ABSTRACT

The perceptions and experiences of eight Aboriginal youth who participate in Aboriginal youth organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia are explored in this thesis. I begin by examining the literature on Aboriginal youth within the larger context of mainstream society and the urban environment in order to highlight the role that current and historical structural policies have played in their lives. I then trace and critique the positive youth development movement, and examine the various wholistic models of Aboriginal education that have been applied to mainstream and Aboriginal community-based settings. My theoretical approach is a synthesis of Indigenous, critical and Indigenous feminist theories. An Indigenous wholistic framework that incorporates an intergenerational methodology is used to examine the two research questions: (1) How do urban Aboriginal youth articulate, conceptualize and view Indigenous knowledge? (2) What are Aboriginal youths’ experiences of wholistic education provided by urban Aboriginal organizations? Do these organizations meet their needs in terms of a wholistic understanding? From the Aboriginal youth’s perspective, how can urban Aboriginal organizations integrate a more wholistic approach? A sharing circle workshop and open ended interviews with youth and an Elder from the urban Aboriginal community were chosen for the methods. I have also interwoven key teachings that I have learned from Raven (the trickster) who has traveled with me throughout this journey and has significantly shaped this research story. This study confirms the findings in the literature which state that urban Aboriginal youth are finding new ways to explore their Indigeniety and cultural traditions. Four main themes emerged from the first research question: (1) Indigenous Knowledge is Important (2) Indigenous Knowledge is a Process (3) Indigenous Knowledge is Wholistic, and (4) Indigenous Knowledge is Expressed in Multiple Ways. These themes interconnect to form a wholistic representation of Indigenous knowledge. The second research question describes how the organizations are providing wholistic education to meet the youth’s needs and discusses how they can integrate a more wholistic approach. The youth also share their hopes and dreams, and visions for Aboriginal youth organizations by identifying future directions for program planning and development.
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my dear friend Usamah Ansari whose passion and engagement with the life-world around him was an inspiration to me. I would also like to extend my gratitude to his family for their thoughtful selection of Usamah’s poem for my thesis:

“Is chand se voh aj paye kaha chale
Kitno ne pa’o chuum kar poocha kaha chale

By today’s moon, where has his feet taken flight towards?
How many have kissed her feet and asked where to go now”

Thank you for sharing your wisdom with us all.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. A STORY OF HEALING, TRAUMA & TRANSFORMATION

“The eagle is flying around and all of a sudden, something happened. He got shot. He was wounded and he fell inside a ditch. A farmer saw the eagle and picked it up, but the eagle was fighting the farmer, still trying to get away. But being wounded and very defenseless, the farmer took the eagle to his farm and put him in the chicken coop with the chickens. So after a period of time, through feeding and through mimicking the actions of the chickens, the eagle looked around and figured, “Well geez, if that’s how they feed, I guess that’s how I’ll feed. If that’s how they sleep, that’s how I’ll have to sleep. And if they hang around like that, well I guess I’ll have to do the same thing.” So there was an identity change, and the eagle started becoming a chicken.

So this went on for a period of time, and one day along came a [Native Man]. He was walking down the road and asked the farmer for a drink of water. He looked over in the chicken coop and saw the eagle acting like a chicken. So he said, “What’s that eagle doing there in the chicken coop?”

The farmer said “Well, I found it in the ditch, mended its wing and put him in the there. He just needed to heal up. The eagle can fly out any time. Its wing is healed. There’s no cage over him. There’s a fence around to keep the chickens in, but the eagle doesn’t want to go. He just thinks he’s a chicken I guess.”

So the [Native man] told the farmer that the eagle was a proud bird and explained that it stood for courage, power, and might. Anyway, the [Native] guy said, “Can I take the eagle?”

The farmer said, “You can do what you want with it. Take him out of there. It’s just one less I have to feed.”

So the Native man took the eagle, but the eagle was very docile. He thought he was a chicken. He kept bobbing his head. He had lost his complete identity.

The [Native man] started talking to the eagle and telling him what the eagle represents. He said, “You shouldn’t be there. You should be flying high in the sky, people looking up at you and seeing you spread your wings and giving courage.” The eagle didn’t have a clue about what he was hearing.

So the [Native man] took the bird to the mountain and said, “I’m going to let you go. I’m going to drop you off here where you can fly and soar. So the [Native man] let the eagle go and the eagle just flopped back down to earth just like a chicken. He just stayed on the ground. And the [Native man] went down and picked him up, brought him back up again and he explained what he represented and everything else about it. He explained that the eagle was not a chicken and that he’s different from anybody else. He said “you have to
know who you are and what you stand for." And he threw him off the mountain, and the same thing happened again. The Native man went down and picked him up again and took him back up. He explained again and again about it. The eagle started to flex his wings. His keen eye sight started to return, and the strength in him started to come back. So he let the eagle go again, and this time the eagle soared with the wind before he fell back down. He was hopping on the ground this time. He was shaking his wings and looking around. Again, the [Native man] explained who he was and what he represented. When he threw the eagle off this time, the eagle flew and soared and everything came back to him, who he was and that he wasn’t a chicken. He wasn’t like anybody else, he was completely different. He gained everything he’d lost because where he was placed and put (James Waldrum, 1997).”

The story noted above was shared with me by my friend, Preston Guno, after we discussed research ideas for my thesis¹. This story spoke to me about the history of Aboriginal education in Canada to present day. Many of the historical educational policies in Canada have reflected grossly inadequate funding; structural contradictions; tacit and explicit agendas of genocide; physical and sexual abuse; assimilation; broken promises; and pervasive Euro-centrism (Battiste, 2000; Lawrence, 2005; Little Bear, 2000; Marker, 2008; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The totality of these policies and their consequences represent the Canadian governments’ succinct efforts to erase, silence, and assimilate Indigenous peoples through mechanisms of institutionalized racism.

The eagle in the story can be understood to represent the process by which Aboriginal peoples were wounded from the effects of colonization. The complacent farmer, armed with ‘good intentions’ and hoping to fix the eagle’s problem, represents the countless generations of government officials, overzealous missionaries, and ordinary citizens who created and facilitated debilitating educational policies. The chickens in the

¹ He later forwarded me the original version of the story Waldrum, J.B. The Way of the Pipe: Aboriginal Spirituality and the Symbolic Healing in Canadian Prisons. Broadview Press.
coop represent dominant society’s values, beliefs and education system (past and present). The eagle’s inability to fly out of its coop after its wing has been mended invokes the painful legacy of residential schools which continues to have damaging intergenerational effects on many Aboriginal people.

Through the eagle’s identity crisis, the story illustrates how historical educational policies and practices have also functioned to homogenize the educational needs, values and goals of First Nations youth in Canada (Corbiere, 2000, Haig-Brown, 1988; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003; Sterling, 1992). This is a particularly important issue because homogenization is intrinsic to the fragmentation, dehumanization and objectification of Indigenous peoples lives (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 29).

However, the story is not over. The Aboriginal man who comes along and finds the eagle in its sad state kindly begins teaching it that it is not a chicken and does not belong in the chicken coop. He says “You shouldn’t be there. You should be flying high in the sky, so people looking up at you see you spread your wings, giving them courage.” This vision can be understood to represent the efforts made by Aboriginal people across Canada who continue to assert the need for ‘First Nations control of First Nations Education’ (Assembly of First Nations, 2008). On another dimension his care and loving actions demonstrate Aboriginal educators’ belief that all Aboriginal youth can and will succeed through a commitment to teaching and learning. In order for this success to occur, the story teaches us that we must reclaim our traditional teachings and values so we can heal and be whole once more.
The eagle’s transformation signifies the reclamation of these traditional teachings and values by Aboriginal educators, parents, communities and Nations. Once the eagle is encouraged and challenged to be the best s/he can be, s/he is transformed in the same way that Aboriginal students are when they are placed in educational environments which honour their culture, language and worldviews.

As the story ends, we are brought back to the beginning, reminding us of the circular structure that is embedded in Aboriginal oral traditions and texts. This circular structure symbolizes wholeness and teaches us how Aboriginal communities can overcome the pain and trauma of our past to once again be harmonious and balanced. My community-based research invokes this concept by articulating Aboriginal youths’ perspective of wholistic education and contributes to the body of work which aims to advance an Indigenous pedagogy.

1.2. PURPOSE OF STUDY

As Aboriginal peoples move away from our painful history of failed education policies, positive new discourses about the value of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing continue to gain momentum in Aboriginal community settings (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, 1997; Battiste, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Corbiere, 2000; Gamlin, 2002; Gamlin, 2003; Grande, 2004; Kuokkanen, 2007; Smith, 1997; Smith 2003: Smith, 2008). To advance these discourses, this thesis attempts to gain insight into the perceptions and experiences of eight Aboriginal youth who are participating in Aboriginal community-based educational programs in Vancouver, British Columbia.
The community-based research I conduct among urban Aboriginal youth focuses on my participants’ experiences and perceptions of wholistic community-based education. It considers Aboriginal youth to be catalysts of change, engages Indigenous ways of knowing and draws upon the work of Indigenous scholars (Kim Anderson, 2004; Jo-ann Archibald, 2007; Marie Battiste, 2000; Gaile Cannella & Kathryn Manuelito, 2008; Gregory Cajete, 2000; Sandy Grande, 2005; Michael Marker, 2008; Charles Menzies, 2003; Graham Hingangaroa Smith, 2003; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). The insights generated regarding the values and objectives of learning reflect the aspirations, challenges and cultural dispositions of urban Aboriginal youth. As such, it may contribute to the development of a wholistic educational framework for Aboriginal youth which pursues the goal of transformative praxis by honouring Indigenous culture within a positive, empowering and generative contemporary urban context. Further, it may also advance the value of Indigenous research; provide new insight about Aboriginal youth organizations; perpetuate Aboriginal youths’ interest to participate in community based programming; and enhance Aboriginal youth’s understanding of Indigenous knowledge and wholism.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research investigates: (1) How do urban Aboriginal youth articulate, conceptualize and view Indigenous knowledge? (2) What are Aboriginal youths’ experiences of wholistic education provided by urban Aboriginal organizations? Do these organizations meet their needs in terms of a wholistic understanding? From the
Aboriginal youth’s perspective, how can urban Aboriginal organizations integrate a more wholistic approach?

I explore urban Aboriginal youth’s perceptions and experiences of wholistic education through the use of Indigenous research methods and approaches which acknowledge the impact that colonialism has had on their contemporary reality. The voices of Aboriginal youth in Vancouver are heard and they redefine the value and objectives of learning in their own terms and provide integral insights into the development of a wholistic community based model for educating Aboriginal youth.

1.4. RESEARCHER’S LOCATION

On my mother’s side of the family, I am Nisga’a from the Nass Valley of Northwestern British Columbia. We are part of the McKay family, from the Ni’isjoohl House and belong to the Ganada (Frog) Clan. On my father’s side, I am French and German.

I am proud and honoured to be of Aboriginal ancestry. I feel that this ancestry has not only influenced my career, but also my scholarly endeavors and political involvement. More specifically, my goal in pursuing graduate studies has been to conduct community-based research so I may assist in the positive transformation of Aboriginal communities in British Columbia. I believe that Aboriginal people have a common vision of overcoming our history of colonization in order to rebuild healthy and vibrant communities so that future generations may thrive and prosper. My commitment to this larger vision includes conducting meaningful research and creating educational initiatives which aim to positively transform the lives of Aboriginal youth.
My family history shapes how I envision my research, choose methods and construct a theoretical inquiry. The duality of my early experiences has taught me to seek multiple perspectives so that I may gain the most comprehensive and practical view of a subject and has motivated me to employ a wholistic framework premised on Indigenous methods and theories while weaving (some) concepts and methods from critical and Indigenous feminist theories. Realizing that any research I do inherently implicates me as researcher who is contributing to the discourse about First Nations people, I feel the need to negotiate and resist dominant discourses and their misconstructions of Indigenous people and their lived experience. Therein, I seek to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and the perspectives articulated by Indigenous scholars into my research so that I may honour the historical traditions and perspectives of my ancestors as I seek solutions to the contemporary dilemmas which confront the communities to which I belong (Archibald, 2008; Archibald, 1997; Battiste, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Corbiere, 2000; Gamlin, 2002; Gamlin, 2003; Grande, 2004; Kuokkanen, 2007; Smith, 1997; Smith 2003).

Over the past six years, my involvement with the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA), an East Vancouver youth organization, has provided many opportunities for personal and professional development that have motivated me to research Aboriginal youth and community- based education. Working directly with all levels of government to implement programming priorities for “at-risk” youth has given me a critical perspective of social and educational policies that have been constructed by a discourse of individual deficit and blame, rather than a more positive framework of youth development and inclusion (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). As I began to problematize
these policies I learned how to resist, rename and reframe the inherently pathologizing discourse so that I could help UNYA to deliver more effective programming which incorporated wholistic Indigenous philosophies and principles of positive child and youth development (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990).

Given that 5000 Aboriginal youth per year access UNYA, their experiences have substantially enriched my understanding of the potentialities and challenges of community-based education (Urban Native Youth Association, 2006). Although a high percentage of the youth I worked with were not in school, I saw them learning and excelling in a range of cultural, physical, leadership, educational and social activities. I learned that the programs and services that are offered to youth must reflect their own aspirations and cultural dispositions in order to be effective. However, in conducting preliminary research for this thesis it has become evident that there are very few studies which have focused on community-based education in the Vancouver Aboriginal community and an even smaller amount of studies have incorporated Aboriginal youth’s voices on this matter. These observations and experiences have informed my current research project.

1.5. CONTEXT

Many of the studies, policy documents, commissions and reports which have been published about Aboriginal education state that some progress has been made in some areas. Yet, efforts to improve Aboriginal education remain limited by ongoing obstacles and challenges (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2007; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). These challenges are particularly significant for urban
Aboriginal youth in Vancouver, who have a graduation success rate of 39 percent (as compared to 71 percent for non-Aboriginal students) and are the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2005); there are 40,310 Aboriginal people living Vancouver and 60% of this population is under 25 year old (Statistics Canada, 2006). The research which has been conducted on urban Aboriginal education projects are primarily focused on the mainstream education system and do not investigate the important role that Aboriginal youth organizations play in meeting the social, emotional, physical and cultural needs of Aboriginal youth. These organizations have assumed an important role in the overall education of Indigenous youth, aiming to compensate for the lack of wholistic education provided by schools (Centre for Native Policy and Research, 2006). In 2006, the Urban Native Youth Association provided services to 5,000 Aboriginal youth, many of whom were not in school (Urban Native Youth Association, 2006). The high level of youth participation indicates that these organizations provide services and an environment that Aboriginal youth value and which shows that they are needed, and reinforces the need for wholistic approaches.

The increasing urbanization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada has caused the population of urban Aboriginal peoples to increase and in 2008 they reached their highest level, 54% of all Canadian Aboriginal peoples; there is no indication that this will decrease in coming years (Statistics Canada 2008, Horizons, 2008). As a result, organizations and services in the Vancouver urban Aboriginal community are being utilized by an unprecedented number of Aboriginal youth and their families. However, funding levels have not increased to meet this growing demand. The National Association
of Friendship Centres (2008) states “the federal government’s refusal to adequately address the needs and opportunities of a growing urban population has placed inordinate strains on Aboriginal peoples, their communities, and institutions” (4).

At the same time, Aboriginal and community organizations are administering educational programs and services that are of significant value to Aboriginal youth because they provide resources that are culturally appropriate, offer a wide range of wholistic programming (i.e., sports and recreation services, support services, and spiritual guidance) and are not limited to an institutionalized Euro-centric educational curriculum, Organizations such as the Urban Native Youth Association, The Knowledgeable Youth Association (K.A.Y.A.) in East Vancouver provide a comprehensive array of innovative programming which incorporates traditional cultural components in order to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal youth. Such programming includes: advocacy, education programs, sports and recreation programs, arts and cultures programs, youth summer programs and residential recovery homes. The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, the Broadway Youth Resource Association, the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre and the Vancouver Native Housing also offer Aboriginal youth-specific programs. As a result, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the Native Centre for Policy and Research (2005) have identified a need for research regarding the strengths and weaknesses of urban Aboriginal youth organizations and organizations which represent and serve Aboriginal youth. However, few studies have responded to this need or have included urban Aboriginal youth’s attitudes and perceptions of formal or community-based education (Blair, 2001: Gilchrist, 1995: Riecken, Tanaka & Scott, 2006: Ward & Bouvier, 2001). It is imperative to include
Aboriginal youth’s voice in research that will directly impact them if such research aims to facilitate the goal of transformative praxis in community-based education. In other words, Aboriginal youth must be seen as catalysts of change in their communities.

Laurent Jerome (2007), a researcher from Interuniversity Centre for Aboriginal Studies and Research, affirms this position:

> many young people are burying an image that continues to be rooted firmly in local and national social representations: that of destruction a means of expression. By joining band councils, creating their own institutions (youth councils), becoming involved in national associations, Aboriginal youth are claiming increased responsibilities and promoting initiative [and youth voice] as a new model of social recognition (Government of Canada, 23).

Within the province of British Columbia, there is a growing activism amongst Aboriginal youth who are personally and collectively providing strategies on how to improve legislation, policy, initiatives, programs and services for Aboriginal youth (KAYA, 2009). For example, the Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective (UAYC) recently hosted a forum this spring and produced a document titled “Our Culture, Language, and Education: A United Aboriginal Youth Collective Action Plan” (2009). The youth have provided direction to local, regional, provincial governments and Aboriginal organizations in their action plan by highlighting specific gaps in the areas of culture and education that are to be addressed. To this end, many of the youth within the UAYC have been very proactive, and have taken a great deal of personal responsibility and initiative to assist governments and Aboriginal organizations to successfully implement the action items outlined in their report.

The activism of (some) Aboriginal youth is not limited to the political realm. Many Aboriginal youth within the city of Vancouver are also finding new ways to connect with their Indigeniety and explore their cultural traditions through variety of mediums: graffiti,
hip hop, beat boxes, video, digital media, live mix video, theatre, spoken word, art installation (Reece, 2009; Williard, 2009). According to Glenn Alteen, the Producer of the website BeatNation.org (2009) “there is a strong sense of activism present in the [youth’s] work.” Skeena Reece and Tania Willard who are curators for Beat Nation.org both note the ways that hip hop has served as a form of activism and is a driving force to allow youth to express themselves and engage in their culture(s) in new ways. They proclaim hip hop to be an important vehicle that allows Aboriginal youth to bring important social and political issues to light.

Given that many urban Aboriginal youth are involved in efforts to effect positive changes in their communities, research needs to include them, acknowledge their efforts, and promote positive conceptions of them in Canadian society at large. Such participation will have a significant impact on the research participants themselves as well as other urban and reserve-based Aboriginal youth because it can encourage them to employ their collective voices in pursuit of political, social, educational and social changes in their own communities. Finally, community-based research can play a vital role in pursuing the appropriate provision of services, programs and funding for urban Aboriginal peoples.

1.6. OUTLINE OF THESIS

Chapter 1 describes the purpose of this study as well as the context in which it emerged. I also briefly introduce myself and highlight the personal experiences which have shaped my process.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature reviewed for this study. It begins by examining Aboriginal youth within the larger context of mainstream society and the
urban environment in order to highlight the role that current and historical structural policies have played in their lives. It then traces and critiques positive youth development by dividing the literature into four inter-related themes: (1) a developmental stage; (2) a philosophical approach; (3) practices in the field of youth work; (4) and policy. Finally, it examines wholistic models of education that have been applied to mainstream and community-based settings.

Chapter 3 begins by reviewing the literature on Indigenous knowledge and its interconnections with Indigenous theory. I then bridge Indigenous theories and methods with Western research methodologies. Finally, I articulate and briefly define the theoretical approaches that I utilized for this study—Indigenous, critical and Indigenist feminist theory—and explain how they inform my research.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach and research process employed for this project. It references the literature in providing a framework for understanding an Indigenous research methodology and a qualitative wholistic framework. It also introduces an unforgettable friend and fellow sojourner who traveled with me through my research process: “Raven.” Further, this chapter also discusses my data analysis process as well as the re-presentation of the research.

Chapter 5 provides a foundation for understanding the data that will be presented in chapters six and seven. It provides a partial analysis of the first research question: “How do urban Aboriginal youth articulate, conceptualize and view Indigenous knowledge.” The chapter also introduces participants and reports on the objectives and outcomes of the sharing circle workshop.
Chapter 6 describes how the youth articulated, conceptualized, and expressed Indigenous knowledge and discusses the four main themes that emerged in my analysis of this data: (1) Indigenous Knowledge is Important (2) Indigenous Knowledge is a Process (3) Indigenous Knowledge is Wholistic, and (4) Indigenous Knowledge is Expressed in Multiple Ways.

Chapter 7 examines the wholistic education that is provided by urban Aboriginal youth organizations from the perspective of the youth interviewed in this study and addresses the second research question: “What are Aboriginal youth’s experiences of wholistic education provided by urban Aboriginal organizations? Do these organizations meet their needs in terms of a wholistic understanding? From the Aboriginal youth’s perspective, how can Aboriginal organizations integrate a more wholistic approach? The chapter concludes with the youth’s ideas about the future directions that Aboriginal youth organizations could take in terms of program planning and development.

Chapter 8 looks at the findings through a broader lens in that I attempt to take a step back and look at the bigger picture. This chapter then summarizes and concludes the thesis. Lastly, the limitations, and benefits of the study, and implications for future research, are considered and also noted.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The story at the beginning of this proposal illustrated how historical educational, political and social policies continue to have lasting impacts on Aboriginal communities throughout Canada. It is necessary to place Aboriginal youth in the larger context of mainstream society and the urban environment by highlighting the role of current and historical structural impacts which continue to affect them. In so doing, this literature review will describe how historical and contemporary policies have functioned to produce pathological discourses which have been harmful to the lives of Aboriginal children and youth. Secondly, it will trace the development of a more positive construction of child and youth development while asserting the need to integrate this perspective with a structural/institutional analysis to be truly effective. Finally, it will examine wholistic models of education that have been applied to mainstream educational environments while emphasizing the need for research on Aboriginal youth’s stories and experiences of wholistic education in urban Aboriginal community organizations.

2.2. THE ‘INDIAN PROBLEM’ TO ‘RISKY REALITIES’

Canada, as a country, has been a very busy beaver in its determined efforts to take away Indigenous rights and freedoms…by its past and present laws and policies (Ovide Mercredi, 2000, p. 4).

A host of historical and contemporary processes have caused the Aboriginal population in Canada to steadily increase in urban areas over the last forty years. These Aboriginal people are a diverse group who inhabit cities for a variety of social and
economic reasons, including the need for education, employment, housing and healthcare (The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). There are also many status and non-status Aboriginal and Metis who reside in the city because they have not been connected to their reserve or home communities for several generations as result of the federal government’s divisive Indian Act policy – a policy which has aimed to assimilate them through mechanisms of institutionalized racism which encouraged urbanization (Bonita Lawrence, 2007). Still others may be the descendents of the original Native habitants of the area and have ancestors who resided there for thousands of years. According to Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane (2005) others may simply be discontents who “challenge the imposed foreign borders between on reserve/off reserve, urban and rural to traverse the entire hemispheric space of what they call ‘Turtle Island’ for a myriad of reasons” (16).

Despite the varying circumstances which characterize urban Aboriginal people’s lives, many scholars have noted how historical, structural and institutional inequalities which stem from Canada’s colonial and imperialist policy have contributed to urban Aboriginal people’s contemporary reality (Battiste, 2000; Lawrence, 2005; Mercredi, 2000; James (Sakej) Young Blood Henderson, 2000; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 2001). The imposition of residential schools, the loss of lands and languages, reduced or prohibited access to resources, prohibitions to traditional learning and ceremonies, the sixties scoop, the continued systemic apprehension of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginal child welfare agencies, and high incarceration rates into the criminal justice system have attributed to the poverty, marginalization, racism, and culturally inappropriate curriculums experienced by Aboriginal people in the past and present day
(Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples, 2006). Many of these historical and contemporary policies have and continue to be firmly rooted in deficit thinking and pathologizing discourses and practices. Pathologizing discourses have a tendency to “Other” First Nations people and regard them as being racially and culturally inferior to Western standards. These discourses are then translated into hegemonic practices which are articulated through policies and leads to further oppression due to the structural constraints placed on Aboriginal youth’s collective self development (Young, 1990).

Wotherspoon, & Schissel (2001) and Murray (2004), who discussed at-risk youth, vulnerable populations, and the labeling of Aboriginal youth, assert that these discourses continue to adversely impact the lives of First Nations’ youth today. They critically investigate the discourses and practices of children and youth “at risk” as they are enacted in academic, social and policy arenas. These authors trace the development of the term as it has been defined by the education system and other agencies in Canada. They note that it has been used by the opposite ends of the political spectrum, which has resulted in competing and contradictory interpretive policy frameworks. The authors uncover the many variations that exist within the conception of risk and find there is a central tendency in most educational policies and interventions to adopt a medical or pathological perspective (p. 322-325). This perspective is shown to focus negatively on the deficits of the learner and their families as the central problem responsible for school failure rather than looking at the structural and institutional inequalities that construct this situation. The definition and the measurement of “at risk” varies considerably from one context to another, although in most cases it is a broad term which has mixed implications for the children and youth it affects, namely those who are of Aboriginal
ancestry and minority groups (p. 328). The authors therefore contrast a social control model with a social justice model in order to examine the challenges and possibilities of each in terms of their response to children and at-risk youth (pp. 328-335). Therein, they call for a broader critical framework that encompasses a social justice orientation in meeting the needs of learners and their communities.

Similarly, Murray (2004) examines the discourse regarding vulnerable populations in the federal government’s policy from the 1980’s to the present day. The author argues that it has attempted to deal with ‘risky people’ by augmenting neoliberal initiatives (p. 51). She shows how vulnerable populations and ‘at-risk’ people are depicted in social and educational policies which assess them according to what is construed as the ‘norms’ of education, health, development, security, safety and social inclusion (p. 57). Murray concurs with Wotherspoon & Schissel’s conclusion that pathological discourses have a tendency to individualize social problems rather than looking at them as being a product of broader social, educational, economic and political structures. However, unlike Wotherspoon and Schissel, she explicitly attributes attempts to contain individuals who are exposed to multiple risk factors to neoliberalism. This is a useful distinction because neoliberal policies and beliefs articulate the expectations that individuals be self-governing, responsible and autonomous in meeting their needs. This ideology runs counter to First Nations’ epistemologies, in which the social organization of the community consists of integral interdependencies which support an individual’s physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing (Nee-Benham & Cooper, 2000). Focusing on neoliberalism helps to determine the political motivations that produce restricted identities based on victimization and powerlessness. It also explains why it has
been difficult for mainstream educational institutions to offer wholistic education to Aboriginal youth (Murray, 2004, p. 58). Neoliberal discourse therefore helps to maintain an elite power bloc of public and private-sector alliances through the use of a shared language which elevates market principles into all realms of social, political, education and economic life (Carlson, 1995; Bacchi, 2000). This discourse in many instances can further entrench the ‘intergenerational foot print’ of colonization in Aboriginal people’s lives (Mark Trotten, 2007).

The Government of Canada has recently set out on a new path to ‘greater economic prosperity’, but First Nations peoples continue to be excluded from this path. The language of neoliberal political discourse, which includes the terms ‘at-risk’, ‘vulnerable populations’– reflects the government’s most recent construction of dealing with the same old ‘Indian problems’ in the same old way (Dyck, 1991). According to Baachi (2000), the results of this discourse indicate that the real “problems are rarely solved, except in the sense that they are occasionally purged from common discourse or discussed in changed legal, social or political terms as though they were different problems” (48). There is clearly a need to deconstruct neoliberal discourse and identify the motivations and assumptions which are embedded within it in order to reformulate problems and solutions within a context that empowers, rather than silences, and creates space, rather than denies it.

A critique of the neo-liberalist lens elucidates important connections between the educational, social and political policies that continue to shape the lives of Aboriginal children and youth even if the language used to describe them has changed. These connections are important because the pervasive mind-set they articulate continues to
have detrimental effects on the wellbeing of Indigenous youth (Sheilds et al, 2005) and their families. For example, paternalistic policy prescriptions of normalcy through the misidentification of ‘at-risk’ youth only serves to undermine the objectives of those programs which aim to advance Aboriginal youth’s interests. Unless challenged by critical and transformative Indigenous research, the pathologies that underlie neoliberally-oriented policies will remain symptomatic of other policies that pertain to Aboriginal youth, and will do little for their development into healthy adults. This research project disrupts these ‘at-risk’ discourses so a more positive lens can be employed to frame discussions.

