

**Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in British Columbia:**

**Nicola Valley Institute of Technology -**

**“An Eagle's Gathering Place”**

by

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## **Abstract**

The Indigenous teachings of my parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and the Elders of my community have inspired my passion for education. My professional educational journey has taken me to many Indigenous communities throughout Canada, the United States and abroad. Through these experiences, I realized that not all Indigenous post-secondary institutions were in fact Indigenous. Many were named Indigenous but their systems and curricula mainly reflected those of mainstream society. Working at an Indigenous post-secondary institution that is based on Indigenous values and Indigenous Knowledge (IK), I knew there was a difference; it is that difference that this thesis addresses.

This thesis examines the governance structure, educational policies, programs, and student services offered by the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), which has become a leader in Aboriginal public post-secondary education in Canada. NVIT has two campuses in British Columbia, with its main campus located at Merritt and the other at Burnaby. Framed within an Eagle's Perch metaphor, and an Indigenous Knowledge system, the NVIT story is told about how it achieves self-determination through its Indigenization processes, and how its leadership takes an anti-hegemonic stance to confront forms of hegemonic control.

A mixed methods case study is used to understand how the principle of self-determination is enacted within an Aboriginal public post-secondary institution. The study's theoretical framework draws on Indigenous Knowledge and critical theory. Data from student and alumni surveys; interviews with Elders, Board of Governors and management; institutional documents; and reflections on my professional experience at NVIT indicate that community-based partnerships, IK educational approaches, the multi-faceted Elders' roles, and the family cohort approach to learning contribute substantially to NVIT students' post-secondary access, retention, and success.

The Eagle's Perch at NVIT guides and challenges its leaders, students, faculty, Elders, and staff to create a learning and gathering place where the transformative power of the Eagle's

Indigenous teachings are sustained and shared with others. Drawing on the literature, research findings, and my reflections, I developed a Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education that includes seven principles of Indigenization, self-determination, anti-hegemony, good governance, educational values, program relevancy, and extended family.

## **Preface**

This work is approved by:

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as my constant voice that says 'you can do it' and to my sisters Carmie, Colleen and Lynda for their listening and encouragement through the years of the journey and for stepping in when my children needed them.

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## **Dedication**

*To Percy and Marie (Pierro) Minnabarriet*

*My parents who have been the voices, guides and inspiration for my life, my learning and my values*

*And*

*To my children who have reinforced my Parents' teachings*

*Kris and Krista, Rocket and Heidi*

*Kyle, Christine, Cindy and Louis*

## Chapter One: Introduction

We have to find a way to fulfill our mandate, to teach our students about the mainstream, without giving up ourselves, without assimilating into those boxes that don't meet our needs. We must be respectful and understand that those institutions complete us in a way; we need for our members to be fully equipped to deal with today's needs in society. But we must find ways to maintain our sovereignty, to maintain and support our cultural learning, while also making sure that our students can move into those institutions at their most excellent – well-equipped with their cultural tools, their cultural knowledge, and their information. How do we do that? It is the responsibility not only of Aboriginal institutes and communities, but also those partners that are important to us. (Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, En'owkin Centre, cited in *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in BC: A Place for Aboriginal Institutes*, 2008, p. 11).

The processes of colonization have exposed Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> people to a barrage of non-Aboriginal socio-economic policies and cultural influences, which have led to rapid and traumatic socio-cultural change for Aboriginal people and their communities. As a result, the educational conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada remain significantly lower than the non-Aboriginal population. To underscore this grave problem, Mendelson points out, “the Aboriginal population fared much worse than the total population, with at least 54 percent failing to complete high school compared to 35 percent in the population as a whole” (2006, p.10). This is a dire situation because to participate in the Canadian societies economic and labour market and to enroll in post-secondary education individuals usually need to attain the minimum of a grade 12 education.

The British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development also highlight this concern for the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in the post-secondary system. The *Aboriginal Report – Charting Our Path* (2008, pp. 6-7) delineates Aboriginal post-secondary education in the last decade. In 2006/07, 4.5 percent of students in the post-secondary system identified themselves as Aboriginal which is a 0.5 percent increase in the number of Aboriginal students relative to the total student population since 2002/03. Providing a demographic sketch

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<sup>1</sup> Terms such as Aboriginal and Indigenous will be used interchangeably in this thesis. Other terms such as First Nations, Native, and Indian will also be used when literature is cited and discussed that use such terms. In the Canadian Constitution, the term 'Aboriginal' signifies First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. First Nations usually refer to people who are registered with an Indian Band, although many colleges and universities use the term First Nations in a more inclusive manner to mean Aboriginal people and those with Aboriginal ancestry.

depicting how Aboriginal students are distributed throughout the post-secondary system in British Columbia, Jothan explains that

...in 2006/07, 39 percent of Aboriginal students in British Columbia's public post-secondary system were registered at rural colleges, and 23 percent were registered at universities and in 2007/08, 7 percent of Aboriginal British Columbians held a university degree, compared with 23 percent of non-Aboriginal British Columbians (2009, p.27).

Areas for improvement in the post-secondary system regarding Aboriginal education were also recommended. On behalf of the Government of BC, in 2007 Geoff Plant completed his consultation report, *Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead Access & Excellence The Campus 2020 Plan for British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education System*. The report identified the need for a series of strategic actions to be taken to improve Aboriginal student success in the public post-secondary education. These recommendations for action consisted in obtaining:

1. accurate information on the performance of Aboriginal students;
2. more comprehensive data gathering and analysis to achieve equality in Aboriginal participation;
3. higher attainment rates in earning degrees for Aboriginal students by 2020; and
4. greater parity in post-secondary outcomes between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students by 2020.

The crisis today, in regards to 'educating Aboriginal people' has historical roots that originated with colonization by early missionaries and the federal government (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, RCAP, 1996). Since Confederation, Canada (the federal government) has consistently intruded upon Aboriginal rights and freedoms through policy and legislation. For example, the *Indian Act of 1876* was an instrument of social control that subordinated Aboriginal people, thereby relegating them to the status of a colonized people and depriving them of Aboriginal rights to their traditional lands, languages, and cultures. As Harold Cardinal, a key Aboriginal political leader asserted, "instead of implementing the treaties and offering much needed protection to Indian Rights, the *Indian Act* subjugated to colonial rule the very people whose rights it was supposed to protect" (cited in Hick, year, para.1). As part of the process of subjecting Aboriginal people to colonial rule, the *Indian Act* granted educational power to the Government of Canada to regulate and control Aboriginal people's education.

Thus, today, education policy for Indian/First Nations people is still controlled by the federal (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, AANDC) government with a broad range of powers that regulates and controls virtually every aspect of Aboriginal education and Aboriginal people. In its fiduciary responsibility, the federal government through AANDC determines the policies and procedures for post-secondary education on behalf of Aboriginal people. The Canadian provincial governments also exert their power to determine post-secondary education policy for Aboriginal people, although Aboriginal people and their political and educational organizations have had some influence to shape policy in since the 1990s. According to Harold Cardinal, instead of implementing meaningful educational policies, the federal and provincial governments have implemented colonial education policies that deprive the very people they are trying to help. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) notes that over the years improvements in Aboriginal educational success have been incremental but the pace of improvement is too slow and too small to reach parity with the non-Aboriginal population. Much more has to be done to alleviate the barriers and hardships many Aboriginal students struggle through at all levels of education (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2000). The opening quote by Indigenous scholar, Jeanette Armstrong exemplifies a critical issue that runs throughout my thesis: the need to work from a position of sovereignty regarding our Indigenous Knowledge (IK), and finding ways to build upon IK to facilitate the success of Indigenous post-secondary learners. My long-standing concern, commitment, and engagement in Indigenous controlled post-secondary education are also rooted in the personal history of my extended family and community.

### **1.1 My Story: Early Life and Education**

My passion for making substantive changes in my role as an Aboriginal educator and administrator is not something that I acquired or developed throughout my career, but rather it is training, a way of life and a baton of responsibility handed down from my family, both current members and those who have crossed over to the spirit world. I follow my Indigenous oral tradition in sharing aspects of my personal lived story to portray who I am and forces that have shaped me.

Growing up in my grandfather's home shaped my life, values, aspirations and goals all of which translate into the First Nations public servant I am today. Education has been the focus and vision of my work, my schooling and my life's desire - it is my passion. Through education I have been able to advance my father's words and create opportunities for people in my community and for people throughout the province of British Columbia and beyond.

I am the great granddaughter of Alec and Isabelle Pierro (St'uxwtews); Nancy and Louis Minnabarriet (Nlaka'pamux), the granddaughter of Johnny and Rose Pierro (St'uxwtews); Mary Anderson and Victor Minnabarriet (Nlaka'pamux) and the daughter of Percy (Nlaka'pamux) and Marie (nee: Pierro) [St'uxwtews] Minnabarriet. I am also the sister of 17 brothers and 5 sisters. I live in my father's territory and was educated in my mother's territory. My teachings came and continue to come from my Aunts, Uncles, Grandfathers and Grandmothers of both territories.

My Grandfather was the last hereditary chief of St'uxwtews (Bonaparte First Nation, Shuswap Territory) and as his interpreter I was responsible for the technical (reel to reel tape player, later a cassette) and verbal reports back to the community. Reporting to the community and Elders was my responsibility from the age of 9 to 17, after which I left home to acquire a post-secondary education. I was also required to train my replacement (my younger sister) to operate the equipment and to prepare the reports my grandfather required. When I worked with my Grandfather in a position of community responsibility, I received indispensable training, which helped me to develop invaluable skills in memorization, public speaking, and interpretation; furthermore, I began to understand the structure of 'Indian' political systems and issues. Part of this training also included learning about interpersonal skills, leadership styles, oratory and written structures, and much more. The St'uxwtews and Nlaka'pamux way of education and training have given me many rewards. When asked what I see as my job in Aboriginal Education in BC, I always smile and remember the words my father told me when I was a young person fresh from university and coming home to the reserve to work in the Band Office. My father's words ring true. He said "your job is to create opportunities that otherwise would not be available for the people you are working for regardless of what their situation in life is" (P. Minnabarriet, personal communication, 1979). These are the words I have

worked and lived by. I thank my Grandparents and parents for their vast knowledge and patience in transferring their knowledge and skills so that I can pass it on to my children, family and community. I would like to share a personal experience story that outlines barriers, assumptions, and processes that I encountered trying to access post-secondary education<sup>2</sup>.

*As a First Nations person who was educated in the provincial public school system in the 1960s and 1970s, I encountered racism, profiling and streaming. In the 1960s and 1970s, the public school system had two streams of education, one was the academic stream, which tracked students into university and the other was a commercial stream, which was non-academic and geared toward the lowest denominator for the existing labour market. As an 'Indian', my seven brothers and I were tracked to the commercial stream. This meant that I could not apply to university because I was not academically prepared to do so. However, I completed my 'grade 12' commercial curriculum in grade 10 and was not yet old enough (age 16) to leave school. I was then put into the grade 9 academic stream to 'keep me busy'. I had managed to complete the grade 9 and 10 academic curriculum in one year and then moved into the halfway point in grade 11; I turned 16 and was told I could now leave school. I indicated that I wanted to stay and complete my grade 12. The principal at the time was benevolent and allowed me to stay as long as I could keep up with the other students (all white students as we were the only Indian family in the public system until grade 12 when my cousins were integrated into public school from residential school). I maintained my courses and was successful. When I completed grade 12 and graduated with an academic stream standing I was excited because that meant I could go to university and become a teacher (my dream).*

*In July of 1973, the Indian Agent<sup>3</sup>, Mr. Brown came to see me at my grandfather's house on the reserve (Bonaparte) to inform me that my application for tuition to the University of British Columbia (UBC) was denied because I was an 'Indian' under the Indian Act and I could not attend university unless I wanted to enfranchise. I could, however, do one of three things; I could go to secretarial school, become a hairdresser or become a practical nurse because those were the only areas the Department of Indian Affairs would approve. I was disappointed and angry as well as humiliated because I wanted to be a teacher. My father talked to me and advised me to go to secretarial school because it would be a good skill to have as a backup in my life tools. So I entered Cariboo College (now Thompsons Rivers University) in September 1973 and enrolled in the two-year secretarial science program (because I had academic standing). I graduated and went to work. It was not until September 1989 that I once again entered post-secondary education. I spent a year doing college prep courses and then found out that I could have entered as a mature student. When I asked the academic advisor why she did not offer me that option when I first enrolled, she informed me that I was 'Indian' and in her experience I would not be smart enough to complete the university course work. I had to prove myself by at least passing the college*

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will indent and italicize some personal experience stories that others and I tell. These stories are ones that exemplify issues, possibilities, practices, and understandings that can be used for analytical storywork purposes (Archibald, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The Indian Agent was a federal government employee who controlled all administrative and financial matters for Indian Band members.

*prep courses before entering first year. I completed my first year and then left and applied for admission to Simon Fraser University where I eventually completed three degrees.*

Why do I relate this story to you? I do so to show that barriers of racism, low expectations, ill-founded assumptions and ignorance about Aboriginal people, and lack of student support is real and it hurts (Archibald, Bowman, Pepper, Urion, Mirehouse, & Shortt, 1995; Mendelson, 2006; Pidegon, 2008). I was able to move beyond the frustration, anger, and hurt and conditions of feeling powerless to a position where I am now completing a doctoral degree. The strong Indigenous teachings of my family and community have helped me move forward on my educational journey. I want to “give back” to others, which is another Indigenous teaching. I give back through my work in an Aboriginal post-secondary institution and through this thesis that addresses Aboriginal post-secondary education.

## **1.2 Positioning in the Research**

I am the Vice President of Academics and Partnership Development at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT). NVIT is an Aboriginal Public Post-secondary Institute with its main campus located in the interior of British Columbia (BC) at Merritt, and a newer campus located in the Lower Mainland at Burnaby, BC. Much of NVIT’s programming, instruction and support are based on the Medicine Wheel, which is an Indigenous holistic learning framework. I have been associated with NVIT for 21 years, first as a member of the Board of Governors, then as faculty and now a member of the senior leadership group. We are responsible for the strategic direction and operational management of the organization as it works towards achieving its vision and stated objective of providing “quality Aboriginal education and support services appropriate to student success and community development” (NVIT, 2008, 3). As the Vice President of Learning Services, I am responsible for the academic programming and student services and for providing the guidance and direction that meets the institute’s internal and external mandates. I work closely with the President, the Vice President of Corporate Services, and the Deans of Instruction to support their efforts in developing and maintaining programs, systems, and processes that are designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal community and learners. I provide leadership, guidance and advocacy to the NVIT community and to external stakeholders and partnerships on various aspects of the institute’s academic operations, as well as student and academic outcomes and leadership.

I am also very involved in Aboriginal Educational leadership within the province of B.C., and Canada. I chair various provincial and national committees that are in the process of evaluating and identifying the direction of Aboriginal education. My interest and passion has been Aboriginal education in my capacities as an advocate and an agent of change. The types of committees I am involved in range from post-secondary provincial framework design to program development, community economic development, First Nations institutional development and advocacy, to community development and curriculum design with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I have also had a role in redesigning the Aboriginal Shield Drug Awareness program for grades 3-10 in the public and band sanctioned school systems. I am presently the chair of the province-wide Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA), which provides policy, research, advocacy, and programmatic supports to Indigenous post-secondary institutes.

### **1.3 The Movement of Indigenous Post-Secondary Institutes in British Columbia**

The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association is the third generation of organized Indigenous post-secondary advocacy in British Columbia. In 1983 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), British Columbia Region, Ron Penner, Director of Education implemented the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) which was the mechanism to fund Aboriginal private post-secondary Institutes. During this time there were five Aboriginal Institutes: En'owkin Centre, Native Education Centre (now Native Education College), Chemainus Native College (CNC), Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), and Heilsuk College. These five Aboriginal Institutes comprised the first ISSP Board formally formed in 1985 and to which I was appointed and have remained for 15 years. At this time these Institutes metamorphosed into the Aboriginal Association of Postsecondary Institutes (AAPSI), which existed until 2000; under funding restraints, AAPSI was dissolved. IAHLA then became the provincial Aboriginal post-secondary structure.

The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) was formed in 2004 "at the request of Indigenous controlled Post-Secondary Institutes and Adult Learning Programs to address and further the mutual interests of all Indigenous controlled Learning Centres in British Columbia

(BC)” (IAHLA, 2008, p.1). NVIT is a partner member with IAHLA in its commitment to providing lifelong learning opportunities for Aboriginal learners.

The Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) provides federal government funding (from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada) for the research and development of programs relevant to Aboriginal peoples. NVIT works closely with the ISSP Committee to produce proposals with the goal of increasing the participation of Aboriginal peoples in culturally relevant post-secondary programs.

IAHLA Institutes play a vital role in providing Aboriginal students with a solid foundation through holistic models of education that incorporate Aboriginal epistemological ways of knowing and understanding the world and ontological ways of being in the world. These Institutes allow Aboriginal students to learn in supportive, safe, community-based environments where students can access support services offered by family, friends, culture and community. Elders are integral in the learning process as mentors, teachers and counsellors at both IAHLA and Public Post-Secondary Institutes (PPS). They provide students with the support and cultural teachings that they require as they “walk in two worlds.”

Elders, administrators and instructors would like to see more curricula developed that are culturally-relevant for Indigenous students. Along with a dearth of culturally-relevant Indigenous curriculum, there has always been a lack of Indigenous academics teaching at Indigenous post-secondary institutions, as noted by Indigenous leadership. In 1999 I had a conversation with the late Grand Chief Gordon Antoine, an important founder of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. Our discussion reflected on the lack of First Nations Academics employed at NVIT and the frustration around hiring First Nations instructors. Due to the related concerns of a lack of Indigenous curriculum and Indigenous instructors, I realized that NVIT was a place to advance my father’s words and to advance the vision of “Indian Control of Indian Education,” which is the only Canadian national policy developed by Indigenous political organizations (in 1972). The establishment of Indigenous controlled post-secondary institutions is one result of this policy. The Indian Control of Indian Education Policy advocated for local community involvement and control and meaningful inclusion of cultural

knowledge and values, which are essential meanings of the term, 'self-determination'. I share another story that shows the problems/barriers that Indigenous students face in accessing post-secondary education and the pivotal self-determining role that an Indigenous post-secondary institute can play in addressing these barriers.

*In 2004, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, an Aboriginal Public Post-Secondary Institute had a partnership with Simon Fraser University (SFU) to offer a degree in Integrated Studies-Aboriginal Community Economic Development at NVIT. NVIT had a cohort of 18 students who had completed their diploma in Aboriginal Community Economic Development and were ready to continue with the partnership degree.*

*The cohort of students ranged from recent high school graduates to individuals in their mid-50s. Several of the students had attempted to complete programs from other public post-secondary institutes prior to coming to NVIT and therefore had brought with them an academic history of failure or disappointment on their transcripts.*

*Unlike some of the other students, one student maintained a 4.10 Grade Point Average (GPA) and had a 4.00 Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) from NVIT programs that she had completed. As proof of her exemplary work, she had also, at one point, made the Honour Role and Dean's List. When it was time to register for the degree program all the students applied to SFU according to the requirements of the partnership with NVIT. However, the student who had proved to be an exemplary NVIT student in so many other classes was denied admittance to the program and to SFU. The rationale behind rejecting this student was that her CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) had suffered because her otherwise stellar transcript also reflected the past incompletes and failures that she received for courses taken at other institutions before she enrolled at NVIT. Consequently, her CGPA was below 2.5, which was the requirement for admittance. Rather than acknowledging her successes, SFU penalized her for some of her more difficult encounters with the education system, which caused her to question the reasons for being rejected. The student did not understand that the reasoning for denial was that her transcript carried all her past failures and incompletes which lowered her overall CGPA.*

*When this situation was brought to the attention of the Dean of Academics at NVIT, the Dean met with the entire potential students for the degree program and did a transcript review. It was determined that only two students would actually meet the requirements for admittance to the degree program based on their historical transcripts. At this point the Dean of Academics met with the Dean of Registration and Student Services at SFU to review the problem and solve the situation. It was determined (after several hours of negotiation and educating the Dean of Registration and Student Services at SFU) that students transferring from NVIT to degree programs at SFU would be able to submit their NVIT transcripts only as a basis for admission, which would allow SFU to ignore past failures, incompletes, and withdrawals from other institutions for admittance, therefore ignoring their past failures, incompletes and withdrawals from other institutions.*

*This is a huge barrier that Aboriginal students must deal with constantly. As a result, notwithstanding, this initial setback caused by an institutional barrier, the individual as well as six others from this program were on the SFU Dean's list for all of the five semesters that*

*were required to obtain their degree. Five of the seven students who were on the SFU Dean's List would not have gained admittance to SFU had the agreement to only produce NVIT transcripts for entrance qualification not been in place.*

*This particular individual presently has obtained her Master's Degree from University of Calgary in Urban Planning and is currently working with INAC in Ottawa. Others from this program have gone on to complete Master's Degrees in various disciplines and three are now in PhD programs in other Canadian universities.*

I highlight this story because it is important to understand the barriers Aboriginal students have encountered, and if not addressed in a positive manner, then the student gives up and will not continue. The role of an Aboriginal post-secondary institution such as NVIT can be critical for dealing with institutional barriers that Aboriginal students encounter, such as the example above where another public post-secondary institution's policy would have denied admission to a very capable student, if the NVIT administration did not advocate and negotiate a change in admission policy.

NVIT was founded on the belief that Indigenous Knowledge could provide the foundation for a holistic, relevant, and good quality education that facilitates students' post-secondary educational success. Indigenous student success is aligned with the social, economic, health, and political strength of Indigenous communities, which are key aspects of community self-determination (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996.). I believe that it is time to hear stories about the ways that an Indigenous post-secondary educational institution, such as NVIT has used IK to shape its governance, programming, and student services that contribute to the self-determination goals of Indigenous communities in British Columbia. In Indigenous oral tradition, we tell stories about lived experiences so that others can learn from our difficulties and successes. When we tell this type of story, we take time to first reflect on what we have learned; thereby, using a form of analysis. We also remember what others told us, what we observed, and how we felt. This thesis is like an Indigenous story about the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology told from the perspectives of its students, alumni, leadership, and Elders. The following research questions are used to shape the telling of the NVIT story:

## 1.4 Research Questions

1. How well has the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology addressed self-determination through its programming and student services in relation to:
  - a. Inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in programs and campus activities;
  - b. Instruction and program/course delivery;
  - c. Student academic, emotional, cultural, and financial issues; and
  - d. Elders' roles and responsibilities?
2. How does NVIT, in its role as an Indigenous post-secondary institution, ensure that its governance, learning, and student service policies are culturally grounded and that they address students' academic, financial, social, and cultural issues?
3. What makes NVIT's approaches to policy relevant to and effective for its students, alumni, leadership, and Elders?

To address these questions, I conducted a mixed methods case study of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, which is described in Chapter Two. The next section reviews literature about Aboriginal education with an emphasis on post-secondary education. There is a dearth of scholarship about Indigenous controlled post-secondary institutions, which creates a need for a study such as this one.

The following fundamental questions exist at the center of the debate for educators involved in Aboriginal post-secondary education. How does one implement the goals of self-determination, language revitalization, access to post-secondary education and sustainable funding of Aboriginal post-secondary education? What are the criteria for evaluating Aboriginal post-secondary education? How can post-secondary education address both the need for more Aboriginal people with degrees and the need for higher education that is culturally grounded and provides Aboriginal students with the tools to transmit their culture? The answers to these questions are important because they relate to how Aboriginal institutions like NVIT, address the issues of Indigeneity, hegemony and self-determination. These questions are explored in detail in the literature review in chapter two and the contextual complexities of NVIT in chapter 3. Furthermore, the answers to the issue of Indigeneity, hegemony and self-determination are explored in every chapter in this thesis and they form the core basis of the Eagle Perch, metaphor.

## 1.5 Literature Review

### 1.5.1 Policy Issues and Trends in Aboriginal Education

The social control aspects of the *Indian Act* placed Indians in the position of a colonized people as indicated in the first section of Chapter One. The *Indian Act* extended education power to the Government of Canada to regulate and control Aboriginal people's education in Canada. However, over the years the *Indian Act* and education have been used to assimilate Aboriginal people and as a result have undermined their Indigenous knowledge systems.

Industrial/Residential schools were founded in the 19th century and funded under the *Indian Act* by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada a branch of the federal government. The schools were run by churches of various denominations — about sixty percent by Roman Catholics, and thirty percent by the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada, along with its pre-1925 predecessors, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist churches ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadianresidential\\_school\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadianresidential_school_system)).

The foundations of the system were the pre-confederation *Gradual Civilization Act (1857)* and the *Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869)*. These assumed the inherent superiority of British ways, and the need for Indians to become English-speakers, Christians, and farmers. Between 1879 and 1986, upwards of 100,000 children in Canada were forcibly removed and placed into Indian Industrial Residential Schools. Their unique culture was stripped away to be replaced with a foreign European identity. Their family ties were cut, parents were forbidden to visit their children, and the children were prevented from returning home. First Nations children were the *only children in Canadian History*, to be singled out by race and forced to live in institutions; generation after generation (Rosiers, 2001).

In 1931 Edward Ahenakew, a national Aboriginal leader helped formulate the resolution passed by the League of Indians of Western Canada, requesting the following:

1. The department of Indian affairs must establish local reserve schools, since children in residential schools were making slow progress;
2. A year later the League argued that pupils be allowed to spend more time in the classroom; and
3. The League also argued that teachers must be properly qualified (1986, v1, p. 12).

The continuous developments in post-secondary education across the country have gone hand-in-hand with political developments. As Aboriginal peoples organize and articulate their demands, the

government has been obliged to meet requests put forward by Indian organizations. In *The New Buffalo* (2006), *Stonechild* traces Aboriginal post-secondary education policy from its earliest beginnings as a government tool for assimilation and cultural suppression to its development, as a means of Aboriginal self-determination and self-government. With first-hand knowledge and personal experience of the Aboriginal education system, *Stonechild* goes beyond merely analyzing statistics and policy doctrine to reveal the shocking disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal access to education, the continued dominance of non-Aboriginal people over program development, and the ongoing struggle for recognition of First Nations–run institutions.

Post-secondary education is often referred to as "the new buffalo"<sup>4</sup> for Aboriginal people and is a contentious but critically important issue for First Nations and the future of Canadian society. While First Nations maintain that access to and funding for higher education is an Aboriginal and Treaty right, the Canadian government insists that post-secondary education is a social program for which they have limited responsibility. In 1995, Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) developed the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework*, to increase participation, retention, and success in post-secondary education and training for Aboriginal people through three main strategies: strengthen public post-secondary institutions in meeting the needs of Aboriginal people; stabilize partnership agreements between public and Aboriginal controlled institutes; and, provide for the designation of Aboriginal-controlled institutes as public post-secondary institutions. As a result of this framework the following has been instituted by AVED,

1. Established NVIT as a B.C. Aboriginal Post-secondary Institute;
2. Established the *Aboriginal Special Projects Fund* that consisted of more than \$16 million in funding; and
3. Established Aboriginal positions in all public post-secondary institutions.

Although these are great additions it still does not address a majority of the barriers and lack of Aboriginal participation in the public system.

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<sup>4</sup> New Buffalo is a term used by elders to talk about education. When you look at traditional culture, the buffalo probably provided 95 per cent of all the things that they needed. With the buffalo gone, the question became what replaces it? Education was the thing that would guarantee the ability of First Nations people to survive in this new world. So that is basically the concept, that the new buffalo is access to education. University of Regina. U. of R. Report, June 14, 2010. ISSN 1206-3606 Publication Mail Agreement #40065347

## 1.6 Barriers in Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education

Barriers Aboriginal people face in post-secondary education include the lack of academic preparation for university and college entrance, family/community obligations that may conflict with the institutional policies, and funding limits and caps in funding from federal and provincial government sources (Jothan, 2009).<sup>5</sup> In another study, Mendelson (2006) examined the barriers (i.e., teacher quality, housing, funding etc.) to Aboriginal post-secondary education and concluded that:

- Significant efforts must be focused on getting Aboriginal students through the education system; and the
- Majority of the students who do not have high school education must get a second chance at education (p.35).

Malatest and Associates (2004) observed the lack of both quantitative and qualitative information regarding the barriers of Aboriginal post-secondary students in Canada, and Indigenous students in Australia and New Zealand. The report seeks to identify all the barriers to Aboriginal postsecondary success: historical, social, geographical, cultural and personal. It then discusses issues surrounding funding for Aboriginal students and concludes by offering the following strategies for Aboriginal post-secondary education: increased access programs, Aboriginal institutions, partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions, Aboriginal –centred programs for mainstream institutions, curriculum development, Aboriginal languages, science and health initiatives, student supports, and alternative assessments.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), a provincial First Nations controlled educational service/research provider and policy advocate identified the following hindering factors to Aboriginal post-secondary student success in both mainstream and Aboriginal institutions:

1. Lack of culturally appropriate settings, low expectations, racial discrimination, isolation, and marginalization in mainstream universities;
2. Lack of resources such as tutorials, orientation workshops, personal support/counselling, housing assistance, childcare assistance, university urban adjustment assistance, and career counselling;

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<sup>5</sup> While doing the literature review for this paper it became evident that there is little research done, however I am aware that there are studies in progress, such as post-secondary transitions, but their reports are not yet available. These studies are commissioned by the Indigenous Adult & Higher Learning Association, First Nations Education Steering Committee and a national review on post-secondary being done by the Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa. I fully intend to utilize these studies in my research once they are released.

3. Lack of or limited Aboriginal leadership expertise in Aboriginal governance at many Aboriginal institutions that struggle to attract and sustain Aboriginal faculty and administrators;
4. Lack of community participation in post-secondary education; and
5. Lack of Cultural Education and Language (FNESC, 2008, pp. 28-30).

Agbo (2004) states that one of the challenges facing Aboriginal education is how to enhance Aboriginal students' achievement through culturally responsive pedagogies. The issue involved is not merely that of methods of teaching and learning but of acquiring the necessary tools for shaping and implementing a socially and culturally oriented curriculum that recognizes Aboriginal local resources in context and reinforces and maximizes their use in education to make school learning an integral component of the social and cultural context of Aboriginal children's heritage. This article is about First Nations perspectives, opinions and attitudes about the status of language and culture in schooling and their suggested strategies to revitalize and preserve First Nations cultures. Agbo concludes that the issue involved is not merely one of cultural education of students but also of helping Euro-Canadian teachers attain the necessary cultural tools for determining and putting into practice a socially and culturally oriented program.

### **1.7 Programs and Approaches that Address Barriers to Post-Secondary Aboriginal Education**

Indigenous populations throughout the world have been deprived of opportunities for advanced education, thus limiting their ability to participate fully in their societies. For 25 years, "Access programs" in (Canada) have promoted high post-secondary success rates among people, largely from Indigenous populations with poor histories of educational success. Each access program provides education for a selected group of previously excluded learners, leading to a specific diploma or degree granted by a university or community college. Access programs go beyond equality of access to provide "equality of condition" through student support services. Principles and practices that have proven effective in maintaining success rates are described for the areas of student recruitment, the selection process, integration of student supports, financial support, academic support and remediation, and personal supports. Despite evaluations confirming the effectiveness of the programs, federal and provincial funding has declined considerably since the late 1980s. Despite

funding problems, access programs have contributed to Aboriginal community development and the transition of Aboriginal students to graduate programs. Recent developments in Aboriginal higher education include cooperative arrangements with First Nations, development of culturally relevant training programs to meet specific needs, and recognition of university degree credit for completion of certificate programs (Alcorn & Levin, 1998).

In 2009, the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association commissioned a study, *Transitions from Aboriginal Controlled Post-Secondary Institutes*, to identify education institutions in British Columbia that are working toward the development and implementation of access programs that are culturally relevant. The study identified the following as meeting these goals: an Aboriginal Public Post-Secondary Institute (NVIT), an urban-based Aboriginal Private Post-secondary Institution (Native Education College), a Northern rural Aboriginal Institute (Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society, GWES), a central interior Aboriginal Institute (En'owkin Centre), and a coastal corridor institute, (Heiltsuk). It was found that "Aboriginal institutes play a better role in providing Aboriginal students with holistic approaches to education" thereby, equipping students with the tools needed to transition to other education institutes successfully (p. 79). A major contribution from the report was that "cohort models provide experiential knowledge whereby students can apply new skills and knowledge toward the job market opportunities [and access to other higher education learning environments]" (p. 80).

Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen (2000) present some of the unique post-secondary programs that have been established to meet the distinct needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The short case studies presented in the article point to the variety of programs and models for educational delivery. In critically examining the case studies, special reference is made to how these are designed in relation to add-on, partnership, and First Nations controlled approaches. As indicated in this research, post-secondary education programs for Aboriginal peoples are rapidly evolving: the developments are impressive, yet many challenges remain. Fundamental questions that exist at the center of the debate for those involved in Aboriginal post-secondary policies and programs are worth repeating. How does one implement the goals of self-determination, language revitalization, access to post-secondary education and sustainable funding of Aboriginal post-secondary education? What are

the criteria for evaluating Aboriginal post-secondary education? How can post-secondary education address both the need for more Aboriginal people with degrees and the need for higher education that is culturally grounded and provides Aboriginal students with the tools to transmit their culture? In assessing the situation of post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples the authors address these questions in the following areas: access and rates of completion, Indian control of Indian education, and relevance (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

According to Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald, who was interviewed by Richardson and Blanchet-Cohn (2000) the achievements of the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) have been significant (p.38). Compared to other Canadian universities, the FNHL and UBC are leading the way in providing student services and developing academic initiatives that are university-wide. Other campuses have put in place similar models, for instance the University of Toronto. Archibald believes that the First House of Learning's comprehensive approach – whereby the 'House' is involved in curriculum development, providing student services, research, and community linkages — could be a model for universities and colleges worldwide. While the UBC First Nations House of Learning considers its community linkages as strong, it recognizes the importance of strengthening and sustaining these relationships. Another theme that has served the FNHL very well has been “quality education is determined by its relevance to the philosophy and values of First Nations and guided through the voices of the Ancestors” (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohn, 2000, p.38). Jo-ann Archibald notes that as the FNHL begins a new millennium, this teaching will continue to form a foundation for its work in future years. Pidgeon (2008) discusses how Aboriginal student support services promote success and retention in Canadian Universities. She cites British Columbia universities such as the University of British Columbia, Kwantlen University College, Okanagan University College, University of Northern British Columbia and University of Victoria, for not only creating Aboriginal support centres but hiring Aboriginal counsellors to promote student academic and cultural support on campus (p.6).

In the literature review above, I first outlined the federal government's educational policies and mandates that have denied Aboriginal decision-making and that have aimed to assimilate Aboriginal learners to Western educational systems. I then highlighted the various academic,

financial, social, and cultural Aboriginal post-secondary education barriers that have been identified in some studies. This research has often focussed on public mainstream post-secondary education. While this research is important, it fails to address housing, day care, academic preparedness, and funding, which are critical services that have a substantial impact on student access, retention and attrition. Aboriginal organizations and institutions such as the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA), First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) and others have identified these same problems. The section above presented some more recent post-secondary approaches that have created improved access for Aboriginal people. I am aware of current research initiatives that are trying to identify latent barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education; however, there has not been any research that focuses on the effectiveness of approaches to lessen these barriers in Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions in B.C. Since some of the Aboriginal post-secondary institutions have implemented appropriate solutions towards eradicating the barriers, we need to find out if these approaches are effective or not, from those who are most intimately impacted and involved, such as students, Elders, and administrators.

This is not an isolated situation and does not only impact British Columbia, the Native American post-secondary education system also deals with similar situations for example “most tribal colleges are located on or near Indian reservations and provide access to post-secondary education, accredited degrees, and vocational training for both Indian and non-Indian students” (Ambler, 2005,p.4). The Native American Tribal Colleges system has “incorporated native culture and tradition yet these institutions face similar problems such as access, recruitment, curriculum issues, lack of funding, and retention of students and faculty” (Higher Education Forum, 2004, p.22). Access to post-secondary education has generally increased in the tribal system according to Lori Webster (2003) “In 1982, the total enrolment at tribal colleges in the United States was approximately 2,100. By 2003, it has increased to 30,000” (pp. 1-2).

In countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Samiland there have been great strides in the development of Indigenous institutions that promote the ontology, epistemology and pedagogy of

Indigenous peoples. For example at the Saami University College in Norway the main language spoken and curriculum taught in is the Saami language. In New Zealand, the Maori have developed their own Maori Education system that preferences the Maori language, culture, and ways of knowing. In Australia, there has been greater emphasis on Early Childhood Education, Community Education and Access to Post Secondary Education.

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## **1.8 Research Gap**

There has been limited research associated with Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions; most of the literature has focused on identifying barriers that Aboriginal students experience in public universities and colleges. There seems to be less information on how well these few Aboriginal institutions are addressing approaches that lessen the barriers to education and what makes the approach successful. What is needed is thorough research information from an Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institution such as NVIT to find out how they have addressed barriers to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students as well as how they have used Indigenous

Knowledges to shape their policies, programs, and practices so that Indigenous student success is increased.

The structure of my thesis moves from Chapter One, which outlines the introduction and positioning of me in the thesis, and concludes with the Literature review. Chapter Two presents the Theoretical and Methodical Framework. It starts with examining Indigenous Knowledge as theory, and then looks at Critical Theory in relationship to IK. The final section discusses the methodology that I used. Chapter Three presents NVIT's contextual complexity of its history, and cultural, geographical, economic, and political forces that shaped it. The chapter also introduces student demographic and completion data. Chapter Four shows the analysis of the surveys and interviews that focus on factors that influence student learning. Chapter Five continues with the analysis and findings from the governance system at NVIT and how it relates to and/or protects NVIT in a provincial post-secondary system. Chapter Six is an overview of the findings and the formation of the 'Framework', which emerged during the case study and is presented as a way to articulate the functions of NVIT. Chapter Seven is the conclusion, which highlights some recommendations and final reflections.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical and Methodical Framework: Eagle's Vision**

This chapter describes the theoretical and methodical frameworks used in this thesis. Section One presents theoretical principles shaped by Indigenous Knowledge, which is my major, theoretical approach. These principles relate to the holistic epistemological and pedagogical nature of IK such as the role of Indigenous Elders as a source and transmitter of knowledge; values that stem from the collective community; an emphasis on local context; and forms of knowing through visions, dreams, stories, and inter-generational learning. Section Two introduces some notions of Critical Theory that can challenge systemic barriers in order to create academic space for IK. Section Three concludes the chapter with a description of my methodology.

### **2.1 Indigenous Knowledge as Theory**

Since the late 1990s, conceptualizing Indigenous Knowledge (IK) within education has been prompted largely by the scholarship of several Indigenous scholars many of whom are highlighted in this chapter. Indigenous Knowledge serves as my major theoretical framework for my study. This section highlights the key epistemological and pedagogical sources and principles derived from the Indigenous Knowledge literature that guide my study. I discuss the role of Indigenous Elders as sources of traditional IK and change agents in post-secondary educational contexts. Holistic, experiential, community/place-based, and cultural IK epistemology and pedagogy are highlighted, as well as the Indigenous use of 4Rs to shape education. The influences of IK educational theoretical frameworks are discussed and I also show how a local IK symbol/metaphor guides my theoretical framework.

Indigenous Knowledge, as articulated by Indigenous scholars, is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people to address the forces and impacts of colonization and hegemony, which in a university setting have been referred to as cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2002). According to Battiste (2002), Indigenous academics have been trying to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous Knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded from contemporary

educational institutions and from Eurocentric systems. Battiste argues that “Indigenous academics are developing new theories and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities and their institutions” (2008, p. 2) and by doing so, they assert their intellectual self-determination. Most importantly, returning to the Indigenous traditional teachings, and ways of knowing and learning, is an act of reclaiming and revitalizing our Indigenous Knowledge systems for improving Indigenous education at all levels and in all contexts.

The research about the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in educational learning approaches indicates students will benefit from education that is culturally sensitive and responsive (Archibald, 1995; Battiste, 1998, 2002, 2004; Cordoba, 2005; Jothen, 2010; Newhouse, 2007; Pidgeon, 2008). An important aspect of implementing Indigenous Knowledge in education is to ensure that learning experiences adhere to Aboriginal students’ cultural perspectives, experiences and worldviews. Also important, is the fact that, for non-Indigenous students and teachers, education using such methods often has the effect of raising awareness of Indigenous traditions and appreciation of Indigenous cultural realities (Battiste, 2002). Furthermore, Aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions can reclaim and revalue their languages, symbols, arts, and cultures and use these to achieve educational success (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Jothen, 2010; Kavanagh, 2008; Smith, 2000). Indigenous Knowledge is not a new concept because it has been practiced by Indigenous Peoples for millennia, but it may seem new to academe.

For many generations, Indigenous people have relied on their ways of examining and relating to nature, the universe, and the interconnections between these dimensions. Traditionally, Indigenous education processes were carefully constructed through individualized instruction; observing natural processes; adapting to modes of survival; obtaining sustenance from the animal, water, plant and material worlds; and using natural materials to make tools and implements (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005, p.20). Elders played a central role in teaching traditional forms of Indigenous Knowledge. A key challenge for any post-secondary institution today, is to include Indigenous Elders’ Knowledge in ways that are respectful and responsible (ethical).

### **2.1.1 Indigenous Knowledge and Elders**

The report *Moving Forward: National Working Summit on Aboriginal Postsecondary Education, March 2011* (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada) articulated Indigenization in post-secondary education as a “process where educational institutions incorporate and adopt local Aboriginal Knowledge and culture” (p. 16). The report also highlighted the use of Elders in the process of Indigenization and their contribution to the “Indigenous ways of Knowing”. This report also notes “successful indigenization of an institution requires a major culture shift [where] curriculum incorporates Aboriginal Knowledge, history and culture and is therefore relevant to [Aboriginal students’] life experience and their communities” (p. 21). In colleges and universities, achieving this definition of Indigenization requires that faculty have the knowledge expertise and that the institutional leadership is receptive and supportive of such an intellectual movement. Aboriginal Elders have contributed to the post-secondary Indigenization movement in Canada through their mentorship, teaching, and involvement in academic committees (Newhouse, 2008; Pidgeon 2008).

