

relational context and still maintain its shape" (p. 8). In other words, by writing myself

into the thesis through my reflexive narratives, I will reveal the relationships between the

ideas shared, the context of the study, and the people involved.

*Ethical Considerations*

It is important to for the reader to understand my role not only in the research

process, but at the ALC where the participants are registered. Due to my employment at

the ALC, there could be a perception of power imbalance in this study. However, I am not in a power vis-à-vis position of authority; I am not a teacher but a member of the administration team as a coordinator for the adult learning centre. I do not have any authority over enrolment/admission, grades or marks, or withdrawal from the program. As adult learners in the program, students are independent and make their own choices and are treated as mature adults. I enlisted the ALC secretary to invite potential participants and stressed that participation is voluntary and one has the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In doing so, I adhered to a professional code of conduct at all times. I spoke with to the school division administrator responsible for research in the division regarding my graduate study and a letter was given to the School Division requesting formal permission to do research at the adult learning centre (see Appendix G). Prior to this study commencing I received official documents indicating the school division endorsed the research.

Pseudonyms are used in this final report and all identifying comments have been altered or omitted. A confidentiality statement (see Appendix H) was signed by the researcher, the secretary and by the research participants to ensure the identities of participants are kept confidential. The data was stored in a locked file cabinet in an office located in my home and only my advisor and I will have access to the primary data, transcripts, and journals. The data will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

*Overview of Chapters*

In Chapters three and four I analyze the data and frame the chapters using the social determinants of health as a theoretical lens. Social determinants of health are concerned with the amount and quality of resources made available to society's members

and how the living environment, economic and social conditions affects the health of

people and communities (Richmond & Ross, 2008; Raphael, 2009; Raphael, 2010).

Studies as early as the mid-1970s have shown that the social conditions and economic

forces people experience have a much larger impact on their health than lifestyle choices,

such as using tobacco or alcohol, or being physically active (Raphael, 2010). In *The*

*Social Determinants of Health* (2nd ed.)*,* edited by Dennis Raphael (2009), the twelve key

social determinants of health relevant to Canadians are Aboriginal status, education, food

security, gender, housing,  social safety net, social exclusion, early years, income and its

distribution, health care services, employment and working conditions, and

unemployment and employment security (p. 7). For the purpose of this thesis I will be

discussing the first seven social determinants of health mentioned above in chapters three

and four.

Chapter three begins with an historical perspective, a glimpse into what the

participants in this study experienced growing up. It elaborates on how experiences

related to poverty, gender and Aboriginal identity shape who these women are and why

they are returning to school to attain their grade 12 Mature Diploma. Chapter three then

delves into the feminization and racialization of poverty and how the five mothers in this

study manage, sometimes just hanging in there, to balance their school and home life

responsibilities; all this while struggling to find the time to take care of themselves.

Chapter four analyzes the community of learners and community service credit,

respectively, in relation to the Circle of Courage® and examines what enables the women

in this study to be successful at school. In chapter four I continue to analyze the

community of learners in relation to a social support network, it is in this section I share

both the positive and negative aspects. In chapter five, I discuss the findings arising from

this research process from a CD perspective and will draw conclusions about the research questions by illustrating how CD and education are mutually supportive and beneficial. In Chapter five I use Ellis' (1998) questions regarding the meaningfulness of the research to evaluate the findings. I also provide recommendations for policy, practice and future research. Throughout the chapters I have included my field notes as journal entries and will discuss my role as a CD educator/practitioner and how the research has impacted my practice.

CHAPTER THREE

Balancing the Demands of Motherhood, Student Life and Living in Poverty

*Five Women*

> *The five women in the research are not only mothers and students, but survivors,*
> *warriors and vulnerable. One participant said when she gets stressed out she will*
> *cry, "I will go and sit in the washroom and cry. I will come out and feel much*
> *better. I will say, 'ok, what do you guys want? Time for bath. Time for bed.' I*
> *don't let my kids see me cry, I am very emotional…strong but weak at the same*
> *time." (Jennifer, interview transcript)*

To obtain some sense of the five women participants who took part in this research,
I share information from the individual's journaling and interviews pertaining to their
lived experiences. Out of the five participants, three self-identified as Aboriginal descent,
Lisa, Karen, and Michelle. Heather self-identified as Caucasian and Jennifer shared her
father is a Filipino immigrant and her mom is of white European decent. All of the
women at the time of the study were living in low SES circumstances in subsidized
housing and on Employment Income Assistance.

The participants in this study are impacted by most of the twelve determinants of
health outlined by Raphael (2009), including income, education, unemployment,
conditions of childhood, food security, housing, services and social supports (Richmond
& Ross, 2008; Raphael, 2009; Raphael, 2010). All five participants were raised by single
parents and have experienced living in poverty from childhood, through youth, and into
their early adult life. The longer one experiences living in poverty, the greater the
negative impact over a life time. According to Raphael (2010), a child`s socio-economic

status can set a trajectory where the impacts of the socio-economic conditions can accumulate over time. Even when socio-demographic characteristics are taken into consideration, the effects of poverty over time have exponentially negative health effects. MacKinnon (2010) states that, "those experiencing long-term and intergenerational poverty, often come to believe that there is little hope for a better future" (p. 67).

Absenteeism from school and poor academic achievement are some of the residual effects of children growing up in poverty (MacKinnon, 2010). None of the participants in this research completed high school. Two participants dropped out in their grade twelve year. One woman, Lisa, was 3 months shy from graduation, and has fond memories of her years in high school:

I ended up meeting a guy in my grade 9 year and we were together until I left actually, I was eighteen. He was like my strength. You know, he was a white boy from the country and I was the Indian girl from CFS. We kind of stuck together and had our own little crowd. High school was really good. I really enjoyed it.

Lisa stopped going to school when she learned her father had passed away; she was 17 at the time. Lisa was eight years old when she and her sister were taken away from her parents and put into foster care.

Jennifer was the oldest of four children growing up. Her youngest sister was born with a heart defect and at 14 months she passed away. It was at this time her mother abandoned the family and left Jennifer and her two siblings with her dad. Jennifer shares, "after that everything in school was just like…I couldn't even focus. I had to think about my brother and sister." Jennifer's father needed to work 16 hour days to make ends meet and that left Jennifer with the responsibility, at 11 years of age, to take care of her siblings. She stayed in school until her grade twelve year (as Lisa did) and met her

boyfriend, and father of her three children, in grade ten. Near the end of their final year of high school they stopped attending. Jennifer shared:

We just started partying. I know it sounds awful, but that is what we did. We skipped and slept in. Slept at his house and his mom would always get us, she would yell at us in the morning, 'get to school'. We skipped too much. We both didn't finish. We didn't want to go to school anymore, that's it…it was close to the end and we weren't graduating anyways so we may as well stop.

Heather had a rough childhood growing up and was put into a group home at age 13 for her own safety. Her mother was an alcoholic. One day her mother sat in a friend's house drinking and left the kids in the car. Heather got out to check on her mom, or to go to the bathroom, but was viciously attacked by a dog and ended up being taken to hospital, and to this day has scars to constantly remind her of that day. Heather did not need to go to school after that for many weeks; her mom let her stay at home. Heather stopped going to school after her grade ten year: "I didn't go back to school because I wanted a job. My mom said if I got on the honour roll I can do whatever I wanted, so I got on the honour roll and dropped out."

While Karen and Michelle did go to school for their senior years, they hardly attended their classes. Michelle dropped out when she was seventeen years old and only received credits for her grade nine year:

I came to high school for three years and never passed anything. I would drop out every year. I would sign up again, and by the end of the year…I would hang out at the school, I would make sure I was here by lunch to see all my friends; I just never went to class.

Karen's last grade completed was grade ten. During her middle and high school years she moved between her parents' homes, her mother lived in the city and her father lived on the reserve. She did not stay in one school for more than a few months at a time and was responsible for caring for her younger sister. She shares with me:

> I had a sister that I took care of a lot of the time. I moved around a lot. I was out in the reserve and out in the town- back and forth. I never stayed in a school too long. I kept going back and forth too, it is the way it was. That is what I did growing up, just moving around all over the place [laughing as she shares this with me]. I was in school for so many years; I just never got any credits.

Karen eventually quit school at age 17. I asked her if there was any particular reason why she quit, and she replied, "no home. No home…mmm, no home. I was all over the place. I had nobody…I had no home." She said her mother tried to encourage her to go to school but Karen didn't care about school, "She couldn't put up with me, I wasn't listening to her, she tried so much. It was me who wasn't listening." Being transient or moving from place to place will affect how an individual is attached, or in this case unattached to a school, and as a result high absenteeism is a common experience. High absenteeism results in falling behind in school and can eventually lead into leaving school (MacKinnon, 2013).

For the participants in this study, the time from when they dropped out of high school to when they learned they were first pregnant was spent partying and living unhealthy lifestyles, and perhaps they were a little lost. All of them spoke of wasting their life away before they returned to school. Lisa's daily routine or reference to time was her TV:

I just sat around and did nothing. I really did nothing. I sat at home and watched

Days of Our Lives at 2:00 pm, then I watched Doctors at 3:00 pm, 4:30 pm came

around…got to watch some Oprah. I knew everything. I knew [my daughter`s]

feeding schedule from the TV when she was younger.

Our paths crossed when these five women decided to go back to school to attain a

Mature Diploma. In my role as a CD practitioner it was my responsibility to inform the

community about the adult learning centre and free childcare. I regularly go door to door

meeting new residents and catching up with people I have already met. For three of the

participants I knocked on their door, introduced myself and asked if they want to go to

school.

*Gender and Aboriginal Identity*

Gender as a determinant of health involves recognizing the many roles and

responsibilities women have, including opportunities and obstacles. How women identify

themselves in the various facets or domains of their life are expressions of gender identity

(Haworth-Brockman, 2010). From a feminist perspective, to create and understand social

change it needs to start with women's experiences. When I share my participants stories I

must, and do, talk within their lived experience. The term "Women" does not represent a

homogeneous group; women's lives are complex, changing and adapting to the social

context of their lives (Spade & Valentine, 2004). The details are essential when talking

about women, because the context of one's life and experiences shapes one's

"expectations and reactions to change" (Dagenais & Piche, 1994, p. 65).

Another layer of complexity or intersection that needs to be explored when it

comes to women is Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal women share many of the same

worries and responsibilities as other women in Canada, but there are some distinctions

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that only Aboriginal females have in common. According to O`Donnell and Wallace (2012), Aboriginal women are a "unique population" when you consider demographics, culture and socioeconomics. For instance, in Canada the Aboriginal peoples have "50 distinct and diverse groups, each with its own language" and traditions (Smylie, 2009, pp. 381). Demographically speaking, Aboriginal females, including women and girls, are a growing group. In 2006 the female Aboriginal population comprised 4% of Canada's total female population, and is accelerating over the rest of Canada's female population. For example, in a ten year period from 1996-2006, Canada's non-Aboriginal female population grew nine percent, compared with 45% for Aboriginal females. Of all the provinces (excluding Canada's Northern Territories), Manitoba has the largest percentage of Aboriginal females, that is, they make up 16% of all females in the province in 2006. And according to Canada's census of metropolitan areas, Winnipeg has the largest number and largest concentration of Aboriginal women and girls (O`Donnell & Wallace, 2012).

Aboriginal status as a social determinant of health explores the historical (and current) processes and policies that adversely impact the Aboriginal community and their determinants (Hart, 2010). The persistent and residual effects of colonization on Aboriginal peoples are a key determinant of health. The ongoing effects include "dislocation from traditional lands and lifestyles; policies of cultural and linguistic suppression . . . [and] the impacts of interpersonal and institutional racism" (Smylie, 2009, p. 282). It is imperative that when we discuss Aboriginal status as a social determinant of health we understand this within the context of Canadian colonialism.

Three of the five participants in this study are of Aboriginal descent. Karen and Lisa share some of their negative experiences and memories growing up. Lisa and her

little sister had a "really rough childhood" and were removed from their mother's responsibility into the foster care system. Lisa shares, "I was a native girl growing up in a white community and nobody let me forget it". Prior to being put into care Lisa experienced a lot of abuse and remembers her mother being "really drunk" all the time. One memory she shares is riding on a bus for hours with her mother and little sister: "she would be like drunk on the back of the bus and we would take the bus around and around and around while she would sleep but we would stay with her." Lisa shares she had to grow up fast as she needed to learn how to cook for her little sister and made sure that they both got to school for the breakfast program. While in foster care she was forced to call her caregivers "mom" and "dad" even though they did not treat the two girls like they were family. Lisa often got in trouble for "being mouthy because of the way they treated me…I really, really, felt like an outcast, that is for sure." When Lisa turned 17 she moved to the city to be with her mother who was "known to be on the strip, which is like Main Street strip, like the Northern, the Yale, the West, the Sutherland." Lisa started hanging out there too, hustling and stealing to get by; she said it was a really awful time in her life. It was during this period in her life when she met a young Aboriginal man who is the father of her child.

She met him on the bus one day and started hanging out with him. Lisa says he took her out of that dangerous hustling lifestyle. He shared his traditional lifestyle with her by taking her to Pow Wows and encouraging her to sing. He taught her what the drum and dream catcher means and about smudging. To this day Lisa smudges daily to cleanse her house, heart and mind. Lisa shares, "he showed me a *whole* different perspective of life and all I knew as Indians, like down on Main Street because I never experienced anything else. He opened up my eyes to so much more." Shortly after they broke up she

learned she was pregnant with his child. They did try to live together for a couple of months but Lisa said that their "relationship was already done before then" and they went their separate ways.

For Karen life was hard growing up between the reserve where her father lived and the city where her mother resided. Her family, specifically her father and his sisters and her mother's eldest sisters, experienced residential schools. These experiences where very bad and traumatic. Her mother's family does not talk about it. Karen's father's residential school was located on the reserve next to their reserve or home. Karen did her best to take care of her father, which is why she often returned to the reserve. She shared that her father was grossly affected by his experience:

> I have seen my dad go way down there and I was trying to help him with it all. I
> think that was last year he went through this breakdown…and everything, so I was
> there trying to help him. I know he is up and going again, so….