2.3. CHILD & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Many academics, policy makers, and community organizations have voiced the need for government and educational policies to shift from a deficit-orientation in order to construct a more positive approach to child and youth well-being (Brendtro and colleagues, 1990; Mahoney & Lafferty, 2003; McCreary Centre 2002; McCreary Centre 2005). The emergence of new and positive approaches to child and youth development has provided an alternative to the pathological discourses which characterize the deficit orientation. However, these approaches are not without their challenges (Lesko, 2001). In this section I will define and then critique the positive youth development framework. Lastly, this body of work will be synthesized to demonstrate the need for educators and practitioners who serve the urban Aboriginal population to incorporate a wholistic understanding of child and adolescent development as well as a systemic analysis that does not focus entirely on individual problems or deficits.
Since the 1990’s the *positive youth development* movement in Canada and the United States has been advanced by health promotion professionals, educators, academics and policy makers who seek alternatives to youth policies and practices which are largely based on problem reduction (Jaffe, 1997; Hamilton and Hamilton: 2004; Mahoney & Lafferty: 2003;). *Positive youth development* is a broad term which can be confusing because it is used in many different ways to describe a number of related items. Benson and Pitman (2001) state that *positive youth development* is a wide ranging term that “simultaneously denote[s] a call to action, a mobilization of people and places, a body of knowledge, a set of organizations, a philosophy, and a life stage” (3). As a result of the term’s comprehensiveness, I have divided my review of the literature on positive youth development into four main interrelated themes: (1) a developmental stage; (2) a philosophical approach; (3) practice in the field of youth work; (4) and policy.

Developmental psychology understands youth development in its most basic sense, as a ‘natural’ process that is attuned to the basic needs and stages of an adolescent’s development (Benson & Pitman, 2001; Dean, Harpe, Loiselle & Mallet, 2008; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). As a philosophy it encompasses a set of principles which emphasize the need for individuals, organizations and institutions to nurture the growth capacity of young people while they go through the ‘natural’ stages of life, especially at the community level. Hamilton and Hamilton (2004) state that the fundamental principles of a *positive youth development* approach can be narrowed down to the “universality (or inclusiveness of all youth) and positive orientation on building strengths” (4). The authors intentionally define positive youth development in a broad manner in order to avoid confusion and disagreement amongst scholars, practitioners and
educators. Mahoney & Lafferty (2003) expand their approach and propose that guidance; support, opportunities and involvement are important principles that facilitate more positive outcomes for young people than interventions aimed at resolving problems.

Finally, one of the best known (and most extensive) frameworks for this philosophical approach has been developed by the Search Institute, which has identified 40 assets (internal and external) that constitute a foundation for healthy development that applies to all young people. Many schools and communities organizations in Canada and the US have drawn upon the Search institute’s asset model to inform program planning in both countries (Search Institute, 2009). Evidence of the models’ apparent ‘success’ has been noted in the research the institute has published (Benson & Scale, 2004; Henderson, Thurber, Scanlin, & Bialeschki, 2007; Roehlkepartain, 2007; Sesma & Roehlkepartain, 2003).

A significant portion of the literature describes a range of positive youth development practices in schools, community centers, and youth organizations (Deschenes, McDonald, McLaughlin, 2004; Ream & Witt, 2004; Zeigler, 2004). Positive youth development in this sense refers to the application of the pertinent principles to a planned set of practices that foster a youth’s development. For example, researchers and practitioners in schools have applied the principles to after school programs and structured activities (Vandell & Pierce, 2005; Fraser and Cote, 2005).

Other findings in the literature highlight the different features of positive youth development in programs, organizations and community settings (Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Moller, 2008, Yoshikawa & Shin, 2008; Yates & Youniss, 1999). Yoshikawa and Shin’s work is the most useful in the context of this study because it focuses on strategies
which enhance the positive outcomes of youth programs. They include shifting from problem-focused models to youth empowerment models, making community programs more comprehensive, and integrating community programs with other social institutions. However, the researchers pay little attention to the powerful social forces and structural conditions that impact community settings and therefore fail to provide a critical perspective, which is essential when considering the needs of Aboriginal youth.

Positive youth development has also gained prominence as a political movement which has unified a wide range of discussions and actions in aiming to shape policy as well as practice (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004; Benson & Pitmann, 2001). However, as Jaffe (1997) notes, the full-scale adoption of a framework based on positive youth development is impeded by significant institutional challenges. Policy makers involved in government youth programming have adopted the model to a certain degree, but there is an increasing reliance on ‘evidence based approaches’ which emphasize risk-orientated pathologies rather than positive constructions of youth (Clegg, 2005). Jaffe states that positive youth development “has made the greatest inroads with youth orientated non profits. It has made the least progress in influencing schools, employers and employment intermediaries, and justice institutions” (11).

The policy challenges which impact youth organizations’ ability to facilitate positive youth development are illuminated by the McCreary Centre’s research (2002). The centre advocates a policy framework for youth health in BC that incorporates all categories of youth as well as sub-groups with special needs (e.g. Aboriginal youth and other immigrant youth) in order to counteract the tendency to favour fragmented policy initiatives (p. 12). It asserts that all youth engage in some element of ‘risk-taking’
behaviors. Consequently, it finds that it is more cost effective to deliver universal prevention programs to single-risk youth and focus on early recognition/ intervention programs for the small fraction of the total youth population who face multiple risks. Such youth-friendly frameworks must consider that “policies that emphasize a single approach to youth health are less likely to demonstrate sustained effectiveness” (p. 25) and incorporate multiple strategies to effect change.

While the McCreary Centre offers important insights and possible solutions to fragmented policy approaches to youth, their promotion of a youth-positive policy causes me to question why it has not created new terminology to eradicate pathological categories of ‘risk’ and why it premises ‘positive outcomes’ on individual behaviors and attitudes. I therefore examined later research conducted by the McCreary Centre to see if it had acted on its own recommendations and taken a more positive approach to Aboriginal youth.

In 2005, the McCreary Centre released “Raven’s Children 2: Aboriginal Youth Health in B.C.,” the largest health survey ever conducted on Aboriginal youth in B.C. Its guiding principles promote a positive outlook for Aboriginal youth as they progress into adulthood while realistically identifying how to improve their health and wellbeing (p.1-46). The feedback and comments provided by an Aboriginal youth facilitator who participated in the survey reinforces the need for Aboriginal youth to develop their own concepts of positive youth development. Brittany Dixon, who participated in the administration of the survey, states “that youth’s comments speak to the need to deemphasize the deficit approach to researching Aboriginal youth. I felt it was inspiring for this group of youth to learn about the positive statistics we have found” (p. 6).
While the McCreary Centre (2005) strives to promote more positive youth friendly language in presenting the findings of this survey than it does in its earlier work, risk factors are still considered, although they are combined with protective factors. Protective factors are defined as those factors which healthy youth development requires and include: “caring relationships with adults, positive expectations for growth, and opportunities to develop competencies in school and community life” (p. 15). It should be noted that the surveys were only conducted with Aboriginal youth who were currently attending school. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the experiences and opinions of out-of-school youth are represented or are equivalent to that of in-school youth. Other health surveys conducted by the McCreary Centre (2008) on street youth and in custody youth demonstrates that youth have less ‘protective factors’ and higher rates of ‘risk’ than in-school Aboriginal students.

The work of Brendtro and colleagues (1990) also adds an Indigenous dimension to the definition of child and youth development. The authors offer an interdisciplinary discussion aimed to empower ‘at-risk’ youth in community and educational environments. They examine the alienation of children in contemporary society as seen through the lens of Native American philosophy, which asserts that belonging, mastery, independence and generosity are values critical to the creation of a wholistic youth culture in education and youth programs (p. 35). Therein, the authors state “research on effective schools has shown that a key characteristic of programs that foster good discipline is the creation of a ‘total school environment’ rather than adopting isolated practices to counter behavioral problems” (p. 31). It is important to acknowledge that the success of a total school environment represents one strategy to support youth in
reclaiming their cultural identity at the same time, it is necessary to focus on how community organizations meet the wholistic needs of Native youth in terms that do not essentialize Aboriginal cultures. The problems inherent in the use of the term “at risk” must be recognized, although the book was written before more positive conceptions of youth development emerged and it took a liberal humanist perspective.

Brendtro et al. (1990); Benson & Scale (2004); Deschenes, McDonald, McLaughlin (2004); Eccles and Gootman, (2002); Fraser and Cote, (2005); Hamilton and Hamilton: (2004); Henderson, Thurber, Scanlin, & Bialeschki, (2007); Jaffe, (1997); Mahoney & Lafferty, (2003); Moller, (2008); Ream & Witt, (2004); Roehlkepartain, (2007); Scanlin, & Bialeschki, (2007); Search Institute, (2009); Sesma & Roehlkepartain, (2003); Vandell & Pierce, (2005); Yates & Youniss, (1999); Yoshikawa & Shin, (2008); Zeigler, (2004) all recommend that academic, governmental, educational and community bodies adopt positive concepts of youth development which offer an alternative to the deficit approach. However, these positive concepts should be regarded with a measure of caution because each of these authors fails to acknowledge how political and education systems create structural and institutional challenges which impede youth’s development. This issue is highlighted by Nancy Lesko (2001), who draws attention to the way in which historical and contemporary social and political factors produce the ‘natural adolescent’ within positive youth development frameworks.

Lesko (2001) questions the assumptions or “confident characterizations” implicit in the positive youth development approach and commonly accepted ideas about youth. Therein, she examines how adolescence has been constructed historically and continues to be shaped and powerfully defined by modern scientific discourses (particularly by
those in the field of developmental psychology). These assumptions include the notion that youth: “come of age”; have “raging hormones”; are “peer orientated”; and develop in line with a natural aging process (2-5). The way that she traces the development of adolescence throughout history to expose how Western notions of progress and biological determinism continue to affect current thinking about youth is particularly salient. She infers that our way of viewing adolescents has been influenced by imperialism, masculinity and racial dynamics. However, this influence is obscured by the positive youth development framework because it construes adolescent development to be a natural biological process which is not affected by social and cultural influences. Nonetheless, whiteness, masculinity and domination continue to inform concepts and frameworks of youth development. This critique is highly pertinent to First Nations youth because they are expected to ‘transition’ into adulthood in a way that is class, gender and race free (as is the norm for white middle class male youth). Lesko argues that most accounts “do not consider modern adolescence in relation to broad cultural transformations of time, race, gender and citizenship” (8). To this end she proposes that new theoretical understandings of youth be developed which use feminist theories to focus on the recursive nature of growth and change and question the linear understanding of youth development. She also advocates that educators, practitioners and policy makers begin to look at what they can learn from youth in order to challenge conventional thinking. As Leslie Roman (1996) states, “by redirecting our gaze from the spectacle of youth at risk and [looking] to both ourselves and the material/political context that produce particular moral panics about youth, we can (however modestly) begin to alter the terms through which public memory is constructed in official policies” (p. 166). It is
therefore important to critically examine taken-for-granted practical and theoretical assumptions about adolescence and youth development in order to avoid reproducing social and organizational practices that continue to pathologize youth; this holds true even if the assumptions are couched in positive language. Finally, it should be noted that once Lesko’s argument is explicated, it becomes clear that most of her ideas align with an Indigenous perspective, even though she does not focus solely on Indigenous youth in her book.

It is necessary to develop a more integrated understanding of positive youth development that is critically oriented, and encompasses an Indigenous wholistic perspective, creates the conditions necessary for positive outcomes to occur, and challenges the asymmetries of power between government, communities and individuals (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007:6). This is a particularly important challenge for policy makers, educators and community programmers whose work affects or serves Aboriginal people, given the destructive impacts that colonization has had upon them. Furthermore, with the exception of Brendtro et al. (1990), all of the authors which have been referenced in this section fail to provide a wholistic understanding of child and youth development. This further emphasizes the urgent need for critical research to explore alter-Natives to more conventional approaches. The Indigenous wholistic perspective on child and youth development is an example of an alter-Native context which can be employed to pursue institutional change for First Nations youth.
2.4. TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHOLISTIC EDUCATION

It is impossible to separate Indigenous knowledge from a wholistic understanding of education since many First Nations traditionally adopted wholistic approaches to education which reflected their own unique cultural content and which were embedded in their knowledge system (Archibald, 2008). Each Indigenous knowledge system consisted of an integrated body of knowledge that was context specific. As such, Indigenous knowledge and world views continue to foreground multi-layered and multi-dimensional relationships with the land, oral traditions, artefacts, song, and dance; today, Aboriginal peoples utilize the non-traditional mediums of print literature, film, and video as powerful vehicles of self-expression. For the purposes of this thesis Indigenous knowledge will be further discussed in the theoretical and methodology section and its tensions with Eurocentric knowledges and research will be addressed. However, the positive potentialities of writing, electronic communications and academic discourse for Aboriginal expression cannot be denied, and I will elucidate my process of negotiating these possibilities as an Aboriginal researcher.

Wholistic education was rooted firmly in Aboriginal languages, land, cultures and the oral tradition, which transmitted knowledge to the learner through stories, narratives, songs, dances and ceremonial artefacts (Archibald, 2008). It was understood to be part of a lifelong experiential process, which simultaneously engaged and developed all aspects of the individual and the collective (Archibald, 2007; Nicol, Archibald, Kelleher & Brown, 2006). In this sense, individual learning was viewed as one part of a collective that extended beyond the family, community, and Nation to Creation itself (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). The CCL (2007) illustrates how the Medicine wheel (used
by the Blackfoot, Cree, Dakota and others) “presents learning as [a] life long process connected to stages of human development, beginning before birth and continuing through childhood to old age” (6). This understanding of human development is important because it conveys the circular structure that is embedded in all Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies and allows us to see how wisdom and knowledge were imparted to individuals throughout a lifetime. Teaching was to a large degree the province of Elders, who were significant sources of knowledge which they passed on to the younger generations. These teachings were primarily conveyed through oral histories and stories many of which are still being shared with young people today. Several authors have sought to develop and publish contemporary models of wholistic education based on First Nations traditional values and wholistic perspectives. Archibald (2008), Corbiere (2000), Dei, Kurmanchery, Gamlin (2002), James-Wilson & Zine (2000) advocate the need to incorporate wholistic practices into contemporary education models. In aiming for mainstream educational environments to become more responsive to Aboriginal learners, these authors focus on different epistemological practices and pedagogies as well as the inclusion of Aboriginal languages in mainstream education environments. Finally, the Canadian Council on Learning (2007) proposes how community models can be used to develop a wholistic framework for measuring life-long learning.

In her foundational book, Archibald (2008) defines wholism in relation to oral traditions and storytelling from traditional times to the present. The author provides a visual symbol to explain her definition: “the image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness and ultimately wellness. The
never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show the synergistic influence of our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come” (p. 11). Archibald has developed seven principles related to using First Nations stories and storytelling for educational purposes, which she has termed ‘storywork’: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. She provides a useful example of how these storywork principles may be applied in the development of a grade seven curriculum titled “First Nations Journeys of Justice” (p. 101-127). Throughout the book, Archibald addresses important issues for individuals, researchers and educators working with Indigenous knowledge and content and provides important methodological insight about working with Elders and First Nations communities. Further, she emphasizes the need for collaborative, respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators. This book is of particular salience for my research because it includes First Nation’s oral histories and storytelling as a research methodology and embraces a wholistic perspective in furthering an understanding of Indigenous knowledge.

Like Archibald, Gamlin (2002; 2003), a non-Indigenous educator seeks to integrate wholistic practices into the curriculum. He believes that basic literacy begins with the oral tradition and the values that are embedded in them. However, Gamlin’s (2003) central aim is to broaden the current curriculum so that it encompasses a critical definition of literacy. His research therefore seeks to build a bridge between traditional Aboriginal values and the literacy needs of First Nations learners in contemporary society (p. 16). In doing so, he hopes that Aboriginal literacy will encompass a more wholistic perspective and be transformative for learners (p. 16-21). Gamlin does not define
wholism but quotes several other Aboriginal researchers’ analyses of the concept (citing Archibald’s definition at length). His does however, define literacy as a way in which learners “re-symbolize and [reinterpret] past experience while honouring traditional values... in contemporary time” (p. 21). This concept is important to educators and practitioners because it encourages them to use traditional values and wholistic perspectives in their lives and pedagogical practices. Furthermore he states “elders tell us that creativity is an intrinsic aspect to our survival. New thinking, new behaviour and survival all follow from listening to traditional values” (2002, p. 3). This idea inspires me to envision the possibilities of using our collective creativity to reinvent traditional ways of thinking within a modern urban context in order to ensure our cultural survival, transform our communities, and secure a healthier, happier future for Aboriginal youth.

Ensuring cultural survival is also a central theme in Corbiere’s (2000) article. In this article, Corbiere (2000) presents a critique of the standardized provincial curriculum in Ontario and its adverse effects on First Nation’s self-determination. He argues that standard curricular practices need to make epistemological and pedagogical shifts in order to effectively use First Nation’s orientations, knowledge, and teaching practices as means by which to implement a wholistic education. Wholism is described as “a pedagogical shift approach to educating First Nations people that develops the whole child…A wholistic education is compatible with traditional tenets of First Peoples’ conceptualizations of wellbeing and good life” (p. 24). Corbiere asserts that wholistic education must address the generation gap between Elders and youth in aiming to combat colonization and promote healing for First Nations people. Corbiere illustrates the connection between the land, stories, and language as formative elements of wholistic
education which reconnect the generations. If language is not addressed then generational gaps in meaning will prevent wholistic education from achieving its goals. This idea is congruent with Battiste & Youngblood Henderson (2000), Chamberlin (2000) and Battiste’s (2000; 2007) understanding of education. All of these authors’ research is significant because it presents a clear example of the need to employ multiple “texts” (land-based, experiences, stories and language) to form wholistic education programs and radically alter conventional mainstream approaches. The article also raises some intriguing questions about which language, customs and knowledge to include in the wholistic education of urban Aboriginal youth. Further research is needed to answer these questions and to determine the mechanisms that are needed to support such a process for teaching. Although this research is beyond the scope of my project, it is a valuable subject that merits consideration in future research endeavors.

Dei, Wilson, Kurmanchery & Zine (2000) are non-Indigenous authors who contribute to the discourses on Indigenous knowledge and wholistic education with the previously mentioned authors. They advocate a critical approach to education which incorporates Indigenous knowledge and wholistic practices, with a goal of creating wholistic schools. Towards that end, they argue that a transformational perspective is needed to honour the wholeness of children and youth and create intimate connections between the curriculum and the student’s experiences. They believe that Indigenous knowledge helps learners of all backgrounds to understand the connections between their home environment, education, history, culture, identity and ways of knowing (p. 46-61). They claim that “(w)holistic education must become more critical in order to allow students to examine institutions and social practices that separate and oppress them” (p.
78) and assert that critical thinking must be incorporated into any model of Indigenous education if it is to be truly transformative and pursue equity and social justice. For me, a heartwarming dimension of this book is the authors’ desire to form collaborative relationships with Indigenous people, which is imperative if true transformation is to occur in mainstream educational environments.

Looking beyond mainstream schooling approaches to wholism, Lertzman (2002) provides an alter-Native context which explores how the principles of wholism can be applied to community-based learning environments. Lertzman (2002) is a non-Indigenous researcher who defines wholistic education as a way “to cultivate self-knowledge and to foster core personal development: the making of whole human beings” (1). In his article he examines a rites-of-passage model in an outdoor youth wilderness program called “Rediscovery”, a culturally-based outdoor recreational program which began in 1978 in Haida Gwaii. The program employs Aboriginal teachings of wholism in an experiential approach to learning and teaches songs, dances, traditional ecological knowledge, and cultural knowledge to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Elders, youth and adults form staff teams to deliver an outdoor program which recreates an extended Aboriginal family summertime experience on the land as they gather, hunt and fish. There has been no evaluative research conducted on the program, although participants and Native communities seem to have a positive response to the program. This research is salient because it addresses the methodological and ethical concerns which are needed for Native and non-Native researchers to be culturally literate and respectful. In addition, this article demonstrates the importance of land-based experiences in the delivery of Indigenous knowledge and wholistic education practices.
Lertzman’s description of programming, wholistic approach to education and methodological concerns are particularly relevant to my research. However, I am left to wonder how one might incorporate aspects of place-based learning in programming for Aboriginal youth in urban environments.

The ‘National Wholistic Framework on Life Long Learning’ proposed by the Canadian Council on Learning (C.C.L.) (2007) may support the aforementioned community and educational models in enabling them to flourish even further. The council provides crucial data to include in a comprehensive national framework which measures wholistic life-long learning and redefines how success is measured in First Nation, Inuit, and Métis learning. In their recent report the C.C.L. (2007) acknowledges the limitations of current data and indicators in mainstream education in asserting that new learning frameworks which measure learning success wholistically must be created in partnership with Aboriginal educators, community practitioners, government, researchers and the Aboriginal community. The CCL (2007) cites numerous reasons for the creation of these frameworks. First, current data which measures youth and adult learning is based on learning deficits. For example, one of the most commonly reported indicators that measures Aboriginal learning is the high school drop-out rate. This indicator cannot accurately gauge Aboriginal youths’ abilities to succeed in school because it does not consider that the education system that does little to meet their cultural, physical, spiritual and emotional needs. Second, most learning measures are premised on the completion of high school and post-secondary education completion, which does not consider the Aboriginal spectrum of life long learning (from infancy to elderhood). Third, most of the indicators are based on formalized assessments (performance and standardized
evaluations) which are at odds with the purpose and nature of wholistic learning for First Nations, Inuit and Metis. This formal system of measurement only captures mental performance (based on Euro-Canadian standards) and does not encompass the spiritual, mental and physical learning that is articulated in Aboriginal wholistic education. As such, current data measures do not capture experiential Aboriginal learning in the community and traditional education activities which occur outside the classroom.

The CCL (2007) highlights the need for each Aboriginal community in Canada to create, identify and understand the complexities involved in creating a wholistic measurement framework for measuring progress in life-long learning. This framework will not evaluate Aboriginal child and youth development in deficit-based terms but will focus on the “underlying domains and indicators” (CCL, 24) of life-long learning that are congruent with Aboriginal peoples’ redefinition of success and reflect their strengths. The CCL’s perspective is aligned with the purpose and context of my research and reveal it to be both timely and seminal.

Many scholars are forging transformative pathways of hope for First Nations education through their research endeavors and the articulation of localized knowledge. Their work explores stories about people; the importance of their relationships with each other, spirit and place; and the incorporation of language and traditional principles in contemporary education models and practices. All of the authors discussed in this review offer perspectives that complement each other and explore considerations that must be addressed if wholistic education is to be achieved in mainstream schooling and community environments. The Canadian Council on Learning asserts the need for wholistic practices and models of education to be incorporated into a national framework.
However, if this goal is to be realized, it is essential for Aboriginal non-profit organizations to conduct research on wholistic practices, and such research is relatively scarce. My study serves as a collaborative effort between Aboriginal youth and myself to identify the possibilities and challenges of wholistic educational practices of Aboriginal youth organizations in Vancouver. This research responds to the CCL’s (2007) call for community-specific data and indicators which can be incorporated into a larger National wholistic framework. These measurement tools will articulate the perspective of urban Aboriginal youth, and in so doing, support the redefinition of learning success from the perspective of Aboriginal youth and support transformative praxis in programming and communities.

In closing this section it is salient to note that the term wholism has multiple functions in this thesis: it is a component of my methodology, a central tenet of IK, an educational model and a foundational concept. The relationship between wholism and IK also merits comment. As both terms are fluid and metaphorical in nature, they sit uneasily with the linear western style of academic enquiry and evade being neatly fit into precise, separate categories (Nakata, 2007). They can be seen as having as twinned or complimentary relationship – in one sense intertwined, and in another, interchangeable.
CHAPTER 3: THEORY

3.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

My research is rooted in a blend of traditional Indigenous knowledge (as shared with me by friends, family, educators and mentors over the years) and theoretical knowledge, as cultivated from published Indigenous, critical and feminist scholars. These scholars, include Kim Anderson (2004); Jo-ann Archibald (2007); Marie Battiste (2000); Gaile Cannella & Kathryn Manuelito (2008); Gregory Cajete (2000); Norman Denzin (2003), Sandy Grande (2005); Yvonne Lincoln & Joe Kincheloe (2008); Michael Marker (2008); Charles Menzies (2003); Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2003); Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Shirley Steinberg (2008).

In this chapter I will first discuss Indigenous knowledge and its interconnections with Indigenous theory. Second, I will highlight the difficulties of including Indigenous theories and methods in Western research methodologies. Third, I will relay the process of how I have come to understand my theoretical perspective. Finally, I will briefly define Indigenous, critical and feminist theory and demonstrate how they inform my research.

3.2. WHAT IS INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE?

The values, beliefs and practices that are embedded in Indigenous knowledge systems are still in the process of being unraveled and explored by Indigenous academics who see this field of inquiry as pertinent to innovation and success in Indigenous

Indigenous peoples throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs and practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be recognized as having an adaptive integrity that is as valid for today’s generations as it was for generations past (8).

Answering the question “what is Indigenous knowledge?” will therefore elicit a variety of responses from Aboriginal people. Each will reflect particular cultural beliefs, traditional practices and relationships with the natural environment. Given that Indigenous individuals’ worldview is firmly rooted in their culture, their understanding of Indigenous knowledge will be rooted in their society’s shared philosophies, values and traditions. Perspectives of Indigenous knowledge are therefore interconnected rather than singular; each Aboriginal community will have their own understanding of it and impart this understanding to its individual members, and these understandings will have enough cross-community commonalities for Indigenous people to create a common definition of Indigenous knowledge.

It is my intention to first describe the contours of Indigenous knowledge within a general framework which highlights the common characteristics and sources that are shared amongst the hundreds of Aboriginal communities and Nations across Canada. Second, I will present my own personal understanding of Indigenous knowledge which will involve an unraveling of my assumptions about the binary distinctions between Indigenous and European knowledge systems. This will provide me with a basis for
integrating Indigenous theories of transformation and Western critical theories in my analysis later.

Indigenous knowledge is context specific and embedded in a given community’s experience and adaptation to a particular environment over time as part of a dynamic and ever changing process. Indigenous knowledge is described as: wholistic, ecological, relational, pluralistic, timeless, experiential, contextual, metaphorical, dynamic, communal, oral, and narrative based (Battiste, 2008; Castellano, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Meyer, 2001). Further, Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson (2000) assert that it encompasses two complementary perspectives: “first as a manifestation of human knowledge, heritage and consciousness and second as a mode of ecological order” (2000, 35). As ecological insight, Indigenous knowledge is considered to be derived from the Creator. Indigenous knowledge therefore reflects an awareness of the interconnectedness of all living things, of which humans are a part, and expresses Aboriginal people’s connection and relationship to the land; their wisdom; their technology; their culture; and their spirituality.

The sources of Indigenous knowledge are derived from: traditional knowledge, which has been passed down from countless generations since the beginning of time; empirical knowledge, gained from observations by many people who have lived on the land over extended periods of time; and revealed knowledge that is acquired through visions, intuitions and dreams that are considered to be spiritually derived (Castellano, 2000).

Within my own culture, Indigenous knowledge illuminates the meaning of our feast system, our traditional laws, our ways of governing ourselves, our oral histories and
our social structure. Generally, I have come to understand it as a process which connects all living things and reflects the balance between the individual and the environment. I have made a conscious choice to employ the medicine wheel as a general metaphor for Indigenous consciousness, even though it is not a part of my culture’s traditions. This metaphor conceives the world to be a circle which is divided into spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions. It also signifies a circular understanding of time which does not promote the idea of progress or a definitive beginning and ending. Time, like many other processes, is cyclical, and to understand cyclicality as an overarching concept requires patience and dedication.

The medicine wheel teaches me to think in a wholistic manner that is not fragmented and provides me a comprehensive view of reality. In doing so, it denotes the importance of balance between the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental dimensions. On another level the medicine wheel is deeply spiritual in that it teaches respect for all living beings and Mother Earth, and encourages us to live by our hearts, minds, body and spirit and to value harmony amongst ourselves. These notions also represent a balance between one’s inner and outer life and necessitate the requirement of a balanced attribution of energy and attention among all the components of a person and the life world around them.

Indigenous knowledge is process- or action- orientated and connotes that everything in the living world is constantly changing and in a state of constant motion (Battiste, 2000). When I consider this view within a wholistic context I see the changes as part of a repetitive pattern or cyclical process. For example, the seasons of the year and movement of the moon are constant cycles which are interrelated and affect each other. I have also
learned that Aboriginal languages reflect Indigenous knowledge in being verb- and process-orientated to reflect ‘happenings’ rather than objects. As Leroy Little Bear (2000) points out, “the languages of Aboriginal peoples allow for the transcendence of boundaries. For example the categorizing process in many Aboriginal languages does not make use of either/or, black/white, saint/sinner” (78).