The institutionalization of Aboriginal Elders in post-secondary education has become a new innovation designed to pass on Aboriginal culture, teachings, history and practices within this milieu. The role of Elders in post-secondary education is also an issue that has been in debated since the 1980s. There has been discussion in regard to who is an Elder, what makes an Elder and what should an Elder’s role be. Each post-secondary institution must wrestle with these important questions in order to maximize the educational impact of Aboriginal Elders. Roderick Mark of the University of Calgary identifies some additional issues:

...we have misused the role of elder through our ignorance and failure to see that not all elders are teachers, not all elders are spiritual leaders and not all old people are elders (Medicine cited in Mark, 1987, p.147).

In their role as Elders in the Academy, it is “vitally important that Elders as leaders in post-secondary education are not decorative, not symbolic, but are deeply entrenched in the new architecture of Native education as foundations” (Steckley, 2007, p. 3). At NVIT the Elders roles have evolved from ‘decorative’ to formal where the Elders’ are involved with teaching, development of policy and implementation, and are the cultural advisors and spirit of the institution. The Elders are a permanent part of the NVIT structure and have secured funding. Detailed analysis and functions of

Elders' roles are described in Chapters Four, Five and Six. These concepts of Aboriginal Elders as educational foundations are an important source of epistemology, ontology, and pedagogy of Indigenous Knowledge or Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

Related to the concept of Elders is the role of storytelling as they transmit their knowledge from the past to the present generation. One of the main themes running through this thesis is stories as a way of analyzing and sharing knowledge. Stories Elders tell are a means to transfer knowledge of ways of knowing, living, and spirituality that relate the way of life of Aboriginal peoples. An Indigenous Academic who has contributed greatly to the development of Indigenous Knowledge is Jo-ann Archibald (1995, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2005). Archibald has unpacked what stories are and how they contribute towards the development of Indigenous Knowledge through her articulation of educating the heart, mind, body and spirit in her book about Indigenous Storywork (2008). "Stories are not only to be recounted and passed down; they are also intended as tools for teaching (p.4, 2008)," Archibald articulated seven principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (ibid). The use of this storywork framework has formed the foundation of this thesis.

Indigenous stories provide us with an authentic means for honoring the voices of my research participants and presenting these voices in a way that connects with our audience (those interested in Indigenous post-secondary education), inviting further dialogue and exploration. My thesis uses a storytelling approach that mirrors an intergenerational approach where those who have lived through an experience and have learned from it, share that knowledge with those who are interested in learning or who are in the early stages of learning. This sharing includes storytelling. According to Cajete (1994) "The telling of story is such a universal part of human communication and learning that it may be that story is one of the most basic ways the human brain structures and relates experience" (p. 137). Through stories we share our feelings, heal wounds, discover hope, increase understanding, and strengthen community. Indigenous people around the world still tell ancestral stories to invoke healing spirits and inspire change (Sunwolf, 2003). Many of my earliest childhood memories include sitting on the lap of a parent or grandparent/Elder and listening to their stories. Over the years, I have

continued to learn and teach through storytelling. Utilizing storytelling to transmit educational messages is a traditional and culturally respectful pedagogical method practiced by Indigenous people (Hodge et al, 2002). Elders also contribute to education in ways that go beyond an educational storytelling role.

Research findings by Simpson (2001), Stonechild (2006), Evans, et al. (1999), and Preston (2008) have suggested that Elders contribute greatly towards Aboriginal education. They act as positive Aboriginal role models to enhance students' understanding of Aboriginal peoples, traditional ways of learning, values, culture and intergenerational mentorship. Elders are the foundation and corner stone of transference of knowledge, histories, systems and structures that foster positive identity, family and kinship relationships and a positive learning environment for students, staff, faculty, board of governors and management at post-secondary institutes where Elders take on these leadership roles. I will highlight examples from the aforementioned Indigenous scholars below.

Simpson (2001) examined the relationship between Indigenous philosophies, theories of knowledge, and methodologies meaningful to Aboriginal academics. This study is based on critiquing Western forms of knowledge, theories, and methodologies from an Indigenous methodological and theoretical approach in terms of (a) how researchers of Indigenous Knowledge see themselves; (b) how Indigenous academics' personal decolonization processes led by several Elders takes place; and (c) how cultural revitalization processes occur where Indigenous academics become the students while the Elders become the teachers or experts. This study shows how Indigenous Knowledge was transmitted through Elders as community experts. Simpson argued that it is only when Indigenous academics sit quietly and patiently listen with their hearts that Indigenous paradigms and processes emerge and begin to take control. Aboriginal Elders played a critical role by holistically supporting the cultural integrity of Aboriginal academics and being agents of change across communities and institutions.

Stonechild (2006) articulates the advantages of smaller Aboriginal controlled institutions and identifies Nicola Valley Institute of Technology for its ability to address culturally relevant post-secondary education, which include elements such as

culturally relevant approaches to education that include an holistic balance of spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual components to make Aboriginal-controlled higher education unique and contribute to the success of Aboriginal students. Contact with Elders and meaningful integration with community are other elements that ensure that First Nations higher education is relevant and rewarding (p.103).

Stonechild believes that by supporting a “holistic approach to education and being cognizant of the multiple needs of the students these [Aboriginal-controlled] institutions are best able to address the needs of Indigenous peoples in their own communities” (p.106). He also notes that the way Aboriginal controlled institutes involve Aboriginal Elders differs markedly from mainstream universities where they are often marginalized and given token recognition.

Preston’s (2008) discussion of Aboriginal post-secondary education articulates the progress of Aboriginal students’ success through a review of demographics and statistics related to program completion. In the review, Preston articulates that “language, learning styles, teaching styles, communication modes, and cultural patterns reflected within most postsecondary institutions differ greatly from the traditional teaching pedagogy of Aboriginal people” (p.11). Preston also reinforces a holistic range of institutional supports, which include Elder involvement, in order to facilitate institutional success for Aboriginal learners:

Successful postsecondary institutes must be supported by an array of initiatives...the presence of Elders, Aboriginal resources, Aboriginal instructors and staff members, community-based programs and curricula and pedagogy reflective of Aboriginal culture beliefs and values (p.17).

Evans, et al. (1999), describes the relationship between the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and a First Nation post-secondary institute, Wilp Wilxo’oshwhl Nisga’a (WWN). The relationships between these institutions are described as being respectful and reciprocal, enjoying an equal partnership regarding relevancy of curricula. The arrangement is a process of Indigenization through their relationship in the form of developing the three pillar responses:

one pillar is the Office of First Nations Programming (OFNP) which offers student support of various kinds and operates the First Nations Centre (FNC). Another pillar consists of the many courses dealing with Aboriginal issues...[and the] third is the responsibility for providing specific courses relevant to the extraordinarily diverse Aboriginal nations within the UNBC area....This includes courses taught in Aboriginal communities, internships, and community-based research projects (pp. 5-6).

The major components to Indigenization according to Evans et al.,(1990) is the process which is identified in the following six steps.

- Step 1 (initiation) involves one or more informal meetings with the Elders and leaders of the community to set direction and to identify five fundamental goals 1) community's needs (cultural or linguistic recovery, development of cultural pride)... 2) a set of principles to guide the process, 3) sources of information, 4) relevant University guidelines and 5) community guidelines.
- Step 2 (planning) establishes a central committee to provide support and guidance. The committee is critical and consideration must be given to cultural issues as well as bureaucratic [issues].
- Step 3 (curriculum development) the committee establishes a curriculum model appropriate to its pedagogical philosophy and objectives.
- Step 4 (implementation) a pilot project can be run to evaluate the curriculum, followed by [evaluation] and revisions.
- Step 5 and 6 (evaluation and expansion) the committee evaluates, makes recommendations and looks for new directions (pp. 5-16).

It is important to note that through the articulation of the experiences of Evans et.al, Elders have been major and important contributors to the process. They had decision making power that assisted in determining the protocol (how the partnership would work), content (what type of curricula), who would be involved, and how the implementation would progress.

The studies highlighted above have used various approaches to identify the strengths of their Aboriginal Elders, and they have used these strengths to involve Elders in academic planning, program instruction and evaluation, and faculty mentorship. Given the opportunity, responsibility, and respect Aboriginal Elders can work along with faculty, staff, and leaders to change and transform post-secondary institutions through Indigenous Knowledge processes. In my study, the role, responsibilities and impact of Indigenous Elders on NVIT is examined through the methodology. The aforementioned discussion also demonstrates that Elders are an important component for Indigenizing the Academy; however, other components such as community-based involvement and Indigenous courses/programs and services are also needed. These other components need to be based on IK epistemology and pedagogy.

### **2.1.2 Indigenous Knowledge: Epistemology and Pedagogy**

In recognition of the complexities of Indigenous Knowledge studies by Battiste (2002), Pigeon (2002), Kirkness and Barnhart (1991), Armstrong (2002), Homes (1993), and Castellano (1996) provide an Aboriginal centered dialectic on the interplay between Indigenous Knowledge and Western pedagogical practices in educational contexts. These authors focus on the epistemological nature of Indigenous Knowledge and they suggest that: (1) IK does not derive its origins or prominence from the individual but from the collective understanding derived from one's community; (2) IK is about what local people know and do and what local communities have known and done for generations; (3) the ability to use community knowledge produced from local history forms important cultural literacy skills critical to survival in an Aboriginal context; and (4) what local people know about their environment must be included in the planning and implementation process of education. In addition, and possibly most important theoretically, these authors and several others have introduced the idea of Indigenous cultural literacy as knowledge communicated via local culture and languages that reflects local innovations and techniques in environmental and place-based activities such as fishing, and using plants to manage local diseases.

Some Indigenous forms of epistemology, or ways of knowing, are expressed through dreams, visions, songs, storytelling, land-based experiences, and intergenerational learning. In fact these ways of knowing can also serve as pedagogy. These forms of knowing are experiential and they are integrated into a holistic framework that includes the development of the heart, mind, body, and spirit (Archibald, 2008; Armstrong, 2000). In Western educational systems, the cognitive often takes priority and is prized. However, Indigenous epistemology is expansive. For example, the affective domain is important to learners as well as to educators because the cognitive way of learning often loses its sensitivity towards learner's and others' feelings (Brown, 2004). Gehl and Minidoo (2010) support this view and they state that an Algonquin Anishnaabe worldview helps one attain knowledge that is gained through personal experience and reflection. The Indigenous pedagogies of mentorship, apprenticeship, ceremonies and practice/experience help to unlock the affective and other knowledge domains. In an attempt to address this sensitivity to the affective and other domains in my research, I framed the first thesis question as:

1. How well has the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology addressed self-determination through its programming and student services in relation to:
  - a. inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in programs and campus activities;
  - b. instruction and program/course delivery;
  - c. student academic, emotional, cultural, and financial issues; and,
  - d. Elders' roles and responsibilities

In many of the interview questions, I asked respondents what they know and what they have experienced; questions that are derived from Indigenous holistic and experiential epistemology. Brown (2004) states that paying attention to the affective, fosters an upward movement towards healing and learning which has been essential in NVIT's transformation (organization) of knowledge. There is a balance between the cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual dimensions of students' lives at NVIT. It might be said that an NVIT education reflects a certain "way of being and doing" that runs contrary to what we see practiced in mainstream colleges and universities: individual accomplishments and competitiveness versus collective activities; learning through books and direct instruction in the contrived environment of the classroom rather than through experiential learning in real-life settings; a focus on cognitive understanding as opposed to a balance between the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual (Armstrong, 2002; Kirkness and Barnhart, 1991; Pigeon 2002,). NVIT includes forms of learning that are used in Western post-secondary institutions but these approaches do not override or dominate Indigenous ways of learning. Rather, the latter is more prominent in the majority of programs, especially those offered in Indigenous communities. In the community-based programs, the learner is situated within a broad interconnected web of relationships: with the land, with ancestors and with others. Aboriginal education is often hands-on, experiential and geared towards meaningful purposes.

In contrast, Aboriginal post-secondary students today are being silenced through educational policies and practices that run contrary to their Indigenous ways of being and learning. It is not surprising that they continually face these epistemological challenges in mainstream colleges and university systems. Aikenhead (1995) explained the tensions between Aboriginal and Western learning processes using science as a focal point:

Aboriginal Knowledge for the sake of survival versus gaining Knowledge for its own sake;  
celebrating mystery vs. eradicating mystery; human action that is intimately and subjectively

interrelated versus formally and objectively decontextualized; holistic perspectives reflecting a gentle, accommodating, intuitive and spiritual wisdom versus a reductionist Western science with its aggressive, mechanistic and analytical explanations (p. 220).

It is not much wonder that Aboriginal students (like the Alumni's problems with a public post-secondary institute as discussed in Chapter one) in mainstream colleges and universities feel silenced.

According to Marlene Brant-Castellano (1996) the challenge for Aboriginal people working and studying in post-secondary educational contexts would be to go beyond the deconstruction of oppressive ideologies and practices, and to move to implementing renewed expressions of Indigenous philosophies, world-views, and social relations. For non-Aboriginal people the challenge would be to share cognitive power and open up meaningful space in colleges and universities so that Indigenous ways of knowing can flourish within them.

## **2.2 Indigenous Knowledge: 4Rs as Principles for Post-Secondary Education**

Guiding principles related to Aboriginal teachings, values and beliefs help to describe, explain and guide Aboriginal peoples' understanding of their world. As such, some of these principles have been conceptualized as Indigenous knowledge(s) and theory. A study by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), found that there are many issues and problems Aboriginal students face while attending higher learning institutions. They argued that the university, as an established institution is deeply rooted in policies, practices, program and standards intended to serve the needs of the Western-based University and the non-Indigenous society in which the university is located. As such, Aboriginal students who come to the university are required to conform to the same policies, practices and standards, which according to the authors, often lead to lower levels of Aboriginal students' achievements, high attrition, poor retention and weak performance. In this context, the students become the victims of special counselling, advising centres, bridging and developmental programs, tutorial and additional support services designed to "cure" and further assimilate the students. Both authors call for the university to change their culture of policies, programs, practices and standards to

respond effectively to the higher education and human resource needs of Aboriginal students and communities which are rooted in the following four Rs:

1. Respect of First Nations cultural identity. This means Aboriginal students must be respected as individuals and people. Their culture and knowledge, tradition and core values must be recognized.
2. Relevance to First Nation's perspectives and experience. This means universities must legitimize Indigenous knowledge that is not only derived from books but respect Indigenous knowledge that helps students appreciate their culture and customary norms.
3. Reciprocal relationship. This means faculty members and students enjoy reciprocal relations, and must be in a position to create a new kind of education, formulate a new paradigm or framework that helps address the needs of reciprocity.
4. Responsibility through participation (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991).

Other scholars have found Kirkness and Barnhardt's 4Rs useful such as Archibald (2008), Pigeon (2008), and Wilson (2008). Contributing to Indigenous Knowledge oral tradition/story development and expanding on the work of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), Jo-ann Archibald (2008), identifies seven storywork teachings as: respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness and synergy. These principles, according to Archibald emanate from intergenerational cultural values, beliefs and understandings. Therefore, for Archibald, understanding and practicing cultural respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity lead to knowledge about the power of story to "educate the heart, mind, body, and spirit" (2008).

Pigeon (2008) used the principles from the 4Rs to examine university student services and learning approaches for Aboriginal students. Pigeon's study examined the question "what makes a university a successful place for Aboriginal students?" This study moves away from a student deficit discourse by critiquing universities from an Indigenous pedagogical and theoretical approach in terms of (a) how Indigenous Knowledge's were defined and found (or not) in universities and (b) how Indigenous understandings of success, responsibility, and accountability were articulated by students, faculty/staff, and Elders in three universities in British Columbia, Canada. This study shows how Indigenous Knowledge's were present, mainly as 'pockets of presence', in the academy in some Indigenous programs, Indigenous student services, and through Indigenous faculty, staff, and

students. She argued that First Nations Centres played a critical role by holistically supporting the cultural integrity of Aboriginal students and being agents of change across the institution. They did not view students as having 'deficits' that needed to be fixed, but rather provided services to help them overcome the systemic barriers they faced. Pidgeon's research also mentioned the important role that non-Indigenous faculty and staff play as allies for Indigenous approaches. However, her term 'pockets of presence' shows that Indigeneity is still marginalized in comparison to the wide-spread use within universities and still found mainly in Indigenous oriented programs and services.

In his argument for relational accountability, Wilson (2008) explains the three Rs that he used in his research: respect, reciprocity and relationship. Wilson argues that these principles comprise notions of relational ontology and they form the basis of a distinct Indigenous methodology. According to Wilson, being accountable to one's relationships with others, especially with family and community, is an important dynamic in relational ontology. On the other hand, another scholar posits the position that universities need to shift their academic stance on taking Indigenous community involvement more seriously.

Tierney (1993) advocates for the reconstruction and transformation of the university's culture to better serve First Nations through working closely with First Nations communities. He argues that this transformational shift of university culture may seem at first to be a daunting task, but it really is no more than a matter of shifting to a policy, posture and practice of actually working with First Nations people. In mainstream universities, this transformational shift also means that university leadership and others would need to give up some of their policy power, which does not seem evident (Pidgeon, 2008). Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions are the exception where their origins and purposes are very much derived in and by Aboriginal communities. NVIT's process of working with Aboriginal communities will be exemplified in this case study.

Using the Indigenous 4Rs in my research allowed me to acknowledge and respect the demands of the respondent's times and lifestyle. The way I used the 4R's in this research are explained in the Methodology section of Chapter Two. The foundation of the 4R's means that Aboriginal students need institutions that create the conditions so they can learn and share their own

IK, as well as to develop critical understandings about IK, and ultimately critically examine their community and societal roles and responsibilities. Other Aboriginal academics and researchers have used specific culture-based IK principles (Armstrong, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Holmes, 1993). No matter what form these principles take, they all share a common purpose, one that is rooted in and shaped by Indigenous knowledge.

### 2.3 Indigenous Knowledge: Educational Frameworks

Much of the Aboriginal post-secondary education literature reveals that Canada's Aboriginal people have had continual struggles with post-secondary education systems, but they are gradually making some programmatic and policy changes. But, in order to realize significant change, Eber Hampton (1988) says that "Aboriginal education must be recognized as a distinctive and legitimizing desire of Aboriginal people to be self-defining, to have their ways of knowing respected" (p. 25). Hampton further argues, for a new view of education that is steeped in IK teachings that comprise what he calls twelve "principles<sup>6</sup>":

1. *Spirituality* -- At the centre of spirituality is respect for the spiritual relationships that exist between all things.
2. *Service to the community* -- The individual does not form an identity in opposition to the group but recognizes the group as relatives (included in his or her own identity). The second standard is service. Education is to serve the people. Its purpose is not individual advancement or status.
3. *Respect for diversity* -- The respect for diversity embodied in the third standard requires self-knowledge and self-respect without which respect for others is impossible.
4. *Culture* -- Indian cultures have ways of thought, learning, teaching, and communicating that are different than but of equal validity to those of White cultures. These thought-ways stand at the beginning of Indian time and are the foundations of our children's lives. Their full flower is in what it means to be one of the people.
5. *Contemporary tradition* -- Indian education maintains a continuity with tradition. Our traditions define and preserve us. It is important to understand that this continuity with tradition is neither a rejection of the artefacts of other cultures nor an attempt to 'turn back the clock'. It is the continuity of a living culture that is important to Indian education, not the preservation of a frozen museum specimen.
6. *Personal respect* -- The individual Indian's sense of personal power and autonomy is a strength that lies behind the apparent weakness of disunity. Indian education demands relationships of personal respect.

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<sup>6</sup> In the United States of America (USA) standards are used, However, in Canada, the notion of standards implies an emphasis on standardized tests, Therefore, the term principles are used for Hamptons 'standards'.

7. *Sense of history* -- Indian education has a sense of history and does not avoid the hard facts of the conquest of America.
8. *Relentlessness in championing students* -- Indian education is relentless in its battle for Indian children. We take pride in our warriors and our teachers are warriors for the life of our children.
9. *Vitality* -- Indian education recognizes and nourishes the powerful pattern of life that lies hidden within personal and tribal suffering and oppression. Suffering begets strength. We have not vanished.
10. *Conflict between cultures* -- Indian education recognizes the conflict, tensions, and struggle between itself and White education.
11. *Sense of place* -- Indian education recognizes the importance of an Indian sense of place, land, and territory.
12. *Transformation* -- The graduates of our schools must not only be able to survive in a White dominated society, they must contribute to the change of that society. Indian education recognizes the need for transformation in the relation between Indian and White as well as in the individual and society.  
([http://www.usask.ca/education/ccstu/guiding\\_documents/12\\_standards\\_of\\_ed.html](http://www.usask.ca/education/ccstu/guiding_documents/12_standards_of_ed.html)).

In addition to the 12 principles, Hampton argues that changes have to be made in the nature of and processes for instructional activities, such as literacy and mathematics because they have often been treated as mechanistic processes which have not benefited Aboriginal students. From the 12 elements, Hampton developed a learning model that included:

1. Aboriginal students must find meaning with critical thinking and action-based skills. Aboriginal students must solve their own problems and problems facing their communities.
2. Literacy in an Aboriginal context is not abstract, but is embedded in a social context, and that underlying meanings are to be found in the social world of individuals, families and communities.
3. The content used to develop literacy must be rethought as an inclusive realm in which Indigenous Knowledge and learning are integral elements.
4. Literacy thought from constructivist models allows students to pursue literacy through highly individual paths
5. Finally, the constructivist model calls attention to the important roles that different life experience and cultural schemata play in the process of making meaning (p 30.).

Thus, Hampton encourages educators to use new pedagogical schemes of learning, in an attempt to decolonize education, by raising and legitimizing IK and the collective voices of Indigenous peoples. As an illustration of Hampton's IK theory, NVIT has structured its Indigeneity framework using the twelve principles and five learning modes to build its curricula and instructor's professional development. This learning framework guides the data analysis and findings presented in Chapters Four to Six. The other NVIT Indigenous Knowledge component stems from the local First Nations culture and communities that established NVIT.

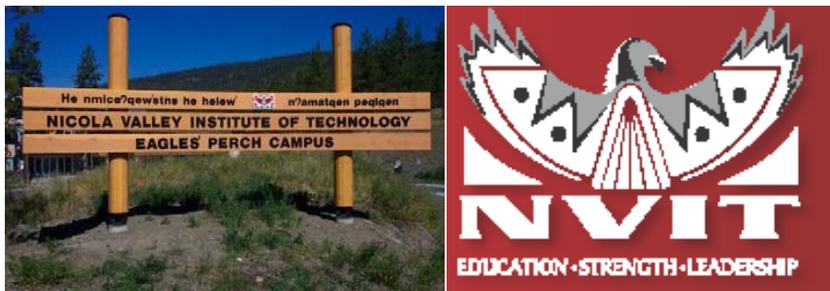
## 2.4 Indigenous Knowledge: NVIT “Eagle Perch - N’meechaktin” Metaphor

The review of Indigenous scholars’ ideas and publications discussed in this chapter has focused on principles drawn from Indigenous Knowledge(s) related to their research study. I draw my insight from Indigenous ways of knowing and being and upon the works of these and other Indigenous scholars as a source for my theoretical principles and inspiration to carry on with my research study.

The principles guiding this study are rooted in “Indigenous Knowledge” as a transforming path for imparting knowledge that is experiential, living, spiritual and oral. Many symbols and icons are used as metaphors to explain this method of transference of IK. My study uses the Eagle, which is both symbolic and spiritual to NVIT as the mode of transference of knowledge and acknowledges it and Elders as Knowledge Keepers. The Eagle Perch symbol at NVIT identifies several themes, which relate the Indigenous concept of “being in relationship.” “Being in a relationship” brings with it values, action, protocol, responsibility, accountability, respect, structure and expectation.

Over the years, I have been interested in the development of NVIT as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution. Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) was named at a traditional naming and blessing ceremony [conducted by the NVIT Elders] on October 29, 1999 (V.1, 1, 2001). The NVIT Elders chose the name and the Board of Governors approved the name and sign for the campus (see Figure 2.1) as follows:

**Figure 2.1: “Eagle” Perch at NVIT**



B03/87 Moved by May Antoine seconded by John Chenoweth and resolved that: The Board approved design option 'B' as discussed with revisions. Carried.

It was agreed the poles extend upward past the top sign as shown in option A and have carved real "Eagle's" perched at the top of the poles. Other suggestions included flowers or shrubs at the base of the sign and lighting.

The content of the signs are as follows:

Top of sign:

Nlekepmxcin name	NVIT logo	Nsyilxcen name
He nmice?qew'stns he helew		n/amatquenpeqiqen

Institute of Technology

Bottom sign: "Eagle Perch" Campus

To gain the full appreciation of the NVIT logo I asked Elder May (age, 86, and she has been involved with NVIT since the early 1990's) what the Indigenous symbolism of the Thompson "Nmeechaktin" means. May asked me to go for a walk around the current NVIT campus with her. I share this story experience of our talk.

*As we walked around she looked at me and said the Thompson phrase "Nmeechaktin" translates into "Eagles' Perch", which carries the further connotations of gathering place, nesting place, and returning. She sat on a rock and asked me to do so. May, continued to talk about the symbolic significance of the "Eagle" as all-encompassing. For example, the "Eagle" is a symbol of power, strength, vision, fierceness, innovation, spirituality, protection and knowledge. As we were chatting, an "Eagle" circled, above us and glided around in circles for about five minutes, I asked May why the "Eagle" was circling around this area; with a look of love she tells me; you know this has been a nesting place for the "Eagle", and the "Eagle" returns to home-to their nest, to safety and for comfort. May continued to explain a range of other meanings implied by the symbol of the "Eagle" and why the Elders chose this location for the campus. For example, the "Eagle's" wings are outstretched to receive everyone who comes to the campus. Furthermore, the wings are uplifted to receive the Knowledge that is passed on from Creator to NVIT. Condensed within this compact symbol of the "Eagle's" wings, there is reference to the four directions, the four nations of people, the four seasons, and the four cycles of life.*

*Reflecting on the conversation with May, I became interested, particularly with the many meanings the "Eagle Perch" stands for with respect to the NVIT logo. May explained to me that in the circles and colours of the logo are all of the elements in Nature; this because NVIT works in balance with these elements, our programs are reflective of this direction. Since there are five tribal Bands in the Nicola Valley that founded NVIT, these bands are represented by the five planes depicted in the "Eagle's" body. The symbol of the "Eagle" is situated atop of the acronym "NVIT" just as the real "Eagle" dwells on mountaintops and tree tops, which is an analogy that implicitly conveys the message that the Eagle's clear vision and strength will live within us.*

*By identifying the “Eagle” as the symbol for NVIT, NVIT assumes the responsibility for those who come to share and learn in this environment, it lends its courage and determination with its own commitment to embrace both Western and Indigenous forms of Knowledge and education to those who chose to share their time in the institution. According to May, a more traditional perspective and reading of the “Eagle” is that the “Eagle” teaches us that it is good to combine traditional wisdom and the new Knowledge that is required during times of tremendous change. The wisdom taught by the “Eagle”, reminds us that it is important to realize that change might be necessary in one’s life time and thus we must find the courage to foster and bring about that change. I asked May who taught her about the “Eagle Perch” and how valuable the “Eagle” has been to Aboriginal people. May smiles and says, I used to come here with my grandparents, this is traditionally a meeting ground for the people, they used to bring me to this area to watch the “Eagles”, roaming around in circles. They passed on the different meanings and stories of the “Eagle” to me. May looked at me and said ‘Verna, that is exactly, what I am doing with you is passing on the same meanings and stories about the “Eagle Perch” to you so that you can pass it on to the many students that come to NVIT.’ She gazed at the sky, and said ‘Verna, let’s thank Creator and leave this place because the “Eagles” want their peace now.’ I thanked May and promised that I will carry on with the teachings I received from her. (Personal conversation, October 28, 2011)*

### **2.4.1 Verna's Reflections on May's Teachings on "Eagle" Perch**

The "Eagle" represents NVIT and all that it is. NVIT like the "Eagle" is a safe place, a place of wisdom, Knowledge, comfort, challenge, struggle, love, hope, strength and belonging. Like the name "Eagle's Perch", the campus represents the return of students, faculty, staff and management. It is also where the Board of Governors come to govern and ensure the vision of the "Eagle" is being carried out in the forms of administrative policies and practices, academic programs, and cultural experiences for the students who come there and for the people who work there. NVIT is everyone's home. Like the "Eagle", the Elders of NVIT ensure that the culture, traditions, values, mores, and norms guide the practice, curriculum and spirit embodied in the campus, which holds everything Aboriginal, such as Indigenous Knowledge systems.

Closely connected to the concept of being in a relationship with one's environment are the metaphor of the "Eagle" and the concept of reciprocity. In an Indigenous worldview, reciprocity in relationships is often expected. Values of generosity and sharing are inherent in reciprocity, as is the responsibility of being concerned for others and their well-being of the community. A common motivation for any interaction in the community is that when various parties are concerned about beneficial interaction, they will be more interested in perpetuating ongoing interaction. By this, I mean that Indigenous people are interested in self-determination; telling their own stories; using their own voices; and finding solutions to their own problems. This sentiment is well expressed by the "Eagle" metaphor at NVIT.

A primary component of Indigenous perspective is the importance of the "Eagle Perch" symbolism at NVIT with the "Eagle being in relationship" to everyone and everything in one's environment as related to this concept of inclusion. To better understand this concept of being in a relationship, it is important to examine the following quotation by Thomas King:

'All my relations' is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, to all the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, 'all my relations' is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in harmonious and

moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone is that they act as if they have no relations') (1990, p15.).

After reading King's quote and his ideas, I asked my family Elder (Uncle) to explain them to me and how they related to us. I wanted to know what "all my relations" meant from a Shuswap/N'lakampux perspective and if what King was saying translated to our culture in the Interior of British Columbia.

*Verna: Is the term 'All My Relations' an ideal, a concept that is empty or does it have value?*

*The Elder: 'All My Relations' is about the past, the present and the future. It is about the world we live in and all that it encompasses, it is the animals, the plants, the earth and the air; it is about the people too. Being 'Indian' is not being a romantic or romanticizing the notion of being 'Indian' or living in a utopia. I think Thomas is telling us that please look, try to understand how Aboriginal people have lived experiences: with families, the elements, with spirit and spirit world, with understanding the inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. Today, Aboriginal people still practice their ways, even those in cities, they still understand what it means to be a 'relation' in a family or extend/kinship family. There were certain commonalities, no matter how they lived or where they lived and how much time passed before they met again, or if they ever met again. Also, people create their own families, if they have none, or are not close to any of their own family. They build a family of aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, nieces, nephews and grandchildren, these families can be from any walk of life; but by the virtue of being or creating your family, there is a responsibility, a respect that is attached to the role as family member, you have created 'All my Relations', therefore you must respect all the different cultures and ways of that family just as you would your blood family. Today, I think that some people are lost; they don't have the understanding about 'all my relations' like the writer we are talking about. I keep telling you that in your work you have to keep 'family' or as we were talking 'All my Relations' center of the building for our communities, you have to make sure that people know about what it means. That's your job from your grandfather, your father and now I add my voice. The circle has to keep going to your children, grandchildren and family. (Personal Journal, April 2, 2011).*

Thomas King's concept of 'all my relations' has become an important aspect of the NVIT "Eagle" metaphor, and the concept of "the circle". The circle can be seen as a learning practice for understanding the concept of "being in a relationship," as it encapsulates the Indigenous values of respect, kindness, honesty, patience and equality. These values are important for circle learning participants to practice:

Respect—it is very important for circle participants to respect each person by offering each person an opportunity to speak, without interruption, till their turn comes up.

Honesty--- the value of honesty is reflected in what is said in a circle. There is an understanding that each person who speaks must speak from the heart. A speaker demonstrates compassion by subtly acknowledging some understanding that everyone makes mistakes.

Patience—the value of patience is evident in the accommodations made for the varying amounts of time required by people within the circle to both express themselves and to feel comfortable in doing so.

Equality--- the value of equality is demonstrated in the understanding that no one in the circle is more important than another (King, 1990, p.5).

As evident from this discussion, the circle like the metaphor of the “Eagle” represents NVIT. The circle has many facets and complexities, one value often influences others so that a balancing act between values is often at work in the decisions participants make about what they say in the learning circle. There are many checks and balances in place to provide a safe environment. If the values of the circle are not respected, the circle will fall apart and few people would want to be responsible for this happening. The “Eagle” through its wings receives every person that comes to the NVIT campus. The “Eagle” protects students and makes NVIT a safe place for students to study. It understands the challenges and struggles that people at NVIT go through. As such the “Eagle” is patient, reciprocal, and honest and moves in circles. In Archibald’s *Indigenous Storywork* (2008), she discusses holism as the “interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms to form a whole healthy person [or community]” (p. 11). The interrelatedness for me symbolizes the interconnectedness of NVIT and the Eagle. As the Eagle glides in circles and is all encompassing, so are the very circles of life. Archibald calls these

never-ending circles – concentric circles [that] show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come. The animal/human kingdoms, the elements of nature/land and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles...ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behaviour are essential and are embedded in cultural practices (p.11).

Therefore, the interrelationships of the “Eagles Perch” circles build capacity within the faculty, students, administration and Board of Governors which then translates to the building of community, in whatever form community takes. An example of this is articulated in the following Indigenous Knowledge metaphor articulated by Gregory Cajete:

There are five major foundations that underlie Indigenous education. The first one, of course, is community. The next foundation has to do with technical environmental Knowledge or making a living in a place by understanding and interacting with it. ...The third foundation is

the visionary or dream tradition based on an understanding that one learns through visions and dreams. The fourth foundation the mythic foundation...a foundation that we can call spiritual ecology; It underlies the variety of expressions of Indigenous religion that we find around the world. It is the intimate relationship that people establish with a place and with the environment and with all the things that make them or give them life. The corn metaphor invites reflection in many forms. Beginning in July and continuing through the month of August, Pueblo corn dancers draw together in different communities to celebrate their sense of community and to honour corn as symbol of their life and their well-being. Food is essential for life and understanding the food you rely on and how that food gets to your table becomes in itself a lesson about life and living (cited in Battiste, 2000, p.184).

Cajete's description relates to Hampton's 12 standards and a model of Aboriginal education. Together, they both provide a link to the Indigenization of Education at NVIT. In addition, Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991), wholistic values from the 4Rs assists in building the vision of culturally relevant education values. At NVIT one of the strategies that is proving most successful in connecting its curriculum to students lives in culturally and educationally meaningful ways is through the involvement of Aboriginal teachers, Elders and the Community

Why is the "Eagle" symbol central to NVIT's mission and vision of Aboriginal post-secondary education? First, there is a need to understand Aboriginal universal symbols, culture, traditions and sense of belonging in order to incorporate it into the mission statement of NVIT. Second, addressing student's academic, financial, social and cultural barriers at NVIT is dependent on the development of effective policies. Third, there is a need to understand the development of an Aboriginal post-secondary institution such as NVIT to increase the learning potential of Aboriginal students. Fourth, it is important to identify further research areas that can be used for transformational learning, instruction and curriculum development from an Aboriginal post-secondary institution. Supporting Hampton's educational model, it is important to understand anchoring Indigenous Knowledge to the primacy of place, land, and culture. There are continuing struggles and tensions for an Aboriginal institution placed within a public post-secondary system that is laden with dominant ideology. It is a constant struggle to promote and maintain Indigenous Knowledge. Indigenous institutions such as NVIT have asserted their right to place IK in a central position of importance with the guidance and leadership of community Elders and leaders.

As I reflect on May's advice and King's quote, I begin to understand how imperialism and colonialism have impacted Indigenous ways of knowing and being. To many academics the impact has led to resistance discourse, of which my dissertation is an example. Considering this challenge, Indigenous education needs critical analysis and examination of its mission, goals, objectives that move beyond imperialist and colonialist policies, goals and objectives. Indigenous centered critical theory is needed to extract the best of Indigenous thoughts and practice to represent research based alternatives and solutions to current educational challenges.

## **2.5 Indigenous Knowledge Befriends Critical Theory**

Indigenous processes of "managing education", teaching, knowing, governing, leading, resolving conflict, family and relations, decision making and interacting with human and non-human entities are difficult to fully communicate in Eurocentric based languages. They can only be understood in reference of the worldview, principles and values of an Aboriginal culture and by recognizing and respecting the spiritual foundation of Indigenous Knowledge. When these are ignored, the creative, innovative, and dynamic nature of IK is lost, so too is the understanding that IK is both values, process and content. It is important to note that Indigenous peoples have continued using their knowledges to fulfil their own needs and to live sustainably for thousands and thousands of years. I am noticing that a great many Aboriginal academics are returning to Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous processes to solve contemporary problems and they have done so through their own critical analysis and theory.

In his support for Indigenous Knowledge theory formulation, Graham Smith (1997, p.38) stated that there are three significant components of Indigenous theory (derived from Kaupapa Māori theory), that align themselves with Critical Theory. The first is 'conscientization' which Smith refers to as 'revealing the reality'. This is a process that critiques and deconstructs the hegemonic forces that marginalise Māori Knowledge and takes place within a 'Critical Theory' framework. The second component is resistance, or what Graham Smith calls 'oppositional actions'. He sees this as having two approaches. The first revolves around what he calls reactive realities, i.e., "responding and

reacting to the dominant structures of oppression, exploitation, manipulation and containment". The second approach is "proactive activities" where the aim is to bring about a change in conditions to allow wider change to occur through acting collectively (Smith, G., 1997, p. 38). The third component of Smith's analysis of Maori is "praxis" or as he defines it: "reflective" change. This involves not just critiquing what has gone wrong, but working to achieve a way forward drawing on and applying what is learned (1997, p.38).

While few authors would state that Kaupapa Māori Theory emerged from Critical Theory, many writers acknowledge the congruence and strong relationship between the two. Linda Smith states that Kaupapa Māori is "located in relation to Critical Theory, in particular to the notions of critique, resistance, struggle and emancipation" (1999, p. 185).

Pihama adds that: Kaupapa Theory aligns with Critical Theory in the act of exposing underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within society and the ways in which dominant groups construct concepts of 'common sense' and 'facts' to provide ad hoc justification for the maintenance of inequalities and the continued oppression of Māori people (Quoted in Smith, L., 1999, p. 186).

The Maori scholars noted above emphasize the need to critique and expose the source and nature of power within academe that continue to colonize and oppress Indigenous peoples and Indigenous Knowledge. Turning to or befriending aspects of Critical Theory may help with the process of resisting continuing forms of academic colonization, developing a critical consciousness, and creating more space for forms of Indigeneity. I discuss some critical theorists whom I turned to for these purposes.

### ***2.5.1 Turning to Critical Theorists***

Giving voice to the knowledge's of the excluded is an educational project that should have as much priority as the discovery of the knowledge that is prized in academia. I looked to some of the critical theoretical perspectives of Gramsci (1971), Giroux (1993), and Freire (1970) to help me

understand the power struggles that I have experienced and witnessed in academe and to find some hope in making systemic change and space for Indigenous Knowledge.

According to Gramsci (1971) subordinate groups believe that social mobility is possible and that democracy exists for all. As such, Gramsci argued that transformation needs to occur in the mind/intellect and the arena of consciousness. The struggle, as indicated by Gramsci, needs to be enacted at an individual level and then communicated to other people to form masses that share the same ideas and alternative ways of thinking. According to Gramsci, it is in the arena of consciousness “that the elites use the organic intellectuals to maintain the dominance (1971, pp. 23-43).” However, given the inequalities and the injustices, it is necessary that the subordinate classes (like Indigenous academics) free their consciousness from Eurocentric academe and create a new culture and in this process the indigenous academics can have a role as transformers. Following, Gramsci, critical theorists like Giroux, (1993) established the groundwork that aspires to transformation and liberation through education.

Giroux (1993), whose work appeals to many educators, uses the metaphor of “border politics” to demonstrate that individuals can cross the barriers that divide them and struggle together to fight against domination and to promote social change. Giroux also delved into the field of cultural studies from which he called for an interdisciplinary approach to education theory that would cross boundaries of fields like literacy studies and social theory. Cultural studies according to Giroux, requires that teachers be educated to be cultural producers, to treat culture as an activity unfinished, and incomplete. This suggests that they should be critically attentive to the operations of power, such as whom or which group has decision-making power and to understand how such power is used in the production of knowledge and authority. Archibald, (1995) drawing on cultural studies suggests that teachers in Aboriginal institutions must have a comprehensive knowledge of cultural practices and First Nations traditions/Indigenous Knowledge and use their position and power to include IK in their educational field/pedagogy. It seems both Giroux and Archibald do agree that educators need to cross academic boundaries or borders in order to start the change process in dominant fields of knowledge.

Contributing to the debate of the oppressed, Freire (1970) states that self-depreciation is one of the characteristics of the oppressed. When the oppressor has brainwashed the oppressed into a self-defeating negative image of themselves, it stops any form of mobilization to move forward. In his attack on the “banking” concept of education, Freire argued that traditional classroom relationships often replicate dominance of the oppressor over the disempowered oppressed. Teaching in a “circle” he stated, brings the teacher and the student to the same level. The student becomes a subject (participant) rather than an object in the educational environment. This realization according to Freire can facilitate a break from the cycle of oppression. Indeed, liberation in the Freirean articulation requires more than a shift of consciousness or an inward change. Instead, he suggests, liberation takes place in the action of human beings operating in the world to overcome oppression. The writings of Indigenous academe have served as sites of resistance in a variety of disciplines.