The negative impact of residential schools will affect many generations for those who attended them, even though the last schools closed in the 1990s (O'Donnell & Wallace, 2012). For many Aboriginal people residential schools provided the most painful experience with colonialism. Many Aboriginal parents or grandparents who are now in their late adulthood remain damaged psychologically and spiritually, due to this residential school experience (Silver, Ghorayshi, Hay & Klyne, 2006; MacKinnon, 2013). This experience or family history in Karen's life is too difficult for her to talk about so we switched to her own memory of school experiences. She recalls not being well taken care of and able to do whatever she wanted. She remembers being lonely. Karen did not achieve success in her early years in school, and according to Silver (2013a) there is a correlation to the combined impacts of colonization, racism and poverty which "have

devastating effects in Aboriginal people's success in mainstream educational system" (p. 14).

So what do Lisa and Karen's experiences growing up Aboriginal mean? How do their experiences impact their stories, their identities, and how they relate to the world? Women are not a homogeneous group; a one size fits all concept is not viable. We must continue to explore and understand the diversity and complexities of women's lives, and how we are different in our experiences of privilege and oppression (Dewar, 1993). It is imperative to keep in mind that women's experiences differ within gender groups due to class, race, age, and culture to name a few. Early experiences, such as growing up Aboriginal in a racially divided community, changes how one views the world and how one fits in it. All Lisa knew about Aboriginal people was from her experiences growing up; the "Indian" girl in a white rural community who was taunted by white kids that "all she will ever be is a welfare bum." Then later, once she left high school, in her early adult years she partied regularly with her mom on the "strip". Lisa shared, "I was not shown the proper ways."

Karen experienced and observed her elders' debilitating mental health issues, which can be attributed to residential schools. How did she view the white mainstream education system growing up? Social exclusion from an Aboriginal identity lens is the absence of Aboriginal people in society's institutions. You will not find many Aboriginal people working in the labour market, including the service sectors, in comparison to the proportion of Winnipeg's Aboriginal population (Silver, 2006). Silver (2006) asserts that "Aboriginal people feel, and are, socially excluded from the dominant culture and institutions – employment, schools, housing...for example." (p. 18). For example, at the adult learning centre where I work there are no Aboriginal teachers.

Karen easily entered and exited the education system for years when she was going between her mother's home in the city and her father's home on the reserve. Every time Karen moved she would switch schools, teachers and classes. She did not complete a full year at one school, ultimately setting her up for failure when she reached high school as she did not attain any credits past grade ten. The context of these women's lives and experiences, from childhood into adulthood, informs how they make choices and shapes their self perception.

*Why did you go back to school?*

The participants/women in this study have much in common, but their stories are individual and their journeys are different. What they all share, besides having children after they dropped out of high school, is the belief that education is a way out of poverty. One participant, Karen said an education "means I can get a good job. Get a good job and try to support my son." Education and poverty are two SDOH, and education is viewed as a "key mediator" and a strong determinant of an individual's income in later life (Raphael, 2009).

The reasons the participants shared as to why they are going back to school to finish their grade twelve included a sense of embarrassment living on Employment Income Assistance (EIA), being bored of doing nothing, a desire to have a career and not work for minimum wage, and mostly to be positive role models for their children. A research study conducted in a school for adolescent parents also found that young mothers wanted to be good role models for their children and be healthy for their kids (Orchard, Halas, & Stark, 2006). When I asked Jennifer, a mother of three children, and the one who cries in the bathroom so her kids do not hear her, why she is going back to school she felt shame having to depend on social assistance or EIA:

I felt shitty being on welfare…I wanted to do something with my life. My family was always down about welfare. I was kind of ashamed, like towards my dad's family because they are all hard working. Still to this day my dad doesn't know I am on assistance, I am scared to tell him.

Many of the participants talked about their parents working hard to get what they have and this had a lasting impact on them. Michelle shared that her mother never got a high school diploma and that her mother's plight motivates her:

One thing that makes me motivated to go back to school now is to see where she is at [and] having to work …just to make ends meet. She is living paycheck to paycheck and probably will forever, so major motivation for me.

Michelle understands the more education you have the better chance of increasing your yearly earnings (Statistics Canada, 2012) and going back to school to attain a grade 12 diploma is a good start. Michelle continues that she was wasting time and "just existing, not doing anything" before realizing she needed to do something, especially as her children got older and starting asking her questions about money. She wanted to go back to school to set a good example for her daughters:

Yes, I want to do something with my life, and you know sitting there every day is absolutely boring. You're not challenging yourself, you are not doing anything. It's not fun, I don't find it fun to sit there all day and do nothing. A lot of it is one day my kids are going to be old enough to go...ask me...and [daughter] did ask me, "mom, where do you get your money from?" And to explain to her that, um, I don't work and I get help, support from assistance, and I don't want her to think that is what you do.

Heather and Lisa offered additional reasons for returning to school. For Heather, her children wanted their mom to graduate, as the oldest one was in middle school and encouraged her mother to finish. When I asked, "Why are you back at school?" she responded with a laugh, "To graduate, so my kids can get off my ass about not graduating, because my kids were like bugging me. They are all up on me about that." Lisa said getting her grade twelve was a step closer to self sufficiency:

I wanted my grade twelve so I could get a job. That is all I wanted because many doors were closed for me because I didn't have my grade twelve. Everyone asked if I graduated. I don't want to work for ten dollars an hour. I want a career. You need schooling.

For the five women in this research, their children are a key motivator in going back to school and persevering when they are overwhelmed with life. These women share a sense of pride when they talk about succeeding in school. Jennifer said she wants to accomplish something: "now I have kids, I want them to look at me when they get older and be proud of what I am…I want them to be proud of their mom." For Lisa it goes back to what someone told her in high school:

There were some times when people would pick on me, 'Oh, you are really going to be a real welfare case, you're going to have a kid, you aren't going to get anything done in with your life', and like…as soon as I got pregnant, I am like, *oh my god*! Ok, I am on welfare (giggle), got a baby and like…oh no, this guy is telling me my future and NOW that is what drives me. I am not going to let him think that of me. I am going to show him…not only him but the whole world, just because I had a kid and I'm a single mom, and yes I had to go on welfare, I am going to do it. I am not going to stop until I am there.

For these moms it is important for their children to understand that being on assistance is not a desired outcome in life. Lisa shares, "welfare is not ok; I don't want my daughter to think it is. I am trying to teach her that no one gets by on life sitting around doing nothing." The women in this study do not want to be on EIA for the rest of their lives, they want to work but find that without their grade twelve they are very limited in their options.

Education, as a SDOH, impacts one's ability to secure employment and therefore one's ability to be self sustaining and not reliant on government welfare cheques. Education, and more of it, leads to a greater chance of employment, as the "average annual earnings for both women and men rise with their level of education"(Statistics Canada, 2012, p. 149). Statistics link education to the employment rate; only 35% of women who do not have their high school diploma were employed compared with 74.7% of women with a university degree who were employed (Statistics Canada, 2012, p. 112). An Aboriginal woman with a Bachelors degree will earn "higher median incomes than non-Aboriginal Canadian women with equivalent education" (p. 233). In fact, recent research indicates that the only time the Aboriginal population does better than the median incomes of non-Aboriginal people is when an Aboriginal female obtains at least a Bachelor's degree.

For the five women in this study, going back to school was a means to become more independent and more economically stable. These five women do not want to live in poverty or be dependent on welfare for the rest of their lives. They do not want their children to experience their struggles based on low SES. They view education as a determinant to a better life.

*Racialization of Poverty*

Poverty in Winnipeg is spatially concentrated and racialized (Silver, 2010). Poverty is not distributed equally across the city. Poverty is not distributed equally demographically speaking either. Aboriginal people are disproportionately represented in the inner city or spatially concentrated low income areas, such as the north end, and thus poverty is racialized. Racialized poverty is the increased likelihood that Aboriginal people, or any minority group, will be living in low SES or poverty, and increased possibility of experiencing social exclusion (Comack, 2012; Silver, 2010). In the inner-city as much as four-fifths of Aboriginal households live below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cutoff (LICO) (Silver, 2010). As described in chapter one, Canada's LICO measurement is an attempt to demonstrate the income level at which a family may be struggling financially because a larger portion of their income is spent on the basics, such as food, clothing and shelter. Being below the LICO does not even attempt to address the social aspects of poverty, such as social exclusion.

Silver (2010) suggests that racialized poverty is a social determinant of health, and describes it as "complex form of poverty" (p. 165). Spatially concentrated poverty neighbourhoods are not only in the inner city, but exist in various areas throughout the city, often referred to as pockets of poverty. Racialized poverty as a SDOH negatively impacts educational outcomes, increases childhood poverty and adversely effects health outcomes. According to Comack (2012), race and gender are "factors that mediate our experiences" (p. 19). The next story illustrates how gender and race interlock and inform Karen's perceptions on her experience with police in the community. Karen shared a story with me that you might find bothersome or uncomfortable, at least I did.

On the morning of Easter Monday, during the time of this research, Karen was running late for school as she thought it was a holiday until her friend texted her that school was open. When she stepped out of her building into the alley she noticed a "cop cruiser" was driving slowly behind her. She stepped to the side to let the car pass, but it didn't so she kept walking, listening to her music playing through her head phones. The police car eventually pulled up beside her and the police officers started talking to her so she took out her headphones and said, "What"? The two white male officers asked where she was going and she replied, "To school". The officers then offered her a ride because she was running late and said, "Well, we just care about you getting an education". Karen felt this was too weird and declined the ride. She said she felt a chill and walked off. She writes in her journal:

> I then started thinking; I wonder if that's why some people (Aboriginal Native girls) go missing? I have heard of what some 'cops' do to native guys, so that's when I started to think more about that. I am glad nothing more happened *if* they happened to be dirty cops.

Elizabeth Comack (2012) explores the concept and practice of racialized policing and asserts that "race is not a biological category," but a construct created by society, and that racialization is the process where people see race as real and different (Comack, 2012, p. 17). It is in this "difference" where there is unequal treatment and access, as pertains to economic, political and social life. Karen, having been stopped by the police and questioned where she is going as an isolated experience may not be racist. In the context of the stories Karen hears from other people in her spatially concentrated and racialized community it is a racialized narrative. The stories Karen hears and the realities faced by Aboriginal peoples include Aboriginal women going missing and police officers

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hitting Aboriginal males and "roughing" them up for no reason; collectively, these stories or experiences can be interpreted as racialized policing.

In her interview Karen said it felt as if this encounter happened to her because she is Aboriginal, and after it happened she found it very hard to concentrate on school for the rest of the day; she said it bothered her that whole day. I remember feeling helpless, stunned and angry, and unsure how to support her. Nothing like that has ever happened to me. I certainly would not be able to focus on math class for the next three hours. I remember spending close to an hour with her that day listening to her. I remember observing other students at the ALC surround her with support and messages of empathy and anger, many of whom where Aboriginal and had similar stories or experiences.

Karen's story is not isolated. I remember early in 2007 meeting a community leader, who also happened to be a police officer, at a local community governance group where I was advocating for some services in the community that many of the students in this study lived. This police officer said some very derogative statements about the community, painting all of its residents with the same brush as the few bad ones. He did not believe in providing any services in this community because "they" would not appreciate it. I remember being taken aback by this comment, but managed to present my case successfully to the governance body in spite of his negative comments. A few months later I ran into him again; this time his son was playing at our community's local baseball diamond. This community leader again said negative things about the community as a whole, but these comments were more focused on the area residents not taking care of the space or building. I expressed to him that you cannot label every community member the same based on the actions of a few and started sharing some of the highlights and successes. If a police officer can generalize and blatantly share his

tainted perspective in public, I realized advocating for this community is going to take more than one voice; it is going to take the whole community to stand together. For the next few meetings I invited an area resident to join us, and by doing so this police officer did not say anything blatantly derogative and from then on we ensured a community resident who lived in subsidized housing participated in these gatherings to ensure their community was better represented. How can community members develop trust with the police when this community leader presents himself as someone who does not share a belief in the value of community?

We may never know the motivation behind the police officers' gesture to offer Karen a ride to school. Did the fact that she was young, female and Aboriginal have anything to do with it? Karen believes it does, as does her mother who wanted to call the police about this incident, but Karen would not. "What would the police do?" she said to me. According to Comack (2012), Karen is not the only person who would not lodge a complaint against the police, to the police. Many Aboriginals who are racially targeted by the police feel the police will defend their own and say what they need to. In other words, there is little trust police officers will implicate their own, or take seriously the allegations made against their fellow police officers. Karen was not in distress when the police pulled up beside her, but she did not feel safe when the two white male police officers started talking to her. Would she have felt less threatened if there was a female officer in the car? I share this story as a means to highlight the point about the intersection of race with gender and class. Karen's social position left her feeling vulnerable in ways a middle class white woman may never experience.

The shared and lived experience the women (or participants) in this research have is the responsibility to manage the many roles and duties they have as a mother and as a student. Four out of the five women in this study are single parents or the head of a lone-parent family. The "feminization of poverty" refers to the increase of single mothers, or poor women, heading a household and raising children (Spade & Valentine, 2004). Of all family types, lone-parent families experience the lowest average total incomes (Williams, 2012). The women in this study have many roles and responsibilities, and limited resources. They need to feed their children and arrange time for shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, family, self and study. Feeding the many mouths in the home with limited resources living on social assistance can be tough. Food insecurity is a real issue for these women.

Food security, a social determinant of health, is when all members of a household can access enough safe and nutritious food at any time. Food insecurity is when quality or quantity is compromised, largely due to low SES (Fernandez & Tonn, 2010). The head of lone-parent families have the highest rate of food insecurity (Turcotte, 2012). The cost of food is always increasing, especially with oil prices rising and supermarkets passing these increased costs to the consumer, but the amount people receive on assistance does not increase in relation to the increase in food prices. The cost of healthy and fresh food is more than the cost of processed unhealthy food. Participants in the focus group talked about the food bank and the low quality of food offered there. If desperate they would use it. They talked about not wanting to "suffer for money," "no more chip ins," "looking for quarters in the couch and pockets," "couch diving and counting up your pennies," (all three laughing at their shared experience to get money when they had none, either for

milk or bus fare). They laugh, but it is their reality. I don't count my pennies, nor struggle to find a quarter. I struggle to find $20, which pales in comparison.

