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Understanding Academic Success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) Students Through the Use of an Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous Methodology)

Ashley Victoria Dorothy Johnson
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Running head: UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students through the use of an
Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)

by

Ashley Victoria Dorothy Johnson

Honors Bachelor of Science, Biology and Psychology

at Wilfrid Laurier University, 2007

THESIS

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Master of Arts

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Abstract

School-retention rates for Indigenous (Onkwehonwe) students are disproportionately lower than the non-Indigenous population in Canada (Mendelson, 2006). Currently, few studies on Native education acquire the perspectives and knowledge from successful OS. Many non-persistence factors for OS have been uncovered, but few studies have offered solutions. Additionally, there is minimal (re)search using an Indigenous methodology (Onkwehonwe'neha) in the exploration Onkwehonwe education. This search (study) focused on the perspectives and experiences of six successful OS (i.e., five graduate students and one entering a graduate program). Two of the six participants were Aboriginal student-services coordinators at accredited universities within Ontario, Canada. Through the use of culturally relevant Onkwehonwe'neha methods of conversations and a sharing circle, the participants shared their perspectives on factors that contributed to their success in school and on interventions that might increase academic success for other OS.

Four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success were identified: *challenges* that OS face in their journeys towards success, *motivators* that increase OS's motivation to continue in school, *supports* that assist OS's success, and *interventions and strategies* to increase success. As a result of using an Onkwehowne'neha, the author was able to understand the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of the findings. A cultural framework was developed to illustrate the integrated, multi-level, and wholistic approaches needed to address challenges that OS face at various levels of education (i.e., elementary, high school, and post secondary). Specifically, combinations of motivators, supports, and interventions were identified as ways to mitigate challenges that OS face in their academic journeys. Some supports and interventions also were found to increase motivators among OS.

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Terms of Reference

Listed are some terms of reference that will be used throughout this thesis. And it is important to note that the terms Native and Onkwehonwe will be used interchangeably to refer to Indigenous people throughout this study.

Onkwehonwe is an Haudenosaunee word, which in English means “Original People” or “first People” of this Land. I use this term most frequently throughout this paper to refer to Indigenous people. Because the Onkwehonwe word includes the term *people*, it seemed redundant to say Onkwehonwe *people*. Thus, for the most part, I simply say Onkwehonwe when referring to Indigenous people.

According to Section 35(2) of the Constitution Act, 1982, the term Aboriginal includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. Aboriginal is a widely recognized word and is commonly used by Native and non-Native people. However, there are some Native people who do not like this term Aboriginal because Native people are the “Original” or “first people of the land” (Onkwehonwe, see below) and the prefix ‘ab’ seems to imply something other than the “Original”.

Indian is a legal term and is used in certain government legislation such as the *Indian Act*. It is considered derogatory for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it was due to an erroneous geographical mistake made by Christopher Columbus that the term “Indian” was applied to Onkwehonwe peoples (he thought he had landed in India when he had landed in North America). Secondly, the *Indian Act* was created by North American colonizers as an assimilation tactic against Onkwehonwe people of North America. For instance, many Onkwehonwe people lost their Native status due to this legislation. Thirdly, many Onkwehonwe people, including myself, feel that the term “Indian” is synonymous with “savage”. In fact, I remember textbooks in grade

school using the term “Indian” with the word “savage” in parentheses to reference Onkwehonwe peoples. Many of my relatives have similar memories.

American Indian refers to Indigenous peoples of the United States. Native American also refers to Indigenous peoples of the United States; however, at one time both Canada and the United States were considered “Americas” and so many Indigenous people use the term Native American regardless of their country of residence.

Native is a term that is commonly used to identify one’s self as Indigenous and is a term that I feel comfortable using and use often. Native means “people belonging to a land” (Willett, 2007, p.10).

Indigenous means “Native to a land” (Willett, 2007, p.10) and is another term that I feel quite comfortable using and will be seen throughout this thesis.

Haudenosaunee means “People of the Longhouse”, referring collectively to Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, Mohawk, and Cayuga nations. And is used instead of the term “Iroquois” which is a French version of a Huron name meaning “Black Snakes”.

First Nations refers to “Indigenous people of Canada” (Willett, 2007, p.10) and it “usually refers to those who have treaty status” (Willett, 2007, p.10).

Finally, I would to point out that I will be using the term ‘search’ and ‘searcher’ instead of ‘research’ and ‘researcher’ as the former terms bring with them many negative connotations among Indigenous communities (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

One purpose of this search was to explore school retention and school success factors of Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students at various levels of education from the perspectives of both successful Onkwehonwe students (i.e. Onkwehonwe graduate students) and Onkwehonwe advisors for Onkwehonwe students. Another purpose of this search was to identify, from the viewpoints of the participants, interventions and/or strategies to increase Onkwehonwe students' academic success at various levels of education. The findings from this search are limited due to the small sample size (n=6) and gender imbalance (only 1 male). However, the participants are of the small proportion of Onkwehonwe to have received a higher education. Therefore, their voices and perspectives are of great value. This search provides in-depth information on factors and interventions that contribute to Onkwehonwe students' success in school.

The education of Onkwehonwe students (OS) is a critical issue and deserves a great deal of attention since the number of Aboriginal students is proportionately lower than the non-Onkwehonwe student population. As of 2001 census data, 48 percent of OS do not complete high school while the comparative figure for the non-Onkwehonwe population in Canada is 31 percent (Mendelson, 2006). In 1996, the non-completion of high school was 54% for OS. Although the high school completion rates for OS have increased by six percent, high school retention rates remain alarmingly low (Mendelson, 2006). In 1996, only 9.4 percent of Onkwehonwe attended university compared to 22.5 percent of the broader population (AUCC, n.d.). And only 5 percent of OS completed a university degree in 1996 (AUCC, n.d.). These rates were very low and, according to 2001 census data, have dropped to 4 percent of OS completing a university degree (Mendelson, 2006).

In addition, the issue of Onkwehonwe education is becoming more important as the Onkwehonwe population is on the rise and younger than the non-Onkwehonwe population of Canada. According to the 2001 census, those identifying themselves as Aboriginal comprise 3.3 percent of Canada's total population; this is a 22 percent increase since 1996. And, the median age for the Aboriginal population in 2001 was found to be 24.7 years old compared to 37.7 years old for the non-Aboriginal population (Holmes, 2006). As the Onkwehonwe population is on the rise and consists mostly of younger generations, the issue of Onkwehonwe education is becoming a crisis and the levels of student "drop out" among Aboriginal populations is almost epidemic (Willett, 2007).

Education is important in terms of self-government, self-reliance, and the self-determination of Indigenous peoples (Willett, 2007). Currently, the unemployment rates for Onkwehonwe people are persistently high (Holmes, 2006). However, surveys show that Onkwehonwe people who complete post-secondary education receive higher incomes and have an increased chance of finding employment (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Holmes, 2006). Higher education seems to be the paramount way to increasing social mobility for Onkwehonwe people (Sloane-Sleale, Wallace, & Levin, 2000). And an increase in the number of Onkwehonwe people with a post-secondary education can provide Onkwehonwe communities with more educated community members in various fields, thereby increasing Onkwehonwe communities' self-reliance and self-determination through capacity building.

Education levels remain persistently low for Onkwehonwe populations despite numerous studies in the area of Native school retention (Hodgson-Smith, 2000; Willett, 2007). When reviewing the literature, I found that most of the research performed in the area of Native education focused on school attrition and those students who have been *unsuccessful* in

completing their education. In addition, very few research studies in this area have fully employed an Indigenous methodology (Onkwehonwe'neha). Indigenous methodologies may prove to be a more valid methodology when searching for knowledge about Onkwehonwe people and communities, since the cultural lens of the Indigenous methodology is consistent with the culture of the issue at study (Absolon, 2008). Johnson (1996) explains that knowledge acquired through Western scientific research methods has produced knowledge that is culturally irrelevant to Onkwehonwe. She furthers that if culturally relevant knowledge is to be gained, it must be gained through a culturally relevant way. On the basis of more cultural relevance, I have decided that an Onkwehonwe'neha will provide a more culturally relevant way of understanding academic success factors among OS.

In addition to a more culturally appropriate methodology, the use of an Onkwehonwe'neha for my search is important for a couple of other reasons. Firstly, research has a history of being negative and harmful to Onkwehonwe (Absolon, 2008; Castellano, 2004; Willett, 2007). The principal tenets of an Onkwehonwe'neha, respect and reciprocity, reduce the possible harm of (re)search by placing a positive focus on benefiting the community and/or people involved within the (re)search (Absolon, 2008; Bishop, 1998b). This spirit of reciprocity increases ethicality by minimizing harm and negative outcomes from research. Another reason that an Onkwehonwe'neha is important to Onkwehonwe (re)search is that we, Onkwehonwe, have used our knowledge to survive on this land since our origins (Absolon, 2008; Cardinal, 2001; Johnson, 1996). Through our Onkwehonwe knowledge we have survived attempted genocide (Duran & Duran, 1995). We have our own valid methodologies for searching for answers and must bring these methods to the forefront of our (re)search as a means of "rewriting and rerighting the Indian position in history and society" (Lavallee, 2009, p. 4).

My intent for this search was to utilize an Onkwehonwe'neha to co-create knowledge with highly successful OS (graduate students) and Onkwehonwe academic advisors on factors and interventions/strategies leading to academic success and school retention for OS.

Prior to beginning a review of the literature in the area of Native education, I will give some background information about myself that will also show my positionality, my stake in this search, and my motives for doing this search (Absolon & Willett, 2005). This is called my *location* and is an integral part of an Indigenous methodology, because it increases trustworthiness by showing the reader whether or not I, the searcher, have a vested interest in the study (Absolon & Willett, 2005). As Sinclair (2003) put it, "It [locating self] means revealing our identity to others; who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things, and our intentions for the work we plan to do. Hence, 'location' in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point" (p. 122).

Location

My name is Ashley Johnson. I was born to a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) mother and a Romanian father. I grew up with my Kanien'kehá:ka grandma (mother's mother) as my mother passed away when I was five-years old and my sister one-year old. My family is from Six Nations, Ontario. My family has always had a strong connection to our Onkwehonwe roots. My family, like many other Onkwehonwe families, has been negatively impacted by forced colonization and assimilation practices. Due to these practices, my grandma did not know how to speak her language and she was raised Christian. Even though my grandma did not grow up knowing her traditions and language, her worldview was that of a Kanien'kehá:ka person. This is the worldview that she passed on to me.

As a small child I began to have an understanding of the negative effects and impacts of the *Indian Act* on Onkwehonwe, particularly on Onkwehonwe women. For instance, my grandma

and grandpa were both “full-blooded” Mohawks from Six Nations. And my grandma was considered a “status Indian” prior to marrying my grand. However, my grandfather did not have his “Indian” status card when they married, so my grandma lost her status as an “Indian”. My grandpa’s family never had their status cards and it is unclear as to why they did not have their cards. However, there is some speculation that my grandpa’s family had become enfranchised so that they could own land (i.e., exchange of status as “Indian” to be able to own land). My grandma did not regain her status as an “Indian” until 1988 when Bill C-31 was passed. As a result, none of their children (including my mother) was able to obtain her or his status cards until the late 1980’s after my grandma and grandpa finally obtained theirs.

Growing up I experienced many of the challenges that other Native families experience. Alcohol was a big problem in my family and there was always a bit of chaos in the home because of it. When my grandpa was around there was a lot of verbal and physical fighting, since my grandma and he did not get along.

I grew up with my grandma and my younger sister (occasionally my grandpa would live with us). We lived in a tiny house in a small, off-reserve town. Our house was very old and run-down, but it was home. It was the same house that my grandma moved to when she left the reserve as a single mom with two baby girls (my mom and my aunt). As I got older I became embarrassed about our little run-down house and would not invite friends over or let them know where I lived.

My grandma was granted custody of my sister and me when she was 68 years old. Despite her age, there was nothing she could not do. She worked in tobacco fields until she was about 73 years old. As a young girl I remember putting tar and new shingles on the roof with her (she would have been about 72 years old at the time). I was hesitant to climb onto the roof with her

because I was scared of heights, worried that she was too old, and didn't think that she knew what she was doing. I told her, "No" and insisted that maybe we should have a man do this work. She responded, "There isn't anything a man can do, that we can't do for ourselves. Now get up here!" My grandma was strict, so I did not dare question her again.

I grew up hearing the stories of racism that my grandma, grandpa, and aunts and uncles had experienced. I was fortunate to not have directly encountered overt racism in my younger years, because I attended multicultural Christian private schools that were very accepting. And it was not until my teenage years that I began to be exposed to more overt forms of racism.

Despite the chaotic times at home I felt really loved. I was raised by a very loving and strong grandma. She had an unwavering belief in my sister and me and supported any of our goals. She was an amazingly strong woman and I am so blessed to have had her in my life. She taught us that there is nothing that we cannot do. And although she would not have used the term "feminist" to describe herself, she was a true feminist.

I was very lucky to go to a small private elementary school that was paid for by my mom's estate. The education that I received was more advanced than the public schools. Because it was a one room school with only six to ten students, I was able to get a lot of individual attention from the teacher. I did not like school when I was young and would always tell the teacher's daughter that I was going to drop out of school, as soon as I could. Then one day my teacher took me aside and told me about my Canadian Basic Skills Testing scores and she explained to me what these scores meant and said that I was very good in math and other subjects. She told me that I had a lot of potential and was in the top percentile for my grade. That day things changed for me and I starting thinking, "I can do this [school]". I no longer wanted to "drop out".

I went to a public high school and I fast-tracked by finishing the required grade 12 courses and all six of my Ontario Academic Credits (OACs) in one year. So I completed high school in four years, rather than the typical five years at the time. I could not wait to get out of high school, because I felt that I did not fit in. It was a predominantly “white” high school with many cliques and many of the students coming from wealthy families. I was so shy and felt very out of place.

I attended Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) for my undergraduate degree, becoming the first person in my family to go to university. As a side note, my grandpa only attended school until grade three and was illiterate, and my grandma had received a grade eight education. I started my undergrad in 2001, but had to withdraw for personal reasons. The Associate Dean of Science, at the time, was very supportive and encouraged me to come back the following year. And that is what I did, I re-entered in the fall of 2002. Unfortunately, I had to redo most of the course work I had begun the previous.

At this time, my grandmother’s health was declining rapidly. She had not been well for a while due to diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney failure, three heart attacks, and one stroke. She was so strong, and every time the doctors would tell us that she was not going to make it, she would pull through. She wanted to live until my sister and I were the age of majority; that was her goal. She would go to dialysis three times a week for four hours each time (she called it work and never really understood the importance of it). However, she fell in the summer of 2002 and, due to her diabetes, developed an ulcer on her foot which became gangrenous. She was admitted into the hospital in October 2002 where she stayed until her death in January 2003. I was her power of attorney and she begged me not to let them amputate, so I promised her I would not let them. It was a very difficult time and needless to say my grades suffered that year.

My sister was 15 years old and I was 19 years old when my grandma passed away. I took on a lot of responsibility with my sister and had to work full-time as a full-time student to support both of us.

I graduated from an Honours B.Sc. program in Biology and Psychology in 2007. I had chosen a science program because of my aspirations to become a medical doctor. After witnessing my grandma's many illnesses and interacting with her doctors, I decided the medical field was one that I wanted to pursue. I did not get accepted the first time that I applied to medical school. Because I really enjoyed psychology and my undergraduate thesis, I decided to apply to the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University and was accepted. This past year, during my Master's studies, I reapplied to medical school and was accepted, so I will be attending medical school in the fall of 2010.

I attribute my success in school to: my grandma first and foremost for her belief in me; the small private elementary school that I was fortunate to attend, because it gave me a strong foundation in academics; my elementary school teacher who took a special interest in me; my thesis supervisor who encouraged me to apply to the MA program; the Associate Dean of Science for his understanding; and Grand River Post Secondary Education Office in Six Nations, Ontario for some funding that I was able to receive for my education. The struggles that I have had in attaining higher education are financial, emotional, and family struggles, as well as feelings of alienation. Alienation stemmed from the feeling of not fitting into the "cultures" of my secondary and post secondary academic institutions.

I have an emic perspective to the challenges that Native students face in the academic systems. There are many Native students who are not as fortunate as I have been and have not been able to succeed in the educational systems, which have been largely created by and for the

dominant society (Heinonen, 2004). Personally, I have Onkwehonwe friends and family members that have not been able to succeed in these educational systems. Consequently, the issue of Native education has become a close-hearted and very important issue for me. Therefore, it is important for me to search for answers pertaining to Onkwehonwe school retention in hopes of making some sort of positive impact for Onkwehonwe students and their success in school.

Literature Review

At this time I will review some of the literature on challenges that Onkwehonwe students (OS) face while acquiring their education. The first challenge that I will discuss is the intergenerational impacts of the assimilative history of education (Birchard, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Thompson, 2007). I then will follow with a description of the struggles that many OS face when trying to bridge their Onkwehonwe world with the academic world (Heinonen, 2004). The struggles that OS endure when trying to bridge these two worlds stem from the cultural discontinuity between the student and the school, which leads to emotional and mental stress in the form of cognitive dissonance (Kanu, 2005; Guillory, 2003; Willett, 2007; Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Another factor that affects school retention rates among OS is institutional racism (Alfred, 2004; Heinonen, 2004; Lin, Lacounte, & Eder, 1988; Wax et al., 1972; Willett, 2007; Wilson, 1991). The fourth challenge that I will discuss has to do with the limited number of educational facilities on reserves (Heinonen, 2004; Holmes, 2006) and the substandard quality of them due to under-funding (Holmes, 2006). Under-funding and limited access to educational facilities cause many OS to be ill equipped for their post secondary education (Holmes, 2006). A fifth challenge for OS in obtaining higher education is financial difficulties (Wells, 1989; see also Holmes, 2006; INAC, 2004; Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007). Furthering the challenge of

financial difficulties, many OS have dependants (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Lanceley-Barrie, 2001). In addition, financial resources for OS are low and when financial resources are available, they are inadequate (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006; INAC, 2004; Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007). The final discussed challenge hindering the academic success of OS has to do with internal factors which include self-concept such as low confidence, self-doubt, internalized oppression, and hopelessness (Kanu, 2005; Goulet, 2001; Swanson, 2003; Willett, 2007).

After a review of the challenges affecting OS, I will introduce some strategies that have been proposed and/or attempted to increase Onkwehonwe school retention, and will also discuss some of their strengths and weaknesses. The first three strategies I introduce may help decrease the amount of cognitive dissonance experienced by OS. The first strategy is to increase the number of Onkwehonwe faculty and staff within post-secondary institutions (Holmes, 2006). Another strategy discussed is the incorporation of Onkwehonwe perspectives within curriculum development through Aboriginal advisory committees. In addition, programs with an Aboriginal focus and specialization have been developed at some universities. A third school retention strategy is access, bridging, or transition programs that can be used to help integrate students into university programs (Antone, 2001; Hikel, 1994; Holmes, 2006; Levin & Alcorn, 2000). Since financial difficulties are a challenge for OS (Bazylak, 2002; Heinonen, 2004; Howard, 2002), increasing funds available for their education is another strategy that may increase Onkwehonwe school retention rates (Birchard, 2006; Holmes, 2006). And finally, addressing demographic challenges, some on-reserve facilities and programs have been developed (Holmes, 2006).

*Challenges*Education as Assimilation

“We are not abstractly removed from history; we are products of it.” (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 60). Colonization is a lurking variable in Onkwehonwe (re)search meaning that its effects are present among Onkwehonwe everywhere and therefore are present in any research involving Onkwehonwe (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Marker, 2004). Johnson (1996) states: “to understand any aspect of Native reality requires a frame of reference which includes the Native experience of forced assimilation and colonialism” (p.23). Therefore, it is important within the exploration of Native education to understand the effects of colonization and assimilative practices on school retention. Such practices have been shown to have ongoing negative effects on Onkwehonwe school-retention rates (Duran & Duran, 1995; Huffman, 1991; Thompson, 2007; Willett, 2007).

When one considers the history of colonization, the answers to why its effects are still negatively impacting the lives of Onkwehonwe everywhere become clear. As Duran and Duran (1995) put it, “Native American people have been subjected to one of the most systematic attempts at genocide in the world’s history... Whole tribal groups have been completely exterminated; most of the land that was inhabited by Native Americans has been stolen” (p. 28). Churchill (1998) poignantly describes the genocide basic to the birth of both the United States of America and Canada in this account:

During the four centuries spanning the time between 1492...and 1892...a hemispheric population estimated to have been as great as 125 million was reduced by something over 90 percent. The people have died in their [sic] millions of being hacked apart with axes and swords, burned alive and trampled under horses, hunted as game and fed to dogs, shot, beaten, stabbed, scalped for bounty, hanged on meathooks and thrown over the sides of ships at sea, worked to death as slave laborers, intentionally starved and frozen to

death during a multitude of forced marches and internments, and, in an unknown number of instances, deliberately infected with epidemic diseases. (p.1)

Assimilation tactics were enforced and the first residential school was opened in 1849 in Alderville, Ontario in an attempt to “civilize” the “Indians” (Helin, 2006). Church and government leaders forced children to attend these boarding schools. The ways of the dominant society were instilled in the children by stripping them of their family ties, Onkwehonwe language, cultural traditions, and their Onkwehonwe identity (Helin, 2006; Birchard, 2006). Many students within these schools endured sexual and physical abuse (Birchard, 2006; Helin, 2006). The last residential school closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.; Birchard, 2006). The effects of residential schools are still being felt today among Onkwehonwe and will affect Onkwehonwe communities indefinitely (Duran & Duran, 1995). Many of us, Onkwehonwe, do not know our Onkwehonwe language or traditions and are conflicted in terms of our spiritual beliefs and identity due to the intergenerational effects of residential schooling and other assimilative practices.

In addition, until 1951, if Onkwehonwe persons wanted to attend a post-secondary school they would be required to give up their identity as a status Indian thereby assimilating into “white” mainstream society. Thompson (2007) states:

Under the Indian Act, an individual would be required to give up their identity and all rights as an Aboriginal person in exchange for the right to get a post-secondary education. This law did not change until 1951- for many of us, this is our parents’ generation. Is it any wonder that there are significant gaps in education attainment between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians? (p.1)

This regulation on the attainment of post-secondary education, named the Enfranchisement Act, greatly impacted the enrollment of Onkwehonwe within post-secondary educational facilities.

Holmes (2006) indicates that in 1952 there were only two Aboriginal students attending

university in Canada. With very few of our Onkwehonwe ancestors obtaining a post-secondary education, there is a decreased likelihood that current generations will pursue a post-secondary education (Lessons in Learning, 2009). So, the effects of the Enfranchisement Act are cyclical and continue to contribute to the low number of OS pursuing a post-secondary education.

Even after the enfranchisement law pertaining education for Onkwehonwe changed, “education continued to be an assimilative practice, education was powerfully assimilative, and tended to alienate educated Aboriginal Peoples from their families and communities” (Canadian Millenium Scholarship Foundation [CMSF], 2004, p.11). Due to the assimilation tactics that were largely enforced through schooling, many OS continue to view assimilation as a prominent aspect of post-secondary education, “which has led to an over-arching distrust and hostility to education” in many Onkwehonwe communities (CMSF, 2004, p.11). This distrust and hostility towards education by many Onkwehonwe, negatively affects their post secondary participation.

The effect of what is being called the “Native holocaust” (Duran & Duran, 1995; Morrisette, 1994) still affects many Onkwehonwe today in the form of post-traumatic stress response (Mitchell & Maracle, 2005; see also Duran & Duran, 1995). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) found that many social problems existing among Onkwehonwe such as, abuse, alcoholism, and loss of pride can be linked back to the sense of the disconnect that Onkwehonwe children experienced due to being sent to residential schools. Thus, this intergenerational trauma leads to many of the economic and social problems present in Onkwehonwe communities and families (Stannard, 1992; Thorton, 1987), and also acts as an obstacle to Onkwehonwe academic success (Huffman, 1991; Pewardy & Frey, 2002; Willett, 2007). While there is no doubt that colonization has impacted Onkwehonwe school retention

rates, further research is needed to fully understand the impact that colonization has had on education (Willett, 2007).

Bridging two worlds simultaneously/ Cultural Discontinuity

In some ways education continues to be assimilative in nature (Hampton, 2000) and some would argue that post secondary institutions continue to be unsafe grounds for OS (Alfred, 2004). Universities are considered “unsafe grounds”, because they represent a negative environment in which Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are not recognized (Birchard, 2006). Hampton (2000) states:

Most, but not all, university education in Canada today is education for assimilation. Universities typically operate on the assumption that Eurocentric content, structure, and process constitute the only legitimate approach to knowledge. First Nations history, culture, knowledge, and language are largely ignored, and even when they are subjects of study, the perspective is almost always Eurocentric (p.210).

This lack of inclusion and lack of recognition of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies often leads to cultural discontinuity between the Onkwehonwe student and the academic institution (Willett, 2007). Cultural discontinuity creates many struggles for OS by causing them to feel as though they are struggling to live in two worlds simultaneously (Heinonen, 2004). Willett (2007) calls the struggles that arise out of cultural discontinuity, cognitive dissonance, which causes mental and emotional stress.

Many OS attending post-secondary institutions feel as though they are struggling to live in two worlds simultaneously, their Onkwehonwe world and the Western academic world (Heinonen, 2004). Theories of cultural discontinuity indicate that children’s learning and thinking patterns are deeply rooted in their culture and that a child is likely to have difficulty in school when there are incongruencies between the child’s culture and the teacher’s and classroom’s culture (Winzer and Mazurek, 1998; see also St. Germaine, 1995; Tinto, 1997).

This cultural discontinuity arises out of socio-cultural differences and causes cognitive dissonance, which creates the struggle of bridging two worlds simultaneously (Heinonen, 2004; Willett, 2007). The socio-cultural differences found between Onkwehonwe and non-Onkwehonwe populations are: worldview, language, way of learning and knowing, and way of communication (Vygotsky, 1981; Werstch, 1991; Winzer & Mazurek, 1998; Willett, 2007).

Furthering the struggles of cognitive dissonance, OS do not see themselves reflected on campus, since there are very few Onkwehonwe staff, faculty, and students (Holmes, 2006; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Willett, 2007). Overall, they do not see themselves reflected in the academic institution's curriculum and pedagogy (Holmes, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Willett, 2007). These socio-cultural differences significantly contribute to the low school retention rates of OS (Battiste, 1998; Kanu, 2005; Guillory, 2003). Willett (2007) illustrates the struggles of cognitive dissonance among OS by stating:

White students have the privilege of attending educational institutions which reflect their worldview; Indigenous students, for the most part, do not. White students can concentrate on learning the content of their educational studies without having to do any mental gymnastics around whether or not the substance of their learning matches their outlook on the world; Indigenous students must negotiate between two worldviews in addition to learning the content of our educational studies. (pp. 46-47).

As well as experiencing cognitive dissonance, OS may feel alienated from their home communities, as they partake in higher education, adding to the challenges that OS experience in trying to bridge two worlds simultaneously. In some cases, OS may feel that there is a lack of support from community members and may endure criticism from their Onkwehonwe community, because some members of their community may view partaking in higher education as denying one's culture and becoming "white" (Montgomery, Miville, Winterrowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000; Willett, 2007). OS may also become more alienated from their communities,

because their western education may distance them from their cultural traditions and ways of knowing. It is often difficult for OS to participate in the academic world while maintaining their cultural identity (their “indianness”) (Montgomery et. al, 2000). In this sense, education is a double-edged sword for Indigenous peoples (Willett, 2007). As we partake in higher education we risk becoming more assimilated into the dominant society and may also risk criticism from our communities for becoming “white-washed”.

Institutional Racism

Cleary and Peacock (1998) state:

An easily observed and tangible characteristic of institutional racism is the conscious and unconscious exclusion from the curriculum of American Indian history, culture, literature, and other instruction relevant to these students’ lives. Other less noticeable aspects are the absence or token inclusion of American Indian teachers, administrators, or school board members. (p.69)

The institutional racism that Cleary and Peacock (1998) described is experienced by OS, since academic institutions are largely created for and by the dominant culture (Alfred, 2004; Heinonen, 2004). Eurocentrism, alienation, colonialism, and Western epistemological foundations are components of institutional racism practiced by Western academic systems (Willett, 2007). Institutional racism “permeates every aspect of the experience of marginalized students in mainstream educational institutions” and is considered to be the most significant factors affecting Aboriginal school retention (p. 35). The lack of cultural inclusiveness, lack of acceptance of Onkwehonwe epistemologies and ontology, and the low representation of Onkwehonwe people within the western academic systems, create a dangerous environment for OS (Alfred, 2004). In addition, OS also face more blatant forms of racism from their teachers, which negatively impacts their school experiences (Lin, Lacounte, & Eder, 1988; Wax et al. 1972; Wilson, 1991).

“In Canada we are taught in school that every citizen has the same opportunity for achievement regardless of race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation” (Willett, 2007, p. 39). However, the statistics show that this concept of “sameness” is simply untrue. Willett (2007) highlights the disparities between the dominant “White” society and other races by saying:

Which ethnic group can boast the most ‘successful’ people: the richest, most powerful and most famous? Whites. Which ethnic group occupies the most key positions of authority? Whites. Walk into any public building and look at the pictures on the wall that represent success and accomplishment. Which ethnic group is most highly represented? Whites. (p. 39).

The Eurocentrism of the education systems continues to privilege those from the dominant society and create barriers for OS to overcome if they are to succeed in school (Willett, 2007).

McIntosh (1998) argues that we are “taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness... never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance” (p. 169).

Assuming that every race has the same opportunity for success within educational systems that are created by and for the dominant society is a false and racist notion for two reasons. Firstly, post-secondary institutions operate based on Eurocentric and Western epistemological foundations which are considered the “standards of excellence”, thereby implying a superiority of the dominant race (Willett, 2007). Secondly, these “standards of excellence” privilege one race, the dominant race, while oppressing other races (Willett, 2007).

As I previously mentioned, OS also face more blatant forms of racism by teachers and school staff. Some teachers form prejudicial beliefs about their Onkwehonwe students’ abilities due to their students’ home life and background (Wax et al. 1972; Wilson, 1991). Lin, Lacounte, and Eder (1988) found “40% of Indian students felt at least some degree of hostility

from their professors while only 15% of White students felt so” (p.14). One participant in my undergraduate thesis (Johnson, 2006) said:

He was a teacher that said to us that we would never get out of this whole um... our neighbourhood or school. We'd never go on to college stuff like that. I was angry! I sat there just angry at him you know? And I told him how do you know that?

Retrospectively, the operation of educational facilities on principles assuming ‘sameness’ (in regards to opportunities and learning styles) and the outright racism from school faculty and staff are challenges that negatively affect Onkwehonwe school retention.

Under-funding and substandard Educational Facilities

The insufficient quantity of local educational institutions in Onkwehonwe communities (Heinonen, 2004) and the sub-par education delivered from many remote and reserve schools (Holmes, 2006; see also CMSF, 2004) can inhibit Onkwehonwe students’ success in school for a couple of reasons. First, the low number of high school and post-secondary educational institutions within Onkwehonwe communities forces many students out of their home communities to attain an education (Heinonen, 2004). In addition, many schools in Onkwehonwe communities are sub-standard and underfunded creating many struggles for OS once they reach secondary and post-secondary levels of education (Holmes, 2006).

Many Onkwehonwe communities are limited in terms of educational opportunities due to inaccessibility (Heinonen, 2004). Numerous remote Onkwehonwe communities do not have high schools, forcing OS to travel or sometimes live far away from their home community, if they wish to attend high school. In terms of post-secondary education facilities, there are few reservations that have these types of facilities; one such facility is Polytechnic located on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. The little to no educational opportunities in Onkwehonwe

communities puts a strain on the students culturally, financially, and emotionally since they are forced to leave their communities in order to obtain higher education (Holmes, 2006).

There may be a lack of preparedness for higher education due to ill-equipped and under-funded reserve and/or remote schools (Holmes, 2006). Numerous elementary and secondary schools in remote and/or reserve areas, where many OS come from, offer a substandard education compared to schools off-reserve or in bigger communities. This disparity in the quality of education at the primary and secondary levels makes it difficult for OS to get accepted into university and/or to succeed in university, because they typically lack the academic preparation for such ventures (CMSF, 2004; Holmes, 2006).

Overall, educational factors such as limited access and under-funding greatly affect school retention, furthering the disparity between Onkwehonwe and non-Onkwehonwe student populations.

Financial Difficulties

Economic factors are significant in determining Onkwehonwe school retention (Wells, 1989; see also CMSF, 2004). University is very expensive and, with many Onkwehonwe living at or below the poverty line (Children and Youth Crime Prevention through Social Development, n.d.), the financial burden of university can be far too difficult for some OS to bear (Holmes, 2006).

In addition, many OS have to leave their home communities containing the financial and care networks of their family and friends (CMSF, 2004). Extra expenses of travel costs and accommodation also are created when OS leave their home communities to go to school (Holmes, 2006). In addition, OS also tend to be older females and are likely to be single parents (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Lanceley-Barrie, 2001). Overall, OS have higher costs due to

dependants, travel, and accommodation (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006). Since most of the students' families live at or below the poverty line, families are unable to provide financial support (Holmes, 2006). Often funding sources do not take into account the extra costs and circumstances that are specific to OS, so the funds that OS are able to receive largely underestimate the actual costs for OS to attend school (CMSF, 2004). These financial factors make the completion of higher education very difficult.