The ideas of marginalized people and allies working together to make systemic changes, recognizing power dynamics, and ensuring that they do not take on hegemonic or colonial ideology or practices resonate with the critical perspectives of the Maori scholars mentioned earlier. Moving Indigenous Knowledge away from the academic margins in which IK has usually been placed within post-secondary education to a more central intellectual space is difficult because of the Eurocentric power and dominance that continues to exist in this field. However, Indigenous scholars and allies have a responsibility to engage in this struggle; otherwise the status quo of systemic failure continues for Indigenous learners. I am more encouraged knowing that I can draw upon Indigenous experiences, such as the 4R's, Storywork, local symbols, voices, and literature of those who have worked to place Indigenous Knowledges in post-secondary education. I also have a responsibility to share what I have experienced and what I have learned about making systemic change to improve Indigenous post-secondary education. These systemic changes are examined through my research methodology and subsequent “findings” chapters.

## **2.6 Methodology**

The methodology was designed to investigate how well post-secondary education policies, programs, and student services were addressed at NVIT, a public Aboriginal post-secondary

institution. The academic, financial, social and cultural factors that affect Aboriginal students attending NVIT were also included. How NVIT addressed access to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students and barriers or difficulties that students experienced while undertaking their program were important considerations. I felt that it was important to provide a body of research that articulates and applies the contributions of Aboriginal knowledge, traditions, values and world views in designing meaningful Aboriginal post-secondary education.

To undertake my study, I explored the literature on case study methods. The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences and meanings of students, alumni, Elders, Board of governors and management within NVIT. There are multiple definitions and understandings of the case study. According to Bromley, it is a "systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (1990, p. 302). Data come largely from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 1994). The goal of the NVIT case study method is to describe as accurately as possible the fullest, most complete description of the case. The study described in this thesis merged the most useful aspects of case study with NVIT life history. An important activity was to craft useful approaches to collect meaningful data. McNeill cited in Kenny et al (2004) introduced case study as a methodology of "in-depth research into a subject" and elaborates upon case study characteristics that:

...involve an in-depth study of a single example of whatever it is the person wants to investigate. It may prompt further, more wide-ranging research, providing ideas to be followed-up later, or it may be that some broad generalization is brought to life...There is no claim to representativeness, and the essence of the technique is that each subject studied, whether it be an individual, a group, an event, or an institution is treated as a unit on its own (p. 25).

Treating NVIT as a unit on its own works well with the IK approach that emphasizes local cultural contexts, I also thought that Merriam's (1991) four characteristics of a qualitative case study could be applied to my research. Merriam's' characteristic is presented first, followed by an example of how I implemented the characteristic within my case study research for NVIT. The four characteristics are:

1. Particularistic: This focuses on 'a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent...good design for practical problems - for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice' (p. 11).

NVIT is the focus of the case study. It is in a unique situation because it is the only Aboriginal provincially funded public Post-secondary institution in the province of British Columbia. A holistic understanding of NVIT's 'particular situation' regarding its policies, programs, and student services was achieved by examining the perspectives of Elders, Board members, management, students and alumni, archival and current documents, and my reflections.

2. Descriptive: 'is a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study. Thick description [means] the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated...interpreting the meaning of....demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and mores, community values, deep-seated attitudes and notions' (p. 11).

The geographical, historical, political, educational, and economic context of the Indigenous communities that founded and continue to guide NVIT is presented in Chapter Three. Student and alumni demographic and descriptive data is presented in Chapter Four. The cultural and community norms and values are presented throughout the thesis through lived experience stories and perspectives of those most intimately involved with NVIT.

3. Heuristic: "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study...discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (p. 13).

The reader should gain an understanding of the successes and challenges of establishing and maintaining an Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institution. The way that Indigenous Knowledge has guided NVIT's academic programs and student services will be new knowledge to those who don't know about NVIT, and at the same time, it will confirm what those involved with NVIT know. New meaning is portrayed in the elements of the NVIT Transformational Model that include governance, a family/cohort approach, program relevance and values as defined by the Eagle Perch metaphor.

4. Inductive: 'relies on inductive reasoning...generalizations, concepts or hypotheses that emerge from an examination of data – data grounded in the context itself' (p. 13).

The data derived from interviews, surveys, archival and current documents is grounded in the NVIT context and campuses. Inductive analysis was used for both interviews and surveys.

In summary, the use of a case study methodology for my research is the 'focus on a specific [organization]; [it is] descriptive; and heuristic [which] offers insights into the [organization] under study (Merriam, 1991, p. 21). In order to better understand how NVIT's post-secondary education is shaped by Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous community leaders, I asked those most intimately involved with NVIT: students, alumni, managers, Elders, and Board of Governors. Faculty were not involved in individual interviews, mainly to avoid possible power dynamics because of my management position within NVIT. I did not want faculty to feel any discomfort in making decisions

about whether to participate or not and if they agreed to an interview, concerned about freely voicing their perspectives. Faculty input was received through group meetings that were part of their daily schedules. The managers and I work collegially; so hierarchical power dynamics were not a concern.

### **2.6.1 Starting the Fieldwork**

Prior to beginning the fieldwork I obtained the University of British Columbia ethic's approval and approval from the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. I sent a letter to the President of NVIT advising him of my intention to conduct my field study and requesting permission to undertake the NVIT case study. The response was positive and the President agreed to NVIT being a study site; he thought the outcomes would help NVIT move ahead. Several problems arise in all fieldwork situations and the researcher is often faced with a variety of difficult decisions.

During the execution of the study, I watched for opportunities to “piggyback” on events that were already planned in order to use people's time effectively. For example, there were regularly scheduled business meetings with management, Elders, administration staff, instructors, and students that I attended as a staff member and from which I received valuable input, with the informed consent of the participants. I made special efforts to respect and reflect the established protocols and cultures of NVIT and the people being interviewed or surveyed. I demonstrated as much patience and tact as possible — within the time limits and resources of the project, most importantly, in extending response deadlines and encouraging respondents to participate in the study. The fieldwork for this study was conducted at Merritt and Vancouver campuses, from August 2009-December 2010.

### **2.6.2 Student and Alumni Surveys**

The most time-consuming, frustrating, and human resource-intensive part of the research methodology was the survey of current and past students from NVIT. An on-line survey was designed with closed and open-ended questions to capture the perception of students and alumni. The questions related to the major research questions noted in Chapter One and some were based on the findings of literature such as Malatest (2006). In particular, the students and alumni were asked to rate their satisfaction with how Indigenous Knowledge was addressed in courses, student

services, and campus activities; the quality of teaching, instructional approaches, and program delivery that they experienced; the quality of student services; satisfaction with the role of Elders; and satisfaction with policies such as housing and admissions. The questionnaire was pilot tested with students and alumni, which included two face to face meetings and some telephone and email communication.

The online survey tool used was the Vovici Survey Consortium of post-secondary institutions in B.C. and Alberta. The physical server is housed under contract at Gentoo Systems (a private firm in Victoria) and a confidentiality agreement was signed with them. A student online survey was conducted between March 04, 2010 and November 08, 2010. Two recruitment methods were used for students. At first, 100 students were selected at random and sent an email from the registrar's office informing them about the project and inviting them to participate. After some difficulty with administering and analyzing the survey, it was then posted on the NVIT portal and students were asked through third-party recruitment, via their course instructors to consider filling out the survey. In light of the amount of course work required by students, the survey deadline was also extended a couple of times.

There were a few challenges to administering the survey. It was designed to be accessed on the NVIT computers in the three student computer labs where a student could log on to the survey site and complete the survey. Once that student finished another one could then access the survey and complete it. However, a technical glitch happened that limited the number of students completing surveys. After a student finished the survey, that same computer "locked" the survey and when a new student tried access the survey, he/she was prevented access to it. This locking mechanism was done to prevent the same individual from completing the survey numerous times. It was a quality control initiative that turned out to be a barrier to accessing and completing the survey. Students gave up waiting and did not return to complete the survey. Another issue arose during the initial analysis, where the online analysis tool, Voci, combined the results of both surveys (alumni and students) into one unit thereby invalidating the data. The second administrative round of questionnaires to students and alumni were "overkill," which resulted in a smaller number of students answering the second call

for the survey. In future, I would not use this particular online survey tool or restrict survey access to particular computers. I would perhaps use focus group discussions instead in order to lessen time for data gathering and more in-depth stories might result. However, I found that those who completed the survey gave many qualitative written responses.

The student response rate is difficult to calculate because it is not known how many students actually received the information through third party recruitment and because of this revised recruitment method; the student sample was not random selection. Twelve currently enrolled students completed the online survey.

For a broader understanding of NVIT the registrar's office sent an email to a random selection of 30 alumni (30 was chosen as a fair representation of alumni students, also NVIT does not have an active alumni program, however, former students still communicate with NVIT and were the contact sample) who had successfully completed cohort programs at NVIT asking them to complete the online survey. The timeline for completing this survey was also between March 04, 2010 and November 08, 2010. This group had a very high response rate with 22 responses (73%) despite a second call for survey participation because the invalidation of data described above. Reasons that may be attributed to a higher response rate include: (1) the alumni did not have to rely on the NVIT computers to complete their surveys because they had access to computers at work and/or home; (2) there were fewer alumni who received the surveys; and (3) alumni seem to be very loyal to NVIT and want to "give back" to others through sharing their perspectives.

The inclusion of a survey moves my case study into a mixed methods mode. In addition to the survey, the other qualitative case study methods included individual interviews, historical document review, and personal reflections. The combination of all of these methods seemed at times to be unwieldy and difficult, but not impossible to complete.

## **2.7 Interviewing Management, Elders, and Board of Governors**

During the fieldwork the following eight interviews were completed with the following participants: two Elders one from each campus (Vancouver and Merritt); two senior management

comprising the Vice-President Corporate Services and a Dean; four members from the Board of Governors of which two were current and two were former board members. The two former board members were also NVIT alumni. Each interview took between two and three and one-half hours. Culturally appropriate protocol was followed that included giving a gift of tobacco for permission to interview, recognition of the territory we are in, thanking the interviewee for their time, and after completing the interview an offer of sustenance was given – the Elders were the only two who agreed to the sustenance. I asked each person for permission to tape record the interview and all agreed. The participants also signed the university informed consent forms. The interviewees chose to remain anonymous and the transcripts were sent to them for verification when completed. In the following sections, I describe each set of interview experiences.

## **2.8 Elders' Interviews**

Originally, my plan was to conduct two focus groups of Elders, but there were some drawbacks to the study methods in its beginning phases. For instance, trying to bring participants together who have busy schedules, seriously delayed the formation of the focus groups because we could not find a mutually agreeable date where everyone was available. As well, a common expectation that participants be paid monetarily and receive refreshments at larger focus group gatherings proved prohibitive because there was no funding available to do so. Because of the limited time and funds available to carry out this project, the personal interview method with a much smaller number of interview participants was determined to be more suitable. Primarily, person-to-person interviews were conducted, which is important for most Aboriginal people, especially Elders, because this method allowed for a more intimate relationship where the Elder felt comfortable and could ask me to clarify or explain a question when needed.

The Elders also felt it was better to interview an Elder from each campus instead of having focus group discussions. The Elders met and identified the two respondents and I interviewed them. They felt that it was more important to get direct information and not all the stories that they would inevitably launch into if they met as a group. They said they wanted to use my time productively which I greatly appreciated. Before the interviews, the two Elders met with the Elders' Council and

gathered their points to express to me. This was a way in which the Elders felt their voices would be included in the study and it was agreed that the two identified would be able to ensure others' comments were captured. The two Elders who were interviewed were from each NVIT campus: Merritt and Burnaby. There were eight semi-structured and open-ended questions (see Appendix 5) and the two Elders answered all the questions.

One interview was conducted in the green room or Meditation Room at the Merritt campus. This room is used by the Elders to do their one on one discussion with students, faculty and staff; therefore, the Elder felt comfortable and relaxed with the surroundings. This Elder has been involved with NVIT for fifteen years. The second Elder was interviewed in the researcher's office at the Burnaby campus and all protocol as mentioned above was followed. The Elder who resides in Vancouver and who is an Elder for the Burnaby campus felt comfortable with having the interview in a familiar place and was relaxed, felt no pressure to hurry and hence the interview was three hours. This Elder has been involved with NVIT for eight years.

## **2.9 Management Interviews**

Once the project was approved by the Ethics Review Board at UBC, the main obstacle to overcome was to find an agreeable date and time to interview the Dean of Instruction (three years) and former Board member and Chair (six years) and the Vice President of Corporate Services (18 years) of NVIT. I anticipated that these two interviews were likely to generate more in-depth responses because of the intimate and lengthy history each person had with NVIT. Consequently, I developed a comprehensive interview schedule of 19 semi-structured and open-ended questions, some of which were multi-part (see Appendix 6). The two interviews were scheduled and conducted at the NVIT Burnaby campus. The interviewees agreed to be interviewed in the researcher's office because this location worked for their busy schedules. Both individuals also stated that they were comfortable with conducting the interview at the Burnaby campus and using the interview guide that I had prepared. They felt comfortable with the nature and scope of questions.

## **2.10 Board of Governors' Interviews**

The Chair of the Board of Governors and a long-standing Board Member were invited to participate in a two-hour face-to face interview. In addition, the Board Chair participated in the interview with two former Board members, who had served on the Board for several years. The Chair felt that it was important for him/her to get a historical view of NVIT from two others who had a longer history with NVIT. The former Board members agreed to include the Board Chair in their respective interviews. During the these interviews, the Board Chair mainly listened and at times asked clarifying questions, which was helpful. Three current and former Board members were interviewed at the honouring event of the late Grand Chief Gordon Antoine, at the Merritt campus and the other was interviewed at the individual's home residence. It took a long time to secure interview dates and to actually conduct the interviews because on many occasions they had to cancel due to other urgent matters. It took eight months to finally complete two of the four interviews, but eventually I got it done.

## **2.11 NVIT Historical and Current Document Review**

The historical documents that were used for the case study and analysis were archived board minutes, reports, articles, newspaper articles and anecdotal records (1983 – 1995) that are held in the office of the President at NVIT. In addition, I was able to locate former board minutes from 1985-1988, which is when I was a board member. The difficulty in obtaining archival documents for the early days of NVIT was the fact that they were housed with the Nicola Tribal Association and they were not easily accessible due to staff and office location changes. I am very grateful to the Administrative Assistant to the President who was able to locate several documents for me through her network. These documents are now a part of the NVIT archives. The current NVIT documents included the web site material, student data reports (2005-2010), and applicable program reports.

In reviewing the documents, I looked for information that portrayed the historical, geographical, cultural, economic, and policy context of Indigenous communities in the Merritt area to show the reasons that Indigenous community leaders decided to establish their own post-secondary programs and later a post-secondary institution. Chapter Three includes this material and most importantly it focuses on Indigenous perspectives that start the story of NVIT.

Other documents helped to fill in parts of the story. Chapter Three also highlights NVIT student demographic enrolment and completion data for contextual reasons. The student data indicate the trend of annual increases in student enrolment and student graduation rates. The Aboriginal children and youth growing population and the continued low grade 12 dogwood graduation rate for Aboriginal learners presents both challenges and opportunities for NVIT, which are discussed in the next chapter.

### **2.11.1 Reflections about the Methods**

In this section I will first discuss the interview as a particular method that I used, then I will comment on the mixed methods case study as methodology. All interview methods for Elders, senior management, and Board of Governors followed Indigenous protocols, which I strongly believe are important for ensuring that Indigenous research participants feel comfortable, and feel that their perspectives are valued. The negative legacy and mistrust of research where Indigenous people and their knowledges were disrespected is still held by many Indigenous community-based people today (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). However, conducting respectful, relevant, responsible, and reciprocal research is difficult (Archibald 2008, Pidgeon 2008). Here, I share some reflections about how these protocols posed some difficulties.

In demonstrating respect, I felt that it was important for each person to determine the date, time, and location for his/her interview. I also showed respect, patience, and perseverance when participants changed the methods' process and cancelled interview dates. For an example of the former, the Elders decided that two members should be interviewed instead of having two group sessions. The Elders and current and former Board of Governors are all very busy and even though they supported and agreed to be involved in my research, other commitments, of which many were related to their roles and responsibilities at NVIT, were more important than research. The delay in completing the interviews and the surveys indicates the need to ensure adequate planning time is allotted to the data gathering process and that flexibility in administering the methods is possible.

As an Indigenous person it is my role and responsibility to be respectful of all the research participants, especially the Elders because they are key sources and teachers of IK. I carried out the interviews in their chosen interview space, with familiar surroundings, at times that were convenient

for them, and provided them with an opportunity for dialogue. It was also important for me to show a cultural form of reciprocity. This cultural notion of reciprocity was demonstrated by the offering of tobacco, which was traditionally used for spiritual purposes and signifies a deep respect to the person to whom it is given. Reciprocity is also demonstrated through my thesis where I share what I have learned to those who read it.

Demonstrating respect, relevance, and reciprocity is not always easy. For the Elders, I felt that it was important to take the extra time to ensure that the Elders' Council was comfortable with the process and decision of giving their voice to the appointed Elders. I respected their decision to limit the interviews to two people and understood that they were in turn showing reciprocal respect to me because they wanted to focus on my questions and not "stray" from the topic by telling other stories. Upon reflection, the most serious drawback with interviewing only two Elders was that only a few participants could take part and share their thoughts and "voices" mainly due to time constraints for conducting and transcribing the interviews. Perhaps if I had said that I wanted to hear their stories about NVIT and had structured the research process to be more story-based then the Elders would have not been concerned about trying to answer my questions. A story-based approach may have been more relevant to IK approaches, but it may have created other ethical issues connected to my supervisory or managerial role within NVIT.

Regarding ethical considerations, as the Vice President of Academics and Strategic Partnerships, I did not interview faculty or others where there was a power imbalance or a perceived power imbalance, which meant that I was in a position of administrative power over others. I interviewed individuals who were peers in a management position or others in position of power over my role at NVIT, such as board members or previous board members.

I utilized my own experiences in roles where I had been a board member, faculty member and department administrator and to tell experiential stories as part of the methodology. This telling was done this through storywork (Archibald, 2009), and it is embedded throughout the thesis. I was very conscious of the leadership position I have within the institution and the information I am privy to due to that position. The tension between presenting and representing the participants' perspectives, my knowledge and perspectives of matters, while at the same time expected to be critical, reflective,

and truthful as a graduate student in academic is a fine balance. Throughout my research, the guidance of traditional Indigenous values from my family and from the IK philosophy of the Eagle's Perch helped me navigate these tensions and expectations.

In my reflection of the case study as methodology, I believe that it was appropriate for the purposes of examining and understanding the historic and current holistic dynamics that have influenced the governance, policies, programming, and student services of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. The flexibility of the case study accommodated the mixed methods approach. I am more comfortable characterizing the case study that I used as a methodology that facilitated the development of a collective lived story about NVIT told from the perspectives of 'insiders': community leaders who started NVIT and those who study and work there. I drew upon critical theory to make a space to privilege insiders/Indigenous perspectives and stories as a form of resistance to letting outsiders shape the telling of our story. The NVIT case study could be characterized as one that is shaped by Indigenous Knowledges, perspectives, and stories of the Indigenous people and communities that it serves.

## **2.12 Conclusion: The Eagle's View**

This chapter concludes with some perspectives/view from the Eagle's Perch at NVIT about the presentation of the theoretical and methodological frameworks. In Indigenous oral tradition, repetition of some stories is important for reinforcing important teachings and for finding new meanings from the stories (Archibald, 2008). I repeat a section of Elder May's story told earlier about the meanings of the NVIT's Eagle Perch:

*According to May, a more traditional perspective and reading of the "Eagle" is that the "Eagle" teaches us that it is good to combine traditional wisdom and the new Knowledge that is required during times of tremendous change. The wisdom taught by the "Eagle", reminds us that it is important to realize that change might be necessary in one's lifetime and thus we must find the courage to foster and bring about that change. I asked May who taught her about the "Eagle Perch" and how valuable the "Eagle" has been to Aboriginal people. May smiles and says, I used to come here with my grandparents, this is traditionally a meeting ground for the people, they used to bring me to this area to watch the "Eagles", roaming around in circles. They passed on the different meanings and stories of the "Eagle" to me. May looked at me and said 'Verna, that is exactly, what I am doing with you is passing on the same meanings and stories about the "Eagle Perch" to you so that you can pass it on to the many students that come to NVIT' (personal communication, Oct 28, 2011).*

This small segment from May's story exemplifies Indigenous Knowledge principles of inter-generational pedagogy, individual and collective, responsibility, place-based knowing, respectful relationships, and the power of story. I have been given the responsibility to pass what I have learned to others, especially students who attend NVIT. The responsibility is also a form of reciprocity that keeps IK sustained and strong. The use of IK as my main theoretical framework has helped me persist with this thesis research despite many challenges that I experienced in carrying it out. Some principles from critical theory also helped me appreciate the need to continually resist colonization and to understand better the various forms of power dynamics that emerge between interactions that NVIT has with the government policy makers. Most importantly, I realized that I needed to keep grounded in IK and to not get distracted by engaging in academic critique that does not offer solutions. I had to be like the Eagle, who always returns home, and for me, home is nested in IK.

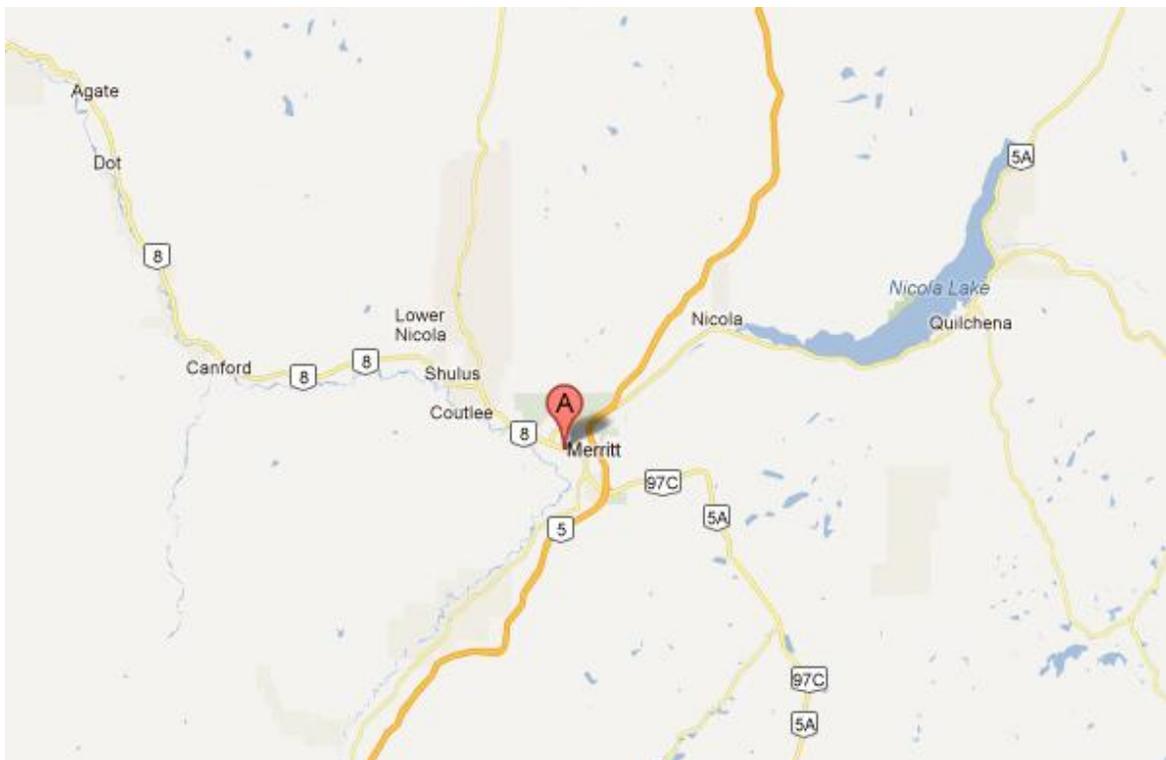
The Eagle also helped me carry out a mixed methods case study methodology that focussed on developing a collective lived story of NVIT through those who are part of the Eagle's wing and responsibility. The case study methodology that I developed was guided by respectful, reciprocal, relevant, and responsible relationships and protocols (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Elder May talked about the Eagle's teaching of bringing together Indigenous traditional and other forms of knowledge to address change. The various methods used in the case study such as the survey, interviews, document review, and personal reflections brought various forms of knowledge together to examine how well NVIT has addressed the learning needs of Indigenous students and their communities to create educational success for them. The mixed methods case study is about the quality of learning home that NVIT has established for people who live and gather in this home. Its main location is the traditional gathering place and home for Eagles and Indigenous people. In the following chapters the voices and perspectives of the research participants will highlight the successes and challenges that NVIT, as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution experienced in carrying out the Eagle's vision for its nesting and gathering place.

## Chapter Three: The Contextual Complexities of NVIT

### 3.1 The Geographical Area

The geographic, historical, social, economic, and cultural contexts of the five First Nations communities that founded NVIT open this chapter in order to show the problems and possibilities associated with Aboriginal people's struggle for self-determination for developing and operating self-governing institutions such as post-secondary education. This contextual information is important for appreciating and understanding the reasons for NVIT's formation and the driving forces that have guided its vision, values, programming, and student services. The role of Indigenous Knowledge as one of the main forces is presented. Student demographic data is also included to give another contextual dimension. The chapter ends with a discussion about the on-going contextual challenges and complexities that confront those who are in NVIT leadership roles and responsibilities.

**Figure 3.1: Map of Nicola Valley First Nations Communities**



As shown in Figure 3.2, NVIT, located at Merritt, British Columbia is nestled in the heart of the Nicola Valley, home of the Nlaka'pamux and N'sylix (Okanagan) people with an estimated Indigenous population of 3,152. It is also the home of 7,000 non- Nlaka'pamux people, and is located 280 km north of Vancouver on the Coquihalla Highway. The NVIT Merritt campus is at the centre of four transportation routes: Kelowna to the East, Kamloops to the North East, Cache Creek to the North West, and Vancouver to the South West. These four routes are the veins that flow into the valley and bring with them the students who attend the institute. The Thompson Nicola Regional District, which includes Merritt, British Columbia, is endowed with abundant natural resources, rivers, forestry, mining, mountains and lakes, which have sustained the Nlaka'pamux and N'sylix people for thousands of years. With the founding of NVIT, these natural resources became a contemporary educational means to sustain Indigenous people of this area

Five communities within the Nicola Tribal Association (NTA), a regional structure designed to administer the social, educational, political and economic matters of its membership, founded NVIT. There were several individuals who were Chiefs at the time NVIT was founded, such as Percy Joe, Frances Shutter, Herby Manual, Robert Sterling Sr. and Grand Chief Gordon Antoine who believed in the national policy, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NVIT Archival Documents 1983) and had the vision to organize and formulate the initial planning ideas. These First Nations communities included:

- (1) Coldwater Indian Band: The main Coldwater Reserve area (IR#1) is located approximately 13 km southwest of Merritt, Paul's Basin (IR#2) is located approximately 22km southwest of Merritt, Gwen Lake (IR#3) is located approximately 15km south of Merritt. The Coldwater Indian Band has approximately 780<sup>7</sup> band members covering approximately 2,499 hectares of land (<http://coldwaterband.com/about.php>)
- (2) Nooaitch Indian Band located is on the Nicola River about 10km west of the old Canford C.P. railway station, on 1,693.4 hectares of land and has a population of 247 members ([http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=699&lang=eng](http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNMain.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=699&lang=eng)).
- (3) Shackan Indian Band in the Nicola Valley, approximately 20 km east of Spences Bridge and 40 km west of Merritt on Hwy 8 has 3,873.7 hectares of land and has a population of 122 members (<http://www.shackan.com/>).

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<sup>7</sup> Band population figures are for the 2010-2011 time period to show the current population.

- (4) Lower Nicola Band has ten reserves (totalling 17,500+ acres) surrounding the town of Merritt and has a population of 1057 members ([http://maps.fphlcc.ca/lower\\_Nicola](http://maps.fphlcc.ca/lower_Nicola)).
- (5) Upper Nicola Band is located approximately 45 km east of Merritt and 90 km south of Kamloops, British Columbia. The Upper Nicola Band has 8 reserves with the main communities located on Nicola Lake Indian Reserve #1 and Douglas Lake Indian Reserve on 30,848 hectares of land. The population is 946 registered members (<http://www.uppernicolaband.com/aboutus.htm>).

### **3.2 Socio-Economic Impact and the Need for Education**

A number of forces underline the problems that beset Aboriginal economy in the Merritt area. Some important forces have been the high Aboriginal unemployment rate due to low levels of education and the lack of jobs in Aboriginal communities. However, the most devastating force has been the impact of colonization through Residential Schools, which denied generations of children access to their culture and language and which denied Indigenous families and communities the ability to transmit their Indigenous Knowledge to their children (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In the 1970s, a dramatic shift occurred where Aboriginal leaders across Canada, and at the local level, finally gained national political voice and agency to put forward an educational policy that was based on self-determination and local control, which was the 1972 Indian *Control of Indian Education Policy* (National Indian Brotherhood, now Assembly of First Nations). This policy fought against the ideology of Western hegemony and positioned Indigenous Knowledge, values, and culture as the basis upon which to offer education.

The Nicola Tribal Association leaders decided to focus on establishing their own post-secondary institution in order to develop educational skills and knowledge to expand employment opportunities for their people; to further their goal of self-determination; to have strengthened forms of local governance. Before NVIT was established, Nlaka'pamux and N'sylix people attended provincial institutions such as the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Cariboo College, College of New Caledonia and Okanagan College. A majority of these students from these two major First Nations did not have a grade 12 diploma and needed upgrading to achieve entrance to the post-secondary programs. The following quote shows the difficulty one student experienced at a public community college and the positive impact that NVIT had on his subsequent career:

I left school in grade nine to work; now I want to do Forestry and I need my grade 10 or grade 12, so I went back to Cariboo College. I stayed there for 3 months and didn't finish. I didn't fit

in, I was behind in the school work, and no one helped me so I gave up. I came to NVIT in 1989 and now I work for my band and I have my Forestry tickets, I can feed my family and stay at home (Alumni Survey, October 21, 2010).

Economic development requires the coming together of a wide array of skilled people, effective leaders, and resources to build Aboriginal communities. Prior to the full development of NVIT, the Indian Affairs policies and direction were changing. The movement to begin Treaty discussions with BC First Nations came with the new policy of federal government devolution of programming from the national to the local levels. Within the city of Merritt, agriculture and resource-based industries have historically provided more employment opportunities; therefore it was no surprise when the Aboriginal leaders focused on natural resource development, community economic development and community development as the major training programs for NVIT students in its early stages in the 1980s. However, the Aboriginal leaders were also concerned about the damage from excessive extraction of timber, mining resources and the pollution of the rivers and lakes and fishing and hunting resources. These concerns were the bases of the revival of local Indigenous Knowledge for environmental protection and managing the natural resources. The Aboriginal community leaders' vision was that problems associated with the impact of colonization such as low levels of education and the environmental devastation caused by Western society could be addressed within their own post-secondary institution.

The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology was initiated in response to First Nations people taking greater control of their own affairs. Education plays a key role in improving opportunities for effective self-government, including developing independent organizations and expanding economic and social service activities. First Nations people, desirous of the skills necessary to be change agents in their own communities, are demanding an educational environment in which they can freely express and develop their own unique understanding and cultural identity (Annual Report, p.7, 1987/89).

### **3.3 History of NVIT**

In response to First Nations people taking greater control of their own affairs, the establishment of Nicola Valley Institute of Technology was led by two local Indigenous educators: Robert Sterling Sr. and Grand Chief Gordon Antoine. They were supported by local Indigenous leaders associated with the Nicola Tribal Association. Five Chiefs, representing 26 reserves, made the decision to provide community-based educational opportunities to their Band members. A

contract with the British Columbia Institute of Technology in 1983 resulted in the delivery of a vocational forestry program to 12 local Native people (Dempster, 1990, p.5). During the early years, NVIT was an institution that was administered by the Nicola Tribal Association and as such all systems and structures (financial and administrative) were operated through a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) hired by NTA for the purpose of managing the fledgling institution. The first CEO and later President of NVIT was Doug Baker (Archival Document; Annual Report 1988, p1). Mr. Baker carried out the duties of the day and was accountable to NTA. During the 1980s, NVIT was registered as a private post-secondary institution under NTA, where finances were very limited and the five founding Bands continued to support the operation of the institution through very high tuition rates (\$6,660 per semester, which was agreed to by the local and surrounding First Nations Bands who sent their students to NVIT) and though the personal guarantee of Grand Chief Gordon Antoine who believed that this was the right thing to do (Board of Governors interview, June 20, 2011).

The Nicola Valley Tribal Council (NVTC)/Nicola Tribal Association (NTA) was the managing and directing organization for the budding institution later to be named Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. During this timeframe there was a committee of Chiefs from the NVTC/NTA who were the champions for the program. This structure and relationship lasted from 1983 to 1987. NVTC/NTA as the administrators had several debates and motions that were tabled during meetings from 1983 to 1987 that led to the formation of NVIT in 1988. One of the major issues the budding program faced was financial stability. This issue was addressed by the following Board motion:

On December 3, 1983, Area Council Meeting #83-13, Motion No 3: Moved by Arthur Dick and Seconded by Dan Manuel approved 50% financial responsibility be shared between the area Council and the Upper Nicola Resource Technology Program. The motion was carried (NTA Minutes, 1983).

This was the very beginning of the relationship with British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and the Nicola Valley Indian community. In the same motion Garth Fraser was appointed to work in developing this relationship (NTA, 1983). Paul Wilims, a former BCIT faculty and NVIT faculty member for 26 years recalls how he became involved in the beginnings of NVIT. "John Jackson enrolled in the BCIT renewable resources program in the early 1980s and shortly after John left BCIT, the distance education department of BCIT was asked to deliver the first year of the renewable resources technology program to a group of Nicola Valley people" (Archival Memo, P. Wilims, 1992).

From 1985-1995, NVIT was a Private Post-Secondary Institution as structured by the British Columbia's Societies Act. As a Private Post-Secondary Institution there were benefits as well as drawbacks. One of the drawbacks was the lack of secure funding to do planning and hiring of faculty and staff. Another drawback was not being able to assign transferable credits to courses or design transferable and ladder-able programming for students who wanted to complete further education at a public college or university. However, NVIT being innovative partnered and laddered their courses and programs with other Public Post-Secondary Institutions, such as: the College of New Caledonia (Prince George), Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), and Cariboo College, (now Thompson Rivers University). Students would enrol and take the courses at NVIT but their official transcript would come from the partner institution.

A huge issue for NVIT in the early years was trying to build and grow the institution on limited funding and funding that was transient (funds that came from several different organizations and agencies/ministries yearly, but could not be counted on for ongoing financial support) therefore, it was an unstable institution and was a challenge for students who were attending NVIT. The challenge to students was the insecurity of the continuation of their program. Students were constantly in a flux as to whether the program in which they were enrolled would continue. To the credit of NIVT, programs continued, students obtained their credentials and education and were able to carry on their education with other institutions. The following story is a recollection from a former member of the Board of Governors that highlights the challenges that NVIT experienced in its designation as a Private Post-Secondary Institute.

*In the past the five Nicola Valley bands started NVIT and that was how my role as a board member came to be because there were seats available for the five Nicola bands. So I think that the Nicola Valley bands have a really strong connection to NVIT and I think it's stronger than the other First Nation communities and I don't know if that's a biased opinion because I was a part of NVIT's inception. I was a board member and I know the history and I've been a part of the Nicola Valley Tribal Association meetings when NVIT was an idea. So I would say that there is a lot of support for NVIT from Aboriginal communities.*

*When we were a Private Institution, we had a lot of control over our programs, our finances, over our decision-making, over our hiring and the content of our programs, but it was difficult to get our programs and courses accredited the way we wanted them. Let me explain. We wanted to educate our students about our First Nations society, our ways, our history and our spirituality; we wanted that in our courses and in our teachers. But, we also wanted our students to be able to move to other Public Post-Secondary Institutes and continue on and*

*get their diplomas and degrees. So, we had to compromise some of our ideals for other schools to give our students credit. But I think you know that the thing that remained, the biggest challenge was always maintaining the First Nation identity; training specific to First Nation or Aboriginal communities has been a major challenge and it has been an important asset for NVIT. One of the things that I recall when I was on the Board was when we were talking with the Public Institutions about the Social Work degree program we didn't want to have just another ordinary social worker program where students took one course in First Nation studies or whatever and then upon receiving their degree they were considered to be qualified to deal with First Nations. So that's one of the programs that I know that at the Board level there was a lot of consideration given to training specific to First Nation needs and concerns of situations and people cultures. Another challenge was funding. As a Private Post-Secondary Institute we were not eligible for funding from the provincial government. Another one was achieving recognition or equal status as Public Post-Secondary Institutes or colleges. There was the need to legitimize NVIT programming.*

*Through all my roles I have done a lot to help generate funding support as a Board member. I served on several different committees; we're always having meetings with various funders or the Ministry to seek additional funding. And then I was a staff member working in the continuing education department a part of the role that I had was apply for funding from various federal government pots or provincial government ministry of education funds or whatever else we were eligible for.*

*I think that one of the major barriers to NVIT was to provide the academic programming, training and education but also being accredited, maintaining the Aboriginal focus and Aboriginal content within the programs and also always maintaining that First Nation's identity. Another real concern was not being swallowed up or convinced by larger educational institutes or colleges to sway from our identity to theirs. So I would say that keeping the First Nations identity of NVIT has always been a struggle (Former Board Member Interviewee. September 6, 2010).*

Another story told from a different former NVIB Board member, shows the difficult tensions experienced and subsequent decision that the Board made to have NVIT become a Public Post-Secondary Institution.

### **1995-Present: NVIT Becomes a Public Post-Secondary Institution**

*From the 1985 to 1995 the Board of Governors of NVIT had several meetings and conversations debating the value of becoming a Public Post-Secondary Institution (PSSI). The discussion always ended in a dichotomy. One, as a Private Institution NVIT had control over its finances, decision making on how the Board was appointed and governed, and on the kinds of programs it offered although those programs were laddered or transferred in public colleges and universities. On the other hand, NIVT as a public post-secondary institute would have secure funding, legitimacy as an education institution, ability to articulate its own courses and programs at a provincial level and the ability to work with other Aboriginal private institutions and organizations and to be a conduit to access post-secondary education.*

*What NVIT would give up by becoming a PSSI, would be the autonomy of determining its own Board membership, as a PSSI the province would have the power to determine the composition of the Board. However, the Board of the day and Chief Gordon Antoine, the Board Chair determined that there was a way to ensure that the Board remained Aboriginal and anchored within the founding First Nations and still adhere to the legislation of the province. The other situation was the ability to maintain the mandate of NVIT, which was retaining Aboriginal culture, content of courses and programs, values and access to the*

*Elders. The financial accountability that was given directly to the Board of Governors and the founding Bands would now be to the province due to the use of public funds, and NVIT would have to adhere to all the public accounting practices and protocols, which was not so as a Private institution.*

*What NVIT would gain as a PSSI, was the financial security, being a member of a provincial education system and structure that would allow the students more mobility between PSSI's. As a public institution NVIT would have more autonomy over its credentialing and programming for credit and transferability to other PSSI's, it would not have to negotiate certificate and diploma credentials with other PSSI's, and it would have more legitimacy for laddering into degree track through partnership arrangements with other PSSI's. NVIT would be equivalent to other public institutions and could negotiate with them on an equal level. After these debates, the NVIT Board moved forward to become a Public Post-Secondary institution in 1995. (From the perspective of a former Board of Governor, November 17, 2011)*

A core component of NVIT's academic foundation is Indigenous Knowledge, which is discussed in the next section.

### **3.4 Indigenous Knowledge and NVIT Foundation**

As an Aboriginal founded institution, NVIT is rooted in the Nlaka'pamux and Nsilxcn Indigenous Knowledge systems of the Indigenous founding communities. As mentioned above, local Aboriginal leaders wanted their post-secondary institution to provide education and training that addressed the educational, social, and economic needs of their communities and they wanted to ensure that Aboriginal values, culture and traditional teachings formed the foundation of learning. As such, the organization of knowledge is rooted in Indigenous Knowledge systems that are woven into NVIT's mission, vision, curriculum, program relevancy, education values, governance and family concept. However, the NVIT leadership has encountered many struggles to establish Indigenous Knowledge, as a base for the development of programming.

Some of the struggles to institute IK into the programming at NVIT were the definition and understanding of what IK was. The leaders of the day talked about programs that were First Nations, Nlakapmux or Nsilxcn, about what those values were and how they translated to programs. But the idea of IK in the early days of NVIT was of a budding knowledge system. The concept of First Nations culture, history, and values formed the discourse in relation to what we today call Indigenous Knowledge. During the development of the Natural Resource Technology program with British Columbia Institute of Technology, which was mentioned earlier, the NVIT leadership ensured that the

students of the program had knowledge of their territory, the history of that territory; the uses and values related to the land and ensured that knowledge was part of the students' program. This was done through practice, having students go on the land and map it, in other words, to experience the land. Elders were brought into the classrooms as guests to share their knowledge of how land management traditionally happened and field trips were an integral part of the program. Today, we have moved to have Elders in the classroom as teachers and not as guests.

Another program that ensured IK was a foundation was the Sexual Abuse program that was based on traditional healing methods as part of the course content. Once again Elders were present in the program as were other guest lecturers. This program has metamorphosed into the Chemical Addictions program, which is presently being delivered and is founded on the traditional healing methods as well as the Indigenous Medicine Wheel concept of teaching and rounded off by the Red Road concept of 'walking your talk' by practicing values such as respect to oneself, others, and the environment. Elders, Indigenous traditional healers, and professional in this field comprise the faculty that teach this program.

All programs past and present at NVIT have had the bases or foundation of IK but have also incorporated the Western ideology and epistemology of today's industry and workforce. The NVIT Board and the Aboriginal communities it serves believe that it is important to have students who are grounded in IK, but also have the transferable skills to walk in 'both cultures' and succeed in those cultures. NVIT graduates must have the ability to walk the earth and understand the values of those steps in the form of experiential learning and working in the diverse world in which we live. Bringing Indigenous Knowledge and Western Knowledge (WK) together has points of tension and convergence; however, the main point that I am making in this section is that NVIT leadership/management ensure that IK takes prominence and shapes the program focus and approach and also ensures that Western forms of knowledge and skills are included when necessary. By combining both IK and WK, the program serves the cultural, academic, and professional needs of students.