As I continue to learn more about the dynamic nature of Indigenous knowledge and languages, I am reminded that it is an evolving process that challenges me to delve deeply into my consciousness to search for Indigenous knowledge which I have learned from teachers, stories, experiences, articles or songs. In so doing I revisit learning acquired over time through ‘talks’ about traditional teachings with respected Elders/Mentors/teachers, classroom discussions and personal reflections. This requires me to enter into a new pattern of learning and ‘being’ which appears to be different than my Western understanding of knowledge. For example, I found it difficult to taxonomically classify Indigenous knowledge without creating the binary distinctions that characterize Western perspectives. Indigenous knowledge systems seemed so vastly different from the Western knowledge systems that I felt it was necessary to create a dichotomous relationship between the two for the purpose of comparative analysis.

Archibald (2008) shares a similar experience in her first attempt to examine the relationship between Indigenous orality and Western literacy. She writes

At first, I positioned orality and literacy in a dichotomous relationship because their principles and characteristics seemed so different and conflictual. Perhaps I did this because historically First Nations and anything considered “Western” have usually been considered different from each other and in opposition. The benefit of clearly separating the two was that I began to explore a pathway that led me to understand the strength of Indigenous orality (15).
Like Archibald, I also question if there can be an interface between different epistemological models that seem at first glance to be diametrically opposed. I have realized that it may be beneficial to explore the ways in which they complement each other - even though the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems is not yet acknowledged to the same degree in Western institutional contexts--changes have occurred as a result of transdisciplinary efforts. These efforts have enabled academics to move beyond disciplines and knowledge systems to weave together and explore new knowledges (McCregor, 2004).

This exploration has led me down a new pathway where I experience what it means to negotiate the parameters of two worlds and knowledge systems. I strongly identify with Mona Tur and Simone Ulalka (2005)’s approach to this task. They state an Indigenous person’s response to walking between two worlds and two knowledge systems:

is dynamic and complex and mirrors a social history that has been both oppressive and empowering to resister and victim. It reflects times of confusion and contradiction, it encompasses celebration, times of strength and power, it is immersed in Indigenous ways of knowing and being and is surrounded by a system which is foreign yet is not (p. 178).

The journey thus not only invokes for me, experiences of confusion and contradiction as I learn to navigate between two knowledge systems but also celebrates the strength and power of Indigenous ways of knowing as I ask new questions and unfold another layer of Indigenous knowledge.

My quest to acquire and describe Indigenous knowledge has led me to realize that my academic focus has been on the legacy of colonialism for Indigenous people. My understanding of Indigenous knowledge has developed within the social, historical,
economic, educational and political contexts of that legacy. I have not explored the personal spaces that I occupy with Indigenous and Western knowledge and in order to do so, I had to refocus and look inward. My consequent discovery of ‘finding my Indigenous knowledge’ has added missing pieces to a colonial puzzle that I have struggled with as scholar. These pieces are helping me to negotiate the parameters of two worlds and knowledge systems by placing these understandings in their appropriate places. As I find my place in these worlds I gain a more wholistic perspective of my reality.

3.3. FINDING MY INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Over the last six months several interrelated events have led me to experience a personal transformation. I jokingly refer to it as “finding my Indigenous knowledge” since a key moment in this transformation occurred while I was trying to understand the meaning of Indigenous knowledge in my life. This key moment happened after participating in an Indigenous knowledge class and subsequently visiting my mother. I was prompted to visit my mother after I realized I could no longer find the answers I was looking for by reading a book or talking with mentors. To proceed in my journey I needed to ask my mother several questions about our family and their experiences over the years. I met my mom on a beautiful September afternoon at an outdoor restaurant for lunch. She began by telling me that Indigenous knowledge is not static or linear. Rather, it consists of multiple layers, each layer waiting to be unfolded by an individual when the time has come for them to receive the knowledge. As such, it represents a way of knowing that is understood to be part of a cyclical and relational process. She also informed me that she
might not know all the answers I was looking for (in particular, the origin story of our clan) but she knew family members and others people from our Nation who would be able to help me. Over lunch we discussed various ways I could get in touch with some of our family members. This was the first time I realized that my mom had taken on a new responsibility as the knowledge holder of our family’s stories; this task was passed on to her after my grandmother and grandfather passed away into the spirit world.

Later in the day we went back to her apartment and she asked if I might be interested in looking at a scrap book she had put together about our family in one of her First Nations classes. Before she opened the book, she began by telling me her process of putting the book together, carefully recalling every detail she had considered. She explained where she had found the pictures and why she felt it was important to include them in the book.

The book began with a map of the Nass Valley. My mom told me she had placed it at the beginning of the book so she could teach people about the land we came from and act as a reminder about the history that ran through her blood. She had placed a picture of Roche de Boule/ Stewyadin mountain on the next page because she felt it was a central part of our lives when we lived in Hazelton. My mom spoke about how she had decided to give me, my brother and sister each of our own pages. It was uncanny how well the themes she had chosen matched our personalities!

I was also happy to see pictures of my grandparents looking as if they hadn’t aged a day since I had last seen them. There was large picture of the two them taken shortly before my granny had passed away that I had never seen before. My grandpa had my granny wrapped in his arms as they smiled like two mischievous teenagers for the
camera. The banks of the Skeena River were behind them and it was a picture-perfect day. Seeing this picture reminded me that I was connected to a genealogically significant landscape that was replete with memories.

Three pages of the scrap book were dedicated to my mom’s brothers, sisters, aunties and uncle, and there were only a couple of pictures of her. I was surprised to see a picture of my great-great-great grandfather, who was part of a delegation that petitioned King George for Nisga’a sovereignty in 1913. He looked very much like the sort of man it would have been difficult to say no to.

After the book was closed, my mother told me more stories about our family. Some of them I remember her telling me repeatedly when I was younger and didn’t understand why they were told to me so frequently. As an adult, I have learned that story repetition is an ancient pedagogy which is central to oral culture because it allows stories to be passed down through the generations (Anderson, 2004; Archibald, 2008; Daly, 2005; Cruikshank, 1991). In this way our family’s stories will continue to live in the present. This is how I now understand the meaning of a living tradition.

I also learned many new stories I hadn’t heard before. They constituted new knowledge which elicited a deep appreciation for my family’s strength, courage and rich history. A strong tide of emotions swept over me as my mother shared them and I felt immediately humbled and appreciative for being given such important knowledge about our history.

I realize that somewhere on my journey through my undergraduate studies, I had forgotten how to listen to the stories I had been told while growing up. In their placement I learned new words and Western theories which helped me to understand the social,
historical, economic, educational and political impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples’ lives. My thoughts and energy were absorbed by the devastations of these impacts and my awareness of all that my Nation and my family had lost due to the Indian residential schools, non-Native diseases, and Christianity was acutely sharpened. However, seeing the world from this perspective made me feel lost, fragmented and incomplete. I felt like I was missing important interpretive mechanisms that would help me navigate the parameters of two worlds and knowledge systems that were both part of who I was. The stories that my mom shared with me that evening helped me to regain balance and gave me a sense of wholeness in terms of my identity.

On my return home from visiting my mother, I felt quite literally as if the top blew off my head, allowing a colourful vortex of energy to flow from the universe into me. The world was no longer black and white, but full of bright beautiful colours. Somewhere deep inside me I felt a synergy between the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical aspects of myself. This feeling reflected an experiential understanding of balance and wholism which showed me the transformative power of Indigenous knowledge. I had begun to learn how listen with my heart, which Archibald (2008) refers to as the “third ear”, which made it possible for me to hear new rhythms and sounds to which I had previously been deaf.

It has taken time for me to see how my family has constructed their stories differently from the ‘grand narratives’ I learned in university. I do see the connection between the two in the sense that we were and continue to be affected by government policies. The key point of divergence is that my family has not forgotten who they are or where they come from. Understanding how my family’s past is inscribed in the present
has enabled me to move more fluidly between two seemingly different knowledge systems and in so doing, to find my own story. Finding my story has brought me to another level of consciousness in regard to the principles of Indigenous knowledge: intuition, family, stories, relationships, wholism, and place. I am also better able to explore the relationships among Indigenous ways of knowing to mainstream institutions and educational initiatives.

3.4. BRIDGING THEORY & METHODS

A growing body of Indigenous scholars incorporate their understandings of Indigenous knowledge into theories that seek to transform this knowledge into a political and educational power base which challenges the primacy of European cognitive approaches to knowledge (Battiste, 2008: Denzin et al, 2008: Grande, 2008: Smith, 2008). At the same time, it forges new relationships between the two by foregrounding the value and significance of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous methodologies to educators and policy makers.

Because Eurocentric research aims to deconstruct knowledge into systems of classification which can be defined, measured and analyzed, it makes it more difficult to describe wholism and the Indigenous epistemological principles which underlie Indigenous theories and methods. As noted previously in this paper, most Indigenous epistemological principles are process orientated, relational, interdependent, and wholistic. It is therefore necessary to create a research design which reflects these principles. Otherwise, the application of most Eurocentric methodologies (with the exception of feminist, critical and complexity methodologies) to Indigenous research will
require Indigenous knowledge to be extracted from its original context, which means it is no longer inter-relational, interdependent, balanced and wholistic.

The same dissociation occurs if Aboriginal methodologies and theories are separated. For Aboriginal peoples the process of collecting knowledge is considered as important as the theories that support it and cannot be separated into a distinct phase of research (Archibald, 2008). Further, Smith (1999) points out an Indigenous methodology represents a convergence of theory, epistemology and praxis which constitutes a localized strategy of resistance to positivist research methods and theories. Indigenous theory and methods are therefore understood to be inextricably intertwined. She states Indigenous theory “contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritizing and legitimizing what we see and do” (39). While important work is being done to strengthen Indigenous methodologies, for Indigenous scholars to maintain autonomy and create academic space for Indigenous research, they must not only highlight the differences between the Indigenous and Western research process, but also find convergences between the two. To this end, Michelle Pidgeon (2008) states it is necessary for Indigenous scholars to “balance Indigenous and Western techniques and to share this knowledge with others wishing to research with Aboriginal peoples” (p 64). She claims that this will enable Indigenous and Western scholars to forge pathways to a new world. It is therefore my intention to reiterate the challenges of finding this balance by signaling to the reader the steps I have taken to ensure that Indigenous research methodologies remain at the center of my research process. It is my hope that respecting both traditions and examining the interface between them will enhance the scope of my
research (Nakata, 2007). More specifically, my reference to Indigenous theory, critical theory, and Indigenist feminist theories promises to provide me with a rich and multi-dimensional theoretical framework. The significance of these three theories will now be discussed.

3.5. A SYNTHESIS OF INDIGENOUS TRANSFORMATIVE, CRITICAL, & INDIGENIST FEMINIST THEORIES

It has been one short week since Jo-ann asked me to place myself more firmly in my theoretical approach by using a story, teaching or metaphor. I must admit I felt a little confused and scared to begin this process because I realized that I could not find the answers I was looking for by simply reading a book; the answers would have to come from within. This has led me to see that I have been intuitively drawn to the Indigenous theoretical concepts of wholism and transformation because of a personal longing to be engaged in a transformative learning process which allowed me to learn more about my identity.

Sandy Grande (2008) shares a similar story about a journey of self discovery that was prompted by discussions with colleagues and friends that encouraged her to use the social engagement of ideas or place ‘ideas in motion’ in order to understand her method. She writes:

I engage them “in motion” through a process of active and close observation wherein I live with, try on and wrestle with ideas in a manner akin to Geertz’s notion of “deep hanging out” but without the distinction between participant and observer. Instead the gaze is always shifting inward, outward and throughout the spaces in between, with the idea itself holding ground as the independent variable. As I engage with this viewpoint, I survey viewpoints, on the genealogy of ideas, their representation and potential power to

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2 Nakata (2007) also reminds us that in order to create new knowledge foundations we must take into account new innovations and experimentation that bridge the Indigenous/Western divide rather than looking at the separation of the two systems that is expressed in most literature.
speak across boundaries, borders and margins and filter the gathered data through an Indigenous perspective (233).

Like Grande, I have lived with my ideas, trying them on for size. However, I only recently learned how to extend them outward and inward simultaneously through discussions with friends, relatives and mentors in order to find an authentic theoretical perspective.

I was born into the ‘Ganada’ (or frog) clan and I will use the frog as a symbol of my learning process. A frog has the ability to live on land and in water, which allows her/him to transcend boundaries and live in relational harmony with all beings. The earth, which represents the land and Indigenous theoretical knowledge, is inseparable from Indigenous peoples and contains knowledge about creation and the cyclical process of life. When the frog is on land it uses its large eyes to see that the Earth’s patterns and phases are in constant flux, similar to the placing of ‘ones ideas in motion’. These patterns and processes are never-ending.

The frog’s binocular vision also provides it with a depth perspective that is useful as it navigates through turbulent waters. These waters are representative of the struggle between Indigenous and European knowledge systems that frames the deep social issues of colonization. It is necessary to use this perspective to infiltrate ‘whitestream’ consciousness, break the tide of colonization, and positively transform relations between Indigenous and European bodies of knowledge. When the water is calm, the frog is able to swim freely with the current, allowing her/him to explore new places which border the land and water, while retaining the ability to swim away from the current if it gets too

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3 I would like to acknowledge and say thank-you to Preston Guno and Deva Little Mustache for taking the time to share their knowledge about the frog with me. My clan also owns the raven crest because our oral history tells a story about how a supernatural frog met a supernatural raven. As a result, members of my clan can display or wear both crests. Frog and Raven are interchangeable for the Nisga’a.
strong. This is not unlike the stream of theoretical knowledge and concepts which position me on the border of western and Indigenous theories.

As the frog swims through the ever-changing current, it must continually take moments to surface and separate from the water’s influence. By returning and detaching itself from the water it reaffirms the benefits of being able to live in both worlds. The same is true for me when I take a momentary pause to reflect and detach myself from the ‘genealogies of ideas and their representations’ (Grande, 2005). Understanding this process of detachment allows me to see all the possibilities and tensions which arise due to the interaction between the systems of knowledge and helps me to better understand my own perspective and follow my appropriate path.

Leroy Little Bear (2000) writes “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again (85). This highlights the relational interdependence between the two bodies of knowledge and reduces the tendency to construct Indigenous and Western theories as being in binary opposition to each other. In other words, I need to explore the bridges between these systems to gain a wholistic view of the world.

Finally, because the frog evolves from a tadpole to the adult form it later inhabits, it embodies a significant message of transformation and growth that is relevant to both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. This message also means that I will always be seeking knowledge and wisdom that will lead to the unfolding of rigid institutional and theoretical structures while utilizing my energies to help others on their journey; whether it be on land or in water; or both...
My exploration of the Frog metaphor has led me to clarify that Indigenous theories of transformation are the foundation of my theoretical lens and that a synthesis of critical and Indigenist feminist theories will inform my analysis. All Indigenous theories aim to question structural inequalities and social institutions that perpetuate the oppression caused by historical and contemporary forms of European imperialism and colonialism. At the same time, they privilege Indigenous epistemologies, build connections between various Indigenous knowledge systems, and ultimately seek to transform society. As such, Indigenous theories have a dynamic capacity to challenge Eurocentric biases; redress the cultural misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge that has endangered Indigenous ways of life; empower Aboriginal peoples as agents of change; and support the development of wholistic community-based programming.

I draw upon a significant range of nation- and culture-specific Indigenous theories that have emerged recently in academia, including Graham Smith (2003) and Linda Smith’s (2000) ‘Kuapp Maori Theory’, as well theories based on more general Indigenous knowledge, such as Sandy Grande’s (2005) ‘Red Pedagogy’, and Gregory Cajete’s (2000) “Indigenous Knowledge: The Pueblo Metaphor of Indigenous Education.” Although there are differences in these theories, they are united by common threads which allow them to put forth an efflorescence of Indigenous thought in the academy. All of the scholars reviewed for my thesis employ transdisciplinary approaches to convey how Indigenous knowledge can be used to transform Indigenous education, and each weaves the concept of transformation as a key design element of each theory.
Towards this end, Maori scholar, Graham Smith’s (2003; 2005) transformative praxis theory is useful because it calls upon Indigenous researchers to ensure that their research has meaningful impact and can be used in a positive proactive way to facilitate change. I refer directly to the key elements of research that he has gleaned from the Maori experience in New Zealand, and which I feel are compatible with a First Nations Canadian context. Smith argues that it is necessary to reflect on the characteristics of what counts as useful Indigenous theorizing and recommends that researchers include the following elements:

1. **Portability** of transformative elements which speak to the element of change.
2. **Praxis**: must be made with the community of interest. This is an Indigenous accountability; if one purports to speak on behalf of the people, one must have buy in; can’t be built in the Academy—must come from experience.
3. Needs to be critical—to speak to and to make ‘space’ within the new formations of colonization.
4. Must not dis-connect epistemologically and ontologically; must support specific cultural situations while at the same time have some relation to generic Indigenous issues.
5. In this sense, because Indigenous theory is grounded in communit(ies) experiences and because it has an organic connection it has provided a more neutral point of contact between Indigenous communities and the academy (10).

It is important to note that it is not my purpose to provide a formulaic articulation of Indigenous theory; rather, a consideration of what constitutes useful and appropriate Indigenous theorizing inform my research process. Given Smith’s (2003) assertion that all Indigenous research should have the capacity to ‘make a difference’ and support positive transformation in Indigenous communities, this consideration is appropriate and valuable for educators and programmers who work with youth in the urban Aboriginal community.

Further, while the merits of including Indigenous knowledge and theory in academia are rarely challenged, the pursuit of such is wrought with issues of receptivity
because the current education system is premised on an Eurocentric model that
systemically excludes alternative forms of knowledge (Battiste, 2008; Henderson, 2000,

[F]ew schools and university have made IK a priority in educating Indigenous
students, much less teaching all students about diverse knowledge systems;
instead the focus is on fragmented cultural practices that make visible Aboriginal
peoples’ artistry, pow wows, and archival and museum work, which perpetuates
notions of Indigenous peoples as historical, local, not contemporary and global
with a knowledge system that has value for all (86).

Indigenous scholars must therefore continually assert the need for educational institutions
to be more receptive to the Indigenous paradigm and emphasize that Eurocentric methods
and approaches have done little to aid the positive transformation of Aboriginal society.
Charles Menzies, Jo-ann Archibald & Graham Hingangora Smith (2005) argue that
“because of the poor return on research and the lack of significant change in the
educational life chances of large numbers of Indigenous learners in the Pacific Rim
nations, it might be useful to focus more critically on the notion of transformation” (1).
As a result, Indigenous theory is a vital component of my research because it links to
methods and practice in a meaningful way that creates the possibility to contributing to
concrete change in Aboriginal communities.

The concepts of transformation, emancipation, critique, resistance and struggle
that frame Indigenous theory also align with many of the goals of critical theory, which is
orientated towards critiquing and transforming linguistic, cultural, political, and
economic institutions. The work of critical theorists such as Joe Kincheloe (2008),
Shirley Steinberg (2007), and Norman Denzin & Yvonne Lincoln (2008) is particularly
relevant to Indigenous research because it provides a critical understanding of present
social conditions: how they evolved, how they can be transformed, and what principles and actions should govern their transformation. This transformation is envisioned as the product of a multi-disciplinary wholistic approach which draws from a range of disciplines, including: economics, history, philosophy, political science, sociology and psychology. According to Denizin et al (2008): critical theory and “critical pedagogy aim to disrupt hegemonic cultural and educational practices that reproduce the logics of neo-liberal conservatism” (8). Critical theory is therefore instructive for research on Aboriginal youth because it provides a critique of ‘at-risk’ discourses which have been framed by neo-liberal assumptions and underpinned by socio-historic structural conditions.

Finally, the Indigenist feminist theoretical perspectives articulated by Cannella and Manuelito (2008) and Joyce Green (2007) are salient to my research because they acknowledge of the importance of the researcher’s experience in the research process; emphasize that it is necessary for research to include multiple voices in order for it to advance a comprehensive understanding of a subject; and assert that research should contribute to positive change. Cannella and Manuelito (2008) also focus on the concept of ‘transformative egalitarianism’, which understand Native epistemologies and spirituality as ways of caring for all people (men, women and all ethnicities); ways to decolonize Indigenous peoples lives; and ways to build alliances amongst feminist, Native and womanist worldviews. Although Indigenous perspectives have traditionally been at odds with ‘whitestream’ liberal feminism, there are, some common threads between Indigenous perspectives and socialist, neo-marxist and marginalized feminisms (Grande, 2005). Denzin et al (2008) comment that “Indigenist pedagogies are informed,
in varying and contested ways, by decolonizing, revolutionary, and socialist feminisms. These types of feminism “address issues of social justice, equal rights, and a code embodying these principles interrupts the practices of positivist research, [and] resists the idea of research being something White men do to Indigenous peoples” (15). The Indigenous feminist lens enlightens my research focus because it challenges imperial capitalist patriarchal structures and generates a vision of egalitarianism premised on the inclusion of both male and female Aboriginal voices.

By delineating the intersections between Indigenous, critical and feminist theories, my research contributes to academic transdisciplinary genres and pluralistic discourses which constitute sites of resistance and transformation across lines of gender, class and ethnicity.

The next section will incorporate these theoretical understandings into an Indigenous research model which guides my research process.
CHAPTER 4: INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGY

4.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter outlines the methodology employed for this thesis. An Indigenous methodological approach that incorporates a wholistic framework has informed my methods and data analysis for this study. I also outline my methodological considerations, concerns and ethical responsibilities as a researcher within this framework. A sharing circle workshop and open ended interviews with youth and an Elder from the urban Aboriginal community were chosen for the methods. I have also interwoven key teachings that I have learned from Raven (the trickster) who has traveled with me throughout this journey and has significantly shaped this research story.

4.2. THE RESEARCH STORY: RAVEN’S TALES

Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses…Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices (Smith, 1999: 143)

For Indigenous communities, the process of the research is often more important than the outcome (Smith, 1999). As Jo-ann Archibald (1990) reminds us “our Elders first teach us to understand and appreciate our environment before letting the journey begin” (68). I therefore begin a learning process which highlights some of the methodological considerations and concerns related to being a Native researcher working in an Indigenous community. In doing so, I do not seek to provide all of the answers to the ethical problems and responsibilities of conducting such research; rather I hope to take you (the reader) on my personal journey as I explore the educational and community
landscapes and relationships of my research environment. As such, I hope the details of this research story may contribute to the advancement of a transformational pedagogy that is both practical and useful for other sojourners in similar landscapes.

In a similar vein to Archibald (2008) who writes about ‘Coyote’ the omnipresent and ubiquitous trickster who has traveled on her research journey, I have come to know this Trickster character as Raven. The trickster character in Aboriginal stories has multiple meanings. Trickster has the ability to shape shift (metamorphosize) and transform itself into other beings. According to Archibald (2008) “The English word “Trickster” is a poor one because it cannot portray, the diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster, who sometimes is a shape shifter, and who often takes on human characteristics” (5). In many of the stories, the trickster character also teaches us how create balance and harmony in our lives, in this way Raven demonstrates how I have attempted to created a wholistic research project. Aboriginal stories often have implicit meanings and Archibald (2008) reminds us that it is up to the learner to find the theories embedded in stories (16). Thus, I understand Raven to play with different levels of metaphors, reflexivity, and analysis. I leave it to you (the reader) to find and create your own meaning from Raven’s stories.

I have had many unexpected moments throughout the research process when Raven has swooped down in front of me to caw her cacophonic song. Sometimes Raven’s songs were loud and easy to understand, while others times they were cryptic and required more patience and deeper listening for it to be audible for me to hear the message. Despite the dissonance of Raven’s songs, none of her messages have left me unchanged. These haphazard, funny, and sometimes ‘troubling’ moments have
significantly influenced my research journey. I have therefore chosen to inter-weave these moments throughout the body of this thesis. I realize that research done in a ‘good way’ requires one to be transparent about the messiness and riddles they encounter throughout the research process. Sharing some of Raven’s teachings are my way of describing how I worked with feelings of doubt, familiarity, surprise and uncertainty through the data gathering and analysis process as I traversed along this research path. In another way, Raven’s stories can also be understood to form part of my analysis.

4.3. INDIGENOUS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research can play a pivotal role in the decolonization of Indigenous peoples. Research methods and methodologies, the theories that inform them, the questions that they generate and the presentation styles they employ (be it writing, film or other forms of media) require careful and critical consideration. As Linda Smith (1999) states, “we must [centre] our concerns and world views and then come to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (39).

I do not take my position as an Indigenous researcher lightly. I briefly described my intended research when I began my Masters program last September, and it has changed considerably from then to now because I have learned a great deal from my mentors, research committee and most of all the youth and Elder who have so generously shared their perspectives with me. An important consideration that I continually keep in mind is to carefully reconsider, reflect and analyze the ethical, cultural, political and personal dimensions of my research. Smith (1999) reminds me that one need always
remember who the research is for and who will benefit from it once it is completed.

Wilson (2008) adds another moral layer to the fabric of an Indigenous research design. He states:

the knowledge that the researcher interprets must be respectful of and help to build relationships that have been established through the research process of finding out information. Furthermore the Indigenous researcher has a vested interest in the integrity of the methodology (respectful) and the usefulness of the results if they are to be of any use in the Indigenous community (reciprocity) (77).

To this end, I asked myself two central questions: ‘what constitutes an Indigenous methodology?’ and ‘how can I ensure that my methodology reflects the common beliefs and principles that are embedded in Indigenous knowledge systems’ without essentializing Aboriginal cultures?’ In my view an Indigenous methodology means that Indigenous knowledge, voices and experiences are privileged in the research process to facilitate a wholistic understanding of the researcher and participants. As such an Indigenous methodology means that the researcher ensures relational accountability to one’s family, community, Nation and the living world. Historically, Indigenous people have been subjected to research practices by outside ‘experts’ who often misappropriated and exploited them and their knowledge. Their negative experiences accentuate the need for research to be grounded in the needs, concerns and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples. An Indigenous methodology acknowledges this complex history while ensuring research is done by, with and for one’s community (grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs and relationships which define it). Such community driven research is vital to the identification, examination and resolution of current challenges affecting
Aboriginal people, as well as to the evolution of transformative praxis in community-based programming.\(^4\)

### 4.4. **A QUALITATIVE WHOLISTIC FRAMEWORK**

I employed wholistic qualitative research methods because this methodology leaves room for ‘insider’ perspectives, or the subjective voices, relationships and experiences which are pivotal dimensions of Indigenous perspectives and approaches. A wholistic qualitative research approach helps to translate and express people’s identities and stories in their own words and from their own perspectives, and is embedded in Indigenous knowledge systems in which stories told through various oral traditions explain human behaviors, actions, and practices throughout a lifetime of social, economic, political and educational development (Archibald 1997; 2007). Emily Faires, Jo-anne Fiske, Carloyyn Kenny and Cora Voyaguer (2004) outline a framework for wholistic research which includes:

- honouring past, present and future in interpretive and analytical research processes including historical references and intergenerational discourse;
- honoring the interconnectedness of all life and the multi-dimensional aspects of life on the Earth and in the community research design and implementation; and
- honouring the spiritual, physical, emotional and mental aspects of the person and the community in research protocols, methodologies and analyses (15).

This framework is incorporated into my research because I feel that it honours Aboriginal world views while acknowledging the complexities of research. It also ensures that research continues to evolve as a process of discovery and expression, and that researchers assume greater accountability: to their participants, to the communities they seek out, as well as the life world around them.

\(^4\) It should be noted that there are multiple Indigenous methodologies and not all Indigenous researchers will be motivated (nor are they required) to conduct their research with an Indigenous community.
A wholistic approach emerges as central to an Indigenous research methodology because it provides the opportunity to view the interconnections that exist between social and physical phenomena; it unites Aboriginal communities through shared experiences; balances relationships between researchers, participants and communities; it signifies the importance of a research practice that is facilitated through multiple lenses; and it connects the multiple aspects of individuals’ lives as part of community processes (Faires et al 2004).

The need for wholistic frameworks of research to be grounded in Indigenous world views and experiences present a unique challenge to urban Aboriginal research. Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I have questioned whether or not employing such a framework essentializes Aboriginal cultures. Is it possible to employ a wholistic model for my methods which acknowledges the multiple Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginal peoples in Vancouver? And if it is, how can I adapt my research methods and principles to an urban Aboriginal context in a respectful and inclusive way?