In some cases monetary funds are available for OS, but the process in obtaining them is long and difficult due to complicated financial forms, and sometimes OS lack awareness of available financial aid sources (Winrow, 2002). Increasingly, when students are aware of financial aid sources and apply to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and/or to the Post Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) for financial assistance, they are turned down due to insufficient funding available to meet the growing demands (ACCC, 2005). Furthermore, the cost of tuition is high and is constantly increasing; for example, between the years 1993 and 2003 post secondary tuition costs rose by 98.9%. During this time, Canadian students received a 45.1% increase in funds available through their Canada Student Loans programs, while OS only received a 22.3% increase to their post secondary education funding (Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007). The number of OS unable to receive funding from their band is growing as tuition costs have grown and more students are competing for financial support with less money to supply the demand. In 2000-2001 school year, according to the Assembly of First Nations, 8,475 eligible students did not receive any funding (Holmes, 2006; INAC, 2004). Also, students are often ineligible to apply for federal and provincial student loans, if they receive government support from their band (Holmes, 2006). In addition, Non-status and Métis Aboriginals are ineligible for

this type of financial support (ACCC, 2005). The inability to receive funding support while attending school largely determines post-secondary school enrollment among OS.

Overall, OS face many financial struggles due to higher costs while attending school and few financial resources. Many eligible First Nations' students are denied funding from their bands, because the funds available to their bands are insufficient to meet demands (Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007). The denial of these OS to funding from their bands, in most cases, denies them of a post secondary education (Holmes, 2006). Thus, there is an ever-present disparity in the education of Canadian students and OS (Birchard, 2006).

Internal factors

Self-concept is the way in which we view ourselves and is related to self-confidence. For instance, if we view ourselves in a positive light we are likely to have higher self-confidence (Willett, 2007). Self-concept can be either motivating or de-motivating for OS and is a principal internal factor that affects Onkwehonwe students' academic achievement (Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003). Willett (2007) found that negative self-concept hinders an Onkwehonwe student's ability to succeed in academia. One reasons for a negative self-concept may be internalized oppression. Willett points out that if we, Onkwehonwe, are not critically conscious then we may accept subservient roles in Western society. Historic oppression and ongoing oppression of Onkwehonwe are manifest in OS, as the sense of powerlessness and sense of hopelessness (Goulet, 2001). This sense of powerlessness and hopelessness creates self-doubt and low confidence in some Onkwehonwe students' beliefs about their academic abilities, thereby negatively affecting school retention.

Finally, it is clear that the answer to the problem of the low school retention among OS cannot be answered by a single factor, but rather there are many factors that inhibit their academic success and many of these factors are intertwined (Willett, 2007).

Current School Retention Strategies

Increase Onkwehonwe Staff and Faculty

As I previously mentioned, many OS struggle with feeling as though they are trying to live in two worlds simultaneously (Heinonen, 2004; Willett, 2007). This struggle is created, in part, through the low representation of Onkwehonwe in Western academic institutions (Alfred, 2004; Willett, 2007). In addressing the low representation of Onkwehonwe, some universities have taken steps to increase Onkwehonwe staff and faculty and are employing Onkwehonwe elders, and other Onkwehonwe community members on campus, to serve as advisors and counselors (Holmes, 2006). There is also the Federal Contractors program that requires that provincial regulated employers who employ more than 100 people, and receive at least \$200,000 of federal contracts, must commit to employment equity by increasing employment of Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, women, and visible minorities. Most universities fall into this category and are required to provide reports and updates on their progress in terms of employment equity. In theory, employing more Onkwehonwe faculty members will help decrease the amount of cognitive dissonance that OS face, because they will be able to see themselves reflected within the academic systems (Holmes, 2006; Kanu, 2002; Willett, 2007). However, given that school retention rates remain low among Onkwehonwe, the pool of qualified Onkwehonwe who can serve as faculty for post-secondary institutions is small and limited (Holmes, 2006). Therefore, the representation of Onkwehonwe within Western academic institutions remains low.

“Indigenizing” Education

Willett (2007) states that one reason OS experience cognitive dissonance is because “they do not see themselves...in the curriculum, or in the pedagogy and they drop out” (p.19). So, employing more Onkwehonwe faculty and staff who participate in curriculum development and design is an obvious and simple way to begin to decrease the cognitive dissonance that OS face while attending Western post-secondary institutions (Kanu, 2002). Some universities are attempting to be more inclusive through the development of Aboriginal advisory committees that make recommendations to university administration in terms of policy development and changes. For example, in 1992, Queen’s university established an “Aboriginal Council” with the mandate to: “ensure that for generations hereafter Aboriginal Peoples will have access to higher education at Queen’s University, and that the institution will be responsive to the broader needs of Aboriginal Peoples” (Holmes, 2006, p.30). Additionally, First Nations University in Regina is an example of a university that incorporates Onkwehonwe perspectives in all its programs (Holmes, 2006).

There are also some Canadian universities offering Native studies programs and programs that focus in the specialization of Onkwehonwe issues. The aim of these programs is to increase the number of professionals working in Onkwehonwe communities by increasing their preparedness for the various factors that they will encounter in these communities (Holmes, 2006). Some examples of programs with an Aboriginal focus are: Wilfrid Laurier University’s M.S.W degree in Aboriginal Social Work, Northern School of Medicine’s M.D. program which focuses on serving Northern and Aboriginal communities, University of Northern British Columbia’s certification in First Nations Public Administration, and University of Saskatchewan’s program of Legal Studies for Native people. While Native studies programs are

open to all eligible students, there tends to be a high proportion of OS enrolled in them (Holmes, 2006). Native studies programs and programs that specialize in Onkwehonwe issues often have a higher proportion of Onkwehonwe faculty, incorporate Onkwehonwe styles of learning, and tend to be closely linked with Aboriginal support services on campus (Holmes, 2006). Due to the Onkwehonwe inclusive nature of these programs, OS may experience a lesser degree of cultural discontinuity within them, thereby increasing Onkwehonwe student enrollment. There does not seem to be specific numerical data on the retention and success rates of these programs at this time, however, the future of these programs seems promising.

Overall, increasing Onkwehonwe input and perspectives within the pedagogy and curricula of post-secondary institutions seems to be a promising approach to decrease the cognitive dissonance that OS face while partaking in higher education. However, there remains the problem of a limited pool of eligible Onkwehonwe candidates to fill faculty positions (Holmes, 2006).

Transition Programs

In order to combat the lack of preparedness due to poor educational facilities in Onkwehonwe communities and the lack of educational opportunities that many OS have had, bridging programs (a.k.a. access or transition programs) have been created at some universities. These programs are created on the basis that if academic, social, personal, and financial barriers are addressed, then minority students will be able to perform at the same levels as non-minority students (Levin & Alcorn, 2000). These programs recognize that minority students simply do not have the same opportunities as those non-excluded members of society; this combats the concept of 'sameness' upon which Western university systems operate.

Access programs were developed in the 1970's and were intended for Aboriginal people, inner city poor, and minority people. Some examples of these transition programs are: Carleton University's "Aboriginal Enriched Support Program", which serves as a transition program into a university degree; Cape Breton University's access program called Elmitok which is a program for Mi'kmaq students wishing to further their education; and the University of Toronto transitional year programme (TYP) (Holmes, 2006; see also Antone, 2001). Students who normally would not meet admission requirements are conditionally admitted to university through a screening process, the programs usually last a full academic year exposing students to a limited set of academic courses. They may also provide mentoring, tutoring, and academic counseling to the students within them. Ultimately, they help the students adapt to university life. If the students are successful at the end of their transition year they are able to enter into a regular university program (Holmes, 2006).

Students within these programs are able to connect with one another and work together creating a cooperative environment. This cooperative environment is congruent with Onkwehonwe worldviews in which cooperation is a key principle (Antone, 2001). Some of these transition programs also employ Native faculty and/or staff (Antone, 2001) helping the OS to see themselves reflected on-campus. The cooperative environment and Onkwehonwe staff within these programs may lessen the cultural discontinuity that OS face while attending Western post-secondary institutions.

There is evidence that these transitional programs have been successful in increasing school retention and contribute to the development of Onkwehonwe communities. They have been fairly successful in demonstrating that hundreds of people who, under normal circumstances, would have been inadmissible to a college or university program, due to

incompletion of high school or inadequate program prerequisites, can actually enter and succeed in post-secondary institutions (Levin and Alcorn, 2000). In addition, transitional programs have been found to positively impact graduation rates in that 40 percent of students admitted to these programs graduated, while only about five percent of OS who enter university through regular stream channels graduate (Hikel, 1994). While transitional programs seem to be successful in increasing school retention among OS, much of the literature regarding their effectiveness dates back to the 1980's and 1990's; therefore, the literature's validity to the current time period may be questioned.

While transitional programs have been shown to be successful, these programs have experienced monetary set-backs. Transitional programs originally offered some financial support to alleviate the financial struggles of the students within these programs. However, over the past ten years the amount of financial support available from federal and provincial governments for these programs has drastically decreased. Since 1988, the federal government has completely withdrawn its funding for these programs and provincial governments have decreased their support (Levin & Alcorn, 2000). This decrease in financial support has reduced the capacity of these programs.

As well, non-credit components of the transitional programs may not be eligible for federal, provincial, or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) financial support. These programs were originally intended to respond to both the cultural and the financial barriers that Onkwehonwe and minority students face (Levin and Alcorn, 2000; Wells, 1989). However, the decreased financial support and the ineligibility of funding for students within these bridging programs creates a barrier for students wishing to enter and participate in them. While transitional, bridging, or access programs, have been found to decrease some of the barriers that

OS face, they cannot account for personal and family supports, and OS are still dropping out of the programs for “personal reasons” (Levin & Alcorn, 2000).

In theory, transitional programs may be helpful in increasing Onkwehonwe admissions and retention by addressing social, personal, financial, and academic barriers (Hikel, 1994; Levin & Alcorn, 2000). However, these programs have some weaknesses, such as inadequate funding, non-credit components, and the inability to address personal reasons for school attrition (Levin & Alcorn, 2000).

Funding

The area of funding sources and limitations of these sources is far more in-depth, complicated, and broader than I am able to acknowledge within this thesis. In addition, literature critically examining Onkwehonwe school retention funding strategies is meager. However, I am able to briefly present two sources of funding that were discussed in the literature: government funding and monetary awards for OS.

The Canadian government has brought a lot of attention to the low school-retention rates among Aboriginal populations and has stated its goal in decreasing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student-retention rates. For instance, in the 2006 Kelowna Accord, then Prime Minister Paul Martin committed a half billion dollars to Aboriginal higher education and a billion to improving primary and secondary education (Birchard, 2006). However, despite such promises, fulfillment of these monetary funds towards Aboriginal education has yet to occur and little has been done to decrease these educational gaps. In fact, due to limited government funding INAC turns away thousands of eligible First Nations’ students each year (Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007).

Holmes (2006) indicates that there are some private foundations and sectors that offer monetary awards, but the number of these awards remains relatively small, and there is a need for the provision of more monetary awards targeted at Aboriginal students. Because economic factors are a determining factor of academic success for OS, universities should increase the number of scholarships and bursaries awarded to OS (Holmes 2006).

Overall, finances can determine whether an Onkwehonwe person will go to and stay in school (Bazylak, 2002; Heinonen, 2004; Howard, 2002). Unfortunately, funding remains inadequate, this means that many OS are not acquiring a higher education due to financial difficulties (Birchard, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Special Chiefs Assembly, 2007).

On-reserve Educational Facilities

Many OS have to leave their home communities, sometimes travelling great distances, to attain a higher education (Holmes, 2006). In order to counter the struggles that OS face, due to leaving their home communities, some academic facilities have been developed in Onkwehonwe communities (e.g. Six Nations Polytechnic). Often these academic facilities are partnered with universities in larger cities. Sometimes these on-reserve facilities offer first-year courses for specific university or college programs. After the first year, the students in these programs are expected to attend the main campus of the partnered university to complete their program (e.g., Carleton University's Bachelor of social work in First Nations program) (Holmes, 2006). Other times, these on-reserve education facilities offer an entire program with an Aboriginal focus and customized curriculum development for Aboriginal communities (e.g. Aboriginal Practical Nursing program at Six Nations Polytechnic partnered with Mohawk College); programs such as these also aim at capacity building in Onkwehonwe communities by preparing students within them to work in these communities. However, these programs can have high operating costs due

to the customized curriculum development, and the cost of bringing outside professionals into the small communities to act as faculty members in these schools with relatively low enrollment (Holmes, 2006).

Conclusion and Gaps in the Literature

Despite the research and proposed strategies for Onkwehonwe school retention, retention rates remain low (Hodgson-Smith, 2000; Willett, 2007). The consistently high school-attrition rates suggest that the proposed strategies are insufficient and/or are not being adequately implemented.

In reviewing the literature in the area of Onkwehonwe school retention, I found that few studies utilized the knowledge of *successful* OS and even fewer studies selected participants that were Onkwehonwe *graduate* students. Most studies in this area of research have focused on school *attrition* rates and on those students who were *unsuccessful* in completing a post-secondary program of study. Although it is important to find out why so many OS are “dropping out” of school, I believe that it is equally important to focus on those OS who are *successful* in the Western academic systems, *despite* the many challenges that they while in school. In my view, we can learn a lot from these successful students by listening to their stories of success and learning about their coping strategies and retention factors that have led to their success. Additionally, we can learn from them by asking them for their thoughts on factors and interventions/strategies that can facilitate academic success for other OS. I also believe that the knowledge of Onkwehonwe advisors serving OS can be very important and helpful in this area of study. These advisors will have valuable knowledge and perspectives on how OS have come and can come to academic success. In response to the negative focus that research has placed on

Onkwehonwe education, I decided to focus on the experience and knowledge of highly achieved OS and Onkwehonwe advisors serving OS.

In addition, there is minimal (re)search that fully utilizes an Indigenous methodology in studying Onkwehonwe school retention. The low number of researchers utilizing an Indigenous methodology for their research (Cardinal, 2001) may be due to the lack of acceptance of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives within academic systems (Absolon, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Absolon (2008) states that “the study of Aboriginal cultural phenomena through a non-Aboriginal epistemological lens can only yield distorted findings” (p. 43). Therefore, considering that many OS struggle with cognitive dissonance due to cultural discontinuity (Willett, 2007), it may be particularly useful in this area of Onkwehonwe (re)search to apply a (re)search methodology which is culturally congruent with the cultural phenomenon of Onkwehonwe school retention. For this reason and to contribute to research utilizing an Indigenous methodology, I used an Onkwehonwe’neha (Indigenous methodology) to explore the area of academic success for OS through the perspectives and experiences of successful OS and Onkwehonwe advisors.

As with most qualitative studies, the findings from this search are neither generalizable nor representative due to a small sample size (n=6) and gender imbalance (1 male). However, they provide in-depth information in the area of Onkwehonwe academic success. In addition, the search illuminates experiences and perspectives of successful OS and Onkwehonwe advisors (i.e., Aboriginal student-services coordinators).

Chapter 2: Methodology

Methodology: Onkwehonwe'neha

As I have just mentioned, I decided to use an Indigenous Methodology or Onkwehonwe'neha to explore academic success factors for OS through the perspectives of successful OS and Onkwehonwe advisors. Onkwehonwe'neha translates loosely to “the way of life of the Original People”. A process of decolonization is important within an Onkwehonwe'neha, meaning the searcher unlearns colonization and re-members their indigeneity (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Johnson, 1996; Simpson, 2001). Part of this process involves a decolonizing of language (Johnson, 1996). Therefore, I use the Kanien'kehá:ka word “Onkwehonwe'neha” to describe the Haudenosaunee concept of an Indigenous methodology.

The participants in this thesis are high achieving OS (graduate students) and Onkwehonwe advisors for OS. The focus of this search is on how OS can arrive at academic success. Because the participants in this search are successful OS and Onkwehonwe advisors, their knowledge in the area of Onkwehonwe academic success is crucial. For instance, the graduate participants were able to provide valuable information on how they were able to arrive at their own academic success and they also provided insight as to how other OS can also arrive at academic success. The Onkwehonwe advisors, who also happened to be successful OS (one had completed a Master's degree and one was entering a Master's program in the fall of 2010), were also able to provide insight on their own success in school and how other OS can arrive at success. The participants were co-creators of knowledge in this search; together we co-created knowledge on factors that contribute to academic success for OS and on school-retention strategies and interventions that can be applied to education with the goal of increasing OS's academic success.

Prior to explaining the methods of my Onkwehonwe'neha or Indigenous methodology, I will begin this section with an explanation of an Onkwehonwe'neha and its applicability. Then, I will present some literature on Indigenous methodologies and its principles. Finally, I will describe some common values and principles of community psychology (my program of study) that align with an Onkwehonwe'neha.

An Onkwehonwe'neha includes the ontology, values, morals, and ethics that have been passed down to us by our ancestors. I am a Haudenosaunee person and so my Onkwehonwe'neha will reflect Haudenosaunee ontology. Our values are shared principles and contribute to our self-concept. Some of these values include: collective thinking and consideration of future generations; decision-making by consensus and considering all points of view; sharing labour and fruits of the labour; duty to the Onkwehonwe community and Creation; learning to be observant of everything that surrounds us; equality; ability to listen; and finally the view that everyone has a special gift from the Creator that can and should be used to benefit the larger community. Customs are essential to carrying on the Onkwehonwe'neha and some important aspects of these customs are thanksgiving, arts as they connect generations in spirit, and Onkwehonwe languages as they are a means of expression of the soul. Our morals guide our ethics and these include: generosity, sharing, equality, respect, honouring others, love, peace, honesty, feeding others, thankfulness, hospitality, cooperation, to live in a harmonious relationship with nature, and to ignore and withhold from evil or idle talk. Onkwehonwe'neha is our way of thinking and feeling and is an intuitive way of problem solving and expression. Our Onkwehonwe'neha provides us with our own unique problem solving methods and understanding of the world. Our Onkwehonwe cultures are rich with ways searching for and gathering knowledge (Cardinal, 2001). Indigenous knowledge has guided Onkwehonwe people

since our origins and has always been with us (Absolon, 2008; Cardinal, 2001; Johnson, 1996). Methodologies and methods within an Indigenous paradigm are unique and distinct, and are capable ways of searching for and gathering knowledge (Absolon, 2008; Wilson, 2001; Rigney, 1999). Deloria (1992) states that “Native science”, Onkwehonwe ways of knowing and gaining knowledge, is a valid and complete academic discipline. Utilizing an Onkwehonwe’neha to explore factors of academic success for OS is valid and culturally appropriate. The Onkwehonwe’neha values, ethics and principles described above are central to my methodology.

Wilson (2001) states, “our [Indigenous] ontology, epistemology, axiology & our methodology are fundamentally different [from dominant paradigms]” (p. 176). Some distinguishing features of an Indigenous paradigm are that our ontology is premised on the belief that knowledge is relational and interdependent upon all of creation (Absolon, 2008; Wilson, 2001). Our epistemology, or the way that we think about our reality, stems from the interconnected relationship that we share with reality (Absolon, 2008; Cardinal, 2001; Johnson, 1996; Lavalley, 2009; Walsh-Bowers & Johnson, 2002; Wilson, 2001). For example, an object is not defined as just an object, but rather an object is defined by the relationship we share with it. Due to the relational nature of reality, an Onkwehonwe’neha can never be objective or value-free as our epistemology is based on our *relationship* with knowledge, and “our emotions are connected to all mental processes” (Lavalley, 2009, p. 4; see also Walsh-Bowers & Johnson, 2002). Our subjective and value-laden epistemology starkly contrasts the ideological foundations of mainstream Western scientific research whose goal is objectivity and a value-free stance (Johnson, 1996). Johnson argues that this value free stance “of mainstream science creates the objectification of social knowledge, and by doing so dislocates Native experience” (p. 23).

In terms of axiology or morals, within Indigenous research, the searcher has a relational accountability to all of creation; meaning searchers are accountable to themselves, to their participants, to their community, to their people, to the earth, to the knowledge they obtain, etc. (Wilson, 2001). This principle is consistent with the Haudenosaunee Onkwehonwe'neha morals of cooperation and living in harmonious relationship with nature as well as the values of collective thinking, consideration of future generations and the use of our gifts or skills to benefit the greater community.

Indigenous methodologies are organic and emergent in nature and will evolve as the research process progresses (Absolon, 2008). So my search methods emerged and evolved throughout my search journey. Typically within Western research methods there is an:

...unequal distribution of power, in which the researcher is dominant and the “subjects” are subordinate. The researcher maintains control over all aspects of the research, including the dissemination and use of research findings. The researcher may publish reports, make inferences, and propose theories without obtaining direction or consent from the Native community (Johnson, 1996, p. 19)

This lack of consultation and collaboration has caused harm to Onkwehonwe communities by resulting in the publication of misinformation and negative stereotyping of Onkwehonwe peoples (Mihesuah, 1993). Within an Onkwehonwe'neha, the emergent nature of the search is largely guided by the participants involved, as their role, within Indigenous methodologies, is to guide and direct the search process (Baydala, Placsko, Hampton, Bourassa, & McKay-McNab, 2006; Simpson, 2001); they are the co-creators of knowledge (Willett, 2007). This open research design honours Onkwehonwe principles of respect and that everyone has the role of both learner and teacher (Johnson, 1996). In keeping with an Onkwehonwe'neha and honouring these principles, the participants guided this search. Participants guided the conversations and sharing circle. They also had control over their transcripts and my interpretations of their words (see

methods below) and they directed how and where the findings from this search should be shared (see action and dissemination plan below).

The Onkwehonwe graduate student participants were the experts in this search as they have achieved academic success despite the many challenges that they faced while in school. The Onkwehonwe advisors (i.e., Aboriginal student-services coordinators) were experts, because they have served many successful OS. As honour and respect are core morals of an Onkwehonwe'neha, their status as experts honours their knowledge and shows them respect. Within an Onkwehonwe'neha, the participants and the searcher(s) develop a relationship with each other and through this relationship they collaborate and co-create knowledge together (Baydala et al., 2006; Johnson, 1996; Willett, 2007); this is consistent with collective thinking, consensus, cooperation, and harmonious relationship principles of Onkwehonwe'neha ontology.

Many Onkwehonwe are skeptical of research and feel that it can be very damaging to their communities (Schnarch, 2004). This concern is more than warranted, because research has been used to perpetuate ignorance towards Onkwehonwe people, and much of the research has produced harmful outcomes (Absolon, 2008; Castellano, 2004; Mihesuah, 1993; Willett, 2007). This skepticism of research by Onkwehonwe leads to another reason I am utilizing an Indigenous methodology rather than a Western methodology. Because Western Eurocentric methodologies bring with them "colonial baggage", an Indigenous methodology increases the trustworthiness of searches (Absolon & Willett, 2005). Ermine (2000) emphasizes the importance of utilizing Indigenous methodologies by saying:

Any suggestion of ethical practice coming solely from a society gripped in a history of colonialism and imperialism must remain problematic for Indigenous Peoples. By correcting the prevailing errors or perception in research and asserting Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous Peoples can offer a research paradigm that models human emancipation and one that does not stymie human knowing. (p. 133)

Utilizing Indigenous methodologies increases the trustworthiness of research, as it recognizes the strengths and knowledge of Onkwehonwe people and serves as a means of recovering from colonialism. Onkwehonwe survival depends on Onkwehonwe knowledge (Couture, 1992), therefore we must “re-appropriate the knowledge production system” that has allowed us “to survive in harmony for thousands of years” (Johnson, 1996, p. 29). The acknowledgement and utilization of Onkwehonwe knowledge also assists Onkwehonwe in our pursuit of self-determination (Rigney, 1999).

In terms of my program of study, I am fortunate that there is a degree of alignment in the concepts and values of an Onkwehonwe’neha and community psychology. This alignment is important since many Onkwehonwe searchers have difficulty applying an Indigenous methodology to their (re)search due to a lack of acceptance in the academy (Absolon, 2008). I feel that some of the shared values and concepts between my Onkwehonwe culture and my academic discipline have decreased difficulties in applying an Onkwehonwe’neha to my Master’s thesis. A central concept of community psychology is the ecological levels of analyses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this framework of multiple ecological levels of analyses, an event or problem has multiple causes as each level of analysis is in relationship with the individual, and each level is interdependent. These levels of analysis include: individual, microsystems, organizations, localities, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007). The relational and interdependent nature of this community psychology concept is similar to an Onkwehonwe’neha, which is also interdependent and relational. However, a major distinction is that an Onkwehonwe’neha also takes into account the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional aspects of reality (Marsden, 2005; Wilson, 2001) with spirituality being central (Johnson, 1996). Johnson explains that the Creator is our reference

point within an Onkwehonwe'neha, because "mind, matter, and harmonious interrelationships are the creations of the Creator", thus, the Creator is "the source of natural order and balance" (p. 33).

Some core values of community psychology that are pertinent to an Onkwehonwe'neha and my ability to do this search within my program of study are respect for human diversity, collaboration and community strengths, and citizen participation (Dalton et al., 2007). As I stated previously, Indigenous methodologies and their methods are often dismissed and not recognized within Western academic institutions (Absolon, 2008; Lavallee, 2009). Community psychology's core value of respect for human diversity recognizes that different cultures have different ontologies and epistemologies, and it also recognizes the need to adapt research methods so that they are culturally appropriate (Dalton et al., 2007). In addition, within community psychology, citizen participation refers to making decisions through the involvement of all the participants or members of the community affected by the research (Prilleltensky, 2001). This is congruent with an Onkwehonwe'neha since the participants, within an Onkwehonwe'neha, are fully engaged and guide the search process (Baydala et al., 2006; Lavallee, 2009; Willett, 2007). Finally, community psychology draws on collaboration and community strengths to promote change. Community psychologists ideally collaborate with citizens, or those affected by the issue at study, and draw on the strengths of the community members to gather knowledge for change; the members contribute to knowledge formation (Prilleltensky, 2001; see also Dalton et al., 2007). This is particularly important for my thesis search, as I drew on the strengths of OS who have succeeded in school and advisors who have first-hand experience in serving OS, in order to acquire knowledge that may be able to help other OS persist in school. This is congruent with an Onkwehonwe'neha, because the participants are

the experts or teachers and the searcher is the student (Simpson, 1999; Willett, 2007). As many of the core values align with the values and principles of an Onkwehonwe'neha, I feel that I can be successful in completing the requirements of the MA in Community Psychology program while also staying true to an Onkwehonwe'neha.

In summary, I decided to utilize an Onkwehonwe'neha due to its cultural relevance, validity, and increased trustworthiness. The cultural relevance and validity of an Onkwehonwe'neha may prove to be particularly useful when exploring the topic of Native education, as a main challenge for OS is cultural discontinuity (see p. 33). At this point I would like to clarify that there is a difference between doing research with an Onkwehonwe perspective from a dominant paradigm and actually doing research from an Onkwehonwe paradigm (Absolon, 2008; Wilson, 2001). And for the purposes of my search journey, I searched from an Onkwehonwe paradigm by *fully* utilizing an Onkwehonwe'neha. Doing so, also addressed the insufficient amount of research in the area Onkwehonwe school retention that *fully* utilizes an Onkwehonwe'neha. I also decided to focus on stories of *success* from *successful* OS to uncover factors of Onkwehonwe academic success. This addressed the minimal literature on Onkwehonwe academic *success*. I had conversations with Onkwehonwe advisors who serve OS, because they had witnessed OS succeed in school. I also held a sharing circle with Onkwehonwe graduate students to learn from their experiences and insights. Through the use of an Onkwehonwe'neha I worked in collaboration with the participants to uncover their perspectives about academic success factors and interventions/strategies to increase Onkwehonwe academic success. I also received the guidance of an elder throughout my search journey, in terms of methods, Onkwehonwe protocols, and making meaning of the findings.

Search Questions

As I mentioned in the prior section, there has been a vast amount of research in the area of Onkwehonwe education and school retention, however, despite all this research, school retention levels remain low (Willett, 2007). I found that some of the gaps in the literature were the insufficient usage of an Indigenous methodological approach and the lack of knowledge sharing from successful OS. So, I chose to use an Onkwehonwe'neha and asked successful OS to share their knowledge about their academic success, including their coping strategies for success and factors that facilitated their success. Since the OS involved in this study have highly achieved academically (i.e. graduate students), they are very knowledgeable in the area of Onkwehonwe school-retention and are the *experts* in this area of inquiry. So, I also asked them to share what they believe to be contributing factors to academic success for OS, in general, and what they believe to be effective strategies and/or interventions to increase OS' success. I also chose to ask Onkwehonwe advisors/counselors (i.e. Aboriginal student-services coordinators) serving OS similar questions as they have heard the stories of many OS, including successful ones. Additionally, the Aboriginal student-services coordinators also happened to be successful OS, so they too shared stories of their own academic success and contributing factors to their success in school. Together we co-created knowledge on the supports and services needed to foster Onkwehonwe academic success.

The primary questions for this search were:

1. What are factors of academic success for Onkwehonwe students (i.e. how successful Onkwehonwe students arrive at their success despite the many challenges that Onkwehonwe students face)?
2. What are the participants' ideas about effective school-retention strategies and interventions that can be and/or are being employed at the different levels of education (elementary, high school, and post secondary) to help increase Onkwehonwe school retention?

Methods

The Onkwehonwe'neha methods of conversation and sharing circle were used to answer these search questions. I had conversations with Onkwehonwe advisors and an elder. And one sharing circle occurred with Onkwehonwe graduate students. Because the elder provided me with guidance and input for the conversations (with Aboriginal student services coordinators) and the sharing circle, I begin with an explanation of the elder conversations.

Conversations

Conversations are an Onkwehonwe search method as they align with the organic and emergent nature of Indigenous methodologies (Absolon, 2008). Conversations differ from interviews in that they are a more natural Onkwehonwe method of meeting and sharing knowledge with each other (Absolon, 2008; Johnson, 2008); the conversation "is more like a visit than an interrogation" (Johnson, 1996, p. 48). They are more informal than interviews and do not follow rigid guidelines or interview guides (Absolon, 2008); this informal nature helps create a noninvasive environment where the participants feel comfortable and are able to guide

the conversations (Johnson, 2008). The searcher waits until the participant has finished speaking and never interjects. Within the conversation, both parties are able to listen, reflect, and respond to what each other is sharing. It is through this process of sharing and reflecting on “each other’s feelings and perspectives” that the spirit of reciprocity is upheld (Johnson, 1996, p. 56). In addition, a small token of gratitude, such as tobacco or other gift, is given the participants to show gratitude for the knowledge that they will share within the conversations (Absolon, 2008; Baskin, 2005; Restoule, 2004). Overall, conversations uphold important Onkwehonwe’neha values of equality, honor, respect, and gratitude. Within conversations, power relations are equal as the participant is able to guide the conversations and there is not the common dominant role of the interviewer. The participants are honored and respected through thanksgiving and a token of appreciation to show thanks for their expertise and the valuable knowledge that they have shared.

Elder Conversations

Elders are the keepers of knowledge and are integral to an Onkwehonwe’neha (Baydala et al., 2006; Colorado, 1988; Simpson, 2001). They “carry traditional teachings, ceremonies, and stories of all our relations” (Lavalley, 2009, p. 8). Thus, it is advised that Onkwehonwe searchers obtain counsel and guidance from elders to learn correct spiritual frameworks and cultural protocol (Bishop, 1998). Elders also help guide search processes (Baydala et al., 2006; Simpson, 2001). Therefore, I had ongoing conversations with an elder regarding my search, including cultural protocols and traditions, and any other questions that arose.

Additionally, elders within an Onkwehonwe’neha, help the searcher with cultural revitalization (Simpson, 2001). Part of being an Onkwehonwe searcher who is searching from an Onkwehonwe paradigm begins with a personal decolonization process and a cultural revitalization process or “re-membling” process (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Simpson, 2001).

The cultural revitalization process involves learning and strengthening knowledge in cultural traditions and protocols. So in order for this cultural revitalization process to occur for myself, a Haudenosaunee person, I thought it beneficial that the elder that I asked to support me in my search journey should also be a Haudenosaunee (“People of the Longhouse”) and knowledgeable about traditional beliefs of the Longhouse.

Age is irrelevant to the definition of an elder. Rather, an elder is someone who is recognized in the community for their wisdom and knowledge (Baydala et al., 2006). So, in terms of recruitment, I asked some members of my community, including my family members, for suggestions of an elder who I should approach about involvement in my search. A few of my partner’s family members suggested one elder in particular. I printed off my information letter (Appendix D) and asked them if they could pass it on to her. She indicated to them that she was interested in supporting me in my search journey and asked my partner’s family member to pass her phone number on to me. I then contacted her via telephone and set up a date and time to meet.

One elder participated in this search. The elder who supported me in my search is a Haudenosaunee woman in her late fifties who is also a traditional healer in the Haudenosaunee community. The conversations with the elder varied in length and frequency and occurred in the elder’s home. The first couple of conversations served the purpose of getting to know each other and to build rapport. It was also important during the initial meeting for me to locate myself, meaning that it was important that I tell the elder about myself (who I am and where I’m from), the purpose of my search, and my stake in the search (Willett, 2007). During our first meeting, I also went over my consent form (Appendix C) and explained that participation was voluntary and that she could withdraw from my search at any time; I also gave the elder traditional

tobacco. After I learned more about traditional tobacco giving as consent, I realized that traditional tobacco giving as the sole form of consent would have been the more appropriate route of consent, particularly for an elder. To explain, traditionally in many Onkwehonwe cultures, we give tobacco to someone when we are asking for them to share their knowledge. If they accept the tobacco that means that they have consented to share their knowledge. This form of consent is considered the highest level as it is contractual with a spiritual element (Ghislaine, 2006). In addition, the participant can give back the tobacco at any time to withdraw from the search.

In our first meeting, the elder and I talked about confidentiality and anonymity and decided that it was best to make a decision about anonymity in our last meeting. I also told her that her identity would remain anonymous unless she indicated that she would like to be known in my thesis. I expected to converse with the elder one more time, but she has had an unexpected loss in her family and we were unable to meet for our last scheduled conversation. So, unless otherwise indicated, her identity shall remain unknown.