NVIT's programs and courses have evolved over the years due to the pressure and demand of Aboriginal communities, leadership and industry. A majority of NVIT's present programs are associated with building or strengthening community capacity for the preparation of treaties, self-government and employment. Programs are generally designed with a program review committee that includes Elders and community members, or a First Nations community or organization may want a specific skill set at which time NVIT will work with that sector to identify competencies, courses and program criteria, the program/ courses are then taken through the academic system and then through the Board of Governors for approval. An example is the First Nations Language and Speech Therapists program; there was a need identified by the First Nations Education Steering Committee, (an provincial Aboriginal organization that has a provincial mandate to address and advocate for Aboriginal education from K4-12) to train Speech therapists for the schools. A committee was structured and a program identified and built to deliver for credit to the students who needed the skills and credentials to work with children who required speech therapy. Another example is the Aboriginal Community Economic Development program which has a national accreditation for Economic Development Officers (EDO). NVIT in cooperation with Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) developed the 16 competencies for EDOs nationally. This was done through a national committee and once completed NVIT took the program through its academic structures and systems. Today there is 11 other PSSI's delivering the program nationally. The base criteria of this program are to ensure that IK is evident, measurable and quantified in the course content, practica and credentialing. Institutional vision and values that are rooted in IK have guided the development and implementation of NVIT's programs and student services. The next section highlights NVIT's vision and values, and shows the community-based process that was used to develop them.

### **3.4.1 Vision and Values**

The commitment and vision of NVIT's Aboriginal Board of Governors continues to guide the institution. This vision encompasses and honours Aboriginal traditional culture and values, and recognizes the need to prioritize these within the educational goals of NVIT's curriculum.

Consequently, NVIT's mission, vision and values are rooted in Indigenous Knowledge. The collective vision for the institution entails that NVIT:

1. Becomes the school of choice for Aboriginal students because it has a reputation for producing quality graduates;
2. Offers an extensive choice of programs relevant to the interests and needs of Aboriginal students and communities;
3. Provides a rich educational and cultural campus environment in which to learn and work;
4. Possesses the active and dedicated leadership of an Aboriginal Board of Governors, and a qualified and committed staff, the majority of whom are Aboriginal; and
5. Serves as a successful catalyst to the Aboriginal communities in their quest for education, development and greater self-determination.

The overarching value that NVIT promises to uphold is a commitment to Aboriginal cultures and traditions. Ensuring that its programs, courses, and student services include Aboriginal content and that a holistic learning framework is used to address the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual realms of human development are examples of how Indigenous Knowledge can be actualized. Not all courses may address IK but a program has more scope for doing so, as will be shown in Chapter Four. Supporting this IK principle value are other values that include:

1. Respect for the dignity, rights, cultures, beliefs of all people;
2. Continual growth and development of individuals and communities;
3. Honesty and trust in relationships;
4. Openness in communication;
5. Balance and harmony in all activities;
6. Critical self-examination and a willingness to admit both strengths and weaknesses;
7. People making decisions for themselves;
8. Care and support for others and respect for the earth; and
9. Accountability to ourselves, the Elders, the students, the communities and to the provincial government (Final Report, 1992, p.10).

NVIT went through a very thorough process of identifying its mission, vision and values. This process included several community meetings held in community halls of various First Nations within the Merritt area. In addition, four community meetings were held at the ballroom of the Coldwater Hotel in Merritt where all aspects of community membership came, had a meal and broke into groups to discuss the ideals of what would be included in the mission, vision and values of the institution. These items were then taken by the consultant and refined, brought back to check in with the community at large through two forums. Then the final documentation was designed and passed by the Board of Governors. Each community meeting started and finished with a prayer by an Elder; the

protocol of all information said was recorded. Elders were given respect to voice their opinions regardless of the time it took, and the idea of checking back with the community was important to ensure that the words being written were reflective of what participants said. The following is a story of a Board Member's recollection of the process:

*When we [Board] decided to engage in a planning session to help us with our identity, values, mission and vision, we decided to engage a consultant to do this for us. One of the main issues was to get community involvement. We wanted the community to own our institution and take a part in building its direction. We did this through meetings and forums and community involvement. There was always a discussion about how much NVIT would provide for students and a discussion occurred about NVIT as an educational institute was not a social service institute or we're not here to take care, you know, providing all counselling service because at that time there was a request for a drug and alcohol counsellors or various different assistance for students that had social problems such as drinking or maybe housing or leaving their home and I know that around the Board table there was always the discussion and some Board members wanting to keep NVIT strictly an educational institute like all other educational institutes. But the discussion always came back to, we are an Aboriginal organization and we need to do things differently. And if that's what we need to do to help our students to succeed to finish their programs and to graduate that is what we need to do. So that has been an ongoing discussion. I imagine it still carries on today because it's a huge factor when we think about our students graduating: do we just want them graduate or do we want them to be successful to be employable to go out in the world and have a degree that can work in either the non-First Nations world or a First Nation community? So I know that all came out of the meetings and forums we had. The communities spoke about what they wanted as our mission and values, what is important for NVIT and what makes us different (Board Interviewee, October, 2010).*

The Board member's story contains an example of on-going questions/tensions about the purpose of NVIT's programs, whose needs should be addressed, and how do Board members make these important decisions. A key message from the story is that community stakeholders were very involved in shaping institutional vision and values, and through this process, ensuring that NVIT "does things differently" when it must in order to address community educational needs. By involving Indigenous communities, they contribute their cultural knowledge resources through partnership approaches.

### **3.5 Programmatic Innovations Based on Indigenous Knowledge and Partnerships**

In the context of developing and designing post-secondary programs, NVIT uses its vision and purpose to address the educational needs and interests of Aboriginal communities/organizations throughout British Columbia. In the last five years, approximately 20 Aboriginal communities have received some form of programming through NVIT's Community Education Division on an annual basis. In order to address their diverse learning needs and interests, NVIT has partnered with various

Aboriginal and other organizations and post-secondary institutes because of its limited provincial funding. Processes for addressing this financial limitation has resulted in the development of another core principle that drives NVIT's day-to-day operations and vision for the future, which is a commitment to working in partnership with other organizations and with Aboriginal communities. These community partnerships enrich NVIT's programmatic offerings and services and they result in NVIT's ability to serve more students. Some examples of partnerships include:

1. Thompson Rivers University (Bachelor of Social Work);
2. Vancouver Community College (Practical Nursing and Health Care Attendant);
3. En'owkin Centre in Penticton (ongoing affiliation agreement);
4. Neskonlith First Nation in Chase (Home Support Worker/Resident Care Attendant);
5. First Nations Education Steering Committee (Speech & Language Assistant and Education Coordinator);
6. Hey-Way'-Noqu' (Chemical Addictions Worker) and
7. Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Law Enforcement Preparation Program).

Programmatic partnerships have expanded NVIT and other post-secondary institutions' ability to serve Aboriginal communities throughout British Columbia. Issues of limited finances may be one catalyst to work cooperatively, but a more important driver is addressing the key educational priorities identified by Aboriginal communities, such as Aboriginal language revitalization. As part of NVIT's continued efforts to serve the unique needs of First Nations communities, NVIT has placed increased emphasis on supporting the retention of their respective Indigenous languages by collaborating with the BC College of Teachers (a provincial professional certification body) and Thompson Rivers University (TRU) to offer a two-year Indigenous Language Program followed by a one-year Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC), which certifies graduates of these programs to teach language and culture classes in schools. The DSTC is a 90 credit program which consists of approximately 30 courses at 3 credits per course. NVIT's contribution to the TRU partnership is the delivery of language courses, which TRU does not have. TRU offers education courses that NVIT does not have, therefore creating a partnership that allows students to move from NVIT to TRU seamlessly. The purposes of this collaboration are to provide the public K-12 system and Band/First Nation schools with certified Aboriginal teachers who teach the Indigenous language and culture within their respective communities and to support the retention of Aboriginal cultures and languages. Neither NVIT nor TRU has the finances or expertise to offer this scope of Indigenous language education, but by working cooperatively, we are able to do so. My personal reflection follows, which

highlights the intellectual property rights and other issues that Indigenous language communities have experienced when they have tried to work with universities on Indigenous language programs and the processes that NVIT developed in response to community concerns.

*NVIT has a mandate to address Indigenous Languages through the development and delivery of courses and programs that are designed in partnership with language partners. To address this mandate, NVIT with their language partnership had designed a language and culture framework that is utilized to structure the language programming. Some of these partners are En'owkin Centre (Nsilxcn), Lillooet Tribal Association (St'át'imc), Tk'emlups (Kamloops) Indian Band (Secwepemc) and Nicola Tribal Association (N'lakampux) as well as five other First Nations languages. Many of the language communities NVIT is working with have had challenges in designing and implementing their languages because of 1) very limited financial resources to build a program; 2) the courses they have designed in conjunction with other PSSI's are involved with ownership issues (who owns the information and curricula once it is completed); 3) assigning credit to the courses and programs designed – these courses and programs must have transferable credit to other PSSI's in order for students to build a transcript that would allow for them to use these credits toward a Developmental Standard Teaching Certificate or to use as University Transfer courses for other degree track programs; and 4) recognizing teaching faculty at the community level – the ability to address faculty credentials through other means of measurement and standards such as articulating instructors from the PSSI.*

*Some ways in which NVIT has been able to assist communities to build and deliver their language programs or courses is through shared resources. This means that NVIT will apply for funding or assign base funding to the language initiative and partner with a community to help build their program. In designing this partnership NVIT is very clear with the partner community that all material and content of this partnership is owned by the language community and cannot be delivered unless NVIT has the express permission from the language community. NVIT's job is to ensure that the courses and programs meet academic rigour, the teaching faculty meet the academic standards (or the articulating instructor meets academic standards) and that courses are awarded credit once they have complied with the academic structure and passed through Education Council at NVIT. This process is greatly accelerated when the language community has worked with the language template. As a result of this model NVIT has built an expert partnership with several of the language communities and there is now a provincial development to develop a Language Fluency Degree. Also, more PSSI's are becoming involved with language development within their region and are beginning to understand the need to address the issue of ownership of material. Today, NVIT has over 70 language courses being delivered throughout the province (Personal reflection, November, 2011).*

In order to achieve the goal of assisting with Aboriginal community-determined development, the themes of social, economic, land and governance self-determination are embedded in NVIT's overall program content and pedagogical approaches. Face-to-face instruction is the primary means for delivering on and off-campus courses, but videoconferencing and online educational technology are available to increase community access.

Changing post-secondary educational knowledge structures to give prominence to Indigenous Knowledge systems is an on-going struggle, but not impossible, as shown by the

programmatic innovations discussed above. Other examples are shared in Chapters Four and Five. Today, NVIT offers innovative and relevant programmatic credentials for future leaders that include a comprehensive array of courses and programs that range from basic literacy to a four-year baccalaureate degree. NVIT also provides a range of short courses through its continuing studies department at the Merritt campus, which are on topics of general interest, personal development, and culture. All of these programs include IK in meaningful ways. I believe that the IK prominence attracts many Aboriginal students. The next section highlights NVIT's Aboriginal student enrolment trends.

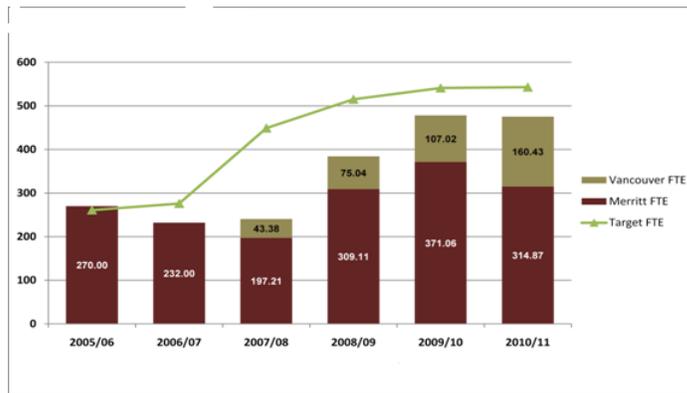
### **3.6 Aboriginal Student Demographic Trends at NVIT**

This section of the thesis presents basic empirical data about the enrolment and demographic (gender and age) trends of Aboriginal students at NVIT. The past six years (2005-2011) are reflected here through FTE enrolment. An FTE means:

Full-Time Equivalency (FTE) - Student FTEs represent full-time and part-time enrolments, converted to represent the number of students carrying a full-time course load. One student whose course load is equal to the normal full-time number of credits or hours required in an academic year for normal progression in a recognized program would generate 1.0 Student FTE. A Student FTE represents the instructional activity (course registrations) of one student completing all the requirements of a full-time program in a period that extends over one normal academic year. The enrolments of students with less than full-time course loads are converted to Student FTEs. Example: A student taking a normal full-time course load in one year would be 1.0 Student FTE. A student taking one-half of the normal program course loads in one year would be 0.5 Student FTE (IAHLA, p. 25, 2011).

The last six years are examined because this is the most comprehensive data that NVIT has collected. Prior to these years, data was often anecdotal and if available, it was presented in tables with a descriptive narrative to explain the data. Most recently, NVIT joined a provincial data consortium called *Colleague* that feeds into the provincial data warehouse, therefore, much more data is collected and data analysis expertise is available. The following data is extrapolated from this system.

**Table 3.1: NVIT Funded and Actual FTE'S 2005/06 to Present**



Note: Prior years included additional FTE calculated after FTE deadline

Source: Central Data Warehouse Standard Reports, cited in NVIT Accountability Plan 2011/12, P.21

Table 3.1 shows the actual and targeted FTEs. With the exception of 2006/2007, which marked the lowest levels of FTE, the FTEs showed a steady growth for the following years of 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Student headcount represents the number of students registered in all reported instructional activity, including skills courses and developmental activity.

**Table 3.2: Headcount by Academic Year (September to August)**

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
775	777	963	1220	1244

Source: Central Data Warehouse Standard Reports: Cited in NVIT Accountability Plan, 2011/12, p. 19

Table 3.2 shows student head count from 2005-2010. There has been a steady growth for the number of students registered at NVIT. The highest growth rates were recorded from 2005/06 to 2010; the growth rate is attributed to the addition of the Vancouver/Burnaby campus, the increase in community-based program delivery, and the increase in Indigenous language programming.

**Table 3.3: Demographic Percentage Enrolment by Fiscal Year (April to March)**

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Aboriginal	88.02%	86.45%	82.27%	85.08%	84.22%
Female	65.72%	71.08%	75.26%	76.45%	66.99%
Male	34.28%	28.92%	24.74%	23.55%	33.01%

Source: NVIT Data Warehouse cited in NVIT Quick Facts, May 2011, P.1.

Table 3.3 provides the gender enrolment of students attending NVIT, expressed as a percentage of the total FTE. As NVIT has a policy of 80% Aboriginal students, it is important to understand the gender data is inclusive of all students. I was not able to dis-aggregate Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal. More female Aboriginal students have attended NVIT than Aboriginal male students, which is a consistent Canada-wide enrolment trend for Aboriginal post-secondary students (ACCC, P.10, November 2010). NVIT's female enrolment trend peaked in 2008/9 to 76.45% and declined to 66.99% in 2009/10. The enrolment trend is different for male students. The male enrolment trend had been consistently low and then increased somewhat in 2009/2010. However, NVIT has now added an Introduction to Trades Program and realigned the Natural Resources program to Environmental Resources Technology program with the hope that these two programs will be desirable by Aboriginal males.

**Table 3.4: Ages (Headcount) by Academic Year (September to August)**

	2005/06 Head count	05/06	06/07 Head count	06/07	07/08 Head count	07/08	08/09 Head count	08/09	09/10 Head count	09/10
17 and <	17	2%	26	3%	17	2%	30	2%	12	1%
18 to 21	117	15%	103	13%	130	14%	167	14%	186	15%
22 to 24	83	11%	58	7%	93	10%	120	10%	138	11%
25 to 29	111	14%	97	12%	122	13%	153	13%	184	15%
30 to 39	153	20%	175	23%	214	23%	271	22%	274	22%

Source: Central Data Warehouse Standard Reports; Cited NVIT Quick Facts, May 2011, p 2.

Table 3.4 shows the age of students by academic year. Based on the data, the majority of students attending NVIT between 2005 and 2010 were between 30 and 49 years of age. Those between 50 and 64 years show a high peak between 2008 and 2010. Another area of interest was the 18 to 21 age groups; there is a steady growth for those students. NVIT still continues to engage older adult students, while the numbers of students enrolling directly from high school or a few years later have been increasing steadily. School District 58 in Merritt, BC, is the public school system that is one major catchment area for NVIT.

**Table 3.5: Aboriginal High School Student Transition from School District 58 to Post-secondary Institutions**

SD 58 Aboriginal Students Transition to PSI									
Institution	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	Grand Total
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	3	6	8	9	6	2	11	9	54
Thompson Rivers University	5	9	6	4	6	2	3	7	42
Okanagan College			2	1	1	1	1	2	8
University of British Columbia Okanagan				1		3		1	5
Justice Institute of British Columbia				2	2				4
University of the Fraser Valley			1			1	1	1	4
College of the Rockies	1	1			1				3
University of British Columbia				2			1		3
Vancouver Island University			1				2		3
British Columbia Institute of Technology					1	1			2
Northern Lights College				1		1			2
North Island College					1				1
Northwest Community College								1	1
Selkirk College								1	1
Open Learning					1				1
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>134</b>

Source: Central Data Warehouse, cited in At a Glance (NVIT), 2011, P.21

Table 3.5 shows Aboriginal students transitioning from School District 58 to post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The data shows that over an eight-year period 54 students attended NVIT while 42 attended Thompson Rivers University located at Kamloops, BC, which is the closest city to Merritt. There are a few First Nations Band Schools in the Merritt area; however, NVIT does not have student data from these schools.

In fiscal year 2009-10, NVIT had a combined full and part time student body of 1,300 students. Approximately 84% of our full-time equivalent students are Aboriginal; for programs delivered on site in First Nations communities throughout the province that figure is typically closer to 100%. In 2009-10, the NVIT student body represented 137 or 67% of British Columbia's First Nations communities as well as First Nations communities in six other provinces and territories across Canada.

The higher growth rate of the Aboriginal population and its younger median age are factors that will contribute to NVIT's future potential for increased enrolment. BC's Aboriginal population is increasing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. A related statistic is that the Aboriginal median age is substantially younger than that for all Canadians. Census data (2006) for BC reports the Aboriginal median age as 28.1 (26.8 in 2001) compared to the non-Aboriginal median age as 40.5 (38.7 in 2001). Related to this is that the Aboriginal 15-24 age cohort in BC increased by 21.1%

compared to 5% in the same age range for BC's total population. Similarly, the Aboriginal 0-14 age cohort showed a 6.2% increase whereas there was a 4.1% decrease for the overall population in that cohort (2006 Census Data cited in NVIT Accountability Plan Report 2011-12, p.11). This information shows NVIT's mandated target student population is increasing and suggests that NVIT needs to ensure its opportunities for an Aboriginal post-secondary education are and remain accessible and relevant to community-based contexts, educational, and economic needs. The previous five years of data shows consistent NVIT student success. One measure of success is the number of graduates each year. Table 3.6 is a snapshot of that success indicator. The graduates are those who completed all of NVIT's programs.

**Table 3.6: NVIT Graduates from 2005-2010**

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
<b>Graduates</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>128</b>

**Source: NVIT Colleague, November 10, 2011**

Student comments taken from the *NVIT Student Blog* end this section to give some personal perspectives about how they feel about their graduation. These story comments include other important indicators of student success that are about a feeling of belonging, learning and sharing culture, staying connected to children while learning, getting good grades, and feeling positive about learning. .

*NVIT recently celebrated two graduations: in Burnaby, May 10 and Merritt, May 19. Congratulations graduates! Both ceremonies were very beautiful and emotional as some realized they're going to have to go into the world now with their new skills and fresh ambitions!*

*At the close of the year we have a 'Remembering our Year' luncheon where students could enjoy a nice meal and remember all of the good things that happened this year. Some common fears that were shared of when they first came through the doors of NVIT was that they weren't ready, didn't know anyone in their classes, didn't know if they could handle the move away from their home communities, didn't know if Post-Secondary was for them. Now here they were, the same bunch, at the end of the year, hanging out with their newly made friends, able to give inside tips to the 'newbies' of town and very relaxed, comfortable and hopeful of the future and the fear, all but forgotten.*

*One student said she never felt that she belonged, ever in her life, before coming to NVIT. Now, she knows what that feeling is. She brings her children to the school for events and they feel it too. Below are a few comments made by students upon the reflection of the Academic Year 2010/11:*

*Question: What was one of your favourite memories of this Academic Year? (Sept 2010- Nov 2011)*

*'I loved our cultural orientation, especially making drums!' EMSK student  
'Meeting new people, making new friends' AA student  
'Spending time with the Elders' BSW student  
'Mornings with my daughter because my first classes weren't until 10:30 am and the daycare was right there!' CRLS student  
'Making a video for History 101' AA student  
'Being able to enjoy the company of others/ Talking about the things we've learned' Criminology Student.*

*Question: What was one of your biggest accomplishments this year?*

*'Joining this program (EMSK). It inspired me to come back in the Fall to finish my Grade 12 and then continue on to the Environmental Studies program.'  
'Writing my first 10 page essay.'  
'Graduation'  
'Organizing myself.'  
'My biggest accomplishment was getting an 'A' in MATH; my first time being back in math since elementary school.'  
'Passing with high grades and completing all assignments.'  
'Finding out what I'm capable of!'*

*It's always a bitter sweet time of year when all of the Finals are over, last assignments are handed in. One of our elders said it best when she said she's going to be sad that some of the students are moving on as they've gotten to know the students and their families really well... but they're also really proud of them and have seen them grow from day one until the last day or until their graduation. This ending is a new beginning. On a last note, I thought this was a powerful accomplishment for the year that one student responded: 'CONFIDENCE' (NVIT Student Blog <http://nvitblog.wordpress.com/>)*

### **3.7 Discussion**

NVIT started as a First Nations community initiative in 1983. The Nlakapmux and N'sylix community leaders were concerned about their lands and resources and the failure of the Western oriented post-secondary educational system in the Merritt area to provide relevant and adequate education for their community members. During the 1980s, other First Nations, Native, and Indian post-secondary private institutions were forming or had been in existence since the mid-1970s such as the Native Education Centre (Haig-Brown, 1995), and En'owkin (Armstrong, 1999). These institutions and programs were for Indigenous learners; they addressed Indigenous culture and language in various ways; and Indigenous community members governed them. The designation of

being a “private post-secondary” institution afforded these Indigenous institutions a fair amount of decision-making and choice about their institutional purposes and programming. However, their difficulties often centered on financial concerns because they did not have core funding to maintain their infrastructural needs and programs. Their main sources of funding often came from federal government call for proposals for specific programs or from government employment/labour market priorities. The institutional management were kept busy writing proposals and running short-term programs, which had the potential to divert them from their original mission and purpose.

The stories about NVIT’s beginnings as a program run by the Nicola Valley Tribal Association and then its establishment of a private Aboriginal post-secondary institution shows both the opportunities and problems associated with having more local decision-making control but without assurance of on-going funding, and most importantly not having the authority to credential programs that would be transferrable to or officially recognized by public post-secondary institutes. The credentialing authority was vested in the provincial government and given to only public post-secondary colleges and universities. Therefore, private Aboriginal post-secondary institutions experienced the hegemonic decision-making and policy force of the provincial governments and mainstream colleges and universities. This latter point required NVIT and other Indigenous post-secondary institutions to develop official agreements with existing public post-secondary colleges and universities where the latter offered the course using their instructors or where they hired local people to teach the courses. The key point here is that these courses were often under the auspices and control of the post-secondary institution and not the Aboriginal institution. The public institutions also often charged additional fees to offer these courses. The story example of the Indigenous languages shows the power that public institutes try to exert when they want to maintain intellectual property rights for any language material and courses developed and then offered through their institutions.

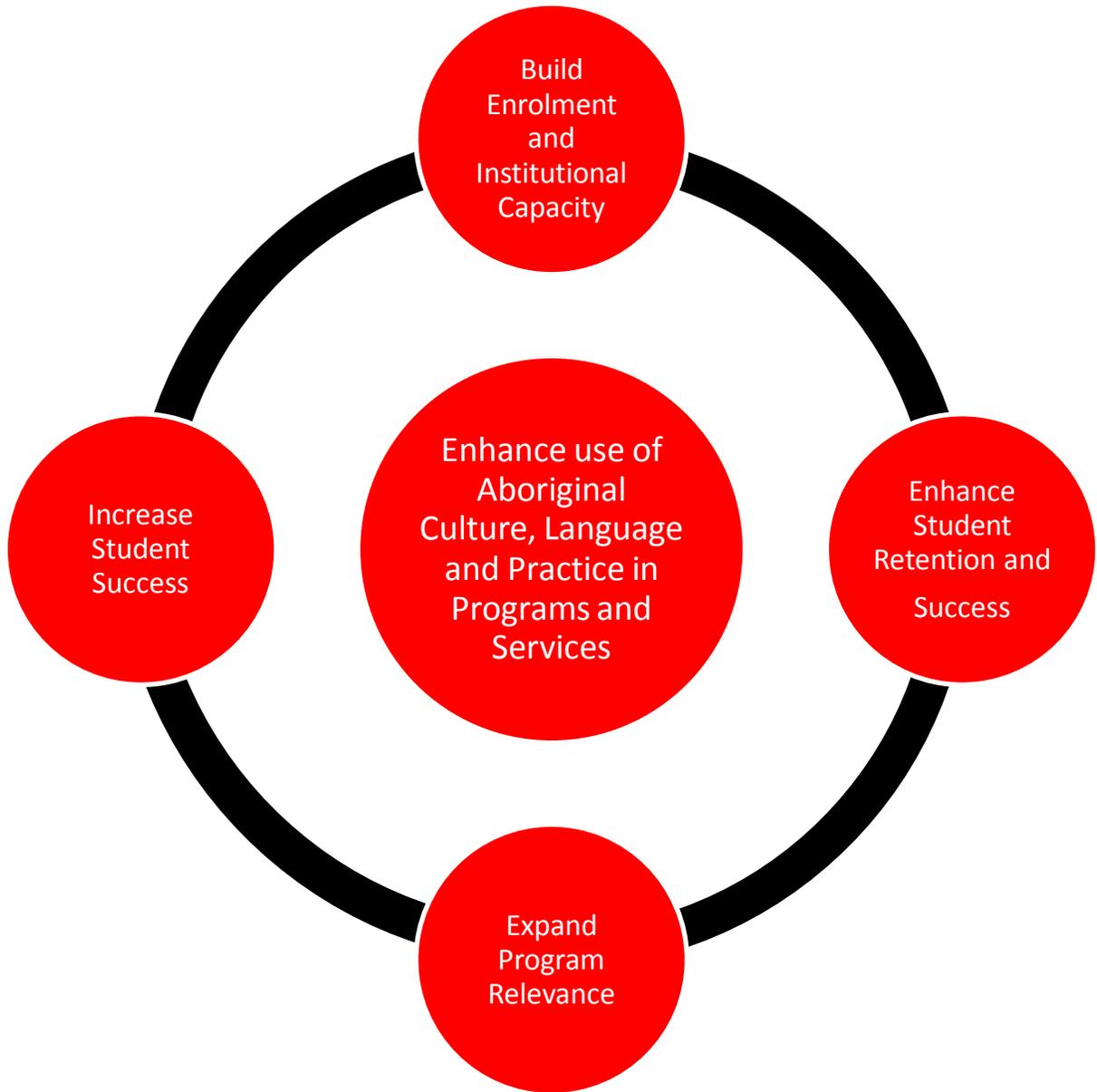
The 1992 *Report of The Provincial Advisory on Post-Secondary Education For Native Learners (also known as the Green Report)* and the subsequent introduction of the BC provincial government’s Aboriginal Policy Framework in 1995 facilitated the opportunity for NVIT to move from a private Aboriginal post-secondary institution to a public Aboriginal post-secondary institution. In 1995 the provincial government with its legislative authority sanctioned NVIT to become the first public

Aboriginal post-secondary institute in British Columbia. Then in 2007, the Ministry of Advanced Education asked NVIT to take over the operations and programs of the former Institute of Indigenous Governance (IIG) another Aboriginal Public Post-Secondary Institution, located at 4355-Mathissi Place in Burnaby, B.C. The IIG had serious problems associated with its leadership and low student enrolment and it was closed down shortly after NVIT moved to its location. It is interesting to note that the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), another public post-secondary institution, which helped to establish the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) through a partnership agreement, shares this same Burnaby location. In fact the physical site is under the auspices of BCIT. NVIT shares a building with other BCIT programs and student services.

The NVIT Burnaby campus commenced delivery of programs in the fall 2007 semester. The Ministry of Advanced Education's decision to first, designate NVIT as a publicly-funded post-secondary institution and second, to establish a second major campus in the Lower Mainland recognizes that NVIT had demonstrated the capacity and expertise to deliver a comprehensive set of successful programs at two different campuses. NVIT's 'public' designation provided on-going funding assurance, but it also resulted in the province having more control of how the funding was/is spent, requiring new accountability measures and processes, and having more input about enrolment targets.

In its current Accountability Plan and Report, which is required by the Ministry of Advanced Education, NVIT (2011/12, p. 34) has outlined five broad strategic goals (see Figure 3.1). Even though the Accountability Plan is a government requirement, NVIT's Board of Governors and management have maintained a central role and space for Indigenous Knowledge. While the core Aboriginal culture, language, and practice comprises *the nucleus* of the other goals, the other four goals consist of (1) enhancing student success, (2) increasing student enrolment, (3) increasing access, and (4) expanding program relevance. These five goals are inter-related and linked to the institute's mission of providing quality education.

**Figure 3.2: NVIT's (2007): Five broad strategic goals as cited in Accountability Plan, 2011/12, p.34.**



While NVIT's mandate, vision and values reflect Indigenous Knowledge, the accountability policies and procedures set by the provincial government through the Ministry of Advanced Education creates more tensions and challenges for NVIT. This next section examines the ways NVIT has negotiated these tensions and challenges in order to survive and flourish.

### **3.7.1 Increasing Student Enrolment and Institutional Capacity**

A major institutional challenge continues to be increasing student enrolment in order to attain the critical mass necessary to enhance institutional effectiveness and efficiency "economies of scale" as determined by the provincial government. However, our Board of Governors also want to establish an institution of sufficient size to achieve our desired future that is based on quality education driven by Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous community-based needs and interests. BC's high Aboriginal young population demographics and such factors as the poor level of Aboriginal high school education and high Aboriginal unemployment levels reinforce NVIT's external strategic need to grow but these particular 'drivers' have additional challenges.

### **3.7.2 Student Access, Support, and Retention**

Another major challenge area continues to be provision of meaningful access for students to our programming and support for them while engaged in their studies. I have linked access, support, and retention in this discussion because these three components are inter-related and greatly influence Aboriginal student success. Four key issues that impact student access, support and retention are community-level access, the educational backgrounds of students, culturally relevant support for students, and education funds available to Indian Bands.

### **3.7.3 Community-Level Access**

The on-reserve registered/status Indian projected population increase in BC between 2004 and 2029 is expected to be 57% compared to an off-reserve Indian population change of -1%.<sup>8</sup> In conjunction with the fact that a far larger proportion of Aboriginal former students (29%) attending colleges and institutes had to relocate from their home community than non-Aboriginal former students (19%), this demographic increase in the on-reserve population suggests the need for

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<sup>8</sup> Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Registered Indian Demography, Catalogue: R2-457/2007.

increased attention to finding ways in which community-level access to NVIT programs can be supported, thereby addressing a geographic barrier to post-secondary education. This challenge can be addressed by NVIT continuing to expand the delivery of its programs into Aboriginal communities in the province and by the introduction and expansion of technologically supported delivery methods, including online and videoconference courses and programs. However, this type of community-based delivery is more expensive than on-campus approaches and the funding that NVIT receives from the provincial government does not cover this important form of program delivery. On-reserve First Nations communities also have financial limitations based on the power that the federal government exerts in determining the funding levels that it provides to First Nations. The level of community-based educational access and program delivery cannot continue to increase to meet the young Aboriginal on-reserve population demand unless there is some significant change in financial policies.

#### **3.7.4 Academic Preparation**

A very high percentage of the Aboriginal population has less than high school graduation as their highest education level. Over 50% still do not complete their “Grade 12 Dogwood” that expands their admission to colleges and universities (Accountability Plan Report 2011-12, p.13). This problem is compounded by many Aboriginal high school graduates not graduating with English 12 or Math 12, which are necessary requirements for many post-secondary academic programs. This is an access issue because those with less than high school face major barriers in accessing post-secondary education and training, which then limits their access to higher income employment opportunities. This suggests the need for NVIT to address student academic barriers by providing high school completion programs or academic transition programs from high school to post-secondary education.

#### **3.7.5 Relevant Student Support**

Jothan (2010), Mendelson (2008), and Kavanagh (2008) have suggested areas where Aboriginal students may need support and some of these are:

1. A high proportion of Aboriginal students leave high school without completion of Grade 12 and/or without completion of English and Math 12;
2. A high percentage of Aboriginal students have to interrupt their studies for financial reasons;

3. There is evidence that Aboriginal students are more likely to be single parents than non-Aboriginal students;
4. There are requests in mainstream institutions for more Aboriginal content in curriculum (e.g., Elders input, accurate Aboriginal history, aspects of traditional beliefs and values); and
5. There are requests for more student support (e.g., increased tutoring and individual attention) and for smaller classes.

This information points to the need for post-secondary institutions to enhance student support/retention related activities and for the development and inclusion of curriculum that better meets the needs and interests of Aboriginal students and their communities. If one takes into account high incidents of abuse and attempted suicide among Aboriginal communities, there is even a greater argument for student support mechanisms within educational institutions that are holistic and of a healing nature (RCAP, 1996). The need for emotional, spiritual, and physical healing and development in learning and through student services need to become indicators of post-secondary student success. Chapter Four examines holistic student services as a starting point of these types of success indicators.

### **3.7.6 First Nations Band Education Funding**

The education funding available to First Nations Bands, through the federal government, as mentioned above, continues to be a very serious economic barrier to post-secondary educational access and a yearly reality for NVIT as an institution that has a student population that is primarily Aboriginal and has a majority of First Nations (status) students. It is an understatement to say federal funding has not kept up with the increased costs of post-secondary education. For example a single mother with three children receives \$1,200.00 per month for living expenses. This amount is supposed to cover shelter, food, transportation, clothing and daycare (Bonaparte Indian Band Education Policy, 2008, p. 21). Rent in either Merritt or Vancouver is more than \$1,200 per month for a two/three bedroom apartment.

Provision of on-campus housing became a priority in 2006-07 as the result of the student-housing crisis (shortage of and high rent) in Merritt. With the financial assistance from the Ministry of Advanced Education, NVIT undertook the construction of a student housing project that opened in September 2007. The “72 room-80 student bed” complex adds significantly to Merritt’s ability to

house NVIT's students at affordable prices. This housing project and NVIT housing policy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

### **3.7.7 Program Relevance**

While it is necessary for NVIT to ensure its courses and programs are credited and transferable, this imperative should not be interpreted to mean that our programming must simply duplicate what exists in non-Aboriginal colleges and universities. In fact, were NVIT to do that we would not be true to our mandate as an Aboriginal institution nor to our mission? The story about the community discussions to determine the vision and values of NVIT reinforced the need for NVIT to address the holistic needs of Aboriginal communities through its programs and services. NVIT needs to continue to explore ways in which it can address the education and training needs of Aboriginal communities. We describe this objective in one of our mission outcomes: NVIT is committed to “a programming focuses on Aboriginal community development by emphasizing the social, economic, land and governance development themes” (NVIT Accountability Plan Report, 2010/11, p.8). This is an ongoing priority for the institution both in terms of new programs as well as in terms of updating existing programs and enhancing their relevance. This statement is lived in the life of the students, faculty, and staff at NVIT; it is not one that lives only in the institution's documents.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The problems and possibilities associated with Aboriginal people's struggle for self-determination and Indigenous controlled post-secondary institutions demonstrate that Indigenous Knowledge can shape these institutes' vision and values. The story of NVIT's geographical, economic, political, and historical origins demonstrates the persistence, commitment, and vision that Indigenous community leaders had and continue to have to ensure that NVIT lives its origin story.

Moving from a Private Post-Secondary Institution to a Public Post-Secondary Institution resulted in NVIT gaining more academic power to develop accredited programs and courses and having a stronger financial situation. However, NVIT also gave up some of its autonomy to offer some programs and to determine some of its Board governance. The provincial government became more involved in determining NVIT's accountability processes, such as student data collection and student

enrolment through its funding mechanisms. The funding issues discussed above, also show that it is difficult for NVIT to grow in ways that BC Indigenous communities need and want.

One important theme of the NVIT story presented in this contextual chapter is that Indigenous Knowledge or Eagle's Perch has maintained a central place in NVIT's vision, values, programmatic planning and delivery for over almost three decades. Chapter Four presents another part of the NVIT story to develop understandings of how students' learning has been shaped by Eagle's Perch.

## Chapter Four: Learning Approaches and Student Services

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the first major research question: How well has the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology addressed self-determining programming and student services in relation to:

1. Inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in programs and campus activities;
2. Instruction and program/course delivery;
3. Student academic, emotional, cultural, and financial issues; and
4. Elders' roles and responsibilities.

This question focuses on educational approaches, services, and people that influence students' post-secondary educational learning. The perspectives of the major NVIT stakeholders provide an overview of their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with how NVIT addresses the aforementioned learning-related components noted in the research question; how these components may have helped or hindered their program access and retention; and additional internal and external challenges that they experienced with these components.

This chapter emphasizes the voices of Indigenous students and alumni because they are the reason that NVIT exists and we need to know what matters to them in order to engage in institutional planning, policy development, and evaluation. Often, students do not feel empowered or important in these institutional matters. I acknowledge the limitations of the survey sampling process and that any results need to be interpreted cautiously. The survey is only one way to get feedback on learning related issues. Interview data from Elders, management, and Board of Governors is added to the students' opinions to show the inter-relatedness of the former groups' roles and responsibilities to student learning.

This chapter is structured so that first, a brief introduction to student and alumni survey participants is given that presents their age range, gender, family status, and educational level attained (for alumni). They were also asked why they became an NVIT student. Second, the survey and relevant interview responses are presented for each of the learning components mentioned above. Third, the findings are discussed in relation to Indigenous Knowledge and critical theory. Fourth, the chapter closes with some summary comments.

#### **4.1.1 Aboriginal Student Survey Participants**

Twelve students responded to the online survey. Seven of them were female and five were males. Three of the females were 23 years of age; the remaining four were between 25 to 28 years of age. The ages for the five males ranged from 23 to 32 years. Five of the females had one or two children. All 12 students were not married. A changing demographic student enrolment trend is starting to occur at NVIT. Five years ago the ages of both men and women taking programs and courses ranged from 25 to 40 years and most of them had more children and families. As indicated in Chapter Three, NVIT is beginning to receive some of the grade 12 students coming straight from high school or those who have been out of school for only a few years. The majority of the student respondents indicated that they became a student at NVIT to gain skills and knowledge so that they could get better jobs. Their reasons are different from those noted by alumni in the next section.

#### **4.1.2 Aboriginal Alumni Survey Participants**

Twenty-two alumni responded to the online survey. Nineteen of them were female and three were males. The females were 29-35 years of age. The ages for the two males ranged from 29-35 years and one man from 45-50 years of age. All of the women had one or two children. Some of the women were married or in other forms of relationships and the three men were not married. Most of the respondents had completed a Master's degree program; all of them are working with their bands, NVIT, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, or private and government agencies. The data shows that alumni respondents chose NVIT for the following reasons: the Indigenous content and Indigenous faculty; NVIT was close to their home and therefore they had their extended family systems to assist them; NVIT Elders played a part in their decision to attend because of the resemblance of family structure; and the lower tuition rates and lower cost of living in a smaller community such as Merritt.

The ages of the alumni survey participants were higher overall than the currently enrolled student survey participants. The age range of the students was 23-32 years of age; while the alumni age range was 29-50 years. The alumni were members of a specialized cohort program and the students were taking mainly university transfer courses. The students' major reasons for selecting NVIT focus more on education for career and labour market purposes and the alumni were more interested in programs and institutional supports for Indigenous content, Indigenous faculty and

Elders, and financial and social reasons. Once enrolled at NVIT, students are exposed to various forms of Indigenous content and approaches that are an important part of programs and courses.

#### **4.2 Aboriginal Knowledge and Curriculum**

NVIT, as a publicly funded post-secondary institution is subject to the same provincially prescribed academic standards for accredited university transfer courses and applied professional programs that were mentioned in the previous chapter. At the same time, the Aboriginal leadership that created NVIT was committed to placing Aboriginal culture, values, and knowledge in a central position in its programs and courses. Over the years, Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing have become stronger institutional components where academic courses such as English are focussed on Indigenous writers, and course pedagogy includes more experiential and inter-generational learning. Adhering to Western-based provincial and professional accreditation expectations and standards, as well as Aboriginal-based expectations and standards presents many challenges and opportunities for NVIT, which will be discussed later.

Indigenous scholar, Marie Battiste (2002) advocates a position in which Indigenous Knowledge is a natural part of a school or post-secondary core educational curriculum; thereby replacing its usual marginal positioning where Indigenous Knowledge is often treated as an 'add-on' or 'enhancement' to students' learning. At NVIT, Indigenous Knowledge (its epistemology and pedagogy) has become a natural part of programming that is often done through using Indigenous content and learning approaches such as experiential/project activities, case studies, storytelling, and intergenerational learning with Elders.