It takes time to go shopping to purchase food and other household needs, more so if you take a bus. Perhaps you are fortunate enough to have kids in the school system and can by go by yourself during school hours. Or do you go with your children and hope they listen like good kids today? I recall when my children where toddlers I hated going to the grocery store with them, because most of my time was spent keeping them from fighting or running away. There were many times when the stress level was too much and I ended up yelling at or threatening them. I have on a few occasions left the shopping cart as is and walked out of the store with no purchases because it was too much for me to handle. I had options, whether it was my mother or my partner, who could watch the children while I returned to the grocery store later on to buy food for dinner. Many of the mothers in this research do not have that support. Or if they do, they need to choose when they utilize it, for example, when they need time to study for a test or exam? Or go out on Friday night with the girls to unwind and de-stress over the week, which is important for their mental health? Or go grocery shopping so the family can eat?  Grocery shopping is typically a weekly event, but so is study time, so how do you choose? (Do you even have a choice?)

There is a lot of effort in planning and cooking meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Often making lunches is more expensive than kids coming home for lunch as schools do not have microwaves and many parents choose to make sandwiches. A loaf of bread is now three dollars, and can make six to eight sandwiches. For Jennifer's family that is one loaf per day (multiply by five days, this equals $15 a week for bread alone).

For the participants there is also a never ending supply of dirty clothes that not only need to be cleaned and dried, but folded and put away. What do you do if you don't have a laundry facility at home? With no clean clothes, do you go to school with dirty clothes or skip the day to get laundry done? Do you send your kids to school in last week's dirty clothes? For many this is not a choice and they wear dirty clothes. The community laundry facility was only open Monday to Thursday from 12-4 pm during the time of this study. I know most of my laundry gets done on the weekend; in fact it is Sunday night when I start thinking about the next week. But I have a washer in my house. What if you don't? I also have purchased a total of five laundry baskets; Michelle has also purchased five. We shared (and laughed) that we live out of clean laundry baskets; again, we are happy they are laundered.

Time with family is a high priority! All participants value quality family time, being outside or doing group activities. This can often cost money. Mostly it means time taken away from other duties and responsibilities such as housekeeping and study time.

Finding and taking time for self is good for mental health and self preservation. This self time for some of the participants would coincide with chores, for example, Michelle would be doing laundry while talking to her friends on the phone on a Friday night. Another example is when Jennifer would invite her sister over. Jennifer would be doing housework, while her sister would try to entertain the kids. Often this wasn't so productive in terms of getting work done, but hanging out and sharing a conversation was a great outcome for Jennifer. When Jennifer was asked about why self time was important for her, she replied, "If I didn't have self time I would go nuts. I would probably have a nervous breakdown." Lisa shared:

It's just sometimes you really need to just sit there with the TV off, the curtain open and just sit in the sun and just sit around and listen to your music and just have it quiet because when [my daughter] is home she doesn't stop talking, she doesn't stop making noise, she doesn't stop bugging me…down time is just like WOW, you just need to relax.

Last on the list of priorities is time for study. This is very challenging. Homework is done usually if there is a pressing assignment or exam to study for, otherwise it is not done. If they are going to study, it is once the kids are in bed and for some of the moms the kids do not go to bed till after 9 pm. Then they clean up after dinner, maybe tackle laundry, some will talk with friends on the phone or Facebook. Homework being done at midnight is not uncommon. They then only have six or seven hours of sleep (if lucky) and then have to start again the next day. The best time for study is while they are in school, over lunch, or extra hours during the day, for example, from 1-3 pm if there is childcare space available.

Emergencies or other unplanned or unexpected events, which include health and other serious issues, are often unforeseen and can cause a lot of chaos and stress. Jennifer had a sick grandmother and family from out of town during the research process; Lisa's mom is diagnosed with terminal liver disease; Karen's father is dealing with mental illness linked to residential schools; Michelle's mom is recovering from cancer; and Heather was dealing with the death of her best friend in jail and another devastating event in her personal life. School can take a back seat at these times in life.

There is a provocative document published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba (2009) titled, State of the Inner City report: *It Takes All Day To Be Poor*. This document provides powerful, personal insights regarding the day to day

lives of a wide demographic of people living in poverty who are dependent on the various

social, economic and educational systems, and the people that work within them. It

highlights the challenges and struggles people living in poverty experience: no money for

transportation for a meeting with an EIA worker, doctor appointment, or to go shopping;

for those who find money for transportation, everything takes longer when you depend on

the bus; the feminization of poverty, when mothers must also take their children with

them to the various appointments or tasks. All of these challenges can add stress to a day,

especially if younger children are involved.

The women in my research have limited resources, busy schedules, and are mostly

reliant on bus transportation. Unless they have someone to watch their child(ren) they

must take them to all these places to meet the demands expected of them from various

agencies. Michelle's EIA worker would not provide her with a bus pass allowance: "I

asked but she said I lived too close. She took the address where the school was and [said]

I can walk. I was like, in the dead of winter you want to carry a kid to school?" But

Michelle did not pursue it further because she was fearful they might get too involved in

her life, "I don't' want an argument because I don't want them in my business…I feel if

you bring them into your business then they are in your business and you are not going to

get them out." When Jennifer heard that Michelle's worker calculated the distance she

shared this comment:

> That bus pass isn't only for school; it is for you guys or for whoever- to go to the
>
> office actually, if they need to. They don't (grunt in frustration). That bugs me.
>
> Calculating the distance - that is stupid.
>
> I learned that Michelle was not receiving transportation funds to go to school at

the end of the school year and it was too late for me to advocate for her. Michelle's fear

of the Employment Income Assistance workers getting more involved in her life or "business" is common among the participants in this study. Many talked about how some workers are rude to them. Lisa shares:

> My current worker is really supportive…she wasn't looking down on me or making me do this or that. The last worker I *had*, if I didn't hand in my attendance report every month she would cut me off. Like even if it was late, she was really, really rude and yet I would be coming to school all the time, doing my own stuff and like I am trying to raise my daughter I don't have time to go run around to EIA, and go there and fax this here and it was- *she put a lot of stress on me.*

There is a lot going on in the lives of these five women, they have many roles and responsibilities. The five women in this research study need to go shopping for groceries, prepare and cook meals, clean the house, help their children with homework, spend time with their family, and try to carve out time to complete their school assignments or to study for tests or exams. They do all of this with a restricted resources and limited amounts of money and time.

*Priorities*

During the interviews I asked all the participants how they prioritize the various demands on them, and to list them. All five participants stated quality time with their children was the most important and *always* would trump homework. After spending time with their children their second priority was chores, which includes, but is not limited to, shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Third on this list was spending time with friends, whether it was on the phone, in person or at a social gathering. Homework always seemed to be last. Jennifer shared in the focus group why homework gets "pushed aside,

because no matter what, kids will always come first. Even before yourself. We all know that, we are moms."

The women shared that establishing and keeping to a routine helps with balancing their numerous responsibilities. When Lisa breaks her routine of going to school and daycare she notices negative changes in her child:

She is getting bored, getting more mouthier, telling me 'no'. There is no structure, sometimes you just want to sit around and do nothing, but she wants to go outside and play and do this and that. Daycare really helps to keep her in a structured routine. And when I screw up her routine it's like I pay for it, she also pays for it.

Begin (1990) argues that the environment that women live in is an essential component of health. The environment can include poverty, malnutrition, and psychosocial conditions "such as social pressure . . . lack of support in family and domestic life, dependency, and lack of status" (p. 5). The mothers in this research do it all on their own; some do not have any other supports like a mother or sibling or caring/trusting neighbour. Dependency on welfare or the EIA worker is something the participants want to end, and see education as a pathway out. But it doesn't help when the EIA worker says "no" to a bus pass and in the heart of winter a student/mother must then carry her toddler (assuming she only has one child), bundled up in a snow suit, in minus 25 degrees Celsius, to school if she wants to go. In my journal I wrote:

Ugh, always challenges. Two students are not receiving funding for transportation; both are using other money (food) to pay for bus fare to get here. On Monday this week Karen came to office saying, again (this is the second month), she didn't get her transportation/education funds deposited in her account. She seemed stressed like she really needed it; I gave her two bus tickets in the

short term. Another student also did not receive any money for transportation.

(March 2, 2011)

To have to regularly ask or beg an EIA worker for money to cover transportation costs so you can get to school is appalling to me, it adds extra pressure and stress to the already busy lives of the women in this study. What I find disturbing is when I have a 19 year old woman applying to the ALC who shares that her case worker says she needs to find work first and not attain her grade twelve Diploma. I remember feeling livid that day. Who is this EIA worker that does not see any value in a 19 year old completing her grade twelve diploma? Does this worker know that McDonalds will only hire you if you have a grade twelve diploma or are attending school? What job is this 19 year old supposed to get? A large part of my role, which I discuss more fully in chapter five, is advocacy in an effort to reduce some of these environmental challenges.

Many of the participants spoke about feeling guilty when they did their homework instead of taking care of their children. One class in particular had a lot of homework, so Jennifer did her best to do it at home:

Oh I can't do [homework], I am trying to write and all the kids are like, "I want a freezie, I want this, I want that". I am sitting there writing and just ignoring and blocking them out, and then I feel guilty.

Sometimes to make good choices, the consequence is being a bad mother. The feminization of poverty is evident here.

I remember when I tried to stay home and do my school work. The plan was to work for a few hours and then take a break to feed my kids a nice hot lunch, but the kids had other plans. I also chose to ignore them when they were pining for my attention, and then they started fighting and crying. I learned I cannot focus on school when my kids are

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in the same space as me, even though there are walls separating us. My guilt came after I told them in a desperate voice that I was trying to do homework and for them to go outside to play quietly. Well that only lasted another 10 minutes…my homework that is.

The participants shared that while at school, they thoroughly enjoyed it, but once they got home they could no longer stay motivated to do school work. Many spoke about spending extra time at school or suggested that the ALC provide childcare over lunch hour so they can stay an hour or two longer while they are in the study zone. Once they got home they knew they would not open their school book until the next day at school. Michelle shares about her children, "someone needs something all the time." All five participants say it is hard to concentrate on homework when you are at home, and they are "dead tired" by the time the kids are in bed and sleeping, and "that is why homework is last" on their priority list.

Self preservation becomes a necessity for some of the participants. This would take on many forms. For example, Lisa spoke about going home after class, while her child was still at daycare (her second year she secured a licensed childcare spot), cleaning up the kitchen and then turning on music and "vegging" out on the couch, not thinking of anything until it was time to pick up her daughter from daycare. Others spoke about evening time, after the kids have gone to bed, turning on the TV, ignoring the dishes and everything else and just relaxing on the couch. Jennifer enjoys bingo and usually stays until "closing time." Michelle summed it up nicely for the participants in this research in terms of balancing all their responsibilities and being flexible:

Something has to give. You always let something go. If you aren't going to do dishes that day, I don't do dishes that day. If I'm not going to cook a pot roast, I

will throw some nuggets in. It is balancing whatever you have time for, and planning helps a lot…Balance is very hard, something is always right there that I need to do- constantly.

During the focus group I asked the participants to name the top challenges that they experienced going to school in adult education. The most difficult, particularly in the first two months, was getting up in the morning. Then came chores and laundry, followed by homework, sick child(ren), and  personal challenges. These challenges are a daily part of the participants' lives while attending school. The feminization of poverty also considers that the workload is more for a solo parent, and that women need to get by often with inadequate resources, such as limited social networks or supports, reduced financial resources and not having enough time in the day. I often wish for an eight day week where I can better balance chores, kids, work and school. With the women in this study it felt that just when they were on a roll with school and routines, something happened to shake it all up, like their child(ren) coming down with the flu or having lice. School is then put on hold for a day or so while they sort their situation out. Once back at school, they then need to fight their way back to a routine and get caught up on assignments and tests.

As the many examples described in this chapter demonstrate, being the head of a lone parent household and living in low SES, and for some, adding the complex challenges of being Aboriginal or a racialized minority creates many challenges that must be overcome in order to succeed. In the next chapter I examine what enables the women in this study to be successful at school.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Women Keep Women Strong"

Education is not only linked to higher income and better health outcomes, but it is correlated to increased social capacity (Raphael, 2009). Increased social capacity can reduce the social isolation and exclusion many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women living in low SES experience. A solo mother attending school needs supports around her, and preferably people who understand and are sensitive to her plight and challenges. This chapter starts with the exploration of social safety nets through the development and exploration of a community of learners. The second half of the chapter discusses the community service experience and knowledge gained by the participants.

*Community of Learners*

I remember having a smile on my face when I stepped out of the office the first week of classes and saw a group of students sharing stories and laughing just before class started, all of whom were mothers and had children in the infant and toddler lab. As much as school can be hard work and students need to stay focused, it is important to enjoy your experience and time together; laughter shared among peers is healthy.  Building on Ladson-Billings (1995) work, a community of learners is a group of learners, or students with similar goals and experiences. The students in such a group encourage each other and learn collaboratively and provide a social support network. Through my research I learned of two layers of support. One is a group of learners attending the same school; the other is an existing social support group for a participant where one or more members attend another school. The individuals people surround themselves with are their social support network, a determinant of health.

SDOH also influence a person's ability to navigate social systems and cope with their environment. Opportunities may present themselves, but if a person does not have the personal and social resources they may not be aware of them, nor be able to act effectively. The participants in this study surrounded themselves with family members (for some of the participants this was limited to one or two family members), neighbours, friends and fellow students. It is important to keep in mind that one's social network is not always a positive experience; this will be elaborated on shortly.

One of my roles as a community development practitioner at the adult learning centre (ALC) is to build on students' strengths to increase their capacity. One way I accomplish this is to help increase the social support network for new students by including other mothers attending the ALC, who share many of the same responsibilities and roles. Working through a community development lens, one of the program ideas was to create networking opportunities for new students to meet each other as well as previous or returning students. This was done with purpose in an attempt to create a community of learners that will support one another in their school and home life. Prior to each new semester (there are two semesters in an academic year) a Meet and Eat is organized where we invite staff, students and their children to join us for lunch. This networking event provides the students, or mothers, in the program an opportunity to meet other students, to learn which classes they share, and ways to support one another. This time also provides the students' children a chance to meet other children attending the infant and toddler lab, in the hope this would increase the comfort levels on the first day of school and daycare. For many of the children in our program this is the first experience in a daycare-like setting, where the children will be left in the company of qualified staff that would ensure

their wellbeing in a nurturing and stimulating environment, while their mothers attend classes.

The Meet and Eat facilitated at the time of this research provided an opportunity for the students to learn from returning students what they can expect in the coming months, including the highs and lows. The experiences they shared included the amount of homework to expect, the challenges in finding time to complete assignments, the challenges when their child becomes sick and how missing classes impacts their workload in an adverse way, and how they have to learn to balance being a mother and a student. I learned that over the first few weeks of class many of the students at the Meet and Eat exchanged phone numbers and invited each other to become friends on Facebook. This proved beneficial when a student needed to miss classes because her child was sick. The students would share notes and provide assignments that the teacher distributed that day. If the students lived close to each other, they would drop by after school to visit and pass on the assignment and notes. There were even times when a few students arranged study groups as a way to support one another in school.

The Meet and Eat gathering created a sense of community and really helped on the first day of classes. The mothers that shared a class did sit together. Jennifer said it made it more comfortable to have other mothers she knew in her class because they "know what you are going through; the homework piece and trying to get everything done, and all your kids stuff". The women attending the ALC who use the childcare provided at the school have similar goals and experiences, which helps with the creation of a community of learners.

*Social Support Network*

Two of the participants, Michelle and Jennifer each had an existing and supportive social network, mainly comprising of friends they had since their high school days. Both Michelle and Jennifer had at least one friend from their social network attending school as well, albeit at a different school. This layer proved to be as beneficial as having a cohort of learners in the same school.

Jennifer's journey to the ALC started months before she enrolled. Jennifer maintained a strong network of friends from her days at high school, and it was with one of these friends she shared a conversation about their mutual desire to go back to school. They both decided to go to a local university to register. It was at this time the university informed Jennifer that she needed to upgrade and attain a mature diploma prior to registering at the university. Jennifer was a little disheartened because even though she could not register at this time, her friend had met the university's requirements and decided to register and attend without her. This dynamic proved to be very motivating for Jennifer over the next academic year. They spent many nights on the phone listening to each other's stories and challenges, and ultimately offering encouragement and support to push through the tough times. The social support network, a SDOH, for Jennifer provided peer support by celebrating successes and sharing challenging experiences.

Even though Jennifer may not have gained as much from the community of learners at the ALC as other participants did, she did contribute to the success of other learners. On occasion Jennifer stayed after class to finish her work, and she often encouraged another student (and mother) to complete her assignment:

I made her stay here a couple of times to do her work. She was like, "I didn't bring my binder", I said, "Well I have loose leaf. So, I have the paper and you are staying." Then I ended up leaving before her.

Michelle's social support network consisted of her mother, her friends from high school and the father of her children (I will call him Dave for the purpose of this story). Although they are no longer a couple, they maintained a good relationship for the sake of their children. Every Friday Dave would take the children for the night, allowing Michelle the time she needed to catch up on other obligations, often this time was spent on housework, on the phone with her friends or going to the gym. About one year prior to when Michelle registered at the ALC, Dave attained his GED while in jail and he regularly would tease Michelle about this and the fact that she did not graduate. Over the course of the year Dave got accepted into post-secondary studies and he and Michelle would occasionally talk about their academic lives. For Michelle this was a competitive relationship, for they often shared the marks they received on various assignments and the one with the higher mark would gloat. This only spurred Michelle on to attain further and continued success.

For Michelle the support provided by the community of learners at the ALC was "more academic," for example, they would proofread each other's assignment prior to handing them in. She became a great support for the other mothers. She would help them with homework and through Facebook she would forward any assignments if they were away. Her greatest strength came from her friends she had since high school and her mother. There were times when Michelle was overwhelmed with assignments and other life responsibilities and started losing motivation:

Like some days I could care less. I just stop caring. I don't want to go; I don't want to do it. I just don't. I hate those because sometimes I can get into slumps like those for weeks at a time where I just don't want to do it, so I won't…but all you have to do is get up. Half the time once you force yourself to get there, and I would go to school that day, I went "aaahhh, I love school, what am I doing?"

It was the conversations with her friend who was also going back to school for her mature diploma that helped her work through the challenges and build her motivation back up. It is the shared lived experiences with her own group of community of learners that supports Michelle through the rough patches, as many of them are single mothers as well. In fact Michelle did share that the dynamic in her social support network changed for the better since she and her friend returned to school; the socializing no longer centralized around alcohol and partying.

Social support networks can have positive impacts as well as negative influences. Jennifer stopped going out as much with her friends because the hangover the next day made her unable to "function properly" with her kids and made the work harder. Even after she told her friends she could not go out and party while she is in school, they would say, "c'mon, it is only one weekend." For the most part Jennifer was able to say no, but occasionally she needed a release and would join her friends for a night out.

Lisa was trying to quit smoking cigarettes and marijuana and spoke about the people around her offering her marijuana as a coping mechanism when she was crying over learning about her mother's terminal illness. Lisa wanted a shoulder to cry on, not drugs to numb the pain. She shared she had to change friends and found this difficult. Half of Lisa's family is supportive and will watch her child. She can go to her sister's house to do laundry and socialize at the same time. Lisa was a great support for the

students at the ALC. She became friends with many of the students in her community of learners outside of school and they became part of her social network.

Sometimes bad things just happen. Heather provided and received great support with her community of learners. She would give rides to school if they, other students who lived nearby, were at her house in the morning as she was getting her kids to school. Her friend (and neighbour) did assignments with her, and actually had fun doing it. But life turned downhill for her when her friend, who played a key role in her life, was sent to jail and within a few months was murdered. Heather had two other women who supported her, both of whom had completed school, had good jobs, and lived in her community. On a few occasions they helped by taking her kids so she can finish homework. The father of her children was not very supportive of her going back to school. He occasionally would take his children for the weekend, but if they were sick or had nits, he immediately returned them home. According to Heather, he "didn't want to deal with the lice, he has long hair and that is his big issue with it." But through all this Heather continued to support the people around her, she even brought a friend who had recently dropped out of school to the ALC for a presentation about post-secondary options. She really looked out for others in her community and at the ALC.

Near the end of the school year a bad incident happened to Heather and compiled with the loss of her friend she could barely make it to school. At this time Lisa and Karen became supports for her, as best they could. In her journal Heather entered, "I have come to the conclusion I need to make some changes"; she further elaborated during the interview that she needs to change her friends, hobbies, environment and the places she hangs out. This isn't the first time Heather has recognized the need to change her social supports around her. Two years prior when she was first enrolled at the ALC she made

changes to her circle of friends stating, "Those were bad people" and shared that the changes were both easy and hard, but did not elaborate more.

Over time, since starting at the ALC, many participants noticed changes in their social support network and made changes as well. Lisa made significant changes to her social support network to attend and achieve success in school:

I made a huge and a lot of changes. I ended up making some friends here; I ended up ditching my old friends to come to school. Not to say I am better than anyone, but I really felt I was too good for them because they would be drinking in front of their kids. A bunch of my friends lost their kids since I have been going to school. So I am really glad that I never went down there and I chose to go to school. I did make some bad choices of friends here, you know, but I ended up ditching them. I became a loner. It bothered me at first because they were all drinking and partying and I have to stay at home. My choice, whatever, but now I am like HELL yah, I am so glad I did that. A lot of bad things have happened to my friends.

The people that you surround yourself with are a social support network. This support system can have a positive or negative impact. For the women in this study it is important they surround themselves with a good support network, one that will support them with their goals to achieve academic success.

Lisa's main and most reliable supports are her sisters; two are older and one is younger. She says, "We are going to be there for each other…we will always have a strong connection." Her sisters let Lisa do her laundry at their place, they help Lisa with clothes for her daughter, they provide babysitting when she is in a jam, and also support her financially if she is in need of food or other essentials. Lisa shares, "if they can do it, they will do it."

Karen seemed to benefit the most from the community of learners at the ALC. Prior to school she was very isolated and had no friends. She lived with her mom and her son. Her days and nights were spent with her son's routine of meal time, play time, bath time, bed time and cleaning up after him. Galabuzi (2009) describes social exclusion in a Canadian context as the inability of marginalized groups to fully participate in "Canadian life." Social exclusion, a SDOH, is both a process and outcome, and exists because of unequal access to social, political and economic systems and resources among groups in society. Often they experience a lack of belonging and acceptance (Galabuzi, 2009; Hart, 2010). All five women in this study experienced some form of social exclusion and had limited access to resources, both financial and social. All five women talked about wanting to change the circumstances in their life because they do not want their children to be excluded from participating in "Canadian life."

The community of learners at the ALC provided Karen with a social safety net. She really connected with the students/mothers at the ALC. The community of learners supported her in many ways: texting morning alarm, working on assignments together, spending time on weekends with kids outdoors (socializing), and helping her with anxiety for a math test and building up her confidence and surrounding her when she was approached by the police one day, as described earlier. Karen's mother helped watch her child on some occasions in order for her to complete some homework, but she worked shift work and this was not regular or consistent support.

Karen shared that prior to connecting with other students/mothers and making some friends at the ALC that she and her son did not leave the house, "just me and him doing nothing," but now she enjoys socializing with other mothers and having her "*self* time hanging with friends." I asked her if she finds herself smiling more now: she giggled

and said, "Yeah. Yeah. I am good the past couple months, I have enjoyed myself." The focus group talked about women as strength by supporting each other. Lisa summed it up nicely, "Women keep women strong." They share the same stresses, whether you are a single mom or not. You know, you are the mother." I agree with Lisa, I need women in my social support network. I am a mother going to school who still does the grocery shopping, 90% of meal preparing and cleaning (at least it feels that way), laundry, and organizing our family schedule. I do not touch house maintenance though, that I leave for my partner. It gets overwhelming at times. I want him to do more, but sometimes it is easier if I just do it myself. A sentiment that Jennifer shares, she too finds she does and chooses to do all the housekeeping chores at home, including meal preparation and getting the children off to school. Her partner, the dad of their three children, supports her going to school. Jennifer says he offers "encouragement, not really anything else…encouragement is important, I don't hear it from anyone else [except his mother]."

The three participants in the focus group believe the best support comes from within a community of learners, especially when the membership is made of other mothers. Michelle says, "It doesn't take much for moms to know each other. You're both moms and you already have the biggest thing in your life in common [children], and going to school. You can relate easily." Other reasons include not needing to explain why homework was not done. As Jennifer noted, other mothers in school understand "trying to get everything done and all your kids' events and stuff." Jennifer continues to share that she only sat next to other mothers because she felt uncomfortable sitting next to a student, usually younger, with no children because "they don't know why I didn't do my work."

The study results show that the community of learners supports academic success and that the benefits extend outside of the classroom, as was evident in the participants'

experiences, for example when Karen started having a walking partner for her and a play date for her son on the weekends. The positive impact of the community of learners increases when the members of the group have similar experiences and goals. Social networks are valuable as they increase one's social capital. Social capital is positively linked to better educational outcomes and health, as well as better income equality (Silver et al., 2006).

The Meet and Eats were purposely orchestrated to help build a sense of community, or sense of belonging among the mothers attending school at the ALC. It was at this event where first time students learned from seasoned students, who were also mothers, about the challenges, responsibilities and expectations they will encounter. Having had the opportunity to meet other mothers who were students prior to school helped create a sense of belonging in the first days of school. As mentioned by Jennifer, mothers tended to sit next to each other enabling a sense of belonging to develop. Over the course of this study I observed the community of learners help other mothers not only feel comfortable in school, but support them in ways they were able to achieve academic success. Examples mentioned earlier include forwarding class notes and assignments when another mother was not able to attend. Some of the participants in this study said it was the phone conversations at night that helped them stay focused and motivated when they just wanted to give up.

On a cautionary note, not all the social supports were positive, and it was acknowledged by many of the participants that change in their social support network's composition was needed in certain circumstances. Changing your support network is not always an easy task as shared by Heather. Unless you change your address and contact

information people can still contact you and ask you to go out and party, and it was hard for Heather to always say no.

Their sense of belonging slowly yielded to mastery for the women in this study, the second quadrant in the Circle of Courage®. Karen was woken up almost every morning via a text message from a member of her community of learners, which led to mastery of her routine to get up and go to school with her child. The community of learners surrounded her with support when she was experiencing test anxiety; she ended up not only writing the test, but passing with an above average grade. According to Brendtro et al. (2002), "self control and self restraint" are learned in mastery (p. 49). Having the ability to say no to her friends going out to drink demonstrated that Jennifer was well on her way to mastery. Having realistic expectations and an awareness of the challenges better enabled the learners to gain self control and restraint. Mastery for the women in this study demonstrated itself through routines, self control to say no to going out on a school night, and included staying over the lunch hour to get their homework done while they were at school and in the "zone".

Nurturing relationships is a constant element throughout the Circle of Courage® philosophy; here a person with greater ability is seen as a teacher or mentor, not as a rival. Other mothers attending school can potentially provide various supports through the development of a community of learners. From the research I learned that this group can support one another by helping baby-sit in times of need, offering encouragement to keep going, sharing notes, or studying together as a group. For me, the best demonstration of mastery is when students recognize when they need help, and ask for support.

*Community Service Credit*

This section will discuss the community service experience and the knowledge gained from the research, including the success and challenges. From my community development practice I have learned that the community service credit supports EIA funded students to receive financial support for their transportation needs to get to school, as well as earn a grade 12 credit towards their mature diploma. Supporting a community service experience within a student's community has the potential to build inclusive citizenship where peoples' voices are heard and supported. As part of adult education's social role, community service plays a key function in providing a forum for building inclusive citizenship. One objective of my research was to explore the effects of volunteering, either in one's own community or elsewhere, while earning a grade 12 credit in community service. Through my thesis research I learned how the community service credit has potential impact on a student's personal growth, but also how more work needs to be done with community groups and stakeholders in order to provide more structured and supported volunteer opportunities.

Through this research I have learned how a community service experience is next to impossible if there is no childcare provided for that commitment of time. The infant and toddler lab at the ALC will supervise the students' children if the parent is on-site. Due to this restriction, using the ALC during volunteer time for childcare becomes challenging or not available. All four research participants that engaged in a community service experience had challenges with childcare. Three had no choice but to stop going and one just persevered. Heather was the only participant that achieved a community service credit.