To appreciate what a wholistic framework means for Indigenous research it is important to note that Aboriginal peoples in Canada encompass a diversity of histories, traditions, cultures, languages, and identities. However, despite these differences there are many experiences, principles, concepts and values that are shared across Aboriginal cultures, especially in urban areas. The concept of wholism is a particularly consistent thread in the fabric of most Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies. According to Archibald (2008) “Each Indigenous group has developed its own cultural content for the holistic circle symbol; however, a common goal has been to attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World” (11).
research context this speaks to the need for Aboriginal researchers to employ an integrative approach which addresses human relations and practices within their social, spiritual and physical ecology. It is my intention to emphasize the commonalities among urban Aboriginal communities’ understanding of wholism in creating a framework which relays the interconnection between Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous methodologies.

According to Marlene Brant Castelanno (2000) “the personal nature of (Indigenous) knowledge means that disparate and even contradictory perceptions can be accepted and valid because they are unique to the person. Aboriginal societies make a distinction between perceptions, which are personal and wisdom, which has social validity and can serve as a basis for common action” (26). A wholistic framework for research therefore needs to be validated through the collective social analysis of members in an Indigenous community in order for it to be considered appropriate and relevant. Applying the framework to an urban Aboriginal community in almost all cases necessitates a dialogue among individuals in order to honour the multiple and diverse ways in which they express their lived experience. To this end, I have been cautious not to over-generalize the similarities among Aboriginal peoples and acknowledge that there are unique differences in languages, traditions, religions and governance among the approximately 500 distinct Indigenous communities in North America (Wagner: 2006, 149). At the same time, I also sought the guidance of an ‘Elder.’ Mr. Jerry Adams, from the Nisga’a Nation to help me navigate between the personal and collective voice and to determine how to work within an urban context in a respectful way that unites our commonalities. He states “I think we need to be respectful of all cultures, it is not one or the other… I see it as more as being a wholistic Indian of the urban people. I mean
because you have to adapt to everything. There is a new wholistic approach to things now. It is not a ‘pan’ thing, it is a real thing for all of us.”

The next component of my methodology examines my responsibilities as researcher in this wholistic framework.

4.5. THE FIVE R’S: RELEVANCE, RESPONSIBILITY, RESPECT, RELATIONSHIPS, & RECIPROCITY

It is essential that research in the Aboriginal community is done in an ethical and culturally appropriate way that strictly complies with community expectations and protocols (Canadian Institute of Health Research Ethics Review Office, 2006; Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2000;). Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt’s (1991) foundational article on the “Four R’s- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility” indicate the need for post secondary institutions to be more responsive to First Nations students (1-18). The ‘Four R’s’ (with an additional fifth ‘R’ relationships) are relevant principles that can be applied to almost any First Nations learning context and has served as an ethical foundation for my research. These principles are all interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation of each other. In combination, they constitute a wholistic ethical code of conduct for this research.

Relevance:

Relevance means that all of my research must be relevant to the needs and desires of the urban Aboriginal community. This research is based on my eight years of volunteerism, employment and personal experience as a visitor and researcher in the Coast Salish peoples’ territory. Alannah Young (2007) refers to this as the “informal pre-study phase” of Indigenous research which is premised on understanding the cultural,
social and historical background of the people and places that one is to do their research with. The ‘informal pre-study phase’ involved discussing the relevance of this research with the Executive Directors of Aboriginal community organizations, Aboriginal child and youth advocates, Aboriginal youth workers, an Elder and my research supervisor to see if there was indeed interest for such research in the community. Following the completion of my proposal, I met with the Executive Directors of four Aboriginal organizations and an Aboriginal child advocate to present my proposal and receive feedback from them. I incorporated their advice into the second set of revisions for the proposal. Finally, I also spent considerable time examining literature and research pertaining to Aboriginal youth to further confirm that my research was indeed relevant and needed.

**Responsibility:**

Responsibility means that I honour all ethical protocols and community expectations before, during and after the research project. The Canadian Institute of Health Research Ethics Review Office (2006) states that “the [researcher] must understand a broader sense of accountability, in order to understand the responsibility that they have once they enter into the research relationship” (2). Due to this understanding and because of my positionality, I therefore feel a great sense of responsibility to be accountable to my family, my community and my Nation to conduct this study in a ‘good’ way. I believe that understanding the major ethical problems of both Native and non-Native researchers working in Indigenous communities is another integral aspect of this responsibility. To understand these ethical problems I enrolled in the Ts’kel program and completed several Indigenous methodology classes; received a certificate for
completing the Tutorial for the ‘Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans’ (2007); and participated in the Indigenous Graduate Symposium (2008), where I had many thought provoking discussions about the ethical protocols of research with other Aboriginal scholars. In addition, my pedagogical experiences with Raven are included to highlight some of the tensions and surprises that I encountered throughout the research process while I learned more about my research responsibilities. Finally, I remain continually engaged in an on-going dialogue with Aboriginal community members, youth and organizations to determine the responsibilities of this research.

**Respect:**

Respect means that I honour my community, my Nation, the natural world and my conception of the creator. In an attempt to employ respectful practices, I gained comprehensive knowledge about my research participants before meeting them and I followed traditional protocols and community guidelines to acquire an in-depth understanding of the community’s needs (Marker, 2003). First it was important for me to respectfully acknowledge the traditional territories of the Coast Salish Peoples. In the data gathering phase of my research this meant that I expressed my appreciation to the Coast Salish Peoples for allowing me to research and live within their unceded territories before any activity began.

As an Aboriginal researcher, I assumed a dual role as an insider and outsider of the community which represented both benefits and limitations. Partnering with the organization and youth with whom I have established personal relationships with may be considered a benefit to the research process. However, the considerable amount of
knowledge that I had about the organizations and youth was also a limitation in that I needed to take extra care to ensure that my research remained open and transparent so that there were no conflicts of interests. I also recognized the power dynamic that was embedded in my relationship with my participants as a result of being a researcher in a Western institution. To a certain degree this means that I represent Western institutions when I conduct research. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), many Indigenous people are suspicious of researchers (even when they are Aboriginal) because they represent these elite institutions. These institutions have not always represented Aboriginal people in a positive light and have advanced inaccurate and insensitive research which has played an integral role in the colonization of Indigenous people. As an Indigenous researcher who represents these institutions, it is vital that I negotiate my positionality without compromising the purpose and benefits this may research entail.

Brayboy and Deyle (2000) who are Indigenous researchers, outline similar tensions they experienced being insider/outsider researchers in Native American Indian communities. They state that “those [individuals] who conduct research must be aware of their positionality in relation to research participants, acknowledge their lack of objectivity in getting, analyzing, and reporting data, and how ‘traditional’ methods may influence their work” (168). In my relationship with participants I did my best to clearly articulate my position and acknowledge my subjectivity throughout the research process and writing of the thesis. I will now discuss the research site and recruitment process of the study.

I began my research process by hosting three information sessions at the Urban Native Youth Association, the Creating Healthy Aboriginal Role Models Program and
the Broadway Youth Resource Centre. This gave me an opportunity to share my research ideas with youth, answer any questions they had for me, as well as provide contact information for my supervisor and myself.

I handed out ‘free and informed’ consent forms to the youth and their guardians well in advance of commencing my research. According to Piqumeal (2001) “free and informed consent is accepted in most circles, what often goes unquestioned is that free and informed consent may have different meanings and implications in cross cultural situations, particularly when doing research in Native American communities” (65). This has four primary meanings for me as an Aboriginal researcher. First, it means I am required to obtain the collective consent from the Executive Directors of the organizations that I partner with as well as the individual consent of potential participants (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2000; Natalie Pigumel, 2001). Second, I must try to clearly convey my intentions to everybody involved in my study. As Linda Smith (2008) argues, there may be dire consequences if a researcher’s intentions are not fully understood by research participants. I therefore tried to demystify the academic knowledge that informed my research so that it was accessible to all who participated in the research process (Meyer, 2001). Nevertheless as noted in section (Section 4.6.) Raven playfully ‘troubled’ some of these attempts. Third, I understand free and informed consent is an ongoing circular process. This means that I could not conclude with a single piece of paper that consent was given. As a result, I checked in regularly with my participants to ensure that their consent was on-going. The fourth aspect of free and informed consent means that cultural knowledge was only included with the guidance of a respected Elder and authorities in the community (Alaska Native Knowledge Network,

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5 The implications of these cross cultural meanings will be discussed further in section 4.7
Towards that end, I did not include sensitive cultural, spiritual or personal information shared with me in the presentation of my research based on the advice that was given to me by Elder Jerry Adams.

Finally, throughout the process of gathering my data I tried to establish a comfort level with my research participants by respectfully placing their needs at the forefront of my research. To this end I assured them that they could terminate their participation at any time, and emphasized that they were not required to participate in activities with which they were uncomfortable. I also informed them that they could use a pseudonym or alias instead of their real name in my research and any information that I received would be locked in a filing cabinet and kept confidential after the interviews were completed. I also provided each participant a copy of their transcript (transcribed from digital audio-recordings) for her/his approval. Returning the transcripts prior to approval allowed participants to revisit their thoughts and provided them with an opportunity to change, clarify, or withdraw their transcript. Even though they had the opportunity to, none of the youth made any revisions or changes to their transcripts. As a final step and in keeping with the policy of ensuring accuracy and consistency, draft copies of the thesis were circulated to participants, so that they could add comments and make revisions before the final draft of the thesis was submitted to the university. One youth emailed me about a minor typo correction to be changed and commented that “I should be proud of myself for doing such good work” (Personal Email, August 21st, 2008). Another youth informed that she would be free for coffee if I had any further questions but did not indicate that she had any corrections to be made. I also invited participants to the Native Drop In Centre at UNYA so that I could provide them with a mini oral
overview of the findings section of the thesis and answer and questions that had. Despite my efforts, none of the youth attended this session.  

**Relationships:**

From an Indigenous Knowledge perspective, Indigenous peoples view themselves 'in relationship' with all living things and see all things as related to one another; a person’s identity is defined through their relationships with others, as well as through their ecosystem, other living beings and the spirit world (Battiste & Henderson, 2001, 42; Gregory Cajete, 1994).

Given that inter-relationships are of utmost importance in Indigenous cultures, they must also be a central feature of Indigenous research and methodologies. Accordingly, I have attempted to establish stable and enduring relationships with the youth and community representatives I was involved with in my research. Although I no longer work for the Urban Native Youth Association because of my decision to pursue my Masters full-time, I have since become a mentor in one of its programs. In order to be respected as a researcher, I felt it necessary to not only be a role model and a mentor for Aboriginal youth, but also that I nurture the relationships that I have formed in the Aboriginal community. This understanding reflects my intention to maintain my relationships with the organizations and youth that I connected with long after the research is completed.

**Reciprocity:**

Reciprocity in Indigenous cultures is understood in terms of affirming relationships and sharing (Kuokhanen, 2007). Not only is sharing vital to the collective

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6 I was informed by the Drop-In staff that one youth had to attend a memorial and that another youth had not been to the Centre since I had interviewed him. Another youth emailed me that he would attend but did not come to the session in the end.
benefit of Indigenous peoples it also serves as an active form of resistance to the hegemonic forces of research and contributes to decolonizing methodologies. According to Smith (1999), this means that I must “share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented” (16). All research conducted with the Aboriginal community should be a reciprocal process. This means, I will continue to share my knowledge with my participants and community members (Luke Lassiter, 2000: 605). In addition, I believe that the youth have many gifts and teachings that they shared with me as we mutually affirmed our relationships with each other. This reciprocal action in research is written about by Archibald (2008) who worked with Elder Vincent Stogan and received the “hands back, hands forward teaching:”

My dear ones,
Form a circle and join hands in prayer. In joining hands, hold your left palm up to reach back to grab the teachings of the ancestors. Put these teachings into practice in your everyday life and pass them on. Hold your right palm downward to pass these teachings on to the younger generation. In this way the teaching and knowledge of the ancestors continue and the circle of understanding and caring grows stronger (50).

I have interpreted this teaching to mean that I will share my knowledge with participants and community members as they share their knowledge with me for the benefit of future generations. As a thank-you, participants were offered a traditional gift, and will be honoured with a mini-feast at the completion of the research and my thesis requirements. The mini-feast will ensure that the community also benefits from the knowledge and wisdom that the youth and the Elder shared with me, as well as publicly validate the findings of the research.
An Indigenous methodological approach which incorporates a wholistic framework has informed my theoretical lens and data processes for my thesis. I have used the five R’s to provide a foundational understanding of my research process.

4.6. METHODS

A qualitative wholistic framework, guided by an identified community Elder were chosen for this study because these methods provided culturally appropriate elements that were congruent with an Indigenous methodology. The methods included, a sharing circle workshop; and open-ended individual and paired interviews, which are most relevant to the oral tradition and community interactions that occur in most Aboriginal community based settings. These methods also ensured that research participants could share information about their lives in a comfortable setting and in a way that was respectful of their contributions.

4.6.1. RESEARCH SITE:

I partnered with the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) and the Aboriginal Community Policing Centre (ACPC). I was able to access youth from ACPC’s programs and a partner program at another site, called the ‘Creating Healthy Aboriginal Role Models Program’ (CHARM). Through UNYA’s partnership with the Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), I was also able to access and promote my research to youth at both these organizations. UNYA also provided me access to a meeting room to host the sharing circle workshop, and conduct individual interviews with youth. I chose these organizations because they have several Aboriginal youth related programs that provide programming to high populations of youth across East Vancouver. I felt that accessing
youth from these organizations would provide a diverse sample of youth who represented a range of: personal interests, levels of education and cultural knowledge, gender, sexual orientation and engagement with Aboriginal community programs. I also have established relationships with staff from these organizations as a result of my prior work and personal experiences. Please see (Appendix A) for a description of these organization’s mandate and provision of services.

4.6.2. ELDER SELECTION: WHAT KIND OF ELDER AM I?

I consulted with my research supervisor, community members and the Executive Directors of the organizations that I worked with to select an Elder to guide this research process. According to Alannah Young (2008):

In many Indigenous contexts, Elders are considered leaders, consultants and teachers. The collective of Elders in a community are considered the authoritarian body because of their combined expertise and wisdom. Not all old people are Elders as many Elders are the ones who know the protocols associated with cultural teachings and demonstrate them in appropriate ways. (8)

As such, Elders have considerable cultural knowledge, expertise and are highly respected because of their actions and leadership in a community. Age is not a factor in order for one to become an Elder. Elders become accepted by the community because they are deemed to have good speaking skills, are listened to and share their cultural knowledge with others (Archibald, 2008; Young, 2008). Archibald (2008) notes “A researcher who enters a First Nations cultural context with little or no cultural knowledge is viewed as a learner. Entering a teacher learner relationship requires time and practice of various cultural protocols before teaching and learning can really occur (38).”

My teacher/learner relationship with Jerry began seven years ago when I met him at the Urban Nation Youth Association, where he was both the Executive Director and a
mentor to me. Jerry has spent almost thirty years working and serving the urban Aboriginal community in various professional capacities. I approached Jerry to guide this study after receiving advice from several people in the community that he should be asked to begin stepping into a role as an Elder. Jerry is best known for his sense of humour and his care and attention in attending to other peoples’ needs.

As Archibald (2008) & Young (2008) have already noted, age is not always a factor in determining who is an Elder. It is here that Raven enters the story. Below is an excerpt from my research journal (February 12th, 2009):

Jerry and I chatted for a bit about our current work projects. After speaking about his work for awhile, Jerry asked me how my MA was going. I let him know that was why I had come to visit him because I had just received my ethics approval for my research. I briefly explained that I would like to do a sharing circle workshop with youth so that I could ‘give back in my research’ by creating an atmosphere where youth could learn more about IK and wholism in their lives. Following the workshop, I would conduct interviews with the youth to determine whether or not Aboriginal youth organizations were meeting their wholistic needs. I then followed up with “and this is why I am really here” with a short giggle. “I am here because I would like you to be my Elder for this research. I presented him with my “Elder Letter of Contact.”

Jerry looked at me with a bewildered look and said “am I an Elder?” To which I responded “yeah I think you are.” It was at this moment that I realized I should have been more sensitive in my approach. I had not thought about the fact that Jerry might not view himself as an Elder yet, since people had only recently told me that he should start being called upon to act as an Elder. I realize now that there was a bit of dissonance between the fact that people should start treating Jerry like an Elder and the fact that Jerry might not consider himself to be an Elder. Oops! Thankfully Jerry humorously responded by asking me what kind of an Elder he should be “a old dirty elder?” or an “Elder”? I told him maybe we could call him an “Elder in training” to which I garnered a roar of laughter. He quickly followed up again with “well, I don’t want to be one of those dirty elders.” He then added “I am only 61” to which I suggested “that is why we can call you an ‘Elder in training.’ To which we both started laughing.

This was the first research lesson I was to receive from Raven. While this implied request could have been considered a transgression, Raven interjected to teach me that I need to be more careful in future requests to ‘Elders’. I am extremely grateful for Jerry’s
willingness to share his knowledge with me. He has assisted me to develop an enriched awareness about IK and my family. He has also guided the unfolding of this research story.

4.6.3. PARTICIPANT SELECTION & ACCESS

A snowball sampling method was used to select eight youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four⁷ who participated in Aboriginal youth organizations or those organizations that serve Aboriginal youth for two months or more from: UNYA, ACPC, CHARM and BYRC. Participants were invited to attend a sharing circle workshop and participate in interviews through recruitment posters (Appendix B) placed in these organizations. I also emailed the posters to former colleagues who worked with youth in the community. Several Aboriginal youth workers from UNYA, ACPC, CHARM and BYRC were also pivotal in providing information about the study to youth in their programs. This was done primarily through word of mouth.

I also hosted four information sessions at UNYA’s “Native Youth Drop-In Centre”, CHARM’s ‘Late Night Youth Drop-In Centre’ and the BYRC’s “Breakfast Club”. At each of these sessions I tried to participate in their respective programs in order to become better acquainted with the youth and establish relationships before approaching them for the study.⁸ At each of the information sessions I shared information about the project, answered any questions from the youth and highlighted pertinent ethical information to them. I also noted the email addresses of any youth that wanted to

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⁷ I have chosen this age range because this is the demographic of youth that participate in many community based programs because of provincial government funding policy.

⁸ For example: at CHARM, I participated in their evening sharing circle and played ping pong with the youth; at the BYRC, I assisted making breakfast; and at UNYA, I visited with the youth and youth workers in the centre.
participate in the study so they could be sent a reminder about the date and time of the sharing circle workshop.

Youth were informed that they would receive honoraria for their participation during these sessions. A $10 dollar Safeway Gift Card was offered for the sharing circle workshop as well as food, bus tickets and a ticket to enter into a draw for a $50 dollar Future Shop Gift Card. 9Youth were offered a $15 dollar Safeway Gift Card, snacks, bus tickets and another chance to enter into the draw for the $50 Future Shop gift card for their participation in follow up interviews. They were also notified that honoraria would still be provided if they began the “Coming Full Circle-An Intro to IK Sharing Circle Workshop” (See Appendix C) or interviews and decided to withdraw from the session.

The youth were then provided consent forms (Appendix D-F) which outlined all of the information that I shared with them throughout the recruitment sessions to review on their own before consenting to the research. Nevertheless, Raven flew in to ‘trouble’ this process while revealing to me the hidden power relations embedded in my research.

4.6.4. SEEING THE UNSEEN: AN ENTANGLED PROCESS

Raven once again peeked her nose out again and revealed herself to me one week before the ‘Introduction to Indigenous Knowledge Sharing Circle Workshop.’ Raven gleefully pranced along my research terrain to demarcate the power differential between me and my research participants, all the while shrieking an ominous warning.

These power imbalances have also been noted by Brown (2008) who suggests that a researcher cannot be excused from dealing with power, nor does it excuse them of the responsibility of deciding how to use that power. Rather, it is how the researcher

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9 The draw was held after all the interviews had been completed.
negotiates the process that truly matters, for the lives of the participants and oneself. I have chosen to outline how I have negotiated some of these power imbalances below.

4.6.5. CONSENT BY WHOM AND FOR WHOM?

I went to one of the youth centres that I partnered with to host an information session to invite youth to participate in my research study. One under aged youth in the group, who no longer lived with her parents, wanted to sign her own consent form. I have included an excerpt from my journal entry that day (March 3rd, 2009):

Mary, the only girl in the group announced that she didn’t have a family and would sign her own form. Thankfully, Andrina (one of the youth workers) suggested that Mary contact her social worker by sending her the form electronically or get her aunty to sign it for her. Mary disregarded Andrina and proceeded to sign her own form. I let her know that I was approaching the signing of the consent forms by the honour system and then grew silent. Mary chose not to hand me her form after this but decided a little later to give me her email address. I approached Andrina in private and asked her how I should speak with Mary if she came to the workshop with a forged document. Andrina told me to send the consent form to Mary electronically and ask her to send it to her social worker. Andrina told me if I did not get an email from her SW or her aunty that I should speak with Miriam because it was “not too difficult” for her to get the document signed. In some cases, Andrina informed it would be difficult for some youth to get a guardian to sign the form but not in Mary’s case.

Speaking with Andrina was my first strategy in trying to resolve the dilemma. I also went to class and shared this story with my classmates and professor. The class suggested that I try to make an amendment to my ethics application so that I could add an ‘emancipated youth consent form’. I would have followed this advice but I did not have the time to make an amendment to my ethics application because my sharing circle workshop was scheduled six days later. My final strategy was to send Mary an email and ask her to forward the consent form on to her social worker or have her aunty sign it for her. In the end, Mary did not come to the youth centre on the day of the workshop. None of the other youth who participated in the study were emancipated minors. Nevertheless,
this dilemma could have been avoided if I had taken the advice of my research supervisor some months previous and had included an ‘emancipated minor’ consent form in my ethics application.

My concerns with consent forms did not end with Mary however. I continued to experience a great deal of unease with the process of obtaining consent from the youth. I felt a huge weight and moral responsibility inscribed onto me as I watched the youth sign their consent forms. I felt that some youth signed their consent forms based on a certain level of trust and acceptance of me. For those youth that did not know me, I feel that they may have based this trust on their first impressions of me and the relationships that I had formed with other youth workers whom they knew and trusted. A few of the youth in the information sessions signed their consent forms for the honoraria provided (although none of these youth ended up attending the sharing circle workshop or interviews). None of the youth seemed concerned about their legal rights, or questioned my responsibilities as a researcher.

At the information sessions, most of the youth took a quick glance at the consent form, signed it, and wanted to hand it back to me immediately. It was only after I suggested that they may want to keep the form until the day of the workshop so that they could read it, that some of the youth decided to keep the forms. Some of the youth declined however, and handed the form back to me without fully reading it. This situation was similar to Fine and colleagues (2003) process of obtaining consent in their study with low income women. They note:

Even so, many women simply signed the consent form as just another procedural matter, without reading the entire document. The (apparent) nonchalance probably reflected their general attitude towards procedural matters. These respondents—women on welfare—are constantly required to read bureaucratic forms
that are convoluted and technical, and are told to sign off on other’s responsibilities while signing their own (178).

The youth’s apparent nonchalance towards the forms as just another procedural matter was disconcerting for me. It has made me question what would happen to these youth if another researcher came along with different motivations? Indigenous peoples have a sordid history of having research ‘done on them’ instead of ‘with them.’ (Even today, I am not sure if all researchers do the latter). I also question whether or not a consent form truly protects research participants, if they do not fully recognize the importance of such documents.

Obtaining ‘informed consent’ has therefore made me keenly aware of the power imbalances between the participants and myself. If we were to have a truly equal relationship, should the youth not provide me with their own consent forms for me to sign? Or shouldn’t I have put a disclaimer on the consent form that said “warning, the researcher is now signing off on her responsibilities, participate at your own risk.” I also wonder how the honoraria I provided signified a power differential? Even though I followed UBC Ethics Review Board’s rules for the provision of honoraria to participants, I felt strong conflicting emotions when some of the youth told me they were interested in the honoraria and wanted to sign their consent form. Was the provision of honoraria in this situation coercive given that many of the youth would find the Safeway gift cards useful for their day to day living and survival? I offered the honoraria as a way to honour and respect the youth for their time and sharing, yet I worried it might not seem this way.
I discussed these concerns with Jerry who told me that the honoraria should be viewed as a way of paying the youth to ‘witness’ the research.\textsuperscript{10}

I can’t say that I have fully resolved my conflicting emotions over the consent forms but I did my best to go over the implications of the forms at the beginning of my sharing circle workshop and I made sure I asked the youth if they had any questions throughout the process. I also made a sign on a piece of flip chart paper that outlined my and Jerry’s philosophies and responsibilities. I placed the youth’s rights underneath our responsibilities. I also went over the same information with each of the youth in their individual interviews.

Some of my tension was eased when several of the youth tried to decline the honoraria that I offered them at the sessions. They informed me that they had not participated in the study for the honoraria and were happy to speak with me.

Nevertheless, I insisted that they be given the honoraria for their time and generosity. One of the youth gave her honoraria away to another youth who she felt ‘needed it more than her.’ These actions are very symbolic to me and show me that these youth are truly enacting the principles of IK in their daily lives.

\textbf{4.6.6. SHARING CIRCLE}

I employed a structured experience model in the sharing circle workshop as outlined by Opal Charters-Vaught (1999). She states a structured experience workshop allows the “participant to discover for himself [\& herself] the learning being offered by the experiential process” (2). I first conducted a pilot sharing circle workshop that

\textsuperscript{10} Within the Nisga’a tradition, the act of ‘witnessing’ is an integral part of our social system given that everything is done through the oral tradition. Individuals are invited to feasts for significant social events (marriage, funerals, name changes) and are paid to witness the event. The payments for witnessing range depending upon one’s rank, status and involvement in the community.
employed this approach with seven Aboriginal youth workers and a manager from one of
the Aboriginal youth organizations with which I partnered. I incorporated their feedback
and suggestions from this pilot session into the sharing circle workshop template
(APPENDIX C) that I co-facilitated with Jerry Adams. Eight youth in total (ranging in
age from 15-24) attended the sharing circle workshop. I provided dinner, snacks, bus
tickets and honoraria to the participants before the evening began.

Employing the sharing circle workshop using Charters-Voght’s (1999) structured
experience model allowed the youth to determine and validate their own learning from
their participation in various activities throughout the session. It also allowed me to create
a safer space to develop a shared discursive sphere where the youth could learn new ideas
and broaden their understanding of wholism and Indigenous knowledge from each other.
(For example, all of the youth knew what a medicine wheel\(^{11}\) was and related this to
Aboriginal culture(s) but did not use the concept of wholism or Indigenous knowledge in
their everyday discourse. Through their participation in the sharing circle workshop they
were given the opportunity to broaden their understanding of these concepts and learn
more about the terms ‘wholism’ and ‘Indigenous knowledge’ by listening to all of the
participants stories).

I chose to combine a sharing circle with a structured experience model for the
workshop because I felt that the methods are complementary and are based on
experiential and shared learning, which convey key principles of an Aboriginal pedagogy

\(^{11}\) The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol used by almost all of the Native people of North and South
America (in North America it originated from the Blackfoot, Cree and Dakota). Although the Medicine
Wheel was not originally used on the West coast, the concept of holism was reflected in most Nations oral
histories, art, dancing and languages. Today, the Medicine Wheel has been adopted as framework in many
contemporary First Nations settings, although Aboriginal people have multiple ways of interpreting this
concept.
(Battiste, 2002 b). This combined method also allows for input from all participants, and engenders in each participant a personal understanding to the objectives developed for the session. A sharing circle integrated with a structured experience model also creates a safe space where participants can connect wholistically with themselves and with other participants. It was hoped that this practical approach would increase the youth’s ownership to the process.

As a method, sharing circles share some similarities with focus groups in qualitative research. Both sharing circles and focus groups gather information on a particular topic through group discussion with participants. However, sharing circles should be considered unique from focus groups. According to Lavallee (2006), “focus groups extract data (with an emphasis on questioning by the moderator), while circles are acts of sharing with permission given to the facilitator to report on the discussions in the sharing circle” (8). A sharing circle also follows traditional protocols of a particular cultural group. According to Daryl Bazluk (2002) “the term sharing captures the essence of both talking and listening, which is crucial” in any Indigenous research method (136). I believe that by asking the youth to express, view and listen to each other’s opinions, beliefs, experiences and creations of wholistic education in the sharing circle, they could (possibly) feel empowered as they learned from each other and from me. Young (1998) describes sharing circles as a “living process that to some extent develops character and a body of its own through the influences of environment” (31). As a process it is premised on mutual sharing, listening, and ‘feeling with’ others as individuals form reciprocal relationships and learn new knowledge about the living

12 For example, I acknowledged and thanked Squamish and Musquem people for allowing us to be on our territory at the beginning of the circle. I also formatted the sharing circle with the input of Jerry Adams from the Nisga’a Nation.
world. It is hoped that this sharing circle was beneficial to all participants as they told their stories to the group. A discussion of the youth’s comments and the outcome of the evening’s activities will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.6.7. INTERVIEWS

I hosted a pilot interview with an Aboriginal youth worker who had participated in the pilot sharing circle workshop that I had previously conducted to refine my interview skills and learn how to draw meaning from the stories that she shared with me. Next, I conducted open-ended interviews with six of the eight youth who had participated in the sharing circle workshop. All of these youth were over the age of majority and represented a diversity of First Nations from across Canada. Finally, I interviewed Jerry Adams in order to inquire about his understanding of Indigenous knowledge and wholism and to listen to his reflections from the sharing circle workshop. I have also added Jerry’s thoughts, reflections, and teachings into the findings of the research in order to facilitate an intergenerational dialogue amongst him, the youth and myself. I feel this has led to an increased understanding of Indigenous knowledge and wholism and has significantly broadened the knowledge discerned from this research.