Survey respondents were asked how satisfied they were with regards to the inclusion of Aboriginal values and culture in curriculum design, books, instructional resources, campus festivities, orientation, and convocation. Naturalizing Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy should extend to all facets of a post-secondary institution, not just in academic programs; therefore campus activities were also rated. Respondents were also asked to identify courses that helped them to develop their cultural worldview and identity. Both student and alumni data are presented together in each of the

tables to show specific group responses and for comparative analysis. As shown in Table 4.1<sup>9</sup>, respondents had an extremely high satisfaction level (extremely and somewhat satisfied ranking) with 83.3% of students and 100% of alumni indicating this rating. Having an Aboriginal focus draws students to NVIT and helps them develop their cultural identity as mentioned in the following quotes:

I chose NVIT because of the First Nations focus; the instructors are responsive and experienced; they share [this knowledge] with students (Alumni).

I like the content, the books – didn't know my identity when I came here; that is why I came to find it, I did, I love it here (Student).

It is particularly noteworthy that no one gave a somewhat or extremely dissatisfied rating.

**Table 4.1: Percent Satisfaction of Inclusion of Aboriginal Values and Culture in Curriculum**

Question	S= Student A=Alumni	No.	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
NVIT's inclusion of Aboriginal Values and Culture in the curriculum design, in textbook, and other relevant resources	S	12	25.0	58.3	16.7	0.0	0.0
	A	21	61.9	38.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Aboriginal values and culture in relation to campus festivities, orientation and convocation seemed to be satisfactory adjustments and events for respondents. It is refreshing to note that respondents indicated they were somewhat to extremely satisfied with 83.4% students and 95.2% alumni choosing this rating (as shown in Table 4.1<sup>10</sup>).

Some of the activities that relate to Aboriginal values and culture at NVIT were:

1. The Elders host a welcome back tea and bannock for all students in September and January.
2. To foster the concept of 'family' Elders adopt students. This way the extended family is instituted, therefore, giving the Elder permission to address the student in a 'grandfather' or 'grandmother' mode.

<sup>9</sup> As noted there are three separate items identified in Table 4.1 each item on the question was originally identified in a separate table. Presenting every table would have been redundant because ratings were the same for each item; therefore the 'mean' for the three items was calculated and presented in Table 1.

<sup>10</sup> The mean was calculated for the three items in this table.

3. Elders are very much a part of the convocation at each graduation, they host 'leaving' sweats for both male and female students, and they lead the procession as part of cultural protocol into the convocation area. They say prayers, and the Elders' welcome address and the closing. In addition, they are present on the podium and give each student a graduation 'sash' and a 'medicine' pouch to assist them on their next journey.
4. Students host a 'powwow' and participate in community events such as Aboriginal day, the Aboriginal Business case completion, and support the "Trail of Tears" Women's Walk as well as other cultural events.

A student's response sums up an important impact of culture at NVIT: "For me, this is home away from home, I like the atmosphere, and NVIT is grounded in culture."

**Table 4.2: Percent Satisfaction with Inclusion of Aboriginal values and culture in Campus Festivities, Orientation, and Convocation**

Question	S=Student A=Alumni	No.	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
NVIT's linking of Aboriginal Culture into campus festivities, orientation/convocation and preparation at the beginning/end of each term	S	12	41.7	41.7	16.7	0.0	0.0
	A	20	52.4	42.9	0.0	4.8	0.0

Survey participants were asked to identify courses and programs that helped them develop their cultural worldview and identity. The courses that had the most responses included university transfer (UT) courses, which comprise the core of NVIT's Associate Degrees. The UT courses that were mentioned most by the two groups include Indigenous Studies, Sociology, Governance, History, Language, Political Science and Psychology. These courses taught by Indigenous instructors are infused with Indigenous content through the material used and through their pedagogy based on their and the students' lived experiences. Often, university transfer courses offered by public post-secondary institutions have little to no Indigenous content or they may have one or two Indigenous content courses, such as First Nations literature.

The programs that were mentioned include Social Work, Chemical Addictions Worker, Trauma and Addictions, Cultural Immersion, Public Administration, Business Administration, Natural

Resource Technology and the Native Adult Instructors' Diploma. These programs foster cultural worldview and identity because they are for Indigenous communities and designed in partnership with them. All the courses within these programs are infused with Aboriginal case studies, Aboriginal instructor experiences, student experiences, and books written by Indigenous authors. The programs also offer community connections and relevance through the practical placements. Learning through the lens of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous faculty, and Indigenous curriculum was valued:

There are other Indigenous students from across Canada; it makes it more interesting to hear about other places and [Indigenous] cultures (Student).  
Instructors believe in the [Indigenous] values of NVIT and they portray that through their courses (Student).

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal faculty play major roles in instilling student confidence; We hire academically competent people who understand Aboriginal culture and history (Management interview, November 29, 2009).

NVIT promotes Indigenous face in the academic world through Indigenous instructors, elders, design of curriculum, stories, and history together these promote Indigenous identity (Alumni).

#### 4.3 Instructional Approaches and Program/Course Delivery

NVIT management has made a concerted effort to hire well-qualified faculty and staff. All faculty members are expected to have knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture as part of their qualifications as indicated in this quote:

“I have a Bachelor in Indigenous Studies, a Master of Education, and the Native Adult Instructors Diploma. I wanted to teach and work at NVIT, so I made sure that I had the required credentials. The instructors here are all very qualified and believe in Aboriginal education” (Interviewee, November 29, 2010).

**Table 4.3: Historical Percentages of Aboriginal Employees**

	Fall 10	Spring 08	Spring 05	Spring 03	Spring 00	Fall 98
Employee Categories	# of Employees % Aboriginal					
Administration	16 – 56%	17 – 82%	15 – 87%	15 – 73%	11 – 82%	8 – 88%
Faculty	40 – 48%	40 – 48%	30 – 50%	25 – 44%	29 – 52%	43 – 49%
Support	21 – 76%	19 – 70%	14 – 93%	14 – 79%	15 – 93%	16 – 94%
Total	77 – 57%	76 – 63%	59 – 69%	54 – 61%	55 – 69%	67 – 64%

Source: NVIT Human Resources Department, November 30, 2011

In the last six years the percentages (See Table 4.3) of Aboriginal employees at NVIT has remained relatively the same. For instance in the fall of 1998 the overall Aboriginal employees at NVIT was 66%, in the Fall of 2010 the overall Aboriginal employees was 57% a difference of 9%. However, the average for Aboriginal Faculty is 48.83% over the same time period. Although the faculty has remained relatively the same over the last six years, the demand has increased in the form of student numbers and the number of programs that NVIT has. Although demand has increased the funding to add faculty has not increased. In order to naturalize Aboriginal Knowledge into academic programming, Aboriginal faculty have been hired to facilitate and promote empowering learning approaches through innovative teaching practices, and to be role models for the students. NVIT Deans and Directors who hire non-Aboriginal faculty expect them to include Aboriginal Knowledge in their courses.

Survey respondents were asked the question “how satisfied were you with the quality of teaching.” Table 4.4 indicates that the respondents had fairly high satisfaction levels (somewhat to extremely satisfied): 75% for students and 81% for alumni. Instructors who knew their subject, and who used experiential and interactive discussion learning strategies had a positive impact as indicated by the following quote:

I liked my instructors, they were knowledgeable, intelligent, and used their life experience to teach as examples. One instructor took us on field trips, which helped understand Joint Venturing and we went to economic development conferences and each day met as a class and discussed the day’s happenings (Alumni).

NVIT has been very fortunate in its high quality of Indigenous faculty, just recently (June 2010) one of the faculty members received the Gold Recipient of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges <sup>11</sup> Teaching Excellence Award. This award is given to an outstanding individual

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<sup>11</sup> The **Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC)** is the national, voluntary membership organization created in 1972 to represent colleges and institutes to government, business and industry, both in Canada and internationally. With an Ottawa-based Secretariat, ACCC interacts with federal departments and agencies on the members' behalf and links college capabilities to national industries. As another part of its mandate, ACCC organizes conferences and workshops for college staff, students and Board members to facilitate networking and participation in national and international activities such as sector studies, awards programs and linkages. (<http://www.accc.ca/english/about/>)

who has demonstrated global teaching experiences that invigorate, and address student success and retention.

**Table 4.4: Percent Satisfaction with Quality of teaching**

Question	S=Student A=Alumni	No.	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Extremely Dissatisfied
Level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching at NVIT	S	12	41.7	33.3	16.7	8.3	0.0
	A	21	42.9	38.1	14.3	0.0	4.8

Survey participants were asked to rate four instructional approaches that are often used by NVIT faculty: facilitating, consulting, directing, and advocating. These approaches are instructional styles commonly used by instructors teaching in universities or colleges. Some of the programs' instructional approaches are explicitly designed to match the nature of the program. Some of the instructional approaches are ones that I have observed or am aware that instructors use most often. Students and alumni were able to rate these four instructional approaches because they experienced them:

1. Facilitating approach: an instructor seeks and builds upon students' perspectives or views and spends time with students to work through assignments and other tasks. Faculty utilize this student-centered method in a majority of NVIT courses and programs; however the Social Work, Aboriginal Community Economic Development and First Nations Public Administration instructors tend to use this method more as it lends itself to the holistic approach of the Medicine Wheel and Circle Learning environment.
2. Consulting approach: provides an avenue for interaction and input between the instructor, student, and community members in developing the curricula. Instruction is grounded on contextual information and experiences of the student and community. NVIT's faculty also use this instructional method in many of its courses and programs, however the Developmental Standards Teacher Certification, Aboriginal Language courses and Indigenous Studies course instructors tend to use this method more as it lends itself to the inclusion of community based experts and Elders.
3. Directing approach: includes the standard lecture format where the instructor delivers information for consumption by the student. The university transfer courses such as sciences, health, math, psychology and Trades' courses utilize this method more as it is conducive to delivering standardized information to students.
4. Advocating approach: an instructor understands the students' academic, social, cultural, and educational background and uses this context as a starting place for

learning/instruction and demonstrates a caring manner until the student understands the content. The programs that utilize this method are the Law Enforcement Preparation Program, Criminal Justice, Chemical Addictions, Early Childhood Education, and the First Nations Speech and Language Assistant Program as well as several other courses.

In the very good category, 85.7% of the students favoured the directing approach, while 37.5% felt that the advocating approach was in this rating; compared to 47% of alumni who rated direct instruction as very good and 78.9% of alumni who rated advocacy as very good (See Table 4.5).

These four instructional approaches are not totally independent and sometimes instructors use them interchangeably in delivering their courses. These approaches provide some guidance to faculty, but they have much flexibility in carrying out their teaching approaches. For this question about instructional methods, the students and alumni wrote other comments that show the positive impact of caring instructors, smaller classes for individual attention, and the use of Aboriginal content and approaches.

Instructors spend time with me while I am doing my assignment, when I need direction or help they are there (Student)

Small classes, and access to instructors, I like the way everyone has time for you (Student).

The instructors challenged me to develop my own ideas (Alumni).

Instructors use Aboriginal case studies, stories, to illustrate key ideas to help me understand the content (Alumni).

In the ACED program my instructors mentored me to develop self-esteem and leadership, and how that helps me in my work and community (Alumni).

I am in the Chemical Addictions program and what I like is the way the instructors use Aboriginal methods like the medicine wheel, the circle, group work and presentations to teach the content. I like that I can practice my identity and feel good and am encouraged (Student).

**Table 4.5: Percent Satisfaction with Teaching Approaches**

Styles of Teaching							
	S=Student A=Alumni	Number	Excellent	Very Good	Adequate	Poor	Very Poor
Facilitating	S	12	0.0	66.7	33.3	00.0	00.0
	A	20	5.9	94.1	0.0	00.0	00.0
Consulting	S	12	14.3	42.9	42.9	00.0	00.0
	A	20	6.3	68.8	25.0	00.0	00.0
Directing	S	12	0.0	85.7	14.9	00.0	00.0
	A	20	42.1	47.4	25.0	00.0	00.0
Advocating	S	12	0.0	37.5	62.5	00.0	00.0
	A	20	15.8	78.9	5.3	00.0	00.0

**4.4 Aboriginal Alumni Cohort Responses**

This section focuses on alumni who experienced cohort learning. This learning approach has become an important program model at NVIT. As a small institution most NVIT programs lend themselves to the cohort model. The students who enter into a program tend to remain together until completion. Often, cohort programs are offered in communities. The only students who are not attached to a cohort structure are those who are in University Transfer programs and courses and are planning to transfer to another public post-secondary institution.

The Chemical Addictions program uses a cohort model. It is designed to grant access to individuals who are working in this field and who want and need more professional development. The students (15-25) per cohort start and complete the three-year program together. In 2010-11, there were six cohorts operating in this program: Years, 1, 2 and 3 which have a cohort in each year at each location (one in Merritt and one in Burnaby). The student selects a location based on their geographical location or in some instances travel destinations (like airports) that meet their needs. The courses are delivered on a one-week per month basis and in the third month of each semester all three cohorts are scheduled to be on each campus. This method allows for all the cohort based students to interact and build their network systems within the three cohorts at each campus. The students move from the certificate, diploma and advanced diploma as a unit. The benefits of a cohort model are: (1) students build networks; (2) students can work while attending school; (3) students

develop team building skills; and (4) students share their learning and practical experiences with their group members.

The cohort participants comprised the alumni respondents to the survey. They were two different groups made up of (15) students each, a total of 30 students. The first group of 15 began the Aboriginal Community Economic Development General Studies program in 2002 as a cohort and out of the 15 students, 100% graduated within four years with their Simon Fraser University General Studies degrees. The second cohort made up of 15 students began in 2005 and completed in 2007: of the 15 students, 4 graduated. The first cohort was a successful group that NVIT takes pride from. Because the first cohort was so successful, I wanted to explore factors that facilitated their success. Alumni respondents are from both cohorts and some other programs, but the majority are from the successful cohort. Alumni were asked to comment on the nature of their group dynamics, support mechanisms that they received, and how they as a group demonstrated their Aboriginal identity.

#### ***4.4.1 Group Dynamics***

The cohort learning model at NVIT created a learning environment where students felt comfortable with each other and where they formed an extended family approach for helping one another as needed. The development of the NVIT cohort model began with two First Nations communities. One was in the rural north and the other in the central interior of British Columbia. The communities wanted to train Community Economic Development Officers (CEDO's) but the students did not want to leave their communities and jobs to attend school. NVIT was asked to develop a model that would allow for students to do both. The model was developed to deliver courses in the communities one week per month using instructors in a face to face course delivery method. NVIT hired instructors with expertise in the field of Community Economic Development and these instructors travelled to the two locations for one week each month for 18 months. The Aboriginal Community Economic Development (ACED) program is a diploma, which consists of 20 courses. After the students completed their diplomas, they wanted to obtain a degree in ACED.

However, the students from the two locations did not want to break up their cohorts and did not want to attend university in an urban environment such as Vancouver, Prince George or Kelowna.

NVIT's task was to design a partnership that would allow the students to attend in the same manner as the diploma program delivery. NVIT approached the Continuing Education department of Simon Fraser University (SFU) to see if there was a possibility of achieving this request. During the four months of negotiation with SFU a process was designed using their existing on-line courses, but they would be taught in a face to face delivery method at the Merritt NVIT campus.

The interesting part of this model was the amalgamation of the two cohorts into one – to be at the Merritt campus. From the 15 students in the rural north seven came to campus for the degree program, of the 15 students in the central interior, eight came to campus for the degree. The students had to do three additional qualifying courses to allow them to enter into the degree. The courses were six credits of English and three credits of Math. These courses were delivered in a summer intersession for the 15 students. The intersession was a time when the cohorts had to come together as a new cohort. They began their joint degree program in September 2002.

Part of the negotiation with SFU was to ensure that NVIT could hire and utilize their own faculty to instruct the courses. The case was made that NVIT faculty had the subject area expertise. The only SFU instructor hired was a leading Indigenous instructor in CED. The faculty had an opportunity to teach at a university level and the students benefited because they had the instruction from Indigenous faculty who were able to relate to students' contextual backgrounds and at the same time, bring Aboriginal experiences, case studies, text and mentorship into the course content and instructional methods.

Cohort respondents shared the following comments that describe the positive outcomes of the cohort learning approach:

[the] learning environment allowed us to learn individually as well as in a group setting, We attained our diplomas together and therefore we learned from our individual and common experiences.

The cohort group support was important because it helped to bring all the students together and you get to interact with other students and understand more of the class work and assignments.

Learning from several people as compared to just one, enriches everyone's' self-esteem. It brought our class together. We started out as individuals and left as a family, still we continue to interact and help one another despite the fact we are all walking in our different pathways, we are still in contact (Cohort participants).

An important facet of the NVIT cohort model includes providing support services, which will be discussed in a subsequent section. However, respondents indicated that they valued these approaches that helped them develop learning relationships with each other: forming study groups, and getting to know each other through problem-solving activities and fundraising for social activities. They also appreciated the tutoring that they received. Cohorts do not necessarily learn to work together effectively unless some mentorship or leadership is provided. In several of the courses the students had to do experiential learning as part of their academic study. When a course required an experiential component the instructors worked with the student and the community of their choice to develop meaningful projects. For example, in a Community Analysis course the instructor worked with the students to develop a survey with their community, the community's Economic Development Officer worked with the students to carry out the exercise and the instructor assisted in writing up the analysis. The students then presented their research and findings to the community and Chief and Council. This was a way to keep the students connected to their community and be seen as an asset rather than a threat gained from their education.

To assist the students in gaining experience and practicing their programmatic skills NVIT staff and management helped to raise funds for the cohort to attend and present at national conferences. The students attended three conferences, one in Whitehorse, Yukon; Yellowknife, North West Territories; and Edmonton, Alberta. Six were also selected to attend a conference in Fredericton, New Brunswick. NVIT created a baseline budget to cover all the costs of these conferences because they felt it was important for the students to have national exposure in their field of choice. Respondents appreciated receiving mentorship and services from family members, NVIT Elders, and community/organizational networks as indicated in the following quote:

Our families were there for us, prepared dinners, took care of [the] kids while [we] were doing assignments. Elders were great; they counselled us when we had problems and we had the opportunity to network with other institutions, Aboriginal organizations and communities (Cohort participant).

#### **4.5 Facilitating Individual and Group Aboriginal Identity**

The students in the cohort came from the following 12 First Nations: Bonaparte, Lower Nicola, Upper Nicola, Mount Curry, Spullmacheen, Stolo, Williams Lake, Gitwangak, Kitwanga,

Gitamaxx, Kispiox, Gitsxigula. Even though they are members of these First Nations, some have lived in urban areas, off-reserve. Those who come directly from Aboriginal communities tend to have stronger cultural values and identity, and then those who tend to come from urban settings. Some cohort members had a very staunch standpoint in pronouncing themselves as Aboriginal, which encouraged those who were not sure of their cultural identity to develop their Aboriginal identities. All of the students identified themselves based on the Aboriginal community they came from, which is a common Aboriginal protocol used in introductions. During the cohort program, the students built a strong group identity by sharing their critical knowledge and understandings gained through their course work. This group identity emphasized their Aboriginality. Often Aboriginal students in mainstream institutions feel isolated and they don't have a strong group with which to identify (Archibald et al, 1995; Pidegon, 2008). This statement sums up the impact of a strong Aboriginal group identity:

We were proud to be Aboriginals, together; we attended Aboriginal conferences, representing NVIT. We presented papers about issues and problems confronting the socio-economic, culture, history, residential schooling and colonialism and we were proud to do so. We shared stories, traditions and ceremonies and the pain our ancestor's endured (Cohort participant).

Being part of a cohort group not only provided students an opportunity to learn and study and meet other students; it also provided a support structure that challenged students to be accountable to the goals they set for themselves during cohort meetings. It is clear from the comments cited above that students were motivated to work together and they supported each other by sharing ideas, work, and commitment to be successful. The next section highlights other student services that NVIT provides for students to become successful in their education.

#### **4.6 Holistic Student Services**

Survey respondents were asked to rate a set of holistic student services that address spiritual/cultural, emotional, and physical support, such as housing, counselling, childcare, job preparation, cultural interaction, financial aid/funding support, Elders' support, and community support (see Table 4.6). Compared to respondents' ratings for previous topics, there were higher ratings in

the neither satisfied nor dissatisfied category for the range of holistic student services. I interpret this category as having some ambivalence about the topic that prevented the respondent from choosing a satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating. Students gave a higher rating of “neither satisfied”, “nor dissatisfied”, for counselling (80%), housing (54.5%), community support (54.5%), and job preparation (50%); while alumni had a higher ambivalent rating for childcare.

With respect to counselling, contributing factors for this rating maybe that students were not aware that NVIT has counselling services on both campuses. Each campus has access to professional counselling including the Elders.

Some contributing factors that may have influenced respondents' rating for housing services include: 1) NVIT had an agreement with the Conayte Friendship Centre Housing Society in Merritt that gave priority housing to NVIT students with families; 2) The alumni who rated housing at 55% (extremely satisfied) were within an average age of 30-45, single mothers/fathers with children who qualified for subsidized housing; and 3) NVIT's student population largely came from the surrounding First Nations communities and commuted; therefore, they did not use NVIT's housing services. Conayte changed their housing policy that negatively affected the housing priority for students and subsequently created a housing crisis for NVIT for the students who needed these services.

Over one-half (54.5%) of the students were ambivalent about Community Support, compared to over one-half of the alumni who rated this area as extremely satisfied (55%). An assumption for alumni satisfaction is that they were in cohort programs that included community based projects that allowed for community interaction, participation, and support. Whereas, the students did not have extensive community interaction in the wider variety of university transfer courses offered at NVIT.

For job preparation, students may not have sufficient information and knowledge with which to evaluate this area because they have not completed their programs. Alumni indicated fairly positive satisfaction (66.6% somewhat to extremely satisfied).

Childcare was the one area that alumni had a higher ambivalent rating of 72.2% compared to students with 54.5%. However, this service had very dissatisfied ratings from both groups. Childcare was not available at NVIT, other childcare facilities are very expensive and the locations are away from the campus, thus making travel to and from those centers difficult for students.

Cultural interaction services were rated quite high by both groups (between 74 – 94% for satisfied ratings). Cultural interaction at NVIT means practicing the culture within the institution to support students in various ways. One major example involves Elders teaching students how to preserve traditional food, starting with gathering the food (hunting, fishing, and gathering ceremonial plants and vegetables from the community garden) for freezing and canning purposes. In addition, the Elders have organized a traditional food bank. The food gathered is left in freezers and in the pantry at NVIT. If students need food during the year they go to the Elders to receive what they need. Besides the traditional food bank, the Elders also organize a clothing bank. The clothing bank is for students and their families should they require it. The Elders' services are the embodiment of spiritual practice such as prayers, smudging, healing circles and the celebration of successes.

In terms of Elder services, the alumni's rating was higher at 60% (extremely satisfied) while the students' rating was 33.3%. During the time when the alumni were students, the Elders' Council was intact and staffed with four Elders who were part-time and who had rotating schedules. However, in a very short period NVIT lost four of the founding Elders, which left only two available to fill this role. NVIT at this point decided to take a year and reorganize and populate the Elders' Council. The student respondents did not receive as much service and attention from Elders as did the Alumni.

**Table 4.6: Percent Satisfaction with NVIT Student Services**

Item	S= Student A= Alumni	No.	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Housing	S	11	27.3	9.1	54.5	00.0	9.1
	A	21	55.0	15.0	30.0	00.0	00.0
Counselling	S	11	8.3	33.3	80.0	00.0	10.0
	A	21	16.7	33.2	38.9	5.6	5.6
Childcare	S	11	00.0	10.0	54.5	00.0	9.1
	A	21	6.0	9.8	72.2	6.4	5.6
Job Preparation	S	11	33.3	16.7	50.0	00.0	00.0
	A	21	47.6	19.0	28.6	00.0	4.8
Cultural Interaction	S	11	41.7	33.3	16.7	8.3	00.0
	A	21	66.7	28.6	4.7	00.0	00.0
Financial Aid/Funding Support	S	11	41.7	8.3	25.0	25.0	00.0
	A	21	42.1	36.8	21.1	00.0	0.0
Elders Support	S	11	33.3	33.3	25.0	8.3	00.0
	A	21	60.0	19.0	16.0	5.0	00.0
Community Support	S	11	18.2	9.1	54.5	9.1	9.1
	A	21	55.0	25.0	20.0	00.0	00.0

As important as it was to learn about the satisfaction of students and alumni about services, it is also important to understand the Elders' roles and responsibilities at NVIT. The next section examines this area.

#### **4.7 Elders' Multi-Faceted Roles and Responsibilities**

When I was asked to be an NVIT Elder, I was not sure what to expect. Now after five years I am looked at as important in my community. I am asked by other Elders how to become an NVIT Elder. For me it is important because I am a role model for other Elders and students. I am seen as having knowledge and presence. I attend Board meetings, go to conferences and even present at conferences with NVIT staff. My community is proud of me, they ask me to be on their committees and they ask my advice. I think I gained this by being an NVIT Elder-I am proud to be considered an Elder (Elder's interview, September 14, 2010).

The NVIT Elders take on many roles, some of them teach traditional crafts, music and stories; others become mentors and counsel students during difficulties. Most importantly, Elders are the link between the institution, the family and the community. Their multi-faceted roles become important for NVIT regarding student retention and addressing some of the post-secondary education access and

success barriers that Aboriginal students face. As shown in Table 4.7, 66.6% of students and 91.6% of alumni are somewhat to extremely satisfied with the role of Elders at NVIT, indicating that they are valued by NVIT’s learners.

**Table 4.7 Percent Satisfaction with the Elders’ Roles**

	S=Student A=Alumni	Extremely Satisfied.	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied
S	12	33.3%	33.3%	25.2%	8.2%
A	21	58.3%	33.3%	8.4%	00.0%

The Elders fulfill an important extended family role such as grandparents for the students while they are away from their families, parents and community as indicated in the following quote:

I am here for the students, they are my first priority. Whatever they need I try to help them. Sometimes they need money in an emergency, or food, or clothing or sometimes just a shoulder to lean on, that’s what the Elders help with. It is why we like to come to work, to be with the students, they are all our children (Elder interview, September 14, 2010).

The Elders are good listeners, compassionate, understanding, and supportive to students. These are some of the important gifts that Elders share. They also pass on cultural lessons through storytelling, talks, drumming, and singing. Most importantly they create a sense of family for the students. They help students through key transitions points. For example, during graduation the Elders and students engage in “the sweat lodge ceremony to assist the grads in their transition and that’s a very welcome opportunity for students to get closure after completing their education experience at NVIT” (Management Interviewee, September 6, 2010).

During the interviews with the NVIT Elders, they were asked questions about their length of time on the Elders’ Council, their roles and responsibilities, and how their roles influence academic, socio-cultural and financial practices, Aboriginal identity, as well as challenges they confront in their roles.

The Elders stated that they work with students in various ways; some of those ways are traditional teachings, and storytelling. The Elders stated that an important part of their responsibility

is to provide support to both the students and instructors during the students' classes because NVIT classes are not

fly in, fly out, you go in and your instructor talks and you listen. The Elders can go in to the classroom and just listen or just see what's going on and provide help if the instructor or student need them. What we have been doing is letting students know that we were still around to give a helping hand (interview, September 14, 2010).

From the Elders' perspectives, "the inclusions of cultural practices are integral to the academic experience for students and keep them strong in their studies" (interview, September 14, 2010). Their participation in classes demonstrates their commitment to students' learning about and from Indigenous Knowledge. The important role of Aboriginal culture and values in curriculum, and teaching was evident from Elders' responses. One of the Elder stated:

Yes I do believe NVIT is unique in that regard because many courses are taught by Indigenous instructors and it goes without saying that they have the ability to relate in different forms of methodologies, worldviews than they have in regular institutes or colleges. So I believe that the Aboriginal identity at NVIT is strengthened and certainly there are languages being taught here as well and there are lot of different cultural practices and cultural orientations taking place (Elder interview, May, 19, 2010).

Another role for Elders includes approving emergency financial assistance, and teaching financial literacy to students. The Elders stated that they assist students in need and they are able to advance emergency funds in vouchers to students for bus tickets, food and clothing. The Elders teach students how to prepare basic weekly financial budgeting, so that they can use their money wisely.

#### **4.7.1 Elders' Council**

The background to and the role of the Elders' Council were discussed during the interviews with Elders and management representatives. According to the two Elders interviewed, the Elders' Council started in 1983 at Merritt long before the new NVIT campus was built. The Elders' Role has evolved over the years from a group of 'old people' who had little involvement to a very organized, structured, and active group of 20. The Elders offer guidance to our students, faculty and sit on job interview committees, ensure that official protocol is in place when there are visitors, ceremonies, graduations, awards, and special presentations. They ensure that the campuses are smudged, there is tobacco given to the speakers, gifts are on hand, prayers are said, the honouring of visitors,

students, staff, faculty, management and Board of Governors is always in place. They ensure cultural safety and traditional customs are maintained. In addition they continually provide students and staff with daily guidance, advice and support, the Council conducts weekly smudging and prayer circles, and is involved in planning; such as the NVIT Graduation Ceremony, Awards Ceremony, dignitaries visits, and student requests (when required). The Elders are the grandparents, ambassadors and keepers of medicine (their motto) of NVIT. Some of their direct work with NIVT is entrenched in their policy. For example the Elders would: 1) establish a cultural scholarship outlining the criteria for application; 2) Institute the Nlekepmxcin, Nsilxcn, and Secwepemc languages into the NVIT quality of life by visual use of the languages for the naming of rooms, doors, objects and items throughout NVIT; 3) provide leadership and direction for all ceremonial and cultural practices; 4) teach through the Medicine Wheel; 5) participate on curriculum development teams; 6) be an ex-officio at the Education Council meetings; 7) discipline or remove an Elder from within the Elders' Council should it be necessary; and 8) engage in professional development training as defined by the Elders council.

An Elder highlights their role:

We have had 20 Elders, one passed away so now we are left with 19. We work in pairs, Monday through Thursday, and we alternate every week to provide students the opportunity to work with all the Elders before they leave NVIT. Administratively, the Vice President of Academic and Partnership Development is responsible for the entire Elder program. The departmental secretaries provide support for the Elders and have been pivotal in helping us navigate our way through the NVIT system. We have Elders' Council meetings once a month. As far as I know there is an ex-officio seat at the Board of Governors for Elders and then there are two designates who are invited to all the meetings and discussions that pertain to the business of NVIT. We go when we are invited. There are five bands for example, when a Board of Governors' meeting is being held at Lower Nicola Band, Elders from Lower Nicola will be invited to discuss some of our plans and also we hear their news and ideas. The same format applies to the rest of the four bands (Elder interview, September 14, 2010).

The Elders' Council has been involved with policy and institutional development such as setting the vision, mission, values and goals of NVIT.

*I have been an Elder in Residence at NVIT for six years now. I was asked to be an Elder when the campus in Vancouver came to be. I like being an Elder here because I have lots to do. Not just make crafts or be the person who says the prayer. I get to go to meetings and advise sometimes, I have helped build programs for the school, I now teach in one of the programs here. I was very instrumental in developing and setting entrance requirements for our program. I think that is very progressive. Other schools would not do that. When we were defining the policy for this one in particular program, I was with two other Elders (they*

*would not admit to being an Elder though), so the three of us Elders sat down with two of the staff and hammered out what the requirements for students were, how would we admit them, the level of education an instructor had, plus whether or not that instructor was right for the program and what the course content of the program would be. It was a lot of work but lots of fun too. I enjoyed the time I had as an Elder, but I am now an instructor. (Elder Interviewee, November 29, 2011).*

Commenting on the success of the Elders' Council, the managers emphasized the positive impact of student-focussed support:

I find the Elders that are at NVIT [are] working towards the goodwill of students and staff. Elders are willing to share what they know... I think its six years now that I have been working with the Elders and I am happy about the many supports they have put in place such as the food and clothing bank services and the students are benefiting a lot (Management interview, November 20, 2009).

Elders at NVIT provide a host of supports for the four realms of the Medicine Wheel that includes; emotional, physical, spiritual and mental support for students at NVIT (Management interview, November 29, 2009).

Despite all the roles identified above there are still tensions and challenges between the Elders' role and that of Management, for example: there was a conflict between the Elders and the President regarding visiting dignitaries and who receives them first. This is an issue of protocol which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Section 2.

## **4.8 Discussion**

The Aboriginal students' learning pathways and experiences at NVIT can be told from two perspectives. One perspective is based on NVIT student, alumni, Elders', and leaders' opinions about the quality of NVIT students' learning experiences and student services, which formed the focus of inquiry for this chapter. Another perspective is my understandings that I gained from conducting the surveys and the interviews, examining the institutional documents, and reflecting on my many years of leadership experiences at NVIT, which I will also share in this discussion section.

### **4.8.1 Indigenous Knowledge, Learning, and Student Services**

The inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in learning frameworks that include curricula and pedagogy and in student services continues to be advocated for post-secondary education (Archibald & Williams, 2007; Evans, McDonald, & Nyce, 1999; CCL CCA, 2007; Pidgeon, 2008; RCAP, 1996).

However, the literature on Aboriginal post-secondary education also indicates on-going challenges to including Indigenous Knowledge in learning approaches, curriculum, student services, policies, and programs in meaningful ways (Malatest, 2004; Mendelson 2006, FNEESC 2008; RCAP, 1996). One common challenge is that IK may be found in post-secondary programs and student services that are specifically for Aboriginal people, but often IK is not found in core post-secondary education courses (Pidgeon, 2008). Indigenous scholar, Dr. Richard Atleo (Umeek of Ahousat), (2005) believes that education is “a process of cultural reification” (p. 18) and that survival of Aboriginal culture occurs through cultural transmission, therefore, there is a need for post-secondary institutions, especially Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, to defy ethnocentric approaches by instituting Aboriginal knowledge, worldviews, and values firmly into all facets of education.

Taking up Atleo’s challenge is often difficult and problematic in mainstream institutions where cultural reification/hegemony is often Eurocentric; Aboriginal learners are in the minority; and the majority population and university leadership do not believe in the value of Aboriginal Knowledge for the benefit of all students; or if they do Aboriginal Knowledge is relegated to elective courses and not core programmatic courses. The important point is that the power to determine the location and value ascribed to IK is under the purview of institutional leadership and those who control administrative structures and processes (Gramsci, 1971).

In private Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, embedding Aboriginal Knowledge may be enacted more easily because Aboriginal leadership believe in the need and benefit for such knowledge and they have the decision-making or self-determining power to naturalize IK in their learning system. However, these institutions have their own particular challenges, such as funding and transferability, which are outside of the scope of my study.

The focus on NVIT in this chapter is as a publicly funded and accredited post-secondary institution. As mentioned in this Chapter Three, NVIT has two ‘masters’: one is the provincial government who provides the majority of its funding and accredits it and the other master are Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal communities that request NVIT’s educational services. Most fundamentally, NVIT is an Aboriginal institution that was founded by First Nations community-based leaders and it continues to be governed by Aboriginal people; therefore, the needs and interests of

Aboriginal communities often over-ride the province's hold, which helps NVIT continue to enact its self-determining purpose. In my academic leadership role, I am constantly negotiating and balancing the needs, policies, tensions, and possibilities of these two 'masters.' Developing and offering learning programs and student services that address students' social, financial and academic issues and that facilitate student success is the driving motivational force that sustains me.

#### ***4.8.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Learning***

At NVIT a concerted effort is made to ensure that physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual learning needs are addressed in learning programs, student services, and Elders' mentorship in a manner that is inter-related and inter-generational, which reflect some basic tenets of Indigenous Knowledge systems, Brown (2004) states that paying attention to the affective domain fosters a movement towards healing from the impact of colonization and which then enhances learning. Many of our students and their families are impacted, intergenerationally, by the Residential School era and other imposed forces of colonization such as legislation that banned cultural ceremonies (Ing, 1991; RCAP, 1996). We need to ensure that these colonial impacts are addressed in some way so that students understand the origins, processes, and power dynamics of colonization in order to become conscientized (Freire, 1970; G. Smith, 1997) to resist new forms of mainstream colonization. Including material about Residential Schools, discussing its colonizing intergenerational influence, and ways to "heal" and become emancipated from its detrimental effects can be liberating for students. Returning to Indigenous traditional teachings/philosophy is another important decolonizing approach for education (Battiste, 2000; L.T. Smith, 1999).

The cohort learning approach provides both consciousness raising and IK based experiences. The NVIT cohort approach meets some of the IK elements or standards advocated by Eber Hampton (1988): spirituality through relationships; service to the community through practical and projects; respect for cultural diversity; knowing history; pride in sense of place; and the development of a transformative political and social agenda. The faculty also have an expectation to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving, and contextually relevant learning in their instruction and student mentorship (Hampton, 1988).

The results of the NVIT student and alumni surveys demonstrated that they were very satisfied with the learning approaches and student services offered by NVIT. However, I think new research could be conducted with students and alumni to ask them to share stories of their challenges and successes that they experienced during their learning processes in order to attain a deeper understanding about the influence and challenges of critical education and IK on them.

#### ***4.8.3 Indigenous Knowledge and Holistic Student Services***

Student support services offered at NVIT include: academic, career, social and financial counselling; cultural and spiritual teachings; peer support; Elder support; student housing; and assistance in accessing community organizations such as childcare, transportation and other social programs. These services helped to establish a caring extended family environment. The extended family is an important cultural form of support that can also challenge its members to carry out their responsibilities. The feedback received from the students and alumni showed their appreciation of the extended family network and the varied student services that helped them succeed and that made them feel like they are valued; instead of feeling like they are failures. We have implemented success teams comprised of peer support and instructor expertise where students experiencing major challenges are identified as early as possible. The success team, working with the student, develops a success plan focused on the specific student's needs. In an extended family environment, students cannot isolate themselves when they are having difficulties.

The creation of student centered support mechanisms have certainly contributed to the retention and success rate of students. The experience of Aboriginal students at NVIT has been influenced by a number of unique factors, such as Elder mentorship, cultural ceremonies and practices, and extended family relationships. Similarly, research findings by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (2008), Archibald et al., (1995), Pidgeon (1995), and Ball (2001) identified most of the support services cited by NVIT students as important services that can facilitate their success and retention. An important distinction is that the aforementioned studies recommend the inclusion of such student services because they often are not fully offered in mainstream institutions, whereas NVIT offers them as standard services.

#### ***4.8.4 Indigenous Knowledge through Elders' Roles and Responsibilities***

The roles of Elders were identified as very important for NVIT students. For years NVIT has developed a successful "Elder" program, where their leadership and teachings have mentored students to move them through phases of survival within a post-secondary system, recovery of cultural teachings, and development of self-determination for their future educational and career pathways. Research findings by Simpson (2002), Stone Child (2006), Evans, et al., (1999), and Preston (2008) have suggested that Elders' contribute significantly towards Aboriginal education. They act as Aboriginal role models to enhance students' understanding of Aboriginal peoples, traditional ways of learning, values, culture and mentorship. The Elders at NVIT are like the Eagle where they use their IK, lived experience, and wisdom to challenge those who study and work at NVIT to achieve to the highest of their potential. They exemplify characteristics of "power, strength, vision, fierceness, innovation, spirituality, protection and knowledge" that Elder May attributes to the Eagle's Perch in Chapter Two. We are fortunate that the Elders continue to work within NVIT despite the challenges of limited funding that they receive and the heavy demands placed upon them. I believe that we need to develop stronger institutional mechanisms that ensure the Elders have financial and other necessary supports to ensure they are not overworked and that they continue to have an influential role in policy development.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has emphasized the perspectives of NVIT students and alumni in response to how well it addresses self-determining programming and student services in relation to including Indigenous Knowledge in programs and campus activities; instruction and program/course delivery; student academic, emotional, cultural, and financial issues; and Elders' roles and responsibilities. Their feedback was very positive. I believe that a key factor to their high level of satisfaction is the central role that Indigenous Knowledge has played in learning programs and student services through epistemology and pedagogy that is (1) holistic in nature to address the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual facets of our human development; (2) focussed on caring relationships; and (3) based on Indigenous values of respect and responsibility. IK is much more than a "pocket of presence"

(Pidgeon, 2008) at NVIT; it guides and shapes its education and student services. IK approaches play a very influential role in helping students understand the cultural, academic, and social strength that they receive, to help them realize their self-determining nature.

The cohort learning approach and the Elders' mentorship are important findings in relation to the thesis question posed in this chapter. Staying connected to community and culture occurs when the programs are delivered at the community and when cohort members practice the extended family concept of cooperation, responsibility, and caring. The Elders' voices and perspectives demonstrate the commitment they have to creating a family-like learning and social/cultural environment to facilitate student retention and success. The meaning of the Eagle's Perch (nest) is reinforced through these IK related innovations that create a safe learning home for students.

## Chapter Five: Policy and Leadership Practices

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the two remaining major research questions: How does NVIT, in its role as an Indigenous post-secondary institution, ensure that its governance, learning, and student service policies are culturally grounded and that they address students' academic, financial, social, and cultural issues? What makes NVIT's approaches to policy relevant to and effective for its students, alumni, leadership, and Elders? I used mainly interview data from NVIT management and Elders and my reflections to examine these two research questions. In analyzing the interview responses for common themes, I found that participants spoke about principles, considerations, contextual factors, challenges, and successes that occurred and influenced various phases of policy planning, development, and implementation. Participants' responses emphasized the importance of their decision-making engagement with policy in order to resist external and internal hegemonic forces so that Indigenous Knowledge maintained a central place for guiding various policies.

In this first section, policies and policy priorities that support students' learning are discussed, which include services such as admission and housing, hiring faculty, offering programs that develop Aboriginal identity, language, and culture, and providing community-based and community responsive programs.

These policy-focussed questions and analysis maintain the emphasis on Aboriginal student learning and student services; they connect policy and practice to Aboriginal community education, social, health, and economic needs; and they identify ways that policy and leadership are guided by Indigenous Knowledge systems, self-determining approaches, and action that is anti-hegemonic.

