

***Voices of Aboriginal Youth:***  
**Participation and Planning in Winnipeg, Manitoba**

By

Leah U. Ross

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF CITY PLANNING

Department of City Planning  
University of Manitoba  
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*To my parents,*

*Elbert (Doodie) and Indra Ross*

*For their unwavering support and encouragement*

*To my siblings,*

*Arvin, Camille and Shivani Ross*

*For their constant friendship, assistance and all the good times!*

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the notion of Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes at the municipal level in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Using the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp (AYCAC) as the major case study, this research explored how Aboriginal youth define participation. It further investigated the extent to which their understanding of planning had increased as a result of their participation in the camp. Finally, it determined the extent to which the youth have been inspired to form an Aboriginal youth council in order to increase their participation in municipal affairs.

To undertake this research, two case studies, a comprehensive literature review, participant observation, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews with camp participants and administrators were conducted. All of these research techniques were applied within the larger framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Based on this research, I have identified three areas for future research within the literature. First, the accomplishments of Aboriginal youth must be highlighted. Their views regarding participation must be added to the discussion. Second, additional research must also be done to highlight the different experiences encountered by urban Aboriginal youth and their counterparts living on-reserve and in remote/rural areas. Third, the experiences of the mainstream youth must be examined in relation to their applicability to the experiences of Aboriginal youth.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This research stemmed from my interest in youth participation in civic and planning processes. In particular, I was interested in the level at which youth choose to participate in civic and planning processes at the municipal level, and the extent to which their participation is fostered and encouraged. My interest further extended into the realm of legitimate youth participation. If youth are encouraged to participate in municipal processes, is the framework for their participation youth friendly? Are their thoughts and opinions thoroughly considered and acted upon? Through the Urban Society course at the University of Manitoba, I had the opportunity to pursue these interests and undertook a research project involving the Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC). This particular organization allowed me to pursue all of these research questions because it was a municipally sponsored, youth driven initiative. The TYC was charged with representing the youth of Toronto at the municipal level. The TYC is funded by the city of Toronto, though they could pursue any issue they believe is important to the youth of Toronto. By most accounts, the influence that the TYC was able to exert on the City of Toronto was remarkable.

For this research, I travelled to Toronto to observe and interact with the TYC over a four day period. As part of the research fieldwork, I employed participant observation, and hosted a focus group with the youth executives. I also conducted one-on-one interviews with the TYC support staff. A few months after this research, I was contacted by a City of Winnipeg staff person who had recently received funding to host an Aboriginal Youth

Career Awareness Camp. She requested my input in the camp planning, and invited me to attend the camp as an observer. Throughout the camp, and during discussions with the camp participants and leaders, I sensed that there was a desire to form a group similar to the TYC in Winnipeg with Aboriginal youth. This in turn translated into a desire to undertake an in-depth study of the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp.

I hypothesized that the formation of a group similar to the TYC would provide Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg with a voice and a forum from which to express and represent themselves at the municipal level. Though very much in its beginning stages, I believed the AYCAC would be a great launching pad for such a group. Given that both the TYC and AYCAC are youth-oriented municipal initiatives, I believed they would lend themselves well to being researched. It is with this idea that the framework for this thesis research was laid. This research was undertaken with the ultimate purpose of determining whether the AYCAC participants would be interested in forming a youth council similar to the TYC. In the event that this was possible, the thesis would also identify an appropriate youth council structure, and potential issues the youth would like to pursue. To facilitate this research, I utilized participant observation and hosted a focus group. I also conducted one on one interviews with camp participants, as well as camp support staff. All of these research methods were implemented within the framework of participatory action research.

Within the context of this thesis, the Aboriginal Youth Career Camp was the main focus of the research. While the TYC research and the subsequent literature review served to

inform and frame this thesis research, the AYCAC data was the basis for all of the analysis, findings and recommendations. Accordingly the AYCAC was featured more prominently and examined in greater detail. The decision to focus mainly on the AYCAC was made for a number of reasons. First, the AYCAC involved urban Aboriginal youth who resided in Winnipeg. This demographic was the main focus of the literature review because Winnipeg has a large urban Aboriginal population. This thesis provided an opportunity to not only examine what was written, but also to identify gaps in the literature regarding Aboriginal youth, and their participation in civic and planning processes. As much as possible, the literature review focused on this group. Second, the intent of this thesis was to determine if the AYCAC participants were inclined to start an Aboriginal youth council. With this intent, it followed naturally that the research should focus largely on their thoughts and ideas. Thirdly, the research was conducted in Winnipeg where I was residing at the time. This facilitated on-going access and communication with the AYCAC participants and support staff. This geographical proximity allowed me to meet with the youth on numerous occasions, and provided for convenient follow-up when necessary. This ultimately resulted in the development of a richer case study.

My research with the Toronto Youth Cabinet was the impetus for this study. While it was not the main focus of the research, I included details about its roles and responsibilities from both the youth participants and adult coordinators perspectives. These elements were included because they provided insight into some of the successes and challenges the TYC encountered. These details further served to establish the wider context for the

need to increase youth participation in civic and planning processes. It was also an example of what can be achieved when youth are provided with legitimate avenues for participation. Within the overall context of this thesis, the TYC was included as a case study of what youth are capable of achieving.

This research explored the importance of including youth in municipal planning and civic processes. In particular, attention focused on urban Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the opportunities available to them to actively participate in these processes. This research examined the importance of engaging Aboriginal youth in planning and civic processes. It also identified some barriers to participation, and suggested some methods to overcome them. Further, it examined whether the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp served as a springboard for increased Aboriginal youth participation in civic and planning processes. An existing, successful, youth-driven participation model was examined to determine if a similar program could be adopted by Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. Finally, this thesis makes recommendations for increasing their capacity and participation in municipal affairs.

During the summer of 2004, the City of Winnipeg Planning Property and Development Department in partnership with the Seven Oaks School Division and the City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Employee Group hosted an Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp (AYCAC). The camp had three main purposes:

1. Expose youth to the professions within the planning department;

2. Reinforce their cultural identity and pride by involving them in Aboriginal activities;
3. Encourage the youth to stay in school and pursue higher education.

Throughout the week long camp, the youth were engaged in a variety of cultural and planning related activities. This research explored the value of this camp, and determined if this camp could be used as a springboard for further civic action and involvement on the part of the youth participants. A variety of research methods were used to determine if this was necessary and/or possible.

## **1.2 Project Statement**

Youth, in general, are underrepresented in civic and planning processes. This holds true for Aboriginal youth as well. Their participation in these areas is crucial as Aboriginal youth are expected to comprise a large proportion of the youth population in Winnipeg within the next ten years. They must become actively involved in civic and planning processes in order to ensure their concerns are heard and their needs are met. The City of Winnipeg was selected as the site for this research due to its large urban Aboriginal youth population. By the year 2016, Aboriginal people under the age of 20 are projected to account for 36.6% of the total Aboriginal population in Manitoba (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics 1997). As well, the City of Winnipeg recently hosted an Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp (AYCAC). The aim of the camp was to introduce Aboriginal youth to planning related employment and civic processes within the city. This camp endeavoured to encourage and support Aboriginal youth to stay in school and pursue post

secondary education in order to increase their marketability in the labour force. Within the context of this camp, I explored the possibility of developing an Aboriginal youth group as a vehicle for Aboriginal youth to influence planning and civic processes.

Through this research, I aimed to determine if the Aboriginal youth participants are willing to become increasingly involved in planning and civic processes in order to impact planning decisions. This research further explored the benefits of youth engagement in planning. It also exposes both planners and politicians to successful examples of youth engagement within planning processes. This will help to ensure that all members of society have an equal say in how their community develops. Finally, this research assessed the overall willingness of the youth to engage and participate in planning in Winnipeg. Youth participation in the planning process will ensure that new programs, services, and physical developments meet the needs of today's Aboriginal youth. As part of this research, I have drafted a series of recommendations to foster and improve Aboriginal youth participation in civic and planning processes within the City of Winnipeg. The major questions driving my research, within the Winnipeg context, are as follows:

1. How do the Aboriginal youth camp participants define participation?
2. To what extent did the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp foster a better understanding of planning among the youth participants?
3. To what extent has the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp inspired the youth to form an Aboriginal youth council in order to increase their participation in municipal affairs?

These questions were developed based on my experiences with the AYCAC and gaps in the literature. In particular, I endeavoured to determine if the literature on participation is reflective of how Aboriginal youth define participation. This led to an investigation of how the term “participation” can be made more inclusive to reflect the perspective of youth. Further, there was very little information available that deals directly with Aboriginal youth and participation and/or planning processes. These gaps in the literature, in conjunction with the findings from the case studies informed the overall direction of this thesis research. They led directly to the development of the research questions.

### **1.3 Scope and Objectives of the Research**

This research consists of an overview of the importance of youth participation in civic and planning processes. Attention is paid to capacity building among youth, and the various levels of youth participation. Barriers to Aboriginal youth participation are also examined, and possible solutions to overcome them are explored. Particular attention is paid to the City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp. Specifically, I explore how this project can be used as a launching pad for further participation of Aboriginal youth in civic processes.

Through their exposure to municipal and planning institutions, it is hoped that the participants will develop an interest in civic and planning affairs. This will in turn encourage them to become civically aware and politically active. As a potential model for inclusive and influential youth participation, I also included an overview of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, and focused on those elements that could be transferred to an Aboriginal

youth council. This example provides a successful model of youth civic involvement which may be adopted and/or modified for Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. This case study is important to the research because it demonstrates the impact youth can wield when provided with legitimate avenues to influence policy development and planning processes.

Youth participation in planning and civic processes allows planners and policymakers to educate youth about the complexities of the negotiations and trade-offs involved in policy and decision-making (Driskell 2002:35). It further provides politicians and planners with the opportunity to better understand the needs of the younger generation which ultimately aides with future planning. In order for children and youth to express themselves, to be clearly heard, and to have their proposals fully considered, both community members and policymakers must be convinced that children and youth “are fully aware of what they want and particularly what they lack, and that they are capable of formulating proposals” (Tonucci and Risotto 2001:413). In particular, this research focuses on participation methods that recognize the ideas of Aboriginal youth as legitimate planning knowledge, and acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal culture in the daily life of the youth.

Within the parameters outlined above, this research focuses on the following:

### **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

This chapter sets the context for the research. It explains the scope and objectives, including the main research questions that are explored. Further, it briefly outlines the



link between the relevant literature and the recommended outcomes. Lastly, it provides an overview of the entire document.

### **Chapter 2 - Research Methods**

This chapter provides an overview of the research methods utilized to undertake this thesis. Methods used include case studies, a literature review, a focus group, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. All of these methods were applied within a participatory action research framework. Particular attention is given to undertaking research with Aboriginal communities. This chapter also justifies the use of the various research tools.

### **Chapter 3 – Case Studies**

This chapter describes the Toronto Youth Cabinet and Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp. The focus of this chapter is the AYCAC. It outlines the planning and cultural activities the youth were engaged in. It also outlines some of the youth perceptions about the camp. In particular it focuses on their likes and dislikes, and how the camp can be improved. It further outlines other initiatives that have resulted from the camp.

### **Chapter 4 - Literature Review**

This chapter provides the basis for the research. The review begins by exploring the definitions of youth, participation, and urban Aboriginal. This ensures that the reader is clear about the use of these terms within the context of this thesis. This section is followed by a summary of demographics and socio-economic characteristics of the urban Aboriginal population in Winnipeg as compared to those of the non-Aboriginal

population across the province and across the country. The literature review then explores the importance of youth participation, including the benefits to youth, planners and the wider society. Some of the barriers to legitimate youth participation are also explored in this section. This section also includes a summary of the major themes identified from the literature review. This section concludes with the outline of three youth council models. These models are examined to determine if they would be suitable for the creation of an Aboriginal youth council.

#### **Chapter 5 – Research Analysis**

This chapter offers a critical examination of the interviews, focus group and participant observation in relation to the research questions stated previously. Ultimately, the analysis clearly makes the connection between the literature and the current needs of Aboriginal youth. It provides the framework for the suggestions recommended in the next section.

#### **Chapter 6 – Recommendations**

This chapter recommends ways to increase the ability of Aboriginal youth to influence planning and civic processes. As much as possible, the recommendations are based on the insights gained through the various research methods and those from the literature review. Recommendations are aimed at mainly youth and local governments. This section also identifies gaps in the literature and how they can be overcome, and suggests possible areas of future research.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusion**

The conclusion reiterates the findings of the research, and makes the final connection between the research, the literature and the recommendations.

### **1.4 Biases and Limitations of the Research**

#### **1.4.1 Biases**

The biases I encountered during this research stemmed mainly from my recent migration to the City of Winnipeg, my lack of familiarity and interaction with Aboriginal youth and my experiences as a City of Toronto employee. I was also biased in my decision to use participatory action research as the underlying framework for this thesis.

Prior to my arrival in Winnipeg, I had a very limited knowledge and understanding of the demographic and socio-economic status of the urban Aboriginal community, and the Aboriginal youth population in particular. I did not realize the extent to which the media served to shape my perception on matters of which I have little knowledge. I have made a sincere attempt to overlook the negative image of Aboriginal youth frequently portrayed through various media outlets. I have endeavoured to form my opinions based on my personal interaction with and engagement of Aboriginal youth.

Prior to the AYCAC, I was unsure of what to expect, though I thought the underlying principles of the camp were excellent. I thought the camp itself would be an excellent method through which to expose youth to planning and civic processes. I began this research optimistic that the camp would provide the youth with a wealth of knowledge.

However, I was unsure about how receptive the youth would be to the overall camp experience and how much of the information they would absorb and retain. Through the research fieldwork, it is evident that the youth did indeed gain genuine knowledge from the camp, and they were extremely active and receptive participants.

My overall experiences with the AYCAC have served to greatly increase my understanding of the social, political and economic dynamics which influence the lives of urban Aboriginal youth. I have come to realize that due to societal stereotypes and negative perceptions, all of their accomplishments represent obstacles that have been surmounted. As a society, it is our civic duty to support Aboriginal youth in all of their endeavours and celebrate all of their successes and achievements.

At the urging of my thesis committee, I opted to use participatory action research as the underlying research framework for this thesis. I was initially sceptical of employing this method because it was evident that I would not be able to fully implement it from the beginning of my research. Nonetheless, PAR has proven to be invaluable to this research. Through its implementation, I was able to reduce the power imbalance that tends to exist between the researcher and the research subjects. I was further able to develop a trust relationship with the participants, and engage in mutual knowledge sharing with them. The other biases I encountered throughout the course of this fieldwork were a direct result of my employment with the City of Toronto.

I was employed by the City of Toronto for eight years between 1995 and 2003.

Throughout this time, I regularly heard references made about Toronto Youth Cabinet. In a professional capacity, I also had the opportunity to attend a number of TYC workshops and conferences. Further, I filled an employment position that was created through funding secured by the TYC, though I did not become aware of that until after the focus group session.

My initial thought regarding the TYC was that they were far removed from the youth of Toronto because they worked out of City Hall, which is located in downtown Toronto. Accordingly, I assumed that suburban youth would not be adequately represented by the TYC due to the physical distance that separated them. I further assumed that they were a powerful group because they had direct access to city councillors as well as the Child Advocate for the city. Through their direct recognition by and affiliation to the city, I also assumed that they were a well funded organization with the capacity to undertake much more than the average youth advocacy group. I began this research cognizant of my biases though my findings have served to greatly alter my perception of the TYC.

#### **1.4.2 Limitations**

I encountered a number of limitations regarding my research with the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp and the Toronto Youth Cabinet. With regards to the AYCAC, the limitations I encountered surrounded mainly the elapsed time between the actual camp and notification of ethics approval. Further, some of the topics covered during the fieldwork were new to the youth and in some instances, it was difficult for them to

comprehend and respond. Another limitation I encountered was a direct result of my decision to use participatory action research as the overall framework for the thesis research. During the TYC research, the limitations I faced resulted from my decision to use an intermediary to facilitate the fieldwork. The final limitation I encountered was from an organizational standpoint. I was unsure of how to best organize this thesis in order to draw parallels and highlight the best practices arising from both the AYCAC and TYC case studies.

The actual AYCAC was hosted at the end of August 2004. I had a chance to reacquaint myself with the participants again in December 2004 at a follow-up event. However the interviews and focus group were not undertaken until early May 2005 when ethics approval was granted. This resulted in a nine month gap between the actual camp and the interviews and focus group. By this time, most of the youth had forgotten specific details of the camp, and appeared to have only a vague memory of the camp and all of the activities they had participated in. Throughout the fieldwork, some of the participants openly admitted that they could not recall specific incidents and/or activities. To rectify this, pictures and a slide show were used to refresh their memories. The focus group and interviews would have garnered much richer results if they had been hosted in a timely manner, approximately one month after the actual camp.

Due to the elapsed time between the camp and research fieldwork, it appeared that the sense of group cohesion that developed during the camp had diminished. The camp and its affiliated events were no longer a priority for the youth. This sentiment was

occasionally mentioned throughout the course of the fieldwork. The youth suggested that it had been a long time since they last met, and they would prefer opportunities to socialize more often. However, with regular interaction with each other, the youth suggested that it would not be difficult to re-establish their previous level of relationship.

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, I asked the youth exploratory questions regarding the development of an Aboriginal youth council. These questions were necessary for the research. However it was difficult for the youth to respond because they were not familiar with the concepts presented to them. Though visual aids were utilized during the fieldwork, it was difficult for the youth to select which council structure they would prefer given that they had no personal experience in the areas that were being explored.

The final limitation I encountered was a result of my decision to use participatory action research as the main research tool. Due to the nature of this thesis, and the timing of the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp, I was unable to apply participatory action research to its fullest. In particular, I was unable to involve the AYCAC participants in every aspect of this research, and they did not gain a sense of ownership over this thesis and its associated processes. Nonetheless, I was still able to adhere to some elements integral to PAR. In particular, we engaged in mutual knowledge and information sharing, which led directly to my acknowledgement and validation of their input. This in turn resulted in the development of a trust relationship between the youth participants and me as an adult researcher.

Throughout the interviews and focus group, the participants and I were able to engage in mutual information sharing. They were able to provide me with their insights regarding the AYCAC and the possibility of forming an Aboriginal youth council. In return, I shared with them a number of youth council models, and some examples of the work other youth councils have done or are doing in Canada. Education in this respect may lead to the development of increased capacity and eventual action toward some of the ideas we discussed. Within this context, I was the facilitator of a community process as well as a researcher. This served to reduce the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, and validated the input of the participants.

Inherent to this thesis are the opinions and ideas of the youth. Without their input, this research could not come to fruition. Early in this research process I began to recognize and value the knowledge the participants shared with me. They not only provided me with their insights, but rather provided the overall lens through which this research was framed. Acknowledging the value of the participants' opinions and perspectives is a fundamental underpinning of PAR.

Prior to the focus group and subsequent interviews, I had the opportunity to spend time with the youth on two occasions. I spent three full days with them during the camp itself, and interacted with them and their parents at a follow-up event that was hosted a few months later. As such, I was able to develop a trust relationship with each one of them. Trust is crucial to the success of PAR. Though I was unable to fully implement PAR, I



am confident that the fundamental elements were adhered to as much as possible within the context of this thesis fieldwork.

The limitations I encountered with regards to the TYC research were a direct result of my decision to go through an intermediary during the planning stages of research with the TYC. The intermediary was responsible for contacting the participants and organizing the time and date of the session. I enlisted the assistance of the TYC coordinator to facilitate these aspects of the research due to my physical distance from the research subjects, my unfamiliarity with them, and the need to execute this research in a timely manner. As such, I was able to exercise only minimal influence over the selection of the focus group location and time of the session. As a result the focus group was held following an important but lengthy TYC general meeting. What I thought would be most convenient for the youth turned out to be quite inconvenient. Further, the location of the interview was not particularly favourable as we were interrupted twice by security guards who requested that we leave.

The final limitation I encountered during the course of this fieldwork was undertaking the TYC and AYCAC fieldwork independently of each other. While the integrity of both case studies was maintained, it was challenging to link them during the final stages of the research. It was evident in my thought process that the AYCAC could potentially develop into an organization similar to the TYC. However, from an organizational standpoint, it was much more difficult to make that connection on paper. This stemmed mainly from

the fact that I was working with two sets of different yet potentially complimentary sets of data.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

This section has established the framework for this thesis. It outlined the scope and objectives of the research, the intent of the research, and the biases and limitations which have influenced this research. It is imperative to note that all of the biases and limitations I encountered were unforeseen. They were unexpected challenges that arose at various times throughout the course of the research. They occurred equally at the beginning, middle and toward the end of the research. In order to overcome them and forge ahead with this thesis, I was often required to reconsider the scope, objectives, and intent of the research. As such, these biases and limitations played a formative role in the overall development of this thesis. Confronting these issues forced me to frequently reassess the research direction and methods. I was required to devise new methods to acquire and synthesize the data without compromising the integrity and intent of my initial research idea. Overall, I believe that this constant reassessment and re-evaluation resulted in a richer, more complete thesis. The remainder of this thesis explicitly details how these objectives were achieved, and how the biases and limitations I encountered were overcome. The following chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the research methods employed to undertake this thesis research.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This thesis research involved two case studies, a comprehensive literature review, participant observation, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews with the camp participants and camp administrators. All of these methods were applied within the larger framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR was utilized within this thesis because much of the literature surrounding research with Aboriginal populations suggests that PAR is culturally and socially appropriate. The participant observation aspect of this research was conducted in August 2004 while the remainder of the research was executed in May and June 2005 after ethics approval was obtained for this thesis. This section provides an overview of the research fieldwork, and some of the obstacles and successes I encountered during this undertaking. They were analysed within the context of the current literature. As well, I highlighted the research techniques that worked well with the youth.

### **2.2 Research with Aboriginal Communities**

Historically, the negative experiences of Aboriginal populations regarding research are rooted in the intrusion of outside “experts” into their communities. As a result, Aboriginal populations have essentially lost control of problem solving and planning in their own situations and communities. External experts have consistently decided “what was best for the Indians” with devastating consequences (Kenny 2004: 10). Brant Castellano extends this argument by suggesting that research acquired negative connotations among Aboriginal people because the purposes and meanings associated

with its practice were generally alien to the people themselves. Further, the outcomes were often harmful and misguided, even if the consequences were unintended (2004: 98).

According to the *Understanding Strengths of Indigenous Communities (USIC)* project, research to date regarding Aboriginal populations has served only to clarify the problems experienced by Aboriginal populations. This has not translated into the ability to solve them, but rather served to undermine their sense of empowerment (York University).

These conditions are a direct result of the cultural bias by Euro-Canadians and insensitivity on their part to the nature and value of Aboriginal knowledge. These conditions are further compounded by institutional barriers which have prevented the acceptance of Aboriginal knowledge as legitimate knowledge (Hoare, Levy and Robinson: 50). Within this context, Kenny offers the following guidelines for a holistic research framework when conducting research with Aboriginal people:

1. Honouring past, present, and future in interpretive and analytical research processes including historical references and intergenerational discourse;
2. Honouring the interconnectedness of all life and the multi-dimensional aspects of life on the Earth and in the community in research design and implementation; and
3. Honouring the spiritual physical, emotional and mental aspects of the person and the community in research protocols, methodologies, and analyses (2004: 8).

In holistic research, Kenny suggests that researchers must strive for balance between the various components of Aboriginal life in contemporary society.

When engaging in research with Aboriginal communities, it is the responsibility of the researcher to undertake background and preliminary research about the community, its

people, and its history and culture prior to commencing the actual study. This allows the researcher to develop a strong understanding of the situation of the community in question. Further, they will be in a better position to work collaboratively with the participants. Increasingly Aboriginal communities are resolute on addressing their needs with culturally relevant research processes (Kenny 2004: 11). Past research experiences have clearly demonstrated that intrusive research is not fruitful and only adds to the alienation of Aboriginal people (Kenny 2004: 10). Brant Castellano suggests that if the researchers and the research participants have vastly different ideas as to what constitutes social benefit, and how it is achieved, the research is bound to be unsatisfactory to both parties (2004: 103).

In traditional research methods, the researcher attempts to maintain distance between themselves and the research participants in an effort to remain objective. This stance violates Aboriginal ethics of a reciprocal relationship and collective validation. If the researcher assumes control of knowledge production, and produces information through limited, brief encounters, the dialogical relationship with both human and non-human sources is interrupted. As a result, the transformation of observations and/or information into contextualized knowledge ceases. Aboriginal people reject information gleaned through objective, short-term, outsider vantage point as distortions of their reality. By extension, research undertaken by those outside of the Aboriginal community has been “instrumental in rationalizing colonial perceptions of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control” (Brant Castellano 2004: 103). Kenny has identified the following as historical obstacles arising from Aboriginal research experiences:

- lack of partnership with communities;
- researchers in control of all aspects of the research procedures;
- no meaningful participant involvement;
- lack of trust in researchers by the participants;
- conflicting worldviews of researcher and participants;
- lack of understanding by participants on purpose and impacts of research;
- failure to obtain informed consent;
- irrelevant research methods which are not compatible to Aboriginal culture;
- community not involved in identifying solutions; and
- no follow-up or reporting back to the participants (2004:10).