Each of the interviews engaged the same principles that were emphasized in the sharing circle workshop. The interviews were intended to build on the concepts of wholism and Indigenous knowledge introduced in the sharing circle workshop. They

13 While I cannot name this youth worker, I would like to extend my deep appreciation to her for the time she shared with me. She not only participated in this pilot interview on her only day off, but also traveled a significant distance across the city to meet with me.
were also designed to determine what the youth knew already and what they had learned from the workshop.\textsuperscript{14}

Youth were given a choice of either an individual interview or a paired interview. Paired interviews were offered as an option to make youth feel more comfortable, however all of the youth chose to be interviewed individually. I met the youth at a place of their choosing at a time that best fit with their schedules. Half of the interviews were conducted at the Urban Native Youth Association and the other half at various coffee shops on Commercial Drive. Interviews ranged in length from thirty five minutes to an hour and a half. All interviews were recorded on an audio digital recorder and then later transcribed. The youth were informed that the data from their interviews would be password secured and locked in stored filing cabinets. To meet the university requirements regarding data storage upon completion, they were also informed that data would be stored electronically in the lead researcher’s office in a locked storage unit. Food was brought to the interviews that took place at UNYA. Coffee and snacks were bought for the interviews that took place in coffee shops. Honoraria and bus tickets were also provided.

I intentionally selected open-ended interviews to make my questions seem as non-intrusive as possible. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) acknowledge the tensions that arise in employing a standard interview by insiders. They suggest that instead of using a ‘traditional’ interview format (where the researcher asks the participant questions) researchers should “have conversations about their ideas or ask them to recount particular

\textsuperscript{14} For example, a concern was raised by a class mate about the ‘validity’ of hosting a workshop on IK and then asking youth what their thoughts and feelings were about it in subsequent interviews. Two interview questions were specifically designed to learn what the youth learned from the sharing circle workshop regarding the concepts of wholism and IK. This helped me to integrate the youth’s prior knowledge of these terms in my analysis.
experiences while the tape recorder is running” (167). I also felt that this technique would allow the greatest flexibility for participants to ask questions, to openly challenge my questions in order to clarify meanings. I wanted the interviews to be a collaborative process so that the youth could feel that their stories, interpretations, and questions were valued (APPENDIX G).

4.7. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to interpret all the information gathered from various sources in this study, multiple tools were used. My analysis was informed by the theoretical frameworks being used for this study (Indigenous theories of transformation, Indigenous critical theory and pedagogy and Indigenous feminism). I will not outline the theoretical tools used to engage the analysis because I have already done so in the chapter three.

Michelle Pidgeon (2008) used a wholistic pattern, or organizing principle, in her data analysis of interviews and sharing circles in her qualitative research. Like Pidgeon, I began by employing a wholistic model for my data analysis. The wholistic model as an organizing principle served as the unifying thread from my research questions to my research approach. I embarked on this journey thinking that I could simply place the research data into wholistic themes (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional). Little did I know that it would be Raven who would once again guide me through the multiple stages of this inquiry and teach me the true meaning of a wholistic analysis.

4.7.1. THE MENTAL ASPECT

For the first phase of the analysis of the research, I read and hand coded my sharing circle and interview transcripts in an attempt to see emerging themes that were
related to each question (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). I then re-read each interview transcript and created a list of codes derived from the theoretical frameworks employed in this study (See APPENDIX H) (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I then placed each individual interview into a data table, organized under the following columns (research/interview question, my comments, code, missing info/questions). In the first column, I organized the transcripts into interview questions that aligned with the research questions. I also highlighted important quotes in various colours throughout the transcript, to be used for the later stages of my analysis and interpretation. In the second column I wrote down a brief summary and interpretation of the respondent’s answer to each interview question. I then created codes for each respondent’s comments to each interview question using their own words. Next, I coded each respondent’s comments to each interview question using the theoretical codes that I had created earlier (APPENDIX H). I later contrasted these two sets of codes to help me to better balance the participants’ comments with my theoretical subjectivity. In the final column, I considered what events, behaviors, statements or activities seemed rare or were absent, despite my expectations. I also noted any questions that arose throughout the entire process. I then wrote short summaries about these questions and/or absent cases to help me understand the data as a whole (Silverman, 2001).

The second phase of my analysis involved a failed attempt at using the WEFT qualitative software package to analyze the sharing circle transcript and individual data tables that I created. After a day of frustration, I realized that I would save time continuing the coding process by hand since I had already established a system that was incompatible with the software.
In the third phase, I created another set of tables that compiled all of the participant’s transcripts together and organized them according to each interview question. For example I placed all the participants’ comments to the question “Is Wholism Important to You?” into one table. These collective data tables were organized into four columns (Name, Code, Comment, Follow-Up). Viewing the data in this way helped me to begin to determine the similarities and differences amongst the participant’s responses to each interview question. In turn, this also enabled me to form relationships between the interview questions and research question so that I could begin to identify emerging themes. I also wrote short summaries to describe what I had learned from each of these tables that assisted me in my interpretation.

In addition to coding my data according in these tables, I also created a journal of my own thoughts, feelings and understanding of the research process so that I could include this information as separate data that I could connect to the participants’ comments and stories. This journal contained useful contextual information such as the setting, and description of the interviews as well as my personal reflections and biases which I considered in my interpretation (Grbich, 2007). This journal was viewed and commented on by a member of my research committee.

4.7.2. PATHWAYS TO A WHOLISTIC ANALYSIS

We find then, an emphasis in the western tradition of approaching knowledge through the intellect. For Indigenous people, knowledge is also approached through the senses and the intuition (Carlos, Corder, 1995: 30).

After disassembling my ‘data’ into codes, creating multiple tables and strewing hundreds of post it notes throughout my office I became increasingly overwhelmed and unsure how to proceed with my analysis. I spent a considerable amount of time sitting in
front of my computer trying to analyze each interview, concept, and code in my mind. I found it difficult to decide how I was going to gather all of these ideas and write them into a coherent manuscript. The amount of paper, post-it notes and data tables scattered across my office signified the number of false starts and stops that I experienced as I tried to summarize and write the findings of my analysis. Somewhere deep down inside of me, I had a feeling that I was missing something very important.

At first, I took this feeling to mean that I should return to the literature and conversations that had already been started by other Indigenous scholars to assist me in me in the next steps of my research journey. Reading these conversations provided me with a better sense of direction, although I was still unable to rid myself of this uneasy feeling--that is-- until Raven reentered to give me an important clue.

This clue came to me in a dream. In my dream I saw the bright red cover of Shawn Wilson’s (2008) “Research is Ceremony” book. For a better portion of the night the front cover of this book flashed in my mind as I experienced a deep, calm and relaxing sleep that I had not experienced for quite some time. I also felt an opening in my chest that is difficult to explain in words.

When I first awoke, I thought that I had simply become too caught up in research and consequently dismissed what I had experienced. After another afternoon of false starts and stops in front of the computer, I realized that I needed to get outside and go out onto the land to contemplate the empty feeling I was experiencing. Once, I started to walk in the mountains, I began to experience the same calm and relaxed feeling that I had while I was dreaming about Wilson’s book. Suddenly pieces of the interview transcripts and the participant’s comments began floating from my mind into my body while I
climbed a steep slope. The sharp incline of the mountain was overshadowed as I was brought to a deep quiet place inside myself. This place enabled me to feel the emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of my research. Many of the dilemma’s I had previously experienced were automatically brought into perspective. Before, I knew it, I was at the top of the mountain, feeling at peace with myself and better able to understand the message that was given to me from trusted Raven.

I now realize that it is impossible to form any ‘wholistic’ analysis without recognizing the emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions the concept implies. These dimensions and their respective messages can come in many forms (dreams, land, Elders, stories, intuition) and should be balanced with the analytic devices and strategies that are learned in Western institutions.15 I have learned the single most important aspect of a wholistic analysis is to ensure that one connects with all of these dimensions. In this way research can truly become a ceremony and meaningful knowledge can be advanced.

4.8. TEXT & THE RE-PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH

Writing ideas down fixes them as objects that can be taken out of context of time and relationships. As fixed objects, ideas lose the ability grow and change, as those who hold relations with idea’s grow and change themselves (Wilson, 2009:123)

It would be unrealistic to pretend that organizing, writing and re-presenting the youth’s stories in this thesis was unproblematic. I feel it is important to recognize the fact that in the end, I was the person who decided which research questions to ask, wrote the

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15 I am appreciative to Dr. Deirdre Kelly for suggesting that in her view preeminent qualitative researchers such as H.F. Wolcott (2004) and L. Richardson (2003) highlight the role that intuition plays in the data analysis process. Nevertheless, it is my experience that very few other Western scholars provide a detailed summary of this process; or emphasize the importance of intuition and dreams as a way of coming to ‘know’ and make sense of one’s data.
research design and chose which quotes to be re-presented in this study. The participants’ comments from our interviews are taken out of context and re-configured to make sense according to the themes I saw emerging. The youth’s comments should always be considered part of an on-going process; their thinking about a topic will change and continue to grow in the context of time and the new relationships they form. This study merely catches a brief moment of that process.
CHAPTER 5: COMING FULL CIRCLE: AN INTRODUCTION TO IK SHARING CIRCLE WORKSHOP

5.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation for understanding the data that will be presented in chapters six and seven. It will provide a partial analysis of research question one: “How do urban Aboriginal youth articulate, conceptualize and view Indigenous knowledge?” which will be examined in greater detail in chapter six. This chapter will first introduce the participants and then report on the objectives and outcomes achieved from the sharing circle workshop; it will also highlight the new knowledge that the youth learned about IK and wholism from the sharing circle workshop. The chapter concludes with the new understandings that Jerry, the Elder, and I gained from the workshop.

5.2. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MANY VOICES

It would be appropriate to begin by introducing the Elder and youth who have participated in the sharing circle workshop and interviews employed for this study. I asked the participants if they could provide one word or as many as four sentences to describe themselves for the introduction of this chapter. I feel that inviting and taking seriously the youth’s experiences with Indigenous knowledge must go beyond moving their voices from the private to the public realm. In the present inquiry I wanted to think

16 I did not include information about two of the youth who participated in the sharing circle workshop because I have been unable to contact them. These youth did not participate in follow up interviews. All of the youth were 19 years or over and indicated that they wanted to include their real names in the study.
with them and ensure that this research remained a collaborative and inclusive process.\(^\text{17}\) As a result some of the youth have chosen to write their own descriptions of themselves.

**JERRY ADAMS- “Niik’ankwsdins”**

Jerry shares that he:

> [H]as dedicated his whole career working with youth and especially Aboriginal Youth in the Greater Vancouver area. He has been married to Linda for 35 years and they have three grown up children. He is from the Nisga’a Nation but has spent most of his life away from his Nation. He was sent to go to school in the Lower Mainland area of BC, because the Federal Government in the 60’s had decided to start moving some of the Aboriginal youth away from the residential school system. He has lived in Vancouver for over 33 years and has worked as a childcare worker, family support worker, outreach worker and social worker. For thirteen years he was the Executive Director of a non-for profit organization that specialized in working with street involved Aboriginal youth in Vancouver, B.C. He was part of the Children’s Commission as a Tribunal Member for three years. Received the Circle of Courage Award from Reclaiming Our Youth Network a movement of professionals, policy leaders, and parents concerned with children and youth in conflict in home, school and community (Personal email June 15\(^\text{th}\), 2009).”

Jerry is now the Executive Director of a non-profit organization that assists Aboriginal people as they exit the criminal justice system through the provision of residential and rehabilitation services.

**LEO**

Leo is from the Carrier & Nuchanulth Nations. He has grown up in multiple cities in British Columbia. He has a great sense of humour and refers to himself as being ‘Coyote’ the trickster. Leo works in construction doing rebar and visits UNYA’s Drop-In Centre regularly. When I asked him how he would describe himself he stated he was “in the dust right now” because he was looking for work. However, he was quick to describe himself as a “fun Indian.” When I asked him what he thought other people should know

\(^\text{17}\) I provided the youth with four guiding questions to assist them with their introductions. I also informed them that they were not obligated to answer these questions in their responses. The questions were: What do you like to do in your spare time? What word or words describe you best? What do you hope the readers will learn from the information that you shared with me in our interview? What do you like or don't like...
about Aboriginal youth, he provided me with some very deep insights. He said (1) “Not many people take the time to listen to youth.” (2) “Youth have all different kinds of knowledge to share.” and (3) “It is important for people to know who I AM!” His future dreams are to continue traveling and learning about other cultures.

BEN

Ben is from the Squamish Nation and has lived most of his life in North Vancouver. He wishes to share the following information about himself:

I am working in the Finance Department at the Squamish Nation Band Office until September, after work on Mondays and Fridays I have pow wow practice and on Wednesdays I have wool weaving class. In my spare time I like to go to the beach, for a hike, a ride, or if time permits just sit by a river and meditate. The words that describe me best are: father, entrepreneur, pow wow singer, cultural/spiritual, sober and man. I hope the readers of your thesis both see that us youth today aren't as dumb as people may think; we actually have things we value no matter what our history, and I hope the readers are encouraged by my words to turn to tradition. As for what I like and don't like, it's not quite specific enough for me to answer for me at this time. Oh before I forget, I also have a new title, Lead singer of Whispering Wind coming soon! (Personal email, May 21\(^{st}\), 2009).

COURTENAY

Courtenay is from the Cree Nation and has grown up in Vancouver most of her life. She says: “I am forever sharing and using my brain power. I am always listening to my emotions and what my intuition is telling me. I love to go for my goals and move forward. I am always praying for help and asking for healing” (Email June 6th, 2009).

Courtenay is a student at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology where she is currently completing the first year of her Social Work degree. Her future dreams are to: become a youth mentor and tutor in high schools, work in a home for ‘at-risk’ youth and teach Aboriginal arts and culture.
CLOUDY DAYS

Cloudy Days is usually the first youth to greet me when I visit the Urban Native Youth Association. He has an engaging smile that makes him very approachable. He is also a newcomer to the city, only recently moving to Vancouver with his family last September. He is currently enrolled in an Aboriginal pre-employment program where he is learning carpentry and construction-related skills. Cloudy Days has recently applied to Langara College and is in the process of deciding which program he would like to take (Recreation Diploma, the Criminal Justice Diploma, or the University Transfer Program).

TYRONE

Tyrone’s mother is from the Nuchanuulth & Nlaka'pamux Nations. He has lived most of his life in Vancouver, although as a teenager he spent time living in his father’s community in the Interior of B.C. He told me that he likes to visit Aboriginal youth organizations on a frequent basis to play pool, meet new youth and participate in sporting activities. In the past, Tyrone has also been a team captain and volunteer organizer for an Aboriginal youth baseball team in East Vancouver. He also shows a strong commitment to family and desire to learn more about his cultural traditions. Tyrone’s future dreams are to go on to post secondary and study sports science or become a Physical Education teacher.¹⁸

DIMICIA

Dimicia is Kwakwaka'wakw from Alert Bay, B.C. She recently moved back to the Lower Mainland in September (she previously lived in the city when she was in her early

¹⁸ I would also like to thank him for his patience. I accidentally deleted our first interview, and Tyrone graciously agreed to do a second interview and share his insights with me again.
Dimicia likes to “read, write, paint, bike ride, swim” in her free time and describes herself as “indestructible.” When I asked her what she hoped readers would take away from her words she stated “maybe what our needs are as Aboriginal youth in the city and what we are lacking in for support. But most importantly, we are thriving as a community. We are thriving, growing, and building.” Dimicia is in a unique position in that she is both ‘a youth’ and a ‘youth worker’ at an Aboriginal youth organization in Vancouver. I would like to thank Dimicia for her patience, generosity and time. I accidentally deleted half of our first interview and she was kind enough to meet me again to complete a second interview.

The next section will describe how each of these youth and Jerry came together to share their thoughts, ideas and feelings about Indigenous knowledge and wholism in the sharing circle workshop (detailed below).

### 5.3. BRINGING OUR KNOWLEDGE INTO THE CIRCLE

The sharing circle workshop took place on March 8th, 2009 in a large meeting room at the Urban Native Youth Association. Participants included: eight youth, two youth workers, an Elder and myself. The sharing circle workshop had four objectives:

1. To explore the meaning of wholism and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) with Urban Aboriginal youth through a variety of sources: Elder, story-telling, experiential group activities, art, games, rhyme or poetry.
2. To create an intergenerational learning environment.
3. To create a safe space by which participants can begin to notice, or deepen their understanding of wholistic education to their learning processes; and to see how IK is currently operating in their life and/or community.
4. To create group definitions for the terms *Wholism* and *Indigenous Knowledge* for follow up interviews in this research study.
The first three objectives of the sharing circle workshop were achieved. The fourth objective was only partially achieved. The participants created a definition for the term wholism but did not have time to construct a group definition for IK. A template of the workshop is included in Appendix C. I trace my own teachings and learning through the sharing circle workshop and give voice to those who were integral to it. The chapter concludes by weaving the participants’ reflections of the new knowledge they learned in the sharing circle workshop.

5.4. **CIRCLE OPENING & PROTOCOLS**

After all participants had eaten dinner, the sharing circle began by acknowledging and thanking the Coast Salish People for meeting in their traditional territory. Youth were provided information about the purpose of the study, which also outlined their ethical rights and my responsibilities as a researcher. In addition to this, Jerry and I also pointed to a piece of flip chart paper that had been placed on the wall to make visible for participants to see throughout the workshop. This piece of paper outlined our personal philosophies and beliefs:

- Each person’s knowledge, experience or story can contribute to a new understanding that will be beneficial for themselves and the entire group.
- The workshop is about exploring new paths. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers.
- You are encouraged (not obligated) to share and to add to the richness of the group experience, but only if you feel comfortable.
- We are all both learners and teachers, each having something to learn and just as importantly, something to share.
- This is not a test and your comments will not impact your access to services at UNYA, ACPC, BYRC, CHARM or elsewhere.

Youth were invited to ask questions and to clarify anything they did not understand before the evening’s activities proceeded. None of the youth had any questions or
comments. To create a safe space for the evening the youth were invited to participate and create some agreements and protocols for the circle. These agreements are listed in (Appendix C).

5.5. LISTENING DEEPLY: GETTING TO KNOW & UNDERSTAND YOUTH

After everyone in the group had consented to these agreements, Jerry and I invited the youth to introduce themselves and to tell us what they would bring with them on a canoe journey that began with the first letter of their name. We did this for fun as well as to begin eliciting IK examples. Next, we asked the youth to go around the circle in 90 seconds or less and teach us something about being a youth or youth culture that would help us be ‘cool’ and understand them better. This activity was designed to be a warm up exercise to assist the youth to begin feeling comfortable contributing to dialogue in a group setting. I was not prepared for the honesty, length and emotional depth of the answers to this seemingly simple question. For example, Ben explained “a lot of youth are getting back into education these days and getting back into their culture.” Leo stated “generally, I don’t talk much because most people don’t care.” Tyrone shared “there is a quite a bit out there that [youth] want to learn about their culture more: language, games.” Cloudy Days shared “Even though we say we have nothing to say, we have a hundred things going through our minds.” The other youth in the group spoke about the importance of sports, culture and the need for youth to be recognized for their talents and achievements. Only one youth made a comment about pop culture. Needless to say, we did not go around the circle in 90’s seconds or less, however the quality of the youth’s comments indicated that they felt safe and comfortable to participate in the rest of the

19 I had anticipated many more references to pop culture in the youth’s comments.
evening’s activities. Their comments also served as an important reminder that young people have a lot of thoughts, feelings and stories that they want to share when they are listened to deeply. It is important to create welcoming environments where youth can feel a sense of connection and belonging to strengthen their active participation and engagement in the community. A sharing circle guided by an Elder is one specific cultural way which allows these knowledgable voices to be listened to and learned from. After this activity the cedar strand activity outlined in Appendix C was played.

5.6. INTERGENERATIONAL SHARING & STORY-TELLING

Next Jerry and I shared personal life experience stories as a way to introduce youth to the word Indigenous knowledge. In our previous meetings and discussions, Jerry felt it was important not to teach about the concept in a formal academic way since it could be intimidating to the youth. Instead he instructed me that the workshop should “help the youth figure out who they are as young people,” since it would take more than one workshop to truly teach the meaning of IK (Journal, May 5th). \(^{20}\) I shared the story of ‘Finding My Indigenous Knowledge” (outlined in Chapter 3.2) with the youth. Jerry followed with his own story about IK:

To me it is all about family. How we are connected to our aunties and uncles and grandparents. How you learn from that. For me the opportunity was not there because I was sent to go to school down here. I was fortunate enough not to go to residential school. When I went to school, all I could speak was Nisga’a. Now, I can barely speak it. So, they have done a good job in getting that out of that. Now, I am trying to relearn it. For me the missing link is not so much me but my children. Because I don’t know how to teach them. So I got to relearn that. For me the sad part for me is not being able to reteach my kids Nisga’a. Now we go home to different feasts and events that we have in our village, they get accepted back. To me that is where we can hopefully do the same thing for the community

\(^{20}\) Jerry also reminded me that each youth must find their knowledge from their own community. He pointed out that the way for the youth to do this was for them to continue to be connected to their families.
of Vancouver. We are all different Nations but hopefully we can create a safe environment here in Vancouver. Hopefully, we can be the grandparents here for all you guys. Take care of you guys when you need that help. That we have the ears to hear you guys. You know, I am just across the street. I am an open fellow. I am definitely here if you need to talk….As Aboriginal peoples sometimes we just sit. Non-Aboriginal peoples can’t understand why we just sit and not talk at times. Because we feel emotions amongst each other. We feel emotions when everyone is down. We don’t have to be with them. We don’t have to say anything. They don’t have to be written up. To me that part of me and who I am. To me that is Indigneous KA-nowledge. [SOME YOUTH LAUGHING]. That is me, that is who I am. Thank you.

Jerry’s story highlighted the importance of family, community, culture, language, support, humour, and emotional strength as being formative elements of IK and culture. He also quietly ‘problematised’ the tension that exists between an academic understanding of IK and the way it is experienced by individuals in their daily lives. Further, he demonstrated how he continues on his journey to gain more knowledge about his own culture by re-learning how to speak his language. His tone and style of instruction brought a great deal of emotional security to the group, creating an environment where the youth felt comfortable enough to begin exploring, deepening and enhancing their understanding of IK and wholism through the experiential activities discussed below. These activities were designed so that the youth would become the teachers as Jerry and I listened and responded to their comments. In the follow up interviews with the youth, they indicated an appreciation for the intergenerational dialogue and sharing that occurred throughout the evening’s activities.

5.7. **THE YOUTH DESCRIBE ABORIGINAL CULTURES**

In the first part of the sharing circle workshop, youth were asked a series of questions about Aboriginal culture(s) to assist them to begin to understand the connection
The examination of the youth’s cultural values and understandings may also provide insight into the development of future wholistic education initiatives.

The youth identified the following elements, traits and values as being a part of Aboriginal cultures: outgoing, humour, family, community, friends, circle as one, language, and generosity. Next, they were asked to identify individuals that spoke about or expressed their culture. Courtenay pointed out that the question should be re-worded because she felt culture “is not something people express” rather “it is more something you see in people’s actions.” Ben also commented that he felt culture was expressed through words. I re-phrased the question and asked the youth what kinds of actions, or words they heard people say when expressing Aboriginal culture(s). The youth listed the following words and actions as being important to Aboriginal culture(s): being at people’s service, proper acknowledgement, gratitude, and participating and inviting others to a cultural activity.

The youth were then asked to participate in small group activities and answer a question and then share their answers with the entire group once they were finished their discussions. The dialogue was then opened to include everyone’s comments and feedback on each of the smaller group’s questions. The youth identified the following actors, singers or writers as individuals who expressed Aboriginal culture(s): Bill Reid, Jordan Tutu, Evan Adams, Don Burnstick, Buffy St. Marie, Lee Maracle and Leonard George. Jonathan Cheecho and Carey Price were famous athletes that were added to this list by many of the young men in the group.
The youth had a long discussion about the various cultural events that they had participated in or attended at some point in their lives. These cultural events were representative of the diverse cultural heritages of the youth in the room and included land-based and urban activities. Collectively these youth had participated in a significant number of cultural events that included: canoe journeys, gathering traditional food, West Coast Family nights at the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, pipe ceremonies, traditional games, sun-dances, building a Tipi or Pithouse, tanning hides, making a fire and witnessing a totem pole raising. The youth’s comments about these cultural attributes and activities were scribed on coloured sticky notes to be used in the next activity (discussed below).

5.8. CIRCLE ACTIVITIES

The youth were asked to identify a large circle drawn on a large sheet of flip chart paper. All of the youth in the group identified the circle as a medicine wheel and took turns identifying the various teachings, themes and elements that are illustrated in (Figure 1). Leo jokingly told the group that the circle was a scope and the only thing missing was a deer in front of it.

Jerry and I affirmed the youth’s construction of the medicine wheel and provided a brief introduction to the concept of wholism. I explained that the medicine wheel could be considered one example of wholism because each Aboriginal Nation had a unique way of understanding the inter-related aspects of a person’s physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self. I continued to explain that wholism was also reflected in oral stories, art, dancing and languages of most Indigenous people, and that most West Coast Nations did
not use the medicine wheel traditionally. Next, the youth were asked to take some of the Post It notes that they had created in the previous activity and place them in a wholistic pattern in a new blank circle (Figure 2 shown below)

Figure 1: "Medicine Wheel"

The first step employed to assist the youth to understand the meaning of wholism was to have them collectively identify the meaning and themes of the medicine wheel. The second step included asking the youth to take some of the Post It notes from the questions about Aboriginal culture noted in the previous section and place them in the
medicine wheel. After a short break, the Alter-Native expressions activity (Pages 7 & 8 of APPENDIX C) was introduced to the youth so they could personally apply the concept of wholism in their own lives as the final step to understand its meaning. The youth were invited to create a collage using a circle symbol and a variety of collage materials and magazines. They were also provided with alternative options and were invited to create a poem, story or rhyme to describe the mental, physical and emotional aspects of themselves.

One youth had to return to work, and two other youth had to leave to attend dance practice at the Friendship Centre. However, shortly before the workshop ended, one came back and also brought a friend.

![Figure 2: Youths’ Co-Construction of Wholism](image)

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21 One youth had to return to work, and two other youth had to leave to attend dance practice at the Friendship Centre. However, shortly before the workshop ended, one came back and also brought a friend.
Tyrone, Ben, Cloudy Days and Tom eagerly began to make collages. However, due to a staff shortage at the centre, we were asked to close the sharing circle workshop an hour early so staff could go home. We did not have an opportunity to finish the ‘Alter-Native Expressions Activity’ or the ‘Piecing Together our IK’ activity (See page 7 of APPENDIX C). Jerry and I summarized the evening’s activities by sharing what we had learned from the youth and by thanking them for their participation.

As anticipated, the youth’s discussion about the attributes, activities and individuals they associate with Aboriginal cultures, along with their collective definitions of the medicine wheel and wholism in Figures (1 & 2) demonstrate that they already possess a considerable amount of IK. The next section highlights the participants’ reflections from the follow up interviews from the sharing circle workshop.

5.9. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE- NEW KNOWLEDGE SHARED

All of the youth indicated that they learned something new about Indigenous knowledge from the sharing circle workshop in their follow-up interviews. Tyrone found it interesting to learn that he could place himself inside a medicine wheel in the ‘Alter-Native Expressions’ activity. Leo indicated that the sharing circle workshop made him feel “more proud” about his identity. Dimicia was impressed with the amount of knowledge that the youth in the group had to share with each other. Courtenay noted the process of learning about Indigenous knowledge is unique to the individual, is validated

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22 I did return to the centre on two later dates with the materials and supplies from the activity to allow the youth to finish their collages. However, none of the youth were at the centre on the evenings that I returned and no collages were completed.
through personal experience and can be woven together to form a unified relationship
with other perspectives and experiences:

I realized about IK. “Indigenous Knowledge” [LAUGHS] is that it is different for
everyone. Everyone is still learning. I learned that [PAUSE]. It is kind of a long
journey but it is a hopeful one too. It was really nice to get everyone in the room
together and talking. When we hear everyone else’s comments, you can accept
and see everyone’s differences but at the same time you feel really good because
you can see that we are all the same.