## 5.2 Policy for Housing and Admissions

The housing program is not administered by NVIT; However; NVIT does determine housing priority such as families and those from northern or remote areas have first access. At this point in time a formal housing access policy does not exist because the student housing is not used to its maximum and therefore not an issue of accessibility. The student residence is contracted to a residential management company (Campus Living Centres-CLC); CLC administers the housing/residence through a Joint Operations Committee (JOC) which consists of the Director of Student Services, Manager of Facilities, two CLC representatives and NVIT Elders. This committee addresses all aspects related to housing/residence including grievances, evictions, discipline and activities. For example, if a student is found to be in conflict with the residential policies then a committee meeting is convened and the outcome is the development of a behavioural contract that outlines the student's roles and responsibilities that must be followed in order for the student to maintain her/his residence. NVIT does develop the policies that are administered through CLC such as the no tolerance drug and alcohol policy. Drug and alcohol abuse are part of the colonial outcomes of educational policies that denied Indigenous people access to and practice of their cultures, languages, and values in Western based educational systems. Today, in many cultural gatherings, drugs and alcohol are prohibited because they were not part of traditional culture and they have had and continue to have devastating effects upon Indigenous people. I think of this policy ban on drugs and alcohol is a form of resistance to colonization and a return to Indigenous Knowledge teachings of living a good life. It is NVIT's commitment to the families of students attending the institution that an expectation is to provide clean, safe living for their family member. Once the family member resides at NVIT housing/residence then it is NVIT's responsibility to take care of them. One way is to provide a drug and alcohol free campus.

Students and alumni respondents were asked to rate their levels of satisfaction with housing and admission policies at NVIT. Table 5.1 shows that for housing policy 36.4% of students and 95% of alumni were somewhat to extremely satisfied, and 54.5% of students and 5% of alumni were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In terms of admission policy 91.7% of students and 91.5% of alumni

were somewhat to extremely satisfied with admission policy, while 8.3% of students and 8.5% of alumni were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with admission policy.

The lower ratings for students regarding housing could be contributed to the fact that housing located at the NVIT Merritt campus has only been in existence for two years during the period of my research. There appears to be more ambivalence about the satisfaction levels of students. Students did not give additional responses to this question. It is an area that could be examined in future research. The higher levels of alumni satisfaction may be attributed to the Aboriginal housing available in Merritt, which was discussed in Chapter Four.

The higher levels of satisfaction for admission policies may be attributed to the increase in NVIT's community based programs. Admission policies take into account broader based admissions criteria such as prior learning through work experience and leadership, which increases access to post-secondary education for many who do not have an academic grade 12 graduation certificate.

**Table 5.1: Percent Satisfaction with Housing and Admission Polices at NVIT**

Item	S=Student A=Alumni	No.	Extremely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Satisfied
Housing	S	12	27.3	9.1	54.5	0.0	9.1
	A	22	25.0	70.0	5.0	0.0	
Admission	S	12	33.3	58.4	8.3	0.0	0.0
	A	22	31.5	60.0	8.5	0.0	0.0

### 5.3 Policy for Faculty Hiring

The students and alumni respondents stated that the policy priority for hiring faculty and staff is very crucial to the success at NVIT studies. In Chapter Four, students and alumni responses indicated that they valued the mentorship and effective teaching of Indigenous faculty. NVIT's policy is to hire faculty with a minimum of a master's degree, and at times this policy poses several challenges, because few Aboriginal people apply to these positions. Some of the hiring challenges with each campus are:

- 1) Merritt Campus and its geographic location. Merritt is in the central interior of British Columbia. It is a small town of about 9,000 people. However, the Coquihalla Highway is the major thoroughfare to Vancouver, Kelowna, Prince George and points in between and beyond. The salaries are not conducive for individuals to uproot families and move to Merritt. The ability to move within the institution is limited. We are not a research designated institute, which limits NVIT from attracting faculty who want an academic career that includes research.
- 2) Burnaby Campus; although geographically it is in a strong position to target potential employees, the same issues as above remain. The institution is still growing and building and does not have the capacity to hire tenure people so a majority of individuals looking for full time, stable work tend to look elsewhere because NVIT can only hire on yearly terms pending student enrolment.

NVIT has a Hiring Policy (November 2005) that states:

NVIT reserves the right under Section 41 (Exemptions) of the BC Human Rights Code to favour persons of Aboriginal ancestry in hiring and promotion.

Subject to this exemption and where applicable, hiring related clauses in the collective agreement, and the instructor qualifications policy, all appointments to positions (including student employment) will be based on merit, i.e. NVIT will appoint the most relevantly qualified and available applicant who meets the needs of the position.

Hiring processes will apply selection criteria fairly and equitably. Employment opportunities will normally be posted publicly on the NVIT website.

This policy applies to employment opportunities throughout the institution (<http://www.nvit.ca/institutionalpolices/managementandoperations/personnel/b.2.1hiring.htm>).

As a result, if qualified Aboriginal applicants don't apply, NVIT has no choice other than to hire qualified non-Aboriginal faculty. In Chapter Four, management participants mentioned another policy priority that expected all faculties to include IK in their course instruction as either content and/or pedagogy.

#### **5.4 Policy Direction for Learning about Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture**

In interviews with the management team, I asked them to describe how they develop and implement policies to help students learn about Aboriginal identity, language and culture. The

management team replied that curriculum design at NVIT, takes into account, the needs of the students and the Aboriginal communities. The curriculum is also designed in such way that it reflects the values, culture and history of Aboriginal people. The programs play a major role in addressing Aboriginal culture by focusing on specific needs of Aboriginal people. For example, programs such as Indigenous studies, Chemical Addiction Worker, Community Economic Development and Social Work etc. address issues about assimilation, cultural identity, and holistic integration of social, economic, environment and cultural spirituality matters.

At one of the Leadership Team/management bi-monthly meetings that consists of the President, Vice President, two Deans of Instruction, Director of Enrolment Services, Registrar, and Director of Finance & Integrated Systems, which I attended, there was a request to set up a program to train students to become drug and alcohol counsellors to work with individuals that had social problems with substance abuse. Some management staff wanted NVIT to strictly focus on education programs similar to other post-secondary institutions (e.g., business, natural resources, and history programs and courses). Other staff members argued that, in order for students and faculty to succeed, there had to be support available to assist individuals in the Chemical Addictions Worker Program. The support would be items such as: counselling, spiritual mentorship, and access to alcohol anonymous and group support systems. However, the major Indigenous oriented support mechanism is understanding and practicing the “Red Road<sup>12</sup>” lifestyle; this lifestyle is what is practiced by students and instructors in the program. Each class is started with a traditional song and prayer and instructors incorporate the ‘Medicine Wheel<sup>13</sup>’ or ‘Learning Circle<sup>14</sup>’ concept into their courses.

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<sup>12</sup> To Native Americans, The Red Road is a term used frequently which means to live a traditional lifestyle: no addiction to drugs/alcohol, respect for others, respect for yourself, and respect for creation and to worship the Creator (<http://www.theredroad.org/about/>).

<sup>13</sup> At its most fundamental level, the Medicine Wheel teaches that in order to live a good life, we must show up and engage in it. We must be mindful of how we treat each other, Mother Earth, as well as being responsible and accountable in all our commitments. Mindfulness, which means staying in the present and acting in non-judgmental ways, creates an entrance to our souls, where our life's journey starts on a path of seeking the truth of our existence. Medicine Wheel equation: Courage + Mindfulness + Hope + Accountability = Physical, Spiritual, Emotional + Mental Resilience!  
([http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/medicine\\_wheel\\_teachings.htm](http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/medicine_wheel_teachings.htm))

This discussion among NVIT management demonstrates the tensions of choosing to offer common academic programs in order to be like other public post-secondary institutions or to offer programs that address the needs of Aboriginal communities, which may include unconventional approaches such as those mentioned above. What became evident and what was reinforced from those who make programmatic policy choices is that NVIT must continue to take a holistic and culturally/community responsive approach towards addressing students' and community educational, social, health, and economic needs and to resist assimilationist programs and approaches. The key principle for making these academic policy decisions is relevance to Aboriginal people and their communities, whether it is a basic academic program or one that addresses social issues. Another key policy principle is that these academic decisions are made with and not for the Aboriginal community, which reinforces a self-determining approach. These two policy principles require flexibility and responsiveness on the part of NVIT's leadership to meet community-based needs.

### **5.5 Policy Priorities for Community-Based and Community Responsive Programs**

When asked what motivated the management group to pursue community outreach projects, they replied by noting a range of considerations from taking education back to the people in the communities, preparing community members for career/job training, adult education, Aboriginal language training, to providing better community economic development to Aboriginal families and to increase their well-being. In order to realize these self-determining considerations or goals, the management participants said that core funding was needed to establish permanent local learning centres: "Programs like that build some continuity for those communities to become centers of learning and knowledge" (Management interview, November 20, 2009).

NVIT continues to prioritize a policy of offering outreach programs, for example, The Law Enforcement Preparation Program (LEPP) in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

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<sup>14</sup> The Learning Circle - a traditional form of dialogue among North American Aboriginal people - involves a grouping of equals and the tradition of promoting deep sharing and listening, fostering respect, and building consensus on ways forward. "This sharing of lessons and ideas can facilitate benefits such as healthier people and communities," ([http://www.unbc.ca/releases/2009/02\\_17learning\\_circles.html](http://www.unbc.ca/releases/2009/02_17learning_circles.html)).

(RCMP) is delivered on campus in Merritt and is an outreach program offered in partnership with the Surrey School District 36. The students who take the program receive dual credit, which means they are granted credit for a grade 12 course toward their Dogwood Certificate and they receive a university credit. The LEPP prepares students for entry to the RCMP or law enforcement career path. The course content in the program helps prepare students for leadership roles by addressing the issues of identity, colonization and self-esteem. The following programs: Indigenous studies, Community Economic Development and Social Work are also delivered in an outreach method to Aboriginal communities either as full programs or courses of a program. As above the course content helps prepare students for leadership roles by addressing the issues of identity, colonization and self-esteem.

Our policies and incentives are to work in partnerships to seek funding and to provide viable and relevant programs for students within or near to their own communities. We currently have partnerships with well over 20 Aboriginal communities and or organizations. In order to address province-wide representation, our board is currently comprised of five representatives from the five local Merritt area Indian Bands, which are NVIT's founding bands. In addition there are three at large Aboriginal members from throughout the province. So even with our connection to the five local bands, NVIT's Board of Governors addresses communities throughout British Columbia. Aboriginal communities that have programs offered within their area are involved in NVIT policy and decision-making through the following ways: 1) Affiliation Agreements, 2) Advisory program review committees, and 3) Service agreements and through Board of Governor's representation. Developing and implementing these various agreements presents various policy and leadership challenges and successes, which are highlighted next.

## **5.6 Policy and Leadership Practices: Successes and Challenges**

At NVIT, leadership responsibilities focus on key areas for improved student learning. The key areas were discussed in Chapter Four in more detail. They are: building student enrolment and institutional capacity; enhancing student retention and success; expanding program relevance; and increasing student success. The Leadership Team held a retreat and working with Elders,

Department Heads and students decided on the four aforementioned areas on which to work and build NVIT. These key areas are the bases of what the yearly and five year plans are built on as well as all Ministry of Advanced Education report systems that require enrolment and completion targets and plans. The discussion of policy and leadership practices and challenges in this section is organized around the following key policy related themes: Elders' Council initiatives, funding challenges, partnership approaches, governance and leadership development. I begin first, with the Elders' Council.

### ***5.6.1 Elder Council as a Policy and Governance Initiative***

The Elder's Council (refer to Chapter Three) influences governance and decision-making at management and Board of Governor levels by having an ex-officio seat on the Board and having two designates who are invited to all the meetings and discussions that pertain to the business of NVIT. The Elders have a Council of 16 members inclusive of both campuses. They are asked for advice and they offer suggestions that are taken into account when NVIT issues arise. Because the Elders have a seat at several levels of structure from the Board of Governors to the program review committees they influence policy and direction. The Elders designed a policy and terms of reference that reflect their roles and responsibilities to the NVIT family and ensures that they have a secure base or ongoing operating budget, and a comfortable office space and activity space,

As described in Chapter Four, both students and alumni indicated fairly strong satisfaction with the Elders' multi-faceted roles in developing and implementing policy and program initiatives. These roles have become important for NVIT, because Elders contribute to the retention of students and they also address some of the difficulties that Aboriginal students experience with their post-secondary education. Such is the theme expressed by one of the Elder interviewees: "Elders take on many roles, some of them teach traditional crafts, music and stories; others become mentors and counsel students during difficult times; most importantly, Elders are the link between the institutions, the family and the community" (Interview, May, 2010). An important dimension of this learning and cultural link includes Indigenous languages. The Elders' Council as a policy initiative identified the

following example of addressing culture and language: “Elders institute Nle?kepmxcin, Nsilxcn and Secwepemc languages into the NVIT quality of life.”<sup>15</sup>

Elders’ support, mentorship, and family relationship building at NVIT, have been highly respected and valued by many students. Some of the students stay connected with Elders years after completing their studies at NVIT. The positive inter-connectedness between students and Elders continue to enhance and strengthen NVIT’s governance and policy development. One of the Elders described her positive encounter with some of the past students:

The students must have that piece of paper in their hands to be able to compete for jobs. It is not easy for grade 12 [graduates] to get a decent job these days. However, it is really nice to see a lot of our Aboriginals, particularly, the older ones coming back to school. Last year 10 students from the natural resources program were awarded diplomas. I have talked to most of them and they are working in their communities, private sector and in government departments. I still have a student that graduated three years ago and we exchange emails every now and then, and she asked me ‘How are you doing? We are doing fine. We had another baby. And I’m oh good you know’. But that also tells me they enjoyed being here; they enjoyed talking to me or the rest of the Elders. Some of the students stay connected with some of the Elders because of the cordial relationship they developed when studying at NVIT; so that is an example, to make the Elders feel that students appreciate [Elders’] contributions to them (Interview, September, 2010).

Elders’ policy on traditional/cultural processes and protocols are important to NVIT’s management and administration. In the past, Elders have taken on culturally sensitive leadership roles, which have benefited NVIT’s governance structure. In the passage below, one of the Elders discussed one of these cultural protocol roles:

The Elders at NVIT have varied roles that span the institution. When NVIT has visiting dignitaries and/or official government dignitaries, Elders take over the protocol, for example, during the official visit of the Lt. Governor, Elders use drumming to lead the Lt Governor into the campus at Merritt. Elders performed a smudge, sang traditional songs, prayed, and welcomed the Lt Governor to the traditional territory of the Nlakapmux people and the home of NVIT. During this process, NVIT management team was waiting to be invited, to play their part in the ceremony. The President of NVIT took over at the appropriate time to address the Lt Governor (Interviewee, September, 2010).

Elders’ traditional knowledge, protocol, songs and drumming were key factors influencing students’ decisions to stay and pursue their studies at NVIT (student and alumni survey, Chapter Four), Elders’ working within NVIT, take their leadership role very seriously. They work towards the goodwill and success of faculty and students. At times, they share what they know and when

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<sup>15</sup> For details about the Elders’ Council as a policy initiative see <http://www.nvit.ca/institutionalpolices/managementandoperations/personnel/b.2.5elders.htm>.

necessary they take a self-determining stance in some of the policy decisions and implications. For example, when the existing employees' union felt that the Elders needed to be a part of the union, the Elders took initiative and leadership to meet without others from the institution to discuss their inclusion versus exclusion. One of the Elders explained how they declined to be part of the employees union: "they [Elders] felt they had no place in the union; the union is not traditional" (Interviewee, November, 2009). Therefore, the Elders met with the union and informed the union and management of their decision to remain an autonomous entity, separate from the staff/faculty union. As a result of this experience, the Elders subsequently developed their own policy that distinguished their Council from other NVIT units and that included the Council role, membership, compensation, and operational criteria. In this example, the Elders also demonstrated a resistance to internal institutional hegemony from an organized union.

When an Elder is appointed to the Elders' Council the appointee is selected from their Elders in one of the five founding bands. The Chief and Council then notify the NVIT Elders' Council of their selection and the Elders' council deliberates as to whether the recommended Elder meets with their criteria as set out in the Elders' Policy. Once this is established the appointed Elders become a member of the NVIT Elders' Council. If the Elder is not accepted the Elders' Council will ask the founding Band to appoint another and the Elders outline the reasons why the nominated Elder was not suitable.

The Elders establish a schedule for the whole year and identify the Elders who will work in pairs and this determines the budget, how many times they meet and the number of hours each Elder works. The Elders have a compensation of \$25.00 per hour for all the times they are on campus, either in meetings, for the institution activities, for student, staff, faculty, management and board activities. The Elders monitor their budget and from time to time they will request additional funding for additional meetings that were not anticipated. Most Elders will work up to 10-15 hours per month pending their health and other life activities.

Elder's roles at NVIT are unique. They take on many roles, some of them teach in programs such as environmental studies, Indigenous studies, Chemical Addictions and also teach traditional crafts, music and stories and prayers. The Elders are an integral part of the Environmental Science

program (formerly the Natural Resource Technology program). They assist the instructors in field studies, cultural studies and ethnobotany. The Elders are also involved with other programs such as Early Childhood Education as teachers in traditional methods of rearing children. Others become mentors and counsel students during difficult times. Elders welcome dignitaries to NVIT and perform traditional protocol with the inclusion of cultural practices that are integral to the academic experience for students and that “keep” them strong in their studies. As shown in this section, the Elder’ Council plays a major role towards developing and implementing NVIT’s policy initiatives and governance.

### **5.6.2 Funding Issues**

Investing in Aboriginal students’ post-secondary education is not only a benefit to Aboriginal communities and post-secondary institutions; it is an investment and benefit for Canadian society in general. An important benefit to Aboriginal people is that a culturally responsive post-secondary education is a stimulus for life-long learning and healing from the impact of colonization (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). For the last 27 years, NVIT has made post-secondary education accessible, culturally relevant, and academically pertinent to Aboriginal learners despite its funding challenges. Lack of adequate post-secondary education funding has deprived many Aboriginal students and communities the opportunity to fully educate themselves or prepare them for the labour market (Jothan, 2008, 2009, 2010; Kavanagh, 2008).

Funding is always an issue and trying to grow a small specialized institution such as NVIT, which has limited funding, is a challenge, but management has applied some innovative approaches to community-based programming that has resulted in expanding this type of programming. Management and student participants note that NVIT is moving towards the concept of ‘resource sharing’ among communities, organizations and institutions, which greatly improves outreach activities. “It’s not always about the money. ...You know it’s about community development, it’s about making a difference in Aboriginal communities and so that larger sense of why we’re here and what we’re doing that goes through the whole organization is unlike any other post-secondary institution” (Management Interviewee, October 2009). For instance, the trades program explained below is an example cited by one of the management interviewees, which I have summarized.

In early 2007, NVIT acquired a mobile trade's trailer from the province of BC to be used for a 16-week Trades' Bridging Program. The Bridging program included a grade 12 high school completion accreditation and 10 weeks of introduction to 8 different trades. The students then transitioned into employment or trades programming at their local college. NVIT negotiated and acquired funding from the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education to deliver this community based program. NVIT's program policy is to partner with Aboriginal communities who wish to deliver the Bridging to Trades' program. To assist in this financial process, NVIT funds the instruction, tuition, books, moving and setting up of the trailer and the power source while the community contributes the location and the supplies used for the program. These supplies may include welding rods, metal, liquid gas, etc. This cooperative financial and program implementation process has allowed six Aboriginal communities to participate in this program with another six on the wait list for the next two years. These programs have been to Aboriginal communities in Merritt (Central Interior), Hazelton (twice) (Central North Interior), Vanderhoof (North), Fort St. John/Blueberry (North East), and Bonaparte (Central), The trades program is an example of resource sharing with communities that works and takes the stress and pressure away from Aboriginal communities in "chasing" funding to build capacity for their members.

NVIT has been forced due to static provincial funding, to build and increase enrolment by attracting funding from other various government sources. The management team stated that NVIT goes after any opportunities that exist as long as it meets the institution's vision and mandate: one example is the Addictions Counselling Program. This is a partnership with three organizations to fund an advanced diploma (consisting of 30 courses) where NVIT and the other two organizations designed and delivered this program at no cost (funded by Federal and Provincial systems) to students. At this point there are 125 students who have taken advantage of this program and are building the professional capacity of individuals employed in community-based Treatment Centers as well as obtaining a credential that would allow them to advance in their career and employment. The two aforementioned program case examples would not have happened without NVIT's desire to work with various organizations to build a program; thereby demonstrating the initiative and commitment of

NVIT leadership to be flexible enough to adapt what we do to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities.

### **5.7 Partnership Approaches: Successes and Challenges**

In most settings, it is understood that effective partnership approaches and leadership practices are based on the opportunity that the institutions forming the partnership offer to each other. NVIT partnerships are designed in several ways:

- 1) An Aboriginal community may want a one-time course or program, in which case the community contacts NVIT's Community Education Department and through a service agreement (fee for service) delivers the agreed upon course or program.
- 2) An Aboriginal Institute may want a program or a series of programs in which case the Vice President or a Dean of Instruction meets with the Aboriginal Institute and discusses the kind of relationship and program needed. Some Institute partnerships will consist of three or four programs of which the most common are Adult Basic Education, Early Childhood Education, Chemical Addictions Worker, and Language. NVIT and the Aboriginal Institute negotiate the terms of the agreement. Some of the policy and administrative items in the agreement may include a) ownership of curriculum if any is developed through the partnership; b) cost of the program; c) hiring of faculty; d) agreeing on who obtains the Full Time Equivalent (the funding base from the Province of British Columbia); and e) resources i.e. books, instructor resources etc. based program.

In addition to the above partnerships NVIT also partners with other public post-secondary institutions. These partnerships are for the delivery of additional courses (at a third and fourth year or Degree track) or for the laddering of NVIT courses or programs into a degree track or the development of a joint degree track. These partnerships identify who is resourcing what, such as 1) credential, 2) instructors, 3) ladderability or transferability of courses/programs, and 4) who counts the FTE in the provincial system and how this partnership connects with an Aboriginal community if applicable. These kinds of partnership are generally related to Aboriginal Language development.

Partnership successes and challenges often result in new topics for research or theoretical ideas. For instance, while I was interviewing the management team, one of them thought about a contradictory relationship between larger universities like Simon Fraser University, Thompson Rivers University and the University of Northern British Columbia and small Aboriginal institutions like NVIT:

Another challenge is the whole process of ownership. Ownership has many levels and when NVIT is addressing issues such as the delivery of year three and four, for degree status for students, the public post-secondary institution assumes ownership of curriculum, processes and standards. This is most often in conflict with NVIT and the partnerships it is facilitating. For example: In one such partnership NVIT had negotiated with a Public post-secondary institution to deliver years three and four of a degree in General Studies. The first cohort was great although the program implementation was expensive. The partnership worked because the institution and individuals in the department were eager to make it happen. NVIT chose the courses, addressed the content [made it culturally responsive], participated in hiring the faculty and the program was delivered at the Merritt campus on timelines that worked for the students. This was a positive environment and 27 of the 28 students completed their degree, and many continued on to a Master's degree. (Interviewee, November, 2009).

In principle, it would have been possible to focus only on the above successful partnership experience by NVIT, but the interview material began to interest me, to view partnership dynamics in a completely different way. I started to look into another partnership case study between NVIT and a public post-secondary institution, to compare and contrast with the previous one, so that I could learn more about the changing policy dynamics and theoretical ideas about partnerships. I present a summary of another case situation of a partnership that had a different result, which was also mentioned by a management participant.

The second cohort of this General Studies program had 27 students, however, the partner post-secondary institution had a change in personnel in the department and as a result, there was very little collaboration with NVIT. The partner institution determined the courses, content, and faculty (of which none were Aboriginal). The time-table that was implemented addressed the availability of the instructors and not the students. In addition, the tuition for the second cohort doubled and many students could not afford the program. NVIT had very little control or input into how the program was structured, as a consequence only seven students completed their degree and the rest withdrew. When I asked why the students did not continue, a management staff member stated that in addition to the high tuition fees, "the program was different [as noted above] and that students wanted to be in the same kind [of program] as the previous cohort" (Management interview, November, 2009).

In contrast, I believe that the difference between the two cohorts' experiences centres on policy issues of ownership and control and offering a culturally responsive program that fits students' interests and contexts. Ownership has many levels and when NVIT addresses issues such as providing culturally responsive programming, selecting qualified and culturally sensitive instructors, and has more control over the delivery of the last two years of a degree program, Aboriginal student success rate is extremely high. When the public post-secondary 'partner' institution uses a hegemonic approach and assumes ownership of curriculum/program content, instruction, and delivery processes and standards, the success rate of students is very low.

Another contributing factor to the success of the first cohort in the General Studies program was that the two institutions became co -owners and participated effectively as equal partners in the first cohort and this did not happen in the second cohort. We have, then, different perspectives and definitions of partnership as shown by these two case examples. Partnerships do not always feature the same resources, or the same decisions. The management interviewees were then asked to provide their perspectives on NVIT's partnership policies and practices with Aboriginal communities.

The community partnership challenges have focussed on lack of funding to sustain education programs. Often programs are established with short term or 'soft' funding. Community Based programs are always in flux, they are proposal driven and cannot plan for more than one academic year at a time. With the inability to plan and have secure funding it is difficult to recruit students, keep faculty for more than an eight month contract and it causes stress to the community leadership and employees. Most often community sponsored programs will take a year to train an instructor who is usually someone from outside the community about the community's culture and then when the contract is complete the individual moves on to more secure positions. Therefore, the community based program is always in training mode and it does not lend itself to easy transitions for the student, the program and NVIT. The benefit, however, of having a community based program is improved transition if that community moves from offering many community based programs to become a private Aboriginal Institution. Most Aboriginal communities start with community based programs and with extensive experience they may move toward building a private post-secondary

institution. This type of institutional structure has a bit more stability and does have the commitment of community leadership to sustain the institution as opposed to a program.

The Aboriginal private post-secondary institutions are not publicly funded or core funded; therefore, they are in constant search of funds, which leads them into writing proposals to secure funds to maintain staff, faculty and students. What often happens is that an Aboriginal Institute will partner with a public institution and end up paying an enormous amount for programming in their community. Often these programs are not transferable or given academic credit in their own institution let alone province wide, therefore, leaving the Aboriginal institute and its students in a dilemma.

NVIT's partnership with Aboriginal Institutions and Aboriginal communities ensures that all parties have shared and agreed upon control in the process. NVIT works with the community to prepare funding proposals in order to access adequate funds to complete the program. In many instances NVIT has taken on the funding in whole or in part to ensure the program is delivered. NVIT ensures that all its programming offered through partnerships is transferable and accredited to address this issue of student mobility. NVIT respects the Aboriginal institutions and works with them to hire faculty that meet the academic standards of NVIT or they work with the community and jointly hire/appoint faculty. In these partnerships both NVIT and communities are co-owners.

Despite the various partnership challenges that have been discussed, the core principle that drives NVIT's day-to-day operation and vision for the future is its commitment to working in partnership with other organizations and with First Nations communities in order to maximize the use of each other's strengths, gifts, and resources. Through partnerships, NVIT fulfils one of its policies of providing educational programs to serve a wider community base.

## **5.8 Governance and Leadership Policy Practices**

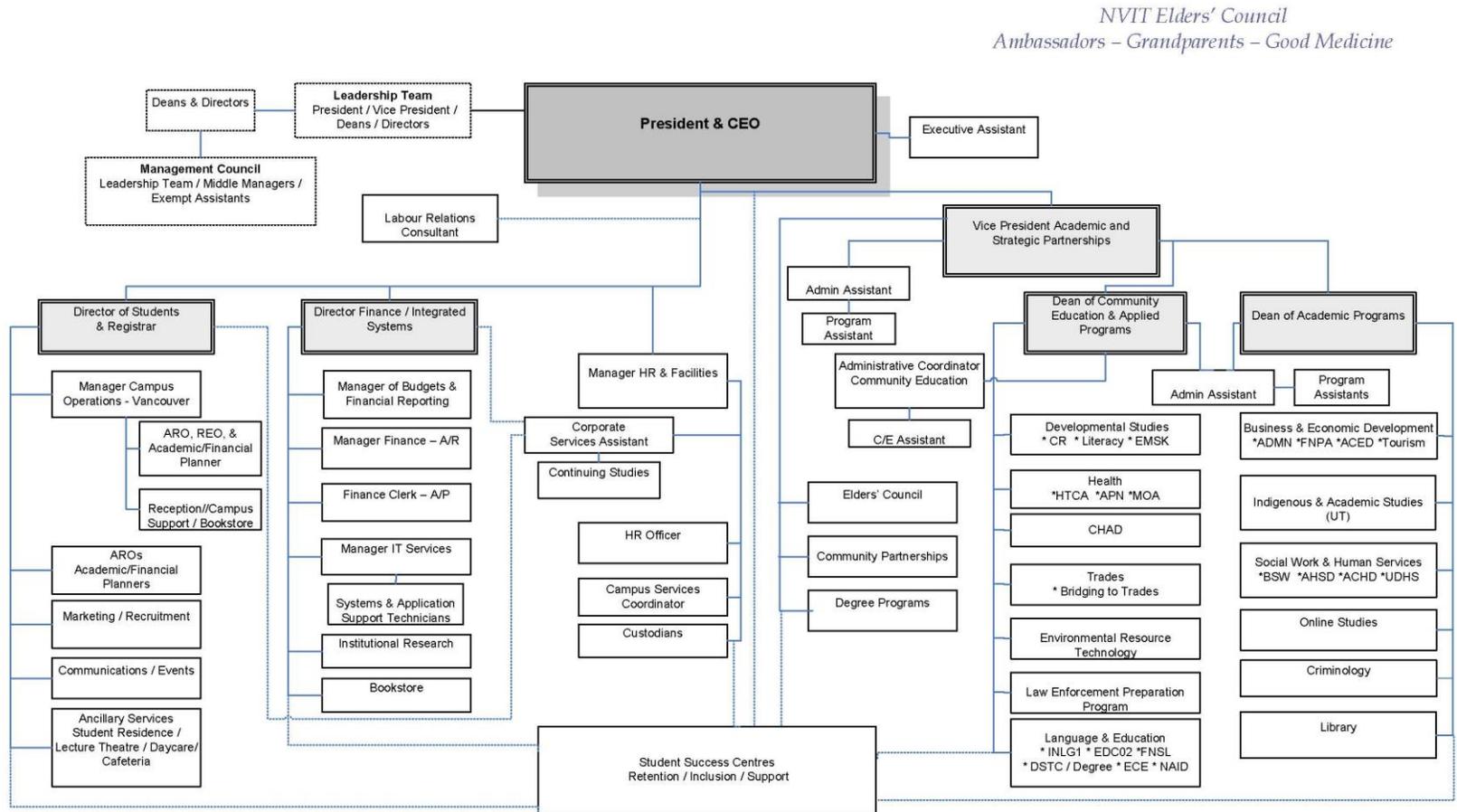
An important aspect of understanding the effectiveness of an institution or organization is through its leadership practices, and policy development and implementation. Effectiveness is also influenced substantially by the leadership values, skills and knowledge of institutional leaders. During

the interview, management team members were asked: “how does NVIT address governance, leadership practices and development”?

The management team explained the theoretical tenets of the overall official governance structure at NVIT is based on the Carver Model of Governance, where the Board of Governors have one employee and that is the President, the rest of the institution is employed by the President and the chain of command is through a system where the President has the final say. No employee or management member goes directly to the Board and the Board does not interfere with the day to day operations of the institution. According to the management participants, this system makes for a clean role and understanding of responsibility and accountability; it also eliminates the political interference in day to day operations and does not mix politics and operations. It gives the President control and a vote of confidence to ensure good governance and leadership without interference of Board members.

The Carver Model of Governance is the official version that is used to portray the organization reporting structure of NVIT (see Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1: NVIT's Organizational Structure**



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Based on my observations and experiences as well as discussions with various staff members, Board and Elders, another version of governance is beginning to emerge that reflects traditional Nlakapmux cultural values of equality, building on one another's strengths and gifts, and working cooperatively for a collective vision of Aboriginal Education for NVIT. Robert Sterling Sr. one of the founders of NVIT believed that all "people needed was a pathway, assistance, and if pointed in the right direction and they could do anything they decided to do" (cited by Board Interviewee, August, 2011). Returning to the original vision of the founders of NVIT, the present leadership is moving toward the incorporation and strengths of the traditional cultural leadership of the 'N'lakampux Valley': "When it is too tough for the rest of the people it is just right for us (N'lakampux) people" (ibid), to make the right choices, build the right programs and live an Eagle's vision of the leaders and Elders of the past.

Leadership is based in the culture and tradition, each person has a job, a role to fulfil, and we work toward a greater success to achieving our goals. NVIT is practicing traditional leadership through the values of sharing, caring, believing in others and respecting Elders and their contributions to the school and others. The value of guidance and persistence to make things happen is a value that we hold, we believe that we can do what is needed to make a better live for our children and grandchildren. NVIT makes this happen and believes in the vision of Chief Gordon Antoine and Robert Sterling Sr. (Board Interviewee, September 2010).

The leadership at NVIT has been following a road map laid out by the former leaders and Elders. A former student and Board member stated:

I've been here for so long. And kind of know where we came from and got a good idea of where we want to go...we have followed a path, a vision, our way to the future, it started here with NVIT....I am very proud to have been a student and then serve on the Board....to keep the path clear" (Interview, September, 2010).

Leadership roles at NVIT are evident in the forms of Student Council that has a separate 'society' and is structured with a President, Treasurer, and Secretary. All matters pertaining to the Student Council are administered by this entity. The executive is elected each September and serves for the Academic year. The President of the Student Council works with the Student Services faculty. The student council also elects a student to sit on the Board of Governors for one year, this position has voting authority and the student representative is present at all board meetings.

The staff and faculty are bound to a 'Collective Agreement' and elect their Union positions of President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary for a two year period. The Union also has a voting seat at the Board and is appointed by the members of the Union each year. In addition to the Union structure the faculty belong to several committees and groups within and external to NVIT.

The Department Heads with the Managers of Programs have a group called "Academic Administrators" and they meet quarterly to address internal issues as they may arise. Some issues that they have dealt with are: faculty load issues, resources, speaker series, and research.

The Deans and Directors also have a consortium that meets monthly to address working collectively between Academics and Enrolment Services, Technology and Institutional Research. They also sit on various committees internally and externally.

The Leadership Team (LT; President, Vice President Deans and Directors) works collectively and collaboratively within the institution. The LT group meets bi-monthly and works with issues that may arise within or external to the Institution. Planning and budgeting is done at this table as well as decision making for the operations of the institution. Although the President has the final say, the LT decisions are what are incorporated. This is a method that moves more to the N'lakampux values of leadership, a more inclusive, respectful, collaborative method that values the expertise of individuals and respects their knowledge base. This makes for a healthy environment in which to work. The LT works extensively on external provincial, national and international policy matters, advocating and moving Aboriginal Education forward. The President sits on several internal and external committees and the Vice President sits on a majority of external committees that address Aboriginal Education; one such committee is the Indigenous and Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA).

Over the past eight years, NVIT has been actively involved provincially to assist in changing provincial policy that relates to Aboriginal post-secondary education. NVIT has taken a major leadership role towards developing post-secondary policies at both provincial and national levels through its affiliation with the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA). IAHLA has the provincial mandate from its membership (the organization represents 39 Aboriginal post-

secondary Institutions throughout BC) to advance policy change with both provincial and federal governments.

IAHLA also mentors its membership in areas of governance, policy development, financial accountability and community responsibility as well as building a provincial infrastructure that addresses Aboriginal Post-secondary education such as the development and design of a provincial Aboriginal Policy Framework that is presently being crafted with significant input and leadership from IAHLA. NVIT holds the Chair of IAHLA and NVIT Board and management have deemed this position and organization a priority with which to work and a necessity to continue to lend support to build provincial Aboriginal post-secondary educational capacity and policy expertise. This IAHLA example shows the scope of NVIT's leadership commitment and belief that governance and policy development are essential to capacity building in Aboriginal communities and institutions throughout British Columbia.

NVIT has also taken on a national educational leadership role as shown in the next example. NVIT has been very much involved with the development, design and implementation and sustainability of the national Aboriginal Community Economic Development program in partnership with the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO). In addition, NVIT has continually bought membership and contributes financially to CANDO's Annual Conference. Each year at the CANDO conference, NVIT hosts Economic Development courses for the CANDO economic development officers (EDOS), which are credited and transferable to various post-secondary institutions across Canada. These courses assist in professional development and certification for the EDO's. These case examples about IAHLA and CANDO demonstrate how NVIT has taken Aboriginal post-secondary education and access to education and training as a serious duty to help provincial, national and Aboriginal organizations to develop and implement meaningful policies and programs.

## **5.9 Discussion and Conclusion**

Theorists such as Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), Hampton (1988) and Gardner (1993) have argued that policy formulation and leadership practice are guided by Indigenous Knowledge and

resistance to assimilationist approaches derived from experience and validated in practice. In other words, formulating educational policies and providing leadership are not static, rather they are forever changing, or modified by the lessons drawn from practice, which in turn are applied in the on-going process of reflection, action and praxis. NVIT's version of policy and leadership practices are different from the traditional structured procedures practised by other educational post-secondary institutions that focus on the processes of rational decision-making which are linear and are directed from the top down.

NVIT's educational policy processes signify the recognition and engagement of all of its educational stakeholders to foster learners' academic and personal success as well as their sense of self-sufficiency and agency that are part of the self-determination process. The literature reveals that educational success depends on strong academic policy and leadership capacity that creates cultural continuity (Oakes and Maday, 2009; Tompkins, 1998). Several studies have found that program changes geared towards Indigenous knowledge and contextual factors such as history, politics, economics, and social matters can lead to greater academic success (Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2010; Stevenson, 2007). As demonstrated in this chapter, Elders and community members provide valuable input towards the policy development and implementation of local curriculum that naturalizes or give prominence to Indigenous Knowledge, while at the same time includes Western forms of knowledge so that learners are prepared for whatever career context they choose (Battiste, 2002). The important distinction made here is that Western Knowledge is not the prominent policy framework.

Educational leadership makes a difference in many ways. At NVIT, despite the official use of the Carver leadership model, (focus on the processes of rational decision-making which are linear and are directed from above), distributive leadership is becoming a practice and collective activity. The emerging form of shared or distributive leadership (Copland and Wright, 2008) builds on an Indigenous value that individual's strengths or gifts are shared when necessary to help the collective. This description of a shared and distributed form of leadership resonates well with accounts of Aboriginal leadership described by Smith (2004). He advocates that Māori leadership should not

involve someone standing in front, at a distance, but rather, —someone who is deeply grounded and deeply embedded in a community.

The current leadership model at NVIT exemplifies a successful shared leadership approach that respects Indigenous Knowledge, skills and values, which builds on the gifts or strengths of employees that ensure wholistic participation. In contrast, based on my many years of working at NVIT, I have witnessed the difficulty that previous key leaders have experienced when they use a “top-down” controlling approach that does not take into account Indigenous values of working together. The time seems right for changing the official Western leadership model to one that is based on Indigenous Knowledge.

The findings from this research study highlight the following contributions of NVIT towards the development of Aboriginal post-secondary educational policy and leadership: (1) supporting students’ access and retention through holistic student services; (2) embedding Aboriginal identity, language and culture in programs and services; (3) giving priority to community-based responsive programs; (4) establishing and maintaining an Elders’ Council; (5) developing resource sharing approaches to funding issues; (6) emphasizing effective partnerships and relationship building; and (7) developing Indigenous oriented self-governance and leadership approaches. Several studies on Aboriginal post-secondary education policy and leadership have recommended similar approaches for addressing barriers that Aboriginal students encounter (Archibald & Brown, 2008; Hampton, 1988; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Gardner, 1993, Smith, 2004; Archibald, Pidgeon & Hawkey, 2010). Additional considerations that I can contribute to the recommendations from the literature and that were drivers for the policy related findings include: (1) striving for self-determination; (2) taking an anti-hegemonic stance when necessary; and (3) understanding how to use Indigenous Knowledge to guide leadership, learning, teaching, and student services.

As noted throughout this chapter, engaging in policy planning, development, and implementation *with* Aboriginal people and communities is a key self-determining and anti-hegemonic principle for determining policy effectiveness. The research participants have reinforced the commitment and Indigenous Knowledge approaches that they and others associated with NVIT leadership have practiced in order to realize effective policy engagement. The Eagle’s Perch has a strong base and

policy framework on which to land, created through self-determining, anti-hegemonic, and Indigenous Knowledge individual and collective efforts of those who study at, work in, and govern NVIT.