I asked the elder for guidance in terms of cultural traditions and protocols. I also asked her spiritual questions that arose throughout my search journey. I did not audio-record these conversations; however, I recorded notes in my personal reflection journal (Appendix F). I have included some knowledge shared by the elder throughout my methods section, making meaning section, and personal reflection section.

Selection of Participants for Onkwehonwe Advisor Conversations

The selection criteria for the advisor/counselor conversation participants were a) that they were Onkwehonwe (Indigenous), b) that they held positions as Onkwehonwe

advisors/counselors within accredited Universities in Canada, and c) that they had served Onkwehonwe students from various Onkwehonwe Nations.

In order to recruit Onkwehonwe advisors/counselors for these conversations, I used a method commonly described within Indigenous methodologies as the “moccasin telegraph” (Absolon, 2008); this term is also commonly known within Onkwehonwe communities (Laughlin, 2001). The moccasin telegraph is known as snowballing within community research (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). In order to perform this technique one would contact people they know who fit or know others who fit the inclusion criteria and give them an information letter (Appendix D), asking them if they would be willing to participate. I was fortunate that my thesis supervisor was in contact with two Aboriginal student-services coordinators within my local area. My thesis supervisor told the prospective participants about my search and passed along my information letter (Appendix D). The prospective participants contacted me, individually, via email and agreed to participate in my search. We then scheduled a time and place to meet. I indicated to them that I could meet them wherever they felt most comfortable.

For this search, I conversed with two different Aboriginal student services coordinators, Emerance Baker and George Kennedy, on separate occasions. Both hold positions at accredited universities in southern Ontario, namely the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University. Both of the participants are Onkwehonwe, specifically Mohawk and Oneida. They are also successful OS; Emerance has a Master’s degree and George will be entering a Master’s program in the fall of 2010. In addition, the participants have served and continue to serve Onkwehonwe post-secondary students from various Onkwehonwe Nations. Furthermore, Emerance has the unique opportunity of serving both Onkwehonwe high-school students and post-secondary students due to a program offered at the University of Waterloo called UW

(University of Waterloo) Directions, which recruits Onkwehonwe high-school students to stay at UW for a weeklong stay exposing them to university life.

The purpose of the conversations was to provide in-depth information about factors facilitating the academic success of OS and strategies that they, the participants, believe to be beneficial for increasing school retention among OS. Emerance and George hold positions within Aboriginal Student Services and therefore, have come in contact with many OS and have heard the students' stories and experiences in their journeys towards higher education. Because of this insider knowledge, they have a very good understanding of the various individual, social and institutional factors affecting Onkwehonwe academic success. They have also seen and known students who have been successful and those who have had to withdraw from school. In addition, they were also successful OS themselves. Therefore, they had valuable in-depth insight into the facilitating factors for academic success for OS and effective school-retention strategies for OS. The conversations also helped inform discussion topics and key points of interest for the sharing circle.

Conversations with the Aboriginal Advisors

Prior to the conversation(s), in terms of cultural protocol and to practice reciprocity, I gave a small gift showing gratitude for the knowledge that they were about to share with me (Absolon, 2008; Marsden, 2005). Also, prior to the commencement of the conversations, I shared a bit about myself and the purpose and motives behind this search.

In terms of meeting University ethics guidelines, I gave the participants the informed consent form (Appendix B) to sign for participation. The form reiterated the purpose and motives behind the search and let the participants know that their participation is entirely voluntary and they may withdraw from participation at any time. The gift that I gave also

symbolized consent, and the participants and I talked about this symbolism at the beginning of our conversations. I talked to my elder about this and she indicated that as long as I gave something from my heart that it was fine. However, as previously mentioned, I became more aware of the importance of tobacco giving in Indigenous methodologies and the spiritual element that it adds to consent; so I gave traditional tobacco to the participants at a later date (Journal Notes, May 20, 2010).

In addition, the participants also had the opportunity to waive their confidentiality if they so desired; the reasoning for optional confidentiality can be found in the “privacy and confidentiality” section of this thesis. Both participants, Emerance Baker and George Kennedy, wished to be acknowledged and waived their confidentiality.

I conversed with each participant once. My conversation with Emerance lasted about 2.5 hours and my conversation with George last about 1.5 hours. My conversation with Emerance seemed to flow effortlessly and we were both very comfortable with each other. Emerance and I seemed to connect immediately. George was very pleasant and willing to share his expertise, but the conversation seemed to require a little more effort than with Emerance. I thought about this additional amount of effort required and I journalled about it. I noticed that I had been a little more anxious in my conversation with George. I thought that this extra level of anxiety may have been due to my lack of experience in having males as participants in any of my (re)search. I talked with my thesis advisor about this and she also brought up how I had grown up in an all-female household. My intuition told me that she was right and that this was another part of the reason for my slight discomfort.

My conversations with Emerance and George were held in comfortable and relaxed environments to promote a more organic experience (Willett, 2007; see also Johnson, 2008). I

had asked Emerance and George where they felt most comfortable meeting. Emerance had indicated that her office at UW (University of Waterloo) would suffice and George indicated that he would like to meet over brunch at a restaurant. I did not follow an interview guide. However, I met with Emerance and George with the intention of finding answers to my two primary search questions: What are the factors that facilitate academic success among OS? And, what are the participants' ideas about effective school-retention strategies and interventions that can be and/or are being employed at the different levels of education (elementary, high school, and post secondary) to help increase Onkwehonwe school retention? The conversations were relaxed, natural and emergent in structure, with Emerance and George guiding the conversations.

I have a lot experience interviewing as a (re)search method, but this was my first experience using conversations as a search method. Even though a conversation is more intuitively natural, due my inexperience in using it as a search method, I had to make sure that I was mindful of my role within the conversation. My role was that of a co-participant as I also participated in the conversation. I also let the conversation emerge naturally as we conversed with each other; this at times was difficult because I worried that we would not answer both my search questions in the amount of time available (Journal notes, March 2, 2010). However, I remembered some words of wisdom that my elder had shared with me. She shared that the knowledge that is given to us, even if it's not what we set out to find, is purposeful. She furthered that everything has a time, meaning that we cannot force knowledge and other such events in life since they will come when the time is right. Within Haudenosaunee teachings, we are taught to live life through reverence and appreciation. These teachings lead "to an understanding that everything has a purpose, reason, time, and place" (Johnson, 1996, p. 126).

As I conversed with both Emerance and George, I realized the value of the conversation method over the interview method. To explain, as I was conversing with the participants, I was able to share my ideas and the participants were able to give their ideas on what I had shared and vice versa. We listened to each other and were able to “bounce” ideas off of each other and thus were able to develop a deeper understanding of our conversation topics than would have been gained in an interview. Therefore, the Haudenosaunee value of collective thinking was maintained. In addition, the Haudenosaunee value of sharing and reciprocity was upheld, because we both went away from the conversations with new knowledge and a deeper understanding of OS and academic success. Most importantly, while the participants and I conversed we were relationship-building, which increased the trustworthiness of the knowledge shared (Journal notes, March 2, 2010 & May 14, 2010).

In order to ensure that I did not miss valuable information from the conversations, I audio-recorded the conversations and transcribed them verbatim. Once transcriptions of the conversations were completed, I gave them to the participant(s) for verification and edits (Absolon, 2008; Willett, 2007); this verification process is often called member checking (Kirby et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The member-checking process will be explained in more detail in the “privacy and confidentiality” section below. In the spirit of reciprocity and gratitude, I gave a note of gratitude with their transcripts.

Sharing Circles

Sharing circles are a small-group format of dialogue, discussion, and knowledge-sharing (Absolon, 2008) and are being increasingly used by Onkwehonwe searchers as an Indigenous search method (Baskin, 2005; Lavallee, 2009; Restoule, 2004). Sharing circles are somewhat similar to focus groups in that they both are a small-group format to gain knowledge on a

particular topic through group discourse (Berg, 1995; Lavallee, 2007). However, they are different in that focus groups *extract* data, but in sharing circles knowledge is shared with *permission* given to the facilitator to give *an account* on the discussions of the sharing circles (Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, & Mackay, 1998). Also, participants within sharing circles share all aspects of their individual self- heart, mind, body, and spirit (Lavallee, 2009; Nabigon et al., 1998). Sharing circles or circle-work uphold the Onkwehonwe'neha value of sharing and relationship (Wilson, 2001). Everyone participating in a sharing circle sits in a circle and each person has a turn to speak while others listen (Marsden, 2005); this circular formation along with active participation and listening builds the relationship between the listener and the speaker (Wilson, 2001), creating a related and interdependent environment in which discourse builds with each speaker (Marsden, 2005). Sharing circles also provide a culturally congruent method in which experiences and knowledge are shared (Absolon, 2008). Sharing circles are methodically congruent with historical ways of Onkwehonwe decision-making (Cardinal, 2001; Marsden, 2005). They provide a non-judgmental, egalitarian, and supportive structure in which participants respect, listen, and learn from each other (Graveline, 2000; Marsden, 2005; Lavallee, 2009; Nabigon et al., 1998). It is a process which benefits all the participants, as they share their experiences and knowledge with each other; thus, creating more knowledge together (Absolon, 2008). Finally, sharing circles should recognize the spirits of our ancestors and the Creator and their presence and influence in guiding the circle process (Nabigon et al., 1998).

Selection of Sharing Circle Participants

The selection criteria for the sharing circle participants was that they would be self-declared Aboriginal/Onkwehonwe students currently in a graduate studies program or have graduated from a graduate studies program within the last two years. I did not choose

participants based on their Nation or cultural knowledge, because school retention rates are alarmingly low for OS everywhere, regardless of their Nation and culture (Battiste, 1998; Birchard, 2006; Kanu, 2005; Guillory, 2003; Willett, 2007).

I recruited OS for the sharing circle(s) using the moccasin telegraph technique described in the previous section. I was fortunate to know two contacts at specific universities in Ontario (which shall remain unnamed due to the sensitive nature of discussion within the sharing circle). I sent my two contacts my information letter (Appendix D) and asked them to pass it on to any other Native graduate students whom they might know. My information letter was well received. Prospective participants quickly replied and indicated that they wanted to participate in the sharing circle and that they had passed my information letter on to other Native graduate students at their university. Within a couple of days, I received responses from seven prospective participants indicating their interest in my search. I also asked Emerance and George, due to their positions within Aboriginal student services and their student connections, to pass on my information letter to any Native graduate students whom they thought would be interested in participating in a sharing circle on Onkwehonwe academic success. Due to the time of year (end of the academic term) and the graduate students' busy schedules, it was difficult to schedule a date and time to meet for a sharing circle. I did not worry about figuring out a venue until I had coordinated a date and time with the students. After failed efforts of email correspondence to set a date, I remembered an online scheduling program called "Doodle" that one of my colleagues had used in scheduling a group meeting. With "Doodle", you simply insert possible dates and times for meeting and then send a website link to those attending the meeting. This program made the scheduling much easier. I sent the link to those who had indicated interest in participating in the sharing circle; within a week we had a date and time finalized.

Next, I contacted the Aboriginal student services centre at the students' university regarding a venue to hold the circle. They graciously offered me a room.

In the end four, female graduate students attended the sharing circle. Since the participants involved in the sharing circle were Onkwehonwe graduate students and thereby successful in attaining higher education, they are very knowledgeable and were *experts* in the area of Onkwehonwe school retention and academic success. Their expertise was important within the sharing circle because the overall aim of the circle was to co-create knowledge on the primary search questions, in other words, co-creating knowledge on the facilitating factors of academic success for OS and interventions or strategies which the participants believe to be important for increasing academic success.

Sharing Circle Method

I used Onkwehonwe protocols for the sharing circle. These are the spirit of reciprocity, gratitude, respect, relationship, and holism. Addressing the spirit of reciprocity, I brought food for the participants to eat prior to commencing the discussion (Absolon, 2008; Fitznor, 2002). I also gave the participants a small token, thanking them for sharing their knowledge (Absolon, 2008; Lavalley, 2009; Marsden, 2005). The room that I had been granted for the sharing circle already had a table in the centre and chairs around the table. I put the food that I had brought on the table in the centre. The chairs were formed in a circle so that each participant could be seen and heard clearly (Absolon, 2008; Marsden, 2005). In addition, the circular shape of the chairs symbolized the sharing circle's circular holistic process (Absolon, 2008). The sharing circle was relaxed, respectful, and conversational in nature. We began the circle with feasting and introductions. We located ourselves by sharing a little bit about who we are and where we've come from. We also shared about our graduate work. As we were eating, I handed out the

informed consent (Appendix A) and went over the consent form with them. After reading through the consent form, they signed them, leaving the portion regarding confidentiality and anonymity unsigned until the circle had ended. We continued with our feasting and casual conversation and the discussion started to turn towards our struggles within the academy. I thought this was a good time to start recording the sharing circle and asked for the participants' permission to start audio-recording. The participants agreed.

Everyone had a turn to speak while others listened (Marsden, 2005). Consistent with an Onkwehonwe'neha the participants guided the circle and the circle topics. Again, I had to be mindful of my role as a co-participant. I have a lot of facilitation experience and it would have been natural for me to facilitate the circle. However, I had to make sure that I remained steadfast in my role as a co-participant since the role of facilitator is incongruent with the Onkwehonwe'neha method of a sharing circle. The sharing-circle participants knew the intent of the circle, because they had read the information letter and consent letter (Appendices D & A, respectively) containing my search questions. I had also told them my search questions verbally when locating myself and telling them the motives of my search. Thus, we were able to stay on the topic of Onkwehonwe academic success and were able to co-create knowledge on the factors contributing to OS's academic success and on interventions/strategies to increase Onkwehonwe school retention.

I did not transcribe the sharing circle verbatim; instead I listened to the audio-recording multiple times and wrote about the topics of discussion, key themes, and key quotes.

After the making meaning process of my search was complete, I sent the sharing circle participants my notes of the circle in order to ensure accuracy of the notes. With these notes, I sent along their individual quotes that I would be including in my findings section along with my

interpretations of these quotations. At this time, they were able to make edits and/or comments to ensure the accuracy. I also sent notes of gratitude, traditional tobacco (as I had not done this in the circle), and a small token of my appreciation to each one of these participants.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Within an Onkwehonwe'neha, confidentiality may be culturally inappropriate and problematic in terms of the cultural protocol of acknowledging the genealogy of knowledge. In many Onkwehonwe "oral traditions people often spend time acknowledging who and where they received knowledge from" (Absolon, 2008, pp.265-266). Confidentiality may be incongruent with many Onkwehonwe peoples' cultural protocols. However, at times it may be necessary to protect the identity of our participants (Absolon, 2008). So, I decided that confidentiality should be optional. Additionally, the focus of this thesis was on *success*, and I felt that the students should have the option of being honoured and acknowledged for their academic success. The OS within this search have overcome many challenges in their journey towards success and they are within the minority of OS completing undergraduate and graduate studies. So, they may have felt that by waiving their confidentiality, their success was affirmed and honoured. Additionally, the advisors, who were also academically successful, and the elder participating in this search have valuable knowledge that should be honoured and acknowledged. Therefore, the participants in this search had the opportunity to waive their confidentiality.

In Western academic research, confidentiality is considered a standard of excellence and must be part of a research design (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey, 2004). However, in terms of empowerment and knowledge recognition this standard of confidentiality is critiqued by some, because in some cases it "continues to silence the Indigenous voice" by featuring the voice of the researcher rather than the participant (Ermine et al., 2004, p. 33). Since optional confidentiality

is not a regular design component of academic research, I was initially worried that there may be potential conflicts with the required ethics review of this proposal. However, potential conflicts were minimized, due to updated guidelines for research involving Aboriginal peoples. For instance, the “Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) Guidelines for Health Research involving Aboriginal People” indicates that Aboriginal participants may wish to be acknowledged and recognized in the research and that the researcher and the participants involved should have a clear understanding of expectations in regards to privacy and confidentiality prior to the commencement of the research (CIHR, 2007). Prior to commencement of the conversations and sharing circles, I gave the participants the consent form (Appendices A, B, & C) which included a portion on waiving their confidentiality. I told the participants that they had the opportunity to waive their confidentiality and told them exactly what this means (that their name will appear in my thesis, published works, presentations, at possible conferences, etc...). I also told them that they did not have to decide until the conversation or sharing circle had ended. And, after the completion of the conversations and sharing circle(s), we revisited the informed consent which contained the confidentiality waiver (Appendices A, B, & C) and participants were able to decide whether they wished to remain anonymous or not. The conversation participants were also given the opportunity to reconsider their decision on waiving or not waiving the conversation, when I sent them their completed transcripts for member checking. In this way they were able to see and read their transcribed words to assist in their informed consent *vis-a-vis* their decision regarding confidentiality. I told all the participants within this search exactly what it means to waive their confidentiality. As well, I gave them a waiver to sign which describes the likely places that the findings would be presented, written up, and/or published (e.g. conferences, workshops, books, journal articles,

thesis, etc.). I also told the participants that their input would help guide how and where the findings are disseminated.

If the participant desired anonymity and confidentiality, I assigned a pseudonym to the individual and real names were not identified in any computerized files or in any publication of the results of the study. I marked these pseudonyms on the participants' signed consent forms (this enabled me to send them their transcripts for the member check). The signed consent forms and paper copies of the transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet located in my Wilfrid Laurier University office. I destroyed/deleted the audio recordings after I had completed the "making meaning" component of my search. Typed transcripts and digital recordings are saved on my personal computer that requires password access, which only I know. The raw data (paper copies of transcripts, consent forms, journal notes) will be destroyed seven years after the interviews have been completed by me or my supervisor.

In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, for those choosing not to waive their confidentiality, I sent the participants their transcripts or statements (from the sharing circles) and I asked them to verify the transcripts/statements. The transcript/statement verification, also known as member checking, involved a process in which the participants received their transcripts/statements and had the opportunity to peruse them and make any necessary edits or let me, the primary searcher, know of any changes that needed to be made to the transcripts/statements in order to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to the highest possible degree, considering the small sample size of this research project (Kirby et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The participants and I made sure that there were no identifying words or passages within the transcripts/statements for those not wishing to waive their confidentiality. At this time, all students, whether they wished to remain anonymous or not,

had the opportunity to clarify or omit passages within the transcript/statements. I also sent along my interpretations of their words so that they can verify the accuracy of these interpretations (Willett, 2007). After the participants had finished with their transcripts/statements, they then sent the transcripts back to me with their edits and/or suggestions.

Making Meaning

Making meaning refers to analysis within an Indigenous methodology or Onkwehonwe'neha (Marsden, 2005) and is ongoing throughout the whole search process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Making meaning is a holistic process that is interdependent and relational, taking into accounts "all aspects of being- mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional- and knowledge from other beings" (Marsden, 2005, p. 50; Wilson, 2001). Due to the interdependent and relational nature of making meaning, I used many methods in the "making meaning" process, such as journaling throughout my search journey (See Appendix F), memo writing, seeking guidance from elders, offering tobacco, recognizing the presence of Spirit and Creator within the search process, and through revelation also known as spiritual knowledge. The "making meaning" process was organic and emergent and I employed strategies to understand findings that made the most sense; thus, this process evolved and emerged over time (Absolon, 2008) and is described in more detail below.

Journaling served as an important part of my search as it facilitated the ongoing process of making meaning. Throughout my search journey and immediately after each conversation and sharing circle, I journalled, recording feelings, insights, new learnings, and questions that arose (Absolon, 2008). Another purpose of journaling was to increase the transparency of my methodology to the reader. This is especially important when utilizing an Onkwehonwe'neha, since Indigenous methodologies are not fully accepted, understood, and/or utilized within

academic settings (Absolon, 2008; Lavallee, 2009). And “as research projects and their methodologies are disseminated, shared and talked about doorways open up permitting and legitimizing the presence and application of Indigenous ways of doing research” (Absolon, 2008, p.273). Therefore, journaling also serves the purpose of increasing the understanding, acceptance, and utilization of Indigenous methodologies within academic settings. Finally, since an Onkwehonwe’neha is never objective, value-free, or neutral, the reflexive nature of the journals may allow the reader to better understand how my values, my motives, and my positionality affect and shape the search (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

After each conversation I made some journal notes about them. Also, as I transcribed each conversation I made further notes in my journal about key points and ideas. I read through the transcripts multiple times, highlighting key words/statements and themes. I also listened and re-listened to the audio-recordings of the conversations to help me connect back to their setting and context (Absolon, 2008). I journalled, wrote memos, highlighted text, made cards as a visual representation of the themes from the conversations and sharing circle, I spoke with my elder about the search process and asked how to present my findings, and I attended to Spirit.

After the sharing circle, I made some notes in my journal about the circle and then went for picnic with my partner. We found a trail in a forested area and went for a hike. I talked to him about some of my thoughts on what I was learning and what my participants were sharing with me (always protecting the participants’ confidentiality and anonymity). He helped me sort through some of my thoughts and make sense of some of the findings from the sharing circle.

In the days to follow, I re-listened to the audio-recording of the circle, multiple times, to help me connect back to the circle and its setting and context. This procedure helped me give an accurate account of the knowledge gained through the sharing circle.

In terms of making sense of both the conversations and sharing circle, revelation and tobacco offerings were important parts of my making-meaning process. Within an Onkwehonwe'neha, the spirit of our ancestors and the Creator are present in all aspects of an Onkwehonwe search for knowledge and so knowledge is also acquired through revelation (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Lavalley, 2009; Nabigon et al., 1998). Revelation, also referred to as spiritual knowledge, includes dreams, visions, and intuition (Lavalley, 2009). Thus, making meaning of the findings in this search was influenced by revelation: Spirit, prayer, and dreaming regarding the interpretation of the conversations and sharing circle(s) (Absolon, 2008; Cardinal, 2001; Marsden, 2005). As an illustration of how revelation helped in my making meaning process, I was having a really difficult time making sense of my search findings and so I offered tobacco and went to bed. While I was going to go to sleep, I thought of how one of the participants used the metaphor of planting the seeds so that OS can be successful. This metaphor made me think of a flower that I had drawn since I was young. I could not sleep, so I got up and drew the flower and started placing some key themes of the conversations and sharing circle inside the flower's petals. This flower representation of some of the key themes and ideas from the conversations and sharing circle helped me understand the conversations and circle better. It also helped me overcome the "block" that I had encountered in the making meaning process by helping me understand the interconnectedness of my findings.

It was also important during the making meaning process that I care for myself spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally. At times, I found the process of making meaning overwhelming, and my elder reminded me that I need to attend to Spirit and to take time for myself. So I made sure to offer tobacco, pray, workout, and talk with my partner and colleagues about my search process.

Chapter 3: Findings

Findings

I contemplated the appropriate heading for this section as I wanted it to be harmonious with an Onkwehonwe'neha (Journal Notes June 23, 2010). I knew that the term "data" seemed ill-suited for an Onkwehonwe'neha, because the word "data" seemed to objectify the knowledge that I gained through the conversations and sharing circle. In making my decision on the appropriate heading for this section, I referred to works of other Onkwehonwe scholars who used Indigenous methodologies in their academic (re)search and I talked with my elder. It seemed to be a consensus that "findings" was an appropriate heading for this section. The elder participating in my search talked about going into the "bush" and looking for medicinal plants and food, and even peace and answers, and talked about how we find these things in our journeys through the "bush". I also thought about some metaphors that have been used by other Onkwehonwe scholars, such as Kathy Absolon (2008), who used the metaphor of filling her basket (through her search methods). It seemed fitting that we, Onkwehonwe searchers, fill our baskets with our findings during our search journeys. Thus, the term "findings" was a fitting heading for this section.

When reviewing the conversations and sharing circle, I realized that we seemed to naturally discuss four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success: *challenges* that OS face in their journeys towards academic success, *motivators* that increase OS' motivation to continue in their journey towards academic success, *supports* that aid in OS' academic success, and *interventions or strategies* that can help increase Onkwehonwe academic success. Therefore, it seemed fitting that the findings should be sorted and presented within these four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success. Within these areas there are several sub-themes based on the specific

challenges, motivators, supports, and interventions/strategies that were uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle. I will discuss these sub-themes when I present the search findings.

The findings section begins with sub-sections named “Meet the Conversation Participants” and “Meet the Sharing Circle Participants”, respectively. These sections help acquaint the reader with the participants and their expertise and are common in searches using Indigenous methodologies (Absolon, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Willett, 2007). In addition to acquainting the reader with the participants and their expertise, these sections serve the purpose of sharing the participants’ personal journeys towards academic success. I am limited by the small number of participants in this search, so I am unable to make broad generalizations to the entire OS population based on the participants’ stories. However, I feel confident, based on the literature in Native education and on my conversations with other OS, that the participants’ stories of their journeys towards academic success are stories to which many OS would be able to relate. The “Meet the Conversation Participants” and “Meet the Sharing Circle Participants” sections also serve the purpose of providing in-depth information on some of the challenges that OS face while in school, as well as some of the motivators and contributing factors that enable academic success for OS.

Prior to presenting the findings for the conversations and the sharing circle, it is important to revisit my role as a searcher and the roles of the participants within this search journey and our relationship with each other. The participants were treated as the experts in this search (Willett, 2007) and were acknowledged for their expertise in the area of Onkwehonwe academic success. Consistent with an Onkwehonwe’neha, the participants and I developed a relationship with each other and through this relationship we collaborated and co-created

knowledge together (Absolon, 2008; Baydala et al., 2006; Goudreau, 2006; Willett, 2007); thus, the participants were co-creators of knowledge and the participants largely guided the conversations and sharing circle (Absolon, 2008; Willett, 2007). Moreover, as a co-participant, I participated in the conversations and sharing circle by sharing my thoughts and ideas on Onkwehonwe academic success and my personal experiences as an OS. Together, we co-created knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success and factors that contribute to this success. In addition, we co-created knowledge on interventions and strategies that may help OS be successful in school.

Meet the Conversation Participants

As a reminder, my intent for the conversations was to speak with one to two Aboriginal academic advisors (including positions such as Aboriginal student services coordinators) about Onkwehonwe academic success. The logic behind this inclusion criterion was that the advisors would have met and talked with several successful OS, due to their positions of working with OS within university settings, and the advisors would have some valuable insight on contributing factors and supports for Onkwehonwe academic success. In addition, due to their positions, they would be able to offer a different perspective on Onkwehonwe academic success than the OS participating in the sharing circle. Perhaps, due to their current and previous contact with several OS, I would be able to indirectly reach a larger number of OS than would otherwise be possible due to the limitations of a Master's degree.

I was pleased to find that both coordinators were also successful OS themselves. Emerance and George were able to provide two perspectives, their perspectives as OS and their perspectives as advisors for OS, in generating knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success. Through their own individual journeys of academic success and through their work as Aboriginal

student services coordinators within universities, they were able to share their expertise in four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success: the *challenges* that OS face while on their journeys towards academic success, the *motivators* that increase OS' ambition and drive towards academic success, the *supports* that aid OS in their journeys towards academic success, and finally some ideas on *interventions and strategies* that may be helpful in increasing Onkwehonwe academic success.

Emerance Baker

Emerance is Mohawk woman from Six Nations, Ontario who grew up mostly off-reserve in a small “white” town. She was born to a Caucasian mother and Mohawk father. Although her father was a language speaker and could speak Onondaga, Mohawk, and some Cayuga, Emerance was not taught any Native languages.

Emerance's parents moved her family into this “very very very white community” and that “the goal was to be normal to assimilate to be just like everyone else in the neighbourhood”. This goal of participating in and seeking assimilation was quite common among the last couple of generations of Onkwehonwe due to the effects of colonization and residential schooling. Emerance's family experienced racialized surveillance meaning that the Child and Family Services (formerly Children's Aid Society) were always on their doorstep. Her family lived in a very poor neighbourhood where many other neighbourhood children had poor upbringings and troubled lives. Although some of the other non-Native children and youth in the community were being abused and were into drugs, alcohol, and prostitution, family services often came to Emerance's family doorstep (even though her family didn't have any of these problems) while ignoring or passing by the other families.

Emerance spoke of hating school and about how some of her teachers directed racist and/or ignorant attitudes towards her because of her race. Her parents didn't make her go to school and she was not reprimanded if she snuck off the bus and ended up at home; "... there wasn't that push from parents" that most youth experience. Emerance didn't complete high school, but rather hung out downtown with her friends. However, she started getting into trouble and decided that it had to stop and so she went back to school. She was 17 years old and was working full-time when she went back to school; it was also at this time that she learned she was pregnant. Emerance had to withdraw from school to care for her child, but she decided to go back to high school when her daughter was old enough for her high school's daycare; Emerance's high school had a day care that could watch over her daughter while she was in class. Once more, Emerance had to leave school to deliver and care for her second child, but she never gave up on finishing her high school diploma; when her second child was old enough for daycare, Emerance went back to high school. Despite being a single mother on a low-income, she persevered and completed her high school diploma with honours.

Emerance's drive and motivation to continue in school largely stemmed from her role as a parent and her responsibility to her children. She couldn't afford much on a low income and could not provide for her children in the way that she wanted; any jobs that she applied to required a high school diploma. So she went back to school in order to better provide for her children.

After graduating from high school, Emerance decided that she was going to apply to university. Two things served as motivators and supports in her application to university, her children and a certain teacher who encouraged her to go onto university. This teacher was her high school biology teacher who told her "you're really smart... you're a little dumb- you know

you don't try and you don't make an effort, you really are quite lazy with your academics, but you still get 92's. So on the most minimal amount of stuff that you do... not many people can do that". Emerance was defensive about her teacher's feedback, because she felt that she was doing the best she could as a single mom with two kids, but her teacher insisted that she could do more. He told her, "You really like doing these things... you really should look up university, forget about these plans to go into non-traditional trades". So because of her biology teacher's encouragement, Emerance applied to university.

Emerance's children were always a source of her motivation and ambition to continue in school, not only to better provide for them, but to also be a positive role model for them. Her other motivation was this sense of justice (as she called it) that she had since she was a child. For instance, while in university, many people were telling her that she couldn't go to school as a single mother with two small children, but she saw other people doing it so she knew what they were telling her was wrong. And she thought if other people could be parents and go to school, why couldn't she? To her, there was no justice in the limitations that many people were putting on her and other students in her position.

Emerance had no idea what to expect from university and was unprepared for the heavy workload. However, despite all her challenges she persevered, even though it took her seven years to complete her four year degree. In fact, she furthered her education and went on to complete a Master's degree. However, her graduate degree also wasn't completed without challenge. Emerance's Master's thesis concerned the problems within the academy from an Onkwehonwe perspective. During her thesis defense she was asked, "If the academy is so bad, why do you want to be here?" It was at this time that her sense of justice acted as a motivator, once again, for her ambition to continue in school. She knew that "there are so many problems

with the way things are taught about Aboriginal peoples...” and she knew that these problems had to be addressed; she was one voice that could help address these issues. So, she continued in school, in part, to address injustices faced by Aboriginal students.

Emerance’s sense of justice and wanting to serve a greater purpose in life is admirable. She has goals of one day becoming a university professor. Her enthusiasm and care for her position as the coordinator of Aboriginal student services is clearly evident when she talks about her work and the students. I was fortunate to meet such a strong and ambitious woman.

George Kennedy

George is an Oneida (OnAyota’a:ka) bear clan man. He grew up in the Oneida Nation of the Thames reserve in Ontario. George recently finished his contract at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) Brantford campus as the Aboriginal Student Services Coordinator and is now working at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU), Waterloo campus, as the Aboriginal Education Projects Coordinator.

George told me how when he was younger, he was not confident in his academic abilities and did not think that university was an option for him. This lack of confidence was partly due to the fact that so few people in his community were entering post-secondary studies and partly due to his poor writing-skills (as he referred to them). George attributed his poor writing-skills to under-servicing, in terms of education, that the youth in his community had received. For instance, he went to school in his community up until grade six and then had to go off-reserve for school during grades seven and eight. During these grades, while the mainstream students would go to French class, the Native students would go to English class, which was taught by substitute teachers. George did not really learn anything during this time with the substitute teachers and felt behind in his English writing skills. George’s confidence in his writing skills did not begin

to develop until a certain teacher inspired him in grade 12 English. He enjoyed his grade 12 English class and it helped him become more confident in his writing skills.

It took George a longer time than usual to graduate from high school. When he did graduate, he still did not have enough confidence in his academic abilities to apply to university. So, he decided to apply to a construction program in college. He chose it because he came from a family of builders. He completed the college construction program, however, he did not like math and soon realized that the construction business was not for him.

George then decided to pursue his long-standing interest in history, particularly Onkwehonwe history at the university level. However, he had not pursued his interest because his writing-skills were lacking. So, when George's confidence in his writing-skills increased, he applied to university.

George applied to two universities and was accepted at both. Because he had a young family to care for, he had to work while attending school in order to provide for his family. So, in his decision on which university to attend, it was important that he kept his full-time student status for funding reasons. It was also important for him to be able to take as few classes as possible to keep this full-time status so that he could also work part-time while attending university. Therefore, he chose the university which required the least amount of classes to maintain full-time student status.

When George began his classes in university he looked around and couldn't identify other Onkwehonwe students/peers. As a result, he organized a Native Student Association to help him and other OS form connections with each other. Together, the students in this association planned events and shared their stories and experiences with each other; with this support George completed his Bachelors degree in history.

George described how his identity as a Native person helped him persevere in life and in school. His mother used to tell him that there are two things you can do in life, “you can either be a ‘wino’ or you could really do something with yourself... You could either do this or you could do something special to make your ancestors proud, because they fought and they sacrificed so much to make sure that we would have a place and that we would flourish”. So, George decided that he was going to do something with himself. And, he strives to “leave a mark during this earth walk” and in making his ancestors proud. In his positions at WLU he has worked hard to establish Aboriginal support programs that were non-existent prior to his arrival. He also will be entering a Master’s program in history at WLU in September, 2010. His goal is to write accurate accounts of North American history from an Onkwehonwe perspective.

I was fortunate to meet George as he is very knowledgeable in Haudenosaunee ways and history. Furthermore, his desire to give back to our ancestors and our Onkwehonwe people is an inspiration.