Participatory Action Research (PAR), if implemented diligently, with its principles strongly adhered to, can successfully overcome all of the historical obstacles listed above. Throughout much of the literature, PAR is repeatedly identified as a research method suitable for work undertaken with Aboriginal communities. It has received a positive response in Aboriginal communities, and acceptance in the wider research community (Brant Castellano 2004: 106).

### **2.3 Participatory Action Research**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) evolved from the qualitative research methodologies of the social sciences, and it differs from other research strategies in many ways. The philosophical foundation of PAR in particular differs significantly from other forms of research because its key principles rest on the following:

- the development of trust between the researcher and the participants;
- demonstrated knowledge of the personal experiences of group members and group processes;
- commitment to serve the group;
- joint development of research action agendas and techniques;
- validation of findings with/by group members, and;
- accountability to the group.

Translating these goals into practices entails major changes in four key elements of the research process: the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, the roles of those involved, data collection and analysis, and the desired outcomes of the study (Schubert 1996: 232). Within this context, the research participants demonstrate knowledge, and choose to share that knowledge with the researcher. It is the responsibility of the researcher to serve the group, be accountable to them, and make a commitment to uphold the integrity of the knowledge the research participants are sharing.

According to Hoare, Levy and Robinson, when working with Aboriginal communities, PAR is preferred over traditional research methods. Orthodox approaches are focused solely on the “ends” of the research, with little or no concern for the way in which the research process may affect the lives of the participants (1993:52). PAR is more successful than traditional methods when used in Aboriginal communities. It integrates well with Aboriginal culture, it meets criteria regarding validity and reliability, and it offers a pragmatic means of recording oral history before much more is lost. Further, it is

a research alternative that provides a means for cultural repatriation (1993:51). It also assists in the creation of a level playing field between existing power systems, such as large government bureaucracies and Aboriginal communities. This provides Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers with the opportunity to express the diversity of values and preferred approaches in Aboriginal communities (Kenny 2004: 16). PAR is increasingly being applied to research undertaken in Aboriginal communities. Hoare, Levy and Robinson offer four reasons for this.

1. PAR contributes to a balancing of the historical record of the Native voice;
2. PAR increases the chance of development effectiveness and longevity;
3. PAR contributes to the healing of social ills; and
4. PAR methods are consistent with Native values (1993:53).

The strong element of participation and the transparency of PAR, “demystifies the research process and equips community members to be advocates of change” (1993:54). Ultimately, PAR is an invaluable research tool because it is based on the understanding that “people are experts in their own lives” (Wang et al. 2004: 911, Schubert 1996).

McTaggart offers a definition of PAR based on its name. He argues that PAR always involves participation, action, and research. Participation is an authentic commitment to the studied enhancement of a social practice by its practitioners. This translates into participation in the action and the research. Actions are wisely planned, deliberately implemented, and carefully studied. Research is carefully observed and theoretically informed by participation and action (1999: 496). Gardner expands on this definition by suggesting that PAR is based not only on research and action, but also on education. The



research does not end with data collection. Rather, PAR employs the data to educate those affected by the findings, and encourages them to act on them. Education can also be expanded to be considered as a means to develop the capacity of the research participants (Hoare, Levy and Robinson 1993: 51). McTaggart expands on this by suggesting that within the context of PAR, all of the research participants are “practitioners of something” (1999: 495). He further suggests that through PAR:

knowledge is not produced with a view to *later* incorporation into practice as it is in other research; knowledge production is embodied in the enactment of emerging understandings. That is the *research* aspect of participatory action research is not an end in itself, it defers to practice...the aim of participatory action research is to *change* individual and collective processes, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice, and incoherent and unsatisfying forms of existence (McTaggart 1999: 496).

Hoare, Levy and Robinson further add to the definition of PAR by acknowledging both education and action, and including the notion of social investigation. They suggest that element assists in the critical consciousness of the research participants and their wider community (1993: 51).

Fundamental to PAR is that the relationship between the researcher and the research participants be one of trust. The researcher must recognize and value the knowledge the participants have and can impart to the process. Equally important to PAR is that participants are involved in every aspect of the research process, from planning to dissemination. Further, the participants and their larger community must be given direct access to the research findings and its impact (Schubert 1996, Barker 2001, McTaggart

1999, Gardner 2004). PAR removes the distance between the objective researcher and the subjective participants, and includes them as active participants in the research with the end goal of empowering the community to create change. Participant involvement acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing and acquiring knowledge. Within this context, the researcher perceives him/herself as a facilitator of community process, as opposed to merely a principal investigator. As a result, PAR serves to advance the social conditions of residents and communities (Gardner 2004: 52).

PAR is used for collecting data, as well as a form of community mobilization. It can be undertaken using a number of research tools, including one on one interviews and focus groups. PAR is generally qualitative in nature, though it can be combined with quantitative research (Barker 2001). According to Barker (2001), participatory action research offers numerous advantages when used in a community setting. These advantages include community mobilization and access to hard to reach communities.

#### *Community mobilization*

PAR is an inclusive research method. It involves participants in the entire process, which in turn generates excitement and ownership over the process and ensuing results.

Accordingly, it will be easier to integrate the results back into the wider community from an action perspective. This will in theory set the stage for increased community action and participation. Further, PAR may also generate interest and momentum at the grassroots level (Barker 2001).

*Access to hard to reach communities*

Differences in background, education level, and socio-economic status between the researcher and the research participants may result in barriers, mistrust, and further marginalization of the participants. These research pitfalls can be avoided through PAR which directly involves the participants in the research process (Barker 2001).

PAR can be used in a variety of community settings where a clear understanding of the issues, values and traditions of the target population is needed. It is most appropriate where there is a desire to “integrate research with community development, mobilize the community, (and) or empower a group of individuals to take charge of their situation” (Barker 2001). Morgan et al. suggests that it is only recently that Youth-PAR has begun to be more widely recognized as a legitimate approach to working with youth (2004: 202). Youth benefit from PAR as it allows them to gain a stronger understanding of the issues involved and become more empowered to take action on a personal and community level. This enables the youth to move forward with new programs and services that address issues discovered through the research on a peer-level (Barker 2001).

While PAR represents a strong move away from traditional research techniques, it is not without challenges. According to Gardner, building trust between the researcher and the participants is a major hurdle. Other potential challenges include: identifying the community’s specific research needs and working with community groups with low literacy levels. These obstacles render PAR much more time consuming than traditional research methods (2004: 53). Hoare, Levy and Robinson offer their own critique of PAR from an Aboriginal perspective.

Most of their concerns center on the belief that in negotiation and litigation processes, valid evidence may be less reliable than when compiled by a non-professional researcher. From a traditional “expert” position, PAR may be viewed as harmful to future scientific research. In particular, it may exhaust informants, create political tensions, or introduce the community to historically distorted facts. This may lead to the subsequent presentation of distorted information. Concerns also surround instances where PAR has generated inaccurate information, and the possibility that it may damage the credibility of future research. Lastly, the community researcher may fail to uncover certain information, or be given inaccurate information arising from family or political divisions within the community. These challenges can be avoided through the implementation of a carefully planned and monitored research program (1993:57). I do not believe these factors will affect the credibility of this particular research endeavour. Given the scope of this research and the limited number of participants, it is highly unlikely that this research will create family or political tensions and present historically distorted facts. Further, these conflicts will not affect the outcome of this research as they are not issues that arose during the course of this work.

#### **2.4 Case Study**

For this thesis two case studies were selected, the Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) and the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp (AYCAC). The TYC is showcased as an example of the influence youth can exert when provided with legitimate avenues for genuine participation. The AYCAC is examined in detail within this thesis to determine how the youth participants define participation, and if they are interested in forming a

group similar to the TYC. The AYCAC case study is the major focus of this thesis. This section outlines the theoretical justifications for employing the case study as a research method. In particular, this section focuses on the definition of a case study, and the pros and cons associated with using it as a research tool.

Yin suggests that case study research is only one of a variety of methods employed to undertake social science research. Case studies are the preferred methodology in the following circumstances:

1. when “how” and/or “why” questions are guiding the research;
2. when the investigator has little control over events, and;
3. when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context (1994: 1).

Hakim offers another definition. She suggests that “case studies take as their subject one or more selected examples of a social entity that are studied using a variety of data collection techniques” (1987: 54). This definition differs from that of Yin by acknowledging that a variety of data collection techniques are generally used during case study research. Lewis offers another description of case study research. Her definition parallels that of Hakim. She suggests that the primary defining features of a case study as being the:

multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context (or in a number of specific contexts if the study involves more than one case). Those multiple perspectives

may come from multiple data collection methods, but may also derive from multiple accounts – collected using a single method from people with different perspectives on what is being observed (Lewis 2003: 52).

There is one major distinction between the definition of case study provided by Lewis and Hakim. Lewis argues that only one research method needs be employed, provided that it gathers different perspectives regarding a specific context. Hakim disagrees by stating that a variety of research methods should be employed. Regardless of this distinction, both agree that the research should aim to collect a variety of perspectives. These varied perspectives are highlighted throughout this thesis in the form of focus groups and interview quotes and excerpts. These pieces of information serve to provide the reader with more insight into the thoughts and opinions of the research participants. They further provide a snapshot of the participants within the context of the research fieldwork.

I agree that a variety of research techniques should be employed in case study research because it allows for a holistic assessment of the case study. This sentiment is echoed by Hakim (1987: 63). From this perspective, Yin suggests that the case study is neither a data collection tactic nor merely a design feature alone (1994: 13). The case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin 1994: 3).

According to Hakim's and Lewis' definition, this thesis is an example of case study research because two separate social entities were selected within a specific context, and

a number of research techniques were employed. Hakim goes on to write that the selected case studies may be located on a continuum of case studies. The case study may fall anywhere in between a “descriptive report on an illustrative example and the rigorous test of a well-defined thesis” (1987:61). Descriptive case studies “may be exploratory, if relatively little previous research exists on the topic, or they may be illustrative portraits of social entities or patterns thought to be typical, representative, or average (1987: 61). Within the parameters of this thesis, both the TYC and AYCAC case studies are descriptive case studies. There is very little existing research regarding both cases, and they are illustrative portrayals of existing, contemporary social groups.

There are a number of shortcomings traditionally associated with case study research. First is the lack of rigor associated with this form of research. Researchers have been sloppy and allowed ambiguous evidence or biased views and interpretations to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions. Second, case studies provide very little basis for scientific generalization. Third, it is widely believed that case study research is time consuming (Yin 1994: 9). Ultimately, Yin writes that good case studies are “very difficult to do” (1994: 11). Hakim echoes similar sentiments by suggesting that the quality of the case study is dependant on the ability of the researcher to produce good case studies. Further, the variation in case study design renders it difficult to summarize their key strengths and weaknesses. Much lies in the degree of congruency between the research questions and the specific case(s) selected for the study (Hakim 1987: 64).

Though the use of two case studies proved challenging throughout this research, it was a useful research tool within the context of this thesis. It allowed me to examine two separate social phenomenons to differing extents, and draw parallels and conclusions. The use of the case study as a research tool provided me with the flexibility to explore various elements of two distinct case studies. Within this thesis, the case studies are featured prior to the literature review because the case studies significantly impacted the direction of the literature review. The themes explored in the literature review emerged directly from my experiences with the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp. The scope and direction of the literature review could only be fully understood once the context of the case studies has been clearly established. The next section focuses on the use of a literature review as a research tool. It outlines the use and purpose of the literature review, and describes how the case studies served to shape and inform it.

## **2.5 Literature Review**

As part of this research methodology, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken. In this instance, the overall scope and objective of the literature review was greatly influenced by the selected case studies. Traditionally, the literature review influences the development of the research questions. In this thesis, the case studies strongly influenced the direction of the literature review which in turn impacted the research questions. This situation occurred because I had the opportunity to undertake participant observation and some research fieldwork prior to clearly defining the focus of my research. Essentially the direction of the literature review and the ensuing research questions stemmed directly from my experiences with the case studies. Given that, this section outlines the



theoretical purpose of the literature review. It further explores the interconnectedness between the literature review and the case studies.

According to Hakim, literature reviews “provide a synthesis of existing knowledge on a specific question, based on an assessment of all relevant empirical research that can be found” (1987: 18). Denscombe offers a more detailed definition of a literature review.

She suggests the following:

Essentially, the literature review serves to put the research in context. It locates the research within the context of the published knowledge that already exists about the area that is being investigated. It demonstrates the relevance of the research by showing how it addresses questions that arise from careful and considered evaluation of what has been done so far, and how the current research aims to ‘fill in the gaps’ or ‘take things further’ or ‘do a better job than has been done so far’ (2002: 51).

Denscombe’s definition is much more comprehensive than that of Hakim. It not only identifies the inherent purpose of a literature review but also discusses how it influences the research questions. It also addresses the role of the current research within the context of the literature review. By comparison, Hakim’s definition does not critically examine the role of the research literature review and the influence it may yield in shaping the larger research project. For the purposes of this research, the literature review served to highlight gaps in the literature regarding Aboriginal youth, with particular emphasis on their participation in planning and civic processes. It also explores what can be undertaken from a municipal perspective to increase Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes.

Denscombe further suggests that the literature serves four main functions:

1. Identify the intellectual origins of the work.
2. Show familiarity with existing ideas, information, and practices related to the area of interest.
3. Justify the choice of research topic and approach as necessary and timely.
4. Develop and refine the research questions and objectives of the research (2002: 51).

Within the scope of this thesis, the literature review served to fulfill all four of these functions. However, I would argue that the literature review in conjunction with the selected case studies fulfilled all of these functions. Given the significance of the case studies to this research, it would have been impossible to fulfill these functions without them.

I identified the intellectual origins of the research by exploring both historical and contemporary writings surrounding the traditional role of youth within our society. By synthesizing this information, I was able to demonstrate my familiarity with this information. This further allowed me to focus on the data which supported my decision to focus on Aboriginal youth and their participation in planning and civic processes. Both the literature review and the selected case studies demonstrate in and of themselves that this research is both timely and necessary. Based on the outcome of both the literature review and case studies, I was able to refine the research questions and overall direction of the research.

The literature review uses existing material as the basis for demonstrating how the current research has *something valuable to offer*. This can be a matter of *building upon* previous literature, using the existing findings as a platform for deciding which direction the research should follow. This in turn served to identify new information that is required in order to proceed with the research (Denscombe 2002: 50). For this thesis, the case studies dictated that the literature review must focus on the following areas: Aboriginal youth, the importance of youth participation, levels of youth participation and engagement, barriers to legitimate youth participation, capacity-building among youth and youth councils. All of these research themes figured prominently in the case studies. It would have been impossible to undertake this research without conducting a full literature review in these topic areas. The information generated through the literature review assisted me to refine the research questions, and strengthen the links between my initial hypothesis and research findings. This resulted in sound research findings and recommendations.

Denscombe suggests that some researchers concentrate on identifying research areas that have been overlooked and use the review of the literature to show that their research *fills a gap* in existing knowledge (2002: 50). Within this thesis, I identified gaps in the relevant literature. While this research does serve to fill in some of those gaps, it does not do justice to them all. The scope of this research is much too narrow to fulfill such an endeavour. Rather the gaps are identified, and potential methods of addressing them are identified.

According to Robson, conducting a comprehensive literature review is a rather arduous responsibility. The researcher must have a “thorough understanding of the historical and current perspectives of the literature; a detailed background and knowledge of the relevant discipline (s); technical proficiency; and substantial time and resources” (1993:23). Denscombe builds on this by suggesting that a critical review of the literature requires that the researcher do the following:

1. Identify the key sources of documented ideas, information and practices.
2. Evaluate the ideas, information and practices contained in the various works.
3. Look for key issues and themes running throughout the works.
4. Take a holistic view of the relevant literature to provide an overview of what it says to the researcher as a totality.
5. Discuss how the research addresses issues, questions or needs identified through reviewing the existing literature.
6. Arrive at research questions, propositions, etc (2002: 53).

As much as possible, these tasks were achieved throughout the literature review. This process, as Robson writes, is both arduous and time consuming. However, it effectively sets the framework to shape the subsequent research tools, analysis and conclusions.

Inherent to achieving this is a strong understanding of the literature. It would be impossible to come to any conclusions without being able to compare and contrast the research findings to the wider body of existing literature.

## **2.6 Participant Observation**

Participant observation was utilized as part of this research to observe the youth within the camp setting. Their reactions, demeanour, levels of participation and overall attitudes

were observed throughout the camp to gain a better understanding of their camp experiences. Jackson defines participant observation as “an intensive examination of a culture, community, organization or group...involves having the researcher join the group for an extended period” (1999: 121). Inherent to this is being a part of the “spontaneity of everyday interactions” (Kearns 2000: 108). Accordingly, the researcher is a participant in the group, and shares in their collective experiences. This results in a more holistic study as the researcher attempts to understand the entire group and their associated dynamics. Robson summarizes this with the following:

A key feature of participant observation is that the observer seeks to become some kind of member of the observed group. This involves not only a physical presence and a sharing of life experiences, but also entry into their social and ‘symbolic’ world through learning their social conventions and habits, their use of language and non-verbal communication, and so on. The observer also has to establish some role within the group (1993: 194).

It is with these aims in mind that I accepted the opportunity to observe the AYCAC.

I was invited to observe the camp by a camp administrator, and acted in a consultant capacity. This invitation resulted from previous discussions with a camp administrator regarding the nature and organization of the camp. I accompanied the youth on all of their trips and participated in all of their activities. Kearns suggests that the choice of setting and gaining access to a particular group of people for the purposes of participant observation are essential to the success of any research (2000). I was not burdened by

these decisions because I was invited to observe the camp. Accordingly, both the location and access to the youth were already pre-determined.

I was introduced to the youth by a camp administrator. She stated that I was a student observer from the University of Manitoba who would be observing and participating in the camp activities for research purposes. Due to ethics restrictions, I attempted to avoid directly asking youth questions regarding their thoughts about the camp. Instead, I interacted with them simply as an observer, in both individual and group conversations. I also had the opportunity to observe the AYCAC in December 2004 at a follow up event for the youth, their parents, and camp administrators. Again, I was introduced to the group in a similar fashion and followed the same protocol as previously outlined. My role during these events is similar to what Robson refers to as the “participant as observer.” The fact that the observer is an observer is made clear to the group. The observer then tries to establish a relationship with members of the group. In this context the observer is observing while participating in the activities and simultaneously asking members to explain various aspects of what is going on (2000: 197).

Though I was limited in terms of my ability to question the youth directly about their thoughts and opinions regarding the camp, I was able to gain a strong sense of the youth both as a group and individually. I was further able to make observations which I subsequently incorporated into the focus group and interview questions. I also used this occasion to cultivate a trust relationship with the youth. This was essential for arranging the focus group and subsequent one-on-one interviews. The development of trust between

the researcher and the participants is one of the key principles of PAR. Inherent to this, the researcher must recognize and value the knowledge the participants will impart to the research process (Schubert 1996, Barker 2001, McTaggart 1999, Gardner 2004).

While there are a number of benefits to engaging in participant observation, Yin suggests there are two major pitfalls associated with it. First, the researcher may at times have to assume positions or advocacy roles which are contrary to the interest of “good scientific practices.” This may directly compromise the researchers’ ability to work as an external observer. Second, the researcher is likely to become a supporter of the group being researched, especially if similar supports do not currently exist. This may hinder the researcher’s ability to record observations and ask questions from a different perspective, as is required for strong observations (Yin 1989: 93). Within the context of this research I was able to avoid both of these pitfalls. While I am an advocate of increased youth participation in municipal affairs, I have not assumed any advocacy roles on behalf of the group. I am also a supporter of the AYCAC. However, the continuity of the group and their future manifestations do not rely at all on my support.

## **2.7 Focus Groups**

A focus group was conducted with the camp participants nine months after the AYCAC. According to Jackson, a focus group consists of a number of individuals “who are asked to discuss topics suggested by a facilitator” (1999: 133). The purpose of a focus group is to give the researcher the opportunity to observe the interactions among focus-group members, detecting their attitudes, opinions and solutions to a problem posed by the

facilitator” (1999: 133). Ideally, a group of between six and ten people sit around a table. The researcher then introduces a topic for discussion, and then moderates the ensuing discussion. The session should last between one and two hours (Cameron 2000: 84). Parents and camp administrators were not invited to the focus group as I thought it would hinder the participants from speaking openly and honestly about their camp experiences.

The focus group was divided into two parts. During the first session, the youth expressed their sentiments regarding the camp. It included a picture presentation to remind the youth of the activities they engaged in. In the second session, the youth explored the concept of Aboriginal youth involvement in civic and planning process. They also examined various youth council constructions in order to determine which would be most appealing to them. This led directly into a conversation surrounding the feasibility of the formation of an Aboriginal youth group.

The focus group participants were between the ages of 11 and 15. When working with youth, a focus group serves as an excellent research tool because youth tend to be more relaxed and willing to share their experiences within a group setting (Horner 2000:510). The group dynamic stimulates individual and collective memories, and are grounded in lived experiences. It also serves to gather detailed information about participant’s experiences, insights, and/or beliefs about the topic at hand. Further, the focus group method capitalizes on the communication exchange between participants to identify, refine and clarify important issues (Horner 2000:512).



### **Prior to the focus group**

A focus group was hosted with four participants from the AYCAC. This is significantly less than the seven to ten people Kruger suggests as the ideal number of participants for a focus group (1988: 93). Cameron suggests that participants should be selected on the basis of their experience related to the research topic (2000: 89). According to Kruger, the use of existing groups may be problematic as the participants may have “formal or informal ways of relating to each other that can influence their responses” (1988: 97). This did not appear to be an issue throughout the focus group because the youth only had the opportunity to interact with each intensely during camp. As well, the focus group was hosted nine months after the camp, and their levels and methods of interaction had shifted.

Contact was made with the youth via telephone. All youth were contacted two weeks prior to the focus group. I explained the purpose of the focus group, and provided them with an overview of the issues we would be discussing. They were then asked if they would be available to participate on the proposed date. I had not yet secured a venue for the focus group as I wanted to ensure that the date and time were convenient for most participants. During this initial phone conversation, all the youth consented to participating. I also took this opportunity to speak with the parents/guardians of the youth and remind them of who I was. I also informed them of the research that I was undertaking, and the capacity in which the youth would be involved. The youth were also informed that snacks and lunch would be provided.

Three days following the initial phone contact, I spoke with the youth again to confirm the date, location and time of the focus group. At this point, one youth said that he would not be able to participate and another said that she may not come. The other seven youth consented to participating.

Two days prior to the focus group, reminder phone calls were made to all of the youth. During these conversations, one youth said he would only be able to attend the second portion of the focus group due to a baseball tournament, while another stated that she would only be able to attend the first half due to a family gathering. Another youth said that he would not be able to make it altogether. One participant simply did not return my phone call, while two said they would not come because they were hosting exchange students. The participant who initially said that he would not be able to attend consented to attending the first half of the focus group. During this telephone conversation, his mother mentioned that at a prior AYCAC event her son had to wait two and a half hours for the organizer to show-up, and then had to rush through the process. This parent wanted to ensure that I was not the same person responsible for the previous event. I assured the mother that I would be there early and that the focus group would start on time.

In total, four youth participated in the focus group. This was frustrating as I made contact with the youth three times prior to actual date. Had I know earlier that the selected date was inconvenient for many of the youth, I would have re-scheduled to a more convenient

date. However, this was impossible as many of the participants cancelled the night prior to the focus group.

### **During the Focus Group**

The focus group was hosted on a Saturday afternoon between 12 and 4 pm, in the community room of a local library. This particular library was selected because it was centrally located in the Seven Oaks School Division, and in close proximity to most of the participants. The library was within walking of most of the participants. I chose to host the focus group on a Saturday because I thought it would be more convenient for the youth, as they would have extra-curricular activities and homework after school. There was also the possibility that the youth would also be tired following a full day of school. I did not want to extend the length of an already long and busy day. I also believed it would be more convenient to have one longer focus group instead of two shorter ones. With one longer session, the youth would only have to accommodate one afternoon instead of two evenings. Further, it allowed me to avoid the issue of youth who chose not to attend the second focus group because they did not enjoy the first.

As the youth arrived, they were given the consent form, asked to read it over with their parents, and return it to me signed. They were also encouraged to ask me questions if they were unsure about anything in the form. Poster boards displaying photos of the camp were placed on easels around the room, and a slide show of camp images were set up on a laptop. The youth were encouraged to look at them in order to refresh their memories of their camp experiences. According to Kruger, this assists to set the context, allowing the

participants to think back to the original experience (1988). The pictures and slide show were successful as many of the youth began exchanging stories, and saying, "Oh, I forgot about that." Snacks were ready for them as they arrived, and they were invited to partake in them as they were perusing the photos and slide show. Once all of the youth had arrived, and had the opportunity to get a snack and look at the pictures, the focus group began. The youth were seated at long rectangular tables that were arranged in a u-shape. With this configuration, the youth were able to see each other, as well as myself and the note taker. This assisted with the facilitation of the dialogue.