# Chapter Six: Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education

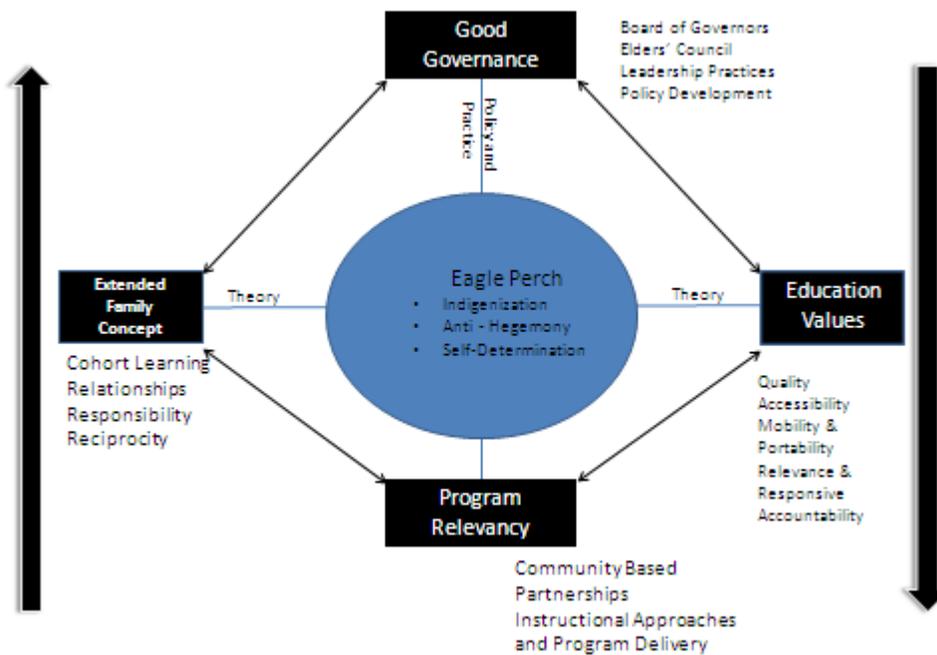
## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a description of the emerging *Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education* that I developed as a result of learning from the research participants' perspectives, examining the scholarly literature and NVIT's archival documents, and reflecting critically on my experiences as an Indigenous educator and scholar. In Chapter two, I described the symbolism and meaning of He nmice?qew'stns he helew or **Nmeechaktin**, (Eagle's Perch). Imagine the Eagle image (Figure 2.1) with the Eagle's wings opened as if it is in flight, hovering above its perch located at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. I have created a transformational post-secondary educational framework that is guided by the meaning of the Eagle in flight and on its Perch. The educational framework reflects the successes and challenges that NVIT has experienced through Indigenization of its education, which focuses on developing and maintaining self-determining Indigenous institutional structures and processes that also counter internal and external hegemonic approaches to leadership, governance, policies, and administrative processes. At NVIT, the Eagle's Perch serves as a strong landing and gathering place that has transformed NVIT into an Aboriginal self-governing and self-determining institution. Together, the three principles of Indigenization, anti-hegemony, and self-determination are embedded in the Eagle's perch that forms the inner circle of the transformational framework. These three inter-related principles are part of the major findings of my research and they are connected to four more transformational principles that are emphasized in this chapter. Although this framework uses NVIT as a concrete exemplar to highlight its principles and possible practices, I share it with the hope that others may find it useful for improving Aboriginal post-secondary education.

In this chapter, Figure 6.1 shows an inner circle with Eagle's Perch. Moving from the perch to the Eagle itself, are four major principles that form the body of the Eagle: good governance, educational values, program relevancy, and an extended family concept. Each principle is also placed

in a cardinal direction with key points noted for it. I will show how these four principles and the three others mentioned above meet and move beyond principles that Smith (2004) advocates for educational transformation: self-determination, validating and legitimizing cultural aspirations and identity, and incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy towards Aboriginal education. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is the theoretical cornerstone of this framework because it reflects an “epistemological stance of many indigenous peoples” (Smith, 1999, p. 8).

### 6.1: Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education



## **6.2 Principles for Aboriginal Post-secondary Education Transformation**

The literature that pertains to Aboriginal post-secondary education recommends various dimensions of the transformational principles that are presented next and I discuss this literature when it is applicable. In these sections four principles of good governance, educational values, program relevancy, and an extended family concept are emphasized. The other principles of Indigenization, anti-hegemony, and self-determination will be discussed in relation to the four principles. The former act as the Eagle's Perch and provide a place for the latter, the Eagle to firmly stand. It is important for me to point out that these aspects of Aboriginal post-secondary educational transformation have been developed and implemented at NVIT in varying degrees. Some since the formation of NVIT and others are more recent. I believe that Aboriginal institutions or mainstream institutions that do not have Eagle's Perch ideals and transformative principles have poor success and retention rates. The following Elder's thoughts are worth repeating. We are fortunate that like the Eagle's Perch, the "Elders [and others] of NVIT ensure that the culture, traditions, values, mores, and norms are infused in [NVIT's] practice, curriculum and essence and all that it holds [the Eagle and NVIT] is Aboriginal" (Elder interviewee, September, 2009).

## **6.3 Good Governance**

NVIT's status changed from being a private Aboriginal post-secondary institution to a publicly recognized and funded post-secondary institution. Despite this change, NVIT still encounters hegemony in various forms, but mainly in the areas of governance, policy, and administrative procedures. However, I firmly believe and have witnessed transformational changes within NVIT's governance structure, over the years, to the current state where notions of good Indigenous governance are prevalent. The concept of 'good' stems from a common Indigenous teaching about living a 'good life' that means each person has the opportunity to realize her or his internal gifts or potential by learning and living Indigenous values and knowledges that result in well-being of the individual, family, and community. I have defined hegemony, as the process by which powerful

groups such as the Ministry of Advanced Education, and mainstream post-secondary institutions use policies, regulations, evaluations, funding, accountability and reporting to control and regulate Aboriginal-controlled institutions. Having an Indigenous Board of Governors, an Elders' Council, Management/Administrative leadership, and inclusive forms of policy development and implementation are mechanisms for good governance.

The governance structure at NVIT is the foundational mechanism for the transformation of its institutional leadership, management and administrative processes. It brings together the Board of Governors, management, faculty, Elders and students to create meaningful and relevant policies, leadership and practice. Connected to these values and interests are theoretical considerations for this Aboriginal post-secondary education framework explored in this chapter. As discussed earlier, Antonio Gramsci provides useful ideas for understanding the manner in which governance structures have facilitated or mediated pressures from government policies. According to Gramsci, subordinate groups such as students at NVIT can, believe that social mobility is possible and that democracy exists for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The struggle in Aboriginal post-secondary education, Gramsci would say, needs to be enacted at the individual Aboriginal institutional level (like NVIT and others), and then communicated to students that share the same ideas and alternative ways of knowing and thinking. Gramsci stated that it is in the arena of consciousness “that the elites use the organic intellectuals to maintain the dominance” (1971, pp. 23-43). The role of Aboriginal instructors, Elders, and the inclusion of Aboriginal culture in textbooks, curriculum design, convocation, orientation and campus activities address the inequalities and the injustices, that subordinate classes need in order to free their consciousness from elite hegemony and create a new culture and in this process. NVIT, as a learning institution can have a transformative role in developing Aboriginal people's consciousness and agency for a new learning culture or transforming traditional knowledge into new forms. The following sections discuss the role of an Indigenous Board of Governors, Elders' Council, and leadership practices and policy development that contribute to a transformative 'good' governance structure.

### **6.3.1 Board of Governors**

As outlined in Chapter Three, at NVIT, institutional governance structures have been changing over time. Presently, the commitment and vision of NVIT's Aboriginal Board of Governors guide the institution. This vision encompasses and honours Aboriginal traditional knowledge/culture and values, and recognizes the need to balance these with various educational goals of NVIT's programs. As such, the current governance structure consists of a Board of Governors, Elders' Council, a management leadership team, faculty/staff unions, Education Council (see Appendix 11), and a Students' Council. Together, members of the NVIT governance team believe in a holistic approach to education whereby the students' knowledge base is enhanced by those values unique to Aboriginal cultures. The programs are designed to encourage ongoing education and to prepare individuals for future challenges and opportunities both within and beyond their communities. The original vision of the founding Indigenous community leaders continues to guide NVIT's governance structure, despite growth and changing leadership challenges.

A core focus of NVIT's day-to-day operations as well as its vision for the future is faculty and staff working in partnership with the Board of Governors (Board). The Board is an institutional strength established by an Order in Council from the BC legislature. Appointed Board members are Aboriginal and are drawn from across British Columbia while also maintaining a linkage with NVIT's five founding Bands. The Board members interviewed, felt this approach not only enhances NVIT's services but it also provides a breadth of perspective reflecting the fact that NVIT students come from over two-thirds of BC's 203 First Nations. This multi-nation foundation is also necessary for NVIT to reach its potential in demonstrating leadership and fostering Aboriginal values and traditions in Aboriginal post-secondary education.

The Board members (as discussed in Chapters Four and Five) were also happy to see that the students, faculty/staff and Elders represented diverse Aboriginal communities and groups. Above all, they all liked the idea of holding Board meetings at the five founding communities. Holding Board meetings at the First Nations founding communities maintains important connections to the founding communities and reinforces the practice of community-based governance.

### **6.3.2 Elders' Council**

Within the Elders' Council structure, the operating principles of governance include the following: having a seat at the Board of Governors, influencing decision-making at management and

Board of Governors' level, and having two designates who are invited to all the meetings and discussions that pertain to the business of NVIT. As described in Chapter Four, both students and alumni surveyed appreciated that Elders have a multi-faceted role in developing policy initiatives related to students' learning. The Elders' role has become important for NVIT, because Elders help in the retention of students and they address some of the barriers that limit access and success in Aboriginal post-secondary education.

Elders' policy on traditional processes and protocols are important to NVIT's management and administration. Elders have taken on important roles to guide the use of sensitive spiritual practices in public settings and activities for which the Board of Governors and management are responsible. Elder's traditional knowledge, mentorship, protocol, songs and drumming were key factors influencing students' decisions to stay and pursue their studies at NVIT (student and alumni survey, Chapter Four). Elders working within NVIT, take their leadership role very seriously, they share what they know and are happy to take a stance to protect their self-determining position with some of the policy discussions. Despite the Ministry of Advanced Education and mainstream institutions' attempt to control NVIT through its funding, regulations, policies and procedures, and evaluation, NVIT has developed anti-hegemonic strategies to diffuse tensions and challenges that often arise; these include the Elders' Council, holistic student support services, Indigenous Board of Governors and Indigenous management principles. Together, they lead to Indigenization and transformation of NVIT governance structures and leadership development and practices.

### ***6.3.3 Leadership Practices and Policy Development***

An important aspect of understanding the effectiveness of an institution or organization is its leadership practices, policy development and implementation. Effectiveness is dependent on the institution's leadership skills, knowledge, and commitment. In Chapter Five, I mentioned that despite the official use of the Western-based Carver Model of Governance, the Indigenous leadership approach has moved to one where there is inclusive and shared decision-making with the management team that seems to reflect Nlakapmux traditional approaches that are egalitarian in nature.

At NVIT, management have done well to de-link purely Western administrative and pedagogic functions to allow Aboriginal administrative policy and pedagogic approaches to emerge and to have a central decision-making function. This is important because of NVIT's values, which include the commitment to uphold "Aboriginal cultures and traditions" (NVIT Calendar 2011 p.5). At the same time the dual categories of Aboriginal and Western administrative and pedagogies co-exist and often are inter-dependent. For example, the need to include Elders in the functions of administration, governance, articulation of Aboriginal culture, participation in decision-making and ensuring the protocol of ceremonies enhance NVIT students' experiences, while at the same time they contribute to the academic functions of NVIT that include both Aboriginal and Western based forms of knowing. The Elders' roles are multi-faceted with leadership, instructional, and mentorship dimensions. Another example is the need to balance English language use, text books and union policy guidelines with Aboriginal language, text books and protocols, which is a major curriculum and pedagogical leadership function that NVIT strives to address. These aforementioned Aboriginal pedagogies may be used alone and at other times they are used along with Western ways of knowing: all are important to NVIT students.

Those who work in leadership positions have also taken on additional leadership roles at the provincial and national levels. Over the past six to eight years, NVIT, has been actively involved provincially to assist in changing provincial policy that relates to Aboriginal post-secondary education and its position in the province and nationally. NVIT has taken a major leadership role working towards developing such policies with the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association. The involvement of NVIT's leaders in these provincial and national arenas has a positive impact on policy development that focuses on student success and renewal to create or maintain good governance.

As noted earlier in Chapters Four and Five, the Board of Governors, management, students, faculty and staff have been actively developing policies to facilitate students' academic learning. The success rates of Aboriginal institutions are largely due to their commitment to student support. Student support services offered at NVIT include: academic, career, social and financial counselling; cultural and spiritual teachings; peer support; Elder support; student housing; and assistance in accessing community organizations such as childcare, transportation and other social programs. The creation of student centered support environments contribute to the retention and success rates of

NVIT. It is important to commend the NVIT Board of Governors and management for demonstrating commitment and effective leadership to develop and implement policies to facilitate students' success such as holistic student services that were described in previous chapters.

#### **6.4 Educational Values**

At NVIT, the Eagle's Perch is the foundational metaphor that symbolizes the transformative governance and learning processes taking place that are based on Indigenous educational values. Aboriginal post-secondary education has the potential to enrich the lives of all Aboriginal people and can contribute to the labour market, thereby influencing Canadian society. At NVIT education is an investment in the individuals and communities that builds the capacity to fashion a prosperous future with a priority on living a good life first, using an Indigenous meaning of the phrase, and second, contributing economically to the development of Aboriginal communities and Canadian society.

One of the Elders stated that our self-determining future depends on educated Aboriginal citizens who will contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of their communities and Canada as a whole. The Elders continued to say that once students complete their NVIT program, a host of questions arise and decisions have to be made with respect to finding jobs. The Elders stated, "It is really nice to see a lot of NVIT students, our Aboriginals particularly, the older ones coming back to school to study, get the diploma and compete effectively in the job market" (Interview, September, 2009).

The Elders tell students that education is a life-long learning process and they are happy to see both the young and the old building their own capacities for change. These Elders' statements show the commitment that Elders have to lifelong learning and their pride for those who complete post-secondary education and who want to make positive changes for themselves and their communities: these are important Indigenous values. NVIT provides a strong learning culture based on Indigenous values of learning that motivates students to learn and equips them with the skills to engage in access to educational opportunities. Education is an investment at NVIT because it equips

students with the skills to combat poverty, crime and unemployment. It is a major source of social cohesion and mobility, which is essential to the self-determination goals of Aboriginal people. While recognizing the profound forces for change, the survey and interviews with students, alumni, Elders, management and Board of Governors resulted in a consensus about the self-determining and anti-hegemonic values of quality, accountability/assessment, leadership, and culture as indicated in the following quotes:

NVIT is a post-secondary school so willing to evaluate itself and be adaptable to ensure success, a school so geared to promoting excellence with all aspects of students' lives, how could we be anything less than what was expected of us? Here at NVIT, we gained our education, learned our strengths, and became leaders ourselves (Board Interviewee, September, 2010).

For me, this is home away from home, I like the atmosphere, and NVIT is grounded in culture (Student survey comment, October, 2009).

Instructors believe in NVIT values such as “respect for the dignity, rights, cultures, and beliefs of all people; the continual growth and development of individuals in the communities; honesty and trust in relationships; openness in communication; balance and harmony in all activities; critical self-examination and a willingness to admit both strengths and weaknesses; people making decisions for themselves; care and support for others and respect for earth; and accountability to ourselves, Elders, the students, the communities and to the provincial government” (NVIT, 2011, p. 5). They portray these values through their design of curriculum and in their teaching, which ultimately promotes Indigenous identity.

These aforementioned values support some of the findings by Hampton (1988). According to Eber Hampton (1988), there needs to be a new view of education that incorporates Indigenous teachings within pedagogy, curriculum, systems and policy processes; therefore, rejecting assimilationist goals that have been prevalent in public education. Based on the survey and interview data, and the subsequent information generated from secondary sources, there are many ways in which students, alumni, Elders and management expectations and values can be articulated, which align with Hampton's view of anti-hegemonic education. There are five priority value oriented themes that seemed to emerge from the study and these are: 1) quality, 2), accessibility, 3) mobility and portability, 4) relevance and responsiveness, and 5) accountability.

### **6.4.1 Quality**

Governments and institutions work in partnership when appropriate, to ensure high quality educational outcomes and intellectual environments in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, community service, and management of intellectual and physical resources. Institutions and the post-secondary sector (PSE) as a whole emphasize creativity and innovation. The PSE sector provides a suitable range of challenging learning experiences, various forms of service to local and broader communities, and internationally respected research and scholarship that enrich the learning environment while preparing the learner for satisfying employment and active citizenship.

NVIT works with government, community and other institutions to ensure the quality of education to their learners not only meets the existing required provincial standards, it also ensures that the Indigenous Knowledge cultural expectations as defined by the Elders (see Elders' interview responses) are also met. Quality post-secondary education means that learners leave NVIT with a solid understanding of their subject area or professional education preparation, have a critical understanding of the impact of colonization, possess a strong understanding of IK, and be ready to undertake the challenge of becoming strong productive citizens in their chosen fields and with their communities.

### **6.4.2 Accessibility**

Accessibility to education for Aboriginal people has been a cornerstone for NVIT. From its early beginnings the idea has continued of ensuring that access to education for all Aboriginal peoples is available if they so choose. Historically this has not been the case for Aboriginal people (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) therefore, it has been important for NVIT to prioritize community-based education. Accessibility (as discussed in previous chapters) at NVIT has many facets; 1) through a welcoming non-threatening environment; 2) involving Aboriginal community in community-based delivery of courses and programs; 3) developing assessment tools that are Indigenous, therefore, relevant to the learner; 4) using various modes of delivery that suit the learner; 5) using Aboriginal curricula that is engaging and relevant; and 6) ensuring that faculty and staff are highly qualified, understanding and efficient. It is important to note that many Aboriginal learners like

to learn in their home environments where they have all the support mechanisms in place. NVIT strives to provide a highly productive service that allows for this kind of local or community-based access to higher education.

NVIT has a commitment that post-secondary education should be accessible throughout one's life. An alumnus stated that she

wasn't just a student number at NVIT and found those at NVIT went above their call of duty to ensure the students' needs were met. NVIT is an inviting, friendly, cultural environment that made learning fun. It is also a family friendly environment; you could bring your children to study, even though at times they may get to talk too loud in the library (Alumni, Survey Response, May 2010).

There are opportunities for those individuals who do not meet the usual admission requirements and require further preparation. For example: a mature student who has worked for several years and wishes to return to school to acquire a credential has the option of utilizing the Prior Learning Assessment (described in Chapter 5) which will grant credit for life and work experience, therefore reducing the number of courses needed for a credential. In community-based education programming which is done in the Aboriginal communities the admission requirements may be waived to grant entrance in a program on a conditional basis, if the student maintains a 'B' average in the first semester, after which the entrance requirements are deemed to have been met. For students who do not meet admission requirements and are not one of the above examples, there is the opportunity to attend a community-based adult education program or attend the Merritt campus Adult Basic Education program, another option is to write the General Education Diploma (GED), and students in this mode can access assistance for tutoring from NVIT's Student Success Centre.

#### **6.4.3 Mobility and Portability**

Students' course and program mobility and portability are important policy issues at NVIT; therefore, they are important values that underpin such policies. Mobility means that a NVIT student has taken courses and in mid program has the desire or needs to move to attend another post-secondary institution; the student can do so without losing any credits attained at NVIT and these credits are accepted for credit at their new institution. Conversely, if a student from another post-

secondary institution wishes to transfer to NVIT, then NVIT needs to ensure it is able to accept these transfer credits. Portability on the other hand means that a student may want to complete their education in a community- based program. They need to have the option of moving from an NVIT or other post-secondary institution to a program being offered in a community. The community may be their own or another one that is offering the same program as the one in which they are presently enrolled. Portability and mobility for transfer purposes are very important for Aboriginal students because they have limited funding to complete their levels of education. It also speaks to the vast working network and relationships that NVIT has in order for students to move from one institute to another with very little difficulty (mobility). Students need to have the ability to move throughout their educational credential, without penalty. Portability for students is important because they may wish to move from a campus-based program to a community- based program that better suits their needs. This is also important for community-based programs that may have several communities involved in their education plan and the ability to offer the program in different locations to assist the students and communities to have access to education. The idea that higher learning is not restrained to the campuses of NVIT is very encouraging for learners with vast needs. NVIT students obtain credit for prior learning as they transfer between programs, institutions and the labour market.

#### ***6.4.4 Relevance and Responsiveness***

Post-secondary education should give the learner the opportunity to acquire relevant and diverse knowledge, competencies, and skills for a complex social environment and labour market. Ideally, it promotes the productive connection of learning, work, and civil society. PSE challenges, informs, and guides the direction of society and is critically responsive to the changing needs of the learner and society. In terms of Aboriginal communities PSE is a learning process that offers Aboriginal students the opportunity to reclaim their identity and re-assert their self-determination. They do so through exploring their own culture, interacting with Elders, exploring Indigenous Knowledge through practice and curriculum, which is anchored in experiences of Indigenous communities through values and worldviews.

NVIT has built its reputation and speciality in being relevant and responsive to Aboriginal learners and communities. To be relevant is to ensure that Aboriginal issues, knowledge, values, and content are present in the fabric of NVIT. It is important to ensure that the people leaving NVIT are able to work and interact in Aboriginal communities, their governance bodies, administrative structures, politically and socially. It is important that individuals who go 'home' to work can do so with a 'hit the road running' attitude.

This means that the community or organization is not spending time acculturating individuals to the issues of the day and what is important. Relevance also means that when an NVIT graduate leaves he/she is confident in knowing that the skills they leave with will be utilized and respected in their workplace. The responsiveness with which NVIT works with issues and communities is important to highlight. Should a community or individual need immediate service, NVIT responds quickly. This may mean working quickly to put a program in place, or to adjust the faculty or curricula, or to respond to a community emergency. Or it could be responding to funding issues that may impede student or program delivery both on and off campus.

Responsiveness is also to the students. For example if a student is in need the institution and Elders' Council work in tandem to address the need as quickly as possible to ensure that the student does not have to deal with undue stress that may impede her/his learning at NVIT. Access to relevant homework supports, counselling services, and recreational programs help students gain strength and become focused in completing their studies. NVIT puts priority in addressing challenges as early as possible and ensuring that success plans focus on the specific needs of learners. Being responsive to and addressing students' academic and social-emotional issues are key factors for promoting success. Success teams that involve educators working together to improve student academic and personal success is an example of institutional efforts to implement these success plans. Many of the students appreciated the involvement and continued support of parents, community Elders, and leaders in NVIT orientation programs, program related events at the school and the community levels, and especially at convocations where they could celebrate with them.

Accountability

PSE institutions and governments are openly accountable to the public in relation to mandates and outcomes and for reassuring citizens, and students in particular, that resources are allocated to achieve maximum value and sustainability of post-secondary education. NVIT has several accountability mechanisms in place. First the Board of Governors is accountable for the institution as a whole. This accountability is reflected in the policies and procedures that the Board has instituted. Second, the President is accountable for the operations and standards of the institution and for the enactment of the Board policies, direction and procedures. Third, the institution is accountable to the public through the accountability processes of legislature related to publicly funded post-secondary institutions. This transparent structure is done through audits, both financial and service, and through various reporting systems and data systems. In addition, the accountability is to Aboriginal learners and communities. One important accountability process is through the academic system that approves course and program transfer that meets academic standards: this system is the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers. The accountability to Aboriginal community is through the provincially appointed Board that represents the various Aboriginal communities within the province of British Columbia.

Accountability is also at the level of programs, for example the Social Work program is accredited through the National Social Workers' accrediting structure and is reviewed every four to seven years; the Natural Resource Technicians program is accredited through the National Foresters Association; and the Chemical Addictions' Workers program is accredited through the International Addictions Certification Board. These are all accountability systems that ensure that NVIT is acting in a responsible, ethical manner. There are many challenges in carrying out these various accountability measures, some of which have been discussed in previous chapters, such as external government or funding requirements that limit new program development opportunities or differences of opinion between larger universities and NVIT about admission criteria. Accountability as a value means that a post-secondary institution takes its responsibility seriously to offer programs that are relevant to Aboriginal community needs and their educational goals. Accountability through self-determination for NVIT means that all programs regardless of methods of delivery and/or curriculum/content are

credited and transferable to other public post-secondary institutions. This accountably ensures that a program taken at NVIT embody Indigenous Knowledge, values and culture.

#### **6.4.5 Program Relevancy**

Archibald, Pidgeon and Hawkey (2010) note that the literature on Indigenous post-secondary education and program relevance recommends culturally appropriate and responsive curriculum and pedagogy in order to improve Aboriginal students' success. As shown in Chapters Four and Five, culturally relevant textbooks, curriculum modification, instructional methods, and Indigenous instructors and Elders play important roles in enhancing students' learning experiences at NVIT.

Some of the relevant NVIT programs are Social Work, Chemical Addictions Worker, Trauma and Addictions, Cultural Immersion, Public Administration, Business Administration, Natural Resource Technology and the Native Adult Instructors' Diploma. These programs foster cultural worldview and identity because they are the fabric of Indigenous community. In fact, the following programs were designed by Aboriginal communities in cooperation and delivery by NVIT: Chemical Addictions Worker, Trauma and Addictions, Cultural Immersion and Native Adult Instructors' Diploma. All the courses within these programs are infused with Aboriginal case studies, instructor experiences, student experiences, books written by Indigenous authors, and community connections are fostered through the practicum placements. When the respondents were asked to comment on NVIT program relevancy most of them stated:

Instructors believe in the [Indigenous] values of NVIT and they portray that through their courses (Student Survey Respondent).

NVIT promotes Indigenous face in the academic world through Indigenous instructors, Elders, design of curriculum, stories, and history together these promote Indigenous identity (Alumni Survey Respondent).

One of NVIT's expected mission outcomes is described as "a programming focus on Aboriginal community development by emphasizing the social, economic, land and governance development themes" (Accountability Plan, 2011, p. 6.). This is an ongoing priority for the institution, both in terms of new programs, as well as in terms of updating existing programs and enhancing their relevance. There is a future need to incorporate Aboriginal community development into existing programs and to create new programs with this focus. More so, there is a need to incorporate

ecological-land based resources, living on the land, and Aboriginal history, culture and governance into major core areas from which all students at NVIT must take before they graduate, irrespective of the programs in which they are registered.

While it is necessary for NVIT to ensure its courses and programs are recognized and transferable, that should not be interpreted as meaning its programming should simply duplicate what exists elsewhere. In fact, if NVIT were to do that it would not be true to its mandate as an Aboriginal institution, or true to its mission. NVIT needs to continue to explore ways in which it can address the education and training needs of Aboriginal students. Community partnerships and program delivery and instructional approaches are key drivers for program relevancy.

#### Community-Based Partnerships

NVIT's partnership with Aboriginal communities to offer community-based programs ensures that all parties have meaningful involvement and control in the process. NVIT works with the community to prepare funding proposals, to access funds and ensure that the funding is available to complete the program. In many instances, NVIT has taken on the funding in whole or in part to ensure the program is delivered. NVIT ensures that all its partnership courses and programs are transferable and accredited to address student mobility. NVIT also respects private Aboriginal institutions and works with them to hire faculty that meet the academic standards of NVIT or they work with the community and jointly hire/appoint faculty. In these partnerships both NVIT and communities are co-owners of the programs. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the core principle that drives NVIT's day-to-day operation and vision for the future is its commitment to working in partnership with other organizations and with First Nations communities. Through partnerships, NVIT fulfills one of its policies of providing educational programs to serve a wider community base.

#### Instructional Approaches and Program Delivery

In terms of the quality of teaching many respondents were satisfied with the teaching at NVIT. Respondents were satisfied with course/program delivery methods and styles of teaching. In some cases Aboriginal instructors have been hired to facilitate and promote the effective use of culturally

relevant factors of empowerment, teaching styles and delivery practices. Some of the alumni cohort commented that they acted as a family, became proud of their cultural symbols and identities, and developed consensus towards their learning activities at NVIT. In an earlier research study, Agbo (2004) concluded that effective instruction and course delivery methods motivate learners to learn with ease and to become successful. Martin (2005) and Holmes (2006) have argued that acquiring culturally relevant academic and support services in a socially and culturally oriented program or institution lead to better comfort levels and success for Aboriginal students.

The results of the student and alumni survey responses indicate that the role of Indigeneity or the naturalization of Indigenous Knowledge into education influenced students' decisions to attend NVIT's certificate or diploma program. Previous studies have identified factors that attract Aboriginal people to a post-secondary institution such as the presence of and engagement of Aboriginal faculty, who also act as role models; the geographic proximity of programs close to one's home community; career choice; and reputation of the institution (Archibald, Pidgeon and Hawkey, 2010; Battiste, 1998; Smith, 1999). Nearly 83% of students and 100% of alumni surveyed were more than satisfied with this aspect and also said:

I like the sense of community, it is like a family.

I chose NVIT because of the First Nations focus; the instructors are responsive and experienced that they share with students.

I felt accepted, cared for, respected and included.

I like the content, the books – didn't know my identity when I came here; that is why I came to find it, I did, I love it here (Student and alumni survey responses).

Archibald, Pidgeon and Hawkey (2010) also identified the following factors that attracted Aboriginal students to apply to university programs: the type and quality of program, quality of faculty expertise, geographic location, quality of Aboriginal programs, and availability of Aboriginal faculty. These same factors are also found in the data from the NVIT study.

## **6.5 Extended Family Concept**

Perhaps as important as the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge was the use of an Aboriginal concept of extended family to organize and support students' learning through cohort programs, cultural activities, and Elders' mentorship. Traditionally, families were large and incorporated several levels of kinships and cultural families<sup>16</sup>. The roles of family members were set according to individual positions in the tribe and families would live together in a communal environment with responsibilities being shared throughout the family. These responsibilities included child rearing, cooking, hunting and teaching various knowledge, for example, from tribal Elders. Failure to carry out his or her responsibilities meant that the rest of the family suffered (Sam, 1992).

Most of the problems facing Aboriginal students in post-secondary education today stem from generations of hegemonic oppression and colonization where learning and practicing Indigenous knowledge, values, and family kinship were denied. Aboriginal people were denied the right to live by their own rules, to decide on their own policies, to have their own education and to speak their own language. However, Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders such as Elders kept the core values alive such as the extended family that cares for and supports one another. Thus, to help Aboriginal students cope with the difficulties that they experience and to facilitate their success, institutions such as NVIT develop mechanisms that emulate the extended family such as learning cohorts.

### **6.5.1 Cohort Learning**

According to Nesbit (2001) cohorts are created not born. They are successful when everyone works together, in improving their own and others' learning experiences. Accordingly, some of the alumni described their cohort/family oriented experience:

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<sup>16</sup> I define a Cultural family to mean those who are not blood related or belong to one's community, but is an individual who represents all the status and position of a family member. For example: my children call my best friends 'aunt' and 'uncle' however they are not blood related. My children are showing respect and including my friends in their circle as a family member.

Learning from several people as compared to just one, enriches everyone's self-esteem. It brought our class together. We started out as individuals and left as a family, still we continue to interact and help one another despite the fact we are all walking in our different pathways. We are still in contact (Cohort survey response).

Cohorts that operated like an extended family were referred to as an "NVIT family."

They provided a context for processes of teaching and learning that contributed support to students and they also challenged students to do their best: According to Kegan et al (2001) "growth processes such as learning and teaching depend on connections and these processes invariably occur in some context" (p. 15). NVIT was one such context. Most of the alumni respondents stated that successful cohort learning takes self-responsibility, courage, honour, commitment, sensitivity and a lot of hard work to create an enriching experience for everybody.

The NVIT Eagle's Perch metaphor encapsulates the Indigenous values and practices of respect, kindness, honesty, patience and equality to guide cohort student learning. The following values and practices are important guidelines for family or cohort participants to follow:

Respect—it is very important for cohort participants to respect each person by offering each person an opportunity to speak, without interruption, till their turn comes up.

Honesty--- the value of honesty is reflected in what is said in a cohort group. There is an understanding that each person who speaks must speak from the heart. A speaker demonstrates compassion by subtly acknowledging some understanding that everyone makes mistakes.

Patience—the value of patience is evident in the accommodations made for the varying amounts of time required by people within the cohort to both express themselves and to feel comfortable in doing so.

Equality--- the value of equality is demonstrated in the understanding that no one in the cohort is more important than another.

These values are also practiced in NVIT's Elders' interactions. In addition to teaching and mentoring roles, the NVIT Elders are like grandparents to the students, adding to the family environment at NVIT. The following quotes show the regard students have for Elders and their impact on students:

I like the sense of community, it is like a family; I felt accepted, cared for, respected and included. I love the Elders, they are there for you and help when you need it or they just make you happy (Alumni survey response).

The Elders are sweet, they take serious their roles, they are concerned about success and it helps because my family is not here, my Elder is my grandmother (Student survey response).

Elders' experience and knowledge help with my issues; they don't have to be school issues, even life issues they help (Student survey response).

The Elders' involvement and mentorship extends to all the learning contexts at NVIT. An extended family learning, social, and cultural environment is strengthened by additional Indigenous teachings about developing caring relationships, enacting self and group responsibilities, and practicing cultural reciprocity.

### **6.5.2 Relationship, Responsibility, and Reciprocity**

A primary component of the NVIT extended family perspective is the symbolism of the "Eagle" being in relationship to everyone and everything in one's environment, which also relates to the concept of inclusion. "All my relations" is at first a reminder of who Aboriginal students are and of their relationship with both their families and community. It also reminds them of the extended relationship they share with all human beings. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, relationships that focus on support from family or cohort, as well as mentoring from faculty, Elders, and community members were key findings from students', alumni, Elders' and management surveys and interviews. The importance of these relationships to help NVIT students overcome educational difficulties must be seen as contributing towards student success at NVIT. Added to these are concepts of responsibility and reciprocity.

"All my relations" is also an encouragement for Aboriginal students to accept the responsibilities they have within their own family and the NVIT extended family by living our lives in a harmonious and ethical manner. Instruction and mentoring from faculty and Elders, along with and community-based learning experiences help students develop cultural and ethical concepts of responsibility that address oneself, family, community, and society.

Closely connected to the concepts of being in a relationship with and responsible to one's family is the concept of reciprocity. In an Indigenous worldview, reciprocity in relationships is often expected. Values of generosity and sharing are inherent in the actions for reciprocity, as is the responsibility of being concerned for family members and others, as well as the well-being of the community. A common motivation for any interaction in the extended family and community is that when both parties are concerned about beneficial interaction, they will be more interested in perpetuating ongoing interaction, which is a form of reciprocity. By this I mean that Indigenous people are interested in self-determination; telling their own stories; using their own voices; finding solutions to their own problems; and sharing these in the spirit of helping others as necessary.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

NVIT like the Eagle is a safe place, a place of wisdom, knowledge, comfort, challenge, struggle, love, hope, strength and belonging. These qualities contribute to the development of relationships which reinforce the struggle for self-determination. Like the name, Eagle's Perch, the campus represents the returning place for students, faculty, staff and management. It is also where the Board of Governors ensures that the vision of the Eagle is carried out through the leadership of managers, Elders, faculty, and staff and through good quality policies, programs, student services, and facilities. Most importantly, NVIT is an important learning place and home for Aboriginal students.

This chapter has examined a number of emerging principles that form the basis of a transformational framework for Aboriginal post-secondary education at NVIT and elsewhere. A number of theoretical and practical points have been included in the presentation of this framework that focuses on four major principles: good governance, educational values, program relevancy, and the concept of extended family. Three other principles of Indigenization, anti-hegemony, and self-determination are closely inter-related to them.

The principle of "good governance" influences the effectiveness of an institution or organization, its leadership practices, policy development and implementation. Effectiveness also implies accountability at all levels of the institution and is shaped by the leadership skills and knowledge of leaders, as well as Indigenous teachings related to living a good life. Designing

accessible, relevant and responsive programs is another important educational role of a Board of Governors, management, faculty, staff, Elders and students. The role of federal and provincial governments with respect to policy formulation, top-down decision making, and the provision of operational funds that affect governance are important issues to address as they hinder transformation. Policy and governance initiatives such as the Elders' Council and inclusive Indigenous-based leadership approaches are innovative ways to deal with on-going external hegemonic contextual issues.

The principle of "educational values" includes traditional values such as a sense of community; holistic learning that centres spirituality, and caring for one another have shaped students' worldviews and learning outcomes at NVIT. Valuing quality, accessibility, mobility and portability, relevance, responsiveness, and accountability are critical guides for subsequent policy and programmatic actions. This means graduates from NVIT are prepared to not only survive in a white dominated society; they must contribute to the change of that society so that Indigenous people and their community members' lives are enhanced.

The principle of "program relevancy" brings Aboriginal knowledge to students and ensures that courses and programs meet the learning needs of the students and are applicable to Aboriginal communities. The relevance and responsiveness of the programs and holistic student services have been designed to build knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the academic and personal needs of students. Most of the textbooks and courses are infused with Aboriginal case studies to enhance learning and knowing. The courses are unique because they offer mobility, portability and are transferable to universities.

The principle of "extended family" provides the basis for developing and sustaining learning and cultural relationships that NVIT students have with Elders, cohort groups, instructors, community and administrators. Together, these cohort and family-like groups contribute to transitions to NVIT, to retention, and transition to other post-secondary educational programs and career opportunities. The Eagle's Perch once again provides teachings and practices to guide family-like relationships, responsibility, and reciprocity so that support for learners is beneficial and results in their success.

So what is self-determination to NVIT as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution? As demonstrated throughout this thesis, self-determination is the belief that an Aboriginal Institution like NVIT has the right and ability to choose and control its own quality of life, its own goals, stories and dreams, and what services NVIT needs to transform them. For Aboriginal institutions that have gone through colonization and imperialism, self-determination is significantly more challenging. As noted in chapters Three, Five and Six, NVIT works within a provincial public post-secondary system, while at the same time it struggles to maintain its Indigeneity. This is challenging, however, NVIT has to balance fiscal responsibility with program guidelines, program development, evaluation and reporting, while trying to maintain NVIT's vision, its stories and its identity as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution rooted in Indigenous Knowledge. This is where NVIT's transformation as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution, which believes in self-determination, Indigenization, and developing anti-hegemonic structures and principles, to help Aboriginal students and institutions navigate the system, can make all of the difference. Self-determination therefore relates to Indigenous forms of governance, educational values, extended family concept and program relevance that help free Aboriginal institutions from colonialism.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion - The Power of the Eagle<sup>17</sup>

This chapter presents a summary of the research and its findings; discusses future policy implications for NVIT; highlights the research contributions, strengths and limitations of the research, and future research topics; and concludes with some of my final reflective thoughts.

### 7.1 Summary of the Research and Findings

This dissertation examined the following three major questions:

1. How well has the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology addressed self-determination through its programming and student services in relation to:
  - a. inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in programs and campus activities;
  - b. instruction and program/course delivery;
  - c. student academic, emotional, cultural, and financial issues; and
  - d. Elders' roles and responsibilities
2. How does NVIT in its role as an Indigenous post-secondary institution, ensure that its governance, learning, and student service policies are culturally grounded and that they address students' academic, financial, social, and cultural issues?
3. What makes NVIT's approaches to policy relevant to and effective for its students, alumni, leadership, and Elders?

The methodology for this research was based on a mixed methods case study of NVIT that included student and alumni surveys; interviews with Board of Governors, management staff, and Elders; document analysis; literature review; and my personal perspectives. These mixed methods resulted in rich and informed sources of information. Indigenous Knowledge, in the form of the Nlakapmux/Indigenous symbolism and meaning of the NVIT's Eagle's Perch provided the theoretical frame that guided my study, especially the analysis. I also drew upon aspects of critical theory from Gramsci (1971), Giroux (1993), Smith (2005), and Freire (1970) that focussed on understanding forms of hegemony and emancipation. Other Indigenous and non-Indigenous theorists also guided my exploration of Aboriginal post-secondary education such as Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991), Archibald (1995, 2010), Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, (2010), and Hampton (1988), who showed how Indigenous Knowledge could shape educational theory, methodology, and practice.

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Although I enjoy Gramsci's (1971) anti-hegemonic ideas and I feel that NVIT has experienced segments of his theory, especially the ideal to build internal leaders' capacity, he does not have the Indigenous understandings of Hampton, Archibald, and Battiste, who align with NVIT's mission and values in regards to incorporating Indigenous Knowledge with capacity building and leadership training. Archibald (1995) suggests that teachers in Aboriginal institutions must have a comprehensive knowledge of cultural practices and Indigenous traditions. She suggests that teachers should be critically attentive to the operations of power as it is implicated in the production of knowledge and authority. At NVIT faculty and managers are aware of the impact of colonization on Aboriginal people and those who teach have Aboriginal knowledge or are respectful of it.

Eber Hampton (1998) suggests that feelings of exclusion come from the assimilationist focus of post-secondary education institutions. Hampton argues that, the key to solving this problem is the establishment of more areas of Aboriginal educational control, including Aboriginal controlled institutions. While Aboriginal people have recently begun to exercise a degree of control of post-secondary education, overall, Aboriginal people have had less control over education at the postsecondary level than at any other level. Almost all Aboriginal education dollars are spent on programs and services at colleges and universities that are not under Aboriginal control. Many of the interviews conducted and much of the literature reviewed for this study demonstrate that whenever Aboriginals are given control of their own programs or institutions, there have been higher rates of success in Aboriginal enrolment and graduation. A key example is the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, which has higher success and retention rates. The internal governance structure at NVIT comprised of a Board of Governors, and units representing faculty, management, staff, students and Elders attempted to break down the hegemonic structures normally used in mainstream institutions and to transform them into Indigenous based good governance structures that have created a central place for Indigenous Knowledge within the institution.

My study shows that those who lead, teach, work, and learn at NVIT have created a culture and environment where learning is built on Indigenous Knowledge ways of learning and teaching, which are empowering and which oppose Western educational hegemony. Indigenous content and

learning approaches have become a natural part of NVIT's programming and includes: experiential/project activities, case studies, storytelling, Indigenous content, and intergenerational learning with Elders. Indigenous Knowledge has played a central role in learning programs and student services to ensure that learning experiences adhere to Aboriginal students' cultural perspectives, experiences and worldviews. Also important, is the fact that, for non-Indigenous students and faculty, education using such methods often has the effect of raising awareness of Indigenous traditions and appreciation of Indigenous cultural realities.

From my review of the literature on Indigenous knowledge, I found that many writers have commented on the impact of imperialism and colonialism on Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This impact has led to resistance discourse, by many academics, including me. Considering the challenges, Indigenous education needs critical examination of its mission, goals, objectives that move beyond imperialistic policies, goals, and objectives. In this context, NVIT has created space for Indigenous knowledge so that Aboriginal students, faculty, benefit from Indigenous worldviews, culture, and Indigenous teaching methods. The findings from this study support Indigenous cultural learning, while also making sure that NVIT students' can move into any institution of their choice at their most excellent – well-equipped with their education that is rooted in Indigenous Knowledge.

In response to the three major research questions posed for the study, the results of my study indicate that NVIT's academic programming and student services were rated highly by students and alumni. They valued the Indigenous Knowledge content and approach to their courses, programs, student services, and campus activities. Community-based programs, cohort learning, and Elders' mentorship were valued by all research participants. The strength of the academic programming and student services was guided by the original vision of Indigenous community leaders and Elders who established NVIT to service the educational needs of their communities to become self-determining and sustainable. The subsequent NVIT leadership has continued to fulfill this goal as NVIT has expanded its educational mandate and services by becoming the first public Aboriginal post-secondary institution in British Columbia. At times, addressing accreditation, programmatic, and accountability demands of provincial government departments, other public post-secondary

institutions, and external funding agencies has conflicted with Indigenous community expectations and needs. With these challenges, the NVIT leadership has had to take an anti-hegemonic stance by privileging the priorities of Indigenization and community self-determination.

NVIT's institutional policies related to governance, learning and student services positively address Aboriginal students' academic, financial, social, and cultural issues. The NVIT governance mechanisms through its Board of Governors and Elders' Council have representation from Aboriginal communities that it serves. Elders' leadership about cultural knowledge and protocols and community-based partnerships ensure that policies and approaches for learning and student services are culturally grounded and responsive to students' and community needs, which is a central meaning of the concept 'Indigenization'.

These policies, from the perspectives of the Aboriginal students, faculty, staff, and Elders have contributed substantially towards high access, retention, and completion rates for many NVIT students. It follows that through careful planning and programming, former and current NVIT leadership, faculty, Elders, and staff have contributed to NVIT becoming a transformational leader in Aboriginal post-secondary education in British Columbia and Canada. The Indigenous teachings of the Eagle's Perch are firmly placed within NVIT and protected by the principles and actions of Indigenization, anti-hegemony, and self-determination.

The Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education that was presented in Chapter Six uses the seven principles of Indigenization, anti-hegemony, self-determination, good governance, educational values, program relevancy, and extended family to guide the development and implementation of policies, programs, and student services for Aboriginal post-secondary student success. This framework is both the Eagle's Perch and the Eagle. For almost 30 years, the teachings and transformative power of the Eagle have guided the development of NVIT as a post-secondary institution that serves the educational needs of Indigenous people and Indigenous communities in British Columbia. Over the years, changes in NVIT leadership have occurred, but the original vision of the Eagle and its founders has persisted and has become stronger despite various challenges. The seven principles were transformed into policy and programmatic

practices at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. I have chosen to present them as principles in order for others to transform them into practices that work for their post-secondary educational context.

### **7.1 Future Policy Challenges for NVIT**

Throughout my interviews and survey analysis, I was impressed by the sense of purpose that drives the students, alumni, Elders, management and Board of Governors. Their notions of NVIT's leadership, in Aboriginal post-secondary education make them compelling and admirable respondents. My case study of NVIT would be an incomplete picture, if I did not highlight some of the future policy challenges that NVIT faces. In some ways, the challenges faced by NVIT are similar to those faced by most Aboriginal institutions. This section outlines some of the policy challenges confronting NVIT, and these include student funding, support for Elders, and support for the cohort family model.

#### **Challenging Federal/Provincial Student and Institutional Funding**

Funding support for students' post-secondary education extends beyond the cost of tuition to include other support mechanisms necessary to ensure student success at the post-secondary level. In addition to tuition, students require funding for books, supplies and equipment costs associated with programs of study, living allowances, childcare, transportation costs and other mandatory student fees. Funding is also required for other services including, counselling and transition programs to assist with the transition from secondary school, preparatory programs, academic upgrading, assistance with entrance exams/interviews, etc. Many students who attend NVIT come from low-income families or live in poverty. They may receive some funding from their Bands/communities but the amounts they receive often do not cover all their expenses. They face many challenges in their application for government student loans, one example, is that if a student receives Band funding then they are often denied a government student loan, even though their funding does not cover all costs. Students may be anxious about applying for a government loan because they are concerned that they will have difficulty re-paying the loan after they complete their programs. Their anxieties are often based on previous denials for employment and racism that they

have experienced with job searches. NVIT will need to continue its challenge to provincial and federal governments to provide adequate post-secondary student funding.

Another major issue with funding is Institutional funding. A small specialized institution like NVIT has the potential to grow and build programming that is relevant and meets the needs of the Aboriginal community. However, the provincial government funds on a targeted Full Time Equivalent (FTE) through a Ministry of Advanced Education formula. NVIT is in a 'catch 22' situation, there is an increased need for developmental and new program delivery funding, however, the rate of funding associated with the FTE formula does not allow NVIT to expand without eliminating existing programs. Aboriginal communities and leadership often request other programming that would address their needs but NVIT has limitations to producing new programming without jeopardizing present operations and programs. This is a frustrating time and causes concern for NVIT leadership and Aboriginal communities. The provincial FTE regulation is an example of a form of systemic hegemony that prevents further growth and innovation. Somehow, NVIT and other post-secondary institutions need to challenge and overcome the institutional funding limitations.

#### ***7.1.1 Increased Support for Elders' Roles***

The support and availability of Elders was a much-discussed element of Aboriginal support in stakeholder interviews. Currently, NVIT Elders' roles are formalized through policy. This policy was developed by the Elders and presented to the Management and Board of Governors. NVIT recognizes Elders as a major part of the governance structure and that role within the governance system is very critical. NVIT has made a commitment to the Elders' Council by way of ensuring that their budget is a mandatory core budget item. Each year their budget is secured but, it could be increased to address the positive work the Elders contribute and it would be able to address compensation to the Elders' Council at a more significant amount than what is presently given. NVIT as well as other post-secondary institutions need to find ways to increase funding and other institutional support for Elders to recognize their important roles and contributions to post-secondary education. The NVIT Elders have carved spaces within the institution that extends its mandate in ways that enhance the self-determination capacities of the institution. To apply this concept to the

mainstream system would encompass a paradigm shift in the systems' understanding and accepting of Elders as valid and legitimate faculty. Once this acceptance has occurred, then the system would engage Elders in the role of Cultural Faculty at the same level as other faculty members in the institution, thus legitimizing the role of Elder as a valued professional.

### ***7.1.2 Support for the Family Cohort Model***

The Family Cohort Model was identified as one of the fundamental elements in the student and alumni responses for success at NVIT. The Family Cohort Model allowed for the students to live and work together and structure themselves into 'cultural' family units as well as an extended family this process is a structure that lends itself to the principle of self-determination. A community that strives for self-determination cannot do so without culturally strong extended family units that work together for the well-being of their community member and their environment. The Family Cohort model's success is phenomenal and the cost to achieve that success is also great. The institution needs to review the funding attached to cohort models and resource them as best as they can. There may be a budget implication but the success I believe, outweighs the cost. The cost of cohort members meeting, sharing, learning and working together is normally not a part of tuition, student services, or ancillary costs for which students can apply to their funders. A policy of cohort education needs to be designed that will allow students the opportunity to participate in such a program. The value of the Family Cohort Model is key to the success and confidence it fosters in students. To expand the inter-generational impact and benefit of cohorts, annual cohort leadership and success camps would provide a larger venue for alumni and students to gather together to share and learn from one another. The alumni could also provide mentoring services at these gatherings.

## **7.2 Significance and Contribution of the Research**

The major contributions this study makes to the literature and practice of Aboriginal post-secondary education is first, the NVIT story told from the perspective of Aboriginal community leaders and NVIT Elders, students, alumni, and management. NVIT's story shows how people who were and are committed to Indigenization, self-determination, and anti-hegemonic ideals transformed them into

practice for Aboriginal student success.<sup>18</sup> My thesis confirms that despite some changes to the educational system Aboriginal students, Elders, management, and Board of Governors interviewed in this research still confront significant challenges when they enter sites such as public post-secondary institutions. A profound finding in this thesis has been the extent of hegemonic structures that Aboriginal institutions confront and negotiate in post-secondary education. These negotiations are especially profound and painful with government and mainstream institutions where the narrative of ongoing colonial power is discussed and employed. Aboriginal institutions also employ a number of strategies to resist ongoing colonialism and mainstream powers. The narrative of colonialism and imperialism are not new but they do reaffirm that post colonialism powers continue to have devastating effects on Aboriginal peoples. It also reaffirms the pervasiveness of hegemonic structures and policies in Aboriginal post-secondary institutions despite the fact that many would rather ignore or downplay the level of power and influence that exists. There is no doubt that the Aboriginal students, Elders, Board of Governors and management interviewed in this research describe a significant psychological toll in an environment of ongoing colonialism and power struggle that takes place at NVIT. The thesis offers some suggestions for mitigating this impact in Aboriginal post-secondary education.

The second major contribution is the development of the Transformative Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education based on the strong institutional leadership role by NVIT in providing transformative processes in Aboriginal post-secondary education. Institutional leadership is critical for making systemic improvements to Aboriginal post-secondary education. The Transformational Framework is unique in that to my knowledge, no other such framework for Aboriginal post-secondary education exists in Canada. It should be beneficial to Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions that are moving toward self-determination and public colleges and universities that are interested in Indigenizing their programs and student services.

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<sup>18</sup> The only other in-depth study of an Aboriginal post-secondary institute in British Columbia is that of Haig-Brown (1995) who conducted a critical ethnography of the Native Education Centre (now Native Education College) located in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The Family Cohort Model is the third major contribution to Aboriginal post-secondary education scholarship. In general, post-secondary institutions have failed to identify culturally responsive and innovative ways of creating successful learning approaches for Aboriginal students. The failure to help students mobilize, to share ideas, and to gain support from mentors and leaders also undermines students' success in post-secondary education. One solution to this problem is the Family Cohort Model that offers an innovative way for students to come together to learn and take care of themselves as a family or cohort. Commenting on the concept of "all my relations," King (1990) argued that the concept is an encouragement for people to accept the responsibilities they have within this universal family by living their lives in harmonious and moral manner (p.15). An efficient and stable family or cohort program can provide an important learning mechanism for building a family of students who work hard, learn together, share responsibilities and care for themselves to achieve high student success and retention rates.

### **7.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

I have shown the advantages of conducting research by using a mixed method case study. Despite some of its short comings, which will be discussed below, my research study has demonstrated that several techniques can be applied in such a case study method to achieve a holistic examination of a particular post-secondary education site. For example, surveying and interviewing users such as students, alumni, management and administrators, Board, and Elders provided meaningful and in-depth individual and collective insights from those who are most deeply involved with NVIT. A common criticism of research from Indigenous people is that they have not been intimately engaged with designing the research and that their knowledge has been interpreted by outsiders. I am an insider to NVIT and students and alumni were involved in pilot testing the survey. The Elders also changed the data gathering format from focus groups to individual interviews with representatives from their Elders' Council. The participants were all Aboriginal people who studied, worked, or were involved in NVIT's governance, management, and programming.

The small sample of student survey responses was a limitation of the research. In Chapter Two, I outlined the major problems that I encountered with administering an online survey with limited

computer access for students that contributed to the small response rate. Because of my management position, I did not want students to feel obligated or intimidated if I had asked them to participate in focus groups or interviews, so instead, I chose the survey method. Perhaps having paper copies of the questionnaire would have resulted in a higher student response rate.

#### **7.4 Potential Research Applications and Future Research**

The potential applications for this research can be phenomenal because it opens many doors for those working with and for Aboriginal institutions. The research data from students, Elders, alumni, management and Board of Governors, and the secondary document review all point to the growing number of Aboriginal institutions and the strong leadership role they have had on Aboriginal education. In the past 15 years there has been an increased number of Aboriginal institutions forming and being involved in Aboriginal education, which has changed the provincial post-secondary landscape. Today, in British Columbia there are 40 Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions that deliver programming from literacy to graduate programs in their Aboriginal community. This is a huge increase compared to the six that were in existence in 1980s, when NVIT became an independent society. Of the six (Native Education College, Native Indian Teacher Education Program<sup>19</sup>, En'owkin Centre, Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society and Chemainus Native College) NVIT was the only one that acquired public post-secondary status through provincial legislature in 1995. NVIT has maintained its mandate to build capacity and it does so by working with and mentoring Aboriginal institutions that partner with them. This case study and Transformational Framework can be used by the Aboriginal institutes for their future planning purposes. Some of the case study approaches such as the Elders' involvement and Family Cohort Model may help reinforce best practices that Aboriginal programs and institutes may already be using and they could be areas for future research.

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<sup>19</sup> The Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) is a Bachelor of Education degree program within the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. NITEP was included in the set of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions that met in the 1980s because it included Aboriginal community-based education, Aboriginal policy decision-making, and Indigenous Knowledge.

The advantages of the case study method are its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports. There is a need for further research inquiry that explores different types of methodologies, techniques and tools applicable in Indigenous case study approaches. The Family Cohort Model has addressed barriers such as isolation, loneliness, and learning difficulties and at the same time it has also opened up other lines of inquiry that needs further investigation. For example, this case study focused only on NVIT. Learning how other Indigenous Institutions in Canada and internationally use cohorts for student learning would make an important contribution to Indigenous post-secondary learning.

### **7.5 Personal Reflections**

As a 10 year old, I remember sitting on the steps of my Great Ka7a's (Grandmother) house day dreaming of a future, while my Ka7a combed and braided my hair telling me that I could be anything I wanted to be. That the only thing that would stop me: is me. I believed those words and I have lived by them. I strived and persevered to be what I wanted to be. Through all the challenges and policies of the past to today I have maintained my Ka7as words.

Trekking this trail of doctoral study and research has been a battle, a joy, a frustration, a challenge, and most of all a reward. I have spent many hours reflecting on the research, the writing, and the many conversations I have had throughout this experience and what comes to mind, what rises to the top for me is the realization that regardless of the past, the challenges and the negativity, I work in a place that can be my almost 'utopia', a place where being a leader is embraced, being an educator is expected, and constant change is mandatory. This has given my heart the freedom to be proud. I have been given and have used various intellectual tools to create change, and the spirit to persist.

As the Vice President of NVIT, it is important to note that through this process I have personally been able to evaluate how I do things and the outcomes of those decisions. This research has allowed me to be more proactive and critical of our policies and procedures. I can speak with confidence and knowledge that I did not have prior to the onset of this study. I am conscious of the way structures can benefit and impede Aboriginal community partnerships and programming as well

as campus based programming. With the knowledge gained, changes can be made to ensure that NVIT remains Indigenous and that its heart and soul are integral to the students, Elders, staff, faculty, management and Board of Governors. I firmly believe that NVIT is positioned very well to achieve its future expanded vision of becoming an Aboriginal University.

Finally, in the background issues at the beginning of this thesis, and in the literature review, I argued that there is a growing consensus about the use of Indigenous Knowledge as a base for the education and development of Aboriginal students. In this regard, the point has been made that NVIT has a holistic perspective toward educating Aboriginal students. NVIT achieves its goals by focusing on the students and community as a whole and recognizing that people will be committed to NVIT's leadership vision when NVIT consults and collaborates with them. Often story-telling and a symbol like the Eagle's Perch are used to help NVIT deliver its mission and visionary objectives. As noted, there are various examples of how Aboriginal values are finding their way into mainstream post-secondary institutions, but those values cannot be appropriately taught without the input from those who know best, that is, Aboriginals, themselves.

This study has demonstrated that an Aboriginal institution such as NVIT is a natural place for designing and implementing Indigenous Knowledge based learning experiences that aim to develop 'good life' teachings, which are needed for achieving individual, family and community self-determination. The tendency in the earlier research studies and literature on Indigenous education was focused on how to get Aboriginal people to assimilate Western ways of learning and knowledge. Recently, Indigenous academics many of whom have been cited throughout this thesis have produced considerable research findings that address how Western educators could understand Aboriginal worldviews and ways of knowing as constituting knowledge systems in their own right, in order to improve educational success for Aboriginal learners. Aboriginal students at NVIT are taught to recognize and appreciate what they already know as Indigenous people and the way they have come to know it (e.g. storytelling, Elders, metaphor, symbols, songs, case studies and projects). At the same time, the students are advised to recognize the co-existence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems. Then it is up to them to understand and relate to the world in its multiple

dimensions and varied perspectives without giving up their rootedness in Indigenous ways of learning and knowing and culture, which is a form of self-determination.

Throughout this research study, the intent has been to extend our understanding of the processes of learning in Aboriginal post-secondary institution. At NVIT, the cultural histories and practices of Aboriginal people are incorporated in the learning environment and the curriculum. The curricula, teaching methodologies and assessment strategies are based on a worldview that adequately recognizes and appreciates Indigenous notions of an interdependent universe and the importance of place in their societies.

It is the notion of a spiritual endeavour and a higher calling that drive NVIT as a leader in Aboriginal post-secondary education. Reflecting on my years of dealing with multiple challenges in Aboriginal post-secondary education, I feel that, out of that frustration, NVIT has become the hope for transforming Aboriginal post-secondary education. Hope is more than just a word; it is a reality and strength of NVIT. The Transformational Framework for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education is also more than words; it is based on the lived experiences and Indigenous Knowledges of Aboriginal students, faculty, Elders, leaders, and community members. NVIT and this framework are a gathering and learning place for those who believe in the power of Eagles.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### **A.1 General Admission Statement**

Eligibility for admission is based on citizenship, age, English language and academic requirements. Specific program admission requirements or course prerequisites must be met in addition to any general admission requirements. In cases where applicants may not meet the specific admission requirements for a desired program or course, NVIT offers programming which may lead to the qualifications necessary for specific program entry.

#### **General admission**

In all cases, specific program admission requirements or course prerequisites take precedence over general admission requirements and should be checked at the time of application. Although some programs and/or courses at NVIT do not require Grade 12 or equivalent, the following qualifications are generally accepted where Grade 12 or equivalent is listed as a requirement for admission:

- a) Students who have graduated from a BC secondary school;
- b) Students who have a BC Adult Graduation Diploma;
- c) Students who have completed the GED meet the general admission requirements for Grade 12 or equivalent, but are also required to complete an assessment and are subject to specific program and/or course requirements;
- d) Students who have not graduated from a BC secondary school may be admitted to the College Readiness program, or desired program, upon completion of an assessment indicative of required English and Math requirements.

#### **Citizenship and immigration requirements**

NVIT accepts applications for admission from prospective students only if they

- a) Are citizens of Canada; or
- b) Hold status granted by Employment and Immigration Canada as Permanent Residents (landed immigrants), proof of which must be submitted; or
- c) Hold a valid study permit issued by Immigration Canada, proof of which must be submitted. Students applying under this section are specifically referred to the sections of this calendar dealing with International Students and International Student Fees.

#### **English Language Requirement**

To create the best possible learning environment at NVIT it is critical that all students be able to participate in classroom activities and complete written assignments. English is the language of instruction and communication at NVIT. Therefore, all applicants must demonstrate fluency in English by fulfilling one of the following options:

1. Two years of full-time study at grade 8 or higher level with English as the language of instruction. Studies that are part of an English as a Second Language program cannot be used toward fulfilling this option; or

2. Successful completion of BC English 11 (or equivalent acceptable to NVIT) with a minimum grade of C+; or

**3. Successful completion of a university transferable post-secondary level English course with a minimum grade of C; or**

4. A minimum score of 213 on the computer-based TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test with a minimum essay score of 4.0; or

5. A minimum score of 550 on the paper-based TOEFL test and a minimum TWE (Test of Written English) score of 4.0; or

6. A minimum score of 4 on the LPI (Language Proficiency Index) within the past 2 years; or

7. A minimum score of 6.0 on each of the academic listening, reading, writing, and speaking modules of the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam.

## **A.2 Mature Status**

For admission purposes, a mature student is one who is 19 years of age or older, and who has been out of school for at least one year. Adults are encouraged to apply to specific programs even if they are unable to meet specified educational requirements since other factors such as maturity and work experience may be considered in some programs. If students do not meet minimum educational requirements for a desired program, they may demonstrate these requirements through an assessment and/or upgrade by completing appropriate program admission requirements and course pre-requisites.

<http://www.nvit.ca/about/policies/secivadmissionfees/c33generaladmissionrequirements.htm>

In addition to the entrance requirements, NVIT also address Prior Learning in the Following way:

NVIT recognizes that students may acquire from their life and work experiences learning that is equivalent to learning acquired from formal post-secondary education. Through PLAR, NVIT will grant credits towards a certificate or diploma for informal learning that fulfils program requirements.

There are several methods of documenting and demonstrating prior learning. The PLAR Advisor can provide information about the various methods of assessment including challenge exams, portfolios, demonstrations, and work site assessments.

The following methods of assessment may be used, independently or in combination, to determine if the PLA candidate has met the requirements for the course. The assessment method should be appropriate for the subject or skill area, targeted to the learning objectives (competencies, skills or outcomes), and reflective of the level of achievement expected of any student.

**Challenge Exams:** A written or oral exam designed to measure the candidate's prior learning experience against the offered course requirements. This may be the same exam given to the students who are formally attending the class but will usually be based on the learning outcome of the course rather than the additional information an enrolled student would have gained.

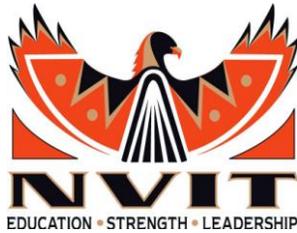
**Portfolio:** Documents or objects that have been produced by the candidate; such as reports, videos, or projects that represent a body of work from a professional work site.

Demonstration: Simulation or actual presentation of the candidate's abilities, which may be live, recorded or videotaped. The assessment may include such activities as oral presentations, role playing a situation, creating a document on a computer, operating equipment or interviewing a client.

Work Site Assessment: Similar to a demonstration. The candidate is observed performing tasks as part of normal work routine. The assessment is usually made by faculty assigned to a candidate, but may also be made by a work supervisor or field expert.

NOTE: Fees for PLAR are the same as tuition for regular classroom registration, however, as PLAR is a recognition assessment tool it will not be considered part of a full time course load as set out in the criteria for a BC student loan. Students who are considering PLAR should take this into consideration when applying for funding. <http://www.nvit.ca/services/plar.htm>.

## Appendix B: Community-Based Assessment Project Plan - June 2011 to March 2012



### A. Description of Project

**Project Title:** Community-Based Assessment

**Project Sponsor:** Director Enrolment Services & Registrar

**Project Duration:** June 2011 to March 2012

### B. Purpose / Rationale

The findings and recommendations in the report from the Community-Based Assessment Pilot conducted by NVIT in March 2011 will be used to inform and guide NVIT's province-wide community-based assessment initiative. This project will:

- Provide Aboriginal communities with access to assessment services and support;
- Offer community members (prospective learners) an opportunity to assess their current skills in a familiar and relevant environment;
- Review assessment results and meet with prospective learners to develop individualized educational plans;
- Provide a Summary Report to the community that highlights the educational opportunities;
- Enter results in Colleague Student

### C. Goals and Objectives

This project will be the final phase of the Retention Alert project. Phase Three of the Retention Alert project moves from the construction and implementation in Year One and the Refining and Reporting in Year Two to the analysis and action proposed in Phase Three. The Datamart of program, course, grade and credential completion rates provides rich information for analysis and reporting. The results will be presented to Administration and faculty for strategic decisions related to services and delivery designed to support program retention targets.

The conclusions of the pilots emphasize the importance of: significant pre assessment planning and activities; subject based reviews prior to assessment; adaptable approaches to address situational needs; sufficient resources and time allocation; meaningful face-to-face post assessment dialogue with learner; and reporting back to the community on overall academic learner needs. In no way do the principles adopted undermine the validity and reliability of the assessment results. The tools used by NVIT are widely accepted in the post-secondary realm and include Accuplacer and the Canadian Adult Achievement Test. Overall, with the community-based assessment pilots, NVIT recognized an increase in assessment completers compared to past processes and practices. Likewise, NVIT will be adapting many of the community-based Best Practices to establish an on-campus Best Practices Checklist. Although there will be slight variances, it is unlikely that there will be any significant change between the two sets of defined practices designed to provide respectful, relevant and meaningful assessment experiences founded on learner-centered principles

Connecting Retention Alert to the proposed project, particularly Gradebook will provide an opportunity for support services to follow up with students as soon as their first grade below a "C" is recorded. With the current system, a low grade is not identifiable until the final grade is submitted. Integrating Retention Alert with Moodle and Gradebook will provide NVIT the capacity to automate an alert when

a grade below “C” results from the very first assignment/exam. Early intervention and academic support may promote retention and higher student success rates.

#### **D. Deliverables & Specifications**

1. Finalized documentation of business processes for the ongoing reporting related to Retention Alert;
2. Finalized documentation of business processes for the automation of alerts generated from the implementation and integration of Moodle and Gradebook;
2. Presentation and collaboration of best practices in Retention Alert with other stakeholders;
3. Research and analysis of past and current retention rates from the course, program and credential perspective;
4. Collaborative establishment of retention benchmarks for programs and courses.

#### **E. Project Risks, Constraints & Assumptions**

##### **1. Risks**

- a) Resources:** There may be a challenge in recruiting someone with strong Colleague, database and reporting skills.
- b) Priority:** Analysis, reporting and presentation of the datamart of program, course, grade and credential completion rates is critical for NVIT make informed decisions that aid in supporting student success.
- c) Change:** Change risks are minimal as this is an ongoing project.
- d) Technology:** Colleague, Web-based Assessment Tools, Internet and Microsoft skills, particularly Excel, will be required,
- e) Contingency:** May need to look at secondment of internal personnel.

##### **2. Constraints**

- a) Time:** Data analysis and reporting requires significant time. It is estimated that this project may require 10% of Project Manager’s time for Coordination and training.
- b) Resources:** There may be the need to hire a third party to prepare analysis tools.
- c) Cost:** This is project funding and ongoing funds are not available meaning all deliverables need to be subsumed into operating in subsequent years.
- d) Scope:** NVIT needs to understand its current retention rates to make decisions that support increased student retention and success rates.

##### **Assumptions**

That Team Members will make themselves available for meetings and training as required;

#### **F. Project Members**

- Project Sponsor:** Kylie Cavaliere, Director, Enrolment Services & Registrar
- Project Manager:** To be determined, Associate Registrar
- Project Team:** Kylie Cavaliere, Director of Enrolment Services & Registrar  
To be determined, Associate Registrar  
NVIT Academic Planners

#### **G. Communication**

- Sponsor:** The Project Manager will provide a status report to the Sponsor at various points through the project.
- Project Team:** The Project Team will meet as required during the project.

## **Appendix C: Survey Policy - Approved/revised - September 8, 2008**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past few years there has been significant growth in the number of surveys used to gather data from and about NVIT's students, faculty and staff. The increasing requirement – internally and externally – for understanding student and/or employee experiences, and for measuring outcomes, means a continuing need for such surveys. Given the increasingly high profile that a number of consortium surveys have, it is essential that results be reliable and meaningful. However, survey proliferation raises the concern that their effectiveness will be seriously reduced if the target populations are faced with too many requests. This situation has led to a decision to better coordinate institute surveys (see Scope below for definition) on campus, which the survey policy outlined here is intended to do.

### **POLICY**

The management of NVIT Surveys is the responsibility of the Survey Management Committee, chaired by the Director of Integrated Systems and Institutional Research and including the Registrar and the Dean of Instruction and Student Success.

The mandate of this group is to:

1. Recommend policy and process improvements in the area of surveys.
2. Receive and consider applications for permission to survey.
3. Maintain an account of the level of surveying imposed on the different constituencies on campus.
4. Assess the effectiveness of approved surveys once completed.
5. Report bi-annually to the Management Committee on survey activity.

Note: in the event a conflict exists whereby a member of the Survey Management Committee is submitting an application for a survey, a Vice-President will assume their position for the purpose of considering the survey application.

### **PURPOSE**

The objective of this policy is to maximize the benefits from surveys on campus. This will be done by attempting to encourage high participation rates by:

- Ensuring good survey methodology and design;
- Encouraging the communication of survey results with the NVIT community;
- Avoiding the collection of duplicate information; and
- Reducing possible survey fatigue by limiting the number and timing of surveys to any one specific group.

### **SCOPE**

NVIT Surveys include any broad sampling or census of a population at NVIT (plus applicants or alumni) that involves direct [\[1\]](#) requests to individuals for information. NVIT Surveys may be addressed to any part of the NVIT community and may address topics including academic, research, personnel, management and environmental issues. NVIT Surveys also include surveys managed by outside agencies but addressed to campus groups and surveys that are parts of research projects.

- I. Grand-parented Surveys:  
The following Internal and External Surveys are considered to be approved:

- Course Evaluations
- College and Institute Student Outcomes (CISO)
- Baccalaureate Graduate Survey (BGS)
- Statistics Canada's National Graduate Survey

If you are unsure whether your survey falls under the scope of NVIT Surveys, as referred to in this policy, feel free to contact the Office of Integrated Systems and Institutional Research for clarification (contact info below).

#### **PROCEDURE:**

A group wishing to conduct a broad survey, or having responsibility for managing part of an external survey, should consider whether it could be construed as a NVIT Survey (see Scope above). If yes, the group will make an application to the Survey Management Committee for permission to proceed. The application will identify:

1. The source and strategic or research context of the survey
2. The issues to be addressed or data to be collected
3. The population to be addressed
4. The approach to be used
5. How the data will be used and results communicated.

[1] Mail, phone, e-mail, and/or in person

The assessment criteria for NVIT Surveys will include:

- a. Alignment with NVIT's mandate and philosophy
- b. Design of the survey including timing, scope, and mode of delivery
- c. Extent to which other surveys supply (or could supply) the required data
- d. Extent of survey burden on target groups within the university
- e. Government requirements

Contact

Cathy Carson  
Director Integrated Systems & Institutional Research  
250 378 3316, or email [ccarson@nvit.bc.ca](mailto:ccarson@nvit.bc.ca)

## Appendix D: Elders' Focus Group/Talking Circle Discussion Guide

Many people think NVIT as Aboriginal public post-secondary institution addresses, in innovative ways, some of the post-secondary education barriers affecting students. As a member of NVIT Elders' council, I am going to ask you about a number of ways Elders have been supporting students to cope with their academic, social, cultural and financial barriers.

1. How long has the Elders' Council been functioning at NVIT?
2. Please tell me what functions, activities and duties you perform to help students cope with their studies at NVIT?
3. How does the Elder's role and knowledge influence the academic practices of students and instructors? (for example how are traditional teachings and practices, stories, listening imbedded in course learning and instruction?).
4. How does the Elders' role and knowledge influence the socio-cultural practices of students and instructors and staff? (e.g. In healing, counseling, mediation, music, festivities etc.).
5. How does the Elder's role and knowledge influence financial services and practices of students (e.g. food bank, clothing, etc.?)
6. How does the Elder's Council influence decision-making at NVIT? (for example, at the Board Directors, management policies).
7. How does the way that NVIT helps students learn about their Aboriginal identity, language and culture compare to what is offered at other post-secondary institutions?
8. In your experience what are some of the challenges and successes for NVIT to eliminate barriers toward post-secondary education for Aboriginal students?

## Appendix E: Management/Board/Elders' Interview Guide

NVIT as an Aboriginal post-secondary institution has over the years developed policies related to governance, admission, student services, staffing, and programming. To what extent do these policies effectively address Aboriginal students' academic, financial, social, and cultural issues?

Interviewees-- President, Vice President of Corporate Services, Chair of the Board, and Vice Chair of the Board and Elders.

1. What attracted you to NVIT?
2. How long have you been with NVIT?
3. What is your role at NVIT?
4. In your opinion what makes NVIT different from other public post-secondary institutes?
5. What are some of the challenges you have had to deal with?
6. How do you generate funding to support services at NVIT?
7. How is Aboriginal community involved with NVIT?
8. How are your policies structured and who structures them?
9. How is Aboriginal culture/traditions/systems incorporated or utilized at NVIT?
10. What types of innovative strategies have you developed to attract extra funding to support academic, financial and socio-cultural activities?
11. What is the fate of the partnership degree programs NVIT embarked on some years ago? Were they helpful to the students towards pursuing further education?
12. You know that Aboriginal students have to use English language to study and most of the curriculums are designed with a focus of Western education content. So for Aboriginal students, often there are barriers which have precluded their full participation in education programs. What types of strategies has NVIT leadership designed to address these impacts?
13. How do you think educational programs at NVIT have helped Aboriginal students to address barriers such as learning about values, self-determination, culture and language and holistic thinking which are major parts of the critical pedagogies attributed to being Aboriginal?
14. Do you think NVIT hiring policies are targeted towards attracting instructors who are academically competent but also understand Aboriginal culture and history of struggles? Please elaborate upon your answer.
15. Are the current NVIT courses or programs preparing students for future leadership positions in management, government, technology, band administration, business, and policy analysts? In other words, is NVIT preparing future Aboriginal leaders to transform their institutions? If yes, please elaborate and tell me why you think so. If no, please elaborate and tell me why you think so.
16. Recently, a number of students completing NVIT have pursued undergraduate and graduate studies in other Universities. Is NVIT considering moving into offering undergraduate program on its own or will it focus on some of the exiting partnership with Universities e.g. UBC, UNBC, TRU, SFU and others to offer degree programs?
17. The community outreach programs are gaining momentum these years, NVIT is connected to communities offering courses to many people. Do you think new policies (incentives and innovative ideas) need to be developed to strengthen the communities program? Why?
18. What role do Elders take in addressing barriers that preclude Aboriginal students their full participation in education programs that addresses their social and cultural needs and aspirations?
19. What are some of the barriers if any, does NVIT have? How do you overcome those barriers? Do barriers exist for faculty, staff, hiring, recruiting and governance, if so how is this addressed?

What is your vision for NVIT?

## Appendix F: Students' Questionnaire

Many people think academic, financial, social and cultural barriers preclude the full participation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education. Towards addressing these barriers, education at NVIT has been designed to reflect on "students' Aboriginal identity", language, culture and self-determination etc. I am going to ask you about a number of ways NVIT made changes to these barriers to make it possible for student learn about their own identity.

1. How many years did it take you to complete your program at NVIT?

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

1a. Which program did you complete at NVIT?

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1b. Please use this space for additional comments:

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2. Please rate the reason why you initially became a student at NVIT, which one (1) indicating your top reason and five (5) being your lowest.

2a. Get a better job

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2b. Develop new skills

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2c. Obtain qualification

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2d. Gain increased self-confidence

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2e. Learn interesting things

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2f. Learn Aboriginal culture and language

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

2g. Please comment:

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3. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and five (5) represents "Extremely satisfied", how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the inclusion of Aboriginal values and culture in the following?

3a. Curriculum design

1      2      3      4      5  
           

3b. Books used in course work

1      2      3      4      5  
           

3c. Instructional resources

1      2      3      4      5  
           

3d. Teaching

1      2      3      4      5  
           

3e. Aboriginal Language used in class or on campus

1      2      3      4      5  
           

3f. Please comment:

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4. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to quality of teaching overall?

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following:

5a. Library resources

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5b. Tutoring services

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5c. Computer lab

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5d. Math lab

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5e. English lab

1      2      3      4      5  
           

5f. Please comment:

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6. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to linking Aboriginal culture to the following:

6a. Campus festivities

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

6b. Orientation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

6c. Convocation

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

6d. Please comment:

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7. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following administrative services:

7a. Information on bursaries, scholarships and funding provided by the registrar’s office

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

7b. Tuition paid for each course at NVIT

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

7c. Submitting final grades on time

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

7d. Academic planning

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

7e. Please comment:

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8. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following policies initiated by management:

8a. Admission policy

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

8b. Housing

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

8c. Other, please comment:

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9. On a scale of 1 to 5 where one (1) represents “Extremely dissatisfied” and five (5) represents “Extremely satisfied”, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the role Elders’ play:

9a. Admission policy

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

9b. Please comment:

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10. As a student at NVIT how would you rate your education at NVIT with respect to preparing you for the following: (1= Very poor, 2= Poor, 3= Adequate, 4= Very Good, 5= Excellent)

10a. Aboriginal identity

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10b. Self-determination

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10c. Employment

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10d. Leadership

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10e. Group dynamics

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10f. Cross-cultural relations

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10g. Partnership building

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

10h. Please comment on any of the above items:

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11. As an Aboriginal person, my studies at NVIT may have addresses aspects of worldviews that are important to Aboriginal self-determination and culture. Please rate how NVIT addressed the following aspects: (1= Very poor, 2= Poor, 3= Adequate, 4= Very Good, 5= Excellent)

11a. Spirituality

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

11b. Humanity

1 2 3 4 5

11c. Holistic

1 2 3 4 5

11d. Individualism

1 2 3 4 5

11e. Language

1 2 3 4 5

11f. Ceremony

1 2 3 4 5

11g. Objectivity

1 2 3 4 5

11h. Collectivism

1 2 3 4 5

11i. Dualism

1 2 3 4 5

11j. Reductionism

1 2 3 4 5

11k. Community

1 2 3 4 5

11l. Story telling

1 2 3 4 5

11m. Elders

1 2 3 4 5

11n. Traditionalism

1 2 3 4 5

11o. Please comment on any of the above items:

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12. Name several courses that have helped you develop your cultural worldview and identify:  
Please list course(s):

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13. Rate the course delivery methods that you experienced at NVIT.  
(1= Very poor, 2= Poor, 3= Adequate, 4= Very Good, 5= Excellent)

13a. Face to face

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

13b. Lecture

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

13c. Small group

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

13d. On-line

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14. Rate the styles of teaching you experienced at NVIT.

(1= Very poor, 2= Poor, 3= Adequate, 4= Very Good, 5= Excellent)

14a. Instructor/advocating

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14b. Instructor/directing

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14c. Instructor/consulting

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14d. Instructor/facilitating

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>				

14e. Please comment:

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15. As an Aboriginal person, my studies at NVIT may have addresses aspects of the following services that are important to me. Please rate the following services at NVIT:

(1= Very poor, 2= Poor, 3= Adequate, 4= Very Good, 5= Excellent)

15a. Housing

1	2	3	4	5
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15b. Counseling

1      2      3      4      5

15c. Childcare

1      2      3      4      5

15d. Job preparation

1      2      3      4      5

15e. Cultural interaction

1      2      3      4      5

15f. Bursary/scholarship

1      2      3      4      5

15g. Funding

1      2      3      4      5

15h. Elders' support

1      2      3      4      5

15i. Community support

1      2      3      4      5

15j. Please comment on any of the above items:

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16. Please provide some suggestions if there are areas that NVIT should improve:

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17. How likely are you to recommend NVIT to a friend or relative?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Not likely
- Other

18. Please comment about the positive and challenging aspects of leadership at NVIT, such as; leadership provided by the Board of Director, Elders' Council, and Management, Faculty members and/or Student groups:

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## Appendix G: Alumnae Questionnaire

Many people think academic, financial, social and cultural barriers preclude the full participation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education. Towards addressing these barriers, education at NVIT has been designed to reflect on "students' Aboriginal identity", language, culture, and self-determination etc. I am going to ask you about a number of ways NVIT made changes to these barriers to make it possible for students to learn about their own identity.

1. How many years did it take you to complete your program at NVIT?

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

2. Please rank order of reason why you initially became a student at NVIT, with 1 indicating your top reason.

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

Please note: you can choose some of the reasons are listed below

1. To get a better job
2. develop skills
3. Obtain qualification,
4. Gain increased self-confidence,
5. Learn interesting things
6. Other

3. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the inclusion of Aboriginal values and culture in the curriculum design, books, teaching and other relevant resources?

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

4. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to quality of teaching?

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

5. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following?

5a. Library

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

5b. Tutoring

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

5c. Computer lab

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

5d. Maths

1 2 3 4 5 Other

5E. English

1 2 3 4 5 Other

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following?

6a. Linking Aboriginal culture

1 2 3 4 5 Other

6b. Orientation

1 2 3 4 5 Other

6c. Convocation

1 2 3 4 5 Other

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following?

7a. Information on bursaries, scholarships and funding provided by the registrar's office

1 2 3 4 5 Other

7b. Fees paid for each course at NVIT

1 2 3 4 5 Other

7c. Submitting final grades on time

1 2 3 4 5 Other

8. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to the following policies initiated by management?

8a. Admission policy

1 2 3 4 5 Other

8b. Housing

1 2 3 4 5 Other

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of satisfaction with NVIT in regards to role play by elders?

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

"Please comment."-----  
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10. As student at NVIT how would you rate your education at NVIT with respect to preparing you for the following: With 1. Indicating Excellent, 2. Very good, 3. Good, 4. Fair, and 5. Indicating poor?

10a. Aboriginal identity:

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10b. Self-determination

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10c. Employment

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10d. leadership

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10e. Group dynamics

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10f. Cross-cultural relations

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

10g. Partnerships Building

- 1    2    3    4    5    Other

"Please comment on any of the items above"-----  
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-----  
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11. As an Aboriginal person, my studies at NVIT may have addressed aspects of worldviews that are important to Aboriginal self-determination and culture. Please rate the importance of the following aspects. With 1. Indicating Excellent, 2. Very good, 3. Good, 4. Fair, and 5. Indicating poor?

11a. Spirituality

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11b. Humanity

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11c. Holistic

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11d. Individualism

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11e. Language

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11f. Ceremony

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11g. Objectivity

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11h. Collectivism

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11i. Dualism

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11J. Reductionism

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11K. Community

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11L. Story telling

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11M. Elders

1 2 3 4 5 Other

11N. Traditionalism

1 2 3 4 5 Other



- Very likely
- Likely
- Not likely
- Other

“Please comment.”

17. Please comment about the positive and challenging aspects of leadership at NVIT, such as leadership provided by the Board of Directors, Elders’ Council, management, Faculty members, or student groups”-----

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18. On the spaces provide please, explain why group formation became an important aspect of your education at NVIT?

a). Number of people in the group\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b). Nature of group dynamics\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c). Main objectives of the group\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d). Types of support mechanism provided\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e) Are the group still in contact with one another?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

f) Would you recommend working in groups as an effective tool for students at NVIT?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

g). How did the group identify themselves as Aboriginal?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

19. Please provide some suggestions for NVIT for further improvement if any?

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