Cloudy Days shared a contradiction he saw between living in a society that does not
always value Indigenous people’s knowledge, experience and culture(s), and the stories
and teachings shared by participants in the sharing circle workshop:

I can say that I am amazed that people these days do actually recognize
Indigenous knowledge because when I am walking around, it just doesn’t
seem like nobody knows it at all. So, I am just kinda surprised that some people
are on the same level and they know exactly what is involved in the culture.

Finally, Ben openly challenged the representation of Indigenous knowledge solely
through text alone and highlights a critical issue for Indigenous scholars:

Yeah, actually I was not really familiar with the concept. IK, I guess it is just
kind of a university word for spirituality pretty much. I knew about that aspect of
it but the knowledge, I think I learnt that is more of a…how would you say that? I
guess it is a colonized form of spiritualism. It is something you put on paper I
guess. I learned that it is recognized in society, that is the only way that you can
put it, knowledge on paper. You can’t put spirituality on paper.

Ben’s comments illustrate the fact that in some instances the spiritual experience of
knowledge exceeds the conceptualization and representation of Western text-centric
pedagogy. As Ben’s comments hint, this may require an experiential understanding in
order for one to ‘feel’ or ‘connect’ with the multiple dimensions and sources of
Indigenous knowledge. The issues surrounding the transformation of Indigenous
knowledge into a political power base that detaches itself from dominant constructions of
knowledge is an important discussion and will be examined in further detail in chapter eight “Raven’s Plight”.

All of the youth indicated that they agreed with the comments and stories that were shared about IK in the sharing circle workshop. They also felt that each perspective was interconnected to form a collective understanding of IK. This seemed to be a consciousness-raising experience for most of the youth in that it helped them to realize that they have a considerable amount of knowledge and wisdom to share with each other. For some youth this experience may have evoked a critical understanding about the contradictions and challenges Indigenous knowledge can represent in community and academic contexts. In summary, all of the youth learned or experienced new knowledge about IK from the sharing circle workshop.

5.10.  WHOLISM: LEARNINGS

The youth shared fewer reflections about wholism. Cloudy Day’s felt he did not learn anything new about the group’s co-construction of the medicine wheel (in Figures 1 & 2) but acknowledged that it was the first time he had heard the word wholism. Courtenay reflects “I learned that wholism starts with you first. Wholism is just the relationship that you have with yourself.” Most of the youth shared their surprise at the amount of cultural knowledge and activities that the group possessed or participated in as Ben explains “we know a lot more than what is written [on the question cards]. How you had the cards with questions and everyone filled up the extra space with more questions and activities. Like I was saying earlier, everyone is on the same page right.” As Ben’s comments suggest, none of the youth disagreed with the construction of Figures
Similar to the youth’s feedback about IK in the previous section, they were in agreement that each individual’s thoughts and experiences of wholism were unique and could not be considered invalid. The unity of these comments demonstrates that the youth are already enacting the collaborative element of IK—an element which acknowledges and honours a diversity of multiple perspectives on a topic.

5.11. CIRCLE REFLECTIONS

Jerry viewed the sharing circle workshop positively. He states:

I think there were a lot of stories that our youth told us. They are a lot more in tune then when I was a young person at that age. Yeah, they just seemed to gravitate to what you were trying to bring about. They stayed around, none of the kids were bored and stuff like that. Yeah, I think a lot of these young folks they talked about their songs. They talked about how some of them went on their tribal journey’s and how that was good for them. Some were dreaming to go on those journey’s. They are learning a lot more from their community than we realize as leaders and Elders. So we need to start recognizing them for what they can give us back.

As Jerry’s comments indicate the youth possess a considerable amount of knowledge and life experience that are beneficial for the urban Aboriginal community. Jerry felt that all of the youth shared important insights about their cultural knowledge as well as a great deal of interest to continue to learn more about their rich cultural heritage(s).

At the end of the evening I wrote these reflections in my journal about the knowledge I had learned both from the youth and through the process of the evening’s activities:

I was worried initially that the youth did not get to complete the ‘Alter--Native expressions activity or puzzle activity. As I think about it now, I question whether or not it was important for them to know how Marie Brant Castellano (2000) described the sources and characteristics of Indigenous knowledge. When I reflect back to my conversation with Jerry and his comments and suggestions in our last two meetings, I realize now that it was more important for the youth to
feel confident to describe their knowledge to us. The underlying message of the workshop was to assist the youth to realize that they already knew a great more than they thought they already knew about IK... For some reason, one of the key things that I have learned through this entire process of putting together this workshop is how to address people’s emotional needs and help them articulate and build from what they already know. (Well, maybe it is not all that surprising given the teachings that I have been given from Jerry!).

The next chapter will describe and analyze the youth’s thoughts and feelings about Indigenous knowledge further by addressing the first research question in greater detail.
CHAPTER 6: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE PATHWAYS

6.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The sharing circle workshop created a safe space where participants could use collaborative group discussion and activities to become aware of, deepen and enhance their understanding of Indigenous knowledge and wholism. This chapter will describe how the youth articulated, conceptualized, and expressed Indigenous knowledge and analyze the four main themes which emerged: (1) Indigenous Knowledge is Important (2) Indigenous Knowledge is a Process (3) Indigenous Knowledge is Wholistic, and (4) Indigenous Knowledge is Expressed in Multiple Ways. These themes interconnect to form a wholistic representation of Indigenous knowledge.

6.2. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT

Significantly, four of the six youth interviewed in this study felt that IK was very important to them. These youth provided a wide range of responses that highlighted the ways in which IK positively influenced their lives. Leo confidently stated that IK meant “everything” to him. Dimicia identified IK as being integral to the continued growth and revitalization of Indigenous communities. She asserts “If we are not educating ourselves with traditional knowledge then our strength as a community is not going to grow, we are not going to continue to get stronger teaching each other.” Courtenay felt uplifted by the positive impacts of IK. She states: “for me, Indigenous knowledge is extremely important. Especially, knowing your personal history and also getting to know the Aboriginal community. There is a lot of hope in that too because you get to meet other
people who are doing good and staying on track. It inspires you.” Finally, Ben
acknowledged that he had only been introduced to the words ‘Indigenous Knowledge’ in
the sharing circle workshop; although he demonstrated a high degree of epistemological
understanding about IK in the following statement:

    It is definitely, very important because it connects things and it gives you a deeper
    meaning into life. It is not so objective. Like I said earlier, it is not so noun
    based. I can actually start telling people the teachings. It is not noun based it is
    verb based because verbs describe it. Yeah, it just connects everything. It gives
    you a better outlook on life and a better outlook on yourself. [PAUSE]. I think it
    is very important.

Ben’s comments reiterate the previously mentioned theoretical assertions presented in
earlier sections of this study in that Indigenous knowledge is verb- or process-based and
evades static categorization.

The comments made by the remaining two youth draw attention to the historical
legacies of colonization and their impact on contemporary urban realities. Cloudy Days
shared that IK was not something that could be easily overlooked but felt that it must be
balanced with his educational and career endeavors. He pragmatically states “it is not
something I can really forget but then I can’t really make it my top priority right now
because I have to think about going to school.” This view closely reflects the present
realities of many urban Aboriginal people living in Vancouver today. While IK may be
important to their overall identity as Aboriginal Peoples, they feel that they must focus on
attaining a higher education in order to survive and succeed in urban environments.
Cloudy Days’ comments thus reinforce the need for IK to be better included, and
promoted within the current educational system and community educational
programming

    IK was also relatively unimportant to Tyrone, who stated:
Well to me it doesn’t seem that important because I haven’t experienced much of it yet. But, I know if I asked my parents or Elders they are going to be “it is totally important. I am pretty sure if they knew what to do they would come in and help too right. Because they think it is so important for the youth to get involved.

His statement implies the impact which residential schooling has had on older generations of Aboriginal people. In many cases these impacts have hindered their ability to teach younger generations about IK. Tyrone further adds that giving youth more education about the impact of residential schooling while teaching them about IK and Indigenous culture would encourage them to do better in school.

The youth’s responses were realistic. Even when they indicate that IK was a central feature in shaping their identity and lives, they remain cognizant that in many ways it is marginalized within Canadian society. As Ben points out:

We are pretty much invisible in our own territory so it is pretty hard to. There is not that much out there yet, but we are starting to get there. We are starting to be recognized more. From the recognition, there will be a lot more programs that offer that kind of knowledge.

Like Ben, several of the youth spoke about the detrimental impacts that colonization has wrought on Indigenous peoples and their knowledge system. Many of these youth shared stories about experiences of racism in their daily lives and in institutional settings, which led them to think about how racism has denigrated Indigenous culture(s) and threatened to destroy IK. Nonetheless, the youth remained optimistic and hopeful that if IK continued to become more recognized in society, it could assist to alleviate present conditions and help to effect positive change. In closing this section, I realize that the youth’s quotes and my analysis of them fail to convey the sense of hope that they shared with me which was communicated more so through their eyes, voice inflections and body language than their actual words in many cases.
6.3. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS A PROCESS

The youth demonstrated a keen interest in continuing to learn about IK and their culture(s). They viewed IK as being part of a life long learning process that included practical education, observing, listening and experimenting under the caring mentorship of Elders, family members, youth workers and the Aboriginal community. In this sense, the youth saw IK to encompass an ever-deepening relationship with their Indigenous roots and an evolving understanding of who they are and where they come from in relation to their ancestors, traditions, family and communities.

The interview transcripts allowed me to discover common themes in the youth’s opinions about the ways in which traditional methods of instruction have helped them to facilitate their learning processes. Ben shares how listening to his father and observing him in day-to-day activities has helped him to strengthen his identity, vocalize his knowledge and master a variety of skills:

I am finding my voice and I am starting to speak. Because I never had my voice. I’ve been only listening. Now I am speaking and I am finding that I have all the knowledge because I was only listening before. I have been just watching ever since I was little. My dad taught me. He never really told me to watch things directly, he just hinted if I wanted to watch. I learned how to drive, how to cook, even right down how to gut a fish. Just by watching.

Tyrone describes how he began to learn his mother’s language through utilizing his acute listening skills:

Well, on my mom’s side of the family a lot of them know their native language. I just kind of caught on. I listened to them talk. Like I just heard them laughing all the time. Oh, what were you guys talking about earlier ‘Oh nothing,’ something dirty.” After awhile I just kind of of caught on. Then I would say the word and they would be like “hey, where did you learn that from.” I would be like “hey, I was listening to you guys, trying to find out what it means.”
Dimicia explains her community and grandparents taught her about IK and were a source of strength for her:

I would say my entire community even in the way that we all come together. A majority of it from my grandparents because I spent a lot of time with them growing up and even when I was a teenager...I lived with my grandmother who was 73 or 74. But, I would have to say even my whole community. Even something like coming together, you are learning and you are embracing. It is really powerful but a majority from my grandparents.

Leo indicates that the Elders’ method of educating youth through storytelling played an integral role in his learning about IK. He emphasizes that the “old news” captured by these stories is fundamental to maintaining the culture and the history of Aboriginal peoples.

All of the youth feel that learning about IK was part of a self discovery process that assists individuals to identify, develop, and refine their gifts and abilities. They agree that language is a seminal method for transmitting IK and share a common desire to learn their languages in order to enhance their discovery of IK.

The youth suggested that colonization and residential schools have disrupted the transmission of IK in their communities and families. They also felt that Aboriginal youth organizations have a key role to play in guiding and enhancing their discovery of IK and culture(s).

6.4. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS WHOLISTIC

All of the youth saw wholism as an interconnecting and element of IK. For example, Courtenay said: “You look at IK, everything is based on a circle and process. There are no boxes. Everything continues in cycles...” All of the youth also identify wholism as a personal philosophy they use on a daily basis to guide their lives in a
positive direction. Cloudy Days refers to wholism as a “Reference guide for our mentality.” Ben feels that wholism was closely linked to his personal success, stating: “In order to be fully successful with my pow wow singing or pretty much anything in life, I have to go the right path. And the right path, is the path to wholism.” Leo shares a similar view to Ben, explaining the need for individuals to balance their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realms; he asserts that without this balance, individuals will not “…be very successful.” Courtenay gave the medicine wheel as example of how she understood wholism:

The thing with the medicine wheel is it is special to me. The thing about it is that every aspect of the medicine wheel is that it runs so smoothly into the next aspect. That is what I really like about it. For me, how I stay balanced is that I like to dance.

Lastly, Dimicia notes that wholism is integral not only to the health of an individual, but also to the health of the entire urban Aboriginal community:

I feel like everybody has a role to fulfill in the community and even us youth. If were are not taking care of the four main aspects of our life in a wholistic way then we are not giving back to our community the way that we should be.

The element of wholism is thus a common strand that weaves throughout the lives of each youth. Together, they affirm that wholism is a fundamental element of IK which creates balance between the spiritual, mental physical and emotional elements of an individual and their community. Further, their comments support themes that have been identified in the literature which claims that wholism is a foundational epistemological principle of IK (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Gamlin, 2002; Corbiere; 2000; Dei et al, 2000).
6.5. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IS EXPRESSED IN MULTIPLE WAYS

While doing my research for this thesis I have witnessed the multiples ways that the youth express, conceptualize, articulate, and emulate the principles of IK. I feel that many of the youth expressed IK unconsciously through their actions, behaviors and style of speech, subtle nuances which make it difficult to explain in academic writing. Further, they displayed an intense interest to continue learning about IK so they could express and share their knowledge for the benefit of others in the urban Aboriginal community. For example, Tyrone states “you never know if you will be good at something until you try right” and is enthusiastic about learning more about IK so he can pass it on to others.

The opportunity that IK gave the youth to discover and express an individual’s gifts was a common theme that was woven through the interviews. Courtenay reveals her surprise and delight in discovering her ability to dance in the traditional Plains style. She explains “For me, when I started dancing, it just came naturally to me. I started dancing two years ago. I always didn’t even think that I could do it and it just came real easy.” Ben recently joined a traditional singing group, which has enabled him to begin learning another Indigenous language and expresses IK in yet another way. He states:

I never actually joined a pow wow group before but I joined one in September. It is a new group and I am already doing leads. I have known people who have been doing it for 10 years and they don’t even do leads yet. Yeah, so that is pretty good. Yeah, it is a challenge though because it is a different language. It is Dakota mostly and I am Squamish and I grew up with some Squamish words.

Later on in our conversation Ben gave a particularly vivid example of the dynamic ways in which Urban Aboriginal youth are integrating IK with the world around them. He shared a conceptual model he was in the process of creating for school. The model, titled “Ne-he-O-Wa” (meaning ‘Four Body’ in the Cree language), is Ben’s endeavor to create
a First Nations response to Abraham Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs.” To this end, Ben uses the medicine wheel to destabilize the hierarchical structure of Maslow’s model and employs words from his Squamish language to re-name and re-frame Maslow’s scientifically- laden discourse. As such, the model shows how IK enables youth to explore conceptual mechanisms in order to bridge connections with European systems of knowledge. Further, in describing the source of his inspiration for the model, Ben again emphasizes the interconnection between Indigenous languages and IK:

I heard this Elder speak at the school, for National Aboriginal awareness week. He said that Aboriginal people are more verb people than noun people. I thought that was a very cool way of putting it. Because noun people, non-Nation people look at things as objects where we look at things as verbs and we can describe it, connected to the Earth. So, I put that in my little write up of what I am working on now, so it is a verb way of thinking. When I am writing up each level, I am going to put traditional teachings in it as well so it connects on a spiritual, physical, emotional level. That is my idea.” (6).

In talking to the youth about the various ways that they expressed IK, I was surprised that there was no mention of hip hop. I had expected that there would be, given that a recent article written by urban Aboriginal youth activist and art curator, Skeena Reece (2009) noted that hip hop was an important tool that helped urban youth to rediscover Aboriginal culture and traditions. However, some of the youth said they had observed a lot of younger urban Aboriginal youth in the city using hip hop as a means to express important social and political Indigenous issues. Dimicia states:

You hear a lot of songs being written by young Aboriginal hip hop artists about land rights and different issues that we are facing. So I think it is becoming more and more a tool that some of them use to express themselves. Then I think some of the younger ones follow what is trendy right now but the more they start expressing themselves I think it is coming out more.

Cloudy Days had also noticed that a lot of urban youth were “drawn to hip hop as way to express themselves”, but he felt that it could be just a “phase”. He emphasized that
Aboriginal youth were interested in a range of musical styles and would express IK through the ones they preferred. Finally, Ben was quick to point out the importance of traditional activities as important vehicles of expression.

6.6. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In light of these youths’ comments, IK can be understood to be vitally important to strengthening, rebuilding, and revitalizing strong collective and individual identities for all generations of Aboriginal people. More specifically, their comments reflect the complex and variegated life experiences of urban Aboriginal youth. They suggest that the teaching of IK must be balanced with the conditions and realities of the contemporary urban environment. Further, the youth’s insights reveal a great need for IK to be more effectively integrated within all levels of the public education system. Elders, family members, youth workers, schools and the Aboriginal community also carry an important responsibility to transmit IK to youth. A balanced and collaborative effort to pass cultural knowledge on to youth is imperative given the impacts of residential schooling on older generations of Aboriginal peoples.

In closing this chapter it is important to emphasize that the youth felt that the development of IK was a life long learning process and that their success would be dependent upon living a wholistic and balanced life. This accentuates the need for Aboriginal youth organizations to promote IK as an aspect of various cultural activities and programming. This will provide youth with a space where they can develop a positive sense of identity while learning to express IK, which could have a positive rippling effect on a youth’s entire family.
The chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the question: “How do urban Aboriginal youth articulate, conceptualize and view Indigenous knowledge.” In the next chapter I will examine the youth’s comments about how Aboriginal youth organizations encourage, foster and promote the expression of IK. This will inform my discussion of the important role that these organizations play in facilitating the IK learning process. Therein, I will identify the possibilities and challenges of wholistic educational programming.
CHAPTER 7: KEEP THEM COMING BACK FOR MORE

7.1. CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter examines the wholistic education that is provided by urban Aboriginal youth organizations from the perspective of the youth interviewed in this study and addresses the second research question: “What are Aboriginal youths’ experiences of wholistic education provided by urban Aboriginal organizations? Do these organizations meet their needs in terms of a wholistic understanding? From the Aboriginal youth’s perspective, how can urban Aboriginal organizations integrate a more wholistic approach? The youth affirm that Aboriginal youth organizations are meeting their needs for a wholistic education. This is evident in the statement ‘I keep coming back’, which was made by several of the youth. Keep them coming back for more reinforces the value and necessity remaining active in Aboriginal youth organizations which allow youth to maintain reciprocal teaching and learning relationships with staff, Elders and their peers to the benefit of the urban Aboriginal community. This phrase can also be understood to be part of an incremental Aboriginal pedagogical approach wherein the teacher shares only a certain amount of information with learners in order to pique their curiosity and motivate them to return and learn more (Archibald, 2008).

The first part of this chapter identifies the Aboriginal organizations the youth accessed and the programs and activities that help connect youth to IK and culture(s); it also briefly compares these organizations to their schooling experience. The second part of the chapter describes how the organizations are providing a wholistic understanding which meets the youth’s needs and discusses how they can integrate a more wholistic
approach. Finally, the youth share their hopes and dreams, visions for Aboriginal youth organizations by identifying future directions for program planning and development.

7.2. ORGANIZATIONS & PROGRAMS ACCESSED BY THE YOUTH

The participants had accessed or visited a number of Aboriginal organizations in Vancouver other than the three which were previously mentioned in this study. These organizations were the: Knowledgable Aboriginal Youth Organization, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Circle of Eagles, Healing Our Spirit, Warriors Against Violence, Spirit of the Child, Klahoweya, and the Vancouver Child and the Foster Parent Society. The programs (including seasonal programs) that they had participated in were: Aboriginal Youth First Sports and Recreation Program, Native Youth Drop-In Centre, West Coast Family Night, Boost Snowboarding Team, Pow Wow Night, Red Blanket Singers Group, Young Women’s Drum Group, and the Canoe Club.

In general, the youth became involved in Aboriginal youth organizations to help them maintain balance in their lives by: meeting new friends; learning more about IK & cultures(s); participating in sports and recreational activities; and connecting with healthy individuals in a safe and comfortable environment. Cloudy Days explained that he didn’t have a precise reason for initially attending an Aboriginal youth program offered by UNYA: “I can’t really think for a real answer, cause this one day, I had nothing to do and I asked a friend of mine “what is a good place to go and hang out?” However, once he was introduced to UNYA, he said “Ever since then, I don’t think they can’t get rid of me!”
Leo told me he attended Aboriginal youth programs because he enjoyed having a place to go and meet friends in a relaxing and comfortable environment. When I asked him what his friends thought about the organization he replied “I am sure they enjoy it. They keep coming back.” Referring to one of the larger Aboriginal youth organizations Courtenay said “I like how the youth workers there, they really try to give a lot of attention to us. If you want to have some one to one to just talk about the day, they will do that.”

7.3. **CONNECTION WITH CULTURE**

The youth had a significant number of cultural activities and ceremonies that helped them to learn more about IK and connect them with Aboriginal culture(s). Included: hoop dancing, West Coast traditional singing, pow wow singing, drum-making, traditional games, First Nations art work, dream-catcher workshops, camping, smudge, Elders, sweat lodges, West Coast Night, regalia making, jingle dancing, butterfly dancing, canoe journeys, bone games, paddle songs, community gatherings and feasts.

7.4. **DIFFERENT THAN SCHOOLS**

When I asked the youth about the difference or similarities between school and the Aboriginal youth organizations, many made negative comments about their schooling experience. For example, one youth shared a lengthy story about the constant prejudice and racism that was inflicted on him by his peers and the school administrator. As a

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24 Two youth were attending post-secondary. Two youth were working and one was unemployed. For the youth who were not in school, I asked them to reflect back on their schooling experiences.
result, he was unable to graduate. Nevertheless, most of the youth felt that pursuing a higher education would be invaluable to their personal wellbeing and success.

All of the youth agreed that Aboriginal youth organizations provided positive safe spaces where they could gather and meet new friends. They stated that many of the programs in these organizations promoted an Aboriginal pedagogy that allowed them to participate in experiential activities and connect to Aboriginal culture(s).

7.5. WHOLISTIC EDUCATION

The youth concurred that Aboriginal youth organizations were providing them with educational opportunities that taught them how to live in harmony with others, their community, nature, and the spirit world. Tyrone indicated that Aboriginal youth organizations were doing a “pretty good job” in this regard and Dimicia highlighted how UNYA was meeting the youth’s wholistic needs:

I do think that they are meeting the youth’s needs wholistically….they have sports and recreation outings. They have Elders. They take the youth to sweat lodges even just to hang out, just to talk. I think [PAUSE] Let me think! I think as service providers they are offering everything that they possibly can.

Ben stated that Aboriginal youth organizations gave him a strong emotional foundation by providing a safe space where he could establish and strengthen relationships with other youth and staff. He said “Everybody is heard in a sense. There is a gathering, just being a group together with. Just all the visiting. Even in drum group, we will just sit there and joke. There is a lot of good connection.” Like Ben, Leo was very optimistic about the possibilities of connecting and interacting with peers who helped him to gain a wholistic understanding and appreciation of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and
heritages in Canada. He stated: “We are all different clans and different tribes and we know what we grew up with and what we share between each other.”

Finally, Courtenay made a particularly vivid remark, signifying the personal transformation that can occur when youth participate in wholistic cultural activities provided by Aboriginal youth organizations: “My friend said that ever since canoe journey she could trust people more and realized that not everyone was a bad person and stuff like that.” Courtenay also noted that wholistic education enabled her to connect with an Elder who helped her to understand the strength and power of Indigenous peoples’ survival:

Yeah, it does. You just know it in your heart. You just know it in your heart and it takes a while to register in your brain. A friend of mine his name is Jerry and he is like this Elder guy. He said that as Aboriginal people have a lot of love and that is why we are still around, even though we have been put down for so many years. Even, though people have been trying to kill us off with Genocide and stuff. The only reason why we are still around is because it is in our DNA to love. She told me that this emotional teaching supports her when she ventures into various parts of the city in the course of her daily life. Exploring her identity as an Aboriginal youth thus allows her to flourish as an individual in her community in various ways.

Courtenay’s comments about love are illuminated by Leilani Holmes (2000) who refers to this knowledge as ‘heart knowledge” and “blood memory.” This suggests that when Courtney says “it is in our DNA to love”, she means that IK is transmitted through the heart of the listener to become memories which flow through blood lines and foster relational connections. Love is thus a key aspect of IK.

Each of the youth conceptualizes the wholistic education provided by these organizations in their own unique way. Nevertheless, there were common threads in their stories. In particular, they all found the opportunity to learn more about IK and
Aboriginal culture(s) in a way that engaged their body, mind, heart and spirit to be of tremendous value.

7.6. A WHOLISTIC MODEL IN ACTION

In our interviews, I invited each youth to fill in the four quadrants of a blank circular diagram with examples of the Aboriginal youth activities or programs that they had participated in. This question was asked to give participants another way to express how Aboriginal youth organizations were delivering wholistic education. Their collective responses are compiled in Figure 3 (below). One youth also mentioned the Aboriginal organizations with which she had been involved.

As shown by Figure 3, the youth identified a diverse range of educational, cultural, recreational and social activities and highlight the crucial support they get from Aboriginal youth programs. This speaks to their need to have teachers and peers, who nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage them, and support them in their day-to-day lives. Aboriginal youth organizations should therefore maintain a wholistic, flexible and supportive approach in order to assist youth and promote a sense of belonging to their community.

7.7. IMPROVEMENTS

Even though the youth unanimously agreed that Aboriginal youth organizations provided them with a sound wholistic education, they offered suggestions about how their

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25 Initially, I was not going to ask this question to a participant if they answered the previous question negatively (Do you feel that Aboriginal youth organizations are meeting your wholistic needs?) However given that all of the youth felt that Aboriginal youth organizations were meeting their wholistic needs, I asked all of them this question.
wholistic learning could be improved. I have intentionally withheld their names in this section in order to respect their privacy and ensure that I do not jeopardize their access to programs and services in the future.

Figure 3: Youth Organizations Meeting the Youth’s Wholistic Needs
One youth felt that Aboriginal youth organizations could promote the programs and activities they offered more effectively; his experience was that he often didn’t find out about a program or event until after it was over or had already started. He also suggested that child-minding was a significant concern for single parents (especially young women), and that its absence could be a potential barrier to participation in youth programs.

Another youth accentuated the need for Aboriginal youth organizations to provide more education, awareness and support about issues related to two-spirited youth\(^{26}\). She explains:

> I think it is extremely important for us to have more education around the history of two-spirit people. In our schools, in our organizations you know? With our youth we have the highest rate of suicide. For queer youth it is second. What if you are both?

When I asked her how Aboriginal youth organizations could meet the needs of two-spirited people, she also touched on the need for these organizations to integrate other social justice issues into the design of programs and activities:

> I think maybe it needs to be talked about more. Just more awareness in the community, so that other youth feel more comfortable or educated about it as well. It is easy to put a sign on the door that says “this space is queer friendly” or “no homophobia” or “no racism or sexism” but all these kinds of things need to be talked about more.

\(^{26}\) According to two spirits.com a non profit organization, the meaning of ‘two spirit’ is traced to ancient teachings that are found in many First Nations cultures. The website states:

> Our Elders tell us of people who were gifted among all beings because they carried two spirits: that of male and female. It is told that women engaged in tribal warfare and married other women as there were men who married other men. These individuals were looked upon as a third gender in many cases and in almost all cultures they were honoured and revered. 2 Spirit people were often the visionaries, the healers and the medicine people…

Not all Indigenous peoples identify with this term. Today some Aboriginal people who are two spirit also identify as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-gendered or queer.
Another youth indicated that the organizations needed to balance anti-racist education with Aboriginal cultural teachings. He stated:

I guess that is one thing that that can be improved. Going back to the improvement of Aboriginal programs I guess that would be giving them the knowledge that while teaching them the same time that our culture, how our people lived and stuff. Also giving them the knowledge of the times and how multicultural it is and how they can’t stereotype just because we have been stereotyped.

These comments support arguments which were presented in the literature review (Dei, Wilson, Kurmanchery & Zine, 2000). In particular, wholistic education must engage more critical thought in order to allow youth to examine the historical and contemporary institutional and social practices that exclude them. This education should explore how Indigenous people’s exclusion intersects and interlocks with multiple forms of oppression, particularly with regard to two-spirited issues, anti-racist education and women’s issues (Green, 2007; Graveline, 1998; Young, 1990).