Meet the Sharing Circle Participants

As a reminder, my intent was to hold one or two sharing circles with four to eight participants in each circle. The inclusion criteria for those participating in the sharing circle was that they would be Onkwehonwe graduate students or recently graduated from a graduate studies program. In the end, I was able to recruit four Onkwehonwe graduate students. Because the school-retention rates for OS are much lower than the broader population and few OS participate in school at the graduate level, these participants were able to offer valuable information on academic success for OS. They shared their own stories of academic success including challenges, motivators, and supports in their academic journeys. They also shared their views on challenges that act as barriers to the general OS population while in school. Finally, the

participants shared their opinions on motivators, supports, and interventions and/or strategies that can increase academic success for OS.

All four participants are currently graduate students and discussed their current struggles within their programs and within the academy. For this reason, three out of the four women decided that they wanted to remain anonymous. In order to protect these participants' anonymity, I use pseudonyms in place of their real names. The four participants are: "Gail", "Sarah", "Susan", and Vanessa. In addition, I emailed the sharing circle participants what I had written about them for their approval.

Due to the less intimate nature of a circle with multiple participants, I was unable to get to know the sharing circle participants as well as I did the conversation participants. However, I was granted a glimpse of their life history and their resilience despite their many life challenges.

"Gail" is a very strong woman who said in the circle that she's had issues all her life and has had to fight her way through her academic and life journeys. She indicated that she is encountering some struggles within her program and with the faculty in her program, but that she will continue to fight and will be successful. "Gail" was very independent from a young age and left home in her early teens, so that her parents would have one less mouth to feed. Her dad had always told her that "you either work or you go to school", so she went to work in early teen years and dropped out of high school. While working she realized that everyone else was making more money than she was because they had a higher education, so she decided to go back to school. Before she went back to school she would buy textbooks and dictionaries at garage sales and she taught herself to a grade 13 level. She then went into a program that was offering upgrading for Aboriginal people who did not have their high school diploma. While in the program, the teacher said to her, "you're already at a grade 13 level, what are you doing

here?” And she replied, “I just don’t have that piece of paper”. So, in her words, she got the piece of paper that she needed. When I asked her what made her stay in school, she replied, “But again that stuck in my head, my father saying ‘either you work or you go to school’. So, I did both, I worked all the time and I went to school in the evenings. And I’m still doing it.”

“Sarah” is in her forties and is currently a Ph.D. student. She is also a very strong independent woman who has been resilient despite life’s many challenges. “Sarah” had many challenges in her journey towards academic success, including personal issues. She attributes part of her success in school to the mentors and professors that supported her during her undergraduate and graduate studies. During the circle, she indicated that her professors were very understanding of her personal circumstances and they allowed some flexibility in terms of due dates and assignments. This empathy and flexibility helped her successfully complete her undergraduate degree and helped her continue on to graduate studies. Sarah also attributed her success in school to the simple completion of each level of education; with each level that she successfully completed, her confidence in her academic abilities grew.

“Susan” is in her twenties and is a single mom. Partly because she’s a single mom she did not even think of doing a Masters program until a university professor would say to her “...when you apply to graduate studies...” She was surprised by what the professor was saying to her and she thought, “...what do you mean apply to graduate studies?” Since beginning her graduate studies, Susan has been finding grounding in her Onkwehonwe culture and language and has been learning more about herself and her Native identity in the process. She also shares some of her Onkwehonwe culture with elementary students to inform them about Aboriginal peoples. Susan indicated that becoming more grounded in her identity is also helping her become more confident in her life and in her studies. She also indicated that at each level of

schooling there has been at least one mentor who has encouraged her to continue in her academic journey.

Vanessa is in her forties and is both a school teacher and a Master's student. She grew up in the "North" and came "South" to do her undergraduate degree. When she first came to university, she experienced a "culture shock". She indicated that the shock was due to the differing ways of thinking and knowing between her and the university faculty and students. She indicated that she found strength in staying true to her identity by saying, "And the way I think is so different than the way that everyone else thought, I just would say to myself stay to true to your identity. I didn't try to change. I just thought this is who I am." Since she grew up in the North, there were few educational institutions in her community so she had to go to high schools outside of her community. She said that she acquired the skill of adaptability through the experience of travelling outside of her community to go to high school; and this skill helped her adapt to university while in her undergraduate program. She always had this sense of responsibility to give back to her Native people and she knew that she wanted to teach Native kids. That is what she is doing, despite a fairly long commute to the Native community that she teaches in. One of her goals is to help increase school retention among Native youth.

Findings from Conversations and Sharing Circle

As previously mentioned, four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success were uncovered in both the conversations and sharing circle. These themes are: *challenges* that OS face in their journeys towards academic success; *motivators* that increase OS' motivation to continue in their journey towards academic success; *supports* that aid in OS' academic success; and *interventions or strategies* that can help increase OS success in school. There were also several sub-themes

based on the specific challenges, motivators, supports, and interventions/strategies that were uncovered.

Four *challenges* that OS face while in school were found: cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and inadequate resources. The *motivators* that give OS ambition to continue in school were external and internal motivators. Three *supports* were found to be helpful for OS in their journeys towards academic success, these were: cultural supports, peer supports, and mentorship and encouragement. Finally, three types of *interventions and/or strategies* were proposed to address the various challenges that OS face while in school: promoting sense of community, increasing awareness and information about education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments. The following table illustrates the themes and sub-themes uncovered through the conversations and sharing circle.

Table 1: Overview of Findings (Johnson, 2010).

Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Discontinuity • Racism and Ignorance • Intergenerational Trauma • Inadequate Resources
Motivators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • External
Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Supports • Cultural Supports • Mentorship and Encouragement
Interventions and/or Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting a Sense of Community • Increasing Awareness and Information about Education • Promoting Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments

Challenges

Challenges that OS face while in school were uncovered during the conversations and sharing circle. In this section of challenges, I will present these challenges. In the sections to follow, Motivators and Supports, I will address how OS are able to overcome these challenges in order to reach academic success.

Cultural Discontinuity

A discontinuity between Onkwehonwe cultures and the Western academic culture emerged. Many OS come from a different worldview than the dominant worldview and this differing worldview can be deeply embedded in OS' thinking patterns. The participants indicated that OS often think differently and understand differently than mainstream students.

“I’m just as smart as anybody else, but maybe in a different way...” (Vanessa)

“because we’re Aboriginal people, we understand differently and this system this colonial system has a mindset where it wants to box you in or institutionalize you” (“Gail”)

Due to cultural discontinuity, OS often encounter a “culture shock” when they go to a post secondary institution. This shock is due the socio-cultural differences between the students’ Indigenous world and the Western academic world. And, because of this “culture shock”, OS can have a very hard time adjusting to this new environment.

They come here all of a sudden, they come to these big universities, these really big environments that are larger than their towns, just the university alone has more resources than there are in their town and even in some of their own urban centres (Emerance)

...you have your identity and you’re trying to fit into this other one so you think this is what I have to do. I can remember coming to Brock for undergrad and I had lived up North the whole time- so it was a culture shock. (Vanessa)

OS may struggle in balancing two worlds, the Western academic world and their Indigenous world. The OS’s indigenous culture and the culture of post-secondary institutions can be very different, and at times contradictory. OS come to school with their Onkwehonwe identity and then they try to fit into this other identity. For many OS, the struggle of “fitting into” the dominant culture while attending school creates a lot of stress. Participants indicated that a critical coping strategy for OS in overcoming the challenge of cultural discontinuity is the maintenance of their cultural identity.

“But it’s a struggle. It’s a struggle between our students knowing how to balance their cultures and how to kind of walk in this other culture.” (Emerance)

And the way I think is so different than the way that everyone else thought, I just would say to myself stay true to your identity. I didn’t try to change I just thought this is who I am. I didn’t understand why I was so different I couldn’t understand that... (Vanessa)

George talked about a chief, who said that,

youth are modern warriors they’re going to go away and take this education and subject themselves to this information that may be contradictory to what they’ve been taught, but they’ll come back and be our leaders and be a better person for it.

Some OS decide that this new post secondary environment is too much for them and they decide that they cannot attend a post secondary institution.

...the very big disconnect between living environments, I think big disconnect between attitudes as well, so when they come here and they go into the student centre... I’ve had students that have walked out of that and said, “I can’t do that, I can’t go there.” (Emerance)

Racism and Ignorance

The racism and ignorance that are directed at OS within university settings was a repeated theme that emerged in the conversations and was supported by the sharing circle. Some forms of racism and ignorance that the participants discussed were racist and ignorant comments/questions, being singled out or marginalized within classes, a lack of support for OS from faculty and programs, lack of acceptance of Indigenous methodologies, and the inappropriate manner that Native content is taught in courses. Many struggles arise out of the racism and ignorance experienced by OS such as feelings of frustration, alienation, and loneliness. Additionally, many OS are expected to represent all Onkwehonwe peoples in their classes. OS also may feel the need to dispel negative Native stereotypes through their own examples; this need to dispel stereotypes creates unneeded stress for OS.

OS frequently face racism and ignorance in their classes perpetrated by their peers, and/or by their teachers and professors. Stereotypical ideas of Onkwehonwe people can emerge through racist and ignorant comments and/or questions directed at OS. These racist and ignorant attitudes on-campus can be very damaging to Onkwehonwe students and can come in the way of the OS' academic success.

“There’s this stereotypical idea of how we’re not well educated...” (Vanessa)

“...so when they share with me these things that the students are saying... they say bad things and it hurts the students really bad... because this is supposed to be a place of higher learner...” (George)

you know I think the overall challenge for them is how to fit in to these programs and not face that stereotype of, oh you’re a Native student, and, oh how’d you get here, you must have got in on your *marks*? Its like yes, actually, they did get here on they’re marks, because it’s the only way to get into these programs. And they struggle against that. I know that from my own experience as an undergraduate student people will ask you the stupidest and strangest things like, oh is your entire university paid for? That’s why you’re here. And how come you get that? I’d love to have my entire university paid for. (Emerance)

“So I often think about what my students are experiencing here and it’s unfortunate that they sit in classrooms where somebody will say something about Aboriginal people and not think twice about it not think about whether it’s damaging.” (Emerance)

OS also may be marginalized within classes and may be singled out to act as a spokesperson for all Onkwehonwe peoples. This burden of having to represent all Onkwehonwe causes OS added stress while on their journeys towards academic success.

Our students that do identify themselves within our classes they carry the burden of our history and our people they shouldn’t... they should just be able to be a student, not a spokesperson for our people, but they do they carry that burden, you know. It’s unfortunate, because everyone else in that class can just be themselves. (George)

One of the students was talking about the sweat lodge in the states where people died because of the practices, and they were really upset by that, because people were asking them in class whether people die in sweat lodges. What a terrible thing to have put on our students, that some how or another something like that, that stealing of our cultures to make money, is something that that student is related to or understands... (Emerance)

“Gail” indicated that her program is like a “battlefield” sometimes and that she encounters some form of ignorance and racism within her program on a regular basis. She indicated that one of her professors singles her out in class regularly and asks, “What do the Indians think about this, [real name]?”

OS’s experiences of racism and ignorance while attending school can cause feelings of alienation, frustration, and loneliness.

So those experiences [of racism and ignorance] aren’t a one of, they certainly aren’t few and far between. So when those students come usually by the time they come to us it’s because they’re lonely or frustrated, something is just going on that is well beyond something that they can actually get through on their own. (Emerance)

I have had classmates stop talking to me in my undergrad when they found out that I am Native, because they figured that I had unfair advantages over them because of my Native status. And the questions and comments that we get as Native students, like ‘Why don’t you guys just get over it? [land claims, residential schools, etc...] It happened 200 years ago.’ ‘You get free education, don’t you?’ As soon as people know that you’re Native you’re automatically bombarded with all of these questions. And it can be very alienating and frustrating for Native students. I have many Native friends that quit school, because they got tired of having to feeling angry and having to defend themselves. (Myself in sharing circle)

In addition, many OS feel the need to dispel Native stereotypes through their own examples by doing extra well in their courses and work. This need to dispel Native stereotypes through their own example creates more burden and stress within OS.

And, I think that our students have a hard time asking for help, because they’re own expectations that they put on themselves, and I don’t know whether this is true for you, but its true for a lot of students, is that you have to be doubly good in what you do. You have to be super-good and overcompensate and be the best of the best because you’re proving something that Native students can do this too. (Emerance)

There’s this stereotypical idea of how we’re not well educated... and I find that when I’m in a class I always try to excel, because I don’t want them labeling me there’s that one Indian that doesn’t know anything. So, I always try to push it that much more. Its crazy

because you think why do I have to do that, but you think these people may never meet another Aboriginal person again, so I have to raise the bar and show them that I'm very smart and intelligent. I can do what you're doing and even more. So, I always find it important to raise the bar to show that I'm not lazy, I'm not late, I'm not this, I'm not that. I do the same thing at my job, because people are watching you, and so that people can say well I knew an Aboriginal woman and she was great. I think you always have to do that [as a Native person], you shouldn't, but you have to." (Vanessa)

I also shared my recent experience with medical school interviews and meeting other medical school candidates:

As soon as they realized I was Native their whole demeanor changed towards me. I knew they were thinking that the only reason why I got an interview was because I'm Native. And, I know that they are going to think this when I am in medical school and I am going to work extra hard and do really well to prove them wrong. (Myself in sharing circle)

Because of this need to dispel stereotypes through their own lived examples, some OS will not ask for help when they need it, because of the stigma attached to needing help. They feel that if they get help, then the Native stereotype of not being smart is perpetuated. And so, for OS, there is a stigma attached to getting help. The following dialogue between Emerance (Em) and me illustrates this point:

- Em- ...There's a stigma attached to being a Native student and going and asking for help...
- Ashley- Ya, I have friends and family members who will not ask for help in school because they do not want to be considered 'the dumb Indian'. And so, dropping out of school seemed like a better option to them than asking for help. I wonder if part of it is pride. Where you have so much pride that you don't want to ask for help.
- Em- I think so... I think so... its like I should be able to do this. You should be able to do this. What does that make me if I can't do it? It's huge. I suffered through the same thing. I know my students are suffering through the same thing....
- Ashley- But again I think what you said earlier... this pressure of being one of the only Native students in your classrooms. So you don't want to be asking for help because it makes you feel like you're not as strong as the rest and everybody's looking to you. I think that's probably part of it.

There also seems to be a lack of support from some universities and faculties for OS, particularly those OS wanting to use Indigenous methodologies in their coursework. At times, these OS are met with rejection and/or resistance. For instance, sharing circle participant “Susan” shared that a certain university program told her not to bother applying and that “there’s more Native students doing Native research in [name of another department]”.

As “Gail” stated:

And if you want to go outside those boundaries like so say you want to use the medicine wheel or something like that they’re like, ‘well why do you need to use that? [said in argumentative tone] Maybe you can incorporate some non-Indigenous theories instead, because Aboriginal people didn’t have theories’ ... give me a break. [everyone laughing] Just because it’s not written down doesn’t mean it’s not a theory. If it’s not written down in a book, then it’s not academically sound [to academics]. Where’s the social justice in that?

There also remains a large problem with the way that Native content is taught within courses. There seems to be a lack of awareness among teachers and faculty in terms of Onkwehonwe peoples. Therefore, Native content is sometimes taught in a culturally inappropriate manner with ignorance, and at times racism. Many OS become frustrated and bothered by the way Native content is taught in their courses.

...institutionally, there’s not a lot of awareness even within the faculty. So they come to me when they have a hard time listening to some of the ignorances of the faculty that are teaching them. They told me a number of the grievances that they have, even Aboriginal content in the courses that they are taking (George)

I see them [Onkwehonwe students] coming in so mad so frustrated, because some professor somewhere said all the Aboriginal people killed off all the animals, they weren’t good hunters, this and that... and it’s in coursework, it’s in class discussion how those Natives get all the free stuff and why don’t we? (Emerance)

Overall, racism and ignorance on-campus, and within classes, were major challenges that OS face while in school, causing OS unneeded stress and responsibility. Racist and ignorant attitudes that are often directed at OS can cause the students to feel alienated, frustrated, and lonely.

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma from residential school and colonization is still negatively affecting Onkwehonwe communities and Onkwehonwe youth. Some effects of intergenerational trauma that are being seen in Onkwehonwe youth are a loss of cultural identity, sense of hopelessness, despair, and internalized oppression.

“And that’s what I see at my school I think that a lot of our kids don’t have their identity they live right on the reserve, but they don’t have their identity...” (Vanessa)

But what I found out with my research is that intergenerational trauma and the challenges affecting us now. And what I’m seeing my school affecting our kids now, they are products of residential schooling... It’s our whole history no one knows anything except for the stereotypes. (Vanessa)

The following dialogue between Emerance (Em) and me also illustrates the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma within Onkwehonwe communities:

- Em- ... You know they talk about that residential school impact, and it’s more than that, it’s a cultural impact.
- Ashley- And we’re all products of that too... It’s not just the people that were in residential school
- Em- Ya
- Ashley- like, look at how it’s resonating through the generations...
- Em- you can’t get away from it, you really can’t. Now when... like I work a lot in the North, I work a lot with high school students, it’s one side of the services that we provide. Ya its fun, it’s challenging but its fun. And when I go to the [names different Native communities] and when I work with these kids, it’s a completely different reality, it’s significantly different, you can’t even touch it from here. There’s so much hope and there’s so much despair at the same time, it’s like things haven’t changed in 30 years, they haven’t changed (Emerance)

“Gail” shared about the internalized oppression that her relative feels due to colonization:

“She doesn’t have that belief in herself because the colonial system has torn her down and said ‘no, you’re not good enough, you don’t look the part’”.

Many OS are affected by intergenerational trauma that stems from colonization and residential schooling. Intergenerational trauma is negatively affecting OS through the loss of

cultural identity, hopelessness, and internalized oppression. Due to a loss of cultural identity OS are unable to find empowerment in their identities to succeed in school (see Motivators section below). Due to a sense of hopelessness, many OS are unable see the possibilities that their lives can hold, thereby, decreasing school retention. Finally, internalized oppression decreases OS's confidence in their academic abilities.

Inadequate Resources

During the conversations and sharing circle, two resources were mentioned as inadequate for OS: educational and financial resources.

Participants in this study confirmed the statistical portrait that OS are under-serviced in high school. This under-servicing causes OS students to be ill-equipped for their post secondary education. Many Native schools, particularly those in remote and/or small communities, are under-funded. Due to this under-funding, many OS do not receive the same standard of education as mainstream students because of fewer educational resources and/or poorer conditions of their schools. The following dialogue between Emerance (Em) and me illustrates this point:

- Em- ... How do you begin to accommodate for the fact that 75% of our students leaving high school aren't prepared in the same way that 75% of the non-Aboriginal students are prepared. The difference is staggering... as in... a recent visit to [name of Native community] which a lot of people know about [name of Native community] and they know about the school problem... but a recent visit just really hit home, and it was like, you can't go to school in the afternoon if you're teenagers and the little kids go to school in the morning..in the elementary schools which are just portables, which are really disgusting.
- Ashley- I've seen pictures and You Tube videos that the community made to increase awareness about the poor condition of their school.
- Em- Have you seen the pictures?
- Ashley- Ya.
- Em- You should be there and smell the smells... its fricken atrocious, the fact that these are our kids supported entirely under the department of Indian

- and northern affairs... Going to school in what are essentially labour construction trailers and that's their school.
- Ashley- And it's been reopened again?
- Em- Yes.
- Ashley- I know that there was some kind of chemical spill years ago that was still toxic, and the toxins were leeching into the environment on the school property. I saw pictures of the moldy conditions of the portables. Has anything changed?
- Em- No..... it floods every year because the school is one of the only places in the community... you have to see it... its one of the only places in the community that doesn't have a very large ramp that comes up. So when the flooding comes, the floods are the floods... so it's, like come on... so there's all of this stuff, all this politics around what's possible with the set amount of money the INAC gives down to communities as far as education, infrastructure, et cetera, et cetera.. there's always challenge there. But the reality... means that the kids coming out of our, our school system, still within Ontario, aren't prepared... you know, can you get a math and science teacher in some of these communities?

OS do not receive the same level of educational service as non-Native students. Thus, the graduation rates for OS are much lower than the broader non-Native population.

You know one of the things that our students are never told is that they are completely underserved in high school, they are never told that. They're always told, just get good marks and you'll go on and do great, but they're never told that when they graduate from this high school, that has a high percent of Aboriginal students or they are an Aboriginal student in a mainstream school, is that they're never ever have the same level of service as a non-Aboriginal student. It just doesn't exist. I mean there are tons and tons of studies that if you're non-Aboriginal going into a mainstream high school your graduation rate is this, if you're Aboriginal going into a non-Aboriginal high school your graduation rate is much much much lower, highly reduced percentage... the possibility of you graduating is highly reduced. (Emerance)

One participant also indicated that the inadequate amount of educational resources for OS and the poorer conditions of many schools that OS attend may cause OS to be disengaged in their education.

there's a lot of enrichment programs around here, that if you're a smart kid and you have a lot of resources that you can go to and do these things, but there isn't anything for our kids that don't have any money, that don't have any resources, and that sometimes don't have parents because they're in care. And its just... how do you keep those kids engaged? How do you keep them interested in staying in high school when their entire life is falling apart. (Emerance)

OS also struggle financially and for the most part money is not available for the OS to attend a post secondary institution. The following exchange between Emerance (Em) and me demonstrates this point:

- Em- ... You have to know the ins and outs of 5 other organizations, 6 other levels of governance in order to really make it work. For the most part though, the money is not there. And if the money's not there then...
- Ashley- Well, I was reading some numbers on INAC and the number of students that they turn away, and so many Native students are turned away from post-secondary funding.
- Em- That are fully eligible.
- Ashley- It's crazy.
- Em- Yep. I paid for my education. I took out loans...

And since many OS lack financial resources to attend a post secondary education, those who do attend one often have to work while going to school.

"So, I did both [school and work] I worked all the time and I went to school in the evenings. And I'm still doing it." ("Gail")

And at the university level I applied to WLU and university of Waterloo and what helped me choose my school is how many classes I was able to take to be considered a full-time student. At University of Waterloo, I was able to take 3 classes and be considered a full-time student. And that's because I had a young family and I had to work, like other [Aboriginal] students, part-time above what other studies I had. So my life was a little more complicated than mainstream students that would be coming directly out of high school, which a lot of our Aboriginal students don't necessarily do [come straight out of high school]. (George)

Sub-par conditions of reserve and/or remote school that many OS attend can cause them to be under-prepared for a post-secondary education. These conditions can also cause OS to lack interest in school participation. In addition, there is a lack of financial resources for available for OS, which makes it difficult for them to partake in post secondary education. When they do attend university or college they have to work while going to school in order to support themselves and sometimes their families.

Summary of Challenges

Four challenges that OS face while in school emerged in the conversations and were supported by the sharing circle: cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and inadequate resources. Cultural discontinuity causes OS to struggle as they try to balance their Indigenous culture and the western academic culture. Racism and ignorance can take many forms and negatively affect OS while they are pursuing their education through feelings of alienation, frustration, and loneliness. Intergenerational trauma, due to colonization and residential schooling, continues to affect OS and can cause a sense of hopelessness, loss of cultural identity, and internalized oppression for OS. Finally, many OS are ill-equipped for a post-secondary education due to sub-par educational resources and a lack of financial resources to attend a post-secondary institution. If OS are able to attend, they usually have to work long hours while going to school.

In the next sections, I will present findings on how OS are able to overcome these challenges in order to succeed in school. Various motivators and supports were shared as ways OS can negotiate and navigate successfully through some of these challenges.

Motivators

Motivators as discussed in the conversations and sharing circle are sources of increased drive and ambition for OS in continuing their education. Two types of motivators for OS' academic success emerged in the conversations and were supported by the sharing circle: internal motivators and external motivators. Internal motivators include confidence in academic abilities and confidence in identity. The external motivators were responsibility to give back and social change.

Internal Motivators

The internal motivators identified in the conversations and sharing circle shared a common attribute of confidence. Confidence in academic abilities and confidence in identity were found to be two internal motivators for OS to continue in school.

As OS successfully complete each level of education, they gain more confidence in their academic abilities. This confidence, due to OS's success in school, then promotes further advancement in education. This success helps OS overcome internalized oppression by helping them think "I can do this [school]".

I think that at each level that you go through like high school, bachelors, you think, ok, I can do this. And once you get your masters it's incredibly liberating. It's all those things that you've been through that allows you to keep going, it's that strength in you. ("Sarah")

"The more that you are able to overcome in school the more you become more resilient and confident in your abilities." (Myself in Sharing circle)

Identity was uncovered as a factor that increases the ability for OS to stay in school. The participants shared that identity helps ground OS. As OS gain knowledge about their identity as a Native person, they become more empowered and resilient, which help them overcome barriers in their journey towards academic success.

"I really think that you have to have your identity to be successful- to know who you are, that empowers you and gives you strength." (Vanessa)

... that's kind of one of the theoretical frameworks as a way of having educational success- is building identity. So, that's sort of what I'm trying to do with my [area of research], but as I'm doing that I find it's important that I become more grounded in my own identity. So, I've done quite a few things since I've been in the masters program, like I've taken the Mohawk language courses, I've been dancing in pow wows and I've started to get into that more and do shows for public schools with a group here in [name] and its helping me become more confident... So building on my own identity is important and I try to encourage others to build on theirs. ("Susan")

I was talking with one of my friends and she's actually doing research on how students who are taking up aspects of their culture more clearly from a younger age are a lot more

resilient, so I think that with our students we are seeing a huge shift. Like our young people I'm seeing a big shift in terms of language speakers. (Emerance)

After talking about cultural identity, some participants indicated that OS can find strength and confidence in identity, regardless of what the identity may be - Native or non-Native.

“So, I think that you choose your identity, and as long as you're strong in that and empowered in that identity, then you can be successful.” (“Gail”)

However, there was no denying that gaining knowledge about their culture and cultural identity is very important for many OS's journeys towards academic success. For instance, some OS may not necessarily identify strongly with their Native identity, but while in school they begin to learn more about their Native history and culture, which can help ground them so that they can succeed in school.

I think that there's a number of students that are aware that they are Indigenous, but don't necessarily know what that means for them, and I think that many times they in coming to post secondary education, they perhaps learn more about themselves and their ancestors and a lot of times... [gave example of OS he knows], but now that this person is in university... they've become involved with the NSA. She's learning a lot more about the history and the culture. And that's grounding her, it's really helping her to succeed at education. (George conversation transcript, p.4)

Overall, confidence due to success in school and identity were two internal motivators thought to aid in OS's academic success. When OS are successful in school, they gain confidence in their academic abilities and feel that they are able to continue in school. Identity, particularly cultural identity, was identified as an important factor that empowers OS to continue in school.

External Motivators

External motivators were identified as providing OS with the ambition to continue in school despite the many challenges that OS face while in their academic journeys. These

external motivators were responsibility to give back and social change. While responsibility to give back and social change intrinsically motivate OS to continue in school, the sources of their intrinsic motivation stems from circumstances outside of themselves (e.g., social issues, injustices, inequities, etc.). Therefore, these motivators are discussed as external motivators.

Many OS decide to go to and stay in school because of motivators that are outside of themselves. For instance, many OS want to give back to their Onkwehonwe communities and Onkwehonwe people. This responsibility to their communities and people is a motivator for many OS to continue in school. Several feel that their lives serve greater purposes, and by obtaining a post secondary education they will be better equipped to fulfill their greater purposes.

....majority of them [Native students], if I think on it now, have something that not that they want to prove that's not it, but they have something within themselves that they say this is really important, because "I'm going to do this". It's a goal or a motivator outside of themselves. (Emerance)

...from the students that I've had come through my office, they have utilized their education and gone back to their communities and used it to improve their communities and the lives of the current population. (George)

"I want to give back to my people [Native] and communities in whatever work I do- in my school work, like for my Master's, and in my future career." (Myself in Sharing circle)

Vanessa indicated that once she became a teacher, she knew that she wanted to teach Native kids because, "Native kids need Native role Models". She indicated that she can be role model to the parents as her life experiences are relatable to many of the parents'. So she devoted her work to Native education so that she could say to the parents, "I know where you're coming from, I've been there, but you don't have to stay there and your kids don't have to stay there."

When some OS become aware of social injustices, particularly pertaining to Onkwehonwe people, they decide to continue in school so that they can use their education for the betterment of their communities and for social change.

And each one of my students that I talked to in the past really are like, this sucks about being at home, or, this sucks about this life or living in town... and strangely they're doing things to change that... they never set out, that wasn't their [motive]- this is my goal I'm going to set out to change the world or change the environment at [name of company] or whatever it is these little things have been huge catalysts to their own growth and direction. (Emerance)

So I think those kind of things are really funny to see, because we're always told that somehow or another it's within us and we just have to find it, and sometimes those external motivators- the injustices that you see and the injustices that you feel you need to address can be the biggest thing to get you through something... really really big. (Emerance)

I really want to change those statistics. If I can succeed... For instance, my relative is now going to go to university. My relative thinks, well, if you did it, I can do it. It's a step in the right way. ("Gail")

I've always had this sense that my life serves a greater purpose and I've always felt a strong connection with my Native identity. Knowing these things and knowing what we've been through as a people... knowing the statistics for our health and our education... all of these things give me the motivation to continue in school, because I know that it's the best way that I can give back to our people [Native people] (Myself in sharing circle)

And in the sharing circle we discussed how this wanting to give back and wanting to make a change in our communities and among our people is part of our cultural worldview as Onkwehonwe peoples; it is part of who we are. To illustrate, Vanessa said:

...I travel an hour and twenty min to teach on the reserve and they [non-Native people] say to me why do you do that, why don't you teach locally? I don't know how to answer that, they don't seem to realize that I have a responsibility. I have to give back to my community. It's just part of me. I just knew I had to do that and why wouldn't I?

So for numerous OS, the external motivators provide them with the most drive to continue in school. For many, these external motivators stem from a sense of greater purpose that their lives serve and from feelings of responsibility to give back to their Onkwehonwe

communities and people, as well as a sense of justice. These external motivators were also identified as part of Onkwehonwe people's worldview. In reflecting about external motivators such as giving back and a sense of greater purpose as a cultural worldview, I thought about how these motivators align with Haudenosaunee values of consideration of future generations and that everyone has a special gift from the Creator that can and should be used to benefit the larger community (Journal Notes, July 13, 2010). These values are the same for many Onkwehonwe cultures and it seems that these values are motivational forces for OS to succeed in school.

Summary of Motivators

Retrospectively, confidence in academic abilities and confidence in identity were found to be two internal motivators for OS' academic success. As OS successfully completed each educational level, they gain more confidence in their academic abilities. This motivator of success helps OS overcome internalized oppression by altering their beliefs about their academic abilities. Another internal motivator that was found in the conversations and sharing circle was identity. As OS gain confidence in their identity, particularly cultural identity, they become empowered and are better able to succeed in school. Finally, many OS continue in school due to external motivators such as wanting to give back to their communities and people and wanting to serve a greater purpose in their lives. These external motivators were also identified as a cultural worldview of Onkwehonwe peoples.

Supports

Three types of support to aid OS in their journeys towards academic success emerged in the conversations and were supported by the sharing circle. These supports are: cultural supports (including Elder supports), peer supports, and mentorship and encouragement.

Cultural Supports (including Elder Supports)

The cultural supports that were uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle were the availability of traditions and cultural services in schools, the ability to use Indigenous methodologies in school, and the availability of elders in schools. I present findings on Elder supports here within cultural supports rather than the mentorship and encouragement section, because Elders are highly revered in Onkwehonwe cultures as they are the keepers of knowledge.

Offering Onkwehonwe traditional supports in schools for OS was identified as beneficial to OS, particularly when they are having a difficult time. These types of supports were identified as a coping mechanism for OS to overcome many challenges they experience in their academic journeys.

that would have been really nice to have someone to go to when I was in university and say, I'm having a really bad day, could we just smudge, or I'm having a really bad day, could I go and put some tobacco down, and it didn't exist then. (Emerance)

In addition, the ability to use Indigenous methodologies in schools is very empowering for OS. This ability for OS to use Indigenous methodologies while they are facing several barriers is empowering for OS and can help them overcome challenges in their academic journeys. While employing Indigenous methodologies in school, OS are able to find strength in their identities and learn more about themselves. Finding strength in their Indigenous ways of knowing helps OS succeed in school. The ability to Indigenous methodologies while in school also helps OS gain knowledge in a way that is culturally congruent with their Onkwehonwe cultures, thereby decreasing the challenge of cultural discontinuity.

And, being able to use our own methodologies while we are facing several barriers there is so much room for growth and to be able to find our strength in our identities and be creative... I never used to think that I was creative, it's like I'm discovering all these

things about myself as I'm going through and facing these barriers- so it's really inspiring. ("Susan")

And, being able to use an Indigenous methodology for my thesis is really exciting. It really acknowledges and validates our way of knowing and being in the world. And I find by using an Indigenous methodology for my thesis, I am learning more about myself and empowering me and helping me become more confident in my abilities. (Myself in sharing circle)

Since elders are the bearers of knowledge and have many lived experiences that can be used as teaching tools, they can help OS overcome challenges that they face while in school. Elders can share Onkwehonwe culture and history with OS, thereby helping the students in their identity formation. They can also provide words of support and comfort to OS when they are in crisis.