Once the youth were seated, I introduced the note-taker and asked everyone to introduce themselves for her benefit. As a group, we then established ground rules for the session.

The group came up with and agreed to the following guidelines:

1. Only one person speaks at a time.
2. Respect the comments of everyone.
3. No swearing.

Prior to asking questions about the camp, I asked the youth what sort of toppings they wanted on their pizza. This allowed the note taker to slip out and order the pizza without interfering with the proceedings. Following this, the youth were informed of the agenda for the day. The first half of the session would explore their perceptions of the camp, specifically what they enjoyed, what they disliked, and what they would change and how they would improve it. This part also investigated their opinions specifically surrounding the cultural and planning aspects of the camp. Following lunch, the themes of

participation, local government, Aboriginal youth participation civic and planning processes, and youth councils were explored. The order of the discussion set the context for the dialogue and allowed it to flow from general to very specific, as suggested by Kruger (1988). Approximately one hour into the session we broke for lunch. The participants enjoyed pizza and cake and socialized amongst themselves while the note-taker and I set up the youth council diagrams required for the second half of the focus group.

During the second part of the focus group it was much more difficult to stimulate discussion than in the first. The youth were introduced to three youth council models. The models were introduced one at a time in the following order: Toronto Youth Council, Aboriginal Youth with Initiative, and Traditional Hierarchical Structure. As each model was introduced, the youth were asked if they had heard about the model or any of its inherent elements, and if they were familiar with the work of a given council. The youth had no prior knowledge of the TYC. Though none had heard of the AYWI structure, a few were familiar with the clan system. Most were familiar with the traditional hierarchical structure because it was the basis of their school youth council on which some had participated. My knowledge of the TYC stemmed from my previous research about them. The information I shared with the youth regarding the AYWI structure was derived from Wuttunee (2004) and personal communication with the founder of the structure. These two sources provided me with the relevant cultural context necessary to impart this knowledge and facilitate this discussion. The information presented to the youth regarding the traditional hierarchical structure was based on my personal

experience with it. Unfortunately, there was very little literature available in support or defence of this structure. However, the youth were able to impart significantly more to this discussion as many had personal experiences with it.

With little experience in this area, it was difficult for the youth to determine which youth council model would best suit their needs, and how they could potentially be modified. They had a difficult time conceptualizing the pros and cons of the various models. Large diagrams of each model were mounted to provide them with a visual image of the model, and I provided a brief oral outline. However, the general concepts were still difficult for them to comprehend. This was compounded by the fact that I was asking them questions about the creation of a council that was not yet in existence. As the dialogue progressed and the youth began to ask questions, their understanding of the models greatly increased. It was at this point that they began to analyse the models on their own, and selected one that would best suit their needs. As this began to fall into place, the discussion then gradually switched to why an Aboriginal youth council is necessary, and some of the issues it should support. The youth mentioned that they enjoyed the snacks and lunch, and they enjoyed the opportunity to meet again as group. It was during the portion of the focus group that the mutual learning and exchange of information was most crucial and most noticeable. Gardner (2004) expands on this definition by suggesting that PAR is based on research, action and education.

The focus group was relaxed and informal. The youth often got up to refresh their snacks throughout. The dialogue was peppered with anecdotes, personal experiences, and inside

jokes. The small group size provided each of them with ample opportunity to voice their thoughts and opinions. Through their body language and the sentiments they expressed, it appeared that all of the youth were comfortable during the focus group. The youth asked me a number of questions regarding the camp and my research. Their questions were encouraged and appreciated. This element of mutual knowledge sharing is important as it is essential PAR. According to Stringer, by engaging in this type of dialogue, participants feel acknowledged, accepted, and respected. This in turn increases the possibility that they will contribute actively to the research (1999: 34).

At the end of the focus group, I thanked the participants for participating, and gave them my phone number in case they remembered anything they wanted to share. Lastly, I asked them if it would be acceptable for me to contact them if I had additional questions or needed clarification. All of the participants consented. Due to the small group size, the focus group concluded much earlier than anticipated. It lasted approximately two and half hours, including the lunch break.

At the focus group, one parent suggested that it was unfair to expect the youth to give up a Saturday afternoon given that they only have two days off a week. Weekends are their time to relax and spend time with friends. I thanked the parent for their input and replied that I would keep her suggestion for future focus groups. A few days later this sentiment was echoed by another parent. She suggested to me that her son didn't really have a prior commitment on the day of the focus group. He was simply not willing to spend his

Saturday afternoon in the basement of a library. This thought hadn't even crossed my mind when I was organizing the focus group session.

Overall, with only four participants, the focus group went well. The youth offered a wealth of insight, and followed all of the guidelines. While all of the youth and their parents/guardians consented to having the session taped, the youth often spoke very quietly. I am unsure if the tape recorders, which were placed on the tables in front of them, were intrusive and made them overly conscious of what they were saying, or if they were simply nervous. Dunn suggests that a tape recorder may inhibit informant responses because they serve as a reminder of the formal interview scenario. Informants may feel vulnerable because someone may recognize their voice if the tape is aired publicly in the future (Dunn 2000: 72). In an attempt to rectify this, I asked the participants if they were uncomfortable with the tape recorders, and if they would prefer if they were removed. I further reassured them that no one but me would ever have access to the tapes. The general consensus is that they were comfortable with them. Towards the end, the youth began to ask if they could hear themselves on playback, and the tape recorder became the butt of many jokes.

## **2.8 Semi-Structured Interviews**

For the purposes of this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four camp administrators, and four youth participants who were unable to attend the focus group. Interviews are purposeful conversations that are "initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on



content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation<sup>\*rB</sup> (Cannel and Kahn as quoted in Robson 1993). Semi-structured interviews are often employed when the researcher has a broad knowledge of the subject, not but enough to anticipate respondent answers (Morse and Richards 2002: 94). Further, they provide the researcher with the opportunity to discover, in detail, how a person defines a situation, what they consider important, and their feelings (Zeisel 1981: 137). Though the interviewer has pre-determined the questions, they have the freedom to modify it based on their perception of what is most appropriate within the context of the conversation. The interviewer can change the way questions are posed, provide explanations, and/or include or omit particular questions (Robson 1993: 231, Dunn 2000). Robson sums up the advantages of interviews with the following:

Face to face interviews offer the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot. Non verbal cues may give messages which help in understanding the verbal response, possibly changing or even, in extreme cases, reversing its meaning" (1993: 229).

One of the major disadvantages associated with interviews is that they are time intensive. Arrangements must be made; permission must be secured; arrangements must be confirmed; cancelled appointments must be re-scheduled, interviews must be transcribed, and; subsequent analysis must be undertaken (Robson 1993: 230).

In the case of the camp administrators, the purpose of the interviews was twofold. The first was to determine their role in relation to the AYCAC, and gauge their expectation of

potential benefits to the youth and the larger city. The second purpose was to determine to what extent they would support the development of an Aboriginal youth council. The youth interviews followed the same format as the focus group and covered the same topics.

### **Participant Interviews**

A total of four camp participant and four camp administrator interviews were hosted. The youth interviews were arranged via telephone. I called the participants and explained that even though they were unable to participate in the focus group, I was still interested in their thoughts regarding the AYCAC. I offered to come to their homes at a time that was convenient for them. Once the youth had suggested an amenable time, I verified with their parents that the arrangement was acceptable. The evening prior to the interview, I called each of the participants to confirm our appointment. I opted to conduct the interviews at the homes' of the participants as it would be most convenient for them. They would also be in a location that was comfortable and familiar. In this atmosphere, I expected that the youth would be more comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. All of the interviews were conducted after school, with the exception of one which was undertaken on a Saturday afternoon. Each interview was approximately forty five minutes in length.

As during the focus group, the consent form was explained to the participant, and they were asked to return it to me signed. They were also presented with pictures from the camp to refresh their memories. The purpose and format of the interview was explained,

and they were encouraged to ask questions. The same themes were explored in the focus groups as in the interviews. One participant in particular embraced the opportunity to ask me questions. He was curious about my past experiences working with youth, my thoughts on the AYCAC, and my overall perceptions of Winnipeg. While the youth proceeded to interview me, I left the tape recorder on. The reasons for this were twofold. It signified to the youth that his questions were as important as mine, and it eliminated any double standard regarding the use of the tape recorder. Further, it reinforced the trust relationship necessary in PAR. My reaction to his questions reaffirmed that I valued his input and was willing to answer his questions with the same sincerity that he answered mine. I was willing to engage in a mutual information and knowledge sharing relationship with him.

The youth were very receptive to the interview process. Many stated that they had never participated in an interview, nor had they been taped. They all appeared very excited at the prospect of participating in an “official” interview. I think this was also partially due to an element of glamour associated with being an interviewee. The youth were very honest about their likes and dislikes. Each interview was different as each youth had a unique set of experiences to share. During the interview process, the youth appeared much more comfortable being recorded than the youth who participated in the focus group.

It appeared that the interview respondents were much more familiar with the concept of youth councils than the focus group participants. It was much easier for them to analyse

the models, and identify potential drawbacks and advantages in each. Further, they were able to more clearly articulate their preferences. I did not encounter the same difficulties during the second half of the interview as I did during the focus group. I attributed this to the fact that the interview respondents were generally older than the focus group participants. As well, some of them were active in their school councils which further allowed them to elaborate during the second part of the interview.

All of the youth who participated in the camp were of Aboriginal descent. However, throughout the course of the focus group and interviews, it became apparent that some participants identified more strongly with Aboriginal culture than others. This is significant because it may have contributed to their appreciation, or lack thereof, of the cultural aspects of the camp. For those youth who strongly identified with their Aboriginal ancestry, the cultural aspects were not seized as a new opportunity, but rather as an event of minimal significance. For those who were not as familiar with Aboriginal traditions, the cultural aspects were viewed as a new and exciting experience that initiated them into Aboriginal culture. The degree to which they identified with Aboriginal culture may have been a contributing factor when they were asked to select a youth council model that appeals to them. Given that the Aboriginal Youth with Initiative model is rooted in the clan system and is consistent with Aboriginal teachings, I hypothesized that those who strongly identified with Aboriginal culture would be more likely to gravitate toward the AYWI model. This correlation was proven to be incorrect during the research process. Those youth with a strong sense of Aboriginal identity were just as likely to select the TYC model or Traditional Hierarchical Structure.

The initial research protocol for this thesis was to include both a focus group for all of the participants as well as one-on-one interviews. Due to the low turn-out rate at the focus group, I had the opportunity to interact with all of the participants on a one-on-one basis as they arrived, during the lunch break and following the session. During the session itself, I was able to ask the youth to expand on their responses and/or clarify their thoughts. Given the quality of the responses gleaned from the focus group, I did not think it was necessary to conduct individual interviews with the focus group participants as it appeared unlikely that new information would be discovered. Accordingly, interviews were conducted only with camp participants who did not attend the focus group.

#### **Camp Administrator Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were held with four City of Winnipeg staff responsible for the AYCAC. Two of the respondents were directly involved in the planning and implementation of the camp, while the two others were more involved in the administrative aspects of the camp. Initial contact was made with two interviewees via telephone, and two via email. All of the interviews were conducted in their respective offices throughout the workday. These interviews were particularly interesting because some focused on the inherent benefits of the AYCAC to the youth while others focused on the overall benefits to the City of Winnipeg. All of the key informants were interested in discussing the camp and willingly provided their personal insights and experiences. As with the one on one interview with the youth, each interview was approximately forty five minutes in length.

Camp administrator respondents were selected based on their level of involvement in the camp. As previously mentioned, two of the key informants were directly involved in the planning and facilitation of the camp as camp administrators. Their direct involvement with the camp was reflected in their interview responses which surrounded the benefits to and experiences of the youth. The other interviewees were instrumental in securing the resources necessary to bring the camp to fruition. Their interview responses centered more on ways the AYCAC benefited the City of Winnipeg in the long run in terms of attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

Under the umbrella of participatory action research, case studies, a literature review, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group were employed to conduct this thesis fieldwork. The case studies served to inform the overall scope and direction of the literature review. Many of the themes which emerged through the case studies were explored in detail within the literature review. The literature review served to provide a context in which to situate this thesis research. It further justified this thesis research and validated it as necessary and timely. The participant observation was absolutely crucial to the research as it allowed me the opportunity to develop a trust relationship with the participants. This facilitated the organization of the subsequent focus group and semi-structured interviews. Inherent to the success of the focus group and interviews were the photos. This allowed the participants to mentally travel back to their camp experience.

Valuable information was gleaned during both the focus group and interviews. However, it appeared that the youth were much more eager to participate in the interview process. It was evident that the youth were excited at the prospect of participating in such an activity due to the element of glamour associated with it. Further, they were pleased that someone was genuinely interested in their opinion.

Though I did experience some challenges during the second half of the focus group, they were all overcome within the focus group setting. Had these challenges surfaced during the interviews, they would have been much more difficult to overcome as there was very little exchange of ideas. These obstacles were overcome because the focus group allowed the participants to engage in a dialogue and mutual information and knowledge sharing. All of the research methods employed throughout this thesis were essential. Each of the methods had strengths and weaknesses, but their implementation contributed equally to richness of the information garnered. The next chapter provides an overview of the Toronto Youth Cabinet and Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp.

### 3 CASE STUDIES

#### 3.1 Case Study: Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC)

##### 3.1.1 Introduction

The Toronto Youth Cabinet is being used within the context of this research as an example of a best practice youth model. The TYC was a successful, influential, youth-led organization that brought the voice of youth to the forefront of municipal decision-making. It is anticipated that the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp will foster the development of an organization such as this. This would essentially bring the voice of Aboriginal youth to the front of the policy arena.

The research for this section was undertaken as part of the Urban Society Course which was offered as an elective through the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba during the spring of 2004. The theme of the course was Child Friendly Cities. Blanket ethics approval was obtained for all research undertaken during this course. This research was submitted to Professor Rae Bridgman as a final paper for the course. The paper was titled *Taking Youth Voices to the Next Level: Conversations with the Toronto Youth Cabinet*. This research was part of a larger project conducted by Professor Bridgman in the Department of City Planning. Bridgman provided a synthesis of all of the research conducted under the auspices of the Urban Society course in an article entitled "Child-Friendly Cities: Canadian Perspectives", featured in *Child, Youth and Environment* 14:2.



### 3.1.2 TYC Structure and Activities

Established in 1998, the mission of the Toronto Youth Cabinet was as follows: *“The Toronto Youth Cabinet serves the population of Toronto by empowering youth to make a difference in the lives of others. In working together with City Councillors, and through fostering partnerships among youth organizations, the cabinet is dedicated to providing youth with a forum to contribute to the development of solutions for a better tomorrow”* (City of Toronto). The cabinet represented youth between the ages of 13 and 24, and has approximately 150 general members and eight executive members. According to one member, “we’re that formal link between city hall and youth.”

The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is a youth driven committee supported by the City of Toronto. The TYC was an official Committee of Council, and was permitted to present deputations at Council meetings which provided them with direct access to City Councillors. Though the TYC is officially linked to City Hall, it is not obligated to argue in favour of City Council. Members are free to express the views that best represent the youth of Toronto. Through deputations, youth forums, conferences and showcasing youth talent, the Cabinet ensured that youth were represented. Members participated in decision-making, civic processes and policy-making on issues affecting young people. Of particular interest was the degree of control and autonomy that the young people had in setting their agenda and making their decisions. They conceived a broad mandate for themselves, which included advocacy, activism, public outreach and education.

The cabinet was an official Committee of Council, and an arm of the Child and Youth Action Committee (CYAC) which was headed by the Child Advocate for the City of

Toronto. Consequently, the TYC was funded by the City of Toronto through CYAC, and their office was located in Toronto City Hall. Within that capacity, the TYC made presentations at Council meetings either in favour of or against certain policy actions. While the TYC was officially linked to City Hall, it was not obligated to side with council. They were free to express the views that were most representative of the youth of Toronto.

The achievements of the TYC were numerous. According to their website, one of their strongest achievements was advocating to stop the closure of ten school pools. They actively lobbied councillors and brought awareness to the issue through the media (Community Information Toronto 2004). Throughout the course of 2004, the TYC launched the *Recreation Not Ammunition Budget Campaign*. Throughout this campaign, the TYC revealed that \$40 million was allocated for the creation of a police firing arms facility. They argued that this money would be better spent on the creation of four community centers in high needs areas across the City of Toronto. This resulted in a highly publicized prevention versus enforcement debate which played itself out in local media and news outlets. This was followed by the passage of the Community Safety Plan. This highlighted the need for greater funding for community projects and preventative measures to combat violence and increase youth safety (Community Information Toronto 2004).

The TYC recently changed its organizational structure from a typical, hierarchical structure with a Chair and Vice-Chair, to a consensus group. Within this new configuration, the hierarchical positions have been replaced with issue based positions. The issue based positions change every year depending on the issues the youth choose to pursue. In addition to issue based positions, there are three teams: Community Relations, Council Relations, and Media Relations

These teams are led by elected executive members. These teams are not static. General members are encouraged to join the teams, as well as any of the issue-based committees. They are free to join as many, or as few, as they desire, and can be as involved or uninvolved as they choose.

### **3.1.3 Conclusion**

It is my hope that the AYCAC participants will be stimulated by the success of the TYC, and be inspired to initiate their own youth activism organization at the municipal level. I am not suggesting that the AYCAC develop into a carbon copy of the TYC. Rather, they should assess the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and adopt from it those elements that most appeal to them. They are also free to tailor other elements to best suit their needs. The AYCAC participants should strive to learn from the experiences of the TYC, and hopefully manoeuvre around some of the pitfalls they encountered. Within these parameters, the TYC serves as a model of what is possible when youth are provided with skills and support to develop their own agenda and carry out their mandate.

## **3.2 Case Study: Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp (AYCAC)**

### **3.2.1 Introduction**

The AYCAC was a joint venture between the Seven Oaks School Division, the City of Winnipeg Planning Property and Development office, and the City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Employee Group. The camp was aimed at Aboriginal youth between the ages of 11 and 15. Its purpose was to provide the youth with opportunities to participate in interactive experiences that “would lead to opportunities for further education and future employment opportunities with the City of Winnipeg (City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Employee Support Group 2004: 2). One of the underlying reasons for this camp stems from the Employment Systems Review conducted by the Equity and Diversity Branch. This review demonstrated that Aboriginal people were not well represented within the City of Winnipeg workforce. This camp was an attempt to rectify this by exposing youth to potential employment opportunities within the City of Winnipeg. The overall reasons for hosting the AYCAC are as follows:

- To increase the number of Aboriginal employees within the City of Winnipeg
- To provide an awareness of and exposure to different job opportunities
- To provide youth with the opportunity to succeed by informing them of the educational requirements for various career options
- To reinforce the importance of staying in school, graduating, and pursuing higher education
- To increase the effective participation of Aboriginal youth in skill development, training programs, careers, counselling, and employment
- To facilitate the successful participation of Aboriginal youth in experiencing the value of team work in a positive work environment (City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Employee Support Group 2004: 4).

These aims were to be accomplished through a one week “internship” with the Planning, Property, and Development Department. Members of the Aboriginal community, including Elders, and Aboriginal outreach workers from the Seven Oaks School Division, were asked to identify potential candidates. Participants were selected via an application process based on full time school attendance, demonstrated academic achievement, and involvement in community activities. In total, the camp had eleven participants, seven males and four females. The AYCAC was modeled after an Aboriginal girls camp developed by Manitoba Hydro which has recently completed its third session.

The Manitoba Hydro camp was called *Building the Circle: Exploring Engineering, Technology, and Trades*. It was a career exploration camp that aimed to raise awareness of non-traditional occupations in the areas of engineering, technology and the trades. It was aimed at Aboriginal females between the ages of 13 and 15. Their purpose was to “support the organizations strategic goals and actions through career awareness events for Aboriginal youth through interactive summer camp experiences that will lead to opportunities for further education and employment with Manitoba Hydro” (Manitoba Hydro 2003).

*Building the Circle* was organized in phases based on the Aboriginal medicine wheel. Each phase built on the skills and experiences gained in the previous phase. Each year, the participants were asked to return and participate in the next phase. By year four, Manitoba Hydro planned to run four camps simultaneously each summer. Built into the camp was a mentoring component whereby phase four participants were asked to lead

and coach other participants through the other phases. Manitoba Hydro also provided on-going academic assistance throughout the school year in the areas of math and science through a tutoring program. They also provided support during the high school to university transition (Manitoba Hydro 2003). Three Check Point Gatherings have been hosted each year to maintain the relationship between the youth, program staff and parents. Participants who have completed all four phases are offered part-time employment with Manitoba Hydro.

While the Manitoba Hydro project appears to be an innovative example of how capacity could be fostered in Aboriginal youth, it was not explored in detail in this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the focus of this paper is on Aboriginal youth participation in civic and planning processes. This particular case study does not focus on these areas. Second, this example is a private sector initiative, and this thesis explores public sector initiatives. Third, the Manitoba Hydro project is aimed strictly at females. The selected case studies are co-ed and aimed to increase participation capacity among both males and females.

### **3.2.2 Why Aboriginal Youth?**

Some may question why the City of Winnipeg targeted only Aboriginal youth, and not all youth, minority youth, or all youth in general. The answer to this lies in two documents, *Plan Winnipeg 2020* and the *First Steps: Municipal Aboriginal Pathways*, both produced by the City of Winnipeg. These policy documents provide principles to guide the social and physical development of the City of Winnipeg over the next few years. These policy

documents directly address the needs of the urban Aboriginal population, and provide overarching policy directives which permit endeavours such as the AYCAC. According to *Plan Winnipeg 2020*, policy plate 2A-03 states that:

The City shall promote self-reliant Aboriginal communities by:

- i. supporting the creation of links between The City of Winnipeg and Aboriginal communities to ensure appropriateness of services and to increase Aboriginal participation in City affairs;
- ii. identifying and pursuing joint ventures between the City and the private sector or non-governmental organizations that increase or enhance job opportunities and economic development for Aboriginal people in Winnipeg; and
- iii. increasing awareness among Winnipeggers and visitors about the richness of the city's Aboriginal cultural communities.

The *First Step Municipal Aboriginal Pathways* further states that:

**Employment:** The City of Winnipeg will undertake initiatives to enhance the participation of Aboriginal people in both the civic and community workforce.

**Outreach and Education:** The City of Winnipeg will develop outreach and education initiatives that promote cross-cultural understanding and improve access to information about civic services (City of Winnipeg 2004: 5).

An interview respondent elaborated on the link between the policy documents and the execution of the AYCAC:

Plan Winnipeg 2020 is a document that talks about the strategic directions of the city...we want to be doing things that sell the City of Winnipeg to Aboriginal people as a good place and opportunity for jobs. Specifically, the camp was a strategic action that has pointed in that direction...look at policy plate 2A-03. We want to take

action to do that. Specifically the links we are establishing is with the youth in the Aboriginal community.

Another interview respondent suggested that “whatever we as a city can do to connect with Aboriginal youth makes total sense. And because we have this (policy document), we don’t have to apologize to anybody as to why we are working with Aboriginal youth, and why we’re not doing stuff, stuff for all youth”

It is clear from the evidence presented above that the City of Winnipeg has been actively working toward improving opportunities for the urban Aboriginal population. It would be difficult for the general municipal bureaucracy to undertake Aboriginal specific programs. However, by adopting the policies outlined above, the city is clearly stating their expectations to the administration. Given that activities such as the AYCAC are supported by policy intrinsically means that these events will be hosted on an on-going basis. Due to this policy backing, it would be difficult to cancel these programs. As one interview respondent suggested, “part of our strategic initiative is attraction and retention of Aboriginals...it’s a good thing to do. Fundamentally, it’s the right thing to do...the reason we justify it as expenditure is because there is potential return for the City of Winnipeg.”

### **3.2.3 AYCAC Camp Structure and Activities**

The AYCAC was held at the City of Winnipeg Planning and Property Development offices. Overall, there were eleven participants between the ages of 11 and 13, who ranged from grade 7 to grade 9. All attended schools in the Seven Oaks School Division.



Throughout the camp, lunch, snacks and transportation were provided for the participants each day. During the camp, the youth were exposed to a variety of planning functions, including mapping, research, critical analysis and design. Further, a number of Aboriginal cultural events were scheduled as part of the activities. The participants were accompanied by three guardians during the camp, an employee from the Planning, Property and Development office, a city outreach worker, and a Seven Oaks School District Representative. In addition to providing supervision, the adults were also required to act as advisors and mentors to the youth during the camp and throughout the year at follow-up events. The following paragraphs outline the planning and cultural aspects of the camp, as well as participant thoughts regarding these activities.

### **Planning-Oriented Activities**

On Day one, the youth were introduced to *Sim City*, a computer based planning simulation game. From all accounts, this activity was successful. It provided the youth with a hands-on city planning opportunity. Most of the participants said they learned the most about planning from *Sim City* because it gave them a context in which they could understand and apply planning principles. These sentiments are expressed in the following excerpt:

Like you can't get bored with it cause there's always something going around. And the games like planned to have stuff go wrong, so then you're like always fixing something, or your money is running out so you have to build more stuff and so it's like very hard to control, like become very good at it. It takes time and effort and you have to know how to plan stuff out good and stuff.

Another youth suggested that,

Sim City is like how it kind of comes together, like you have to have enough money for people to like firefighters, and police and make roads for different ways, so it's not always like a traffic jam, and make more than one thing all over the city.

It is evident from these responses that the youth learned about municipal budgeting, multiple uses, and growth management through *Sim City*.

On Day two, the youth were driven to City Hall, where they met the Deputy Mayor and the Chair of the Equity Committee. They were then taken on a guided tour of City Hall and the Administrative Buildings. It was evident that by far, the most interesting and enjoyable part of the visit was the Council Chambers. The participants were permitted to sit in the chairs of their city councillor and many opted to have their photograph taken. Of particular interest was the chair of the Speaker, which was ornately decorated. In the Council Chambers, the adult supervisors seized the opportunity to engage the youth in informal discussions surrounding voting, city councillors, and decision-making at the municipal level. In this instance, it was evident that the youth were learning from this experience. Physically being in Council Chambers made it easier for the youth to make the connections between their local councillor, City Hall and themselves as constituents. Through this experience, the youth were able to clearly connect the quasi-abstract concept of local governance to themselves and their neighbourhood. Further, they gained a better understanding of the role of city councillors within the wider maze of local governance. As one youth put it, "I learned lots about city hall and all the people who work there, and where the meeting rooms and stuff are, so that was pretty cool." Another youth suggested that prior to the visit with the AYCAC, "I never even knew where it

was.” An interview respondent best summed up the City Hall visit, “the kids didn’t even know much about City Hall when they came here. For them to realize what this is about, what City Hall is, that was really important.”

In Old Market Square, a historic district in downtown Winnipeg, the youth were given a brief orientation of the history of Winnipeg. They were escorted on a walking tour of the Exchange District, another historic site, by employees of the Heritage Branch, which culminated in a scavenger hunt. Throughout this exercise, which involved a substantial amount of walking, the youth at times appeared distracted and uninterested. However, they were much more engaged during the scavenger hunt portion, perhaps egged on by an element of friendly competition. Prizes were awarded to the team with the most correct answers. Given the demeanour of the youth during the tour and hunt, the staff was pleasantly surprised at the amount of information the youth retained and shared with each other.

Day three began with a leisurely walk from the Planning Department to West Broadway, a diverse revitalization site. For many of the youth, this was their first time along the Riverwalk. As such, it was a new experience for them. While the walk was quite long, we stopped along the way to observe the Louis Riel statue. The importance of Riel in Aboriginal history was explained to them and they took some photographs.

A little farther down the Riverwalk, we arrived at the West Broadway neighbourhood. A camp administrator attempted to conduct a quick walking tour of the area, though

through my observations I determined that the tour was not well received by the youth.

One interview respondent confirmed my observation. She commented,

Walking in the West Broadway thing, that was wow, the boringest thing I have ever done. Just walking, I don't mind when we're looking at something, like the Exchange District, but like old buildings are nice and everything, but it was just not really fun. It was boring.

Though the respondent did not clearly articulate exactly what it was that she did not like, it is evident that nothing caught her attention during this particular exercise.

The next destination on the agenda was Art City, a local community arts center. The youth were given a mini lesson on design principles and neighbourhood analysis tools. Again, the youth were not very receptive to the lesson. It appeared that the information was not presented in an engaging and entertaining manner, and many of the participants were simply not interested in the subject matter. According to one youth, "yeah, I didn't like that, I found that so boring. I don't know, it just wasn't fun." Another said, "I didn't really like that place. I just wasn't interested in it I guess." The participants were broken into groups and sent into the neighbourhood to conduct a neighbourhood analysis. It is unclear how many groups actually completed the task at hand. At the very least, they enjoyed the opportunity to freely roam around the area. On their return, the group was given a quick photography lesson. Armed with disposable cameras, they were sent back into the community to take photos of things they felt best represented West Broadway. A few of the participants did embrace the activity wholeheartedly and were quite excited about neighbourhood details they had observed and photographed.

On day four, the youth enjoyed a ride down the Assiniboine River on the River Boat. The youth genuinely enjoyed the tour, and asked numerous questions during the trip. This was the most animated discussion event during both the focus group and interviews. This was evident through the following responses, "I noticed a building that I never saw before...it was a building that I had never seen before and it was a really nice looking building." Another youth said, "the best part about it was being able to sit on top of the boat, or being able to sit outside in front of the boat...but there is so much junk and garbage in the river." The river boat cruise provided the youth with a new perspective from which to view the city. It also allowed them to make some observations about the environmental state of the river.

### **Culturally Oriented Activities**

Each morning began with a traditional smudge ceremony and Aboriginal teaching led by an Elder. The youth appeared semi-interested in the discussion, and a few asked questions. One youth commented that the smudge "felt good, felt it woke you up and stuff for the morning, brought us together early." Another said, "I like that every morning we went to go have a circle and smudge before we did everything. It made me feel clean." This was hosted in a park very near to the camp. All of the youth and camp chaperones participated. An invitation to participate was also extended to all employees of the Planning Property and Development Department, and some accepted the invitation. Every afternoon, the day concluded with a sharing circle in which the participants were invited to share their thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes concerning the days' activities. It became evident through the focus group and interviews that the daily smudge and

sharing circle were essential to the success of the camp. As one respondent said, “if you remove that [the cultural aspects], then it would be another camp, another day camp. But this brings our culture into it.” This element of culture provided a sense of group cohesion and personal identity. In summary, one youth stated, “I think that’s what like brought everybody together, and calmed us down, and brought us like into a serious way instead of always joking around...it made me feel happy to be Aboriginal.”

On day three, the youth walked to the Forks to hear stories recounted by an Aboriginal storyteller. The Forks is a traditional meeting place for Aboriginal peoples and is located at the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine rivers. It appeared that most of the participants were not particularly interested in the storytelling activity. All comments made in relation to this event were negative. Some youth suggested that they were anticipating the river boat cruise and unable to pay attention, while others suggested they were simply “just not into it because it was boring.”

### **Fun Stuff!**

On the first day, participants were provided with a disposable camera to take pictures of whatever they desired. The pictures were developed and later used to create collages which documented their week. This activity was a tremendous success, and the cameras allowed the participants to maintain a photo journal of their experiences. Prior to the sharing circle each day, the participants were given the opportunity to record their thoughts in journals which they were allowed to keep. The journals were confidential – the youth were free to write as much or as little as they wanted. It appeared that the youth

enjoyed this activity, but during the fieldwork, it became obvious that my assumption was greatly misguided. One youth's perspective summed up the comments of the others quite well, "they were like write something in your journal so I put 'write something in your journal'. So I was like look, I wrote something."

En route to another activity, the group briefly stopped by Thunderbird House. Graham and Peters describe Thunderbird House as "a cultural and spiritual facility...building bridges between Aboriginal people and those from other cultures" (2002:11). The group stopped briefly to discuss the cultural centre, but they did not enter. This was disappointing as it would have been an excellent opportunity to strengthen the Aboriginal identity among the participants. When asked what they would change about the camp, one youth suggested a visit to Thunderbird House, stating that, "it's good, good learning stuff." During the brief stop, one youth volunteered to explain the symbolism behind the construction and activities of Thunderbird House. Thunderbird House is an excellent example of the meshing of planning, architecture and culture. By choosing not to include Thunderbird House in their activities, the camp administrators missed a great opportunity to reinforce Aboriginal identity and pride among the youth as well as demonstrate the positive effects of good planning on local communities.

The camp concluded with a "fun-day" at a City-owned golf course. Each participant was allowed to bring two guests. At the golf course, the collages the youth made depicting their camp experiences were put on display for all to view. This provided the guests with the opportunity to experience the camp through the eyes of the youth. The day included a

variety of recreational activities, lunch and an awards ceremony. During the ceremony, participants were presented with participation certificates, as well as \$150 scholarships intended to encourage them to complete high school and pursue a post-secondary education. The scholarship was a shock to all of the participants. This sentiment was best summarized by the following comment, "that surprised us all."

#### **3.2.4 Conclusion**

The City of Winnipeg Aboriginal Youth Awareness Camp is a step in the right direction with regards to providing youth with positive role models, exposure to employment options and local governance. It is also a unique way of reinforcing their cultural identity by integrating it into a city led planning initiative. By all accounts, the youth found it to be an enjoyable and educational experience. All of the youth agreed that they would participate in a similar endeavour again in the future. All of these experiences will serve to improve the participation capacity of Aboriginal youth. It will also strengthen their community, and the wider community as a whole. As well, the commitment the City of Winnipeg is making to attract and retain Aboriginal employees will serve to strengthen their relationship with the urban Aboriginal population.

Based on feedback received from the participants and staff involved in the camp, the City of Winnipeg has recently approved an annual Aboriginal Scholarship/Community Service Awards Program. Based on the parameters of the proposed program, \$100 scholarships will be awarded at the end of the school year to one Aboriginal student in each of grades 6, 7 and 8 who have successfully completed the school year. Scholarships



valued at \$250 will be awarded to one Aboriginal student in each of grades 10 and 11 who have also successfully completed the school year. As well, they must demonstrate academic achievement and community leadership. An additional scholarship worth \$1000 will be awarded to a student entering their first year of a post secondary education at a recognized university or community college. The scholarship will be renewable for those students who continue to meet the prescribed criteria.

Two full time student summer placements will also be dedicated to students who have been recognized through the scholarship/community service awards program. The project is scheduled to run for a minimum of seven years, during which time 49 students will be enrolled in the program, of which 14 will obtain full-time summer work placements. This program is a positive display of support on the part of the City of Winnipeg. It demonstrates a financial commitment to assist urban Aboriginal youth in pursuing higher education and accessing better employment opportunities. The next chapter focuses on the major themes surrounding youth participation in planning and civic processes as discussed within the existing body of literature.

## 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the current literature regarding youth and participation in planning and civic processes. According to Denscombe, the purpose of a literature review is to provide a context for a given research project. Within this thesis research, particular attention is paid to Aboriginal youth. Parallels and discrepancies between them and their non-Aboriginal counterparts are examined. The first section of this literature review explores and defines the notions of youth, participation, and urban Aboriginal. This is necessary to ensure that there is no confusion regarding the meanings of the various terms used within this thesis.

The next section is an examination of the demographics and socio-economic characteristics of the municipal urban Aboriginal population as compared to those at the provincial and national levels. This provides a social context from which to understand the urban Aboriginal youth population. Given that the focus of this thesis is youth participation, the third section focuses on its importance. In particular, the benefits to youth, planners and the wider society are highlighted. Levels of participation are also examined. This provides some guidelines which assist to determine whether youth participation is tokenistic or legitimate. Within this thesis, legitimate youth participation is crucial to the success of any youth endeavour.

While youth participation is essential to sound planning, there are a number of barriers to their inclusion. This section highlights some barriers to legitimate youth participation as

identified in the literature. The following section discusses the importance of capacity building among youth. It is included mainly because it is stated repeatedly in the literature that the capacity among Aboriginal youth must be increased. This will ensure that they are equipped with the skills necessary to represent themselves. The final section in this chapter addresses the topic of youth councils. Given that this research is suggesting the formation of a youth council, it is crucial that I situate it within a theoretical framework. The AYCAC participants were introduced to the three youth council models that are described in this section during the research fieldwork. This section further provides an overview of the information with which they were provided.

## **4.2 Definitions**

### **4.2.1 Youth**

Youth has generally been considered a time of “between-ness” during which young people have been seen as caught between childhood and adulthood. During childhood, they have not been held accountable for their actions. During adulthood, they are considered to be responsible for their actions and behaviour. During this stage, youth are “neither as dependant as children nor do they enjoy the rights and responsibilities of adults” (Beauvais, McKay, Seddon 2001: 9). As such, participation may then be defined as a matter of responsibility (Beauvais, McKay, Seddon 2001: 4). Valentine, Skelton, and Chambers suggest that due to the liminal positioning of youth, the only boundaries that define youth are those of exclusion (1998:9). A further definition comes from the Laidlaw Foundation, which defines youth as a “stage of life broadly defined between the ages of 12 to 29, with an emphasis ...on the under 20 group” (Wright 16). Statistics

Canada defines youth as those between the ages of 15 to 24 years of age. It appears that the City of Winnipeg does not have a strict age range to delineate youth. The Community Services Department, from a recreation-oriented perspective, defines youth as those between the ages of 12 and 17. However, youth between the ages of 13 and 18 can access the city's Youth Action Centres, and some programs are geared towards pre-teens who are between the ages of 10 and 14.

Many Aboriginal organizations also have their own age categories. The National Association of Friendship Centres, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Métis National Council define youth as those between the ages of 15 to 24. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami defines youth as those between the ages of 13 and 29. Finally, The Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation define youth as those between the ages of 18 and 24 (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 6).

According to Chalifoux and Johnson, government programs aimed at youth often use the age range provided by Statistics Canada, which is 15 to 24. This can be problematic as it may compromise the ability of youth to access essential services due to age restrictions and limitations. This particular definition of youth has created a programming gap for those who are in between the ages of 13 and 15, and leaves them in a precarious position (2003: 6). Youth in this age range, and organizations which service them, may also encounter difficulties accessing government funds. This holds true for many of the Aboriginal groups listed above. Youth may not have the opportunity to participate in their programs because they fall into the 13-15 age groups. For the purposes of this research,

youth will be defined as those young people who fall between the ages of 11 and 24 as it best fits the ages of the youth involved in the case studies that were previously described. As well, it falls in line with the age categories of youth previously suggested.

Inherently missing from the literature is a description of the roles and responsibilities of youth from an Aboriginal perspective. All the information presented is based on non-Aboriginal perceptions of youth. As such, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the literature regarding youth is applicable to the Aboriginal youth experience.

Behaviours and attitudes that may be regarded as unacceptable in non-Aboriginal circles may be perceived in a positive light within Aboriginal culture. For example, Aboriginal youth are encouraged to question and reflect on their values and beliefs. This in turn provides an avenue for discussion between Elders and youth. It further provides the community at large with an opportunity to reinforce the origins of their beliefs and values. In some non-Aboriginal communities, the questioning of one's values may be perceived as a challenge to socially accepted beliefs and behaviours. These discrepancies should be highlighted to demonstrate the cultural variations between Aboriginal youth and their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

#### **4.2.2 Participation**

There are numerous ways to define participation. While participation is often referred to by a series of different words, the basic implications are the same. Wright defines 'engagement' as "the state of being involved at some point along a continuum. Engagement implies some form of dialogue: youth to someone; someone to youth" (16).

While dialogue is essential to participation, listening to youth does not equate with actively listening to youth and seriously considering their ideas and suggestions.

Mullahey, Susskind and Checkoway define planning as “the involvement of people in the decisions that influence their lives” (1999: 3). Within this definition, they make the distinction between token participation and participation in which people have influence and can affect change (1999:3). Based on this distinction, they suggest that influential youth participation occurs when actions aim to intervene in existing conditions; involvement is part of the public dialogue and decision-making, and; engagement is influential and changes are significant (1999:4). This suggested definition is more acceptable than that of Wright because it differentiates between tokenistic and legitimate participation. Often youth are but token participants in planning processes. Their voices are not actively heard, and their suggestions are not seriously considered. It is essential to increase legitimate avenues for youth involvement in decision-making processes.

Driskell suggests that participation is about local communities being involved in the decisions which affect them, given that they are most affected by the decisions being made. It is a “fundamental right of citizenship...the means by which a democracy is built and...a standard against which democracies should be measured” (2002: 32).

Participation, from this perspective is based on the following beliefs:

- a. Development must, first and foremost, be in the interest of local residents, including young people;
- b. People who live in the area being planned have the most intimate knowledge of the area and its issues (and young people have knowledge and perspectives that are different from those of adults); and

- c. The people who will be most affected by decisions have the most at stake and therefore have the right to participate in making those decisions (Driskell 2002: 32).

Driskell's definition is particularly important as it clearly states that the perspective of youth often differ from that of adults. Though it is widely believed that adults know best and can adequately represent the voice of youth, it is often untrue. Youth have unique needs, and are acutely aware of, and able to clearly articulate, them. They do not always require adults to advocate on their behalf when they are willing and able to advocate on their own behalf.

Beauvais, McKay and Seddon's notion of youth "citizenship" equates to youth participation, and revolves around youth "identifying with and feeling a sense of belonging to one's community....which logically translates into political participation at all levels of government" (2001: viii). Their notion of citizenship revolves around three "analytical branches":

1. Rights and responsibilities;
2. Access to these rights and responsibilities; and
3. Feelings of belonging, and identity.

They argue that the extent to which people have these dimensions establishes a certain citizenship status. However youth, due to age and/or social and/or economic status are generally excluded from full citizenship. Beyond theoretical rights, full citizenship means:

actively seeking to engage so as to realize one's rights, exercise one's responsibilities, have access to political institutions, be empowered and share a sense of belonging to the community – national as well as local. Being a full

citizen means having the resources and opportunity to participate in the different areas of life” (2001: 2).

Underlying full citizenship is the notion of independence and equality. Independence is essential to all three dimensions. Equality is important because it is a commonly held belief that “there is no real citizenship without the notion of equality among citizens” (2001: 3). The fundamental principle underlying the necessity for youth participation is simply that children and youth are entitled to the right to be involved in the processes which shape their communities presently, and in the future. This definition of participation acknowledges that youth, as citizens of a given community, have an inherent right to participate in all matters which affect their life. Further, society has an obligation to provide them with these opportunities if they are unable to provide them for themselves. Both youth and adults are part of a wider citizenry, and as such, they should be able to participate equally in the processes that shape their environments, and ultimately influence their lives.

For the purposes of this thesis, youth participation will be defined as the inclusion of youth in local level decision-making, wherein youth are perceived as equal decision-making partners; their ideas are seriously considered; they are engaged throughout the entire decision-making process, and their input results in identifiable change. This definition was selected because it echoes the major themes in the definitions previously suggested. Further, if these principles are adhered to faithfully, it will result in legitimate youth input. This will lead to measurable outcomes, and provide the youth with a sense of empowerment and ownership over the process.



Lacking from this discussion surrounding youth participation is an Aboriginal perspective. As with the discussion surrounding the roles and responsibility of youth, there is very little about how Aboriginal youth perceive participation. Due to social and cultural variations, their definition of participation may embrace or reject the various elements previously addressed. In order for engagement methods to be increasingly inclusive, it is essential that the perspective of Aboriginal youth be represented within the literature. This gap in the literature will be addressed subsequently in this thesis when the AYCAC participants are asked to define participation. Their responses are then compared to those found in the literature, and the similarities and discrepancies are highlighted. This information is used to formulate a definition of participation based on the input of Aboriginal youth.

#### **4.2.3 Urban Aboriginal**

As the focus of this thesis is on Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg, it is essential to specifically define the population that falls into this category. The term 'urban Aboriginal youth' is used to distinguish North American Indian, Métis, Inuit and non-status youth living in urban areas from those who reside on reserve, and in remote and rural communities. According to Chalifoux and Johnson, urban Aboriginal youth can be separated into four distinct categories, each with their own particular needs:

1. Aboriginal youth born into an urban environment
2. Aboriginal youth who temporarily live in an urban environment for educational, occupational, judicial, or health reasons, and who are adjusting to an urban setting
3. Aboriginal youth introduced and/or re-introduced to an urban environment after relocating from their home community, either for the first time or after a period of time back in their home community

4. Youth re-entering an urban environment after a period of incarceration, rehabilitation or having lived “off the land” for an extended period (2003:6).

The youth who participated in the AYCAC fall into categories 1 and 3. For the purposes of this research, unless otherwise specified, urban Aboriginal youth will refer to Aboriginal youth currently residing in an urban area, regardless of reason and length of stay.

### **4.3 Aboriginal Youth**

#### **4.3.1 Population Demographics**

Statistics Canada defines Aboriginal people as those who identify themselves as a member of one or more of the following groups: North American Indian, Métis or Inuit. According to the 2001 census, over 1.3 million people, 4.4% of Canada’s total population, reported some Aboriginal ancestry. Within the province of Manitoba 150, 040 people claimed Aboriginal ancestry, which is an increase of 21, 360 from the 1996 census (Statistics Canada 2001). This represents a total of 13.6% of the Manitoba population.

The Aboriginal population in Canada is becoming increasingly urban. Many Aboriginal youth are drawn to urban areas mainly due to the employment opportunities they afford (Johnson and Chalifoux 2003). Nearly half (49%) of the Aboriginal population currently resides in cities. One quarter of Aboriginal people live in ten Canadian cities (in descending order of Aboriginal population: Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Saskatoon, Regina, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal and Victoria). This trend parallels a decline of Aboriginal people who live on reserves and settlements from 33%

to 31% between 2001 and 1996 (Statistics Canada 2003). Alternately, Graham and Peters argue that the rural to urban migration does not result in reserve population depletion. Rather, there is a "circulation" between urban areas and reserves/rural areas (2002: 13). In particular, 56,000 Aboriginal people reside in Winnipeg, which comprises 8% of the city's overall population. This amounts to more than one third of the provincial population claiming Aboriginal ancestry. It is estimated that the Winnipeg Aboriginal population is increasing by 2000 people a year (Johnson and Chalifoux 2003: 10). The overall Winnipeg Aboriginal population is expected to increase by 69.4% by the year 2016 (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics 1997). Based on this, the Winnipeg Aboriginal population in 2016 will be an estimated 94,864 people strong, or approximately two thirds of all Aboriginals living in Manitoba.

By 2003, the Aboriginal population in Canada was much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. The median age of the Aboriginal population was 24.7 compared to the median Canadian population age of 37.7 years of age (Statistics Canada 2003). In Manitoba, the median age of the Aboriginal population was even younger, at 20.4 years old. Approximately half of the Aboriginal population in Canada fell into one of three categories: young adults, youth or children. (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 12). In 2001, there were 14,400 Aboriginal youth living in Manitoba. Of those in the 15 to 19 age group 4,940 resided in Winnipeg. As well 4,670 Aboriginal young people between the ages of 20 and 24 lived in Winnipeg (Statistics Canada 2001). By the year 2016, Aboriginal people under the age of 20 are projected to account for 36.6% of the total Aboriginal population in Manitoba (Manitoba Bureau of Statistics 1997). Accordingly

they represent a large part of the municipal population and are predicted to represent a large part of the future work force.

Based on these statistics, the urban Aboriginal population, and the urban Aboriginal youth population in particular, is set to comprise an even greater proportion of the Winnipeg population in the near future. As such, they will become a large political group, a large percentage of the workforce, and a large social contingent. They must therefore be provided with the opportunities that will strengthen their community and allow them to become more actively and effectively involved in the decisions that affect them.

#### **4.3.2 Socio – Economic Characteristics**

Aboriginal youth in the prairie cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg seem to face the greatest challenges of poverty, violence, racism, and cultural and social alienation. Unfortunately, Aboriginal people fare significantly worse on nearly every social and economic indicator. These demographic indicators suggest that given the sizeable Aboriginal population in western cities, the well-being of Aboriginal people in cities has a direct impact on the well-being of the cities themselves, most especially in western Canada. (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 15). For additional socio-economic data regarding Aboriginal youth, refer to Appendix 1.

Chalifoux and Johnson write that the issues facing Aboriginal youth are “rooted in a history of colonization, dislocation from their traditional territories, communities and cultural traditions, and the inter-generational impacts of the residential school system”

(2003:2). According to Newhouse, Canadian perceptions of Aboriginal people are rooted in the experiences of French and English colonizers (2005), and have focused almost exclusively on the “Indian problem” (Kenny 2004: 3). In the academic literature, Aboriginal peoples are generally referred to in one of three ways:

1. As a prey to victimhood;
2. As part of the “Indian Problem” or;
3. As a burden on society.

Essentially, Aboriginal development has come to be seen through the lens of “problem and deficiency” (Newhouse 2005). In order to change this, there is a need for increased information which will permit Aboriginal people as well as researchers to respond to these stereotypes and “conceptualise Aboriginal history not as one of victimhood but one of contribution” (Newhouse 2005). This will highlight the contributions of Aboriginal people to the development of Canada. Further, it will change the perception of Canadians towards Aboriginal peoples by distancing them from the confines of victimhood and burdenhood. Newhouse expands on this by suggesting that while poverty and economic marginalization are still prevalent, it is essential to bring more positive information to the table because the Canadian public will not “listen to victimhood forever” (Newhouse 2005). To resolve these issues will require the undoing of years of systematic abuse and manipulation. This undoing must be a local, provincial and national priority. This is essential to demonstrate to the Aboriginal population that they are a necessary, valued segment of the Canadian population.