Addressing the issues that the youth mentioned will greatly enhance the wholistic programming and services that Aboriginal youth organizations deliver. The youth’s comments suggest that these issues need to be addressed in multiple ways and point to a need for schools and organizations to work together in order to facilitate a better understanding of two-spirited and other social justice issues.

7.8. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

All of the youth gave me a surprised look and then laughed or raised their eye brows when I asked the following questions: “If you could run your own organization what kinds of programs or activities would you have in it? Who would you hire? How would you run it?” However, after their initial reactions, they generated a ‘feast of ideas’
about their dream Aboriginal youth organization. Leo told me he would have to get the Elder’s advice on how to run his organization before deciding what kinds of programs or activities to offer but had many ideas in mind:

I would probably just ask the Elders what to do for the youth, or for anyone that wants to participate. For what kinds of activities, I would try to teach the youth (or anybody that wants to learn) how: to make a sweat, or how to do a smudge, pipe ceremonies, or how to skin a moose for their hide…how to make a drum, and archery practice.

Tyrone’s organization would provide sports and recreational activities, computer programs, cultural activities, the mentorship of Elders, and a community kitchen in the city. He would also organize opportunities for the youth to leave the city and participate in traditional food and medicine gathering activities. He states:

I would definitely have a gym for youth to go play floor hockey, basketball. Probably close to a park so we could go play baseball or have a BBQ. Computer programs because I know a lot of people are getting into computers now. I would probably have an Elder or someone work with storytelling or sweat lodges, different ceremonies. Medicine. Like herbal medicines. Probably, like a small place as big as the gym across the street for drumming and singing. Maybe like a small area like this for child minding because I know there are a lot of Aboriginal ladies out there that are single moms or single parents I guess. What else? A place like this for fooseball or pool, ping pong or whatever. Community kitchen. I would like to do that. I would like to do that with someone who likes to cook wild food and smokes it or makes jerky or something.

Dimicia’s Aboriginal youth organization would emphasize the value of learning Indigenous languages. It would also take youth out of the city so they could experience and learn land based teachings and acquire leadership skills. She explains:

[We’d] ‘Go into the wild’ where we could learn more about the natural resources that we have and how useful it is to us. Also, getting away from the city and learning leadership and how to problem solve and all those kinds of thing because those are things I see a lot of youth struggling to obtain.
Cloudy Days was quite happy with the way that the organization he participated in was designed. He told me he would most likely keep everything the same, but would add a few more sports and recreational activities, such as take youth on outings to the movies. In addition, he would host more youth advisory committee meetings “since the idea was to keep them coming back for more.”

Courtenay told me she would hire older Aboriginal youth to work for her organization because they could easily identify with some of the issues that the younger youth were facing. She explains:

I think they would do a lot of good because maybe when they were younger they were going through some troubles. Or problems or family issues or whatever it is. Now that they are older and may be aged out, they would find lots of fulfillment as people who are in the same situation.

Courtenay felt that many Aboriginal youth organizations were already providing excellent services and was mindful that she did not want to duplicate existing services. She felt that the organizations could enhance or expand their traditional arts and language programming, so she envisioned her pretend organization focusing on these subjects.

Ben was excited about the possibility of running his organization. He stated “Right away my brain fills up so it is hard to filter!” After having some time to ‘filter’ his thoughts, Ben provided me with a very wholistic and comprehensive array of programming that his Aboriginal youth organization would offer:

All the culture teachings like smudge, sweats, canoe journeys, canoe racing, wool weaving, cedar weaving, basket weaving. I’d have parenting programs, as well as youth groups, talking circles (co-ed and male/female ones). Individualized attention, one on one… I think I would have trips to, probably like an annual trip to somewhere like Haida Gwaii to go and see the old long houses, And have a pow wow. You have to make it modern as well. You have to have modern programs. I guess hip hop classes and all sorts of sports. I definitely have guest speakers and workshops, mostly Elders. Then have professional guest speakers like CFO’s.
In addition, Ben felt that there was a great need for Aboriginal youth to create contemporary oral histories and stories. His organization would strive to meet this need and would also offer language classes, traditional foods cooking classes, and a storytelling program.

It was exciting to witness the inspiration that this question evoked in the youth. Their visions converge in highlighting the need for Aboriginal youth organizations to balance land, language, and cultural teachings with contemporary education and the support of youth workers, elders and peers. At the same time, they all shared a desire to learn their traditional languages and an appreciation of their cultural practices.

7.9. CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have examined the youth’s perspectives of the wholistic education provided by urban Aboriginal youth organizations. In this portion of my research I did not intend to focus exclusively on the shortcomings of Aboriginal youth organizations. Rather, I aimed to highlight the activities and subjects which most appealed to the youth in hope of enhancing the programming that the organizations already deliver.

Aboriginal youth organizations cannot be expected to ameliorate all of the challenges which Aboriginal youth face today, particularly the systemic discrimination and social conditions that have evolved over a hundred and fifty years of colonization. Nevertheless, the youth’s interviews confirm that Aboriginal youth organizations are providing them with an exceptional quality of wholistic education, especially given the funding constraints that they must work within. The youth’s expectations of the
organizations were realistic and their positive perspective was reflected in their concrete and attainable recommendations for the enhancement of wholistic education.

‘Keep them coming back for more’ was a consistent theme that emerged in the interviews. It highlighted the importance that the youth place on remaining connected with these organizations in order to receive guidance and mentorship as they continue on their pathways to learn more about wholism so they may live healthy balanced lives. Their enthusiasm about wholistic education and firm belief in its transformative capacity are inspirational and transmit a message of hope for the future to urban Aboriginal youth and their communities.
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY

This study aims to contribute to community organizations’ ongoing development and enhancement of a wholistic educational framework. As an educator and researcher I see this thesis as one small way to promote a transformational pedagogy that nurtures and facilitates a wholistic understanding of Indigenous identity, teachings and culture for urban Aboriginal youth. In so doing so I hope that I have generated new insights about urban Aboriginal youth organizations; sparked Aboriginal youths’ desire to participate in community-based programming; and enhanced Aboriginal youth’s understanding of Indigenous knowledge and wholism.

My design of a research project that would be useful to the urban Aboriginal community was guided by an Indigenous research methodology that employed a wholistic qualitative framework. This allowed me to engage participants in meaningful, respectful and collaborative research relationships. The research process also led me to seek the wisdom of respected Nisga’a Elder Jerry Adams and to embark on a journey as a student of IK, not only a researcher. In keeping with the methodology, I found it important to detail the story behind the research in an honest way that illustrated the ethical, analytical and moral dilemmas I encountered in my trysts with Raven the trickster.

My primary goal was to explore urban Aboriginal youth’s perceptions and experiences of wholistic education in Aboriginal youth organizations. To this end, I co-facilitated a sharing circle workshop with an Elder which gave the youth a safer space to exchange and broaden their understandings of wholism and Indigenous knowledge. The
youth’s reflections in the follow-up interviews I conducted after the workshop indicated that my key goal was met. The interviews were intended to build on the concepts of wholism and Indigenous knowledge introduced in the sharing circle workshop as well as to compare the youth’s knowledge of IK before and after the workshop.

The interviews also allowed me to describe and analyze the youth’s thoughts and feelings about Indigenous knowledge and wholism in greater detail. I connected the four main themes which emerged from the interviews to form a wholistic representation of IK: Indigenous Knowledge is Important; Indigenous Knowledge is a Process; Indigenous Knowledge is Wholistic, and Indigenous Knowledge is Expressed in Multiple Ways. The interconnectedness of these themes compliment claims made in the literature about Indigenous knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Barnhardt & Kawagely, 2005; Battiste, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Castelanno 2000; Cayete 2000; Meyer, 2001; Young, 2007; Youngblood Henderson, 2000). In articulating these themes, the youth demonstrated that even though they live in an intercultural urban environment which has been impacted by colonialism, they continue to value and celebrate the wisdom and teachings that inform their rich cultural heritages. Their voices expressed a common vision of wholistic well-being for the individual, family and the community as essential to IK. Further, their responses indicated that IK helps learners to understand the connections between their home environments, education, history, culture, land, identity and ways of knowing.

This study confirms the findings in the literature which state that urban Aboriginal youth are finding new ways to explore their Indigeniety and cultural traditions (Reece, 2009; Urban Aboriginal Youth Collective, 2008; Willard, 2009). I observed that the youth easily adapted their sense of IK to their specific talents and the creative paths
which interested them. They also articulated it spontaneously as an aspect of their unique self-expression. Although IK is a complete system of knowledge in its own right, the youth are seeking ways to integrate and blend it with European-based knowledge. As such, IK empowers urban Aboriginal youth to negotiate the complexities and competing identities that characterize their contemporary reality. Accordingly, there continues to be a great need to examine the different ways that Indigenous knowledge is enacted in the various contexts (school, familial, and peer interactions) of these youth’s lives. There is also a strong need to continue to link the ways that IK is perceived, understood and accepted across multiple sites (i.e. educational institutions, Aboriginal communities and the political realm). However, this level of analysis is beyond the scope of my project.

I feel that my study illustrates the ways in which the urban Aboriginal community organizations are facilitating positive transformative change for new generations of Aboriginal youth. These organizations are working to offset the deleterious effects of colonization by using IK and culture(s) to help urban Aboriginal youth to develop pride and strengthen their cultural identities. From the youth’s perspectives, these organizations are incorporating a wholistic approach into their programming which takes their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs into account. The youth also provided important suggestions as to how these organizations can enhance the programs and services they provide to youth. Their identification of the need for the wholistic education to engage more critical thought by encompassing anti-racist, two-spirited and women’s issues is of particular salience as it directly supports claims made in the literature (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Dei, Wilson, Kurmanchery & Zine, 2000; Graveline; 1998; Green, 2007; Silver, 2006; St Denis, 2007). For example, Jim Silver (2006) stresses the
importance of teaching the history of oppression to affected groups so they “can understand, articulate and recognize the forces that oppress them” (145). Enabling youth to understand the history of Indigenous people’s oppression and explore other social justice issues will support the processes of transformation, decolonization, and healing (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Green, 2007; Graveline, 1999; Laenui, 2000; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2003 & 2005).

As experts of their own lives, the youth demonstrated a great deal of leadership and envisioned a clear direction for future endeavors and educational initiatives. That direction was described in their ‘pretend organizations.’ An astute analysis of these ‘organizations’ revealed the need for urban Aboriginal organizations to focus on place-based education and language revitalization strategies in order to strengthen IK. I encouraged the youth to continue to engage their imaginations and work with their community to pursue their shared vision, emphasizing that this would greatly enhance the lives of the next generation of youth.

My belief in the youth’s capacity to fulfill their dreams is bolstered by my observation of UNYA, which has taken youths’ insights and interests into account in proposing the development of a Native Youth Centre27. This centre will be the first of its kind in North America and provide an effective continuum of programs to create more opportunities for Aboriginal youth and help to effect change in their lives. It is my hope that the activities and programs envisioned by the youth in my study will be part of these programs in the not-too-distance future. And I also hope to see the youth actively involved in the centre, particularly in leadership roles.

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27 For more information about this centre please go to http://www.nativeyouthcentre.ca/hirez/index.htm
In complimenting the work of Aboriginal youth organizations it is important to note that they continually struggle to cope with the limited resources that are allocated to them. This is especially true given the B.C. provincial government and federal government cuts to social service programs (Creese & Strong Boag, 2005). I am passionate about the possibility that my research will issue a challenge to policies that determine the fate of funding for Aboriginal youth organizations. In order to pursue this goal I will encourage the administrators of these organizations to use my research to critique, challenge and reframe the evidence-based approaches which the government favours when applying for funding and establishing program guidelines. Such approaches become even more rigid in a neo-liberal political climate.28 The reemergence of evidence based approaches must be seen within the context of neoliberalism and developments in the health field (Gray & Macdonald, 2006). According to Clegg (2005), “Evidence-based practice serves an ideological function that is disguised through the rhetoric of independence and the idea that policy is disinterested and objectively informed” (7). Evidence-based approaches therefore continue to be heavily influenced by bio-medical agendas which (often) deems the knowledge of people affected by policy to be inferior to that of professional authorities. It is therefore necessary to challenge policy makers by asking what types of evidence they are looking for, who is collecting the data, and for what reasons. As many evidence-based approaches have tended to both exclude and pathologize Indigenous people, they can pose great ‘risks’ to our communities and fail to

28 Neoliberalism itself is not a unified economic theory or political philosophy; rather it is a concept denoting a shift in social and political settlements that appears in theories and political practices which support decentralized postwar economic institutions over centralized ones. However, it is important to note that neoliberal discourse assists dominant groups to maintain positions of leadership within elite power bloc alliances and social movements through the use of a shared language which elevates market principles into all realms of social, political, educational and economic life (Carlson, 1995; Bacchi, 2000).
meet the wholistic needs of urban Aboriginal youth.\textsuperscript{29} It is therefore imperative to push governments responsible for Aboriginal policy to recognize and respect an Indigenous research paradigm and the educational priorities and goals that Indigenous people determine for themselves.

Lastly, I must acknowledge that IK is not static or simple as a concept, practice and pedagogy. As I moved deeper into exploring my research questions, more questions came to me in the form the Raven’s riddles, and these questions did not have easy answers.

8.1. **RAVEN’S PLIGHT**

Despite many of the youth’s positive affirmations about the importance of IK in their lives, Raven revisited me at the end of my research to confront me with unsolvable riddles. Jerry helped me to untangle these riddles after I sought further clarification from him about the importance of IK. In his view IK was only “somewhat important” and the concept itself was problematic:

I am old school and feel IK is another term for scholars to study us Indians. If it is to encourage the youth to look at what it means to them yes, if it is only scholastic I would be less inclined to support it. I guess I am somewhat evasive. I don't have a clear answer because I don't know what it means. Sorry kiddo (Personal Email, May 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2009).

These comments added a layer of complexity to my understanding of IK and alluded to implicit tensions in the concept. I was troubled by Jerry’s wariness and lack of familiarity about IK (as concept) and my first reaction was a desire to quell the tension. I

\textsuperscript{29} This is not to say I am against evidence based approaches. I am suggesting that ‘evidence based’ approaches need to be scrutinized in order to make clear the epistemological orientation of the research. In the political realm the need for ‘evidence based approaches’ are usually associated with a positivist orientation. For many Aboriginal youth organizations the provision of this type of evidence to support the success of a program is not always useful.
wondered if I had not been clear when I let Jerry know why I was going to introduce IK to the youth, and if that was the case, how we had ever put together a sharing circle workshop that taught youth about IK. After I reflected on his comments I responded with the following email:

Thank you for getting back to me and sharing your thoughts about this 'troubling term.' One of the things I realize is that I did not share with you, why IK is being used in certain contexts.

IK as a concept has been used by Indigenous scholars to overcome the systemic discrimination that has been created by European knowledge frameworks. It is an articulated vision that is being used by Indigenous people to call attention to the rapid global change that is occurring on their knowledge, lands and languages by dominant knowledge systems. It was also created to share a common language with European systems of thought to discuss the effects of colonization.

I use this term in hopes that one day all learning environments will incorporate its various aspects (experiential learning, story telling, Elders, songs, stories, land, spiritual knowledge, dreams, intuition, wholism) into their curriculum. I feel that these aspects are useful to help Aboriginal youth learn more about their identity and cultural heritage (Personal Email, May 26th, 2009)

Jerry was unmoved by the systemic reasoning outlined in my email and explained the purpose of IK was to facilitate a personal process of self-discovery for the learner through the reclamation of traditional teachings:

You did tell it is my memory bank that gets emptied too quickly. I still think that we are dependent on too many labels through out history. Yet things seem to recycle themselves again. It is traditional teachings we are talking about which are oral traditions in many cases for our people. I think that if rediscovery of self is the end result like it did in your story then it is good. That in the end your IK was right in front of you through your mother. Self-discovery is not new but just plain old traditional teachings that are happening again for our children and youth. Good luck Kiddo! (Personal Email, May 27th, 2009)

My correspondence with Jerry did not give me the insights I was hoping to find.

Yet, I now realize that without them, my research story would be unbalanced and
incomplete. I have therefore outlined the tensions which the correspondence revealed in
the form of Raven’s Riddles below:

**RAVEN’S RIDDLES:**

1. IK is difficult to separate from the individual and to be codified into definition.

2. Indigenous people have become suspicious of the labels created by European systems of knowledge. Some Indigenous people may be resistant to use new categories and labels to describe their cultural teachings and knowledge (even when they are being used by Indigenous peoples).

3. It is hard to capture the meaning of IK in a European format because it is process based and evades categorization. The sources of IK are also often experiential and cannot always be explained through text alone.

4. IK is not a uniform concept across all Indigenous Peoples; it comprises a diversity of knowledge that is spread among different Peoples.

Jerry’s input throughout the course of my research has taught me that IK can be difficult for an individual to define and codify. As Marie Battiste (2000) notes “those who have knowledge use it routinely, perhaps everyday and because of this, it becomes a part of them and unidentifiable except in a personal context” (36). This suggests that IK is often expressed unconsciously rather than intentionally through an individual’s actions. As a result, it may be difficult to discern in the words that they use.

Further, the comments made by Jerry and several other Indigenous scholars invoke the challenges faced by Indigenous researchers and explain why some Indigenous people are suspicious of research (Kuokkanen, 2007; Lawrence, 2005; Pidgeon, 2007; Smith, 1999). Indigenous research has only recently been introduced to academia and Western research practices (Pihama, 2005). Former Western research practices by ‘outsiders’ have put forth negative constructions of Indigenous people which contain a plethora of debilitating labels (Sheilds et al, 2005; Smith, 1999). Therefore, translating
IK into Western academic practices poses significant challenges and the language that Indigenous scholars and educators use to describe Indigenous peoples [IK] continues to be contested, debated, developed and refined in academic, political, educational and community contexts. It is important that these discussions continue.

In striving to understand the meaning of IK I have learned that it needs to be taught within a specific community context at a personal level; otherwise, the concept may alienate learners. IK must remain grounded in specific cultural origins of knowledge and be taught in a way that maintains its spiritual and cultural integrity. Many Indigenous cultures also have their own distinct ways of knowing and it is necessary to acknowledge them in order to facilitate a greater wholistic understanding of the concept. At the same time, I believe it is necessary to address the dominant knowledge system’s discrimination against IK; delineating the interconnections between Indigenous knowledge systems throughout the world is one means of actively resisting this discrimination (Battiste, 2000; Little Bear, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Further, it is salient to note that knowledge can be untidy and unclear. The English language’s propensity for linear representation often tidies up that which tends to be messy in verbal and cognitive constructs (Little Bear, 2000; Youngblood Henderson; 2000). Indigenous languages do not put so much value in linear representations. As a result, of the Western educational institutions’ reliance on Western languages and the written word it inevitably tends to devalue the experiential learning that is so fundamental to place-based Indigenous knowledge. Researchers and educators therefore struggle to express the components of Indigenous cultural systems which have been sustained through oral traditions and Native languages in modern literary and academic contexts;
translating the nuanced details of gestures, facial expressions, and voice intonations to written text is particularly challenging (Marker, 2004). Taking a Western educated academic standpoint therefore requires the researcher to critically analyze ways to represent the meaning of IK with regard to its many sources (including spiritual experiences, dreams, visions, and stories.) This process will clarify appropriate contexts for teaching IK that are of value to the learner.

Despite the emergence of these riddles, it must be emphasized that the youth did not have difficulty integrating IK into their discourse. Although some of them preferred to speak about their specific Nation’s cultural knowledge, they seemed to recognize the value and importance of using IK as part of a shared vision.

I realize I will not be able to solve all the tensions that I encounter as a researcher and educator. Nevertheless, I am thankful that Raven presented me with her riddles. They need to be communicated and explored so that individuals can make their own meaning out of them. I also appreciate Jerry’s comments about ‘perceived dualisms’ because they will help me to address the contradictions which arise from using IK in various contexts. As Marie Battiste’s (2000) so aptly states, "IK is a way of living within contexts of flux, paradox and tensions, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling "perceived opposing forces" (42). In other words, I must learn to live in the question and embrace the journey, rather than the destination.

8.2. LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to my study. First, my research lacks a longitudinal scope. Future research should therefore encompass the impacts of education on
Aboriginal peoples in all levels of schooling: early childhood, elementary, high school, and post-secondary studies. Second, while I designed my research to be inclusive of all urban Aboriginal youth, none of the participants in this study had a disability (that I was made aware of). Future research endeavors should seek to include youth with disabilities, who constitute an underserved population (Evenson, 2008). Third, even though I attempted to recruit a range of youth between the ages of 15 and 24, I am aware that my sample represents the older age of the ‘youth spectrum.’ This is a limitation because the voices of youth under the age of 19 are missing. However, I feel that it is also a strength because the older youth are in positions of leadership position given that many of them have ‘grown up’ in these youth organizations over the years. This gives them a breadth of knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal youth organizations that younger youth may not have accumulated. In addition, they provide valuable examples of the success these organizations have provided in delivering a culturally-based wholistic approach which cultivates ‘older’ youth’s capacity to become leaders and advocates for younger generations. Fourth, I recognize that my research excludes youth who do not participate in Aboriginal youth organizations for various reasons (i.e. access limitations and homelessness). As such, it cannot address the particular needs and concerns of this population. Only one youth in this study was (temporarily) homeless and future research should seek to include the voices of homeless youth or those otherwise unable to access community resources.

30 I had one sixteen year old participate in the sharing circle workshop but I could not reach him for a follow up interview.
8.3. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This thesis elucidates the need for an astute policy analysis, a comprehensive study of programming, and concrete recommendations for policy change. The scope of my study did not permit the inclusion of many valuable voices parents, youth workers, administrators of Aboriginal youth organizations and policy makers. Future research should strive to include and integrate these distinct voices.

The youth made four key recommendations which merit consideration. They stated that Aboriginal youth organizations and educators should: (1) devote more attention to integrating language instruction into their educational pedagogical frameworks because Indigenous languages are an integral part of Indigenous knowledge systems; (2) develop more place-based education initiatives that allow youth to connect with the land and extend IK outside of the city (3) put more of an emphasis on social justice education; and (4) Elders be involved in cultural programming.

Although I initially asked the youth a question pertaining to gender, I was not able to gather enough information to answer it. Future research should therefore investigate if Aboriginal youth organizations need to provide gender-specific programming and services, consider what types of support are gender inclusive.

8.4. BENEFITS

My study contributes to the body of research about Aboriginal youth organizations, Indigenous knowledge and wholistic education. As such, it has provided a space for youth to share their insights, ideas and visions of how Aboriginal youth organizations could enhance wholistic programming. I wish to share the template
“Coming Full Circle an Introduction to Indigenous Knowledge Workshop” (Appendix C) as a capacity-building document which can be modified and improved by youth workers and educators who work with Aboriginal youth. This is my way of contributing to a transformational pedagogy that can nurture and promote a wholistic understanding of Indigenous identity, knowledge, teachings and cultures for Aboriginal youth in various settings. The intergenerational methodology I employed in my study is another benefit because it addresses the imperative to foster stronger intergenerational ties within the Aboriginal community.

In writing this thesis I have collaborated with my research participants in developing a contemporary vision of education which draws upon ancient wisdom, values and principles. In doing so, I have experienced a personal transformation and hopefully been an agent of transformation for others. In the process, I have realized that the end is my beginning because the process of change and transformation requires going backwards and forwards simultaneously. I close with a prayer.

**THE WINDS BLOW,**

**MAKE YOUR MINDS STRONG**

*A Coast Salish Prayer From Bill White*

Creator, we thank you for this day  
Ancestors we thank you for walking before us  
Ancestors we thank you for walking behind us  
Make your minds strong!  
Behold it is a time of change!  
Behold it is a time of transformation!

It is the old people who have saved the teachings from ages past  
It is the old people who have saved the songs of our ancestors, of the Creator  
It is the words of the Creator, of the ancestors brought forward  
for a new time and a new place
With great humility we thank you for these gifts
Change for self, Change for the community
has been foretold and will like the wind be persistent.
Change and transformation is powerful and can be frightening
Make your Minds Strong!
The Creator has provided songs for such things
The Creator has provided dances for such things
The Creator has provided words for such things
The old people, the ancestors knew of the times of change
and the wind blows,
and the teachings and the songs flow
and the winds blow,
hear the wind, hear the songs
Behold it is a time of change!
Behold it is a time of transformation
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McCreary Centre Society (2008). Moving Upstream: Aboriginal marginalized and Street-Involved Youth in B.C.


MeCreedi, O. (2000). Aboriginal gangs: A report to the correctional service of Canada on Aboriginal youth gang members in the federal corrections


APPENDIX A    URBAN ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATION MANDATES

1. THE URBAN NATIVE YOUTH ASSOCIATION

UNYA's mandate is to provide meaningful opportunities for Native youth in the urban setting. Our goal is to be a safe place for Native youth to come and find out about programs and services at UNYA and in the broader community. As of 2008, we offer twenty-one programs including four residential programs and have over one hundred volunteers, over ninety full and part-time staff, and 121 community partners.

We continue to focus much of our efforts on community development initiatives, as we believe that the strengthening of our community as a whole can have a tremendous positive impact on the lives of Native youth. Over the years, we have tried to contribute to the positive development of our community by creating our Full Circle and Helping Hands manuals, hosting community meetings and forums, offering training on youth issues to the community, serving on community steering committees, attending consultation meetings, conducting research, developing innovative programs, hiring and training youth, participating on the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, and creating partnerships that expand services for Native youth.

(For more information please visit www.unya.bc.ca)

2. THE VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY POLICING CENTRE

The Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre (VACPC) was developed to provide a safe place where community members can gather to identify, discuss, and address justice and safety issues in Vancouver. It will also serve as a positive link between the Vancouver Aboriginal community and the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). We will provide an avenue to engage and support people to better understand and utilize the services of the VPD and to rebuild a healthier relationship with the Aboriginal community and the VPD.

3. CREATING HEALTHY ABORIGINAL ROLE MODELS

The program goal is to empower youth by creating opportunities for them to become healthy leaders in their community through various programs and projects, including cultural programs, the Basketball program, theatre training and performances, the fashion and dance project, youth council, late night resource centre and much more.
Invitation to Participate in Research

A Call Out To:

Urban Aboriginal Youth
Who Participate in Aboriginal Organizations

Do You Think You Have A Story to Share About Your Experiences?
My name is Amy Parent and I am from the Nisga’a Nation. I am currently a master’s student in education at the University of British Columbia. I worked previously for the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) and currently, I am a volunteer for UNYA’s mentorship program.

My research project involves exploring the perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal youth who participate in Aboriginal community-based youth programs in Vancouver.

***I am seeking 12 self-identified Aboriginal youth between the ages of 16-24 who participate in one or more program(s) at an Aboriginal organization in East Vancouver for at least two months or more. I am hoping to host one sharing circle/workshop and one follow-up interview with each Aboriginal youth who participates in my study. I’d like to record these discussions in audio-tape so that I may ensure that your words have been accurately recorded. ***

The sharing circle/workshop will be co-facilitated by an Elder and me. You will be invited to participate in fun and creative activities as well as sharing your thoughts and ideas. I will provide information on the purpose and protocol of a sharing circle if you are not familiar with it.

One week after you have participated in the sharing circle/workshop I will conduct a follow up interview. I am also open to doing paired interviews with another member from the talking circle if this makes you feel more comfortable.

Come to my information session, or contact me directly to discuss your potential participation.

I want the full strength of your experiences and thoughts and feelings about them, but I cannot include any information that personally identifies you or other youth, parents, community members or youth workers. I will keep any information that you share with me in locked storage. You may review the record of your participation and withdraw materials or your participation at anytime. Any materials (i.e. pictures, poetry, stories) you decided to leave with the project may be used in publications. I will ask youth who participate in the sharing circle/workshop not to discuss personal information with others, but because a sharing circle has multiple participants, I cannot guarantee that your participation in it will remain strictly confidential.
I believe it is important to include the voices of youth in research that will directly impact them if we are to work towards transforming our community and making community education more relevant to the needs of youth.

I hope that you can join me.

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact:

**Amy Parent**

Educational Studies, University of British Columbia  
E-Mail: amyparent@yahoo.com

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Information Session:

Time: To be Determined  
Location: Urban Native Youth Association,  
March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2009

**Additional Questions and Concerns** can be directed to the study’s principal Investigator, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Association Dean of Indigenous Education, at 604-604-822-5286. Project Title: “Urban Aboriginal Youth’s Experiences and Perceptions of Wholistic Education.”
Objective:

1. The objective of this sharing circle/workshop is to explore the meaning of wholism and Indigenous Knowledge (IK) with Urban Aboriginal youth through a variety of sources (Elder, story-telling, experiential group activities: art, rhyme and poetry).