But it's something that I'm definitely an advocate for [elder program], because from my understanding they're like our knowledge bearers and they live life through a lot of experiences they're having, and they can help us and help us in understanding some of the issues we're facing. So it's extremely important, especially for a student that comes from not knowing their history, and hopefully that elder will be able to share some of that history and culture with them. And I guess assist them in understanding.... They're looking at some of the issues they're facing from a different point of view... most times they have kind words to share with them. (George)

Those students are actually quite strong, if I think back on some of the ones that just graduated recently and the environments they came from, the stuff that I know about them... they've not only found someone who's their idea of how to live a good life, it's visible to them- it's something they can be able to see, but they have also have connected strongly with our elders during our programming or in the community... (Emerance)

When I went up North for one of my med school interviews, there was an elder at the school, and she said a prayer for us and it really calmed my nerves. I think those kind of supports are really important for us [Native students]. (Myself with George)

But there definitely needs to be something available on a full-time basis for when the students are in crisis and to have those elder supports in place. Even if there's minimal of a visiting elder service where students could make an appointment once a month. But I think it would be definitely beneficial to have an elder there as much as possible. (George)

Elders can provide OS with encouragement and positive reinforcement for OS, which can increase their confidence in school, thereby, increasing OS's success in school.

Another student that just graduated from [name of program] was told her entire life that you're never going to be able to do this, you're never going to be able to do this, you're never going to be able to do this. And when she came here she had an advocate who was an elder who said, you *can* do this, you *can* get an [name of program] degree, and you can go back home, and you can work, and you can do whatever you want. (Emerance)

Cultural supports such as offering traditional supports in school to help OS cope and overcome the challenges they face while in school were identified as important supports in helping OS succeed in school. Accepting the use of Indigenous methodologies within post secondary institutions also helped increasing OS's academic success by empowering them and decreasing the cultural discontinuity that they experience. Elders can provide support and guidance, thereby helping OS overcome various challenges that arise in their academic journeys. Encouragement and positive reinforcement to OS can help them gain confidence in school.

Peer Supports

Peer supports were found to be important in OS's academic success for at least two reasons. First, sharing with peers helps OS better cope during the academic journeys. In addition, OS can inspire each other to continue in school.

“And it's also like talking to other people and talking about experiences that are similar, I find it really empowering it's like we're building off of one another's strengths.”
 (“Susan”)

“And it just inspires you to see what everybody else is doing, and then you think, ok now, I'm going to back to work better on what I'm doing.” (Vanessa)

Sharing between OS through sharing circles was also discussed as a valuable support system for OS.

I think getting together like we're doing right now with people that are similar [is helpful to Native students], but we can never get together, because the institution really separates us... And we can never sit down like this. It's an opportunity to understand each other and learn from each other. ("Gail")

And it's a place to share. And I don't know whether it's a Western view, but a lot of people don't want to share with one another... not everyone wants to share, but learning to be able to share with one another is pertinent. ("Susan")

Support from peers was found to help in OS's journeys towards academic success through inspiration and as a coping mechanism. Peers can inspire OS to continue in school despite the many challenges that they are facing in their academic journeys. Additionally, peer supports can act as a coping mechanism for OS to address the challenges that they are experiencing in their academic journeys. The participants identified sharing circles as a medium to facilitate peer discussion and sharing.

Mentorship and Encouragement

The importance of mentorship and encouragement to OS' academic success was a recurring theme in the conversations and the sharing circle. Mentorship and encouragement can come from teachers, peers, elders, and Aboriginal student-services workers and was considered essential at every level of schooling for OS. The mentorship and encouragement that OS receive while in school can help increase their confidence in their academic abilities, which increases their school retention.

They need someone. They do, I think that you go to school... even as a Native student, you can go through school for years and you can go, well I'm doing ok, I'm doing ok, you can have one setback, one thing that will set you back, and it will knock you so far off your horse that that horse is off and running. And it's like what do you do? How do you catch up? How do you get back on? How do you do something? It can be with your graduate work, it can be with your undergraduate work, no matter what it is. I have more friends that are in Ph.D. mode for the last 20 years because they had one experience where they had a supervisor that didn't believe in them or they had a system that didn't

do that- that didn't say, I believe in you, I believe you can do this. I know you can do this. You don't have to be a 15-year old to get that message. It's essential all the way through. (Emerance)

"I think it's extremely important [for Native students] to have mentors whether it be... you know faculty is pretty busy with their time, but definitely peer mentors are important too." (George)

Sharing circle participant "Susan" talked about how she thinks mentorship is important, because when she looks back at her schooling there was one person at every level that helped or motivated her to continue in school. She stated:

In grade school, it was my grade four teacher, in high school, it was that teacher I had for creative writing, and then at university, it was the one professor who would say, "when you apply to graduate studies, you should talk about..."

She further emphasized the importance of mentorship by poignantly stating:

I hear this a lot [from Native students], that it's just one person who encourages you, one teacher that says something positive, like you know, you can write really well... It's kind of like an epiphany, it makes you realize that in yourself. *So can you imagine if it just wasn't that one person?*

The best role models or mentors are the ones that are successful in life and that OS can relate to in terms of life experience; they are someone who the students can see themselves reflected in. OS's beliefs about themselves can be positively affected by having a mentor that they can see themselves in or can relate to. Such mentors offer invaluable support to OS. Specifically, when OS see someone that has had similar hardship in life and has been able to overcome these hardships and is successful, they are then able to see that they too can overcome the challenges that they are experiencing and can be successful in school.

Well, we need to... it's not enough to have people speaking on our behalf, we have to have champions, champions are important- very very important, but if in the end of the day our students don't see you succeeding... if they don't see Natives succeeding in the

academy, then why on earth would they think that they could? Why on earth would they see it as a reasonable option for them? (Emerance)

“Native kids need Native role models- they need to see that they can be successful like everybody else...” (Vanessa)

Emerance shared an example which showed how mentors that OS can relate to can increase their school retention. This example illustrates how mentors can push OS to be the best that they can be through the mentor’s sharing of his/her own similar lived experiences.

This one girl that was here recently, she’s like, ‘well I’m a mom and I don’t think that I can do this’. And I said, you’re selling yourself short, I was so annoyed with her, and I was like, you’re selling yourself short. I said, when you want to come talk to me, come talk to me, but if you want to feel sorry for yourself stand out there and feel sorry for yourself. She’s like ‘What do you mean?’ She was giving me attitude all week and I said I was a single mom, I had little tiny babies when I went back to school, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I said are you kidding? I said I dragged them to daycare with me in a stroller, no bus, and I said everybody has to do their thing, and they probably hated all the years that I was in school, and they probably hated that their mom was a professional student and not a regular mom that did mom-type stuff... so I told this girl, so what? That’s going to be your kid looking at you going, my mom went to school, and my mom had me and went to school, and I said, what kind of role model are you going to be? What do you want to do with your life?... She’s now in school. (Emerance)

For OS, simple words of encouragement and positive reinforcement can transform their lives and their beliefs about their abilities. All of the participants identified at least one mentor that provided them with positive reinforcement and/or encouraged them to continue in school. Mentorship and encouragement were identified as two of the most important supports for OS’s success in school and were important in all levels of education for OS. When OS are able to see examples of mentors with whom they can identify, they are able to picture themselves in their mentor’s position of success. This ability to picture themselves in their mentors state positively affects their beliefs about themselves and their academic abilities. In addition, when OS are able

to see that their mentors have overcome similar hardships in their lives, it gives OS the resilience to continue in their academic journeys.

Summary of Supports

Three supports that aid academic success were uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle: cultural supports (including elder supports), peer supports, and mentorship and encouragement.

Cultural supports, such as Onkwehonwe traditional supports offered in schools, can help OS cope with difficulties that they are experiencing in their academic journeys. Also, being able to use Indigenous methodologies in their school work can be very empowering. OS are able to find the strength to overcome the challenges that they face in school through their cultural identity. Elders help OS succeed in school by providing cultural guidance that can help in cultural-identity formation. Elders are also able to offer worlds of support, comfort, and encouragement when OS are having difficulties; this support helps OS cope with difficulties that arise in their academic journeys.

Through peer sharing OS are better equipped to overcome challenges that they face in school; peer supports provide a coping mechanism for OS. Also, peers can inspire OS through their own shared experiences and goals; this inspiration can help OS persevere in their academic journeys despite the challenges they encounter along the way.

Mentorship and encouragement were found to be vital supports in OS's academic success. Every participant indicated that encouragement from supporters enabled them to continue in school. They also believed that encouragement and/or positive reinforcement from a teacher, advisor, peer, and/or elder was an essential support for all OS. This encouragement and/or positive reinforcement help increase OS confidence in their academic abilities. In

addition, mentors can be a lived example for OS of someone who has had similar hardships/challenges in life and has been able to overcome these challenges and be successful. Having a mentor that OS can see themselves in assists OS in overcoming the challenges they experience in their academic journeys.

Interventions/Strategies for Onkwehonwe Academic Success

This section presents the findings uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle as participants answered my second primary search question regarding interventions and/or strategies that can increase academic success for OS. Three types of interventions were found to be important in increasing OS' academic success: promoting sense of community, increasing awareness and information about education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments. These interventions were proposed in response to the challenges that OS face, such as cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and inadequate resources.

Promoting Sense of Community

Sense of community (SOC) provides a sense of belonging and membership for the members of a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The participants did not refer to their thoughts and ideas about strategies to increase Onkwehonwe academic success as providing a SOC for OS. However, it became clear in making meaning of the findings that this was an overarching goal of some of the strategies that they indicated would be helpful in increasing academic success for OS (Journal Notes, July 9, 2010). Participants identified Aboriginal student-service centres as important in schools for OS, because they facilitate a sharing and collective environment where OS can feel welcomed and a sense of belongingness, thereby, increasing the SOC for OS on-campus.

Sharing and collectivity are important values among Onkwehonwe peoples and OS. Interventions developed within schools to increase Onkwehonwe academic success, therefore should include elements which promote SOC by facilitating collectivity among OS. Collectivity and sharing was identified as a way of healing from the effects of intergenerational trauma. Due to the intergenerational trauma assimilation tactics of colonization, many Onkwehonwe peoples have become disconnected from each other. Therefore, collectivity and sharing were identified ways of healing from the effects of intergenerational trauma by facilitating connections with each other again. To illustrate, “Gail” indicated how Native women, in particular, used to be collective and used to work together, but that now we’re so broken up because of the colonial system and we begin lateral violence against one another. She said that in the university setting she’s seeing that all of us are realizing this need to be collective, and we’re starting to come back together, but there’s a lot more that needs to be done to reach this collectivity and engagement with each other. Gail then talked about a vision that she had where she “saw all Native women standing in a huge circle and looking in all different directions” she said, “we were so disconnected from one another, but when we all held hands the circle was complete and then the real healing started”.

One program identified to increase collectivity and sharing on campus is Aboriginal student services. They are important in facilitating collectivity and sharing, because such services allow OS to better connect with each other and support each other, thereby promoting a SOC among OS. This collective and sharing environment can also serve as a coping mechanism for OS to help OS in overcoming various challenges they encounter in their academic journeys.

Students come in we have an academic support centre where we gather and we share a meal and talk, its an open house so people can drop in as classes end and leave when classes start. It’s very informal, the whole idea is to give a space for the students to gather and talk about anything... (Emerance)

Later in our conversation Emerance also indicated:

“the soup and fry bread days have grown over the years, it used to be the just the Aboriginal student association so the students that always got together anyways, and now it’s grown past that.”

...space like a casual lounge is important [for Aboriginal student services to provide for Native students] where students can have conversations with one another. I think computers are definitely needed and printing services for students. That’s something that’s been used quite a bit and students really appreciate it. Especially with WebCT [online virtual learning environment] so they can print off their notes from that. The undergrad students... not only that... at the Waterloo campus might even... creating a space might even assist in the mentorship relationship between graduate students and undergrad students. (George)

In addition, different aspects were discussed to increase the effectiveness of Aboriginal student services such as location and Native advisors that the OS can relate to. The participants recommended that an Aboriginal student-service centre be centrally located on campus to be more easily accessible for OS. In addition, they recommended that Native advisors work within these centres, because they understand the needs of OS and can create welcoming spaces for OS. These suggestions help Aboriginal student-service centres promote a sense of community for OS by making them feel welcomed and supported on-campus.

Well, location is extremely important as well... um... my suggestion would be to have it central like right in the middle of campus. Where there’s a lot of traffic and it’s highly visible. Not tucked away somewhere... like far away. (George)

“...its really important that we have an Aboriginal student advisor who is an Aboriginal person who understands needs for our students, and creates a welcome space for our students...” (Emerance)

Overall, collectivity and sharing are important values for effective interventions to increase Onkwehonwe academic success since these values promote a SOC. Increased collectivity and sharing among OS are important ways to increase SOC at all levels of education for OS. Aboriginal student-service centres were identified as an important medium for the

promotion of SOC. Increasing a SOC among OS can help OS overcome various challenges that they encounter in their academic journeys.

In thinking about the specific challenges that promoting a SOC might help OS overcome, I remembered how the participants indicated that the racism and ignorance that many OS experience while in school can cause them to feel alienated and lonely (Journal notes July 9, 2010). I realized that interventions promoting a SOC can mitigate the challenge of racism and ignorance that OS face while in school by increasing a sense of belongingness, thereby, decreasing feelings of alienation. Additionally, sharing and collectivity (which also promote a SOC) were identified as a source of healing from intergenerational trauma. Therefore, these types of interventions can also help OS overcome the challenges they experience from the effects of intergenerational trauma and the ongoing impacts of colonization.

Increasing Awareness and Information about Education

In order to address two effects of intergenerational trauma, the distrust of schooling due to residential school history and hopelessness, some strategies were proposed. The intervention that was identified through these proposed strategies was to increase awareness and information about post-secondary education in Onkwehonwe communities and among OS. Two ways to increase awareness and information about post secondary education were community information sessions and the gentle exposure of OS to post-secondary experiences. These interventions were proposed to alleviate some of the effects stemming from intergenerational trauma such as distrust of schooling (due to assimilation tactics of education and residential schools) and a sense of hopelessness among Onkwehonwe peoples about the possibilities that their lives hold.

Interventions to help increase awareness about post-secondary institutions and education to OS, their parents, and their communities were proposed as a way to increase OS' participation in post-secondary education. One such proposed intervention was to have Native post-secondary staff go into the Native communities to provide information to families of OS on what post-secondary education means and what to expect when their children go away to school. This intervention helps to address the negative view and distrust that many Native peoples' experience towards educational institutions, particularly those outside of their home communities; this distrust of educational institutions stems from the negative impact that residential schooling has had on Onkwehonwe peoples.

... when I first started there was only 3 applicants that were self-identified Aboriginal, but just this last year we had close to 200 applicants. That's due to, I guess, my involvement and promotion of the institution and making my community more aware of that we're here too. (George)

You're going to learn this at the community level, you're going to learn this because right now we have people like me, let's say, going into the community and having a tea...I want to host a tea night in some of our communities.... is it done? No, it's not done. But how do those parents, and grandparents and great-grandparents and community members and aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, know what that student is doing? ... It used to be that you sent your kid off to college or university because you wanted them to assimilate. Now it really needs to be that you send your kid off to university or college, because you want them to be able to flourish and take their culture with them and bring it back when they're ready... I think the only way that we can really move forward with that is having more focused community-based types of education-information. A lot of parents now know what post secondary is all about, they still do, they know... do they think it's relevant for their students, for their kids, for their family? Not really still. There's still that hesitancy to send little 'Johnny' or 'Judy' away from home, particularly in light of the years coming out of residential school. It's like "We're not going to let them go, we're not going to do that for them, that's awful". There's a lot of relationship building, not just trust, because they're never going to trust an academic institution, so why bother creating some kind of false pretense of trust... I just know that you have to operate in a particular way, and one of the ways that we have to do that is bring people along with us. People say, oh well, you need community champions... no we don't we don't need community champions, what we need are people in the community that just *know* what's going on, knowledge is just *so* important. (Emerance)

In addition, programs to help expose OS to post-secondary environments were found to be helpful in showing OS their options and possibilities. The gentle exposure of Onkwehonwe high school students to post-secondary environments may help OS become agents of their own lives, thereby, decreasing their sense of hopelessness. *Gentle* exposure is necessary because cultural discontinuity is a major challenge for OS, so in order to avoid an overwhelming “culture shock” many supports (e.g. Onkwehonwe elders, talking circles, Onkwehonwe advisors, Onkwehonwe traditional practices, etc...) should be in place for the OS in their exposure to a post secondary environment. Further, programs that gently expose OS to post secondary environments can also show OS cultural supports that are available to them if they decide to continue their education at a post secondary institution; knowledge of the cultural supports available to them may mitigate the challenge of cultural discontinuity for OS when they go to a post secondary institution.

So we have students that we're really trying to kind of gently expose them to possibilities, what's your options, what's your opportunities, but to also show them that there are supports to get them through that very big disconnect between cultures, the very big disconnect between living environments, I think big disconnect between attitudes as well... [about UW directions program where high school Native students stay at the university for a week for events and workshops to help expose them to university life] (Emerance)

Some of the best interventions that we've had - really the UW directions program I can't speak highly enough of it, it's geared for at risk youth for leaving school, it's not an enrichment in the sense that most people think of enrichment programs, we do have some really smart, bright, brilliant kids that come through the program that do end up going to post secondary, but that's not really the goal. The goal is to get them interested in their lives, become agents of their own lives... it's like, how do you do that? (Emerance)

In summary, the focus of these interventions was to increase awareness and information about post-secondary education in Onkwehonwe communities and among OS. Providing information to Onkwehonwe communities about post-secondary education was identified as a way to mitigate the distrust that is experience by many Onkwehonwe people towards education

and educational institutions. Increasing information about post-secondary education also helps OS know their post-secondary options. A strategy to decrease hopelessness among Onkwehonwe high-school students was to gently expose them to post-secondary life. This process, in turn, exposes them to possibilities and may influence OS to become agents of their own lives. Additionally, knowledge of cultural supports available for OS may help decrease challenges arising from cultural discontinuity.

Promoting Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments

In order to overcome the challenges of racism and ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and cultural discontinuity, interventions were proposed that promote culturally inclusive, safe, and welcoming environments. The interventions proposed to promote these types of environments were “Indigenizing” the curriculum and informing mainstream society about Onkwehonwe people.

The intergenerational trauma of residential schooling and colonization are still affecting Onkwehonwe people today. Many of Onkwehonwe youth are confused about their identities as Native people and do not know their traditions or their culture, even if they live in a Native community. Participants proposed that incorporating traditions and culture, particularly for schools with higher Native student populations, would help OS gain more knowledge about their Native identity. This increased knowledge about their Native identity, in turn, would help increase confidence and empower OS. This intervention may also decrease cultural discontinuity experienced by OS, because the culture of their curriculum will more closely match their culture.

I really think that you have to have your identity to be successful- to know who you are that empowers you and gives you strength. And that’s what I see at my school. I think that a lot of our kids don’t have their identity, they live right on the reserve, but they don’t have their identity…… I’m thinking about our kids and how we go through

reading and writing to become successful, well, maybe that isn't the way, maybe that isn't our path. Yes, you do have to read to survive in this world, but maybe get there another way. I like to look at our traditions and that's the road that I want to go I want to take our kids and say this is who you are. So, in our school for instance, I want to say which group do you belong to, which clan are you, to really help them focus, let's talk about the creation story. For instance, our school is called [name] after a man, well, who is this man? Let's really make a connection to who we are in our school and let's live our traditions. And I said, you know what, our traditions aren't one day, we have a heritage day... because it wasn't valued the way we thought, the way we lived, the way we worked, they've switched it, the Ontario curriculum- so who you are doesn't really matter, this is the Ontario curriculum, but that's not working. Wouldn't it be more empowering for these kids to say look at our traditions as they happen throughout the year.....You've got to have tradition drive the curriculum rather than the curriculum to drive the academics. So you're learning from the traditions. (Vanessa)

In addition, making certain courses or educational components compulsory, such as an Indigenous history course, in educational curricula was proposed as a strategy to increase OS' academic success by increasing knowledge about Onkwehonwe people for OS and mainstream students. Such courses would help OS understand themselves and their rights better (e.g. treaty rights). The hope behind this intervention is for OS to feel more confident in their Native identities. This intervention could help increase OS' knowledge about their history as a process of healing from intergenerational trauma.

I think that it [making Native content courses mandatory] would be really empowering because it would help that Aboriginal identity. The books for so long have ignored that Aboriginal people, there is a book in my one class that says the first doctors in Canada were Aboriginal, so I thought, ok, so finally someone realized there were people here before and life didn't start in Canada at first contact, its started hundreds of years before that. I think it's really relevant that people know that. So many people even live close to reserves and don't know anything about Aboriginal people. ("Gail")

I think this type of strategy [making Native content courses mandatory] would be really important in helping Native students know how to articulate their responses when asked ignorant questions. For instance, when I was younger I didn't know much about treaty rights and our history, and so when I would be faced with ignorant and racist attitudes, I didn't know how to respond and it would really frustrate me, because I thought I'm supposed to know these things, and I just internalized that frustration. (Myself in sharing circle)

“Susan” explained that we don’t solve these social issues, which are part of our lives, by not acknowledging them. She stated:

“We need to reveal the historical context behind why these things [social problems caused by intergenerational trauma] are existing.”

There is a lack of knowledge about Onkwehonwe peoples and this lack of knowledge perpetuates ignorant Native stereotypes in mainstream society.

“...the lack of knowledge about Native people is very slim. Just stereotypes... from cowboy and Western movies, people wearing feathers.” (Vanessa)

Therefore, mandatory courses with Native content may also help increase the knowledge about Native people, thereby decreasing ignorant stereotypes. Decreasing ignorance, in turn, might decrease the amount of racism and ignorance that OS face while in school; thereby, creating safer and more welcoming environments for OS.

I mean its one of the intents to create an environment in K-12 that has a better knowledge translation about what Indigenous culture is all about... that it’s not archaic... that it’s not dead, it’s not just history, it’s continuing... so I love the fact that there’s an Anishnaabe language course in K-12, I think that’s fantastic. It’s great, but it really should be compulsory for non-Aboriginal students Or to take an Indigenous history course, should just be compulsory. It should just be a part of the curriculum. Oh my goodness... treaty law, understanding why we are... why Canada is the way it is... why do Aboriginal students get their education paid for? It’s called a treaty. You know it’s a document, it’s a law, it’s in place, it’s a contract, it’s a live thing it’s not history. And I think sometimes our own students don’t know these things... (Emerance)

In addition, offering Aboriginal student services to all students on campus was said to be an important strategy to create welcoming and safe environments for OS. Doing so, might also address the challenge that Onkwehonwe students have with racism and ignorance while attending school by informing mainstream students about Onkwehonwe people.

So one of the interventions here is that we’re supposed to provide services for Aboriginal students, and I came on board and I said, well, we can’t just provide services for Aboriginal students... because we don’t exist in a vacuum. If we don’t change that

environment on campus, our students are never going to experience anything differently and all of the impetus, all of the work, all of the burden is placed on them to fit in. It doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense. (Emerance)

We're first people, but we work in an international environment, and if those people don't understand who we are and what we do, they're going to treat our students badly, because they're going to come up against some kind of racism that they're going to internalize and say, yes, that's the way indigenous people are. Unless they see something positive, unless they know information, that's the information that they have is that general crap that's out there. (Emerance)

Overall, the proposed interventions described in this section were aimed at promoting culturally inclusive learning environments for OS. Culturally inclusive pedagogy could help OS in their journeys towards academic success by mitigating the challenge of cultural discontinuity that OS experience and by helping OS feel more confident and empowered in their identities. In addition, culturally inclusive pedagogy may help decrease ignorance about Onkwehonwe people. Including more culturally inclusive pedagogy in schools was discussed as a strategy that can be implemented at elementary and high school levels of education. Also, opening workshops and events offered through Aboriginal student services was identified as a way to inform mainstream students about OS and to possibly decrease the racism and ignorance directed towards OS. This strategy was discussed in relation to post secondary education as most Aboriginal student service centres are offered at the post-secondary level. A goal of these interventions was to create safer, and perhaps more welcoming, environments for Native students to flourish academically.

Summary of Interventions/Strategies

Overall, three types of interventions/strategies were proposed to increase OS' academic success: promoting a sense of community, increasing awareness and information about education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments.

Promoting a sense of community occurs through sharing and collectivity among OS. Increased collectivity and sharing among OS are important ways to increase Onkwehonwe

academic success at all levels of education for OS. One identified medium to facilitate sharing and collectivity among OS was Aboriginal student-service centres. These centres could increase connections between OS and increase a sense of belongingness among OS, thereby increasing a sense of community among OS. Promoting a sense of community among OS may help decrease feelings of alienation and loneliness that are experienced by OS because of the challenge of racism and ignorance. This intervention may also mitigate challenges arising out of intergenerational trauma (i.e. disconnect among Onkwehonwe peoples) and other challenges that come in the way of OS's academic.

Increasing awareness and information about education was seen as a way to alleviate two of the effects of intergenerational trauma: distrust that many Onkwehonwe people feel towards educational institutions and hopelessness experienced by Onkwehonwe youth. This intervention may also decrease challenges of cultural discontinuity that OS face while in school by informing OS about cultural supports that are available to them should they decide to partake in a post secondary education.

Finally, interventions to promote culturally inclusive learning environments for OS were proposed. Some strategies to increase more culturally inclusive and safe environments for OS were: (1) incorporating Native traditions and culture in school curricula to help with cultural identity formation and to mitigate challenges of cultural discontinuity, (2) mandatory courses with Native content to increase OS confidence in their Native identities and to inform mainstream society about Native peoples, and (3) offering Aboriginal student services workshops and events to all students to inform mainstream students about Native peoples and to create safer school environments for OS.

Promoting culturally inclusive learning environments for OS is an intervention that can be applied at all levels of education (i.e., elementary, high school, and post-secondary). For instance, at the elementary and high-school levels, “Indigenizing” the curriculum through the incorporation of Onkwehonwe culture and traditions may help OS feel more connected to what they’re learning and may also help with OS’ identity formation and confidence in their identities. Additionally, mandatory courses at the elementary and high-school levels would help increase knowledge about Onkwehonwe cultures and history for both OS and mainstream students. This strategy may help OS feel more confident in their identities and their history. Increasing knowledge about Onkwehonwe people in mainstream society through elementary and high school education may help decrease ignorant and racist attitudes directed at OS, thereby, combating the challenge of racism and ignorance that many OS face. At the post-secondary level, opening workshops and events offered by Aboriginal student services to all students may help inform mainstream students about Onkwehonwe peoples and may again help decrease ignorance directed towards OS on-campus; creating safer, and possibly more welcoming environments, for OS.

Summary of Findings

As I was making meaning of the conversations, I had difficulty separating the knowledge that the participants shared, because many of the findings were interconnected. Consequently, I found it easier to follow the emergent structure of the conversations in categorizing and presenting the findings (Challenges, Motivators, Supports, and Interventions/ Strategies).

In answering my first, primary search-question regarding factors of academic success for OS, various Motivators and Supports were uncovered as factors that enable OS to be successful in school despite their many challenges. Responding to my second primary search-question

regarding effective school retention strategies and interventions, the participants shared their opinions about interventions and strategies that may be beneficial in increasing Onkwehonwe academic success. The participants also proposed strategies to make current interventions more effective. In addition, some interventions were proposed that could be implemented at the elementary, high school, and post-secondary level.

Many of the search findings were interconnected and related to each other. In fact, there was a multitude of connections and relationships between the search findings. For these reasons, it was very difficult to definitively sort the findings into one category over another category. For instance, *motivators*, *supports*, and *interventions* were interconnected with *challenges*, because *motivators*, *supports*, and *interventions* were identified as ways for OS to overcome the *challenges* that they face while in school. Some of the *Supports* and *Interventions* identified also increased *motivators* among OS that facilitate academic success.

Identified internal *motivators* also increase OS resilience in school by increasing OS's confidence. This increased confidence helps OS overcome *challenges* that were found to act as barriers in OS' academic success. Confidence acts as an internal *motivator* for OS and was discussed in relation to confidence in academic abilities and confidence in identity. As OS become more confident in their academic abilities, they are better able to overcome challenges that arise in their academic journeys. OS also become empowered as they gain confidence in their identities, this confidence in their identities helps them overcome *challenges* that they face while in school.

External *motivators* were also uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle. External motivators were described as sources of ambition and drive stemming from circumstances outside of OS causing them to become intrinsically motivated. Some external

motivators were responsibility to give back and social change, ultimately the sense that their lives served a greater purpose. These sources of motivation cause OS to become intrinsically motivated to succeed in school, thereby, aiding in OS' academic success.

Supports were shared as a way to mitigate *challenges* that OS face while in school. More specifically, cultural *supports* such as traditional supports available in schools can help OS cope better when facing various *challenges* in their academic journeys. The ability to use Indigenous Methodologies in school can help decrease the *challenge* of cultural discontinuity that OS experience in school, because they are able to gain knowledge in ways that are culturally congruent to their Onkwehonwe cultures. In addition, elder supports, which were discussed as cultural *supports*, can help OS cope with the many *challenges* that they face while in school by providing guidance and support. Peer supports can act as a coping mechanism, allowing OS to address *challenges*. Peer supports can also inspire OS to continue in school despite the many *challenges* they face in their academic journeys. Finally, mentorship and encouragement can help OS overcome *challenges* in their academic journeys through encouragement, support, and positive reinforcement. Mentorship and encouragement can help increase OS's confidence in their academic abilities (internal *motivator*), which is a contributing factor to academic success for OS. Mentors can also be a source of encouragement for OS by being a lived example of someone who was able to overcome similar *challenges* and has succeeded.

Interventions were proposed to address various *challenges* that OS face in school. Some interventions identified within the search findings were promoting a sense of community, increasing awareness and information about secondary education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments. Given that an effect of intergenerational trauma (discussed as a *challenge* for OS) is a disconnection between Onkwehonwe peoples, promoting a SOC through

sharing and collectivity was identified as a way to being healing from intergenerational trauma. Promoting a sense of community in school environments can increase a sense of belongingness among OS and can combat feelings of alienation that OS may experience due to the *challenge* of racism and ignorance. This intervention may also help OS overcome other challenges they face in their academic journeys by facilitating sharing and collectivity among OS; thus, acting as a coping mechanism for OS in their academic journeys. Increasing awareness and information about education was identified as a way to address some *challenges* that arise out of intergenerational trauma, such as distrust of school systems and hopelessness. Increased knowledge and information about education in Onkwehonwe communities may mitigate the distrust that many Onkwehonwe people towards educational institutions. Also, gently exposing OS to post secondary education/environment may decrease feelings of hopelessness among OS by showing them possibilities and helping them become agents of their own lives. During this gentle exposure, OS should also be informed about cultural supports in place for them if they decide to partake in a post secondary education. This information may decrease challenges arising from cultural discontinuity should they (OS) decide to continue their education within a post secondary institution. Finally, promoting culturally inclusive learning environments was identified as a way to mitigate the *challenges* of cultural discontinuity and racism and ignorance. Through the incorporation of Onkwehonwe culture into school curricula and pedagogy, the cultural discontinuity experienced by OS in school may decrease. Another part of this intervention was to inform mainstream students, and ultimately mainstream society, about the history and culture of Onkwehonwe peoples with the hope of creating safer environments for OS by decreasing racism and ignorance that is directed at them.

Additionally, many of the various *supports* and *interventions* mentioned helped increase *motivators* for OS to continue in school. For instance, cultural *supports* can help increase *motivators* for OS by increasing OS' confidence in their identity. Confidence in identity was found to be contributing internal motivator to academic success since OS become empowered as they gained confidence in their identity. In addition, cultural *supports* were found to help OS' in their cultural identity formation. When looking back to the findings on external *motivators* such as responsibility to give back and a sense of greater purpose, these types of external motivators are culturally linked. That is, in many Onkwehonwe cultures it is often believed that Onkwehonwe peoples are given a special gift from the Creator that should be used to benefit the larger community. Therefore, cultural *supports* that help with cultural identity formation could indirectly increase external *motivators* for OS. Additionally, part of the intervention of promoting culturally inclusive learning environments was to "Indigenize" school curricula by incorporating Onkwehonwe culture and history in school curricula. The delivery of more culturally inclusive pedagogy was seen as a way to increase the internal *motivator* of confidence in identity and possibly culturally linked external motivators.

Finally, any *supports* and *interventions* that help OS with cultural identity formation and confidence in their identity can aid OS in overcoming some of the *challenges* that arise out of intergenerational trauma, such as loss of culture and hopelessness. *Supports* and *interventions* with a goal of cultural identity formation among OS can assist cultural revitalization among OS, thereby combating the intergenerational effect of loss of culture. Additionally, any *supports* and *interventions* that can increase the internal *motivator* of confidence can also help decrease the *challenge* of internalized oppression that arises out of intergenerational trauma by positively altering OS' beliefs about themselves and their abilities.

Retrospectively, there are many inter-connected relationships between the challenges that OS face in school, motivators that give OS ambition to continue in school, supports that help OS succeed in school, and the proposed interventions and strategies to increase OS's academic success.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Discussion

The findings in the previous section provide knowledge about some of the factors, such as motivators and supports that contribute to OS's success in school despite the challenges and barriers that they face in their academic journeys. The findings also suggest some interventions and strategies to increase Onkwehonwe academic success.

In this section, I will further explore and interpret the findings of this search by relating the findings to the literature on Native education and by adding my personal reflections. I will also discuss where this search has overlapped with past literature and research, as well as where it differentiates itself and builds on prior knowledge.

Interconnected Nature of Findings

As described in the findings summary, many of the search findings were interconnected. I stated previously that Onkwehonwe epistemology, the way we think about reality, stems from the interconnected relationship that we share with reality (Absolon, 2008; Cardinal, 2001; Lavallee, 2009; Wilson, 2001). So, by using an Onkwehonwe'neha to explore Onkwehonwe academic success I was able to uncover the interrelated and interconnected relationship between challenges that OS face while in school, motivators that increase OS ambition to stay in school, supports that help OS, and interventions/strategies that may help increase OS' academic success. Within an Onkwehonwe'neha, in order to fully understand knowledge acquired through

searching, we must understand the interrelation and interconnection of the findings (Johnson, 1996). To truly “make sense” of the search findings and gain knowledge about Onkwehonwe academic success, it was important to understand the interrelation and interconnection of the findings.

I realized that a visual representation of the findings would help to better understand the interconnected and interrelated nature of them. I struggled in making a visual that was suitable for the findings. So, I thought about what I know as a Haudenosaunee woman, and a turtle came to mind. Turtles are very important in our Haudenosaunee beliefs, traditions, and ceremonies (i.e., they are one of our clans, their shell is our moon calendar, and the turtle is part of our creation story). The turtle’s shell was perfect for displaying the findings, because its structural segments are interconnected and are “puzzle-like”. The “puzzle-like” structure of the turtle’s shell is important since “nothing exists or can be responsibly understood in isolation.” (Johnson, 1996, p. 116). Likewise, a puzzle is not complete unless it contains all of its parts in the right position. In addition, the turtle’s back is circular in shape representing the wholistic nature of an Onkwehonwe’neha and the approach needed to increase OS’ academic success. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the interconnected, interrelated, and wholistic nature of the findings.

The findings are interconnected in that interventions, supports, and motivators were identified as ways to combat specific challenges that OS face. They are interrelated because one support, motivator, or intervention cannot increase Onkwehonwe academic success, but rather a more multidimensional approach is needed. The findings also are interrelated and must be viewed wholistically as some supports and interventions were found to increase motivators for OS. In order to illustrate these findings, I found an image of a turtle’s shell and inserted the findings into the segments of the shell (Figure 1).

The three main challenges uncovered in this search were placed in the centre of the turtle's shell. Surrounding these challenges are the motivators, supports, and interventions that were identified as ways to mitigate them. In this section, with the turtle as a reference point, I will discuss the findings. More specifically, I present the challenges on the turtle's shell and particular aspects of the motivators, supports, and interventions/strategies that address these challenges. Then, I discuss supports and motivators more broadly as they were found to generally help OS overcome various challenges that arise in their academic journeys. For this reason, supports and motivators border all three of the challenges on the turtle's shell.

Challenges

Many challenges and barriers uncovered in this search and previous literature as impeding OS's academic success. Therefore, I was not surprised by the challenges uncovered in the findings. I did not go into this search to uncover challenges, since the literature in this area was saturated on school-attrition rates and why OS are *not successful* in school. However, it seems that any discourse on Onkwehonwe school-retention requires the acknowledgement of challenges that OS face while acquiring their education. In the conversations and sharing circle, there was an inextricable link between challenges and discourse on motivators, supports, and interventions and strategies to increase Onkwehonwe academic success. For instance, when the participants discussed motivators and supports that help OS in their academic success, they also discussed how these supports help OS overcome specific challenges. Interventions and strategies were proposed based on how well they address challenges that OS face. Therefore, challenges are placed at the centre of the turtle's shell with interventions, supports, and motivators surrounding them. The surrounding interventions, supports, and motivators help increase OS's academic success by mitigating challenges that OS face while in school.

Cultural Discontinuity

This search uncovered that many OS struggle with cultural discontinuity while attending school. This discontinuity occurs due to socio-cultural differences between the OS's home culture and the processes and environments of their schools (Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; Willett, 2007). The participants talked about socio-cultural differences by explaining that Onkwehonwe people think differently and understand differently. These socio-cultural differences can cause a "culture shock" for OS going to a post-secondary institution. Due to cultural discontinuity, many OS have trouble

balancing their Native identity while trying to fit into the Western culture of their schools. This finding of cultural discontinuity was consistent with the literature (Willet, 2007; Kanu, 2005; Battiste, 1998; Guillory, 2003). Moreover, the education gap between Native students and non-Native students has been largely attributed to cultural discontinuity (Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996).

Addressing Cultural Discontinuity

When referring to the turtle's shell, three interventions touch a border of the segment containing cultural discontinuity: increasing awareness and information about education, promoting culturally inclusive learning environments, and promoting a sense of community. These interventions were identified as ways to address cultural discontinuity. Motivators and supports, like with all other challenges, also border this segment. Specifically, some cultural supports were found to be particularly important in mitigating this challenge.

Increasing Awareness and Information about Education

Part of the intervention to increase awareness and information about education was to gently expose Onkwehonwe high school students to a post secondary environment. During this gentle exposure, it is important that OS receive information about the cultural supports that are available to them at the post secondary institutions. This knowledge of supports may help decrease challenges arising from cultural discontinuity, should the informed OS decide to partake in a post secondary education. Consistent with these findings, Jackson et al. (2003) found that exposure to post-secondary environments while the OS are in high school is a school-persistence factor for OS.

Promoting Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments

“Indigenizing” the curriculum was suggested as a way to decrease cultural discontinuity that OS face while in school by incorporating Onkwehonwe traditions and culture into schools, particularly those schools with higher Native student populations. The incorporation of traditions and culture in education also was found to be important in facilitating learning for OS by mitigating challenges of cultural discontinuity. Participants acknowledged that OS learn and think differently than mainstream students. OS learning and thinking patterns are deeply rooted in their culture (Winzer & Mazurek, 1998; Willett, 2007). Thus, the incorporation of traditions and culture in teaching would help OS feel more connected to the material they are learning in their classes.

Promoting a Sense of Community

Promoting a sense of community borders all of the challenges on the turtle’s shell. This intervention might mitigate various challenges, including cultural discontinuity, by facilitating a sharing and collective environment, where OS can better cope.

Cultural Supports

Participants indicated that the ability to use Indigenous methodologies in their studies was empowering and aided in their journeys towards academic success. Absolon (2008) writes : “Undoubtedly, Indigenous research methodologies are empowering to Indigenous peoples” (p. 194). Thus, it makes sense that the ability for OS to use their Indigenous methodologies, while in university, was found to be empowering for them. The ability to use Indigenous methodologies also helps decrease challenges of cultural discontinuity, because OS are able to gain knowledge in ways that are culturally congruent with their Onkwehonwe cultures.

Racism and Ignorance

Another challenge that was uncovered as negatively affecting OS is that of racism and ignorance. Many negative stereotypes about Native people exist and OS are often confronted with these stereotypes while attending school. Due to these ignorant and/or racist attitudes, OS can develop feelings of alienation while on-campus. Many studies also have indicated that racism and ignorance are major struggles that OS face while in school and they can cause OS to feel isolated and alienated (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Timmons, 2009).

I was not surprised to find that institutional racism was a challenge for OS, because it has been referred to as one of the most significant factors negatively affecting Aboriginal school retention (Willett, 2007). Institutional racism can take many forms such as, lack of acceptance for Indigenous ways of knowing and marginalization of OS within their classes. Participants in this search indicated that Indigenous ways of knowing were not accepted within many post-secondary institutions. They furthered that OS meet resistance in programs if they challenge the Western epistemological foundations of the university; at times, OS also may be turned away from programs. Alfred (2004) indicates that post-secondary institutions can be dangerous environments for OS due to the lack of cultural inclusiveness and lack of acceptance of Indigenous ontologies and methodologies.

Participants indicated that OS are often marginalized and singled out in their classes. Jackson et al. (2003) call this form of institutional racism, passive racism. They indicated that passive racism can cause increased social pressure and feelings of isolation for Native students. Increased pressure emerges from OS feeling that they often are expected to represent all Native peoples while in their classes. Feelings of alienation and loneliness from racism and ignorance

were expressed by the participants as struggles that OS face while in school. Consistent with the literature, marginalization and feelings of isolation and alienation have been found to negatively impact OS's school retention (Benjamin et al., 1993).

Participants also indicated that many OS, including themselves, feel marginalized and frustrated by the way Aboriginal content is taught in schools. This type of racism has been called active racism (Jackson et al., 2003). At times, ignorant and racist stereotypes may be perpetuated through class lectures, textbooks, and/or class discussions. Some studies acknowledge that this type of active racism mostly occurs in classes and discussions about cultural and historical issues. Again, this type of racism causes OS to feel isolated, frustrated, and offended. Both forms of racism, active and passive, cause OS to struggle while on their journeys towards academic success.

The racism and ignorance that have been directed at OS push them to take on the extra responsibility of dispelling stereotypes through their own examples. OS may take on the pressure of doing extra-well in their classes as a way of proving Native stereotypes wrong; this pressure to do extra-well causes undue stress for the students. Discussion on responsibility to dispel racist stereotypes as a challenge occurred repeatedly in both the conversations and the sharing circle. This responsibility appears to be a novel contribution of this study, inasmuch as I could not find literature that discussed this added pressure.

Connected to this responsibility of dispelling Native stereotypes is the reluctance to ask for help, as needing help is negatively perceived. Goodrider-McFarlene (1981) found that many OS will not ask for help for fear of looking stupid. Participants indicated that there is often a negative stigma attached to asking for help; it is considered a weakness. Moreover, many OS feel that by asking for help they are affirming the negative Native stereotypes.

Addressing Racism and Ignorance

Along the edges of the turtle's shell segment containing racism and ignorance are promoting a sense of community and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments, as well as motivators and supports.

Promoting a Sense of Community

Promoting a sense of community in school environments helps to decrease feelings of alienation and increase a sense of belongingness. One medium identified to increase SOC was Aboriginal student services. Timmons (2009) indicated that many OS feel that they do not belong in their post secondary environments and Aboriginal student services have been found to mitigate these feelings by increasing a sense of community for OS. Overall, promoting a SOC is an important intervention in decreasing feelings of alienation that OS may experience due racism and ignorance they encounter in school environments.

Promoting Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments

Participants indicated that the knowledge about Onkwehonwe peoples in mainstream society is very slim. They believed that the little knowledge about Onkwehonwe peoples within mainstream society perpetuated racist and ignorant attitudes towards Onkwehonwe peoples. As previously indicated, challenges of racism and ignorance negatively affect Onkwehonwe school retention (Benjamin et al., 1993; Jackson et al., 2003; Willett, 2007). Therefore, mandatory courses were proposed as a means of informing mainstream society about Onkwehonwe people, and history in order to decrease ignorance about Onkwehonwe people. One of the hopes of decreasing the ignorance, in mainstream society, about Onkwehonwe people is the creation of safer and more welcoming academic environments for OS. In addition to these hopes, some

studies have shown increased attendance in school by OS in classes where Native content was included in courses like social studies (Kanu, 2007).

Generally informing mainstream society about Onkwehonwe people was thought to be an important strategy to create welcoming and safe environments for OS while they are attending school. One participant recommended that Aboriginal student services, such as workshops, should be open to all students on-campus. Opening Aboriginal services to all students would help inform mainstream students about Onkwehonwe people, which might help create safer and more welcoming environments for OS. This participant said:

... we [Aboriginal people] don't exist in a vacuum. If we don't change that environment on campus, our students are never going to experience anything differently and all of the impetus, all of the work, all of the burden is placed on them to fit in. (Emerance).

Intergenerational Trauma

“And that’s what I’m seeing in my school affecting our kids now, they are products of residential schooling.” (Vanessa)

“We’re colonized. There’s no undoing it.” (Emerance)

The quotes above reminded me of Cleary and Peacock (1998) who said “we are not abstractly removed from history; we are products of it” (p. 60). Some people may say, “Well, these things (i.e., colonization and residential schooling) happened so long ago”. But what those people do not understand is that it was our (Onkwehonwe) parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who were raised by residential school systems. Many of our immediate and distant ancestors were stripped of their traditions and were sexually, physically, and/or emotionally abused in residential schools. Personally, I have Onkwehonwe friends and family who were never hugged, kissed, or told, “I love you” from their parents, because their parents were never able to fully emotionally develop due to the abuse that they and/or their parents endured in

residential schools. Touch is said to be the first sense that develops in human beings and is crucial for human development and well-being (Field, 2001). So, is it any wonder that the effects of residential schooling continue to negatively affect our Onkwehonwe families and youth in their development and academic success? This is only one product of the intergenerational effects of residential schooling. There is still a multitude of problems that affect Onkwehonwe communities stemming from residential schooling.

In addition, due to colonization, assimilation tactics, and attempted genocide, many of our people were stripped of their traditions and culture, ultimately their cultural identity. Whole societies no longer knew how to function, because patriarchal colonial systems were now imposed on them; systems that were contradictory to Onkwehonwe peoples' ways of knowing and being in the world (Anderson, 2001). Thus, one of the impacts of intergenerational trauma is loss of culture. In their teaching experiences with post-secondary OS, Walsh-Bowers and Johnson (2002) found that "the issues of identity-loss and 'ethno-stress'" among their students "were palpable and unmistakable" (p. 83). Ethno-stress refers to "the stress that occurs when the cultural beliefs or joyful identity of a people are disrupted" (Antone, Miller, & Myers, 1986, p.1, as cited in Walsh-Bowers & Johnson, 2002). Participants in this search indicated that intergenerational trauma is still negatively affecting Onkwehonwe youth because they are disconnected from their cultural identity. Identity was found to be important in OS's success in school, because it increases the students' confidence and empowers them, giving OS the strength to overcome challenges that arise in their academic journeys. To illustrate the loss of cultural identity due to intergenerational trauma and the importance of identity in Onkwehonwe academic success, sharing circle participant Vanessa said:

I really think that you have to have your identity to be successful- to know who you are that empowers you and gives you strength. And that's what I see at my school

[elementary school that she works at]... I think that a lot of our kids don't have their identity; they live right on the reserve, but they don't have their identity...

It is no surprise that colonization and the assimilative practices of education continue to negatively affect OS's school retention (Duran & Duran, 1995; Huffman, 1991; Thompson, 2007). In this search, I found that intergenerational trauma affects OS through internalized oppression and hopelessness. The assimilative practices of colonization and residential schools have caused many OS to internalize negative beliefs about themselves. For instance, they may believe that they are not smart and not capable of obtaining a higher education.

Another effect of intergenerational trauma is a sense of hopelessness among OS. Participants indicated that OS may feel hopeless and that their lives lack possibility, because they cannot see past the despair and pain that their communities are faced with due to intergenerational trauma. Consistent with the literature, the effects of internalized oppression and hopelessness can hinder academic success among OS (Kanu, 2005; Goulet, 2001; Swanson, 2003; Willett, 2007).

However, on a positive and promising note, there seems to be a cultural revitalization occurring where more Onkwehonwe youth are learning their languages and traditions and finding great pride in their Native identity. As Emerance said:

What I'm seeing with really young kids is this kind of pride of be an Aboriginal student, or a Native kid, or an indigenous-kind of weird words right- but being a Cree kid, an Anishnaabe youth, or being a Migmaw youth. I see huge pride in that now.

Participants reported that a cultural revitalization is occurring among the youth where they are learning their languages, drumming songs, and traditions. This revitalization was linked to a sense of pride, among the youth, in their Native identity. So, despite assimilation tactics of

colonization and attempted genocide, our traditions and cultures remain alive and are being reclaimed and revitalized; Onkwehonwe people continue to be resilient.

One more intergenerational impact of colonization and residential schooling is the distrust of education within Onkwehonwe communities. There are two reasons why many Onkwehonwe do not trust educational institutions and education in general. First, education was used as an assimilation tactic to assimilate Onkwehonwe into mainstream society. A report for the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2004) recognizes this distrust as a product of the historical use of education for assimilative purposes:

Government policies used schooling to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples into mainstream European-Canadian society. Many Aboriginal students still see assimilation as a prominent feature of post-secondary education, which has led to an over-arching distrust and hostility to education in many parts of the Aboriginal community. (p. 11)

Another reason that there is a general distrust of education within Onkwehonwe communities stems from residential schooling.

The residential school system was the most prominent example of assimilationist government education policies. From the religious and vocational training, to the rules forbidding use of their language and cultural practices, residential schools uprooted Aboriginal culture and history and made many Aboriginal communities distrust educational institutions in general. (CMSF, 2004, p. 11)

This distrust contributes to the low school-participation rates among Onkwehonwe peoples.

Addressing Intergenerational Trauma

Surrounding the turtle's shell segment containing intergenerational trauma are all three interventions: promoting a sense of community, increasing information and awareness about education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments. These interventions were proposed as ways to respond to various effects of intergenerational trauma. Similar to the other challenges, motivators and supports also border this segment. In addition, supports particular to

addressing intergenerational trauma such as, cultural supports and mentorship and encouragement, were identified as mitigating this challenge.

Promoting a Sense of Community

Participants described a disconnection between Onkwehonwe as an effect of intergenerational trauma. Promoting SOC through sharing and collectivity was identified as an important strategy to begin healing from intergenerational trauma. One of the recognized ways to promote a SOC in schools for OS was the use of Aboriginal student services. Aboriginal student services were found to benefit a sense of community for OS because they could help OS more easily connect with each other, and thereby facilitate the formation of peer support networks.

In addition, various suggestions were made by the participants to increase the effectiveness of Aboriginal student services in increasing a SOC. Some of these suggestions were a casual lounge, centralized location, meetings, social events, and computer and printing services. These findings are supported by Timmons (2009) who found that: “The existence of Aboriginal student lounges (or also referred to as Aboriginal resource centres) is crucial, as this area provided students educational assistance and resources such as the Internet and printers. Perhaps most importantly, these centres imparted a feeling of community...” (p. 24). In addition, Mackay and Myles (1995) found that schools with high success rates of OS are ones that encouraged Native student groups and organized meetings and events. Their findings support the participants’ indication of the importance of making connections with other OS and having regular get-togethers (e.g., soup and fry-bread days).

Increasing Information and Awareness about Education

A proposed intervention was to increase knowledge about post-secondary education and educational institutions. Strategies proposed within this intervention serve the purpose of responding to some effects of intergenerational trauma such as, distrust of education, hopelessness, and internalized oppression.

In order to address the distrust that is felt in Onkwehonwe communities towards education, strategies were proposed to inform Onkwehonwe communities about what a post-secondary education is and what it means for their youth. Some academic institutions hire Aboriginal liaison officers who visit Native communities to recruit students for their schools (Holmes, 2006). However, the proposed intervention uncovered in this search is different from these strategies in that the purpose is to inform Onkwehonwe communities about post-secondary education, in general, not for the purpose of promoting specific universities.

Additionally, within this intervention, a strategy was proposed to decrease feelings of hopelessness, due to intergenerational trauma that is experienced by many OS. This proposed strategy was to gently expose OS to a post-secondary environment, which, in turn, may decrease feelings of hopelessness among OS by showing them possibilities and helping them become agents of their own lives.

This proposed intervention was identified based on strategies that participants mostly talked about in terms of the high school level of education (to inform about post secondary education), however, there is a general distrust of education in Onkwehonwe communities (CMSF, 2004). Thus, increasing information about education at all levels (i.e., elementary, high school, & post secondary) may be helpful in responding to this distrust. This intervention may also be of importance in those Onkwehonwe communities without high schools, where OS leave their communities to acquire a high school education (Heinonen, 2004).

Promoting Culturally Inclusive Learning Environments

“Indigenizing” the curriculum through the incorporation of Onkwehonwe traditions and culture in the curricula also was proposed to help with OS in cultural identity formation and confidence in their cultural identity. Because strong cultural identity has been deeply linked with increased success in school for OS (Clearly & Peacock, 1998), interventions to increase OS’s confidence in their cultural identity are important for OS’s academic success.

Complementing the participants thoughts on the incorporation of Native culture in curriculum, Toulouse (n.d.) found that educational environments that incorporate and honour Aboriginal worldviews, cultures and languages is crucial in building OS’s self-esteem; and, self-esteem has been shown to be a key factor to OS’s academic success (Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003).

In addition, mandatory courses with Native content and/or composed of Native content (e.g. Native history courses) were suggested for both on and off reserve schools, meaning for both Native and non-Native students. The incorporation of mandatory courses to learn more about Onkwehonwe cultures and history is important for OS to gain more confidence in their identities and history.

Overall, these strategies to increase confidence in cultural identity (internal motivator) and knowledge about cultural identity may help decrease challenges that arise from intergenerational trauma in the form of loss of culture.

Cultural Supports

Elders were considered a cultural support. They can help increase OS’s confidence in their cultural identity by sharing Onkwehonwe culture and history with the students. This support from elders addresses the intergenerational effect of loss of culture. Furthermore, this

search found that when OS have more confidence in their cultural identity (internal motivator), they will be more empowered and are more likely to be resilient in their academic journeys. Since Elders are the knowledge-bearers within Onkwehonwe cultures, they are able to provide a unique support service for OS (Holmes, 2006). Through consultation with Elders, OS's self-confidence may be restored which can help facilitate learning for OS (Holmes, 2006).

Mentorship and Encouragement

Mentorship and encouragement was found to increase the OS's confidence in their academic abilities (internal motivator), which enables OS to be more successful in school. This increased confidence can combat a sense of hopelessness and internalized oppression that OS may feel due to intergenerational trauma through positively altering OS' beliefs about themselves and their abilities. Mentorship and encouragement are important in increasing OS' academic success by increasing confidence and decreasing hopelessness and internalized oppression that intergenerational trauma has caused.

Supports

On the turtle's shell, supports are displayed on a border line of all three of the challenges, because they help OS overcome the obstacles that they encounter while on their journeys towards academic success. These supports are peer supports, cultural supports, and mentorship and encouragement.

Peer Supports

A lack of peer support has been found to negatively affect school retention for minority students (Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). Further, peer supports have been found to help OS overcome barriers while on their academic journeys (Willett, 2007). In this search, participants

indicated that having other OS as peers to talk to and share with can be very helpful in OS's academic success for a couple of reasons. First, sharing between OS was seen as a coping mechanism to help OS overcome the challenges that they are experiencing while in school. Secondly, the participants indicated that being able to connect with other OS is inspiring, because this connection provides an opportunity see what other OS are doing and to witness other OS's academic success. Similar results were indicated by Gloria (1999) who found that OS who have supports from peers who are successfully coping in school can model school-persistence behaviours for OS, so that they can also be more successful in school. Overall, the ability to connect with and share with peers, particularly with other successful OS, was found to be a helpful coping system for OS as they journey towards academic success.

Cultural Supports (including Elder Supports)

Cultural supports were found to help OS overcome barriers and challenges while they are in school. The availability of traditional supports on-campus, such as smudging, was indicated as a helpful resource for OS in overcoming challenges. Aboriginal student services that offer various supports have been found to be beneficial to OS's participation in school (Timmons, 2009). However, there seems to be minimal literature, if any, evaluating the importance of traditional supports on-campus for OS.

Having Elders available on-campus to support OS by providing them guidance, including cultural guidance, and encouragement was found to be an important resource. Other researchers also have found the support from Elders to be a valuable support system for OS, as Elders can provide encouragement and honest feedback to OS (Montgomery et al., 2000). The guidance and support that OS receive from Elders was found to help OS cope with the many challenges that they face while in their academic journeys.

Mentorship and Encouragement

Mentorship and encouragement from various sources such as teachers, peers, and elders were found to be a valuable support in OS's academic success. All of the participants indicated that in their own lives they have had mentors who have helped and encouraged them to continue in school. The participants also believed that mentorship and encouragement was crucial for all OS. Consistent with this search, Gloria and Kurpius (1999) found that mentorship was an important contributing factor to school retention among OS. They also indicated that academic settings need to focus on developing mentorship programs to foster relationships between OS and academic staff and/or faculty.

Mentors who OS can relate to were also found important in helping OS overcome challenges and reach academic success. Mentors with whom OS can identify, because they have had similar struggles and life experiences, can provide lived examples of people who were able to overcome similar challenges and be successful. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2003) found that exposure to people who are similar to them and who are in vocations that require a post-secondary education can increase OS's persistence in receiving a post-secondary education.

Motivators

Also bordering all of the challenges on the turtle's shell is motivators. Internal and external motivators were found to increase the ambition and drive of OS to continue their education, *despite* the many challenges they face while in school. Therefore, motivators help OS overcome challenges. Motivators are also interrelated with certain supports and interventions. I explain this interrelated nature within this section.

Internal Motivators

Two internal motivators were uncovered in the conversations and sharing circle, confidence in academic abilities and confidence in identity.

Confidence in oneself has been found to be a motivating factor in OS's academic journeys (Kanu, 2002; Swanson, 2003). In this search, participants indicated that as they successfully completed each level of education, their confidence in their academic abilities increased, thereby increasing their self-esteem. Willett (2007) also had similar findings among some of his search participants who were self-motivated by their own success in school. Interestingly, increased self-esteem has been said to positively affect OS's school retention, because with increased self-esteem, OS are likely to feel more empowered and less isolated in their school environments (Gloria & Kurpius, 2001). Some supports such as, Mentorship and encouragement, are interrelated with this internal motivator, because they were identified as ways to increase OS's confidence in their academic abilities.

In this search, confidence in identity was found to be a motivator for OS and their academic success. The stronger and more grounded OS became in their Native identity, the more apt they were to succeed in school. Gloria and Kurpius (2001) found that when OS had confidence in their sense of self, based on their cultural identity, they were more likely to continue in school. Intriguingly, OS with a stronger cultural identity are more able to succeed in school because they are able to acknowledge Western ways of knowing without being threatened by them (LaFramboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). Some would argue that this finding contradicts theories on cultural discontinuity and there does seem to be an on-going debate on this theory as it applies to OS. There is overwhelming evidence that suggests that cultural discontinuity negatively affects OS's school retention (Gloria et al., 2001; Heinonen, 2004;

Huffman, 2001; Sloane-Seale, Wallace, & Levin, 2000). Yet studies also suggest that when OS are more strongly “grounded” in their Native identity, they will be more likely to succeed in school (Cleary & Peacock, 1998).

In response to this debate on theories of cultural discontinuity, Willett (2007) proposed that OS with a more highly developed ambidextrous consciousness, meaning the ability for OS to move freely between a colonized consciousness and an Indigenous consciousness, are more capable to succeed in school. Although this may be the case for some OS, I would argue the alternative explanation, namely OS are less threatened by Western academic paradigms when they are more culturally grounded in their Native identity (LaFramboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). To explain, in this search I found that the majority of the participants were very strongly grounded in their identities as Onkwehonwe people and were also very vocal about their struggles with cultural discontinuity. Many of these participants acknowledged that they think differently and come from a different paradigm than the Western ways of the academic institutions. However, it seemed the participants were not threatened by the culture of their universities, but rather were more infuriated and driven by the cultural discontinuity they experience and the lack of acceptance of Indigenous ways of knowing within academics. For instance, some of the participants voiced a desire to continue being successful in school while also defying Western academic paradigms and staying true to their Onkwehonwe ontologies. To illustrate, “Gail” said:

...because we’re Aboriginal people, we understand differently and this system, this colonial system has a mindset where it wants to box you in or institutionalize you, and my thing is about breaking that apart and saying “No, I’m not going to be institutionalized. You’re not going to make me into a robot. I’m not going to be a carbon copy of every PhD”...

One of the participants brought up the Two Row Wampum and discussed it in relation to OS's academic success.

It's the two row wampum right... it's ok if our ships keep going side by side, but what happens when the ship keeps coming over to us, or we keep coming over to the ship? Well, our canoe will definitely be crushed by the ship, there is no if, ands, or buts. So how do we straddle those, if we want to work in the big ship and we want to work in the community you know... What do we have to do to straddle those two things, is it even possible to do those two things? I think that a lot of our students are really struggling between the canoe and the ship. And the ship is massive and will definitely very very quickly subsume or consume-depending on what you think, how you think of it- the canoe. (Emerance)

The Two Row Wampum was a treaty made by the Haundenosaunee and the Dutch, French, and British colonizers. It was mutually agreed upon and was intended to be an everlasting "contract" regarding the relationship between the colonizers and the Onkwehonwe. The relationship is supposed to be one of non-interference, respect, peace, and friendship. Metaphors of the colonizer's sailboat or ship and the Onkwehonwe canoe were used to describe this relationship. The sailboat and the canoe are to always glide in the water parallel to each other, and are to never cross paths or interfere with each other's beliefs and laws.

The whiteman said, "I confirm what you have said and this we shall always remember. What we do about our own ways of belief, we shall both respect having our own rights and power." The Onkwehonweh replied, "I have a canoe and you have a vessel with sails and this is what we shall do. I will put in my canoe my belief and laws. In your vessel you shall put your belief and laws. All my people will be in my canoe, your people in your vessel. We shall put these boats in the water and they shall always be parallel, as long as there is Mother Earth, this will be everlasting." (Hill, 1990; Thomas, 1978; as cited in Johnson, 1996, p.9)

When the "whiteman" asked the Onkwehonwe, "What will happen if any of our people may some day want to have one foot in each of the vessels?" The Onkwehonwe replied,

If this so happens that my people may wish to have their feet in each of the two boats, there will be a high wind and the boats will separate and the person that has his feet in each of the boats shall fall between the boats, and there is no living soul who will be able

to bring them back to the right way given by the Creator but only one- the Creator himself. (Hill, 1990; Thomas, 1978; as cited in Johnson, 1996, p.10)

From a Haudenosaunee perspective it is impossible to straddle both the canoe and the ship. So how are OS to succeed in Western academic environments, where they experience cognitive dissonance due to cultural discontinuity? In harmony with Haudenosaunee beliefs, an ambidextrous consciousness is not the answer to success for OS. Participants indicated that the answer lies within Onkwehonwe identity. When Vanessa reflected on her success in school, she stated:

And the way I think is so different than the way that everyone else thought, I just would say to myself stay true to your identity. I didn't try to change I just thought this is who I am.

Perhaps the best way to combat cultural discontinuity and increase academic success for OS is to find supports that will facilitate confidence-building in their Onkwehonwe identities. Cultural supports and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments were identified as ways to help with cultural identity formation and confidence in identity; therefore, they are interrelated with the internal motivator of confidence in identity.

External Motivators

Findings from this search indicated that OS decide to go to school and continue in school for less individualistic reasons than mainstream students. They continue in school for reasons beyond themselves. They feel a sense of responsibility to give back to their Onkwehonwe families and communities and stimulate social change. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) also found that OS obtain an education for reasons larger than themselves and often for more communal reasons. This finding aligns with Haudenosaunee values and morals of benefitting the larger community with the gifts the Creator has given; it can also be likened to Onkwehonwe values of reciprocity. Participants in this search confirmed that a responsibility to give back and

a sense of greater purpose stems from an Onkwehonwe worldview; thus, these external motivators are culturally linked. Because external motivators are culturally linked, supports and interventions that facilitate cultural identity formation, such as cultural supports and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments, might indirectly increase Onkwehonwe academic success. Therefore, external motivators are interrelated with these supports and intervention.

One study contradicted the finding that OS go to school for reasons beyond themselves; Willett (2007) found the four participants in his study participated in university for more individualistic reasons. He suggested that the young age of these participants might have been a factor in this finding. This is plausible as many Onkwehonwe post-secondary students have traditionally been older females (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Lanceley-Barrie, 2001); thus, many of studies in the area of Native education are based on more mature female OS. I also noticed that three out of four of Willett's (2007) participants were male, so there is also a possibility of gender differences among OS in terms of external motivators.

Chapter 5: Contributions and Conclusions

Contributions of the Turtle

The turtle offers a framework (Figure 1) to understand solutions for some of the challenges that OS face while in their academic journeys (i.e., cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, and intergenerational trauma). The framework illustrates the integrated and multi-level approaches needed to increase academic success for OS. It recognizes the wholism required in developing solutions to increase Onkwehonwe academic success. That is, multiple supports, motivators, and interventions are needed to combat the specific challenges that OS encounter while on their academic journeys. To explain, not one *single* motivator, support, or intervention can address a challenge, but rather the combination of various motivators, supports,

and interventions are needed if change is to occur. As an example, promoting a sense of community through Aboriginal student services was identified to mitigate challenges arising from racism and ignorance, however, OS often will not ask for help or seek out services in fear of affirming negative stereotypes. Therefore, other supports and interventions are needed such as, mentorship and encouragement and promoting culturally inclusive environments. At the individual level, these supports and interventions can help positively alter the student's belief about themselves and can help increase OS's confidence in their cultural identities. At the institutional level, promoting a culturally inclusive environment can help create more welcoming and safe environments for OS to flourish academically. This model ensures that the onus is not placed on the Onkwehonwe student, but rather interventions and strategies are identified that need to occur at multiple levels such as institutional and governing body levels (i.e., those governing bodies involved in curricula development) in order for academic success to increase among OS.

Overall, no examples of multi-level cultural frameworks for strategies and interventions to increase Onkwehonwe academic success were available in the published literature. The turtle framework provides multi-level, interrelated, and wholistic ways to increase Onkwehonwe academic success by mitigating the challenges that OS face while in their academic journeys.

Contributions to the Literature

This search is unique for five reasons. Firstly, this is the first search to employ perspectives from Onkwehonwe *graduate* students. Secondly, this search is one of the first to use an Onkwehonwe'neha or Indigenous methodology in uncovering knowledge about Native education. Thirdly, it is one of the few studies that focus on *success* and how OS can reach

academic success. Fourthly, there are few, if any, studies that employ the perspectives of Aboriginal student-services coordinators to gain knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success. And finally, some findings were uncovered that were unique to this search such as the responsibility that OS often feel to dispel stereotypes through their own examples and some aspects of the interventions and strategies that were proposed to increase OS's academic success. Therefore, this search was able to contribute to the literature in a number of ways such as: knowledge generated through collaboration with Onkwehonwe graduate students and Aboriginal student-services coordinators, offering solutions and ways to overcome various challenges that OS face while in school, providing knowledge on the interconnected nature of factors contributing to academic success, uncovering unique findings, contributing to the body of literature using Indigenous methodologies, and enacting the spirit of reciprocity.

Few studies focus on Native academic success by utilizing the perspectives of successful OS (i.e., Onkwehonwe graduate students) and Aboriginal student-services coordinators (who were also successful OS). Collectively, the participants and I shared our unique perspectives on Onkwehonwe academic success. We shared knowledge on personal factors and coping strategies that enabled our success in school despite the many challenges that we faced while on our journeys towards academic success. We also provided our perspectives on factors that contribute to academic success for other OS and we shared our ideas on interventions and strategies that can increase success. Our proposed interventions and strategies were based on the knowledge and experience of successful OS, as well as Aboriginal student service coordinators. Some aspects of our proposed interventions and strategies also differentiated from those strategies reviewed in the literature. Specifically, increasing awareness and information about education in Onkwehonwe communities and among OS was a unique strategy to alleviate the

known challenge of distrust of education in Onkwehonwe communities, feelings of hopelessness, and cultural discontinuity experienced by OS. Informing mainstream society about Onkwehonwe peoples was a distinct strategy to promote safe environments for OS and counter the challenge of racism and ignorance that many OS struggle with while in school. Mandatory courses with Native content (e.g. Onkwehonwe history and culture) and opening workshops/events offered through Aboriginal student services were two strategies identified to inform mainstream students, and ultimately mainstream society, about Onkwehonwe peoples.

Another finding distinct to this search was that OS often feel a responsibility to dispel Native stereotypes through their own examples. The racism and ignorance directed at OS push them to take on this extra responsibility. OS may take on the pressure of doing extra-well in their classes as a way of proving Native stereotypes wrong; this pressure causes undue stress for the students. This finding appears to be a novel contribution of this study, as I could not find literature that discussed this responsibility.

The focus of this search was an exploration, through the perspectives of successful OS and Aboriginal student-services coordinators, of factors and interventions that contribute to Onkwehonwe academic success at various levels of education. Although it was not my original intent, I also uncovered challenges that OS face while on their journeys towards academic success. However, through this search, I was also able to uncover motivators, supports, and interventions/strategies that mitigate these challenges. Most research in the area of Native education focuses on school attrition and non-persistence factors for OS. Further, most research regarding Onkwehonwe peoples often uncovers problems, but rarely offers solutions to the problems (Goudreau, n.d.). Therefore, my search is important for Onkwehonwe education,

because it not only uncovered problems, but it also offered solutions to these problems. These solutions are visible in the turtle framework (Figure 1).

As I stated in the introduction, school retention rates remain low for OS despite numerous research studies and proposed strategies for Onkwehonwe school retention (Hodgson-Smith, 2000; Willett, 2007). The consistently elevated, school-attrition rates for OS suggest that the proposed strategies are insufficient and/or are not being adequately implemented. I began this search journey reflecting on the recurring theme of cultural discontinuity as a barrier for OS; I couldn't help but wonder if a reason that Onkwehonwe school-retention rates are still disproportionately lower than the broader population (despite all the research in this area) is due to culturally incongruent research methods that have been and are being applied to study Native education (Journal Notes, December 1, 2009). Absolon (2008) states that "The study of Aboriginal cultural phenomena through a non-Aboriginal epistemological lens can only yield distorted findings" (p. 43). Through the use of an Onkwehonwe'neha which is wholistic and based on beliefs of the interconnected relational nature of reality, the participants and I were able to co-create knowledge on the interconnected relationships among *challenges* that OS face while in school, *motivators* that increase OS ambition to stay in school, *supports* that help OS, and *interventions/strategies* that may help increase OS's academic success. Findings identified *motivators*, *supports*, and *interventions* that are interconnected with and respond to various *challenges* that OS face while in school. Additionally, some of the *Supports* and *Interventions* identified also increased *motivators* that facilitate academic success among OS.

This search is among the first few studies that have been able to demonstrate the complex interconnected nature of Onkwehonwe academic success (see Willett, 2007). Through a better

understanding of the relationships and interconnections between factors affecting OS's academic success, more effective programs may be developed to increase academic success among OS.

Finally, very few studies in this area have fully employed an Indigenous methodology (Onkwehonwe'neha). Through the use of an Onkwehonwe'neha I was able to contribute to the body of literature produced by Onkwehonwe searchers using Indigenous methodologies in the academic world. Through the words of one the search participants:

And, being able to use an Indigenous methodology for my thesis is really exciting. It really acknowledges and validates our way of knowing and being in the world. ("Susan")

Using an Onkwehonwe'neha and making a contribution to academic literature validate our Onkwehonwe ways of knowing and being in the world.

Ethical Contributions: Reciprocity and Search Relationships

Relationships are important within an Onkwehonwe'neha, therefore, it was important that the participants and I developed relationships with each other. These relationships were developed through locating ourselves (who we are, where we're from, etc.) and casually conversing with each other prior to the commencement of audio-recording. It was through this relationship-building that trust was gained between the participants and me, which in turn, increased truthfulness and openness among the participants and myself. In addition, my role within the conversations and sharing circle was that of a co-participant. Through this role as co-participant I was also able to share parts of myself just as they were sharing parts of their selves with me. It was through sharing, listening, and reflection on what each other shared, that a spirit of reciprocity was maintained (Johnson, 1996). This sharing with each other promoted Haudenosuanee values of collective thinking, harmonious relationships, respect, and balance. It was through these relationships that we were able to co-create knowledge together in the area of

Onkwehonwe academic success. The participants were treated as the experts in this search and were acknowledged for their expertise in the area of inquiry. They also guided the conversations and sharing circle. In addition, anonymity was optional allowing those wishing to be recognized for their contribution to this search to be acknowledged.

Reciprocity is an Onkwehonwe'neha ethic, meaning when we, searchers, take something we must give back in some capacity (Goudreau, 2006). In the spirit of reciprocity, small gifts and tobacco were given to the participants as gratitude for the knowledge that they shared with me in conversations and sharing circle. In addition, during the sharing circle, food was offered to the participants. I also sent notes of gratitude to the participants with the items that were to be "member-checked." Perhaps most importantly the sharing circle served as a healing circle, because the participants were able to share their struggles with each other and find inspiration in each other. The Haudenosaunee value of sharing and reciprocity was upheld as we went away from the conversations and sharing circle with new knowledge and a deeper understanding of Onkwehonwe academic success.

In the Spirit of reciprocity, I will share my thesis with all the participants of this search. In addition, I have shared some of my journal notes (Appendix E) which include my personal reflections on my search journey process, with the hope that other Onkwehonwe searchers may benefit from knowledge of my search-journey experiences, and where I struggled and why. Also in the spirit of reciprocity, I heavily relied on literature by Onkwehonwe searchers. This reliance acknowledges and supports their work by directing those that read my thesis to the works of these other Onkwehonwe searchers.

Limitations

This search, like most, contained limitations. It would have been beneficial to have two sharing circles with the same group of OS. Since a certain amount of time is spent locating ourselves within the circle, it may have been beneficial to do two sharing circles with the same group so that more time could be spent on their thoughts regarding interventions and strategies to increase academic success.

Secondly, because the OS participating in the sharing circle were current graduate students, it was a challenge to schedule a time and date that fit everyone's schedules since graduate students are very busy. Recruitment and scheduling were particularly difficult, because the sharing circle was held at the end of the winter term and many students had left their university campuses becoming dispersed. In the end, only four women were able to participate in the sharing circle meeting my minimum goal of four participants.

Finally, this search is limited by the small sample size (n=6) and gender imbalances (only 1 male participant). It should be noted that at no time were the ideas proposed by the women contradictory to the George's thoughts and ideas on Onkwehonwe academic success. Due to the small sample size and gender imbalance the findings are neither generalizable nor representative, but they do provide in-depth knowledge on the important issue of Onkwehonwe academic success and strategies to increase success. In addition, the findings from this search were congruent with the literature in the area of Native education. Based on the congruency with the literature and the similarities of the participants' experiences with other OS's experiences (as described in previous studies), the findings are transferable among many OS.

Implications for Future (Re)search

Several implications for future research in the area of Native education were identified. First, there is minimal research that incorporates the voices and perspectives of successful OS. Since school-attrition rates remain high for OS, valuable knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success can be learned from those OS who have been successful in achieving a high level of education. Thus, a focus on learning from successful OS is advised for future (re)search.

A great deal of attention has been placed on problematizing Native education, but few studies have attempted to provide solutions for low school-retention rates among OS. Future (re)search should focus on providing solutions for the many challenges and barriers that OS face while in school. In order to develop valid and relevant solutions, the knowledge from successful OS is of benefit.

Various studies, including this search, have found that OS find motivation to continue for reasons beyond their own individualistic purposes and often for more communal reasons (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991). However, some more recent literature has indicated contradictory findings. Willett (2007) found OS participated in university for more individualistic reasons. He suggested the new generation and younger generation may have more individualistic reasons for acquiring a post secondary education. Traditionally, many Onkwehonwe post-secondary students have been older females (ACCC, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Lanceley-Barrie, 2001), thus, many of these studies on Native education are based on experiences of mature female OS. Three out of four of Willett's participants were male, so there may be gender differences in terms of external motivators. Future studies in the area of Onkwehonwe education are needed to explore gender and age differences in the area of motivational factors for OS.

Very few studies on Native school retention and academic success have been able to recruit Native male participants. School retention rates for Native males are even lower than for Native females (Holmes, 2006). Therefore, it is important for future research to focus on the recruitment of successful male OS, who might be able to provide extremely valuable insight on academic success for the male Onkwehonwe population.

Given that this is one of the few studies that utilized an Indigenous methodology to understand Onkwehonwe academic success, further searching using an Indigenous methodology is advised, particularly, to better understand the interconnected and complex nature of Onkwehonwe academic success.

In summary, five areas of future research area proposed: continued focus on voices of academic success, need to find solutions to low school retention rates among OS, research in the area of age and gender differences for Native students as they related to external motivators, the incorporation of more male Native students' voices in (re)search, and further searching using Indigenous methodologies to better understand the complexities and interconnected nature of Onkwehonwe academic success.

Reciprocity: Action and Dissemination Plan

The participants have granted knowledge to me, so I must honour the spirit of reciprocity and give back in some capacity. Because it was the participants that made this search possible, I asked them how they would like to see the findings shared. The participants reported that they would like to see my search findings shared with the Assembly of First Nations Education Sector. They also would like me to publish an article and present on the findings as a means of sharing knowledge in the area of Onkwehonwe academic success and to contribute to the

literature using Indigenous methodologies. So, I will work towards publishing an article on my search findings in a Native education journal and doing presentations at Indigenous conferences (i.e., conferences on Indigenous methodologies and/or Native education). In addition, I will share my findings with the Education Sector of the Assembly of First Nations.

Recommendations for Educational Institutions

It is important that the onus is not solely placed on the Onkwehonwe student to change, but rather, institutional-level change needs to occur if OS are to be successful in school. It is also important that concrete ideas are offered to educational institutions, so that these institutions know how they can do their part in increasing Onkwehonwe academic success. Therefore, I have offered a few recommendations based on the findings from this search, and knowledge obtained from previous searches. Three areas of recommendations are offered as ways that institutions can help increase Onkwehonwe academic success: increasing strength in cultural identity, considerations for school faculty and staff, and sense of community.

Increasing Strength in Cultural Identity

As I mentioned earlier, cultural identity was found to be a very important contributing factor to academic success for OS. A strong grounding in cultural identity empowers OS in their academic journeys. Strength in cultural identity is also important in combating cultural discontinuity, because the more grounded an Onkwehonwe student is in their cultural identity, the less threatened they will be by the Western ways of academic institutions. Based on teachings of the Haudenosaunee Two-Row Wampum, I suggested that one way to mitigate challenges arising out of cultural discontinuity is through supports that will facilitate confidence-building in OS's identities.

When one explores the historical education of Onkwehonwe, it is clear that educational institutions have historically taken on an agenda of assimilating Onkwehonwe by stripping them of their cultures and languages. The sense of disconnect from cultural identity, due to residential schooling and the assimilative nature of education, has been found to contribute to many social problems among Onkwehonwe, including low levels of school retention (CMSF, 2004). However, the same Western academic institutions that have contributed to a loss of cultural identity among Onkwehonwe can take responsibility, and help OS regain their cultural identity. Providing cultural supports in schools for OS and culturally inclusive pedagogy are just a few ways that educational institutions can help OS with confidence-building in their Onkwehonwe identities.

In terms of cultural supports, Onkwehonwe elders should be available in schools. Onkwehonwe elders should be welcomed within classrooms to offer teachings (e.g., in social studies and history classes). For instance, elders could teach students within a history class about the alliance of the Haudenosaunee and the British that was pivotal in the birth of Canada. Other cultural supports that could be offered to OS are sharing circles, smudging, drumming, craft-making, etc...

In terms of increasing Onkwehonwe cultural inclusivity in the pedagogy, mandatory courses with Native content should be offered within school curricula. Onkwehonwe advisory committees, consisting of Onkwehonwe community members and elders, should be consulted in curricula development within educational institutions at all levels.

Cultural supports in schools and culturally inclusive pedagogy can help OS gain confidence in their history and cultural identity. Educational institutions have the opportunity to create a new history, one that instills confidence in OS regarding their cultural identities.

Considerations for School Staff and Faculty

Mentorship and encouragement was found to be crucial in OS's school retention at every level of education. Simple words of encouragement and positive reinforcement help OS believe in their academic abilities. In many cases, OS may not consider higher education until a teacher or mentor mentions these academic routes as possibilities. Training should be offered in schools to increase an awareness of the importance of mentorship and encouragement for students.

Academic planning also should be offered, encouraging students to continue their education; in the case of OS, this academic planning and encouragement may help OS realize the possibilities that their lives hold.

There are important considerations for school staff and faculty to take into account such as cultural sensitivity. Racism and ignorance from teachers and staff have been identified as one of the largest problems that OS face while in school (Willett, 2007). The racism and ignorance can take covert and/or blatant forms. One of the major concerns from many OS is the way that Native content is taught within their courses. Academic institutions should provide their staff and faculty with cultural sensitivity training. Further, this cultural sensitivity training should be taught by Onkwehonwe teachers, community members, elders etc... The training should also be developed with the input from Onkwehonwe advisory committees. The input from Onkwehonwe is important, because there are instances where ignorance may not be realized by non-Onkwehonwe.

Sense of Community

Promoting a sense of community within educational environments was found to be important for a number of reasons. First, a sense of community felt by OS can help decrease feelings of alienation arising out of racism and ignorance. In addition, a stronger sense of community facilitates the support of Onkwehonwe with each other in school environments.

Some important ways that institutions can facilitate a sense of community for OS is through Aboriginal student services. In addition, Onkwehonwe events and workshops could be offered to facilitate networking among OS. Sharing circles were found to be a helpful coping strategy for OS; these could be initiated within schools. Another important strategy to facilitate a sense of community is through offering food. Food is very important in many Onkwehonwe cultures and has also been found to increase Onkwehonwe participation (Goudreau, 2006). As an example, “soup and fry bread” days could be offered for OS. Additionally, in the age of technology, on-line support groups and forums are becoming very popular. Academic institutions could create on-line support groups for OS to network with each other and these forums could be advertised in schools. These web-based groups can also increase a sense of community among OS. Finally, it is important that culturally-neutral events also should be offered for OS such as bowling nights and casual get-togethers offering food, because some OS may not feel confident in their Onkwehonwe identities and may hesitate in participating in events that are based in Onkwehonwe cultures and traditions.

Conclusions

Four areas of Onkwehonwe academic success were identified in the conversations and sharing circle. These were: *challenges* that OS face in their academic journeys, *motivators* that

increase OS's motivation to continue in school, *supports* that aid in OS's academic success, and *interventions or strategies* that can help increase success.

Although I did not intend to uncover challenges that OS face while in school, there was an inextricable link between challenges and any discourse on motivators, supports, and interventions/strategies to increase Onkwehonwe academic success. The challenges that were uncovered in this search were cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, intergenerational trauma, and inadequate resources.

In answering my first primary search question regarding factors that contribute to OS's academic success, various motivators and supports were identified. The supports that were discussed were peer supports, cultural supports, and mentorship and encouragement. These supports help OS overcome challenges that they face in their academic journeys. Two types of motivators were uncovered within this search, internal and external. Motivators gave OS the ambition and will to continue in school. The internal motivators were confidence in identity and confidence in academic abilities. External motivators were based on OS's desire to stimulate change and give back to Onkwehonwe communities. These motivators were found to be culturally linked as they align with the Onkwehonwe spirit of reciprocity. Some supports and interventions were found to be helpful in nurturing both types of motivators; thus, motivators, supports, and interventions are interrelated. For instance, supports and interventions such as cultural supports and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments, increase confidence in identity for OS. These same supports and intervention can also increase the culturally-linked external motivators, because they assist in cultural identity formation for OS. Additionally, supports such as mentorship and encouragement can positively alter OS's beliefs about their academic abilities (internal motivator).

Through an understanding of the interrelated nature of motivators with supports and interventions, school-retention strategies can be developed that positively influence OS's success in a multidimensional manner. To explain, promoting a culturally inclusive learning environment may combat the challenge of cultural discontinuity, while at the same time increasing the internal motivator of confidence in identity.

In response to the second primary search question regarding interventions and strategies that can increase Onkwehonwe academic success, the participants shared their ideas on interventions and strategies that might be able to increase success rates. Three interventions were identified that can be applied to various levels of education: promoting a sense of community, increasing awareness and information about education, and promoting culturally inclusive learning environments.

When reviewing the findings, it is clear that they are all interconnected. For instance, motivators, supports, and interventions were identified as ways to overcome challenges. The turtle framework (Figure 1) offers an understanding of the wholistic, interrelated, and interconnected nature of the findings. It describes the multi-level, integrated, and wholistic approaches needed when responding to challenges that OS face. At the centre of the turtle's shell are three main challenges (cultural discontinuity, racism and ignorance, and intergenerational trauma) and surrounding the borders of these challenges are combinations of motivators, supports and interventions that address them. Motivators, supports, and the intervention of promoting a sense of community were identified as ways to mitigate all three challenges, thus, they border all of the challenges in the turtle framework. All three interventions were found to be important in responding to challenges arising from cultural discontinuity and intergenerational trauma. Two interventions, promoting a sense of community and promoting

culturally inclusive learning environments, were proposed to mitigate challenges arising from racism and ignorance.

As stated in the introduction, education levels among Onkwehonwe remain disproportionately lower than among the non-Onkwehonwe population (Birchard, 2006; Helin, 2006, AUCC, n.d.). As the Onkwehonwe population is on the rise and consists mostly of younger generations, the issue of Onkwehonwe education is becoming a crisis and the levels of student “drop out” among Onkwehonwe is almost “epidemic” (Willett, 2007, p.19; see also Helin, 2006; Holmes, 2006).

It is well known that unemployment and poverty rates for Onkwehonwe are persistently high (Holmes, 2006). Helin (2006) notes that unemployment is one of the biggest challenges for the Onkwehonwe population. He argues that if no action is taken to result in wide-scale employment for Aboriginal peoples, the two demographics (the increasing young population and high unemployment rates) “will combine to create a fiscal demographic tsunami on a scale never before seen in Canada” (p. 59). Therefore, as the Onkwehonwe population is younger and continues to rise, there is an urgent need for employment rates to rise among Onkwehonwe.

There is no doubt that the negative view and distrust of education, present among many Onkwehonwe, is warranted (CMSF, 2004). Irreparable harm has been caused by the Canadian educational system to Onkwehonwe (Helin, 2006; see also CMSF, 2004). Further, “educational systems have taught irrelevant knowledge that can sometimes be destructive” (Helin, 2006, p. 203). In some ways education continues to be assimilative in nature (Hampton, 2000), and some would argue that post secondary institutions continue to be unsafe grounds for Onkwehonwe students (Alfred, 2004). No wonder, then, that the importance and relevance of education is often questioned by Onkwehonwe.

However, education is very important in terms of Onkwehonwe employment rates. Surveys show that those Onkwehonwe who complete post-secondary education receive higher incomes, and have an increased chance of finding employment (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Helin 2006; Holmes, 2006). Undoubtedly, education provides a means for Onkwehonwe to earn higher incomes and escape poverty (Helin, 2006). Higher education seems to be the paramount way to increase social mobility for Onkwehonwe (Sloane-Sleale, Wallace, & Levin, 2000).

Education also is important in terms of self-government, self-reliance, and the self-determination of Indigenous peoples (Willett, 2007). Findings from this search and other studies indicate that often OS use their education as a means to give back to their people and for the betterment of their communities (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Therefore, an increase in the number of educated Onkwehonwe can provide Onkwehonwe communities with more educated community members, thereby increasing Onkwehonwe communities' self-reliance and self-determination through capacity building.

There is a lot of research in the area of Onkwehonwe education, and yet school-attrition rates remain high for OS (Willett, 2007). Part of the problem with current and past research in the area of Onkwehonwe education is that much of the research has been done in a way that problematizes this issue, meaning problems are always uncovered, but rarely are solutions offered. It is clear, through the multitude of studies performed, that OS face many challenges, barriers, inhibiting factors, and non-persistence factors. However, if solutions are not provided, school-retention rates will remain alarmingly low for OS. Further, when school retention strategies have been offered, they have put the onus on the Onkwehonwe student rather than the academic institutions and educational systems (Willett, 2007). School-retention strategies that

put the onus on the students to change are highly problematic (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 1992); they are problematic because they blame the victim, ignore change needed at the institutional level, and are Eurocentric (Willett, 2007).

Onkwehonwe have survived, living off the land, “since time immemorial” (Absolon, 2008, p. 50; see also Helin, 2006; Johnson, 1996). We, Onkwehonwe, have also survived colonization and attempted genocide. We are very strong and resilient people. Therefore, there is much to be learned from our strength and rich cultures. Helin (2006) states:

What emerges from looking back to the 9,600 years prior to contact is a picture of a metaphorical Aboriginal tribal canoe whose occupants were tribally and culturally synchronized to survive the vagaries of Nature. Self-reliance, self-discipline, complete interdependence, teamwork and moral leadership ensured the Aboriginal canoe weathered stormy weather. These are fundamental elements key to the past well-being of Aboriginal people. In the search for practical solutions to problems confronting indigenous peoples today, it is important to keep these inherent traits and strengths in mind. (Helin, 2006, p.86)

(Re)searchers can contribute to OS’s academic success by not only providing solutions to the challenges and barriers that OS face, but also by providing solutions that are guided by our ancestors, traditions, and resiliency. In addition, these solutions should not place the onus on the Onkwehonwe student to change, particularly when many challenges that OS face stem from issues beyond their control. Therefore, strategies to increase academic success should address multiple levels of ecological analysis (i.e., school environments, educational institutions, governing bodies, etc...).

In closing, this search illuminates the understanding and perspectives of six successful OS, which include two Aboriginal student-services coordinators. The participants’ insight was crucial in searching for knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success. The findings from this search provide valuable in-depth information on the complex and interconnected nature of Onkwehonwe academic success. The turtle framework (Figure 1) provides an understanding of

the wholistic, multi-level, and integrated approaches needed to increase academic success among OS. My vision for the turtle framework is that one day, the use of integrated, multi-level, and wholistic interventions will end the challenges that impede OS's academic success; ultimately decreasing the education gap between Onkwehonwe and the broader population by placing OS on a level "playing field" with mainstream students.

Personal Reflections

I was excited to partake in this search journey, because I would be using an Indigenous methodology for the first time in my academic career. I read as much literature as I could find on Indigenous methodologies. However, since Indigenous Methodologies are just beginning to be accepted in the academic world there is a disproportionately lower number of literary works on or using Indigenous methodologies than social constructivist, positivist and other such widely accepted epistemological perspectives. It felt empowering to be able to use an Indigenous methodology because being able to use an Onkwehonwe'neha within the academy acknowledges our (Onkwehonwe) ways of acquiring knowledge. I was also excited to use an Onkwehonwe'neha, because I did not grow up learning my Haudenosaunee traditions. I have been trying to learn more about my traditions and believed that this search journey would help facilitate my cultural learning process.

This search journey can be described by many adjectives such as thrilling, frustrating, saddening, and empowering. I had read how part of being an Onkwehonwe searcher, who is searching from an Onkwehonwe paradigm, begins with a personal decolonization process and a cultural revitalization process or "re-membling" process (Simpson, 2001; Absolon & Willett, 2005). For me, this process of decolonization meant many things such as: learning more about

my traditions, trying to forget Western ways of research that I had been indoctrinated in, learning how to write as I was re-remembering myself, learning how to apply my Onkwehonwe ways of knowing and being in the world, trying not be ashamed and/or hesitant for not knowing many of my Haudenosaunee traditions, feeling more pain and anger as I became more consciously connected with my peoples' history, etc... I had not realized how hard this process of decolonization was going to be for me.

A main struggle that I had was trying to find my footing in my own Onkwehonwe way of searching as I had been so indoctrinated, through years of schooling and multiple research methods courses, in Western ways of research. I remained critically conscious throughout this journey. For instance, I remained aware of my role as a co-participant within the conversations and sharing circle because it was so natural for me to take the role of interviewer and facilitator. However, once I settled into my role as a co-participant, this role felt so natural and the role of interviewer and facilitator seemed to go against the natural flow of nature. I felt like my load had been lightened and I felt freer with my role as a co-participant. In a way, I was ridding myself of colonial baggage and I was re-remembering myself through becoming connected with my Onkwehonwe ways of knowing and being in the world.

Next was the making-meaning process. This proved to be the most difficult and cumbersome process for me as an Onkwehonwe woman and as a Master's student. These two roles seemed incongruent and at times contradictory. I second-guessed myself many times and must have written and rewritten my findings section about five times, because I wanted to make sure that I was presenting the voice of the participants and making sure that I was telling the most complete story of the sharing circle and the conversations. Like other Onkwehonwe searchers, I struggled putting what I know and understand "emotionally, intuitively, and

spiritually” as an Onkwehonwe person on paper (Johnson, 1996, p. 121). There were days that the process overwhelmed me, I was trying to meet these academic standards but I was also trying to stay true to my Onkwehonwe identity. Through this process of decolonization, I had also lost my footing within the academic world. There were days that I sat in front of the monitor frustrated and overwhelmed for hours at time. I talked with the Elder participating in this search and she reminded me to attend to Spirit and Creator (Personal communication, June 16, 2010). And so, I offered tobacco and took time to take care of myself. Once and a while I would forget to do these things and I would become frustrated and overwhelmed all over again. However, as soon I took care of myself spiritually, mentally, and physically, I was able to clear my mind and continue on my search journey.

During my search journey, I found it frustrating that there were few examples available for reference that fully implemented Indigenous methodologies. When I found examples and was able to read works written by other Native scholars, it seemed that these works were all a little different. This diversity is to be expected as there are many different Onkwehonwe cultures and while there are values and principles that are fairly universal among Onkwehonwe peoples, we all have our own distinct traditions and ways of knowing and being in the world (Colorado, 1988). So I had to find my own way within my Onkwehonwe’neha and had to learn to trust my intuition and what I know as an Onkwehonwe woman. I also realized that many of us, Onkwehonwe searchers, are at different places in terms of our process of decolonization. And, I realized that it can take a very long to be fully confident in these processes of decolonization and cultural revitalization. At times, I was worried that I was not doing an Onkwehonwe’neha justice. However, my Elder helped relieve some of these fears by indicating that we’re all at different places in our life journeys and that what’s most important is that I’m moving forward

and that I am aware of myself- that I'm conscious in my search journey. Thus, I can say that I very consciously tried to fully implement an Onkwehonwe'neha. She also urged me to trust my intuition.

This search journey has had far reaching implications on my identity as a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) woman. My process of decolonization does not end with this search journey. In fact, it is only the beginning as I embark on my personal journey towards cultural revitalization. I also plan to continue playing some role in Onkwehonwe education by being personally involved in Aboriginal mentorship programs and possibly being involved in program development for OS. I have been fortunate to meet so many amazing and resilient Onkwehonwe. I feel privileged to contribute to the body of knowledge on Native education by focusing on *success* and ways to increase academic success among OS.

During this search journey I also thought about what education has meant and currently means to me and other Onkwehonwe people. As an Onkwehonwe person, it is easy to harbor anger towards the education system in Canada that has caused so much pain to our people; and continues to cause OS pain and frustration. However, without this education, we will never be self-reliant. If we do not partake in an education, employments rates will remain low and poverty will remain high. In the same breath, I also worry about education, because I have seen so many Onkwehonwe people changed by Western academic institutions, in terms of losing their Onkwehonwe values and "Indigeneity", and forgetting their original motives behind their education. However, if we remain critically conscious and self-aware during our education, I feel that our Onkwehonwe communities could tremendously benefit from the academic success of OS.

This search journey helped me reflect on our resilience as Onkwehonwe people and how we have survived colonization, attempted genocide, and residential schooling. We have not only survived, but our cultures and traditions were never lost. In fact, populations are on the rise and there is an increase in the practicing of our traditions and traditional-language speaking; there is a cultural revitalization occurring in the midst of intergenerational trauma. I am in awe of our strength and resilience. And it makes me proud to say that I am a Kanien'kehá:ka woman.

Through this journey I was able to use my Haudenosaunee ways of knowing and understanding with pride, as a way of searching and acquiring knowledge on Onkwehonwe academic success. Spirituality, creativity and reflection on what I know as a Haudenosaunee woman helped me understand my findings and a turtle emerged. Through the turtle I was able to understand the interconnected, interrelated and wholistic approach needed to increase Onkwehonwe academic success. I learned from the turtle. And, my hope is that others can learn from the turtle as I did.

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Appendix A
 WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
 INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR SHARING CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS
**Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students utilizing an
 Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)**

Principal Investigator: Ashley Johnson Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a (re)search study. Note that the word “search” will be used instead of “research” within this thesis study due the negative history that research has had on Aboriginal people and communities. The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students can arrive at academic success and to determine strategies that can help increase school retention among Aboriginal students. This study will use an Indigenous methodology to increase understanding in the area of Aboriginal academic success. The search will be conducted by Ashley Johnson, a Community Psychology Master’s student doing a thesis under the supervision of Dr. Terry Mitchell, an Assistant Professor in the Wilfrid Laurier University Psychology Department.

INFORMATION

You were contacted for this study because of your personal success as an Aboriginal student. More specifically, you are a self-identified Aboriginal person enrolled in a graduate studies program or have, within the last 2 years, graduated from a graduate studies program.

There will be two Indigenous methods utilized within this study. These methods are called conversations and sharing circles. There will be conversations with two Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) academic advisor/counselor to Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students. Also, there will be conversations with one elder, who is recognized by their community for their wisdom and knowledge in traditional Longhouse beliefs and protocols. Finally, there will be 1-2 sharing circles with 4-8 Aboriginal graduate students participating in them.

You have been invited to participate in a sharing circle.

If you decide to participate in the sharing circle, there will be one sharing circle that will be held by Ashley Johnson on a date that is desirable by the participants involved in it. The sharing circle will take approximately 1.5-2 hours. Sharing circles are a small group Indigenous format of dialogue, discussion and knowledge sharing. Sharing circles are somewhat similar to focus groups in that they are both a small group format to gain knowledge on a particular topic through group discourse. Everyone participating in a sharing circle sits in a circle and each person has a turn to speak while others listen. The chairs will form a circle so that each participant can be seen and heard clearly. In addition, the circular shape of the chairs symbolizes the sharing circle’s circular process. The sharing circle is meant to be a relaxed, respectful and conversational in nature. Everyone will have a turn to speak while others listen. The intention of the sharing circle is to share knowledge and co-create knowledge on academic success factors for Aboriginal students and on strategies which the participants feel to be effective in increasing school retention among Aboriginal students.

The sharing circle(s) will be audio- recorded. Audio-recording of the sharing circles is mandatory for this search. The circle(s) will not be transcribed verbatim however, shared knowledge, key ideas and thoughts on determinants of academic success for Aboriginal students and on school retention strategies and interventions will be recorded and included in the searcher's thesis document. Direct quotations from the participants will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and

RISKS

The potential psychological or emotional risks are minimal as this is a study pertaining to your academic success. There is no "good" or "bad" performance in this study. There is a risk that surprising or uncomfortable memories or feelings may result. However, you will be asked to share only what you are comfortable sharing.

Regret over revealing personal information may also be a potential risk. In order to minimize this risk, you will have the opportunity to read over any direct quotations, if any, and change or omit anything that may give away your identity or that you feel you do not want presented in the search findings due to personal reasons.

As well, since this search project involves 4-8 participants for the sharing circle(s) all with the distinguishing characteristics of being Aboriginal graduate students, anonymity and loss of privacy cannot be ensured. However, in order to minimize these risks, a member check will be performed in which you will receive any direct quotations or information that you have shared within the circle and will have the opportunity to edit or omit passages/words within them to protect your anonymity and privacy.

BENEFITS

This study will document, in your own voice, what you consider to be core factors that have aided in your persistence toward completing your post secondary education. It will also document what you believe to be effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students. Since there is little research in the area of Aboriginal academic success and little research that utilizes the knowledge of successful Aboriginal students, the results will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Aboriginal students and factors contributing to their academic success. The findings from this study will contribute to knowledge and understanding of academic success..

This study also has the potential to benefit you as you have an opportunity to reflect on your strengths and accomplishments. It will also benefit you as you will have the opportunity to share your voice or thoughts on effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Named/acknowledged participation

Within this Indigenous search paradigm confidentiality may be culturally inappropriate and problematic in terms of the cultural protocol of acknowledging where the knowledge has come from. However, there are times when sensitive personal material will be disclosed and confidentiality is important. Therefore, you have the opportunity to waive confidentiality meaning that you would like your name to appear within the searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, thesis document and any other possible publications and/or conferences where the findings may be presented. The appearance of the participant's name within this study serves to acknowledge the participant's contribution to knowledge construction. It also serves to acknowledge the participant's/your success in school despite the many challenges that Aboriginal students face while on the journey towards academic success.

Ashley Johnson will be the only person to listen to the audio-recordings of the sharing circles. Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. For those participants wishing to be named/acknowledge, quotes will be used with personal identifiers contained within them. A member check will be performed for all participants, meaning that the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, any direct quotations made by them and will have the opportunity to edit and/or omit certain passages/words. At this time, the participants will also have the opportunity to decide whether they would like to remain named/acknowledged within this study. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

Anonymous participation

Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data *unless* you request otherwise. Neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be used in the thesis, *unless* you provide permission to include your name. A pseudonym will be assigned to the individual participants and real names will not be identified in any computerized files or in any publication of the results of the study. The numerical pseudonyms will be marked on the participants' signed consent forms so that I am able to send them their direct quotations, if any, and my interpretations of their words. Signed consent forms and paper copies of the transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet located in the primary searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, Wilfrid Laurier University office. The only people that will have access to the locked items are Ashley Johnson and Dr. Terry Mitchell. Ashley Johnson will be the only person to listen to these audio-recordings. Ashley Johnson will destroy/delete the audio recordings after she has completed the final thesis document. Typed transcripts and digital recordings will be saved on the searcher's personal computer (located in Ashley Johnson's home residence) that requires password access of which only Ashley Johnson (the searcher) knows the password. The electronic copies of the transcripts will be deleted seven years after the completion of the study on August 31, 2017. The raw data (paper copies of transcripts, consent forms, journal notes) will also be destroyed on August 31, 2017 by Dr. Terry Mitchell.

Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. However, for the participants wishing to remain anonymous, these quotations will not contain personal identifiers within them. A member check will be performed for all participants. Meaning the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, any direct quotations from the sharing circle and will have the opportunity to read over them and make any necessary edits or let me, the primary searcher, know of any changes that need to be made to the quotations in order to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality are maintained to the highest possible degree considering the small sample size of this search project. The participants will make sure that there are no identifying words or passages within the quotations. At this time they will also have the opportunity to clarify or omit words/passages within the quotations. After the participants have finished looking over their quotations and making any necessary changes, they will then send the quotations back to the searcher (Ashley Johnson) with their edits and/or suggestions. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

COMPENSATION

Prior to the sharing circle, in terms of cultural protocol and to practice reciprocity, the searcher will bring food to be shared among all of the participants. In addition, a small token of appreciation will be given to the participants showing my gratitude for the knowledge that they are about to share with me.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,*) you may contact the searcher, Ashley Johnson, at john3900@wlu.ca. You may also contact Ashley Johnson's supervisor Dr. Terry Mitchell at tmitchell@wlu.ca and (519) 884-1970, extension 2052. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will not be immediately destroyed, but your data will not be transcribed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

Feedback regarding the study's findings will be provided to you via email/regular mail. The feedback letters will be sent out to you by August 31, 2010.

The results for this study may be used for presentations and published in journal articles and/or books. It is also possible that findings may be disseminated broadly in community and academic forms. And the findings will be published within the investigator's (Ashley Johnson's) Master's thesis.

CONSENT

Please note that since the sharing circles are a group setting, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, all participants are asked to hold what others say within the sharing circles as confidential. Also, due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous.

I agree to hold what others say in the sharing circle as confidential. I will not share the participants' identities or what they say in the sharing circle with anyone else.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I wish to waive my confidentiality within this study. Meaning that **that my identity will be named**; my name will appear within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I have been a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I do not wish to waive my confidentiality. Meaning that I wish to **remain anonymous** and not be named within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I am a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B
 WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
 INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR ADVISOR CONVERSATIONS
 Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students utilizing an
 Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)
 Principal Investigator: Ashley Johnson Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a (re)search study. Note that the word “search” will be used instead of “research” within this thesis study due the negative history that research has had on Aboriginal people and communities. The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students can arrive at academic success and to determine strategies that can help increase school retention among Aboriginal students. This study will use an Indigenous methodology to increase understanding in the area of Aboriginal academic success. The search will be conducted by Ashley Johnson, a Community Psychology Master’s student doing a thesis under the supervision of Dr. Terry Mitchell, an Assistant Professor in the Wilfrid Laurier University Psychology Department.

INFORMATION

You were contacted for this study because of your personal role as an Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) academic advisor/counselor to Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students.

There will be two Indigenous methods utilized within this study. These methods are called conversations and sharing circles. There will be conversations with two Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) academic advisor/counselor to Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students. Also, there will be conversations with one elder, who is recognized by their community for their wisdom and knowledge in traditional Longhouse beliefs and protocols. Finally, there will be 1-2 sharing circles with 4-8 Aboriginal graduate students participating in them.

You have been invited to participate in the advisor conversations. There will be one to two Aboriginal academic advisors/counselors involved in this study.

If you decide to partake in the conversation(s) of this study, you will converse with Ashley Johnson on one occasion. The conversation will take between 1-1.5 hours. The conversation will be held in an area that you find comfortable and relaxed such as a home environment, coffee shop, or office to promote a more organic experience. I will not be following an interview guide (a predetermined set of questions), however I will be meeting with an intention of finding answers to my primary search questions: What are factors of academic success for Onkwehonwe students (i.e. how successful Onkwehonwe students arrive at their success despite the many challenges that Onkwehonwe students face)? And, what are the participants’ ideas about effective school-retention strategies and interventions that can be and/or are being employed at the different levels of education (elementary, high school, and post secondary) to help increase Onkwehonwe school retention? In addition, within Indigenous searches, the participants are fully engaged and guide the search questions and the study design. So, the participant(s) involved in these conversations will help guide them and I will be asking the participant(s) for their input on my search design.

The conversation will be audio-recorded and transcribed by Ashley Johnson. Audio-recording of the conversation is mandatory for this search. Direct quotations from the conversations will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis any resulting publications and presentations.

RISKS

The potential psychological or emotional risks are minimal as this is a study pertaining to academic success for Aboriginal (Onkehwonwe) students. There is no "good" or "bad" performance in this study. There is a risk that surprising or uncomfortable memories or feelings may result. However, you will be asked to share only what you are comfortable sharing.

Regret over revealing personal information may also be a potential risk. In order to minimize this risk, you will have the opportunity to read over your conversation transcript and change or omit anything that may give away your identity or that you feel you do not want presented in the search findings due to personal reasons.

As well, since this search project involves 1-2 participants with the distinguishing characteristic of being an Aboriginal academic advisor for Aboriginal students, anonymity and loss of privacy cannot be ensured. However, in order to minimize these risks, a member check will be performed in which you will receive conversation transcript and will have the opportunity to edit or omit passages/words within it to protect your anonymity and privacy.

BENEFITS

This study will document, in your own voice, what you consider to be core factors that aid Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students in their persistence toward successfully completing a post secondary education. It will also document what you believe to be effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students. Since there is little research in the area of Aboriginal academic success the results will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Aboriginal students and factors contributing to their academic success.

This study will benefit you as you will have the opportunity to share your voice, thoughts, and valuable experience on effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students and factors that lead to academic success for Aboriginal students. The findings from this study may be useful to your work as an academic advisor.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Named/acknowledged participation

Within this Indigenous search paradigm confidentiality may be culturally inappropriate and problematic in terms of the cultural protocol of acknowledging where the knowledge has come from. However, there are times when sensitive personal material will be disclosed and confidentiality is important. Therefore, you have the opportunity to waive confidentiality meaning that if you waive your confidentiality you would like your name to appear within the searcher's thesis document and any other possible publications and/or conferences where the

findings may be presented. The appearance of the participant's name within this study serves to acknowledge where the knowledge and findings of this study have come from. It also serves to acknowledge the participant's knowledge and experience in Aboriginal education.

Ashley Johnson will be the only person to listen to the conversation audio-recordings. Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. For those participants wishing to be named/acknowledge, quotes will be used with personal identifiers contained within them. A member check will be performed for all participants, meaning that the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, their conversation transcript and will have the opportunity to edit and/or omit certain passages/words. At this time, the participants will also have the opportunity to decide whether they would like to remain named/acknowledged within this study. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

Anonymous participation

Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data *unless* you request otherwise. Neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be used in the thesis, *unless* you provide permission to include your name. A numerical pseudonym will be assigned to the individual participants and real names will not be identified in any computerized files or in any publication of the results of the study. The numerical pseudonyms will be marked on the participants' signed consent forms so that I am able to send them their conversation transcript and my interpretations of their words. Signed consent forms and paper copies of the transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet located in the primary searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, Wilfrid Laurier University office. The only people that will have access to the locked items are Ashley Johnson and Dr. Terry Mitchell. The audio recordings will be destroyed/deleted after I have completed the final thesis document. Ashley Johnson will be the only person to listen to the conversation audio-recordings. Typed transcripts and digital recordings will be saved on the searcher's personal computer (located in Ashley Johnson's home residence) that requires password access of which only Ashley Johnson (the searcher) knows the password. The electronic copies of the transcripts will be deleted seven years after the completion of the study on August 31, 2017. The raw data (paper copies of transcripts, consent forms, journal notes) will also be destroyed on August 31, 2017 by Dr. Terry Mitchell.

Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. However, for the participants wishing to remain anonymous, these quotations will not contain personal identifiers within them. A member check will be performed for all participants. Meaning the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, their conversation transcript and will have the opportunity to read over it and make any necessary edits or let me, the primary searcher, know of any changes that need to be made to the transcript in order to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality are maintained to the highest possible degree considering the small sample size of this search project. The participants will make sure that there are no identifying words or passages within the transcript. At this time they will also have the opportunity to clarify or omit words/passages within the transcript. After the participants have finished looking over their quotations and making any

necessary changes, they will then send the quotations back to the searcher (Ashley Johnson) with their edits and/or suggestions. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

COMPENSATION

Prior to the conversation, in terms of cultural protocol and to practice reciprocity, I (Ashley Johnson) will give a small token of appreciation to the participants showing my gratitude for the knowledge that they are about to share with me.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,*) you may contact the searcher, Ashley Johnson, at john3900@wlu.ca. You may also contact Ashley Johnson's supervisor Dr. Terry Mitchell at tmitchell@wlu.ca and (519) 884-1970, extension 2052. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will not be transcribed and will be immediately destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

Feedback regarding the study's findings will be provided to you via email/regular mail. The feedback letters will be sent out to you by August 31, 2010.

The results for this study may be used for presentations and published in journal articles and/or books. It is also possible that findings may be disseminated broadly in community and academic forums. And the findings will be published within the investigator's (Ashley Johnson's) Master's thesis.

CONSENT

Please note that due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I wish to waive my confidentiality within this study. Meaning that **that my identity will be named**; my name will appear within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I have been a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I do not wish to waive my confidentiality. Meaning that I wish to **remain anonymous** and not be named within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I am a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C
 WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
 INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR ELDER CONVERSATIONS
**Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students utilizing an
 Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)**
 Investigator: Ashley Johnson Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a (re)search study. Note that the word “search” will be used instead of “research” and that the word “searcher” will be used instead of “researcher” within this thesis study due the negative history that research has had on Aboriginal people and communities. The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students can arrive at academic success and to determine strategies that can help increase school retention among Aboriginal students. This study will use an Indigenous methodology to increase understanding in the area of Aboriginal academic success. The search will be conducted by Ashley Johnson, a Community Psychology Master’s student doing a thesis under the supervision of Dr. Terry Mitchell, an Assistant Professor in the Wilfrid Laurier University Psychology Department.

INFORMATION

There will be two Indigenous methods utilized within this study. These methods are called conversations and sharing circles. There will be conversations with two Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) academic advisor/counselor to Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students. Also, there will be conversations with one elder, who is recognized by their community for their wisdom and knowledge in traditional Longhouse beliefs and protocols. Finally, there will be 1-2 sharing circles with 4-8 Aboriginal graduate students participating in them.

You were invited for participation in this study because of your expertise in Haudenosaunee traditions and ways of knowing. There will be only one elder asked to participate in this study. An elder as defined by this study as one who is recognized by their community for their wisdom and knowledge in traditional Longhouse beliefs and protocols. This study will be utilizing an Indigenous methodology and the searcher, Ashley Johnson, will be needing guidance in terms of traditional protocols and traditional ways of searching for knowledge.

If you wish to participate in this study, you will converse with me, Ashley Johnson. There may be multiple conversations that you will partake in throughout the length of my search, which will end around August 15, 2010. They conversations will vary in length, approximately 0.5-1 hour in length. The conversations will be held only at times that you indicate and will be based on your availability. They will be informal in nature and held in a place that you deem comfortable. I will not be following an interview guide or set list of questions. However, I will be coming to the conversations for guidance and help in term of cultural protocols and any questions that may arise from my search. The conversations may help me choose appropriate methods to uncover knowledge on the topic of academic success for Aboriginal students. These conversations will also provide guidance in terms of interpreting findings from the study and ways of interpreting and presenting these findings.

The elder conversations will not be audio-recorded, but I will write about these conversations in a journal after they have been completed. Quotations made by the elder during the conversations, which are recorded in the search journal, will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations.

The information gained from these conversations will appear in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations.

RISKS

The potential psychological or emotional risks are minimal as you will be sharing your knowledge regarding Haudenosaunee ways of knowing. There is no "good" or "bad" performance in this study. You will be asked to share only what you are comfortable sharing.

As well, since this study involves only one elder, anonymity and loss of privacy cannot be ensured. If you wish to remain anonymous, every effort will be made to ensure that personal identifiers will not be contained within the final Master's thesis document. You will have the opportunity to read the final thesis draft before submission to ensure that no personal identifiers are contained within the final thesis draft.

BENEFITS

This study also has the potential to benefit you as you have an opportunity to reflect on your wisdom and knowledge. In addition, it will allow you the opportunity to pass some of your wisdom and knowledge of Haudenosaunee traditions on to the searcher, Ashley Johnson. It will also benefit you as you will have the opportunity to share your voice or thoughts on Indigenous methodologies and respectful Indigenous ways of arriving at knowledge. This study will also benefit the research community as there is little research that fully utilizes an Indigenous methodology. More specifically, it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Aboriginal education and success.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Named/acknowledged participation

Within this Indigenous search paradigm confidentiality may be culturally inappropriate and problematic in terms of the Indigenous cultural protocol of acknowledging where the knowledge has come from. However, there are times when sensitive personal material will be disclosed and confidentiality is important. Therefore, you have the opportunity to waive confidentiality meaning that you would like to be named within the searcher's Master's thesis document and any other publications and/or presentations related to the findings of this study.

Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. For those participants wishing to be named/acknowledge, quotes will be used with personal identifiers contained within them. And, a

member check will be performed for all participants, meaning that the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, any quotations made by them and will have the opportunity to edit and/or omit certain passages/words. At this time, the participants will also have the opportunity to decide whether they would like to remain named/acknowledged within this study. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

Anonymous participation

Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity and the confidentiality of the data *unless* you request otherwise. Neither your name nor any other personal identifying information will be used in the thesis, *unless* you provide permission to include your name. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet located in the primary searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, Wilfrid Laurier University office. The only people that will have access to the locked items are Ashley Johnson and Dr. Terry Mitchell. The raw data (paper copies of transcripts, consent forms, journal notes) will also be destroyed on August 15, 2017 by Dr. Terry Mitchell. In addition, the journal notes will not indicate your real name and a pseudonym will be used in place of your name.

Quotes made by the participants in this search will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis and any resulting publications and presentations. However, for the participants wishing to remain anonymous, these quotations will not contain personal identifiers within them. And, a member check will be performed for all participants. Meaning the participants will receive, via email or regular mail, any quotations from the conversations and will have the opportunity to read over them and make any necessary edits or let me, the primary searcher, know of any changes that need to be made to the quotations in order to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality are maintained to the highest possible degree considering the small sample size of this search project. The participants will make sure that there are no identifying words or passages within the quotations. At this time they will also have the opportunity to clarify or omit words/passages within the quotations. After the participants have finished looking over their quotations and making any necessary changes, they will then send the quotations back to the searcher (Ashley Johnson) with their edits and/or suggestions. Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit via email/over the internet.

COMPENSATION

Prior to the conversations, in terms of cultural protocol and to practice reciprocity, I will give a small gift or food showing my gratitude for the knowledge that you are about to share with me.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,*) you may contact the searcher, Ashley Johnson, at john3900@wlu.ca. You may also contact Ashley Johnson's supervisor Dr. Terry Mitchell at tmitchell@wlu.ca and (519) 884-1970, extension 2052. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated

according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

Feedback regarding the study's findings will be provided to you via email/regular mail. The feedback letters will be sent out to you via email or regular mail by August 31, 2010.

The results for this study may be used for presentations and published in journal articles and/or books. It is also possible that findings may be disseminated broadly in community and academic forms.

CONSENT

Please note that due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I **wish to waive my confidentiality** within this study. Meaning that **that my identity will be named**; my name will appear within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I have been a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

I **do not wish to waive my confidentiality**. Meaning that I wish to **remain anonymous** and not be named within the searcher's thesis document and any publications and/or presentations of this study of which I am a participant.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D
WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
Information Letter

**Understanding academic success for Onkwehonwe (Indigenous) students utilizing an
Onkwehonwe'neha (Indigenous methodology)**

Principal Investigator: Ashley Johnson Advisor: Dr. Terry Mitchell

You are invited to participate in a (re)search study. Note that the word “search” will be used instead of “research” and that the word “searcher” will be used instead of “researcher” within this thesis study due the negative history that research has had on Aboriginal people and communities. The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students can arrive at academic success and to determine strategies that can help increase school retention among Aboriginal students. This study will use an Indigenous methodology to increase understanding in the area of Aboriginal academic success. The search will be conducted by Ashley Johnson, a Community Psychology Master’s student doing a thesis under the supervision of Dr. Terry Mitchell, an Assistant Professor in the Wilfrid Laurier University Psychology Department.

You were contacted for this search because of one of three reasons: your personal success as an Aboriginal student, your role as an academic advisor/counselor for Aboriginal students, or your role as a Haudenosaunee elder in your community.

There are three phases of this search involving the three different types of participant roles. These are explained below.

Aboriginal Academic Advisor Role

You are invited to participate in this search because of your personal role as an Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) academic advisor/counselor to Aboriginal (Onkwehonwe) students.

There will be 1-2 Aboriginal academic advisor(s)/counselor(s) serving Aboriginal students involved in this search. If you decide that you would like to participate in this search, you will be asked to participate in one conversation that will take approximately 1-1.5 hours. Conversations are an informal and relaxed way of meeting. The conversation(s) will be held in an area that you find comfortable and relaxed such as a home environment, coffee shop, or office to promote a more organic experience. I will not be following an interview guide (a pre-determined set of questions). However, I will be coming to the conversation with the intention of finding answers to my primary search questions: What are factors of academic success for Onkwehonwe students (i.e. how successful Onkwehonwe students arrive at their success despite the many challenges that Onkwehonwe students face)? And, what are the participants’ ideas about effective school-retention strategies and interventions that can be and/or are being employed at the different levels of education (elementary, high school, and post secondary) to help increase Onkwehonwe school retention? Your experience as an academic advisor/counselor for Aboriginal students can provide valuable insight to these questions.

The conversations will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Direct quotations from the participants will be used in Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis document and any publications and presentations of the findings from this search. Due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous. In order to ensure to the highest degree possible that the quotations do not contain information that can give away your identity, a member check will be used in which you will receive your conversation transcript via email or regular mail and can make any necessary changes to it in order to ensure your anonymity. If you would like to be recognized and your identity to be named within the searcher's, Ashley Johnson, master's thesis, you will have the opportunity to waive your confidentiality. Meaning that you can decide whether if you would like to be named within the Ashley Johnson's Master's thesis document and any other publications and presentations related to the findings of this study.

Aboriginal Graduate Student Role

You are invited for participation in this search because of your personal success as an Aboriginal student. More specifically, you are a self-identified Aboriginal person enrolled in a graduate studies program or have, within the last 2 years, graduated from a graduate studies program.

There will be 1-2 sharing circles containing 4-8 Aboriginal graduate students in each. If you would like to participate in this search, you will be asked to attend at least one of the sharing circle dates. The sharing circles will take approximately 1.5-2 hours each. Sharing circles are a small group Indigenous format of dialogue, discussion and knowledge sharing. Sharing circles are somewhat similar to focus groups in that they are both a small group format to gain knowledge on a particular topic through group discourse. Everyone participating in a sharing circle sits in a circle and each person has a turn to speak while others listen. The chairs will form a circle so that each participant can be seen and heard clearly. In addition, the circular shape of the chairs symbolizes the sharing circle's circular process. The sharing circles are meant to be a relaxed, respectful and conversational in nature. Everyone will have a turn to speak while others listen. Knowledge will be shared regarding factors that lead to academic success for Aboriginal students and effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students.

The sharing circle(s) will be audio-recorded. And, the circle(s) will not be transcribed verbatim however, shared knowledge, key ideas and thoughts on academic success factors for Aboriginal students and on school retention strategies and interventions will be recorded and included in the searcher's thesis document and any publications and presentations of the findings from this search.

Due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous. In order to ensure to the highest degree possible that the quotations do not contain information that can give away your identity, a member check will be used in which you will receive any quotations made by yourself via email or regular mail and can make any necessary changes to it in order to ensure your anonymity. If you would like to be recognized and your identity to be named within the searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, master's thesis, you will have the opportunity to waive your

confidentiality. Meaning that you can decide whether if you would like to be named within the searcher's Master's thesis document and any other publications and presentations related to the findings of this study.

Haudenosaunee Elder Role

You are invited for participation in this search because of your expertise in Haudenosaunee traditions and ways of knowing. There will be only one elder asked to participate in this study. An elder as defined by this study as one who is recognized by their community for their wisdom and knowledge in traditional Longhouse beliefs and protocols. This study will be utilizing an Indigenous methodology and the searcher, Ashley Johnson, will be needing guidance in terms of traditional protocols and traditional ways of searching for knowledge.

If you wish to participate in this study, there may be multiple conversations that you will partake in throughout the length of my search, which will end around August 15, 2010. They conversations will vary in length, approximately 0.5-1 hour in length. The conversations will be held only at times that you indicate and will be based on your availability. They will be informal in nature and held in a place that you deem comfortable. I will not be following an interview guide or set list of questions. However, I will be coming to the conversations for guidance and help in term of cultural protocols and any questions that may arise from my search. The conversations may help me choose appropriate methods to uncover knowledge on the topic of academic success for Aboriginal students. These conversations will also provide guidance in terms of interpreting findings from the study and ways of interpreting and presenting these findings.

The elder conversations will not be recorded, but I will write about these conversations in a journal after they have been completed. Due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be assured. However, every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of those participants wishing to remain anonymous. In order to ensure to the highest degree possible that the quotations do not contain information that can give away your identity, a member check will be used in which you will receive any quotations made by yourself via email or regular mail and can make any necessary changes to it in order to ensure your anonymity. If you would like to be recognized and your identity to be named within the searcher's, Ashley Johnson's, master's thesis, you will have the opportunity to waive your confidentiality. Meaning that you can decide whether if you would like to be named within the searcher's Master's thesis document and any other publications and presentations related to the findings of this study.

All Participant Roles

This qualitative Indigenous search design will document, in the your own voice, what you consider to be core factors that aid Aboriginal students' in their persistence toward completing a post secondary education. It will also uncover what you believe to be effective school retention strategies for Aboriginal students. The results will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Native students and factors contributing to their academic success. In addition, this search will contribute to the small existing body of knowledge on Indigenous methodologies.

This study also has the potential to benefit you as you have an opportunity to reflect on your strengths, accomplishments, and experience. It also gives you the opportunity to share your voice and thoughts on issues regarding Aboriginal students in pursuing post-secondary education.

Consistent with the Indigenous value of reciprocity, a small token of gratitude will be given to participants. In addition, food will be provided at the sharing circles.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

Feedback regarding the study's findings will be sent to you via email or regular mail by August 31, 2010.

The results for this study may be used for presentations and may be published in journal articles and/or books. It is also possible that findings may be disseminated broadly in community and academic forms.

If you wish to participate in this study or have any questions or comments contact Ashley Johnson at john3900@wlu.ca or Dr. Terry Mitchell at (519) 884-0710 ext. 2052, or by email at tmitchel@wlu.ca.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Appendix E

Journal Notes

These are some excerpts from my personal reflection journal. They include personal experiences and reflections that occurred throughout my search journey. The purpose of sharing these notes is to model aspects of my Onkwehonwe'neha process, including my making meaning process. These notes are single-spaced to distinguish them as my voice.

March 2, 2010

Today I met with Emerance. We had a great meeting, and it was so nice to see how invested she is in her job and to her students. The conversation flowed very nicely. This was my first time using a conversation as a search method. At the beginning of the conversation, I took a quieter role, like an interviewer, because of habit. I was so worried about asking questions that I was not truly listening and reflecting on what she was saying. While we were talking, my instinct told me that this role was not in harmony with an Onkwehonwe'neha method of conversation. After this realization, I adjusted my role and became a co-participant. I listened and reflected on what Emerance was saying and I shared my views. I suddenly had an "Ah-Ha" moment. I had read about the Onkwehonwe'neha conversation method, but hadn't realized the greater and deeper breadth of knowledge that you gain than compared to an interview. We reflected and shared on each other's ideas, in a way, we "bounced" ideas off of each other. Many researchers would say that this process is not scientifically sound. However, in this conversation, I gained a greater depth of knowledge than I had in any interview that I've performed in my academic career.

I was able to build a relationship of trust and friendship with Emerance. Because of this relationship, our dialogue was relaxed and candid. She was able to get to know me and my motives behind this search. It interesting how you can read concepts, but it isn't until you put them into practical use that you truly understand them. For instance, I read about location. Onkwehonwe searchers are supposed to locate themselves, so that the participants know their motives and stake in the search. I read how this was an Onkwehonwe principle, etc. I understood these things, but I hadn't truly understood them until conversing with Emerance. All of a sudden she asked me, "Who's your mother? Who's grandma? Where do and did they live? Who are your other relatives on the reserve?" Well, I've answered these questions millions of times from other Onkwehonwe. This was not a novel experience; it's a common practice among Onkwehonwe. All of a sudden, I realized, *that's* location and *that's* why it's important. This is how we, Onkwehonwe, relate to one another.

In our conversation, Emerance talked about “planting the seeds” and how it’s important. Her point was that it’s important to provide Native students with knowledge and information about school and healthy lifestyles. They may not go into school right away or heed advice in the moment, but the seeds have been planted. The thoughts have been planted in their minds, and they may decide to use them in the future.

She also talked about how the youth are using the internet to find out about their traditions and ceremonies and are gaining confidence in their identities. She says that she’s seeing a rise in the number of youth practicing their traditions, and some are learning drumming songs off the internet. This increased practice of traditions is also something that I have noticed on my reserve as well. There are immersion schools where Native kids can learn their languages. Now, the kids know their languages and the parents don’t. This contrasts my grandma’s and mother’s generations where the kids weren’t taught their languages, and only the parents knew how to speak their traditional languages.

We also talked about many Native students do not make use of Aboriginal student services. It seems that many Native students won’t ask for help or seek out help or services because they feel they have the responsibility to dispel Native stereotypes and have to do “doubly as good”. I talked with my partner about this and he agreed that it was a reason that he and many of his friends struggled in university. There is this fear that if we ask for help we are confirming negative Native stereotypes. I thought about my own experiences in school. I would never ever ask questions during classes for fear of looking stupid. However, my curious nature didn’t stop me from asking questions when I didn’t understand something, I would just directly ask the teacher or professor after the class.

Another interesting point that Em brought up, is that when Native kids are brought down from up North to experience university life, we’re showing them possibilities, but at the same time we’re showing them things they can’t have or do- Pandora’s Box. She also mentioned this when she talked about a healthy eating program that they have for kids- they teach the kids how to make healthy meals, but when they go home their parents can’t afford these healthy options. But then, she states that we’re *planting the seeds*, so that one day when they’re able to afford these things they’ll remember that program where they learned such and such, and will make healthier choices. Or one day, they’ll think about that exposure that they’ve had to a post secondary campus and decide to go to school. Em says that she receives correspondence from students that participated in the UW directions program (exposure to post secondary) and they tell her how they decided to go back to school. So, it seems that planting the seeds is working.

May 14, 2010

Today I met with George. We met at a restaurant and had brunch together. He was very pleasant and quieter than Emerance. The dialogue was a little more difficult, because his responses and comments were very short. We ate and casually conversed for a while before I started audio-recording. I felt more anxious in this conversation than I had with Emerance. Perhaps it was due to the restaurant setting, or his gender, or his quiet nature, or maybe it was the tape recorder that was in our vision. Nonetheless, he shared valuable information on Onkwehonwe academic success. It was also interesting because the day prior, my partner and I were talking about Haudenosaunee history and that is George’s area of expertise. Without even asking him, George answered our question from the day prior. This experience reminded me

that there is a purpose in everything and that Sonkwaia'tison and our Spirit helpers are always with us.

May 17, 2010

I just finished the sharing circle. What a great experience! I met such awe-inspiring women with similar interests and goals. I had no idea what their discipline of study was prior to meeting them. It turned out that they were doing their theses on similar and/or related topics to mine. They had invaluable insight pertaining to Onkwehonwe academic success, because this is a topic that they had done much reflection on. And all of them were using Indigenous methodologies! What are the chances? I knew that I was being helped and it was part of my destiny to meet them. We shared about our own search journeys and the ways that we are applying our Onkwehonwe'neha. I learned so much from them.

A lot of struggles came up during the circle. I was floored by some of the ignorant and racist attitudes that they are encountering from their professors and programs. It was very angering and I felt their frustration. It was interesting though, because as we shared, the emotions in the room became lighter and happier. The participants indicated that these types of circles need to happen more often. I knew that the circle had served the purpose of healing.

May 23, 2010

I'm just thinking about some of my findings... Our youth if not well-versed in treaty rights (and other such rights as sovereign Onkwehonwe people) and history feel so much frustration when non-Natives confront them. It causes a lot of pain because as a Native person you feel like you should know these things about your people. They internalize these feelings, because they can't articulate them. It can be very painful and damaging to Native students when they are confronted with ignorant comments like, "get over it" etc... An observation that I have made through my undergrad thesis and this search journey, is that it seems as though Native students who know their history and treaty rights, and are more grounded in their Onkwehonwe traditions, tend to better in school. This supports the importance of cultural identity.

June 4, 2010

I'm working on writing out my findings and discussion. I met with Terry yesterday and she suggested that since one of my findings is resilience that I really write about that within my discussion. And, I think that's a really good idea especially since it's something that I've been thinking about a lot lately and it keeps coming up in the conversations and sharing circle.

Terry also indicated that I should really talk about the searcher-participant relationship within this Indigenous methodology and my process of decolonizing. I have struggled in un-learning what I had learned in university about research and research methods. I always had to remain critically conscious of my role in the search methods, meaning I had to make sure that I was the co-participant and not the "researcher". However, this process is very liberating. I had never really felt a connection between my identity as an Onkwehonwe person and these Western research methods. For the first time, my methods of inquiry are congruent with my

Onkwehonwe worldview. It is the writing that is proving to be the most difficult. I have never had problems writing, I have always done really well on my lab reports, research papers and other scholarly papers. Suddenly, I can't put my thoughts on paper. I believe that it's because I've never put my Onkwehonwe voice on paper. My Onkwehonwe voice had always taken a backseat to my academic voice. I feel like I can't write, so it's a little overwhelming.

July 8, 2010

Yesterday, I had a really bad day. I sat in front of the computer for 12 hours trying to write and was extremely unproductive. I realize that I was overwhelmed yesterday because I was no longer connected with my Haudenosaunee ways, and my spirit was disheartened and rundown. I can't believe that I sat in front of the computer and tried to force the process. After all I've learned about *being* in the process and understanding that everything has a time and purpose. I realized that I wasn't taking care of myself, spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. And in order to do continue on this search journey in a good way, I must attend all realms of well-being. So the smart thing to do was to step away and regain my spiritual connection and rest. I offered tobacco and have got some much needed rest. I woke up feeling rejuvenated and no longer upset- my load is light again. I have always been really laid back and am not easily stressed; however, I lost myself for a moment during this search journey. So, today I reconnected with myself and realized that everything will work out; I just need to trust the process.

A week ago I contacted Cora Weber-Pillwax a Native scholar and professor from "out west". I asked her some questions about Indigenous methodologies and she quickly responded and offered me resources. She suggested that I read a thesis by one of her students. I tried to obtain the thesis, but was unable to, so she passed my email along to her former student, Ghislaine Goudreau. Today, Ghislaine sent me her thesis and offered some guidance. It's amazing; when I could most benefit from their guidance, I received it. I don't even know them and they received me with warmth and were very gracious with their time and support. This experience is an Onkwehonwe'neha. Their warmth and support made me think about how in the sharing circle we discussed sharing and collectivity. Through sharing and collectivity we (OS) can overcome many challenges. Through Cora and Ghislaine's sharing of resources and wanting to work collectively with me (another Native scholar), I am able to move forward in my search journey. I am really touched by their support and am motivated to continue on in my search journey.

Throughout this journey, my Spirit Helpers have really been there for me and have brought me support and guidance when I need it the most, and at the times when it would make the most sense to me. This reminds me of what my Elder said to me in one of our conversations: "When the time is right, not necessarily when we think it is the right time, we will receive guidance and/or knowledge. Or an event will occur that we may not have fully understood if it had occurred at the wrong time." In the past couple of days, I was taught valuable lessons of not getting wrapped up in timelines and deadlines, not trying to force ideas/knowledge to come, taking care of myself in all ways, and maintaining a spiritual connection.

July 17, 2010

It is important as an Onkwehonwe searcher that I write with a "good mind" and that I am responsible in what I write. We have a responsibility to write in a "good way" and with a "good

mind”, particularly because research has caused so much harm to our people. I must be careful not to share sacred Haudenosaunee knowledge within my thesis and I must be careful of my wording to ensure that it cannot cause harm. I need to be very aware of what I’m writing in order to ensure that it is ethical and that I am respecting and honouring our ancestors and Onkwehonwe. This mindfulness definitely slows down the writing process, because it may mean that I re-write a sentence multiple times. Further, it means that I try to view a sentence from multiple viewpoints to ensure that no harm can come from it. I also read sentences to my partner and he tells me how it could possibly cause dissension. It may be a slow process, but it’s a necessary process within any Onkwehonwe (re)search.