It is imperative to note that much of the literature regarding Aboriginal people has been written by non-Aboriginal researchers. Further, much of the literature focuses on the socio-economic demographics of and challenges encountered by Aboriginal people. This has resulted in the imposition of mainstream values on Aboriginal populations. In comparison, relatively little has been written regarding the positive strides that are being made by urban Aboriginal communities across Canada on a daily basis. All of challenges encountered by Aboriginals are also common in other communities. Yet, our perceptions of those communities are not solely shaped by negative statistics. Canadians must look beyond the statistics to truly embrace the contribution of Aboriginal people to Canada.

All of the challenges encountered by Aboriginal communities are compounded by the existence of conscious and subconscious racism and discrimination. It is stated repeatedly in the literature that those Aboriginal youth who are able to maintain some element of their identity and culture possess higher levels of self-esteem. Accordingly, they are able to better adjust psychologically than those who remain distanced from their heritage (Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon 2001, Chalifoux and Johnson 2003, Longfield and Godfrey 2003). Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon suggest that Aboriginal youth encounter significant struggles around identity. These identity issues are further compounded by conflicts that emerge between their values and those of the wider society. This issue is especially acute for those who migrate from the reserve setting to urban areas. Under these conditions, it is difficult to maintain their identity and cultural values as a racial and cultural minority. The projection of an "inferior self-image" has been one of the most powerful and detrimental weapons of the colonizers on the colonized. "The

human costs of this assault on the personal dignity of other human beings we reckon to be inestimable. It has carried enormous social costs and continues to do so today”

(Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 2).

Regardless of the focus of Aboriginal literature, it is evident that the Aboriginal community is developing into a strong social, political and economic force. They are no longer willing to have their futures dictated for them. They want to create their own futures, in ways that are culturally appropriate. With their increased presence in urban areas, the Aboriginal population is increasingly becoming politically aware, active, and involved (Words That Matter Inc. 2000: 16). According to Newhouse:

Everywhere we can see evidence of Aboriginal people beginning to govern themselves ... communities are making agreements with community colleges and universities for higher levels of education...some languages (Ojibway, Cree, Innuktutut) are becoming the language of work; there are at last count some 14,000 [Aboriginal] businesses, 40,000 students in colleges and universities.

All of this is occurring quietly and out of sight of most of us. Most of us only see the continuing poverty, social dysfunction, and political protests. This is what the media presents to us. I won't deny there is much poverty, violence at times, and political frustration and protest. One simply cannot ignore these. I do however want to for the time being because they mask some of the more fundamental changes occurring (2001: 78).

Fournier and Crey build on this with the following excerpt which focuses on the contribution and potential of Aboriginal youth:

Today a strong young Aboriginal population is struggling to emerge from the dark colonial days into the bright hope of autonomy and self determination... Aboriginal young people are making themselves heard: in schools and

universities, in Native politics, at protests over education cutbacks, at community marches to combat child abuse, and in healing circles and sobriety treatment centres...Although Aboriginal youth still face immense challenges, these are generations of young people ready to become politically astute future leaders and contributing members of autonomous nations” (2000: 303)

It is noted repeatedly in the literature that Aboriginal youth want to be meaningfully engaged with, and to participate in the debate about their future, and potential solutions. Given their current and future position as a major presence in urban areas, it is critical that youth have a voice and sense of involvement and belonging in matters that affect them (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003, Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples 1997, NAFC and Law Commission of Canada 1999). To achieve this, Aboriginal youth must be active partners in the political process. These young people need legitimate opportunities to participate in the political development of their communities at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. A perceived lack of civic responsibility and sense of belonging may undermine a young person’s desire to undertake social responsibilities. Therefore, society as a whole has a responsibility to ensure that their participation is encouraged, valued and acted upon.

Distinctly lacking from most of the literature regarding Aboriginal people is their contribution to the richness of the Canadian multicultural fabric. The Aboriginal contribution to the Canadian arts and music scenes are now widely recognized. They have successfully maintained their traditional and are now exploring more contemporary, forms of expression. Further, they have developed numerous social, arts, political and cultural institutions which serve their community as well as the wider society. The



Canadian Aboriginal population has left distinct marks on the Canadian landscape. These must be embraced and celebrated by the larger Canadian population in order for the lens through which they perceive Aboriginal people to evolve. Aboriginal communities are active, vital and integral parts of the Canadian mosaic, and they must be accepted and treated accordingly. Alfred offers the following words in favour of celebrating strength, survival and resilience:

Indigenous peoples have every right to celebrate their continued existence, and to draw strength from the fact that their nations live on despite the terrible losses of the past 500 years. Today's challenges must be shouldered proudly because it is no less than the sacred heritage passed on by generations of ancestors who sacrificed and died to preserve the notion of their being. For all the chaos and pain brought by colonization, and all the self-inflicted wounds, the first step in getting beyond the present crisis must be to celebrate the inherent strength that has allowed indigenous people to resist extinction. That strength must then be turned to a different purpose, because beyond mere survival lies a demanding future that will depend on indigenous people's confidences, pride, and skill in making their right of self-determination real (1999:33).

This excerpt provides an acceptable lens through which the contributions of Aboriginal populations should be perceived and acknowledged by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. By understanding and acknowledging the history and struggles of the Aboriginal population, Canadians can begin to appreciate their strength and resilience, and how that translates into their everyday existence.

#### **4.4 Importance of Youth Participation**

This section establishes the importance of youth participation. It outlines benefits to the youth, as well as the wider society. This section is essential as it establishes the context

for youth participation. Nationally and internationally, there is growing interest in facilitating meaningful youth participation in decision-making. This may be perceived as an attempt to tackle the roots of age-based discrimination and inequality (Matthews 2003: 264). According to Forsyth, children and youth are excluded from legitimate participation in civic processes on multiple levels, and are perceived as incapable of participation (2002: 5). Consequently, they are deemed to be well represented by adults. Matthews builds on this by suggesting that adult perceptions of the child are based on the notion of a child “as a fixed material object with little or no social status” (2003: 265). From this perspective, children are invisible, and childhood serves as a transitional phase completed only when children enter adulthood (2003: 265). Simpson suggests that this “invisibility” arises from a combination of factors. They are mainly about who has an interest in planning matters, historical conceptualizations of the child, and specific laws which regulate the use of urban space by children (1997: 917).

Forsyth writes that children and youth are not acknowledged as a core constituency for participation, and accordingly, participation is not tailored toward their interest and needs (2002:5). Yet, Matthews argues, there appears to be no real obstacle to children actively participating in decision-making (2003: 265). The perception of children and youth which is adopted by organizations is of the utmost importance because it determines whether they will be viewed as ‘future’ citizens or current citizens. Future citizens are not yet capable of full participation, whereas current citizens are capable of actively participating in matters which affect them and their communities. Unfortunately, the prevailing view is that of children and youth as future citizens, thus effectively excluding their involvement

in most aspects of planning and civic processes (Simpson 1997: 908). While these explanations focus on children, they can be safely expanded to include youth as well.

The adoption of the *International Convention on Children's Rights* by the U.N. in 1989 represents one attempt to address those issues outlined above. This report "accepted and formalized a new social sensitivity towards the needs of childhood" (Alparone and Rissotto 2001:421). In 1995, the UN produced and adopted the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention read as follows:

"[Countries] shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Article 12)

"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of the child's choice" (Article 13) (United Nations 1989).

According to Alparone and Rissotto, this adoption implies that children must now be considered as a social category, as opposed to merely a transitional phase to adulthood. Inherent to this is a need for "analysis and interpretation of the relationships between the structure of life in society and the roles that the child plays in it as a producer of meanings and culture" (2001:422).

Though ratified by every country in the world, except Somalia and the United States (United Nations 1989), it is questionable whether the *UN Convention of the Rights of the*

*Child* has served to improve the quality of life for children internationally. Freeman suggests that the plight of children world-wide has not improved, but rather worsened since its ratification. He argues that while there is heightened concern for the plight of children, no concrete progress has been made to improve their overall quality of life. He goes on to suggest that:

the language of rights undermines efforts to accomplish genuine social changes by diverting attention from the real abuses, the imbalance of power, economic disparities, social oppression, and focuses instead on symbolic abstractions...the indeterminacy of legal rights does allow for judges to insert their personal and cultural biases into the law" (2000: 279).

Others have suggested that giving children rights serves to undermine the family unit, reduce the parents' ability to make decisions, and overvalues the capacity of children to make decisions (Wardle 1996, Etzioni 1993). The purpose of giving children rights is to ensure that they have access to a certain standard of life. This life should be free from the problems associated with poverty, sexual exploitation, and warfare, and should include rights to justice and civil status. Its purpose is not to undermine the cornerstones of social life; rather it is a guide to the type of life that all children, in a perfect world, could access. However, rights, much like laws, are not binding unless enforced. Parents, communities, social groups and all levels of government must ensure that the rights of children are enforced and protected. If children are permitted to grow up in a society that affords them the rights outlined in the Convention, they will make invaluable contributions to society.

For youth, participation in civic processes presents them with the opportunity to understand their community and environment in new ways; allows them to learn about and appreciate democracy and civic responsibility; and increases their self-esteem, identity and sense of pride in themselves and their community (Driskell 2002, Chalifoux and Johnson 2003, Wright, Bruce and Torma 1998). Young people who are involved in positive activities, such as participation processes, are less likely to pursue high risk behaviours and get into trouble (National League of Cities: 1). For the community at large, regular interaction with youth helps them to overcome “misperceptions and mistrust that often exist between generations” (Driskell 2002: 35). It helps adults to develop an understanding of youth perceptions which may translate into an improved quality of life for young people. Last, adults may derive a sense of purpose knowing that they are investing time to nurture and cultivate future leaders of their community and the wider city (Driskell 2002:35).

For planners and policy makers, youth participation allows them to fully understand the range of needs and issues they are addressing. This directly translates into more informed planning decisions and wiser public investments. Further, youth participation allows them to educate youth about the complexities of the negotiations and trade-offs involved in policy and decision-making (Driskell 2002:35). In order for children and youth to express themselves, to be clearly heard, and to have their proposals fully considered, both the community members and policy makers must be convinced that children and youth “are fully aware of what they want and particularly what they lack, and that they are capable of formulating proposals” (Tonucci and Rissotto 2001:413).

In Canada, there appears to be significant interest in the area of youth involvement in public policy, as is evident by the following:

- The emergence of youth councils, advisory committees, and youth advocacy groups.
- The participation of youth on governing bodies such as school boards, and
- Studies recently completed or underway on youth involvement and participation in decision-making (Wright 9).

In Winnipeg, a recent paper suggests that “the most meaningful way to involve young people is through a community development approach that engages them in a process of identifying issues and needs and working towards solutions” (Flaherty-Willmott 2002: 26). Through this process, youth have the opportunity to build capacity for change and leadership. Many of the youth involved in that particular report suggest that there are an increasing number of opportunities for them to be involved in community decision-making. These opportunities include both formal and informal processes. However, a concerted effort is required to improve them (Flaherty-Willmott 2002, Johnson and Chalifoux 2003). In a separate report, youth also noted that their input in community decision-making is essential to successful programming. Nonetheless, their input and ideas are rarely taken seriously or acted upon. This clearly demonstrates that the notion of public participation in planning has not yet evolved to include youth in the definition of ‘public’ (Simpson 1997: 922). This perception further compounds the notion of youth as unwelcome to participate in planning processes. Regardless, many of the youth suggest a need for increased community-based, youth focused forums and conferences to ensure the participation and inclusion of their ideas and concerns” (Flaherty-Willmott 2002: 26).

City officials make decisions that affect youth on a daily basis, yet youth often have no direct role in shaping and influencing local policies and programs (National League of Cities: 2). Youth participation in active and meaningful community change requires that youth become part of the actual process and course of change in their community.

Therefore, in addition to offering youth more control over their own lives and experiences, it should also concede them real influence over issues that are crucial to the quality of life and justice in their communities (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999, Chalifoux and Johnson 2003, Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon 2001, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1993). Genuine participation occurs when the child has the opportunity to participate at the highest level of their ability, or at the level at which they are most comfortable. The ideal situation is to create opportunities with young people as partners in planning. This maximizes their ability to express themselves about the issues that concern them in ways that are most comfortable and supportive for them. Generally, the ideas of children and youth are location specific and often of particular interest to them. If actively listened to and taken seriously, youth can offer significant insight as to how to plan cities for the benefit of all of its citizens (Tonucci and Rissotto 2001: 417).

Good projects should aim to stretch a young person's capacity and imagination, and challenge them to reach beyond previous knowledge. It should also improve their self-concept upon achievement and provide them with a sense of satisfaction. Youth projects should also nurture a sense of learning by encouraging young participants to examine their actions and reflect on their experiences. They should also allow them to make the connections between their projects and the needs of their community. Further, it should

encourage them to examine and analyze any problems that occur in the process, and teach them how to be self-correcting and responsible (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999, Bruce and Torma 1998).

Based on the literature, I have summed up the benefits of youth involvement in civic and planning processes in the following points:

1. Young people have the opportunity to experience genuine participation and the knowledge of the responsibilities of real citizenship to become effective decision makers.
2. Involving young citizens in the process of decision-making for the future of their community helps establish a collective vision and a sense of community.
3. Youth are encouraged to invest personally in the future of their community.
4. Community planning processes can serve as a springboard to actualize democratic citizenship.
5. Youth involvement in real community projects provides learning experiences that enhance the capacity of students to forge solutions to real world problems, which is essential for the development of civic responsibility.
6. Youth learn they have something to contribute and that they are able to participate in making a qualitative difference shaping the places where they live.
7. Active citizenship – youth learn to identify the issues, conduct research, explore alternatives, and advocate solutions.
8. Youth empowerment – youth can be empowered through the planning process because it provides them with a voice in community affairs. They are able to articulate a position, support it with information, and suggest a course of action. This allows them to become credible, influential citizens.
9. Youth involvement results in reduced conflict and mistrust between youth and adults, and assists to combat negative stereotypes and perceptions of youth.
10. Youth offer a unique perspective, and inject creativity and energy into processes in which they participate.



Ultimately, nothing is more important to the health of democracy and the future of municipalities than the active engagement of young people in representative government at the local level.

While the benefits of youth involvement in civic and planning processes are clear, there is no indication of how applicable the experience of mainstream Canadian youth is to that of urban Aboriginal youth. Unfortunately, through this research, I was unable to find any documentation of the benefits of participation relating specifically to urban Aboriginal youth. This does not suggest that they are not actively engaged in a variety of municipal processes. Rather, it suggests that their experiences and contributions are not well documented. Again, this presents a clear gap in the literature. Given the cultural differences that exist, it is possible that the benefits of youth participation to Aboriginal youth differ from those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Alternately, they may be the same. However, as researchers, it is irresponsible to make an assumption of that magnitude. The topic of youth participation is a complex one given the diversity of youth and their respective thoughts on participation. Clearly, more research is needed in this area.

#### **4.5 Levels of Youth Participation and Engagement**

This section examines the various levels of youth participation. Youth participation can vary from tokenistic to legitimate. This section describes each level, and suggests appropriate frameworks to ensure legitimate youth participation. This is important as it provides certain criteria legitimate participation must encompass. If an Aboriginal youth

council is to be formed with the goal of providing legitimate participation, it should include the appropriate mechanisms to facilitate that.

Hart proposes a ladder of children's participation which gauges levels of participation. The upper rungs of the ladder express increasing degrees of initiation by children, and the lowest three rungs are levels of non-participation. These particular rungs are not acceptable with regards to children's participation. The rungs of participation will be described below, from the bottom to the top of the ladder. While this ladder refers specifically to the child, it can be equally applied to youth.

#### **4.5.1 Non-Participation**

##### *Manipulation or Deception (1<sup>st</sup> level)*

Manipulation can be defined as instances whereby adults consciously use children's voices to carry their own messages. In these cases, the children have no coherent understanding of the issue at hand nor do they participate in any of the decision-making. Deception is more common. It refers to those occasions where adults deny their involvement in a program to project the impression that the project was completed entirely by children. To admit adult involvement, they believe, would diminish the project's effectiveness.

### *Decoration (2<sup>nd</sup> level)*

This occurs when children wear paraphernalia depicting a cause, but lack a clear understanding of it. In this instance children are not involved in the organization of the event. This level is placed one rung higher than manipulation because adults are not pretending that the cause was inspired by children. Rather, children are simply used to “bolster the cause as though they were understanding participants” (Hart 1997: 41). By extension, the children may also be used to heighten sympathy for the cause as well.

### *Tokenism (3<sup>rd</sup> level)*

This occurs with adults who are genuinely interested in providing children with a voice, but have not thought critically about how to achieve that. As a result, projects are designed and the children have little or no say regarding the subject and the communication method(s) employed. Further, they have little or no time to develop their own opinions.

## **4.5.2 Genuine Participation**

### *Assigned but Informed (4<sup>th</sup>)*

These projects are generally not child initiated. However, they are well-informed and aware of it, feel genuine ownership over it, and may have been involved in critical reflection over it. By itself, this level of participation achieves very little by way of democratization of children. They tend to be disseminated from the top down, and have short term impacts.

*Consulted and Informed (5<sup>th</sup>)*

Projects are designed and implemented by adults. However, children are consulted, have an understanding of the process, and their opinions are treated seriously.

*Adult-Initiated, Share Decision with Children (6<sup>th</sup>)*

Children are involved, to some extent, in the decision-making process. They should also understand how and why compromises and decisions are made, as they will be less likely to assume that their participation was tokenistic. If adults cannot foster a sense of competence and confidence to participate at this level, the higher rungs of participation are unlikely to be reached.

*Child Initiated and Child Directed (7<sup>th</sup>)*

Projects of this nature are generally only found in children's play. In these instances, observant adults notice children's initiatives, allow them to occur, and recognize them but do not control them. Often these projects will be carried out in secret by children for fear that adults will not understand their desire or capacity to carry them out.

*Child-Initiated, Shared Decision with Adults (8<sup>th</sup>)*

Children initiate a project and choose to collaborate with adults on it. This demonstrates that children feel confident and competent to the extent that they do not deny their need for collaboration with others (Hart 1997: 4045).

Imperative to the understanding of the levels of participation is that children and youth do not have to consistently operate at the highest level of participation. The key to participation is choice. All programs should be designed to maximize the opportunity for participants to choose the level at which they want to participate. In some situations, participants may not choose to participate to the highest extent of their ability. One of the major drawbacks of this ladder is that it does not address cultural issues and variations in socio-economic status. Both of these may severely impact a youths' ability to fully participate. Cultural norms may dictate the extent of, and provide only narrow parameters for, youth participation in decision-making. Further, in different cultures, youth participation may have various connotations. Depending on cultural values and expectations, the separate rungs of this ladder may be difficult to reach. Within these cultures, children and youth may not be in a position or have the resources necessary to participate due to their socio-economic status. The ladder does not offer any sincere concession for cultural variation and social standing. This lack of flexibility translates directly into barriers to legitimate youth participation.

#### **4.6 Barriers to Legitimate Youth Participation**

This section examines some barriers to youth participation. This is integral to this thesis as it identifies challenges to engaging youth, and suggests ways in which they can be overcome. Aboriginal youth encounter unique obstacles to participation. This section identifies those barriers, and suggests possible solutions to overcome them. This is especially important to the wider context of this thesis because by identifying barriers

from the outset, it is more likely that they can be directly addressed or circumvented in future endeavours.

### *Racism and Discrimination*

Aboriginal youth in particular encounter numerous difficulties when attempting to exert full participation. This can be attributed to social processes of exclusion that continuously directs them away from total participation (Beauvais, McKay and Seddon: 81). In particular is the legacy of discrimination and the accompanying feelings of distrust, and shame. Persistent negative perceptions of prejudice on the part of non-Aboriginal service providers makes many Aboriginal youth reluctant to access, and perhaps participate in, mainstream services (Johnson and Chalifoux 2003, Royal Commission Report 1993, 1995, 1997, Graham and Peters 2002, Longfield and Godfrey 2003, Carter and Polevychok 2004). To overcome this, society must change its overall perception of Aboriginal youth. Recognizing the contributions and achievements Aboriginal youth are making at the local, provincial and national level would go a long way to changing the overall perception of Aboriginal youth by non-Aboriginal populations.

### *Current Political Climate*

The lack of participation of the Aboriginal community in civic and planning affairs may reflect larger issues of dissatisfaction within the current social, political, and economic climate (Beauvais, McKay and Seddon 2001: 71). Further, it may also be a signal that issues most important to them are not being addressed in the conventional political arena (Beauvais, McKay and Seddon 2001: 73). This would support the finding that youth are

not increasingly apolitical but rather increasingly cynical. This cynicism should not be interpreted as a disinterest in the political arena as a whole (Beauvais, McKay and Seddon 2001: 74). To rectify this, the political realm must become increasingly educated about and committed to the issues that are most important to Aboriginal youth. By actively seeking Aboriginal youth input, policymakers can bring these issues to the forefront of the policy agenda. Essentially, youth must be directly involved in policymaking in order to be fully engaged in the process. For this situation to materialize, it is essential that the suggestions made by youth be fully considered.

### *Adultism*

Adultism encompasses the attitude and behaviours that result when adults assume they are superior to young people. They think young people, due to their lack of life experiences, are inferior to adults. When this occurs, young people are talked down to and not perceived as contributing members of society with valuable opinions and ideas, capable of making responsible decisions (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999: 7).

Intrinsic to the problem of adultism is adults planning programs or projects without involving youth in the process, and unwilling to share their power with young people. To overcome this, adults must acknowledge that youth are contributing members of society with valuable opinions and ideas. Once they readily accept this reality, they will be more willing to share their power with youth.

### *Attempts to fit young people into adult structures*

Organizations which employ formal and highly organized protocols may alienate youth who are willing to participate. Organizations should utilize processes which are inclusive and make youth feel comfortable and welcome. Adults must realize that their operating and communication styles may stifle the youth voice (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999, Wright). Alternately, Hart suggests that adults working with youth may shy away from providing structure and rules for fear of imposing their own structures. Often this results in the creation of ad hoc rules and confusion among the participants (1997:48). Clear expectations and guidelines must be established at the outset of any project, regardless of whether adults or youths are involved.

### *Barriers to organizational preparedness*

Under this heading, there are four main issues:

1. Both youth and adults may have false assumptions about youth capacity to enact change. Both may assume that youth have either too much or too little capacity.
2. Adults may resist enacting changes to facilitate youth participation.
3. Adults may fail to recognize the varying capacity and needs of youth.
4. Both youth and adults may be unclear of the role of youth in adult organizations (Wright 19).

To overcome these barriers, both youth and adults must recognize that the other party is capable of contributing to the dialogue. They must also be willing to make the necessary concessions to accommodate each other. These issues can only be resolved when both parties make a sincere effort to work with each other.



### *Location and times of meetings*

Often meetings are hosted during the day when youth are in school and cannot attend. Further, they are often held at venues that are not easily accessible by youth. Meetings should be hosted in locations which are easily accessible via public transportation and at times when youth are available (Wright 12).

### **4.7 Capacity - Building Among Youth**

Capacity building is cited as the most critical element necessary to facilitate Aboriginal youth participation in participatory processes. If an Aboriginal youth council is to be formed and sustained, the youth must be armed with the skills necessary to maintain such an organization. This section outlines how this capacity can be fostered, and demonstrates that increased capacity is essential to the realization and success of an Aboriginal youth council.

It is widely accepted that young people's capacity to participate is influenced by many variables. These include cultural traditions, social class, and informal teachings assimilated from the environment and daily experiences. From a developmental psychology perspective, gender also influences their perceptions and understanding. This is imperative to understand when working with youth as it stresses that there are no universal stages of development among youth. Rather, there is a continuum of evolving competencies functioning in ways unique to each person. Accordingly, when working with youth, it is essential to utilize a variety of participatory techniques in order to maximize young people's capacity to participate. Diversity and inclusiveness are key

strategies when designing opportunities for interaction and participation (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999: 7). Hart reinforces this by suggesting that the goal of people and organizations working with youth should be to “design opportunities in all domains of intelligence with a continuum or sequence of developing competency in mind” (1997: 27). Hart further writes that the most important principle to consider with regards to a youths’ ability to participate is that “we each develop in different domains of intelligence at different rates” (1997: 27). He goes on to explain that multiple intelligences develop in each individual. These vary according to both the innate capacities of children and particular experiences they have had to “experiment with and exercise” those capacities (1997: 27). Many argue that students of any particular group will differ in the way they learn, and that learning styles are a function of nature (Mullahey, Susskind, Checkoway 1999: 6).

Individual participation capacities cannot be tied to age as each person develops at different rates (Wright 17). Age is not a factor in determining a youth’s capacity to participate in decision-making. However, there is some indication that it is not until the age of 15 or 16 that youth develop the confidence to engage in decision-making with adults. At this stage, youth are increasingly philosophical as they test out the identity constructions they have crafted for themselves (Hart 1997: 27). Prior to this age, youth may be “inwardly focused trying to figure out who they are” (Wright 33). Accordingly, there is no “clear consensus on the capacity for youth to engage in governance and decision-making, nor is there agreement on when the transition from child to youth occurs” (Wright 33).

Hart writes that adolescents commonly experiment with their sense of emerging self in a variety of ways, often with strong symbols of dress, behaviour or language. Accordingly, an important function of youth organizations is to provide a context in which youth can develop their own identity and culture. This will positively impact their personal and social identities. In summary, “whatever structures for participation are established, they must allow flexibility for children and adolescents to explore and develop their identities and actions in the world in ways consistent with their own cultures” (Hart, 1997: 29, Wright).

Hart further suggests that a principle factor affecting children and youth’s ability to participate in planning and civic processes is how they feel about and perceive themselves. Often, this is strongly linked to their feelings about their own social class and culture (1997: 30). Aboriginal youth in particular encounter significant struggle around identity. These struggles are due to the many stereotypes about Aboriginal people that are still widely held within Canadian society. As well, they also struggle with the loss of their language, culture and identity. Feelings of alienation from one’s community can also contribute to youth experiencing a lack of desire and interest to improve their community (Beauvais, McKay and Seddon: 79). This may, in part, explain the reluctance of Aboriginal youth to participate in planning and civic processes. While there is a small number of Aboriginal youth who have developed the skills and confidence to participate in such processes, the overall capacity of the community must be increased:

Governments need to provide Aboriginal youth with the skills and the ability to design and deliver programs, and give them the skills, resources and training necessary to do so. It is crucial to strengthen the capacity of urban

Aboriginal communities, and their youth, in order that they manage their interaction with government departments effectively and gain access to funding sources, rather than relying on a few overworked individuals” (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 35).

Currently, there is a need to involve and engage Aboriginal youth at the local, grassroots level. Community-based initiatives should ensure that youth input is obtained, and that it is an integral part of the development, implementation, measurement, and evaluation processes. This will facilitate the mentorship, empowerment, and leadership development skills of Aboriginal youth in safe and familiar environments (NAFC and Law Commission of Canada 1999, Chalifoux and Johnson 2003). By providing Aboriginal youth with the capacity to effectively participate in planning and civic processes, they can take control of various processes to ensure their needs are met. By extension, they can ensure that the needs of the wider Aboriginal community are also appropriately met by service providers, as well as all three levels of government.

#### **4.8 Youth Councils**

One of the major questions driving this research is to whether the AYCAC participants are interested in forming an Aboriginal youth council. Accordingly, during the research fieldwork they were introduced to three youth council models, as previously explained in the Research Methods chapter. This section examines the pros and cons of each of the selected models, and suggests which would allow for the most effective Aboriginal youth council. The models serve only to expose the youth to some youth council models that are currently being used in Canada. Through this section it becomes apparent that many of the national and provincial youth council models currently used in Canada are based

on the traditional hierarchical structure. However, there appears to be no justification for this configuration. This gap fuelled my desire to introduce the youth to other youth council structures in order to provide them with alternative models. Ideally, the youth will select the model which they feel is best reflective of their needs.

#### **4.8.1 Importance of Youth Councils**

Youth councils are a popular and effective way to get youth increasingly involved in solving local problems and more actively engaged in the community. They are vehicles for the ongoing participation of young people in the mechanisms of local government. They promote community service and foster a better understanding among young people of how municipal government works (National League of Cities: 9). Many cities already use youth councils to inject fresh ideas and youth perspectives into local decision making. Within this context, the establishment of a municipal youth council demonstrates a long-term commitment and dedication by city government to increase youth participation and create a strong youth voice.

The main aim of youth councils in France is to “represent the children and young people on a local level, to enable them to set up actions aimed at improving the lifestyle of the people living in their communities, and to give their opinion on projects initiated by adult elected officials” (Association Nationale des Conseils d’Enfants et de Jeunes 2004: 6).

These aims may well reflect the goals of youth councils internationally because it acknowledges their capacity to represent themselves at the local level. Beyond these aims, youth councils highlight issues encountered by youth and bring them to the attention of the local authority. They therefore act as a pressure and/or lobby group. For the purposes

of this thesis, youth councils will be defined as a group of youth between the ages of 11 and 24 who desire to represent themselves and aspire to improve their community for the benefit of all. This representation may happen at the local, provincial or national level. This definition was selected because it clearly identifies the age of youth. It also supports the notion that youth are capable of representing themselves. They do not require adults to speak on their behalf. This is an overarching theme in the literature regarding youth participation. In the literature regarding youth councils it is noted repeatedly that those who become involved in such groups have a strong desire to be actively involved in the betterment of their community. In this context, betterment refers not only to improving the quality of life for other youth, but that of everyone who resides in their neighbourhood, community, and city.

The New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development suggests that the activities of youth councils can be broadly grouped into four categories:

#### *1. Representational Activities*

These activities help to promote the interests of young people by attempting to achieve change. Representation is not limited to formal representation and lobbying of councillors and other politicians and other political bodies. It also includes certain projects and activities which would not have happened without the youth council.

## *2. Educational Activities*

These activities help members to increase their knowledge of society, develop their own views, and gain the confidence to express these views to other people. Through these activities youth also obtain a wide range of other skills through committees, public relations and administrative tasks.

## *3 .Social Activities*

These activities include both the social forums and social events provided by the youth council. Through both these endeavours, young people from different backgrounds can meet, interact, and exchange ideas. These social events are organized by the youth council for its members or young people in the larger area. The inclusion of members' only activities will serve to improve peer relationships and allow youth the opportunity to form strong bonds with each other.

## *4. Youth Council Meetings*

Usually the most regular activity of a youth council is its meetings. Although the content of the meetings vary, the great majority are devoted almost entirely to business – essentially the organization and administration of future activities (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development 2003).

A youth council may choose to pursue any one, or a combination of these activities to achieve their goals. Their goals may evolve as the group matures. They may decide to re-

organize their objectives and either streamline or expand their activities. Youth councils are just as diverse as the communities they represent (Nishnawbe Aski Nation 2004).

There are numerous benefits to establishing a youth council. They provide a vehicle for engaging young people who otherwise wouldn't be involved in local government. They are also a built-in mechanism for accessing youth input. Further, they generally don't require a lot of financial resources to implement and maintain (National League of Cities 9). Some would suggest that by nature youth councils only reach a small fraction of the city's youth population. Regardless, they make a powerful statement to all young people and adult residents that youth are full and valued members of the community (National League of Cities 3).

Some may argue that the youths' lack of access to resources negatively impacts their ability to affect change given that often those who control the funding wield more influence and ultimately exert more power. This topic arose during the TYC fieldwork. Some of the respondents suggested that limited funding allows an organization to focus on advocacy rather than direct programming. Additional funding would serve to distract the TYC from their advocacy responsibilities as they would then be required to fulfill the mandate of the sponsor organization. One interview respondent suggested that instead of additional funding, the TYC would be better served through additional support staff. Clearly there is no consensus on whether the youth council should be provided with minimal or considerable funding. This decision must be made by the youth council in conjunction with their sponsor or host organization.



#### **4.8.2 Youth Council Models**

A number of youth council models are currently in use. Essentially the structure of a youth council depends on its membership, and is not static. Equally, each youth council must be built on the needs and values of their particular community (Nishnawbe Aski Nation 2004). The structure should be able to evolve to satisfy the needs of the council as it progresses. In particular, the youth must determine if they desire to operate under the auspices of the local municipal council or if they prefer to operate independently. Within this section, three youth council models are examined. The models are dissected to determine the pros and cons of each, and if they would be suitable as the basis for a youth council model that is sensitive to and reflective of the particular need of Aboriginal youth. The three models that are examined are those of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, Aboriginal Youth with Initiative, and the traditional hierarchical structure.

##### **4.8.2.1 Toronto Youth Cabinet**

Established in 1998, the mission of the Toronto Youth Cabinet is as follows: *“The Toronto Youth Cabinet serves the population of Toronto by empowering youth to make a difference in the lives of others. In working together with City Councillors, and through fostering partnerships among youth organizations, the cabinet is dedicated to providing youth with a forum to contribute to the development of solutions for a better tomorrow”* (City of Toronto 2003). The cabinet represents youth between the ages of 13 and 24, and has approximately 150 general members and eight executive members. According to one member, “we’re that formal link between city hall and youth” (Ross 2004).

The cabinet is an official Committee of Council, and an arm of the Child and Youth Action Committee (CYAC) which is headed by the Child Advocate for the City of Toronto. Consequently, the TYC is funded by the City of Toronto through CYAC, and their office is located in Toronto City Hall. Within that capacity, the TYC can make presentations at Council meetings either in favour of or against certain policy actions. While the TYC is officially linked to City Hall, the TYC is not obligated to side with council. They are free to express the views that are most representative of the youth of Toronto (Ross 2004).

The TYC recently changed its organizational structure from a typical, hierarchical structure with a Chair and Vice-Chair, to a consensus group. Within this new configuration, the hierarchical positions have been replaced with issue based positions. The issue based positions change every year depending on the issues the youth choose to pursue. In addition to issue based positions, there are three teams (see diagram below):

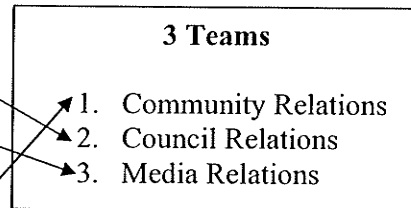
## Toronto Youth Council Model\*

### 11 Elected Executives

1. Children, Education and Youth Representative
2. Director of Council Relations
3. Director of Outreach
4. Director of Media Relations
5. Director of Special Events
6. Director of Membership
7. Director of Finance
8. Representatives

### 3 Issue Based Positions

9. Youth Safety
10. Director of Community Relations
11. Director of Street Level Services



\*author's visual interpretation of the TYC model structure

These teams are led by executive members. These teams are not static. General members are encouraged to join the teams, as well as any of the issue-based committees. They are free to join as many, or as few, as they desire, and can be as involved or uninvolved as they choose. According to the executive, the new organization is advantageous because, as one participant described:

that a few people who have been working really hard on that and dedicate a lot of their time to it, then they sort of become the natural leader, but it's not like an official hierarchy and so we gain a lot more by not having a hierarchy (Ross 2004).

Another youth suggested that issue based positions removes the pressure to perform from participants who are unable to those who are willing and able,

some people, they don't have as much time or the ability to do as much work and so we are not restricting saying well you know because person A will take on all this work, but person B, not because they don't want to, but just because the level of what they can take on is different. And so we don't have that assigned person to do everything and it allows people who have the time, energy, or the will to do it (Ross 2004).

The following excerpt from the discussion surrounding the new consensus group structure is an indication of the openness, cooperation, and understanding which exists among members. It demonstrates their willingness to try new things, to be involved, and to encourage and include others to participate in their overall structure.

The language of a chair, to me anyway, gives the impression that that's the leader, that's the boss, that's the person responsible for the group, but there is no one that you call chair or president, but everyone is sort of on the same level just even just by definition and by the language, the history of the language, so yeah (Ross 2004).

The following excerpts demonstrate the flexibility of positions within the TYC. The youth enjoy the freedom to participate in the committees(s) of their choosing at their leisure. It appears that many of them take advantage of that opportunity.

That's what makes it so great because you can do different things. I'm outreach, I'm not doing media, but like I'll help with it, and media will help with outreach. It doesn't have to be very restrictive in like what we have to do. Like our roles will be static in writing, but it doesn't mean we're restricted to doing that one job. We can do a lot of different things, we're symbiotic that way. It's great the way it works.

The other good thing with not having when the media calls and says who's leading the cabinet, well, we're a consensus

group, so what do you want us to talk to you about? And then we find who's best suited to speak to that issue and it gives everybody equal opportunity to, like, get out there (Ross 2004).

Based on these comments, it is obvious that the TYC executive members are aware of the pressures that apply to youth in their everyday lives. They accept that participation has different meanings to different people. They also understand that participation does not equate with group commitment. This approach is both realistic and healthy. By accepting and acknowledging the limitations of their members, the executive is not blinded by unrealistic expectations. Accordingly, new members are encouraged to participate in ways which are most conducive to them. During this particular discussion, I remember commenting on the maturity of this outlook. The potential for inter-committee participation is also important. This type of participation is conducive to inter-committee communication. It also offers participants the opportunity to learn a variety of skills simultaneously, and enriches the overall TYC experience.

It is arguable that the lack of a distinct leader within the TYC may result in unclear organizational goals and direction. This could translate into reduced efficiency because participants may be unsure of their roles and responsibilities within the consensus structures. It appears that the TYC has overcome these obstacles by maintaining an elected executive. The executive works as a team to ensure that the mandate of the TYC is fulfilled. While some participants clearly contribute more than others, the structure encourages and accommodates this.

The TYC structure would be appropriate for the development of a municipal Aboriginal youth council because it encourages all youth participants to participate in the dialogue, and exchange ideas. The structure also provides the opportunity for flexibility in terms of the issues that they advocate. This example also encompasses the ideals of teamwork and working together for a common goal. These elements are paramount to Aboriginal youth participation, as is discussed subsequently. However, lacking from this model is cultural specificity. This model does not make any allowances for the cultivation of a sense of cultural identity, belonging and pride.

#### **4.8.2.2 Aboriginal Youth with Initiative**

This model was selected because it is based on the Aboriginal clan system and consistent with Aboriginal teachings. This defining characteristic played an integral role in its selection. Given that this thesis is exploring the possibility of developing an Aboriginal youth group, it is essential to introduce a council model that is culturally relevant and appropriate.

In Winnipeg in 1996, in reaction to youth involvement in gang activity, a call for action generated a number of responses from adults and youth alike. A strategy for the development of a youth council was among them. According to Wuttunee,

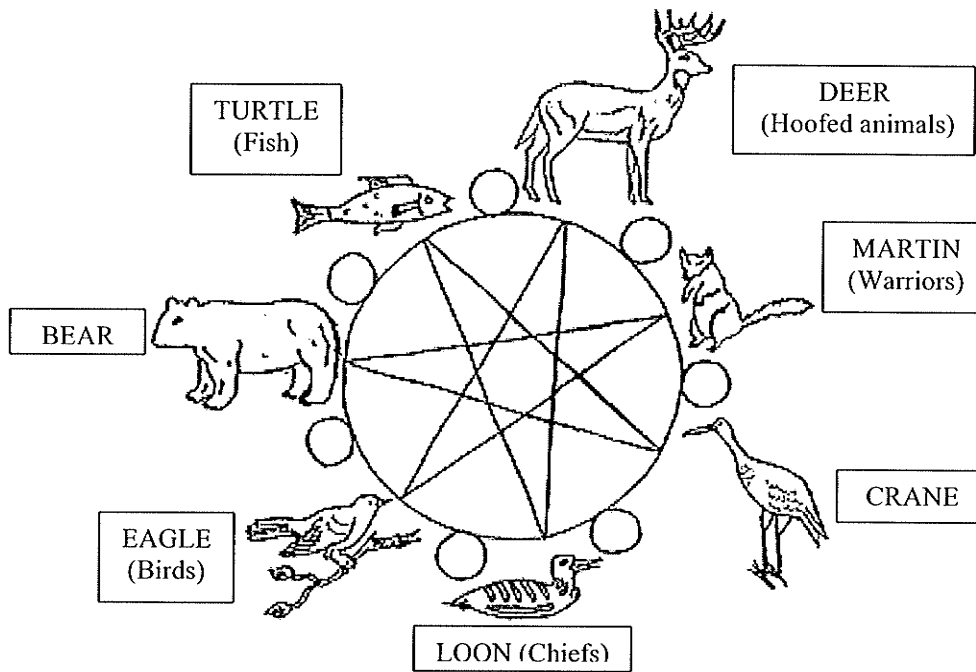
AYWI evolved from that year of effort to provide other organizations with the youth perspective as well as to develop programs to help youth surmount the obstacles they face, thorough educating on process, developing capacity and commitment, and bringing a fresh energy and perspective to helping youth (2004: 77)

Wuttunee goes on to write that the mandate of AYWI is “*to network and build strength with the organizations that have an impact on Aboriginal peoples in the areas of justice, education, policy, and economics*” (2004:77). The priority of AYWI was to establish linkages with organizations in these areas to ensure that youth could approach them and get the help they needed. Essentially AYWI participated in dialogues with other organizations when youth perspectives were required. They provided insight on youth matters to organizations such as the Manitoba Assembly of Chiefs and the Manitoba Métis Federation (Wuttunee 2004: 77).

The AYWI is based on the Ojibway clan system. It is divided into seven clans, each with one major area of responsibility, or gift. Clans are consulted based on their particular area of expertise. Generally, the clan responsible for a given issue will discuss the issue amongst themselves and develop a list of possible suggestions. The director of the clan then presents their suggestions to the other clan directors. The director of the various clans will then report back to their respective clans and discuss the issue. The clan directors then meet to resolve the issues. They reach a consensus which best reflects the input of the other clans. Consensus must be reached before any decisions are final and can be acted upon. The clan system has a built in system of checks and balances. Each clan is accountable to the two clans directly across from it in the circle (see diagram below). Youth are placed in the clans based on their family clan. If youth are unfamiliar with their family clan, the coordinator will assist the youth to research their family history to determine their clan. Each clan has a director. One of the major drawbacks of

this model is that decision making often takes much longer because consensus must be achieved (Lawrence Angeconeb, personal communication, May 13, 2005).

### Clan Based Model\*



\*Adapted from National Adult Literacy Database.2004. So You Should Know/Chi Ki Ken Da Mun – Ojibway Clan System. [www.nald.ca/CLR/chikiken/page23.htm](http://www.nald.ca/CLR/chikiken/page23.htm)



### Clans and Affiliated Areas of Expertise

Clan Name	Area of Expertise (Gift)
Turtle (represents all fish)	Education
Deer (represents all hoofed animals)	Housing and Recreation
Martin (represents all warriors)	Strategic planning
Crane	Governance and Policy
Loon (Chiefs)	Chiefs (provides guidance and expertise to other clans)
Eagle (represents all birds)	Leadership
Bear	Policing and Security

Though the Clan Based Model is culturally appropriate, it does have a few drawbacks. By placing youth in clans based on family lineage, they are unable to choose which issues they would like to address. This may result in a mismatch of interests and skills. Further, the clans may serve to create divisions between the various clans instead of a strong sense of togetherness and team work. These obstacles may be overcome by allowing the participants to work on issues beyond the scope of their clan. Team work can be fostered by creating a sense of appreciation for the expertise each clan brings to the table. The youth will realize that though they are dealing with different issues, they are ultimately working toward the larger goal of strengthening the urban Aboriginal youth voice at the municipal level.

The AYWI was operational for only a year. It was dissolved due to a lack of leadership and administrative support (Lawrence Angecone, personal communication, May 13,

2005). Nonetheless, Wuttunee identifies ways in which the AYWI was successful, and elements that are important for those who endeavour to build on the success of this group:

1. **Involving young people:** It is challenging to engage and excite young people. Youth must be educated on the opportunities they have, and provided with options to “get out of a rut.” A further obstacle to engaging young people is convincing others that young people have something to say. This obstacle was overcome by requiring children under sixteen to have signed consent forms which introduced the parents to the group.
2. **Building on information:** AYWI built on the information the youth had collected from their communities.
3. **Empowering young women:** Traditionally, a balance of strength existed between men and women in Aboriginal society. The most effective means to empower young women is to have this traditional balance role-modelled by other young women.
4. **Tradition:** The clan structure provides the basis for the board of directors. Each issue that comes before the board is examined holistically. Each board member brings the gift of their clan, or their expertise to the discussion. Through this process holistic decisions are achieved.

This council model is most appropriate for the Aboriginal youth council structure because it is rooted in Aboriginal teachings and is a culturally relevant way of linking Aboriginal youth and participation.

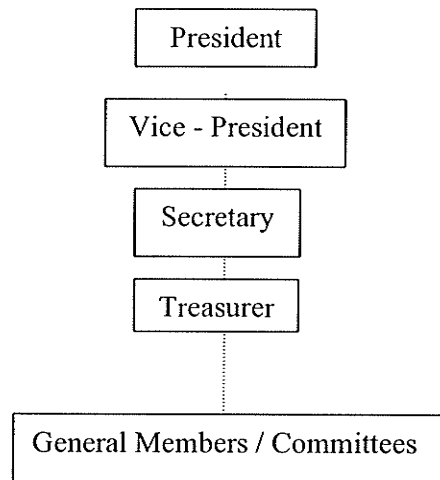
#### **4.8.2.3 Traditional Hierarchical Structure**

The traditional hierarchical structure is another youth council model. It was selected because it is most often used as the configuration for school councils. This assumption was proven during the research fieldwork. As well, it appears that this model is also used for most of the Aboriginal youth councils currently in existence across Canada. All of the

Canadian examples of Aboriginal youth councils that I encountered throughout the course of this research (approximately ten), were all based on this structure.

This particular structure is modeled on a hierarchical structure with the President and Vice- President holding the two highest positions (refer to diagram below). Other common positions include secretary, treasurer and various committee members. Within this structure, issues are debated among council members, but consensus is not required. In instances where consensus is not reached, the issue is put to a vote, and the decision is based on the desire of the majority.

#### **Traditional Hierarchical Structure**



Unfortunately, within the literature, there appears to be no justification as to why this particular model is frequently used as the configuration of choice for youth councils. This presents a clear gap in the literature.

This structure is not well suited to serve as the framework for the development of an Aboriginal youth council because it is an extremely hierarchical in structure. This may inhibit the development of a collaborative environment. Decisions in this format may be decided through a voting process as opposed to consensus. This may result in ideas being excluded from the dialogue, and does not ensure equal and full representation. As well, the final decision may not be representative of the views of all participants. However, because consensus is not required, decisions may be reached in a timelier manner.

Alternately, employing the traditional hierarchical model is a useful way of exposing participants to a variety of positions. In some iterations of this model, participants rotate through the various executive positions. These experiences allow them to gain a variety of skill sets. This element of shared responsibility would also assist to decrease the hierarchical nature of the structure because all the participants become familiar with the responsibilities affiliated with each position. Overall, the traditional structure does not appear to be particularly flexible. This may prevent the council structure from evolving as the council itself evolves. However, the hierarchical nature of this structure may not necessarily translate into a decreased sense of teamwork and cooperation.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

Based on the literature review above, it is evident that there is a growing interest in involving youth in civic and planning processes. The benefits to the youth, planners, and the wider society are clearly outlined, as are the barriers to youth participation. However,

the literature concerning Aboriginal youth participation in these processes is quite limited. Most of the literature focuses on the need to build youth capacity within that community. It is widely believed that strengthening youth capacity will simultaneously strengthen the community as a whole. Essentially, the literature is suggesting that not only should Aboriginal youth develop the capacity to advocate for themselves, but also for their entire community. It is an enormous burden to place the responsibility of an entire community on the shoulders of the current and future generations of Aboriginal youth. Emphasis must be placed on the development of youth capacity first and foremost. Only when that capacity is established should it be nurtured to grow to support their wider community.

Many of the obstacles to full and meaningful participation of Aboriginal youth in planning and civic processes are attributed to the historical wrongs heaped on their community. However, issues such as low-self perceptions, overt racism, and systemic injustices, are much too large to tackle solely through social programs. However, increased participation in planning and civic processes plays an important role in overcoming these barriers. This will serve to increase the participation capacity of Aboriginal youth and also assist to strengthen the overall community, and attack the root causes of many of the obstacles they encounter.

With regards to youth councils, much has been written. However, lacking from the literature are theoretical frameworks surrounding the use of different youth council structures. Very little information concerning the actual structures themselves is available. Also lacking from this body of information is a definition of a youth council. Many

authors use the term youth advisory council, youth group and youth council interchangeably. However, they are rarely defined. These terms need to be defined in order to ensure that they are fulfilling their purpose. The next chapter examines the research findings within the context of the youth participant responses and information found in the academic literature.

## 5 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Introduction

This section examines the research data within the context of the major research questions, and previous literature review. Participant responses were analysed based on the themes explored in the literature review. Similarities between the literature and the fieldwork responses are highlighted, and discrepancies are analysed. In particular, this section offers a definition of participation from the perspective of urban Aboriginal youth. As well, it assesses the extent to which the camp participants were exposed to planning processes. Finally, I outline the participants' ideas regarding the formation of an Aboriginal youth council, and briefly explore some of the issues they would like to support.

### 5.2 How do Aboriginal youth define participation?

When asked how they define participation, the focus group and interview participants provided various responses. These responses will be examined within the context of the definitions explored previously in the literature review.

One aspect of Driskell's definition of participation suggests that people who live in a given area have the most intimate knowledge of it and its corresponding issues. One youth reiterated this by suggesting that, "*issues that go on in the world, that go day by day... issues that we live day by day. We understand issues. That's how we mostly understand issues, by living them.*" This youth clearly articulates that the best way to understand something is to live it. Accordingly, it is impossible to make decisions

without consulting those who possess the lived experiences. They are the irrefutable experts. From this perspective, youth are the experts on matters affecting them, and they should be invited to and treated as equal stakeholders at the decision making table.

Wright suggests that participation includes dialogue, “youth to someone, someone to youth” (16). This sentiment was echoed in one respondent’s definition, with the following: “*Being able to speak freely, have your own thoughts on what’s happening...anyone that you need to talk to, talk to the government.*” Within this context, the youth suggests that participation inherently includes speaking to government officials as well as others who are in a position to support them and their cause. Inherent to the realization of dialogue is the notion of access. If the participant desires to speak to someone in control, that person must also be willing to engage in that dialogue, and provide a certain level of access to facilitate that conversation.

Essential to dialogue is active listening. If dialogue with youth is facilitated, both parties must actively participate. In particular, adults must actively listen to the youth. Further, they must seriously consider their ideas and suggestions, and use that information to inform their final decisions. When speaking of free speech and speaking to government, the participant does not make the dialogue conditional by requiring access and active listening. This demonstrates that at this initial stage of participation, the participant merely wants the opportunity for dialogue. Once this is granted, I think they will realize that access and active listening are essential. They will then begin to push the boundaries



in order to ensure their thoughts are actively heard and considered. However, this cannot materialize until that opportunity for dialogue is firmly in place.

One youth further suggested that participation should be viewed as a continuum of sorts. Youth, much like adults, are under no pressure to fully participate in all aspects of civic life. However, they are entitled to that option, and frameworks to facilitate that must be in place. The youth said, *“you don’t even have to want to know the issues as long as it’s an option for you to know what’s happening out there, what other people want you to know.”* From this perspective, youth must have a right to know, and should they decide to act upon this right, full information must be available to and accessible by them. This stance is similar to that of Hart who suggests that youth do not have to consistently operate at the highest level of participation. The key to participation is choice. Accordingly, opportunities for participation should be designed to allow participants to choose the level at which they desire to participate (1997).

The most common themes arising from the youth definition of participation is the notion of team work and working together for a common goal. Within the responses, each of these themes arose three times. This is evident in the following comments:

*Working together, always trying new things, taking part in it, and just trying before you don’t like it.*

*Getting involved in activities like that, working for the same goal and stuff like that. Like community...*

None of the definitions examined in the literature review explicitly mentioned team work and working together for a common goal as essential to participation. However, a few of the definitions previously cited suggest that a sense of, or belonging to a community is important to participation. One participant took this theme a step further, and suggested that participation means, *“To be active. Like work as a group with other people. To do what you’re supposed to.”* The latter part of this definition connotes a sense of civic responsibility. If youth are unhappy with the decisions that are being made, and the ramifications of those decisions on their daily lives, they have an obligation to do something about it. Another youth echoed this by suggesting that youth must stand up for themselves *“instead of not doing anything and just trying, or helping out.”* This notion ties into Beauvais and McKay’s idea of citizenship. One aspect of this concept addresses rights and responsibilities, followed by access to these rights and responsibilities. Access to these dimensions of citizenship determines citizenship status. Beauvais and McKay suggest that full citizenship includes, *“actively seeking to engage so as to realize one’s rights, exercise one’s responsibilities, have access to political institutions”* (2001: 2). Unfortunately, as of yet, youth are still excluded from full citizenship.

Inherently lacking from all of the youth definitions of participation is the notion of legitimacy, which is mentioned in most of the definitions in the academic literature. Based on the focus group and interviews, the youth spoke as if legitimacy was almost inherent to all of their responses, and did not require separate mention. It would be useless to consult youth unless the information they provided would be fully utilized. It

would be a waste of bureaucratic time and resources to consult youth in a tokenistic capacity.

Based on the youths' ideas of participation, a holistic definition of participation would have to encompass the following:

- Lived experiences
- Dialogue (including access and active listening)
- Continuum of involvement
- Working together toward common goals
- Civic responsibility

Keeping all of these ideals in mind, youth participation may be defined by Aboriginal youth as:

*Providing youth with a forum through which to exercise their preferred level of citizenship, and involving them in an active dialogue which explores their lived experiences in order to work together to achieve common goals.*

### **5.3 To what extent did the camp foster a better understanding of planning processes among youth?**

All of the camp participants openly admitted that prior to the AYCAC, they had little or no understanding of planning and its related functions and careers. However, it is difficult to thoroughly assess exactly how much the participants learned during their camp experience. During the focus group and interviews, the youth were asked "in what ways did the camp change and/or increase what you know about planning?" Their responses to this question will be examined to answer this larger research question. Thus, while it is not possible to determine how much the youth learned during their camp experience, their responses are quite telling. They revealed what was most interesting to them, what they became most aware of, and overall, what they learned. Based on this information, I

explain the extent to which the camp fostered a better understanding of planning processes among the AYCAC participants.

During the research fieldwork, it became evident that the AYCAC participants gained a much stronger sense of what planning entails, and how those responsibilities transfer into a career in planning. On a much broader scale, the youth also developed a stronger understanding, and in some instances appreciation for municipal government. According to one youth, "*I knew nothing. I never even knew it [planning] existed.*" One youth summed up the learning curve he experienced with regards to the role and responsibilities to municipal government:

I knew a little bit of stuff, but some like certain stuff that goes on, like how the government takes taxes, and stuff like that. That kind of stuff. But when you think of it, we couldn't do without taking taxes. Our government would be like so whack if we didn't do stuff like that. I learned lots about the government and stuff. ...instead of always trying to do it your way, you have to do it for other people, not for yourself. So that's another thing that you have to look at too, for that kind of job...I always used to think that the government was like always thinking about them, not for us. So then after I think about it, they're doing more for us than they're doing for them. That's kind of what I learned to...you can't do without something.

An overarching theme in the following quote is teamwork, and the need to work with others and for others in order to accomplish things. This theme arose in most of the respondents comments. It seems that most of the youth were under the impression that the Mayor was able to make decisions that best suited himself, and that he is not accountable to the wider citizenry. Further, it became apparent that most of the youth

were not familiar with the large bureaucracy necessary to effectively execute the day to day activities of local government. This is evident in the following excerpt:

You always have to be working together 'cause just try to imagine running government by yourself, how much work that would be, and how hard that would be. You'd fail if you try to run it by yourself. You can't be everywhere at once. You would obviously fail. You have to work with team, even if you don't like the person you still have to work with them and stuff.

Many of the youth also learned much about careers that they hadn't realized were options they could pursue. One youth in particular mentioned architecture as a possible career, while another suggested golf course planning:

It made me appreciate the planning and stuff. I'm glad that I did go. It gave me new ideas for the city, different opportunities for buildings...makes me look at new opportunities that I didn't know I had. I wasn't interested but once I went, I was...just making buildings and golf courses and stuff.

In terms of the technical aspects of planning, the youth learned about zoning and land designation, and mapping:

*"I know how cities are planned now and various areas for like urban and industrial...the ways cities are built and mapped, how they run and the roles people have."*

*"The planning thing was pretty cool, how they planned the city and that they have to make all those maps, that's crazy. And the city hall jobs, how you can get there and that, and how you don't get paid as much as people think they do."*

*"I know you needed blueprints, and you needed a permit, and you needed funding or something like that."*

Though the variety of planning activities, the youth were able to learn much about the planning and the inner workings of municipal governments. While some of the youth have no desire to pursue a planning related career, they were all exposed to a new set of career options. They also developed a better appreciation for city planning, and how those decisions impact their lives on a daily basis. One youth summed up his overall learning experience by saying, “*we learned things about the city that you really didn’t know.*”

Based on participant feedback, the AYCAC was successful in fostering a better understanding of planning processes among youth. Most of the participants admittedly had no prior knowledge of planning. Their comments demonstrated that at the very least, they developed an understanding of the basic fundamentals of physical planning, including zoning, mapping and the importance of the municipal bureaucracy. Further, they were exposed to a variety of planning related careers that most did not know existed. Unfortunately, all of their responses focused very much on the built environment and physical planning. None of the youth mentioned any form of social planning as an area they learned about. One of the challenges facing the camp administrators was to emphasize that both hard (physical) and soft (social) planning are integral to holistic, successful city planning.

**5.4 To what extent has the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp inspired the youth to form an Aboriginal youth council in order to increase their participation in municipal affairs?**

During the focus group and interviews, the youth were introduced to three youth council models (see “2.7 Focus Groups: During the Focus Group” for a description of the process) and they explored the possibility of developing an Aboriginal youth council. The youth decided the formation of an Aboriginal youth council would be beneficial for Aboriginal youth as well as the overall city. They all agreed that if such a council existed, they would be willing to participate, though to various degrees. Throughout the course of the fieldwork, the youth discussed the need for an Aboriginal youth council. The following outlines the major themes and ideas which emerged from this discussion.

When discussing the need for an Aboriginal youth council, a few overarching themes were raised. The youth did not think they have many opportunities to participate in planning processes, and often did not feel that their views are well-represented. As one youth said, *“I think that it might be in some cases, but if you’re like trying to get your voice out for something big, I don’t think they may listen to you. They take it from their point of view I guess. A little [opportunities to voice their concerns] but we probably need more.”* Another youth disagreed with this statement and suggested instead that, *“opportunities are there when you don’t even know it...you have to find them, take them and handle it.”* This implied that it was the responsibility of each individual to actively seek out opportunities and take advantage of them. However, both participants believed that there were not adequate opportunities for youth participation and input. They agreed that the creation of a youth council would provide a partial solution to this dilemma by

establishing a permanent, accessible forum for youth to participate in civic and planning processes.

The youth also felt a need to challenge current stereotypes which frame how Aboriginal people are perceived in urban areas. In particular, they desired to highlight the positive strides that were being made within the Aboriginal community, and especially among Aboriginal youth. One youth expanded on this:

I would definitely do that because other people might see us as just whatever they see on the street. Like on the streets there are like bums and sniffers and whatever, but there is a bunch of Aboriginal people who aren't like that. Like my cousins are all going for their teacher, and some of them are going for their doctor, and I want to like stand on something and tell them that.

This discussion was not without debate. There were a few youth who felt that these stereotypes were ingrained in mainstream society, and there was very little they could do to change these misconceptions. They could try to change these perceptions, but some felt the attempt would be futile. The following is a part of the dialogue from that exchange:

**Participant A:** Change people's perception of Aboriginal youth, I don't think it'll do anything, they'll think just still think the same thing.

**Participant B:** Can't change the way they think. The only thing you can do is understand they don't make you who you are. You make you who you are, and you're just as wrong as them if you believe what they say cause they know nothing of you, they don't make who you are, you make who you are... There's a few but they'll make up



their minds for themselves. Nothing we can do can really influence it.

**Participant A:** We could make a small difference. If every person were to make a small difference, we could have a big difference at some point.

**Participant B:** Then to take off the stereotype of all Aboriginals being drunk, you would have to get every last Aboriginal to stop drinking and it's not possible. Same with poor. It means you would have to make every Aboriginal equal, and it's just not gonna happen. They can believe whatever they want, whatever they say doesn't make it always true...They grew up like that and they won't stop.

This exchange was significant because it clearly highlighted divergent opinions regarding Aboriginal stereotyping. Both youth realized that this was part of their reality. One was willing to, at the very least, challenge the status quo. The other had already become disillusioned. From the perspective of Participant B, mainstream society was not yet willing to accept and acknowledge the Aboriginal population as contributors to social, political, and economic realms of society. Some may argue, unfortunately, that this perspective represents the predominant view among Aboriginal youth. If Aboriginal youth are going to fully participate in civic and planning processes, they must assume the mentality of Participant A. If they do not, the larger citizenry and bureaucracy will not acknowledge them as a legitimate core constituency that possesses the right to be heard and adequately represented. They must challenge prevalent stereotypes surrounding their involvement in planning processes.

There was also a strong desire to give a voice to those who usually would not have a say, or who perhaps don't think they have anything to say. This ensures wide representation

and that a variety of ideas are heard. According to one participant, the formation of an Aboriginal youth council is necessary because, *"it'd be helpful I think for, instead of like just someone who usually wouldn't have a voice they would have one."* Another youth expanded on this by suggesting that, *"we all have different ideas. Every person has different pieces of advice, or ideas, or something like that."* This argument was succinctly summed up with the following phrase, *"You gotta give people a chance, that think that maybe they can't make a difference make a difference."* Within the larger context of this thesis, this statement essentially applies equally to all Aboriginal youth. Within the literature, Aboriginal youth are reluctant to participate in civic and planning processes because they encounter significant struggle around identity. Identity is inherently linked to their capacity to participate. This comment was indicative of that awareness and the need to increase the participation capacity among Aboriginal youth to ensure their ideas are heard and their needs are met.

One youth touched on the subject of adultism, and in particular adults not taking the input of youth seriously. She stated that, *"a lot of people won't listen to kids and just think that they are saying nothing when they might actually be talking about something important."* Adultism is mentioned repeatedly in the literature as one of the major obstacles to youth involvement and engagement. According to Mullahey, Susskind, and Checkoway, adultism occurs when young people are talked down to and not viewed as contributing members of society with valuable opinions and ideas who are capable of making responsible decisions by adults. Adultism will only be overcome when adults perceive youth as capable of being legitimately involved in the processes that shape their

communities. This will only occur when adults expand their definition of full citizenship to include youth.

Through my discussion and interaction with the AYCAC participants, it was evident that the youth were willing to support a youth council initiative. They expected that this initiative would provide them with an opportunity to provide input and guidance on decisions which would directly affect their quality of life. The youth felt such a forum was necessary because they believed there was a lack of opportunities for legitimate participation. As a result, their views have not been well represented in the decision making process. Further, they felt it was important to tackle existing stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal youth in particular. If Aboriginal youth are viewed through a more positive lens, it would arguably increase their capacity to participate by strengthening their sense of Aboriginal pride and identity. The creation of an Aboriginal youth council is integral to the resolution of these issues.

During the focus group and interviews, the participants were introduced to three youth council models. The first was the Toronto Youth Council model, the second was the Aboriginal Youth with Initiative (AYWI) model, and the third was the traditional hierarchical structure. The participants were most likely to have encountered the third model through student councils in their respective schools. As each model was introduced, the pros and cons of each were examined. Based on the discussion, it appears that the AYWI model was most popular. Some youth openly said they preferred it because it was based on Aboriginal principles they were familiar with, as in the following,

*"I only heard about the clan system...more understanding."* A few thought it was overly complex. One youth stated that given that this would be an Aboriginal youth group, a structure rooted in Aboriginal teachings would be most appropriate, *"it's more Aboriginal based...the clan system would be good. Clan system would be better for this."* Another youth felt it was appealing due to the way *"everything goes together, and like related to native teachings and stuff."*

Two youth felt the traditional structure would be appropriate because they were most familiar with it, *"I like the traditional structure...it's most common. I just like that, the way that it works."* Another preferred it because it was evident who controlled most of the power. This would result in more timely decisions because consensus was not required. Her sentiments were expressed as follows:

I think this one [traditional structure] would work more than all the other ones because that [clan based] one is just confusing. I would stick to this traditional structure because when I was secretary I found it was easier than having the whole big group discussion and people like disapproving and disagreeing. I just like that there is two people up there [president and vice-president] and they would make the choices and if they had a problem they would sort it out and meet each other half way or something and go from there. The other two would take way more time.

Alternately, one participant suggested that the traditional model was not appealing because simply, *"it's not equal."* This suggestion tied in with the respondent's previous suggestion that a youth council would provide all youth with an opportunity to speak and be heard. This will ensure wide representation and the exchange of a variety of ideas. The formation of a youth council would provide a forum for expression and dialogue.

In support of the AYWI structure, one youth stated the following:

That might work. That is a pretty good one actually...I never heard of that before, and it might be interesting to try out. It's like two on one type thing. So like say you were the guy by yourself, so like if you had something, you'd talk to the other two, and you'd agree on it. Then you guys could go on to the next two and talk to them about it, and convince them to do it, and then keep going until you all agree on it. Instead of having, like this one [traditional structure], where you have one person who tells you what to do, or this one where you have a group of people who decide, and then the other group just goes along with them. So this one would be a good one to try out...Everything seems balanced out.

In this response the importance of team work and working together towards common aims is highlighted. This is consistent with a major theme in the youths' definition of participation. It also encompasses the notion of consensus. This implies that only mutually beneficial decisions are pursued. One participant found the Toronto Youth Cabinet model appealing for that reason:

I think that's a good one [Toronto Youth Council]. You always get other people's points of view, so you're not always doing what one person says. So if you all, kind of like all agree on something do it. So if you guys don't agree, you don't do it.

The youth actively contributed to the discussion regarding which youth council was better suited to their needs. While each model does have inherent benefits and drawbacks, the youth eventually reached a consensus. They would be willing to try the AYWI model, but they want the freedom to modify it in the event that it proved to be ineffective.

In terms of some of the issues the youth would like to tackle, there were three major suggestions. The first was to advocate on behalf pursuing further education. As one youth noted, *“stay in school I guess is the most important one. Go to school and go through life easier. With education it’s easier. With college and stuff.”* This message was coincidentally one of the major objectives of the youth camp. The youth did not indicate that there was any correlation between their decision to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal education and their camp experiences. However, it could be concluded that their camp experience did serve to inform this decision. Secondly, there was a desire to address the issue of gangs, in particular the reduction of Aboriginal youth involvement in gang activity. Third, the youth wanted to increase Aboriginal pride and identity among their peers. In particular, they explored the possibility of creating an Aboriginal youth centre.

One youth expanded on this idea:

maybe like somewhere in like downtown area, get an Aboriginal youth group center type thing, like have it big and like have different things there, like a sweat lodge. They kind of have one but just not for youth. like a sweat lodges, smudges, teaching circles, place you can go to get your name...and have an art person to come and teach you how to do some of the art work and stuff...cause people might give Aboriginal kids a harder time than any other kids cause like I said before their one view and they won't think anything good will come to them because of what they see. It would just give them a sense of belonging, where no one will judge you. Yeah, that's why I would make one of those things.

Based on my discussions with the youth, it was evident that they had strong ideas about what issues an Aboriginal youth council should take on, and some concrete ideas about what they could create. All of their suggestions centered on creating and improving opportunities for Aboriginal youth. They desired to provide their peers with the

opportunities and supports necessary to continue their education. They wanted to offer alternatives to gang membership and affiliation. Finally, they aimed to provide other Aboriginal youth with a center that would allow them to embrace their Aboriginal identity and increase their sense of belonging. All of these issues are interconnected, and would serve to increase the participation capacity among Aboriginal youth. Once the overall capacity among Aboriginal youth is increased, they will become a powerful social force on the municipal radar. The establishment of an Aboriginal youth council will provide them with the platform from which to advocate on behalf of the creation of these opportunities. Ultimately, it will also allow them to, as one participant said, *“show how everyone can join together and do stuff like that.”*

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Through the research analysis, it became evident that the urban Aboriginal youth who participated in the AYCAC had very distinct ideas about participation. While some of the themes they highlighted are present in the literature, others were not. In particular their idea of working together toward a common goal was not addressed at all within the literature examined within this thesis. Imperative to their idea of participation was providing marginalized youth with a voice. Again, this element is unique to their definition of participation.

In terms of their camp experiences, it appeared that the initial camp objectives were achieved. The City of Winnipeg successfully meshed together planning components with Aboriginal cultural elements to provide the youth with an enjoyable and educational

experience. Though exactly how much the youth learned through the AYCAC was difficult to determine, it was reassuring that even nine months after the actual event, they were capable of articulating much of what they learned. As time progresses, I am sure the youth will be better able to process much of what they learned, and connect it the larger environment. As a testament to their positive camp experience, all of the youth stated that would participate in the camp again if given the opportunity.

As with their definition of participation, the youth camp participants also had very clear ideas about the development of an Aboriginal youth council. They decided that the AYWI model would best suit their immediate needs. They also suggested that they would be interested in advocating on behalf of increased educational opportunities for Aboriginal youth; decreasing Aboriginal youth involvement in gang activity, and; developing an Aboriginal youth centre where urban Aboriginal youth can congregate and be immersed in their culture. This would serve to increase their sense of cultural pride and identity, which then translates into increased participation capacity. Based on the research findings discussed in this chapter, the following chapter provides recommendations for future areas of research and action.



## **6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

All of the research examined in the body of this thesis suggests that there are a number of gaps in the literature. Through the research analysis, it became obvious that there are a number of opportunities for future research and action. These voids are most obvious surrounding research with Aboriginal youth, youth councils, and youth council structures. Ideally the opportunities for future action will be fulfilled by Aboriginal youth through youth-led, youth friendly initiatives. However, this does not negate the role of adults and the municipality in facilitating some of these endeavours. The recommendations suggested within this section detail how the gaps in the literature can be filled. It further suggests how some of the opportunities for future research and action can be seized and realized.

### **6.2 In the Literature...**

Throughout the literature review, it became quite apparent that much has been written about the Canadian Aboriginal population from a municipal, provincial and national perspective. Most of the information focuses on their socio-economic status. This focus has resulted in the perpetuation of many negative stereotypes surrounding this population. This is particularly true in relation to Aboriginal youth. They are rarely portrayed in a positive light in the literature. Though great successes are encountered by Aboriginal youth on daily basis, they are not reflected in the literature. Even with these strides, the focus still remains largely on the challenges and obstacles Aboriginal youth encounter. Further, much of the literature is written by non-Aboriginal researchers. This has resulted

in the imposition of mainstream values and judgements on Aboriginal social issues. To rectify this situation, the literature needs to refocus its perspective. The literature must create a balance of information that also highlights the positive strides that are being made in the wider Aboriginal community and among Aboriginal youth in particular. Shifts in the literature must be made before societal perceptions can change accordingly. Societal stereotypes will persist unless changes are made to reflect the current positive social trends. Further it is imperative that people of Aboriginal descent begin to document the positive changes that are occurring within their community. The next step is to ensure that those changes are widely disseminated, and receive more attention than the negative stereotypes.

Another gap in the literature is information regarding Aboriginal youth and participation. While some suggest that Aboriginal communities have been “researched to death”, there is very little information available that specifically addresses the issue of Aboriginal youth and research. In particular, there is a gap in the literature surrounding the types of research that are most appropriate with Aboriginal youth, and best practices for conducting research with them. This is especially true in the case of urban Aboriginal youth. It is imperative that this void in the literature be filled in order to ensure that the most appropriate methods are employed to engage Aboriginal youth in an urban setting. It would also be interesting to read first hand accounts of Aboriginal youth experiences with research. This may provide insight into what youth consider to be appropriate, youth friendly research methods. To fill this gap, academics and Aboriginal youth should

document in detail not only the research outcomes, but also focus on the research process. This information may prove invaluable to researchers.

Distinctly lacking from the literature, as well, is the distinction between the experiences of urban Aboriginal youth and their counterparts living on-reserve and in remote and rural areas. The experiences of Aboriginal youth residing on-reserve and in remote and rural areas is quite different than that of urban Aboriginal youth. Given that the social and cultural contexts vary greatly in both environments, it cannot be assumed that the same tensions exist. One can expect that an Aboriginal youth growing up in an urban area would have vastly different experiences than a peer raised either on-reserve or in a rural setting. That distinction must be addressed in the literature. Though some information is available regarding youth on-reserve and in remote and rural settings, very little has been written about the experiences of urban Aboriginal youth. Identifying this distinction in the literature would allow researchers to better understand the unique social, economic, and political circumstances that exist in each situation. This could result in the development of increasingly appropriate research and engagement techniques for urban and rural Aboriginal youth.

Within the literature, there is very little mention of how applicable the mainstream Canadian youth experience is to that of urban Aboriginal youth. This lack of representation was most visible in the literature surrounding the definition of youth, the notion of youth participation, and the benefits of youth participation. While the roles and responsibilities of youth were previously discussed in detail, there was no mention of

whether these roles and responsibilities are applicable within Aboriginal culture. A variety of definitions surrounding youth participation were previously discussed. Again, I was unable to locate any Aboriginal perspective on this topic within the literature. As such, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these ideals of youth participation apply to and are reflective of Aboriginal youth. Lastly, the benefits of youth participation in planning and civic processes are also discussed. Again, the literature did not frame any of the research within an Aboriginal context. This does not mean that Aboriginal youth do not benefit from participation in municipal and planning processes. Rather, it may be indicative that they reap benefits that are not acknowledged by their non-Aboriginal counterparts. All of these topics present areas for future research. Increased literature in these areas would ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal youth are accessible to the wider community. It would also provide a framework for the development of more inclusive participation techniques.

Also missing from the literature is certain information surrounding youth councils. While there is a plethora of literature regarding youth councils, most of it focuses on ways to implement a youth council, and benefits to the youth and the wider society. However, there is little information about the structures of youth councils and very few comprehensive definitions of youth councils. During the literature review, I found minimal information regarding the theory behind youth council structures. This information is essential to the formation of youth councils because it will facilitate their analysis and evaluation. This is essential to determine if they are indeed youth friendly. Alternately, it may demonstrate that a few main structures are generally implemented

because people are comfortable and familiar with them. While many youth councils are based on the traditional hierarchical structure previously outlined, there is no indication as to why that is. This reinforces the need for the emergence of a body of literature which explores the theoretical underpinnings of youth councils and their related structures.

Much of the literature regarding youth councils is based on European and Australian examples. However, lacking from all of the literature is a comprehensive definition of youth councils from a European, Australian, or Canadian perspective. This may be an indication that the term has become so commonplace that it no longer needs to be defined. Alternately, it may suggest that the actual term itself has not been the subject of an in-depth analysis. Further research needs to be undertaken in this area because it appears that the terms youth council, youth group, and youth advisory boards are being used interchangeably in the literature. However each of these terms has their own distinct meaning and connotes specific activities and responsibilities. Further research is necessary in this area to clarify the definition of each of these terms. Though they are related they are by no means the same.

### **6.3 The Youth...**

Based on the research analysis, it was evident that the youth who participated in the AYCAC were interested in participating in an Aboriginal youth council. Throughout the research fieldwork, the youth identified the need for such a group. They selected a council formation which they felt would best fit their needs. They also listed a number of issues they firmly believed were important to tackle. Beyond that, they expressed a larger

vision for the creation of an urban Aboriginal youth center in downtown Winnipeg. This information provides a strong framework for the development of an Aboriginal youth council. However, a few issues must be resolved before this council can begin to take shape.

The youth must decide if this is a project that they want to initiate. It was mentioned repeatedly that if one was initiated, they would participate. This implies that none of the youth are willing to take the lead in forming the group. This suggests that in this instance, an existing project or a number of youth oriented activities would be a means to attracting and retaining youth, and essentially establishing a youth council. This would simultaneously serve to strengthen capacity within the group. Perhaps the youth lack the confidence to undertake such a project without adult assistance. Further, as a group they must resolve to increase their organizational capacity. This can be accomplished by recruiting other Aboriginal youth with relevant experience to assist them with this endeavour. They may also seek out the assistance of some adults who share their vision and are willing to support them, but not overtake the project. As a group, they should undertake a number of capacity building activities.

Beyond this, the youth must decide if they want to operate under the auspices of the city, or if they will function as an arm's length group. They may choose to operate much like the Toronto Youth Council. Alternately, they may choose to operate independently of the city. This may give them more control over the issues they champion, and increased access to various funding sources. As part of this, the youth will also have to decide if

they will focus on direct programming, advocacy, or a combination of both. These decisions have to be made. They can either be direct decisions, or they can be the result of an evolutionary process. As the group matures, the answers to these questions may become more evident. Regardless of how these decisions are made, these issues must constantly be at the forefront to ensure that the purpose and intent of the group are realized. To accomplish this, the Manitoba First Nations Youth Council suggests engaging in a series of visioning sessions in order to develop a political and organizational vision: economic, social, and cultural visions. These sessions should be hosted with the youth to generate some discussion and future directions around these issues (Manitoba First Nations Youth Council).

While all of the youth stated that they would participate in an Aboriginal youth council, they may have difficulty committing to the group. This was apparent when I was organizing the interviews and focus group. Often times the youth were ready and willing to participate, but their participation was dependant on their parents' schedule. This may be problematic because the parents may not view the council as a priority. Should a council be formed, this issue should be addressed. This issue may be resolved by offering youth an incentive, such a school credit or volunteer hours, for their participation. During the AYCAC, transportation was an obstacle for the youth. Offering incentives that directly tackle these barriers would help to facilitate their participation.

The AYCAC was successful in exposing the participants to planning and civic processes within the City of Winnipeg. The youth unanimously agreed that they were exposed to a

number of new experiences and learned a great deal about municipal processes. Through the research analysis, it also became apparent that the camp inspired the youth to become more civically active and politically-minded. The City of Winnipeg should make a commitment to host a similar camp on an annual basis. The benefits of this would be numerous. Firstly, it will narrow the gap between Aboriginal youth and the City while exposing them to the inner workings of the city. Secondly, the youth who participate in the AYCAC may be stimulated to participate in the Aboriginal youth council. Thirdly, it provides the city with the opportunity to present various career options to Aboriginal youth. This will directly assist them in attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees within the city.

The City of Winnipeg, through the AYCAC, has set a precedent in terms of their commitment to urban the Aboriginal population in Winnipeg. They must now decide to what extent they are willing to maintain that level of commitment. The youth will decide if they want to operate under or independently of the city. Regardless of their choice, the City of Winnipeg must decide how much support they are willing to lend to such a group. This support may come in the form of financial and/or human resources, and by actively seeking out their input. The city can only benefit from the creation of such a group because it will directly translate into more informed planning decisions and result in smarter municipal investments over the long term. Based on these benefits, it would be in the city's best interest to actively foster and support the creation of an Aboriginal youth council. However, it is possible that the creation of such a group may lead to the formation of other similar groups by people belonging to other cultural communities. The



city does not need to justify their support of an Aboriginal youth council because policy provisions directly support these types of endeavours.

Based on the outcome of this research, there are a number of areas for future research. In particular, it would be interesting to work with the AYCAC participants, or another group of youth, to develop a council structure that best fits their needs. While this research examines only three possible council structures, it is likely that there are many youth council structures that have yet to be explored and/or developed. For example, the youth may be interested in developing a council structure that is rooted in Aboriginal governance structures, but also incorporates elements that best suit their needs as urban youth. Youth are acutely aware of their needs, and often have excellent ideas to ensure their needs are met. This exercise would provide the youth with a suitable council structure, as well as give them ownership over the council itself.

A further area for research would be to actually implement an Aboriginal youth council based on the research findings presented in this thesis. It would be interesting to explore whether, upon implementation, the youth are still interested in pursuing the issues they mentioned during this research. A further topic of interest is whether the council operates, as one might assume, based on the research findings presented in this thesis. Should this line of research be pursued, it is likely that the youth council that develops may not at all resemble what was described in this thesis. This is expected given that youth and their ideas are in a constant state of evolution. Nonetheless, it would make for an interesting comparison.

Another suggestion for future research would be to interview all of the AYCAC participants in ten years to determine if and how the AYCAC impacted their life.

Questions for this research could focus on the following areas:

1. Education: Did the youth complete high school and chose to pursue higher education?
2. Careers: Did any of the youth choose to pursue any of the careers they were exposed to during the AYCAC?
3. Participation: To what extent do the youth participate in planning and civic processes?

While this line of inquiry may be difficult, it would assist to assess the overall influence, if any, the AYCAC exerted over the lives of the youth participants.

A final area for future research would be to investigate the frameworks and structures that need to be in place to facilitate youth participation at the municipal level. Inherent to this line of research is an examination of the policy initiatives that must be in place to facilitate this, and how youth can be involved in the overall process. This type of inquiry would serve to ensure that municipalities have the appropriate structures and culture required to encourage and embrace youth participation.

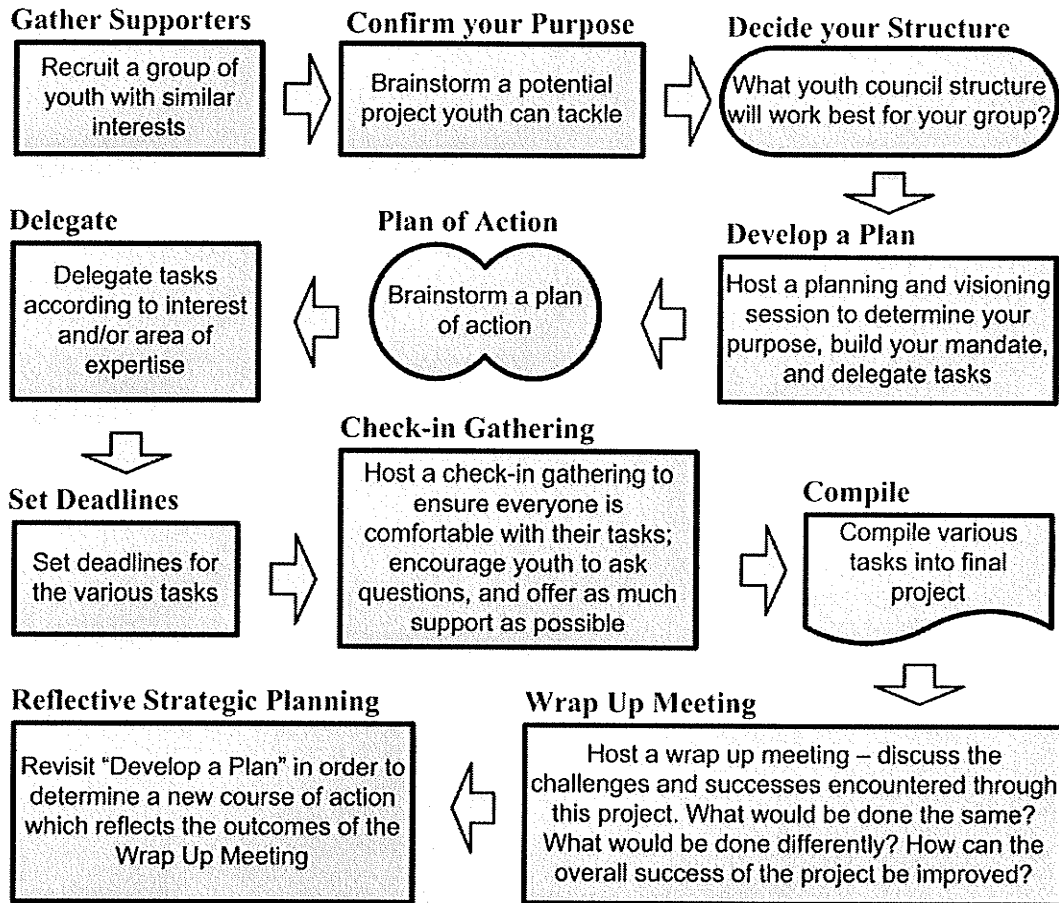
#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Within the literature, a number of gaps were noted. Both academics and research participants have an obligation to document the pertinent information as this is crucial to ensure that both youth and adults are aware of the definitions of various youth

organization configurations. This will facilitate the implementation of appropriate council structures, and avoid any confusion about their purpose and activities.

Based on the recommendations previously suggested, the youth have a number of decisions to make regarding the formation of an Aboriginal youth council. However, there is no need to rush and make these decisions. There is some merit in starting small and expanding as the group's capacity increases. By starting with smaller projects and with a manageable number of participants (approximately ten), the youth will be able to develop a strong sense of unity and teamwork. Starting small also allows the youth to gain small successes that will assist them to establish their credibility with their peers and within their community (New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development 2003). From this stage, the youth can identify the issues that are most important to them. This will further allow them to gain a better understanding of their strength and weaknesses as an organization, and provide them with an indication of where to best focus their efforts. These will all serve to greatly reduce the chance of failure as the group is not extending themselves beyond their capacity early on. As the group evolves, the issues they support and the methods they use will change accordingly. Once they continue to participate in visioning exercises they will maintain a strong understanding of their future directions. The following chart outlines some immediate action youth can take to start a youth council.

## Immediate Action – Steps Youth Can Take Now



Adapted from: New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development.--. Youth councils. Available: <[www.myd.govt.nz.cfm?1=18](http://www.myd.govt.nz.cfm?1=18)>. Date Accessed: March 3, 2005.

In order for youth to undertake these steps, municipalities need to recognize that certain structures must be in place to facilitate youth participation. In particular, they must ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of youth, and be open to their ideas and suggestions. Ideally, municipalities should work in partnership with youth to develop and implement these frameworks. Further, any adults who will be working directly with the youth must be passionate about their participation, and be willing to fully support their endeavours. The City of Winnipeg also has a number of decisions to make. The city must decide the

extent to which they are willing to support an Aboriginal youth council initiative. When making this decision, they must pay heed to the potential benefits and possible pitfalls of supporting such a group. Given the current population demographics in Winnipeg, in this instance, it appears that the benefits far exceed the potential drawbacks.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the Aboriginal youth camp participants define participation?
2. To what extent did the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp foster a better understanding of planning among the youth participants?
3. To what extent has the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp inspired the youth to form an Aboriginal youth council in order to increase their participation in municipal affairs?

These questions were answered within the context of the Aboriginal Youth Career Awareness Camp. The answers to these questions were gleaned mainly from the research fieldwork, with much of the information being drawn from the youth participant responses. Accordingly, much of the information presented originated with the youth themselves, and is reflective of their thoughts and opinions. This chapter summarizes the major research findings arising from this thesis. It also reinforces some of the biases and limitations I experienced during this research and how they influenced the research findings. Through this section, I also discuss ways in which this research could be improved.

Within the literature review and research fieldwork, there is a demonstrated need for increased urban Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes in Winnipeg, and on the international stage. Youth are still not perceived as full citizens with the right and capacity to participate in the decisions which affect their lives. This is particularly true of urban Aboriginal youth. Though they face the same challenges as their non-Aboriginal counterparts, they are compounded by negative stereotypes which

are perpetuated by the media and other social forces. These misperceptions greatly reduce their capacity to participate because it diminishes their sense of worth and belonging to the wider society.

In the literature, and through this research, it is evident that Aboriginal youth possess strong, creative ideas about their neighbourhoods and communities. They are capable of expressing and representing themselves without relying on adult intervention. However, they lack a forum from which to do this. In Winnipeg, the development of an Aboriginal youth council may provide the solution to this problem. It is hoped that with time, this council will gradually evolve into an organization similar to the TYC in that their input will be sought after, and will result in measurable, identifiable change. This would allow Aboriginal youth to affect change at the municipal level, thus strengthening the participation capacity of their community. Simultaneously, it will ensure that all future social and physical planning endeavours reflect their unique perspectives and experiences. At the very least, the development of an Aboriginal youth council will be a springboard for increased Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes at the municipal level.

Throughout this research, I experienced a number of biases and limitations. This has provided me with the opportunity to critically reflect on what I would do differently should the opportunity arise again. One of the major limitations of this research was the small sample size involved in the focus group and one-on-one interviews. As a result of this, the findings from this research are inconclusive, and applicable only in this instance.

They are not applicable to the wider Aboriginal youth population, and cannot be applied to any other municipality.

At the outset of this research, I had very little knowledge of the Aboriginal population in Winnipeg. Through this fieldwork, I have been exposed to a number of Aboriginal cultural activities. These have served to increase my knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal culture, and the distinct contribution it has made to the Canadian context. My involvement in these activities has also shattered many preconceived notions I held regarding the urban Aboriginal population. As in this instance, I was cognizant of my biases before undertaking this research. For future research projects, I would again assess my personal perceptions before beginning the research. This will allow me to separate fact from my own biases, and result in more accurate research findings.

A major drawback during the research was the reality that I did not have ethics approval prior to observing the AYCAC. This severely limited the discussions that I could engage in with the youth during the camp. Should I undertake a similar research project again, I will ensure that I have full ethics approval prior to beginning the fieldwork stage of the research. This would provide me with the opportunity to increase my interactions with the youth, and result in richer research findings. This would also ensure that follow-up activities such as the focus group and interviews are conducted in a timely manner.

Ideally, if this research were to be repeated, I would have the opportunity to observe the AYCAC participants over the course of an entire year. Following the AYCAC, using a



participatory action framework, I would work with them to devise a suitable youth council model, and observe if they endeavour to form an Aboriginal youth council. To facilitate this, I would invite youth participants from some of the models explored in this research to visit the AYCAC participants and describe some of their personal experiences using the various models. From this perspective, the research would focus mainly on how the youths' AYCAC experience served to influence the development of an Aboriginal youth council. In particular, I would be interested in determining how the youth applied the information from their camp experience into a youth council setting. As a result, my research findings would shift to highlight the applicability of the camp experience, and how that meshes with the development of an Aboriginal youth council.

While the idea of forming an Aboriginal youth council is still in the conceptual stage, its implementation would be of significant benefit to Aboriginal youth, the City of Winnipeg, and the larger society. While strides are being made in this direction, much more must be done to ensure that the Aboriginal youth of today and tomorrow have a forum from which to exert their political influence. In particular, the City of Winnipeg must commit to hosting an AYCAC annually, and the urban Aboriginal youth must commit to creating an Aboriginal youth council. Once these commitments are made, the other pieces of the puzzle will progressively fall into place.

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## 9 APPENDIX 1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ABORIGINAL YOUTH

Generally, those cities with large Aboriginal populations are those with the highest instances of Aboriginal poverty. Winnipeg is one of four cities in which Aboriginal peoples are highly concentrated in a few areas, mainly inner-city neighbourhoods. Some suggest that this concentration of the population in a few areas of the city could lead to negative concentration effects, and potentially the ghettoization of Aboriginal peoples. (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003, Carter and Polevychok 2004, Graham and Peters 2002, Hanselmann 2001). Further, the Aboriginal population faces high rates of incarceration, teen pregnancy, low educational attainment and suicide.

According to a 1996 report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Aboriginals are more likely to be denied bail; more likely to be charged with multiple offences than their non-Aboriginal counterparts; spend less time with a lawyer than non-Aboriginal clients, and; twice as likely as non-Aboriginals to be incarcerated (1996: 32). In many jurisdictions, the percentage of Aboriginal youth in custody exceeds their representation in the overall population (Aboriginal Task Group 2004: 47). The Royal Commission suggests that the root causes of problems facing Aboriginal people in the justice system are the cultural conflicts between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations; economic and social deprivation, and; historical and political processes which have exacerbated the problem of poverty among Aboriginal peoples (1996). However, a recent report, *A One Day Snapshot of Aboriginal Youth in Custody across Canada*, suggests a 36% decline in the number of Aboriginal youth in custody, with a notable decrease from three years ago, particularly in four urban areas including Winnipeg. Despite the



reduction of Aboriginal youth in custody, they are still almost eight times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Latimer and Casey 2004).

According to Longfield and Godfrey, one of the largest problems facing Aboriginal communities is the high rate of teenage pregnancy due to a lack of proper sexual education within the home and wider community. This problem is compounded by the reality that many of these children are born with health problems and suffer from high disability infant mortality rates. Adolescent mothers are more likely to be depressed, have lower educational attainment, be single mothers and live in poverty (Longfield and Godfrey 2003, Carter and Polevychok, Chalifoux and Johnson 2003).

Aboriginal youth tend to have lower levels of education than other Canadian youth, and as a result, they are disadvantaged upon entering the workforce (Works that Matter Inc. 2000). Some urban centres, such as Regina and Thunder Bay, have successfully managed to retain Aboriginal youth in school at rates of almost 80% which is comparable to the non-Aboriginal average of 83%. However, a large number continue to drop out of high school (Carter and Polevychok 2004: 5). Nonetheless, that trend is changing. There are now more than 150,000 Aboriginal people who have completed or are in post-secondary education, and there is a growing Aboriginal middle class of higher income professionals (Graham and Peters 2002: 16). This trend is quietly occurring across Canada. Chalifoux and Johnson expand on this by suggesting that young Aboriginals with higher education levels can “expect to markedly increase their likelihood of employment and to raise their expected income level” (2003:26). Further, at the highest levels of education, Aboriginals

earn approximately as much as the non-Aboriginal population (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 26).

Though under recorded, suicide rates among Aboriginal youth are estimated to be five to six times higher than that of non-Aboriginal youth (Chalifoux and Johnson 2003: 50).

While Aboriginal youth encounter the same troubles and confusion of adolescence as their non-Aboriginal counterparts, their problems are compounded by additional challenges. These problems include a society that devalues their identity and culture, a lack of family, community and social supports, and low self esteem (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1995 and 1997, Beauvais, McKay, and Seddon 2001). Suicide is most commonly attempted by those between the ages of 15 and 29, but the foundation for such an act is laid much earlier. It is suggested that those children who experience love and security in early childhood cope better with the challenges and stress that come later in life (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1995: 31).

## 10 APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM (ADULTS)

The research is being conducted by Leah Ross, a graduate student in the Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba. The project is entitled Aboriginal Youth Involvement in Planning and Civic Processes. The University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board has approved the conduct of this research.

The research investigates the urban Aboriginal youth population in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Specifically, it examines the opportunities available to them to actively participate in and influence civic and planning processes. Through this research, there will be an examination of the importance of engaging Aboriginal youth in planning and civic processes, as well as identification of barriers to participation. Further, this research will examine an existing, successful, youth-driven participation method, and suggest ways in which a similar program could be adopted by Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. Finally, it will suggest recommendations for increasing their capacity for participation in municipal affairs.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that analyzing the material at a later date will be completed with greater ease and efficiency. If you have any questions or concerns during the session, feel free to ask immediately. If at any time during the interview session you do not feel comfortable commenting on an issue or question, you are not obligated to do so. If you would like to stop the interview at any time, you are welcome to do so without prejudice or consequence.

Personal information will be kept confidential. This means that your name, your position, your age, and/or any other information that would give confidential information away will not be included in any publicly disseminated materials arising from the study. Where information occurs within a session transcript that will be included in the final report, names and other personal information will be omitted, unless permission to do so has been explicitly granted.

Information from this interview may form part of future articles, books or other publicly disseminated media by the researcher. All research data (e.g., photographs, audio recordings, transcripts, research fieldnotes) will be stored in a private and secured place until such time as publications and/or other publicly disseminated media arising from the research have come to fruition. At this point, the research materials will be destroyed.

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please feel free to contact me at (204) 452-6386 or via e-mail at [leahross@rogers.com](mailto:leahross@rogers.com), OR you may contact the University of Manitoba Human Ethics Secretariat at (204)474-7122.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give Leah Ross (graduate student researcher) permission to use the information gathered during this interview session under the conditions stated above. I understand that this research is part of a study researching Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes. Further, I also understand that this research will promote increased youth involvement in decision-making processes, and agree to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions without prejudice or consequence.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

For those under 18 years of age:

Parent / Guardian Signature (required in advance) \_\_\_\_\_

## 11 APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM (YOUTH)

Dear Parent / Guardian:

This research is being conducted by Leah Ross, a graduate student in the Department of City Planning, University of Manitoba. The project is entitled Aboriginal Youth Involvement in Civic and Planning Processes in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The University of Manitoba's Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board has approved the conduct of this research.

The research investigates the urban Aboriginal youth population in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Specifically, it examines the opportunities available to them to actively participate in and influence civic and planning processes. Through this research, there will be an examination of the importance of engaging Aboriginal youth in planning and civic processes, as well as identification of barriers to participation. Further, this research will examine an existing, successful, youth-driven participation method, and suggest ways in which a similar program could be adopted by Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. Finally, it will suggest recommendations for increasing their capacity for participation in municipal affairs.

With your permission, your child may be observed and/or interviewed. Interviews may be audio-recorded and transcribed at a later date for research purposes. This will allow the analysis of the material to be completed with greater ease and efficiency at a later date. Your child's name, age, level of schooling (grade), and any other personal information will not be included in the any publication and/or other publicly disseminated media arising from the study. Where information occurs within a session transcript, that will be included in the final report, names and other personal information will be omitted.

All research data (e.g., photographs, audio recordings, transcripts, research fieldnotes) will be stored in a private and secured place until such time as publications and/or other publicly disseminated media arising from the research have come to fruition. At that time, the research materials will be destroyed.

### Photography

Photographs may be taken during participatory events, workshops or other kinds of session to capture group dynamics, activities, and interactions between participants. With your permission, photograph(s) of your child may be included in the publicly disseminated materials allowing readers (or viewers) to catch a glimpse of the students' activities and group processes. Your child's face may feature in these visual images. However, name tags will not be worn by the student at any time that will allow them to be identified by name in photographs. In addition, names will not be attached to any persons in the photo, nor in the corresponding text within any publicly disseminated documents.

This research may be disseminated in the form of a thesis, or other publicly disseminated forms (e.g., report, educational video).

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, please feel free to Leah Ross at \_\_\_\_\_ or via e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_. OR you may contact the University of Manitoba Human Ethics Secretariat at (204)474-7122.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have decided to allow my child to participate in the above research. My signature indicates that I have read the information above and have given permission for my child to participate in all the activities he/she wishes to participate in. My child's signature indicates that he/she understands that this research is part of a study researching Aboriginal youth participation in planning and civic processes. They also understand that this research will promote increased youth involvement in decision-making processes, and agrees to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions without prejudice or consequence.

Please fill out the following additional information:

***Photographs***

My child is allowed to participate in the study, but no photographs may be taken of my child.

OR

Yes, photographs can be taken of my child's activities, which may feature in future publicly disseminated materials.

***and***

I also wish to see the photographs that may be included in future publications for my final approval. You may contact me by phone at \_\_\_\_\_ or via e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_

OR

My final approval as to which photographs are permitted for inclusion in the final document is not necessary.

**Parent / Guardian's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student's Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_