One of Karen's volunteer experiences was at a local resource centre. Due to the unavailability of childcare she needed to take her child with her, which posed problems. She said, "it [was] hard because when [my son] is there…I can't do anything because he is running around there, so it was hard." Jennifer had childcare for a while and was enjoying her placement, "but it wasn't enough because you need 110 hrs[7]…I couldn't do it anymore because I didn't have a sitter." Heather persevered through the challenges for her community service credit, partly because she dropped too many courses early on and needed the credit to graduate, and partly because she, like the other women in this study, is a fighter and resilient. When I asked her about her volunteer experience and how she worked through the childcare piece, she said that it:

> Depends how old your little ones are, because if they are really little, it could be hard. I had to take [my son] to my last [day]. I had no one to watch him…and he was off the wall while I was trying to do the counting and the orders and stuff, I was so mad and cranky…volunteering without children would be easier.

Many placements require a criminal record check and child abuse registry documents, but this costs money and takes time to secure. Jennifer's work experience in a school required her to have the documents: "you just don't want to spend the money on yourself. I am like, 'OK, I need $40 for this,' but I can buy pampers, milk and bread and eggs, you know?" Finding money was one challenge, but actually going downtown to start the process was another. Jennifer found the time to go but the day she went it was closed, "I went on a Friday and you couldn't get it…waste of my day…listening to the kids screaming on the way there for nothing. It was hard to get that all, to find the time to go and do it."

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[7] To attain the grade 12 Community Service Credit a student needs to volunteer 110 hours.

There is plenty of work that needs to be done ahead of time for any community service experience to be successful. Jennifer suggested that every mother who is a student at the ALC should be told about the community service credit when they first register, allowing them three to six months to think about and work through some of the key details, including but not limited to, the criminal record check and childcare. Conversely, Heather said she found it challenging because she was running out of time at the end of the year and said, "I should have done it earlier."

An area where success was found, as it relates to a community service experience, was at "one off" events. An experience that only requires one day's work and commitment, such as a community spring clean up, is easier to organize and accommodate for the mothers I worked with. I remember feeling frustrated with the community service credit because I knew the mothers on EIA depended on the education funds they received, but I was not observing much success with securing a placement, never mind logging hours to meet their 60% course load. In my journal dated April 5, 2011, I wrote, "I am finding it challenging to guide students to follow through on their community service hours. It seems these one-off events work. Although Heather is volunteering with her children's' school and is getting great feedback from staff." I noticed that some of the students were experiencing difficulties or challenges with their community service placements, so to ensure the students had an opportunity to meet EIA requirements I created some one off and more supported experiences. On May 9th, 2011, I wrote in my journal, "Trying to role model volunteering. I went to the local resource centre's mother's day brunch with my children to help out. I picked up Karen and another mother to volunteer as well." And so I participated in a few events as support for the students, and the community. I also made sure that the coordinator of the event met with

the volunteer to ensure when they arrived that they would be taken care of. These experiences turned out to be time consuming on my part, but successful. Karen was one of the participants whom I helped set up in these one off events at the local resource centre:

> On the weekends I went a couple of times to help with the BBQ and Mother's Day Breakfast…those [events] I like helping with. The things they do around here I like that. I like helping other people and helping doing activities because that is what I did on the reserve…so that is why I enjoyed it.

> In Brendtro et al.'s (2002) reflections of Generosity in the Circle of Courage®, they share a re-occurring message that young Aboriginal children would have heard growing up: "that the highest virtue was to be generous and unselfish" (p. 57). Brendtro et al. say that ingrained in the Indigenous community was a core value of community responsibility where people were giving of their time and resources with others in their community, and that to help others brought increased self-esteem. Perhaps this is one reason Karen enjoyed volunteering at these one-off events. I recall a journal entry I made on May 17, 2011, "Karen and another mother volunteered on their own for the communities' Spring Clean up, one week after mother's day brunch. They said they enjoyed themselves and would do it again."

A component to achieving success in a community service experience for the participants in this study is a meaningful placement or experience, one that motivates or engages them in some way, whether it is a personal reason or a career goal. There needs to be some interest or passion for the student. Trying to figure out what the students want to learn or experience takes time and effort. In some cases the students completed hours simply to meet the 60% course load requirements (in order to continue receiving

education funds to pay for a bus pass from EIA) without working on a career or academic plan. These experiences were not always successful because after a while they stopped going. If the experience or placement is not meaningful or relevant, there was little to keep them going. Heather said, "If you are not interested [in the placement] you won't want to go." Lisa volunteered at a local resource centre and said it was boring and she did not like the placement: "it was just not my thing…if it was in a hospital doing something [with babies], I would have loved it…I would have been happier in my area of study." Lisa became aware of her career goal in her second year at the ALC; it was to be in midwifery. She goes on to say, "the community service credit would have been good if I was able to volunteer where I wanted to, at a hospital or at Villa Rosa." When the community service experience is related to a personal or career goal, or was meaningful in some way, the potential for positive outcomes are enhanced.

My research question initially was to learn "if and how" the community service experience impacts the individual, their family and community. Early in the study I realized that most of my participants had limited success with the community service credit and had more to say about the challenges they came across and ways to improve it. They experienced success in terms of personal growth. The volunteering experience helped Heather and Jennifer realize and confirm personal or career goals. For Karen, the one off volunteer opportunities were easier to manage and reminded her of the sense of community she experiences on her dad's reserve.

Through my research I have learned that the 60% course load is not always realistic for mothers on Employment Income Assistance in order for them to attain the educational funding, at least not when they first start or return to school. The community service experience needs to have a supportive work placement and childcare

arrangements secured, and *not* start until after students have experienced some academic

success. Working with the Circle of Courage®, once students feel comfortable and that

they belong at the ALC they then work on mastering the routine, waking up, balancing all

their responsibilities, and completing homework assignments. It helps to have some

supports around them both in school and at home. Once a student has mastered some

academic success, they move through the independence stage where one develops or has

the confidence and commitment to explore and experience a community service

placement.

The participants offered a few suggestions to make the community service

experience less challenging. One was to create a "list of people or companies" that the

ALC can build relationships with to help support the community service credit. Another

was to advocate that the costs of the criminal record check and child abuse registry,

approximately $40-$50, perhaps be covered by Employment Income Assistance. In a

journal entry on April 16, 2011, I wrote,

> Jennifer needs the community service credit to graduate, but doesn't have the 40
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> dollars for criminal record check, this is where I feel Employment Income
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> Assistance should pay for these documents; schools and employers often require
>
> them for employment and volunteering opportunities. It makes great economic
>
> sense.

I need to add a cautionary note to the community service experience for the

participants in my research and the women I work with. These women, mostly the head of

lone-parent families, have reduced resources which is not just limited to finances, but

includes energy and time. Mothers living in poverty have a lot to balance and be

responsible for and they need to be careful they do not take on too much. Haworth-

Brockman (2010) states that, "unpaid work can be rewarding and meaningful, but women who juggle a number of roles can find their physical and mental health compromised if they get no respite" (p. 97); the "self-time" that the participants value and try to prioritize is critical to their health and well being, as well as creating a balance with school and home lives.

Success with the community service credit requires reliable childcare and for most of the mothers in the study, extra supports and skills to manage the increased responsibility or course load. Supports come from family, friends, the community of learners and some of the supports are provided by me, or my role at the ALC. To support students who are registering for the community service credit I help them explore volunteer opportunities, guide them with what needs to get done to secure a placement or experience, and check-in on how their volunteering is going. For the mothers who want a community service credit we go over the importance of a routine and asking for help when things get too busy, and we talk about the value of their support network.

Childcare, finances and time being a rare commodity are some of the barriers or challenges the participants experience with their community service. Completing the 110 hours for a credit can prove too much if your childcare situation changes or is unreliable. I worry that the 60% course load may not be realistic for all mothers registered at an adult learning centre. I believe that mothers living in low SES need to focus on creating some academic success prior to exploring the community service credit. A suggestion would be to master some success and earn the Math and/or English 40S credit first. In addition, developing good routines and habits, and finding and building the supports around them are needed first. When the students are ready and have a meaningful placement, the community service experience can be rewarding.

CHAPTER FIVE

From the Perspective of a Community Development Practitioner

*Circle of Courage®*

The four elements of the Circle of Courage® (starting in the east) are belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Although it may appear that individuals may progress through the elements, the elements are interconnected and are with us from birth. Over time and with practice individuals develop emotional and cognitive adaptability and skills needed to foster balance in all elements (Brendtro et al., 2002). When I began this research I started working with the community of learners using the first two quadrants, belonging and mastery, and then entered the last two quadrants, independence and generosity, with the community service credit. This worked well for laying out the journal and interview questions. I see it differently now. The community of learners can be applied across all four elements in the Circle of Courage® framework.

Starting the discussion with belonging, students need to feel accepted for who they are and what they bring to the group, class or program. Belonging starts with relationships and acceptance (Brendtro et al., 2002). The purposeful development of the community of learners started at the Meet and Eat where everyone was introduced to each other and were provided examples of ways they can support one another. It was at this activity the mothers learned about some of the challenges they may face in the up and coming months and strategies to overcome them. The strategies often relied on the relationships and support from within the community of learners. Brendtro et al. (2002) suggest that relationships need to be nurtured for them to be successful. According to Jennifer, many of the mothers sat next to each other in class because they felt comfortable sitting next to another mother, someone who might better understand their motivations,

priorities and challenges. From my observations, students even developed relationships that spilled outside of the classroom environment; Karen is a great example of this. Karen shared that she and another mother would hang out on the weekends while their children played together.

The next element in the Circle of Courage® is mastery. In the spirit of mastery students learn to take responsibility for failure or success and it is in this element where students learn to master their environment. The community of learners provided the students support with routine and issues, advice on challenges, an ear to listen to, and homework support, to name a few. Over time students developed the skills, motivations and competencies to attain goals. For example, when Karen was experiencing anxiety over a math test, the community of learners helped her through that difficult time. Karen learned, with the support of this group, she was capable of writing and passing tests, which led to other successes in school.

As we continue to move clock wise we enter the element of independence. It is here where one feels a sense of responsibility and empowerment for their learning and academic success (Brendtro et al., 2002). The community of learners continue to support one other and reinforce good decision making. Heather often talked on the phone to her friend about her school successes and challenges. It was her community of learners that reminded her she has the power and ability to set priorities and goals. Jennifer, on more than one occasion, encouraged other students to stay a bit later after class to complete an assignment or the notes. The community of learners demonstrate a sense of responsibility to their own and others' learning. It is here students recognize they have control over their behaviours and power is demonstrated and encouraged.

The last element in the Circle of Courage® is generosity. Brendtro et al. (2002) believe that through giving of one's self, or sharing one's gift, is the spirit of generosity. The women who are a part of the community of learners give of their time and energy to other learners; they genuinely care if other mothers achieve success in school and life. Heather would often drive mothers to school if they were at her door when she was leaving to drop her children off at school. Students, or members of the community of learners, would take notes and homework home to a mother who could not attend school that day so she would not fall too far behind. The mothers in this study also demonstrated generosity to their own family. All of the women in this study talked about spending time with their children as a priority, often over homework. The members of the community of learners who have learned about their power to make choices and demonstrate responsibility to their (and others') learning are great role models and mentors for students who may be new or feel isolated. This not only completes the circle, but helps newer students develop a sense of belonging at the school. The Circle of Courage® is a good model or framework to inform our knowledge and understanding of the ways a community of learners can benefit mothers living in poverty going back to school.

The other research area I explored was the community service credit. What I learned from the participants in this study is that the community service is best explored after a student has demonstrated some academic success. Lisa believes students should focus on the Math or English credits first, and only once they have the supports, resources and routines in place should they try the community service credit. This supports my initial theory that students should experience mastery over their academic routine prior to exploring the community service experience. According to Brendtro et al. (2002), it is in the independence element where students feel and recognize the power to make decisions.

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Through my experiences working with mothers in adult education, it is usually after they have transitioned into the independence stage that they have the confidence, skills and commitment to explore a community service experience. Research findings indicate that the participants need to be focused, motivated and experiencing some academic success prior to the community service experience, and that the experience should meet a personal or career goal. Achieving success in the community service experience, although not necessarily attaining the credit, is demonstrating Generosity and giving of their time. In the transition from Independence to Generosity, through the process one can experience personal growth and increased self-esteem (Brendtro et al., 2002). The women set up goals and achieved them by giving service to a community. Jennifer shares, "It made me feel good about myself. I wanted to go back." The women who volunteered did enjoy their experiences and not only want to volunteer again, but have gained something from it. Karen's one off events in her community have increased her social networks; now she knows and says "hi" to more of her neighbours and people in her community. Heather and Jennifer's community service experience confirmed what they would like to pursue as a career goal; Jennifer's would like to be a teacher and Heather would like to work in social services helping out vulnerable people. Heather managed to complete the 110 hours required for the community service credit and has a great work experience reference.

These successes do not mean that all students are able to commit to the community service credit; there are some challenges and inherent restrictions that single mothers experience, such as securing reliable childcare and finding the time to give to a volunteer experience. The four participants that did experience success (some more than others) with the community service experience shared that the spirit of generosity made

them feel good. Jennifer and Heather both said they felt valued and enjoyed giving their time and service; they looked forward to returning the next day. For Karen, her one off volunteering experiences reminded her of her father's community on the reserve. She recalls observing that generosity and giving to others was common practice, and that volunteering made her feel good about herself. In the Circle of Courage® philosophy fostering self-esteem is a primary goal (Brendtro et al., 2002). By giving back to the community, all four participants felt a sense of pride and self worth.

The women in this study demonstrated generosity at varying levels. As mothers, they give to their family; as a member of the community of learners they accepted the responsibility to this group and each other; and those who volunteered gave back to their community. According to Brendtro et al. (2002), it is in the spirit of generosity where "character is cultivated by concern for others so that [one] can say, 'I have a purpose for my life'" (p. 138). The challenge that the women in my study experienced was balancing all their responsibilities, all of the time. The desired outcome of the Circle of Courage® is to aim for a positive balance of all four elements: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Being able to ebb and flow between or around the quadrants, or to re-evaluate where they need to focus in order to achieve success, is one of the strengths of this framework or model.

*Authenticity*

I used Ellis' (1998) hermeneutic spiral to move through this interpretive inquiry, that is, with every method of data collection I reflected and analyzed the results, which then influenced the next research method. For example, the journaling influenced the interviews, which then impacted on the questions asked in the focus group. The spiral continued when I started analyzing the data as a whole and re-visited it looking through

the Circle of Courage® lens. I now want to evaluate the meaningfulness of the findings using Ellis' questions by reviewing key points I identified in chapters three and four. The first question regarding authenticity that Ellis offers is, are the findings believable and convincing?

In this study I am a re-teller of these women's stories and experiences; the written narrative was about their success, challenges and their perspectives while going to school. Some of their stories where compelling, and at times, difficult to hear. My duty was then to re-tell what I heard for the reader. I did my best to share a holistic picture of these women's lives. I included reflexive narratives as a tool to help the reader better understand the relationships that developed with the people involved in the research as well as the contextuality of the experiences. There were times we shared joy and laughter. One of the finest moments for me was when the three women in the focus group, Karen, Lisa and Jennifer, started laughing together when they realized they all looked deep into their couch cushions for small change and called it couch diving. It was a little challenging to hear the individual voices on the recording because all I could hear was laughter and everyone talking at once. All five participants gave of themselves to this research, they spoke honestly and candidly, and I have tried to honour their stories as best I can. I am very grateful to these women for this experience; as a CD worker and a researcher I have not only gained insight into their world, but have grown from their stories and our interactions both personally and professionally.

The second question Ellis asked is if the findings in this research corroborate or support other material or research? Ladson-Billings' work was with school aged children, and her case study was of successful teachers of African American students which led to the development of a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. In my review of the

literature, finding others who use the concept of a "community of learners" similar to Ladson-Billings but with adults has been interesting. There are plenty of research papers on the "networked" community of learners where courses are offered online, in other words, distance learning accomplished via the internet, or online classrooms where students do not go physically to a classroom and sit down next to their peers, but use an internet format where instruction is delivered through the computer.

In the Seven Oaks School Division a study was commissioned in 2010 to explore the personal narratives and experiences of six Aboriginal graduates to learn about their school experiences (Seven Oaks School Division, 2010). The findings corroborate with my research. The SOSD study found that having a sense of belonging positively contributed to the student's success in school and that peer relationships supported their learning. The participants in the study shared that their friends and teachers helped create a positive learning environment. In fact, the school division's mission statement starts with "The Seven Oaks School Division is a community of learners, every one of whom shares the responsibility in acquiring an education." (Seven Oaks School Division, 2010, p. 51). The notion that a community of learners has the potential to not only support their own or individual learning, but others as well is what I learned through my research. The Seven Oaks School Division expands the notion of community of learners to include staff, which I agree with because I am continuously learning from the students at the adult learning centre.

What I did find in my review of the literature was that often the relationships in adult education are viewed through a social capital lens. Social capital is a resource which takes place in the connections and relationships of a person's social networks. Social capital can refer to the resources gained via the network, as well as the network itself

(McIntyre, 2012; Balatti & Falk, 2002). It is crucial to understand that the building of

social capital does not exist in isolation from the systems that continue to contribute to

inequality and poverty (McIntyre, 2012). For example, the participants in this research

developed an increased social network, and through this network some gained lifelong

friendships, while others received valuable supports in academics, such as support with

proofreading assignments and studying for exams, all this while living in poverty and

dealing with all the demands of solo parenting.

Terry's (2006) research followed two community based adult literacy programs in

Manitoba. One of the research directions explored the relationships between learners. The

students in this study worked on becoming a community of learners with the instructor's

guidance and found the learners helped each other in personal ways as well as with

"academic skill development." My research supports this finding. For example, when

Karen was experiencing anxiety over a future math test, the community of learners

supported her in not only reducing her stress, but gave her the confidence to write the test

and do well on it. Another example is when Heather was experiencing crisis in her

personal life; three members of her community of learners were with her almost daily

outside of school hours to provide their support.

In Silver's (2013), *Moving Forward and Giving Back*, three contributors from

three different chapters discussed the benefits of a group of students with similar

backgrounds and life experiences working together. As Morrissette (2013) shared, when a

group comes from the same background they do not feel out of place. Similarly, Laramee

(2013) explained how a group of mostly women "really made a difference in each others'

lives" while attending school together (p. 46). Lastly, MacKinnon (2013) stated the fact

that the group of learners she spoke with had the same life experiences is what

contributed to their school success. In my study Jennifer shared she sat with other mothers because she was more comfortable with them sharing she did not need to explain to other mothers why her homework was not done some days.

This study added a deeper understanding of the experiences of mothers living in low income going back to school. This included learning about their challenges and motivations, but also what supports, knowledge and skills are needed to achieve success, as educators or practitioners and as students.

The third question asked by Ellis is, does research have the power to change or influence practice? In fact, the changes or enhancements to the program occurred during the five years it took to start and finish this thesis. Some of the changes came directly from suggestions given by the participants, for example, offering child care over the lunch hour. That change was implemented shortly after the interviews; Lisa had offered that recommendation so that mothers can continue to work while still in the "zone" or focused on school. Other changes occurred through my observation and interactions with the students. One example is offering healthy individually frozen portions of soup or chili in case the mothers needed to stay over lunch to complete an assignment or test, thus ensuring the parent and child had a nutritious lunch.

My practice has been influenced by this research by reinforcing and validating the importance and long term effects of the Meet and Eats. The Meet and Eat gatherings not only provided students with information and strategies on academic success, but were the start of developing relationships with other mothers that proved beneficial to academic and personal success.

Ellis' fourth question asked how I, as the researcher, was impacted by the experience. I was humbled by these women's level of determination and their ability to

fight through adversity to succeed in school. There were times when I was not sure if I could, or wanted to, finish my graduate studies because it was overwhelming of what was expected of me as a mother, partner, staff and student. It was these women who gave me strength and motivation to continue and I am forever grateful to them. One of the highlights was my interview with Michelle. I was angry and embarrassed that I could not keep up with laundry, but when Michelle shared she had five laundry baskets I laughed hard and life was good again. I now believe it is ok for my children to "live out" of a laundry basket when my work load simply does not allow me to do more. As Michelle said, "something has to give."

I now am more determined to advocate on behalf of solo parents going back to school by putting the correct supports and resources in place. I know the impact it has not only on the parent/student, but the ripple effects it has on the family or children. Heather and Michelle shared stories of the family doing homework together after dinner, mother and children together; it was a form of family bonding.

The last of Ellis' questions I am going to answer is if new possibilities have been revealed for the researcher and for the research participants. There is one item I would like to explore implementing in the 2013-2014 academic year, and that is a family activity on the weekend. It was suggested by one of the participants that we plan a fun event for the families in the Infant and Toddler Lab, something outside of school time. This would allow the parents to get to know each other outside of school and perhaps develop different or deeper connections; it would be interesting to observe if this has a positive impact on the development of the community of learners.

I believe that the research process revealed to the participants how strong and resilient they are. They shared that the reflection on their experiences was a form of

motivation, but also a realization that they are great role models for their children and that it is hard work to balance all their responsibilities, but they are more than capable.

*Community Development Supports Education*

Through my research I attempted to gain a better understanding of how education and community development can be mutually supportive. One of the research questions was exploring how community development (CD) supports education. I have realized through my positionality as a CD practitioner that I am the connection between community development and education. I work through a CD lens where people are seen to have skills, strengths and solutions. Building relationships and trust with community residents and stakeholders is important if I am to champion the efforts of the students in academic success. The fact that I have grown up in this area as a child and youth, and now returned in my adulthood where I not only work, but shop and hang out with family and friends, I believe provides me validity and respect, a sort of 'street cred,' when I meet new community people.

There are a few ways my CD role supports students in academic and personal success. One is the deliberate and planned development of a community of learners, which includes the facilitation of Meet and Eats at the start of each semester to foster belonging and peer support. I regularly monitor students' academic and personal progress. I do not just check their attendance and grades, I like to take a more holistic approach and inquire how their life, family, and school are going, including monitoring their stress levels and mental health. The women share their challenges and success with me; they said I am easy to talk to and that I do not judge them. I support them with non-academic issues, which are not limited to, concerns or challenges they are experiencing with their children, children's school, partners/ex-partners, parents, housing authorities,

Employment Income Assistance workers and community issues. I do not pretend to hold all the answers, but will refer them to other resources or agencies. I do find that sometimes students just want to talk and simply need someone to listen.

Over the past four years, in my role as a CD practitioner at the ALC, I have continued to learn and develop ways to improve the supports and systems around the mothers who attend the ALC in order for them to attain academic and personal success. Working with a CD lens the goal is to create more sustainable approaches in providing relevant supports around the learners that not only support them in school but can spill over into their personal or community life. In addition to providing the Meet and Eat at the start of each semester to help build a community of learners, we provide child care and study space at the ALC on Friday mornings where the students can come in and work independently or in groups on school tasks, including studying for exams. At the ALC we work as a team, which consists of teachers, administration and support staff. Collaboratively we share concerns and successes we have with students in order to better support them. For example, in the beginning of each semester the teachers are provided with a list of students who have children in the ITL and collectively we communicate with each other on a students' progress and observe their wellbeing, attendance and children's progress in the ITL.

The ALC needs to be flexible in order to meet students' various needs, for example, teachers allow extra time in some circumstances for course completion for individuals once the course has finished, or re-schedule tests and exams for another day, including Fridays where I am able to supervise the process. As mentioned earlier, another way we provide support for students is by providing childcare over the lunch hour when needed allowing students to stay and receive extra support from a teacher or other staff.

I have over the years provided rides on cold or rainy days, or if a student and her child(ren) are running late for a test or exam. I even do wake up calls for new students who are just getting into the routine of waking up early. I help the students deal with multiple stressors. Lisa said," Fuck the world" at one point, but my regular contact helped her deal with the multiple stressors. Morrisette (2013) states that "adult education is a process" (p. 36). He goes further to explain that good adult educators do not give up on students, but keep encouraging them to come back and try again.

Women in poverty at times can barely manage school, family and other responsibilities. And then something else happens, a child is sick, family or friend needs extra support, or something bad happens. Solo parents have a hard time managing it all on their own and many just want to give up everything. They feel they don't have the time and energy left. By providing an open door policy and encouragement to keep trying and persevere, many do return and achieve success. Sometimes education needs to take a backseat for a while.

I also support academic and career planning, which helps students access funding and apply for the relevant post-secondary programs in a timely manner. I facilitate workshops and presentations in their community and at the ALC during school hours and on Friday's to inform the students on the post-secondary landscape, including funding opportunities. The participants said the post-secondary presentations were really good and having the information was important. Jennifer received information on various funding sources and said, "I probably wouldn't have done this by myself." There is a lot of information to sort through when you are planning to continue to post-secondary and securing funds to pay for it can be daunting, especially if you have children. Over the year, tours are arranged of various post-secondary institutions, with transportation and

child care for those mothers who do not have supports in their community. Planning and coordinating the tours was appreciated by the study participants and encouraged them to explore post-secondary; as evidence of this three participants registered for university. They all shared they would not have done it on their own. Karen explained, "I wouldn't even try to do it on my own, taking me on those tours, I want to go to college." When Lisa was asked if she valued the presentations, tours and conversations about what is after grade twelve she replied:

It is of value, because I didn't want anything else. I wanted my grade twelve and to go work. You taking me to the University of Manitoba was like, 'wow, look at all these cool people who are smart.' Everyone is here for a reason. And showing us the presentations with…student aid, I didn't know there was so much money that is not being claimed. I ended up going to see him on my off time to like, set up that student aid because I didn't know my band would sponsor me. You were the one who said I should go to school, it's not hard, go get another education, go post-secondary. You didn't say it is not hard, you told me it will be hard, but to do it because I can.

Over the past few years I learned to develop and/or improve the supports and systems around the mothers who attend the ALC. My experience has taught me that when a mother registers at the ALC it is often, at least initially, with the sole purpose to attain their grade 12 diploma. Over time the students not only gain the skills and credits required to graduate, but some realize they want more and can do more to achieve further academic and personal success.

According to Statistics Canada (2005 & 2012), on average, the higher your education level attained, the higher your income earned. It is important students are

provided with accessible opportunities to learn about the post-secondary landscape and not only how to access it, but believe they have the ability and skills to achieve success.

One of my more important roles is outreach, which often involves going door to door at least once a year to see who is new to the area, catch up with graduated students, reconnect with community residents, and ultimately invite people to explore going back to school with the supports offered at the ALC, one of which is the free onsite childcare. It is through this regular outreach that relationships and trust are built with community residents.

Recently one resident who I have spoken with for the past three years about life and going back to school, decided this past year she was ready to go back to school, stating she has observed her neighbours and friends achieve success in adult education and that they encouraged her to apply. In 2010 and 2011 MacKinnon (2013) interviewed "second chance learners" from three adult learning centres and found that most learners "chose a program based on the experience of friends or family who spoke of the programs that provided safe and supportive environments" (p. 53). A regular presence in the community is vital for those who are more reluctant or unsure of adult education or education in general, and having graduated students share their success stories is beneficial. In the summer of 2013 I invited an ALC graduate to go door to door with me. The experience was invaluable for the outreach because I can say, "we are great," but having an area resident share her experiences was more relevant and believable to the community residents.

As a community development practitioner it is important to nurture collaborative relationships with various stakeholders that can positively impact the success of adult learners, specifically the mothers living in low SES; these includes the WRHA, Housing

Authorities, Band Authorities, Resource Centres, community development practitioners and area schools the adult learners' children are attending. Building and nurturing relationships with the EIA case workers is an ongoing and vital effort in ensuring the relevant supports are in place for mothers attending school. There has been a high turnover rate in EIA workers (in the focus group Lisa, Karen and I counted six different workers over a two year period), and a general lack of trust of the EIA workers from the participants' perspective who are afraid they will "get into their business."

A key to a successful relationship is helping the workers understand how the ALC operates and to meet with EIA workers on a human level, hoping they will understand what it is like to be a single mother on assistance trying to get her life in order by going back to school and off assistance. It is the individual EIA worker's discretion if a client receives the education funds (MacKinnon, 2013). In my journal in February 2012 I wrote, "The ALC Director and I met with two EIA supervisors and we learned that EIA workers decide education funding on a 'case by case' basis." EIA is a dynamic system without a clear and transparent set of rules. From my experience, if an individual meets with an EIA worker they are more likely to be successful in attaining education funding or support if they come prepared with an academic and career plan.

Advocating for students with EIA is a key role I play. As mentioned earlier, I have had to advocate for students to receive the education funds to pay for bus tickets (or passes) when Employment Income Assistance workers deemed they lived too close because they did a Google search on the distance from their home to the ALC. On Feb. 15, 2011 I wrote in my journal, "I sent four emails to three different workers" trying to help these women get the education funds. I explained in the email that for parents who have one or more toddlers walking in the winter is not necessarily feasible and often the

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sidewalks are not cleared, making it difficult or impossible for strollers to move through. On all occasions where I advocated for the funds, the students received them, even if only for the winter months. I believe students on EIA with young children attending the adult learning centre should receive the education funds regardless of the distance to school, although this is not a consistent EIA practice.

According to Silver (2013a) the negative or adverse effects of poverty are complex and layered, and as a result, if adult education is to be effective it needs to be "tailored specifically to the circumstances of the students, and if those students are offered enhanced supports" (p. 6). By providing a holistic approach to assist students in addressing the variety of challenges they may face, not limited to, housing, child and family services, EIA, criminal justice system, balancing the numerous demands as a mother and a student, and community or personal issues, the role of a CD practitioner or student support worker can help the student deal with these challenges before it interferes with their ability to succeed academically (Silver, 2013b).

Community Development supports education and is facilitated through my role at the ALC. My role as a CD practitioner is to find ways to support the learners, for example, facilitating the development of a community of learners and supporting the community service experience. The goal is to build capacity with the mothers through increased social networks and skills building, and assisting them with securing the tools and resources they need to achieve academic and personal success.

*Education Supports Community Development*

The process of CD builds community capacity, but it is important that individual and community capacity be built, or exist, before CD takes place. Conversely, you can

have CD (for example my role as a paid CD practitioner in the school division) without community members involved, but it will not build capacity. Therefore it is imperative that community (and therefore individual) capacity is built if effective CD is to take place. If not, then individuals will not have the skills, knowledge or awareness to recognize when opportunities present themselves (Fran & Smith, 1999).

Education builds capacity in individuals. Students gain or increase their skills, knowledge, self-esteem and confidence, enabling them not only to recognize when opportunities present themselves, but having the ability and means to capitalize on them. Education is a tool that can be used in CD because it builds individual and community capacity.

At the individual level, not only does participation in adult learning increase one's social capacity or networks, therefore decreasing social isolation, but it also broadens one's worldview and how they fit in it (Canadian Centre Policy Alternatives, 2006). Morrissette (2013) stated that students "began to see a broader world, and to see that there are different ways of understanding what is going on around" them (p. 39). Silver (2013b) explains that education can be a mechanism that builds critical consciousness where people become less reliant on "outside experts" and start developing and using local skills and assets.

Education also builds capacity at the individual level through the attainment of a Manitoba grade twelve diploma, which increases options for employment and post-secondary education, which in turn enhances the ability to increase income earned. Education is viewed as a "key mediator" and a strong determinant of an individual's income in later life (Raphael, 2009). As stated, there is a correlation between education and income earned, annual earnings rise with levels of education (Statistics Canada,

2012). With more education the potential to earn more money increases and helps individuals move out of poverty, and for the mothers in this study, their dependency on Employment and Income Assistance.

Education builds community capacity by helping one mother and one family at a time. It is the current or graduated students who go back into their community and spread the word about the ALC and their experiences and successes, which influence others to return to school. Silver (2013b) talks about creating education strategies that produce a collective benefit not only for families but the low SES community they live in if those that receive education remain in the community. The vicious cycle of poverty can repeat in the community even with education if individuals are "educated out of poverty" (p. 2) - where the benefits of education are for selected individuals and not the whole community. In other words, if community members attain their Mature Diploma and then move out of the low income neighbourhood, the local community does not benefit from education per se. If the underlying issue of poverty does not change (which is not simply about not having enough money), the adverse effects of poverty will continue to negatively impact the community. Silver (2013b) argues that those who get educated but exit the community benefit only themselves," stripping the community of its most valuable assets" (p. 2). Community and individual capacity is valuable and inherent in the process of CD and low income communities need the graduates of ALCs to stay in their community to build and maintain momentum.

The more residents of a low SES community who participate in adult education and are positively impacted by their experience, the greater the benefit for the whole community. Conversely, the more an ALC works within a community, the greater chance the impacts of education will benefit the wider community. For example, I am currently

working with a mother at our ALC who says she does not want to move out of her community once she attains her grade twelve and college diploma; she feels she can better support the community if she stays. She sees gifts and strengths in her low income community, as well as the challenges of poverty and understands if she leaves she does not become part of the solution. The education strategy needs to involve various community stakeholders where the experiences and knowledge of those community members who have found academic success are valued and recognized. This can be transformative at a broad level because those individuals can become the agents or the catalyst of change in their community.

*Recommendations*

In summary, the research findings in my study suggest that CD supports education and education supports CD; it is symbiotic. With this relationship in mind, the following are recommendations arising from the study.

1. Practice

Educators should work toward the purposeful development and support of a community of learners that is facilitated by a staff member who works collaboratively with the ALC team and students, for example setting up regular Meet and Eats, encouraging study groups to meet on Fridays, and regularly checking in on how school and life is going for the student and connecting them with other students with similar goals and experiences.

A second recommendation for practice would be for CD practitioners and educators to utilize the Circle of Courage® as a lens in an effort to achieve the symbiotic benefits of CD and education.

2. Policy

It is necessary to advocate to funders, such as EIA, to provide education funds in the form of bus passes regardless of the distance a student has to travel to school. More importantly, EIA needs to use attendance as the factor, or base, to determine continued eligibility with 50% course load for solo parents. I also recommend that students provide an academic plan to funders, such as EIA. I would recommend to funders to pay for a criminal record check and a child abuse registry if it is for school purposes, such as a community service credit.

Another policy recommendation would be for adult learning centres to infuse a CD lens into the job responsibilities for support workers. For example, empower the Infant and Toddler Lab staff to connect with mothers in their community as well as at school, and to connect with teachers on student progress and supports. An important CD role is to build community through outreach, home visits, collaborations and partnerships. This community building will assist the ALC to connect with and support the local community.

3. Research

Further research should investigate the transition for mothers living in low SES from an ALC to post-secondary education. What are the supports in place? What are the needs? And what can improve the transition process? Three of the participants went to university after graduation and I am sure there are more challenges and continued supports needed.

For further research involving mothers living in low SES who attend post-secondary education the researcher must be clearly aware of the extra stress and work involved for the participants in a research study. Unless as a researcher you can provide extra supports, I would only ask those who have experienced academic and personal success in post-secondary. Another recommendation for the researcher would be to meet with the

participants in their home or post-secondary school, which is meeting them where they are rather then asking them to add an extra trip in their day. In addition, I would recommend working with the students' time table, for example, be sure to meet or talk to them outside of exam time or when most of their assignments might be due.

*Final Thoughts*

When I started this journey five years ago, I was curious about what else is needed to help parents with young children return to school and to achieve academic success. Knowing that the education was free (as there is no registration fee) and if permitted by the EIA worker the students' transportation was free, that is, they were provided funds to purchase monthly bus passes; and that free childcare was provided, as long as they were on site, the graduation numbers were still low. I often asked myself, "What is stopping them from succeeding?" My research question was to learn how CD and Education can support each other. Working through a CD lens within Education has enabled the ALC to understand the needs and better provide the supports and services for mothers trying to achieve success in school.

It is important to provide holistic supports that spill into the students' personal lives, as well as support their academic success. Developing and supporting a Community of Learners, or a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success, will provide peer support and increase their social network. Members of this community of learners can encourage each other to push through challenges, support each other in times of need, study together, and even hang out on the weekend.

At the ALC we modified our practice based on the women's needs. For example, by providing time to study at noon hour in times of need and Friday morning's with

childcare allows the parents to study or meet with a teacher while they are in the "zone", because once they get home, their family and personal lives become more important. It is essential that the ALC has a presence in the community, for example by doing regular outreach and home visits. If a mother has been absent for a few days, have a staff go and visit her to see how she is doing and if she needs some support, or an ear to listen to. Another way to engage with the community is by participating in community activities and meetings, as well as accessing and supporting the services offered.

Graduation numbers have increased and are evidence of the symbiotic relationship between Community Development and Education. The graduation numbers of students using the Infant and Toddler Lab have doubled since the start of this research. In 2012 and 2013 we had ten students graduate who used the Infant Toddler Lab; this compared with six in 2011 and five in 2010.

The five women in this study did not have great success in their earlier experiences with school, particularly high school. All five dropped out before graduation, started to party, and eventually had children. They have been out of school for a number of years. They decided to go back to school for a few reasons, such as a decreased dependency on welfare, a desire to have an increase in income earned, and to be role models for their children. They all want a better life for their children and believe education is the key mediator. For whatever reason or motivation, they were ready to come back and finish their grade twelve. The women were nervous to return to school because they did not know what to expect, some feared they were not smart enough, others were afraid of failing, but they were excited at the same time because they knew they were embarking on a journey.

The Circle of Courage® allowed me to break down the five women's journey or transition to school into manageable and understandable pieces. Creating a sense of belonging is part of creating a comfortable and safe place to learn. If a student can feel like they belong and can contribute they are willing to stay and try. Having created an environment with opportunities where they can take risks, and feel safe to take risks, they will learn new skills. The women in this study used the support of the community of learners, family, friends and staff at the adult learning centre to move or push forward, learn from mistakes and ultimately achieve both personal and academic results.

Through the process of trial, error and effort the women gained control over their lives. They realized they have the power and ability to set and attain goals. Over time they gained more confidence and believed in their skills and abilities. For four of the participants, grade twelve was what they wanted to accomplish, and three registered for university. These women not only took responsibility for their learning but other students' as well.

The five women in this research gave of themselves to their family, the community of learners and their community. They were not only mothers, but role models, mentors and even community leaders. For those that experienced giving back or volunteering, they felt a sense of joy and satisfaction. Brendro et. al (1990) shares that through the process of helping others we can improve self-esteem. Fostering and nurturing self-esteem is a desired outcome or purpose of the Circle of Courage®.

Through my research I gained a better understanding of how community development and education can support one another through the lived experiences of the mothers going to school at the ALC. I have learned how the community of learners not only supports students in their academic success, but in some situations, this support

extends into the day to day lives of these women and their families. I learned that the community service experience can be rewarding, but also challenging for some mothers to complete. Additional supports or resources, such as reliable childcare, are often needed to ensure a successful experience with the community service credit. The Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence 2008 report calls for more:

> … community-based studies designed to get up-close and personal with young women in Manitoba, to generate new information about what is really going on in their often-complex lives, and consequently, clearly identify the challenges they face, their need requirements in fulfilling their academic aspirations and how best to address these needs. (p. 55)

The five women in this study shared their personal successes and challenges, as well as provided insights on what they feel they need in order to achieve academic and personal success.

In Winnipeg we often hear about children in poverty and the detrimental effects it can have on an individual. A child's poverty is a women's poverty. Haworth-Brockman (2010) states, "Women's poverty is often lost in the portrayal of children in poverty" (p. 95). The needs of women living in low SES not only need to be valued in and of itself, but addressed in relation to their children and community. Haworth-Bockman shares that, "some of the critical information we need comes from the woman themselves;" in this study, I hope I have represented the women's voices, experiences and perspectives well, and that the relevant and needed supports and systems are in place for current and future mothers returning to school.

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**From:** Adrienne Brant James <abjames@reclaiming.com>
**Subject: Re: copyright - circle of courage**
**Date:** 23 April, 2013 3:12:54 AM CDT
**To:** Joannie Halas <Joannie.Halas@ad.umanitoba.ca>, <Jana.Mckee@7oaks.org>
**Cc:** Mark Freado <freado@reclaiming.com>, Susan Buus <sbuus@reclaiming.com>

Joannie and Jana,

I have reviewed the materials sent to me. Jana, I think you have done a very good job of describing the Circle of Courage®. As I am sure you are both aware, the Circle of Courage® is our primary service model and is valued on two fronts: the first is to protect the integrity of services rendered and attached to our name and the second is to assure recognition and accreditation from our work in order to sustain our program and services.

I think we can do that in the following way:

First, I am providing you with our medicine wheel logo, which is the focus of your discussion. You may use this in your thesis manuscript. Do not use the one you sent me; it does not reflect our belief that a medicine wheel should not contain writing or other descriptions within its quadrants.

Second, you need to attach or place in close proximity (e.g., footnote or box for explanation) the following words: The
Circle of Courage® is a registered trademark of Starr Global Learning Network of which Reclaiming Youth International is a corporate division. The Circle of Courage® was first described in the book Reclaiming Youth at Risk by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern. Reclaiming Youth International is responsible for teaching, training, implementation, and oversight of programs employing or referencing the Circle of Courage®. For further information see www.reclaiming.com.

Third, you must edit your manuscript to show the Circle of Courage® with the ® symbol always attached as this is the indicator of federal registration of the trade and service mark.

Fourth: I know your title does not include the Circle of Courage® and that is correct because using it in a title tends to imply ownership which would be improper.

Fifth, an editorial suggestion: the four elements of the Circle of Courage® may reflect a want (desire) or value but the true definition in the context of the Circle of Courage® is that these are in fact inherent and basic needs. Also, while there seems to be a progression in these needs, they are really present from birth and simply acquire more complexity and emotional, cognitive, and skill adaptability through practice as we grow and mature. The

challenge, as you have pointed out in your writing, is to maintain a positive balance of all four dimensions at all times because they are interdependent.

Thank you for your interest in the Circle of Courage®. It is always exciting and complimentary when people want to use this concept. And it is especially gratifying when we can work together to make sure it is done right.

Thank you also for getting back to me with the details that enhanced my ability to provide better guidance. As I said before, in my view this work is important and it will be a good thing if what you learn from this project can be shared with others. I know from my own professional experiences as a social worker that the challenges women face in these situations can be daunting.

Good luck with your work. Let me know how it turns out.

Adrienne Brant James
Reclaiming Youth International
Trademark and Copyright Protection Coordinator
605-864-1769

Appendix B
Information and Invitation Letter

*U of M letter head*
## INFORMATION & INVITATION LETTER
Dear _____,


I am a graduate student enrolled in the University of Manitoba Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation. I would like to do a research project at the _____Adult Learning Centre. I am interested in learning how community development and education can support or enhance each other and explore how an integrated approach might help the students their families and the low income community they live in. My research objectives will focus on two areas; one is exploring the development of a "community of learners" or a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The other focus is student's engagement in a community service credit to explore how this impacts the student and her family and community.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project; your commitment would consist of journaling for one month, it is expected the journals will take between half an hour and an hour each week, followed by a one hour interview then a 60-90 minutes focus group. It will take three months to complete all three activities.

I work at the _____ Adult Learning Centre and this study is separate from my role as the Assistant Project Coordinator and the research collection is general information not related to school performance. To be a participant in this study you need to be a mother who is currently enrolled in adult education and live in subsidized housing.

You will be provided with a coffee mug and a ten dollar gift certificate in recognition of your time and contribution to the research study. The journaling will be first and you will be provided with a journal and pen for the journaling. I am looking for two to three entries a week and will provide you with guiding questions on what to reflect and share on. You can be as brief or detailed as you want. Journal entries can also include pictures, art, articles, etc. Once a week I will photocopy recent journal entries and at times add reflective comments or questions to your journal.

A one hour, one on one interview with each participant will follow the journaling. Interviews will be in-depth and open-ended. The interview will be semi-structured to allow the interviewer to deviate, or move in a different direction if the conversation provides information that needs further clarification or exploration of the subject area. The interview can take place anywhere that you feel comfortable, at the adult learning centre, at home, or another location of your choice. If required, I can also provide transportation and childcare. The data collection will end with a 60-90 minute focus group involving all the participants. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement prior to the start of the research.

The interview and focus group will be recorded by an audio taping device. Completed audio transcripts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. All data will be destroyed, along with any field notes, one year after the completion of the study. As a means to protect confidentiality, all names and identifying criteria will be replaced with pseudonyms during the data analysis and reporting of final results. You will have the option to receive a written summary of the

results of the study when it is completed. The information collected and analyzed will be used in a master's thesis and maybe reported in academic and professional journals and/or presentations.

Thank you for thinking about being part of my research project. If you are interested in the study, let the secretary or Jana McKee know.

**Jana McKee**

Appendix C
Written Text (to be used by secretary when inviting participants)

Jana McKee is a graduate student enrolled in the University of Manitoba Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation. I would like to do a research project at the _____Adult Learning Centre. She is interested in learning how community development and education can support or enhance each other and explore if there are benefits not only for the students, but their families and potentially the low income community they live in. My research objectives will focus on two areas; one is exploring the development of a "community of learners" or a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The other focus is student's engagement in a community service credit to explore how this impacts the student and her family and community.

Your commitment will consist of journaling for one month, it is expected the journals will take between half an hour and an hour each week, followed by a one hour interview then a 60-90 minutes focus group involving all participants. It will take three months to complete all three activities.

Jana McKee works at the _____ Adult Learning Centre and this study is separate from her role as the coordinator and the research collection is general information not related to school performance.

You will be provided with a coffee mug and a ten dollar gift certificate in recognition of your time and contribution to the research study. The journaling will be first and you will be provided with a journal and pen for the journaling. Jana is looking for two to three entries a week and will provide you with guiding questions on what to reflect and share on. You can be as brief or detailed as you want. Journal entries can also include pictures, art, articles, etc. Once a week Jana will photocopy recent journal entries and at times add reflective comments or questions to your journal.

A one hour, one on one interview with each participant will follow the journaling. Interviews will be in-depth and open-ended. The interview will be semi-structured to allow the interviewer to deviate, or move in a different direction if the conversation provides information that needs further clarification or exploration of the subject area. The interview can take place anywhere that you feel comfortable, at the adult learning centre, at home, or another location of your choice. If required, Jana can also provide transportation and childcare. The data collection will end with a 60-90 minute focus group involving all the participants. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement prior to the start of the research.

The interview and focus group will be recorded by an audio taping device. Completed audio transcripts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only Jana will have access. All data will be destroyed, along with any field notes, one year after the completion of the study. As a means to protect confidentiality, all names and identifying criteria will be replaced with pseudonyms during the data analysis and reporting of final results.

You will have the option to receive a written summary of the results of the study when it is completed. The information collected and analyzed will be used in a master's thesis and maybe reported in academic and professional journals and/or presentations.

Appendix D
Consent Form

*U of M letter head*

CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Jana McKee

I am a graduate student enrolled in the University of Manitoba Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation. I would like to do a research project at the _____Adult Learning Centre. I am interested in learning how community development and education can support or enhance each other and explore how an integrated approach might help the students their families and the low income community they live in. My research objectives will focus on two areas; one is exploring the development of a "community of learners" or a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The other focus is student's engagement in a community service credit to explore how this impacts the student and her family and community.

I appreciate your consideration to participate in this research project; your commitment will consist of journaling for one month, it is expected the journals will take between half an hour and an hour each week, followed by a one hour interview then a 60-90 minutes focus group involving all participants. It will take three months to complete all three activities. I work at the _____ Adult Learning Centre and this study is separate from my role as the Assistant Project Coordinator and the research collection is general information not related to school performance.

You will be provided with a coffee mug and a ten dollar gift certificate in recognition of your time and contribution to the research study. The journaling will be first and you will be provided with a journal and pen for the journaling. I am looking for two to three entries a week and will provide you with guiding questions on what to reflect and share on. You can be as brief or detailed as you want. Journal entries can also include pictures, art, articles, etc. Once a week I will photocopy recent journal entries and at times add reflective comments or questions to your journal.

A one hour, one on one interview with each participant will follow the journaling. Interviews will be in-depth and open-ended. The interview will be semi-structured to allow the interviewer to deviate, or move in a different direction if the conversation provides information that needs further clarification or exploration of the subject area. The interview can take place anywhere that you feel comfortable, at the adult learning centre, at home, or another location of your choice. If required, I can also provide transportation and childcare. The data collection will end with a 60-90 minute focus group involving all the participants. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement prior to the start of the research.

The interview and focus group will be recorded by an audio taping device. Completed audio transcripts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. All data will be destroyed, along with any field notes, one year after the completion of the study. As a means to protect confidentiality, all names and identifying criteria will be replaced with pseudonyms during the data analysis and reporting of final results.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

You will have the option to receive a written summary of the results of the study when it is completed. The information collected and analyzed will be used in a master's thesis and maybe reported in academic and professional journals and/or presentations.

**Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

Researcher:          Jana McKee
Phone Number:     xxx-xxxx
Supervisor:          Dr. Joannie Halas
Phone Number:     474-6061

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____          Date _____

Researcher Signature _____          Date _____

Appendix E
List of journal prompts

You are encouraged to use this journal to celebrate your successes, your

challenges, to vent frustrations, to share stories and experiences (good or bad). You can

write as little as you want, or as much as you want.  You can also draw pictures, clip out

articles, write quotes, etc. Make two to three entries as week; this should take from 30 to

60 minutes in a week's worth of journal entering.  I will provide you with some guiding

or reflective comments or questions for the four weeks of journaling. On Monday or

Tuesday of every week I will photocopy your entries and at times provide some reflective

comments in your journal.

*Week One and Two*:

- Reflect on your school experiences: Teachers, students, school work, exams and

  tests, study time, etc. How do you feel about your position within the program and

  amongst the teachers and students? Do you feel accepted or a part of the class or

  program? Do you ever not feel accepted? How do you contribute to the class or

  school?

- How was school today? This past week? Highlights or lowlights? Do you have

  enough time for homework and studying?

- Talk about the supports around you: childcare, other students, staff, family

  members. Who are these supports? What role do they play? How do they support

  you?  When have they supported you?

- Share some of the challenges you experience as a mother, student, family and

  community member. Talk about your day to day experiences.  Talk about some

  recurring moments in your life.

- Share how you try to achieve balance with all your responsibilities.

- Share what motivates you and also what challenges your motivation. Share your success stories, big or small. Share your fears and dreams.

- Is there anything else that comes to mind that you want to add?

*Week Three and Four:*

- *Definition: community of learners. A community of learners for this research is defined as a group of learners, or students with similar goals and experiences. The students in such a group encourage each other and learn collaboratively and provide a social support network.*

- Reflect on your social support network (the people you surround yourself with to help you achieve success in school and at home). Do you feel supported? If yes, how have you been supported and by whom?

- Have you done anything to support others at the ALC, in their learning or at home?

- Do you identify with and feel part of a community of learners? Do you feel support from a community of learners? Explain.

- What other supports do you value or need?

- Do you have any advice on how students might support each other within the ALC and community?

- Are you participating in a community service credit? If not, please explain why not? If yes, please talk about your experiences. What is good about your experience, what is frustrating? Describe the experience of finding a volunteer placement? How many hours do you do in a week or month? Do you volunteer

with your child(ren)? If not, who watches your child(ren)? If yes, what is volunteering with your child(ren) like?

- Where are you volunteering? What are some of the things you are doing or learning? How does giving back or volunteering make you feel?

- Is your volunteering having an impact on your family? On your community? Explain.

- Do you have any recommendations for how the community service credit might be organized or supported?

Appendix F
Interview protocol

Interviews will be done one on one. They will be in-depth and semi-structured and 60 minutes in duration. Interviews will take place in a location of the participant's choice: at school, at a resource centre, in their home, etc. Interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. Child-minding and transportation will be provided if required.

The interview will start with background questions to set up a context. I will explore any themes emerging from the journal entries, as well elaborate on entries that need further exploration or clarification. Below is an outline of questions that will be explored.

Background and context information:

- Tell me a bit about yourself and your educational experiences. What was your high school experience like? What was your childhood experience like? What do you remember about family and community life? Did others in your family or community finish high school? How old are your children?

- What motivates you to go to school?

- Describe or talk about some challenges.

Belonging:

- Do you remember your first day at the ALC? Elaborate.

- Do you feel like you belong at the ALC? Explain. What contributes to students feeling welcome? What makes a student feel unwelcome? Do you have any advice as to how students might be made to feel like they belong at the ALC?

Mastery:

- What did you learn about yourself going back to school?

- Talk about your supports. What supports/resources do you use to succeed academically? (Community, school, community of learners, family, friends, other)? What supports/resources do you need that you don't or can't access currently?

- Talk about the other students, do you feel like you belong to a community of learners? Elaborate. How does this help you academically? How can this support be improved?

- Talk about your successes and challenges. Where do you feel you have achieved in the academic sense? Where do you feel challenged?

- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the development of a sense of belonging and achievement can be enhanced or improved?

Independence & Generosity:

- Do you set goals? Elaborate.

- Did you participate in the community service credit?

    o If yes, describe how you got started? Did you feel welcome and comfortable where you volunteered? Explain.

    o If not, why not?

- Talk about how this volunteer experience has affected you?

- What makes it easy or challenging? Explain.

- Discuss any skills or knowledge gained? Please elaborate.

- Has your volunteering affected the community in any way? If so, please elaborate. If not, explain why not?

- What are you learning about yourself, your family and your community through this experience?

- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the community service credit is organized and or managed?

- Do you consider yourself a role model? Please explain.

*U of M letter head*

**Assistant Superintendent**
**_____ School Division**

Dear Assistant Superintendent,

I am a graduate student enrolled in the University of Manitoba Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation. I would like to do a research project at the _____Adult Learning Centre. I am interested in learning how community development and education can support or enhance each other and explore how an integrated approach might help the students their families and the low income community they live in. My research objectives will focus on two areas; one is exploring the development of a "community of learners" or a group of students with similar goals and experiences who collaborate and work together to support each other in their journey to academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The other focus is student's engagement in a community service credit to explore how this impacts the student and her family and community.

Participants in this study are students who are mothers and enrolled at the Adult Learning Centre and live in subsidized housing. I will recruit four to six participants. Data collection methods will include journaling for one month, it is expected the journals will take between half an hour and an hour each week, followed by a one hour interview then a 60-90 minutes focus group involving all participants. It will take three months to complete all three activities.

Participants will be provided with a coffee mug and a ten dollar gift certificate in recognition of their time and contribution to the research study. The journaling will be first and the participants will be provided with a journal and pen for the journaling. I am looking for two to three entries a week and will provide participants with guiding questions on what to reflect and share on. Entries can be as brief or detailed as participants want. Journal entries can also include pictures, art, articles, etc. Once a week I will photocopy recent journal entries and at times add reflective comments or questions to your journal.

A one hour, one on one interview with each participant will follow the journaling. Interviews will be in-depth and open-ended. The interview will be semi-structured to allow the interviewer to deviate, or move in a different direction if the conversation provides information that needs further clarification or exploration of the subject area. The interview can take place anywhere they feel comfortable, at the adult learning centre, at home, or another location of their choice. If required, I can also provide transportation and childcare. The data collection will end with a 60-90 minute focus group involving all the participants. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement prior to the start of the research.

The interview and focus group will be recorded by an audio taping device. Completed audio transcripts will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. All data will be destroyed, along with any field notes, one year after the completion of the study. As a means to protect confidentiality, all names and

identifying criteria will be replaced with pseudonyms during the data analysis and reporting of final results.

Participant's involvement will be voluntary and they will be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time, and they do not need to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. I am seeking permission from the School Board to proceed with this research and am happy to reply to any questions, suggestions or comments.

I look forward to your reply,

**Jana McKee**
xxx-xxxx

**Dr. Joannie Halas, Advisor**
474-6061
jhalas@umanitoba.ca

Appendix H
Confidentiality Statement


*U of M letter head*
**Confidentiality Statement**
 I, _____ (first and last name), will promise to keep all
identities of participants confidential; that is I will not share this knowledge with other
students, co-workers, etc. I also will not share who has been recruited or asked to
participate in this study.


_____        _____
Signature                                                            Date


_____        _____
Researcher Signature                                      Date