2. To create group definitions for the terms Wholism and Indigenous Knowledge for follow up interviews in this research study.

3. To create a safe space by which participants can begin to notice, or deepen their understanding of wholistic education to their learning processes; and see how IK is currently in their life and/or community.

4. To create an intergenerational learning environment that is fun for the youth!

I. CIRCLE OPENS & INTRODUCTION:

Procedure:
1. Jerry will open circle by sharing a prayer or (funny story?)

2. I will briefly introduce myself and my research. I will relay that during the circle, I will be taking notes and audio-taping our conversation for my writing purposes. I will let youth know that I do this so I will not miss out on anything important they have to say, since it is hard to write everything down during discussion. Everything that is discussed during the workshop will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office. I will let youth know that I want the full strength of their experiences, thoughts and feelings but I will not
include any information that personally identifies them or, other youth, parents, community members or youth workers in my written report of this session.

3. Introduce agenda (activities) for the evening.

4. Jerry and I will create a safe space in which participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives by:

- Conveying that each person’s knowledge, experience or story can contribute to a new understanding that will be beneficial for themselves and the entire group.
- Explaining that the workshop is about exploring new paths in one’s exploration, there are no right or wrong answers.
- Explaining that participants are encouraged (not obligated) to share to add to the richness of the group experience, but only if they feel comfortable.
- Reminding participants that we are all both learners and teachers, each having something to learn and just as importantly, something to share.
- Ensuring participants understand that this is not a test and that their comments will not impact their access to services at UNYA, ACPC or elsewhere.
- Briefly touch on why the term IK might be intimidating. This should help to soften some of the formality of the term and in so doing, render it more accessible. Let participants know that we will begin to discover our own personal meaning of IK throughout the process of the workshop.
- Ask participants why they think it is important to begin exploring the way we think about things culturally (or why is IK would be important)? Discuss briefly and explain to participants that they will have a better understanding of IK as they make their way through this workshop.

b. Youth will be asked if they have any questions for me so far.

4. Sitting in circle, participants will be asked to introduce themselves:

*Ask them for their name, where they are from and to tell us if they were going on a canoe journey, what would they bring that begins with the first letter of their name.*
(For example: My name is Amy, I am Nisga’a, French & German and I will bring Abalone on the canoe journey).

5. Jerry and Amy will share their stories.

6. *Relate these stories back to the theme of the workshop.*
II. Agreements

**Time:** 7:00-7:10 p.m. (10 mins)

**Materials & Resources:**
Flip Chart Paper

**Preparation:**
Write down agreements and goals on flip chart paper before workshop begins. Leave space for additional agreements to be created in the group.

**Procedure:**

1. Jerry and I will invite youth to participate in a few agreements before we begin:

(i) What is shared in the circle and workshop activities stays within the circle. The safety and confidence with which people speak their truth is sacred and youth will be asked to refrain from speaking outside the circle. Only those in the circle have the privilege of hearing that truth.

(ii) When in the circle, the person holding the glass heart speaks. The rest of the group will silently listen and wait for the heart to come to them. Then they may speak.

(iii) We will listen openly to each person’s comments and will use positive language if we do not agree with them (ie each person will refrain from using put-downs).

2. Youth will be invited share any other agreements that they feel are necessary to create a safe and open space. I will write down agreements on flipchart paper.

3. Group will be asked if they agree to these suggestions.

4. I will post the agreements on the wall. The agreements are to remain visible throughout the workshop.

III Warm-up Activity: Cedar Strand Game

**Time:** 7:10-7:20 p.m. (10 mins)

**Materials & Resources:**
10-12 Cedar strands

**Preparation:**
Have cedar strands in a bundle ready to be distributed to group

**Notes:** The cedar strand game will allow participants to get comfortable interacting with each other. I have modified this activity from Opal Charters-Voght (1999).
**Procedure:**
1. Each youth will be given a piece of a cedar strand (I will ensure that the strands will be distinguishable from each other).

2. Youth will be asked to study the strand carefully and note its unique features (because they will be asked to find their cedar strand later on).

3. Participants will be asked to put their cedar strands in a pile in the middle of the circle, and mix them up.

4. Then they will be asked to reclaim their cedar strands as they are passed around in the circle.

5. Next, participants will be asked to debrief how they felt about the process and what they think the activity is demonstrating.

6. I will close the activity by letting the youth know the significance of the cedar strands. The activity illustrates how each of the participants are unique and have special qualities to offer the rest of the group. Each cedar strand woven together will create something new and beautiful (like a cedar basket or hat). I will let youth know that their words and stories are also like the cedar strands. Each of their words, stories or expressions will contribute to a new understanding or creation that will be beneficial to themselves and the WHOLE group.

**IV. DESCRIBE YOUR CULTURE: (SCENARIO QUESTIONS)**

**Time:** 7:20 - 7:30 p.m. (10-15 mins)

**Materials & Resources:**
Flip Chart Paper and Post it notes

**Preparation:**
Write down scenario questions on flip chart paper before workshop begins.
Type paired questions on pieces of paper to distribute to group.
Place a star on one post-it note. (This will be a ‘prize’ post-it note)

**Procedure:**
1. I will ask each youth in the circle to answer the following question written on the flip chart paper:

   (i) Pretend you were to meet someone from another country who does not know about Aboriginal/First Nation/or Metis people. How would you describe your culture(s) or teachings to them?
(ii) How would you describe yourself as an Indigenous person?

2. Participants will be encouraged to provide short answers.

3. I will scribe the responses from the group on post it notes.

4. Next I will have the youth form into pairs for two minutes and give them one of the following questions to answer:

(i) Who do you know that talks about their Aboriginal culture and expresses it?

(ii) Which actors, singers, artists or writers do you know that expresses Aboriginal culture.

4. I will ask the youth to join the circle again, read their question and share their answers.

5. I will ask the pairs what are the qualities that they like in the people that they chose for their examples. Or why did they choose these people?

6. I will scribe the responses from the group on the flip chart paper. This will serve as a point of reference to explore how the members of the group personally relate to the concept of Indigenous Knowledge later on in the session.

7. Now that participants have thought about the personal qualities and characteristics of their culture/Indigenous knowledge, I will let them know that I would like them to think about some of the activities that they do in school, at home or in the community which help them connect to their culture. Many of the teachings and understandings that they learn from these activities are considered to be created from Indigenous knowledge.

8. Provide participants with a post it note and ask them to write down cultural activities that comes to mind. Ask who has a star on their post-it note. (Provide small prize once they have written an answer on the note).

3. Collect what they have written and place the post it notes on the white board.

4. Ask participants how they felt when asked to write down a word. If they don’t raise the word ‘intimidated’, raise it for them.

5. Ask the group to brainstorm some more. Ask them what other activities or teachings they have learned that remind them of IK. Write each word on a Post It Note and affix to a white board and review as a group.

6. Use a pen to connect each one of the Post It Notes to demonstrate how each person’s understanding and insight contributed to a collective understanding of and created new knowledge. In so doing, make note of the web-like formation of thoughts and interconnections as a result of each person’s understanding. Point to this as an example of holistic knowledge…something which will be referred to in the next activity.
V.) Bringing our Knowledge into the Circle: Introduction to Concept of Wholism

**Time:** 7:30-7:40 p.m. 10 mins

**Materials & Resources:**
- White board pen
- Flip Chart Paper

**Preparation:**
- Have draw a large circle divided into quadrants

**Notes:** This activity will introduce the group to the concept of wholism.

**Procedure:**
1. Now that participants have an opportunity to discuss the scenario questions and begin thinking about Indigenous culture(s) and IK, I will draw their attention to a piece of chart paper that has a large circle with four quadrants.

2. I will ask if anyone in the group can identify what the circle symbol is or its meaning. I assume youth will have various levels of knowledge about this concept. Some youth in the group may identify it as a ‘medicine wheel’. I will ask the youth what the term means to them. I will write their answers on appropriate parts of the circle. I will summarize the group’s comments to create a group definition.

3. I will also ask youth to provide examples for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual realms. For example we might place dance in the physical realm, friends in the emotional realm, ceremonies in the spiritual realm, and computers in the mental realm. Some examples may overlap and go in more than one realm depending on the person.

4. I will be careful to let them know that each Aboriginal Nation has a different way of understanding the inter-related aspects of a person’s physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self and that I have chosen this diagram for easy reference. This symbol is also reflected in oral stories, art, dancing and language. I will then show them another circle that has four concentric circles in it (with one self in the middle of the circle and family, community and nation following), as another way to visualize the circle.

5. I will summarize:

“Wholeness/Holism refers to the unity and centering of the qualities of the four directions in the human being. It conveys the belief that all things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is a part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else. Refer participants to the Post-It Note...
exercise they did in Activity 4 and point out that it was a good example of the many interpretations of a concept.” (Cochran, 2008).

6. I will let the youth know that when we think about our physical, mental, emotional, spiritual selves we are considered to be whole and healthy person. When we relate the learning that we do in our daily lives we call this wholistic education or wholism. I will write on the white board: Physical + Emotional + Spiritual + Mental = wholeness, wholism and wholistic education.

4. I will ask if anyone in the group can think of an activity that we did earlier that might also reflect wholism? (Answer: the Elder’s story, or the cedar strand activity, basket of knowledge activity).

BREAK-Give youth 5 minute break while next activity is set up.

VI. “Alter-Native Expressions”: Application of Wholism Activity

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Time: 7:45-8:45p.m. (1 hour to 1.5)</th>
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**Materials & Resources:**
Collage Materials  
Scissors, glue, pens, pencils, crayons,  
Lined pieces of paper  
Name tags

**Preparation:**
Prepare collage materials in container prior to workshop  
Plug in glue guns and ensure there is one adult to supervise these throughout the activity  
Have youth place name tags on the back of their sheets of paper. Their circle is to be at the front (name on the back).

**Notes:** This activity is designed to assist youth in personally apply the concept of wholism. I will use concept maps to visualize knowledge structures in terms of conceptual elements and the relationship between them. The process of making concept maps is intended to help with conceptualizing and memorizing knowledge.

**Procedure:**

1. Youth will be invited to create a collage using a circle quadrant symbol to describe themselves. Those youth who do not want to participate in the collage making will be invited to write a story, poem or free verse to describe the mental, physical and emotional
aspects of themselves. This is intended to take into account different learning needs and styles of personal expression. I will let the youth know that there is no ‘wrong’ way to do the exercise and should feel free do whatever comes to them. They are also open to find a quiet place to do the activity.

2. Inform youth that this activity is limited in time. They will only have 1 hour to complete their project.

3. Point out to the numerous materials that have been provided to help youth represent their personal expression.

4. Provide a precautionary safety note about the glue gun.

5. After one hour, youth will be asked to sit back in the circle. I will ask if anyone would like to share at least one thing from their creations. Ask them to describe how they feel that their project represents them: spiritually, physically, mentally, & emotionally.

VII “Connexions”: Connecting Wholism and Indigenous Knowledge

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<th>Time: 8:55-9:05 pm (10 mins)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials &amp; Resources:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes: This will help youth connect Wholism and Indigenous Knowledge</td>
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Procedure:
1. Now that the youth have talked about wholism and shared their personal understandings of it. I will ask them to return to our early discussion about culture Indigenous knowledge (Activity 3)

2. I will add any additional points to the comments made earlier in part III of the workshop.

3. I will ask if they see a relationship between wholism (or the activity that we just did) and Indigenous knowledge.

4. I will point out that many of the insights and contributions shared earlier reflect the meaning of Indigenous knowledge.

5. As a final activity, I will ask the youth to help me piece together Indigenous knowledge.
VII Piecing Together our Indigenous Knowledge

**Time:** 8:55-9:05 p.m.

**Materials & Resources:**
Pre-made IK Puzzle
Small prize

**Preparation:**
Place IK puzzle pieces underneath chairs before participants arrive.

**Notes:** This will help youth connect Wholism and Indigenous Knowledge

**Procedure:**
1. Each of youth will find a puzzle piece taped under their chair and, when the time begins, their job will be to find their partner by matching their pieces. The pieces will have letters on it – in which case youth will need to make a word. Each piece will have a small definition or picture on the back of their piece to assist the youth in their discussion. A small prize will also be given to the first pair who joins their pieces together.

2. Once youth find their partners and join their pieces together, they will use the markers to write a word, phrase or symbol on the front of the puzzle piece that comes to mind when they think of the word, or its relationship to IK.

4. For example: one group may be given the word Elder. An Elder could be defined as wise and respected person, a knowledge holder, or someone the youth know.

5. Youth will have 5 minutes to complete this exercise before coming back together in a circle.

6. Groups will share their words and place their puzzle piece on the floor to form a large circle to represent a collective definition of Indigenous knowledge.

7. Youth will be asked if they would like to add anything else to puzzle.

**Summary/Closing of Circle: (10-15 mins)**

1. I will re-read the original definitions of wholism, culture, IK to the group. I will ask if anyone wants to add anything to the list. Is there anything that they wish to change or delete? I will finish by going around the circle and invite each participant to answer the following question: Where do we ‘see’ or experience IK in our daily lives? What kinds of IK do we want to learn about in the future?

2. After each participant has had an opportunity to speak, I will let them know that the activities were about creating personal and shared understandings of wholism and
Indigenous knowledge. All meaningful knowledge is created when we all contribute to it from our various perceptions and experiences. I will thank the youth for sharing the wealth and richness of their knowledge with me.

3. Jerry will close the circle.
APPENDIX D  YOUTH ASSENT FORM

Youth Assent Form
“Urban Aboriginal Youth’s Perceptions & Experiences of Wholistic Education”

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Co-Investigator:

Sponsor:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose:
This thesis research project involves exploring the perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal youth who participate in Aboriginal community-based youth programs in Vancouver. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a self-identified Aboriginal youth who is between the ages of 16-24 and has participated in one or more program(s) at an Aboriginal organization in East Vancouver for at least two months or more.

Research Procedures:
The research is divided in two stages. First, you will be asked to participate in one sharing circle/workshop for three hours with myself and an Elder where you will be asked to share your experience and perceptions about wholistic (spiritual, mental, emotional and physical) education. You will also be invited to create a collage, write poetry, rhyme or a story to express your feelings and thoughts on the subject. Second, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up one to one or paired interview one week after the sharing circle/workshop. The sharing circle and interview will be audio taped. The audio-tapes will be kept in a locked in filing cabinet or on a secure computer by the co-investigator.
All materials (i.e. pictures, poetry, stories) you create during the project may be used in publications.

**Risks:**
While participants may experience some discomfort, in fact there is considerable literature to suggest that most participants may in fact benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

The researcher will hand out copies of the Helping Hands: Empowering Aboriginal Youth Resource Guide to you prior to the interview so that you can self-refer if needed; will ensure that that you can stop at any time during the interview to compose yourself or discontinue the topic if needed; will contact a Youth Counselor prior to beginning any interviews to ensure that you have a safe, youth friendly place to go to if needed; and will follow-up with you at the end of the interview to ensure they are not upset and provide referrals if needed.

**Benefits:**
You will gain new understandings about wholistic education and Indigenous knowledge in the sharing circle and one-one interview. You will have the opportunity to listen and share your experiences about your participation in Aboriginal organizations’ in the community with each other, myself and an Elder. In doing so it is hoped that you may gain positive new insight about your educational life journey while strengthening your relations with the group.

At the completion of the research project there will be a mini-feast to present the findings of the research to the community. You will be invited to participate in the mini-feast, although this is entirely voluntary. You will also be invited to share any poetry, art, or stories which were created in the sharing circle. The mini-feast is intended to honour and thank you for your participation in the study as well as to show case your talent.

**Confidentiality:**
All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. All voice recordings and computer data will remain on a secure computer and will be given to the Principal Researcher upon completion of study. The research data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet with Dr. Jo-ann Archibald for five years in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia.

You are asked to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the sharing circle however, as a sharing circle has multiple participants, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.
Your participation in the mini-feast may mean that their anonymity is no longer confidential. Although, I will ensure that I do not name participants during the feast to help protect their anonymity.

Remuneration/Compensation:
In order to defray the costs of inconvenience and transportation you will receive an honorarium in the amount of:

- $10 gift certificate from Safeway for their participation in the sharing circle/workshop, as well as food and bus tickets. Honorarium will still be provided if you begin session but decide to withdraw from session.
- $15 gift certificate from Safeway for their participation in the one to one interview as well as food and bus tickets. Honorarium will still be provided if you begin session but decide to withdraw from session. You will also receive an opportunity to enter your name into a draw for an Ipod Nano. Your participation in the draw is not contingent on you participation in the research, and if you choose to withdraw from the research, your name will still be included in the draw. Special care will be taken to ensure that your confidentiality will not be compromised as result of the draw.

Contact Information for the Study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Jo-ann Archibald at 604-822-5286.

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Assent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your access to further services from the Urban Native Youth Association.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this assent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

I assent/I do not assent (circle one) to participate in this study.

Participant Signature   Date
Printed Name
APPENDIX E  YOUTH CONSENT FORM

Youth Consent Form
“Urban Aboriginal Youth’s Perceptions & Experiences of Wholistic Education”

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Co- Investigator:

Sponsor:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose:
This thesis research project involves exploring the perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal youth who participate in Aboriginal community-based youth programs in Vancouver. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a self-identified Aboriginal youth who is between the ages of 16-24 and has participated in one or more program(s) at an Aboriginal organization in East Vancouver for at least two months or more.

Research Procedures:
The research is divided in two stages. First, you will be asked to participate in one sharing circle/workshop for three hours with myself and an Elder where you will be asked to share your experience and perceptions about wholistic (spiritual, mental, emotional and physical) education. You will also be invited to create a collage, write poetry, rhyming or a story to express your feelings and thoughts on the subject. Second, you will be asked to participate in a follow-up one to one or paired interview one week after the sharing circle/workshop. The sharing circle and interview will be audio taped.
The audio-tapes will be kept in a locked in filing cabinet or on a secure computer by the co-investigator.

All materials (i.e. pictures, poetry, stories) you create during the project may be used in publications.

**Risks:**
While participants may experience some discomfort, in fact there is considerable literature to suggest that most participants may in fact benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

The researcher will hand out copies of the Helping Hands: Empowering Aboriginal Youth Resource Guide to you prior to the interview so that you can self-refer if needed; will ensure that that you can stop at any time during the interview to compose yourself or discontinue the topic if needed; will contact a Youth Counselor prior to beginning any interviews to ensure that you have a safe, youth friendly place to go to if needed; and will follow-up with you at the end of the interview to ensure they are not upset and provide referrals if needed.

**Benefits:**
You will gain new understandings about wholistic education and Indigenous knowledge in the sharing circle and one-one interview. You will have the opportunity to listen and share your experiences about your participation in Aboriginal organizations’ in the community with each other, myself and an Elder. In doing so it is hoped that you may gain positive new insight about your educational life journey while strengthening your relations with the group.

At the completion of the research project there will be a mini-feast to present the findings of the research to the community. You will be invited to participate in the mini-feast, although this is entirely voluntary. You will also be invited to share any poetry, art, or stories which were created in the sharing circle. The mini-feast is intended to honour and thank you for your participation in the study as well as to show case your talent.

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If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your access to further services from the Urban Native Youth Association or the Aboriginal Community Policing Centre.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this assent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to participate in this study.

Participant Signature  Date
Parent Consent Form

“Urban Aboriginal Youth’s Perceptions & Experiences of Wholistic Education”

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Associate Dean of Indigenous Education, 604-822-5286.

Co-Investigator:

Sponsor:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose:
This thesis research project involves exploring the perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal youth who participate in Aboriginal community-based youth programs in Vancouver. Your child is being invited to participate in this research study because she/he is a self-identified Aboriginal youth who is between the ages of 16-24 and has participated in one or more program(s) at an Aboriginal organization in East Vancouver for at least two months or more.

Research Procedures:
The research is divided into two stages. First, your child will be asked to participate in one sharing circle/workshop for three hours with myself and an Elder where she/he will be asked to share their experiences and perceptions about wholistic (spiritual, mental, emotional and physical) education in the Aboriginal community organizations. They will also be invited to create a collage, write poetry or a story to express their feelings and thoughts on the subject. Second, your child will be asked to participate in a follow-up one to one or paired interview one week after the sharing circle. The interview will be approximately one and a half hours in length and will involve further questions about wholistic education. The sharing circle and interview will be audio taped. The audio-
tapes will be kept in a locked in filing cabinet. Any materials (i.e. pictures, poetry, stories) you child creates for the project may be used in publications.

Risks:
While participants may experience some discomfort, in fact there is considerable literature to suggest that most participants may in fact benefit from the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The researcher will hand out copies of the Helping Hands: Empowering Aboriginal Youth Resource Guide to your child prior to the interview so that they can self-refer if needed; will ensure that they are aware that they can stop at any time during the interview to compose themselves or discontinue the topic if needed; will contact a Youth Counselor prior to beginning any interviews to ensure that they have a safe, youth friendly place to go to if needed; and will follow-up with them at the end of the interview to ensure they are not upset and provide referrals if needed.

Benefits:
Your child’s knowledge base about Indigenous knowledge and wholistic education will be broadened through group discussion in the sharing circle and one-one interview. Your child will have the opportunity to listen and share their experiences about their participation in Aboriginal organizations’ in the community. In doing so it is hoped that they will gain positive new insight about their educational life journey while strengthening their relations with their peers, myself and a respected Elder.

At the completion of the research project there will be a mini-feast to present the findings of the research to the community. You and your child will be invited to participate in the mini-feast, although this is entirely voluntary. Your child will also be invited to share their poetry, art, or stories which they created in the sharing circle. The mini-feast is intended to honour and thank your child for their participation in the study as well as to show-case their strengths and talent.

Confidentiality:
All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet. All voice recordings and computer data will remain on a secure computer and will be given to the Principal Researcher upon completion of study. The research data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet with Dr. Jo-ann Archibald for five years in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia.

Your child will be asked to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the sharing circle however, as a sharing circle has multiple participants, we cannot guarantee what other participants do with the information discussed.

Your child’s participation in the mini-feast may mean that their anonymity is no longer confidential. However, I will ensure that I do not name participants during the feast to help protect their anonymity.
Remuneration/Compensation:
In order to defray the costs of inconvenience and transportation your child will receive an honorarium in the amount of:

- $10 gift certificate from Safeway for their participation in the sharing circle/workshop, as well as food and bus tickets. Honorarium will still be provided if youth begin session but decide to withdraw from session.
- $15 gift certificate from Safeway for their participation in the one to one interview as well as food and bus tickets. Honorarium will still be provided if youth begin session but decide to withdraw from session.
- An opportunity to enter their name into a draw for an Ipod Nano. Your child’s participation in the draw is not contingent on their participation in the research, and if they choose to withdraw from the research there name will still be included in the draw. Special care will be taken to ensure that your child’s confidentiality will not be compromised as result of the draw.

Contact Information for the Study:
If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr. Jo-ann Archibald at 604-822-5286.

Contact for Concerns About the Rights of Research Subjects:
If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:
Your child’s participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to allow her/him to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your access to further services from the Urban Native Youth Association.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to my child’s participation in this study.

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<tr>
<th>Parent’s Signature</th>
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<tr>
<th>Parent’s Name</th>
<th>Printed Name of Child</th>
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“The purpose of this interview is to follow up on our discussion and activities from the sharing circle/workshop last week. Our interview today will take approximately an hour.”

“During the interview, I will be taking notes and audio-taping our conversation for my writing purposes. I do this so I will not miss out on anything important that you say.

However, everything we talk about today will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office.”

“I will not include any information that personally identifies you or other youth, parents, community members or youth workers in my written report of this session.”

“There are no right or wrong answers”

Is there a fake name that you would like to identify yourself as in the study?

Do you have any questions for me?

Questions:

1. What programs do you attend at UNYA, and the Aboriginal Community Policing Centre or else where?
   b. Why you attend these particular programs?

2. Are there any activities or programs that help you connect with your culture?
   b. Tell me more about them.
   c. What are they?
   d. How do they connect to your culture?
   e. How do you feel about them?

3. What makes participating in these programs the same or different than school?

4. How important is Indigenous knowledge to you? If you were to give it a rating which one would you choose:
5. After participating in the sharing circle/workshop last week, do you feel you learned anything from the other youth’s or Jerry’s comments that relates to how you think about Indigenous Knowledge?

b. What did you experience when you listened to the group share their stories and understanding about Indigenous knowledge?

c. Did you have any questions?

e. Are there things that you disagreed with? If so why?

f. Do you think knowing more about IK and your culture helps you when you leave (UNYA or blank)?

g. *Go to specific questions on last page*

6. How important is wholism? If you were to give it a rating which one would you choose:

- Not Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Very Important

6. How important is wholism? If you were to give it a rating which one would you choose:

- Not Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Very Important

7. After participating in the sharing circle/workshop last week, do you feel you learned anything from the other youth’s or Jerry’s comments that relates to how you think about wholism now?

b. What did you experience during the circle activity? (When we place the sticky notes into the circle?)

c. Is there anything you disagreed with? Why?

d. [*Ask only if it is important*]
Do you feel that wholism is a useful way to view your life and daily activities?

8. [Take a few minutes. Don’t’ Rush]
In front of me I have a blank circular diagram that is split into four quadrants. Let’s look at the physical area in this diagram. How do the organizations address this area? What are examples? What do you think of them? (Each of the other three quadrants will be reviewed in a similar fashion). Are there any activities that should go in the centre?
8b. I was surprised at how many young men participated in last week’s workshop. Do you think that Aboriginal organization’s meet the needs of young men? Or that young men might be drawn to certain programs over others?

9. What do you like about these organizations? Why?

10. What would you improve or change about these organizations?

10. Do you have any friends that attend these organizations? How do you think they feel about them?

11. Pretend you were going to open your own Aboriginal organization...what kinds of programs or activities would you have in it? How would you run it?

10. Is there anything about IK or wholism that you would like to discuss that we haven’t yet talked about?

Specific Follow up Questions from Sharing Circle Workshop:

12 a. Are there any other contemporary examples of IK or culture that you can think of that are meaningful to you?

b. [*Prompt*] One of the things I have noticed is that a lot of young people in East Van are drawn to hip hop as a way of expressing themselves. Can you tell me more about this?

13 a. Do you see any differences between your upbringing and urban youth who have lived in the city all their lives? Are there any similarities?
APPENDIX H     THEORETICAL CODES FROM LITERATURE

Transformation
Harmony
Wholism
Spirituality
Tradition
Elders
Language
Experiential
Land
Song
Dance
Stories
Culture
Four R’s
Synergy
Dynamic
Community
Interconnected
Process
Personal
Colonialism/Decolonization
Dreams, Intuition, Visions
Hegemony
Resistance
‘At-Risk’
Contemporary expressions
(ie Hip Hop, Art)
APPENDIX I  EXAMPLES OF EMERGING CODES IDENTIFIED BY YOUTH

Voice
Medicine Wheel
Humour
Cultural Activities (ie tanning hides, hunting)
Rediscovery Programs
Sports & Recreation
Balance
Youth Workers
Other Youth
Friends
Knowing
Trickster
Queer
# APPENDIX J

## RESEARCH ETHICS CERTIFICATE

The University of British Columbia  
Office of Research Services  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Institution / Department:</th>
<th>UBC BREB Number:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jo-ann Archibald</td>
<td>UBC/Education/Educational Studies</td>
<td>H08-02246</td>
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**Institution(S) Where Research Will Be Carried Out:**

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Site</th>
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Other locations where the research will be conducted:
Urban Native Youth Association, 1640 East Hasting, Vancouver, B.C.

**Co-Investigator(S):**

Amy M. Parent

**Sponsoring Agencies:**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) - "Urban Aboriginal Youth and ‘Wholistic’ Education in Vancouver"

**Project Title:**

Urban Aboriginal Youth’s Perceptions and Experiences of Wholistic Education

**REB Meeting Date:**

January 8, 2009  
**Certificate Expiry Date:**

January 8, 2010

**Documents Included in this Approval:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protocol:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
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<td>December 9, 2008</td>
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<td>Consent Forms:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elder Consent Form</td>
<td></td>
<td>January 19, 2009</td>
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<td>Parent Consent Form</td>
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<td>January 19, 2009</td>
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<td>Youth Assent Form</td>
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<td>Advertisements:</td>
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<td>Recruitment Poster</td>
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<td>December 16, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</td>
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<td>Interview Sample Protocol</td>
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<td>December 9, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing Circle Workshop Template</td>
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<td>December 9, 2008</td>
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**Letter of Initial Contact:**
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter of Contact</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elder Letter of Contact</td>
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<td>January 26, 2009</td>
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<td><strong>Other Documents:</strong></td>
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<td>Figure 1</td>
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Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair  
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair  
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair  
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair  
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair  
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair