PULLING TOGETHER IN THE ACADEMIC CANOE: THE EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS DOCTORAL STUDENTS

by

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Pulling Together In The Academic Canoe: The Experiences Of Indigenous Doctoral Students

Submitted by Heather Lynn Commodore in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

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Abstract

An area of research that has had little attention is the experiences of Indigenous doctoral students, told from their perspectives. This study offers an in-depth understanding of Indigenous doctoral students’ experiences related to admission and all program milestones during their enrollment in a Canadian research-intensive university. In this research 13 Indigenous doctoral students, most of whom were enrolled in the Faculty of Education doctoral programs at the University of British Columbia, shared their life experience stories about (a) how their web of relationships with family, community, peers, mentors, program structures, and university structures combined to support, guide, and assist them prior to and during their studies; (b) how they created community spaces to remain connected to their programs academically and socially; and (c) how they viewed tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations. For many Indigenous students, the doctoral journey does not occur in isolation, which is theorized through the lens of Kirkness and Barnhardts’ 4Rs, of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility (1991). The participants’ life experience stories were situated within Archibald’s (2008b) Indigenous Storywork methodology to safeguard the integrity of the stories’ meanings.

I discovered that some Indigenous students found the higher education experience isolating and challenging, if not alienating, and did not feel that the university was a place for them. However, they also experienced success through creating community, maintaining their family and cultural connections, engaging in Indigenous peer-support and mentoring programs, and receiving respectful mentoring from faculty. University services and programs that provided a safe, culturally responsive environment for Indigenous doctoral students to flourish included the First
Nations Longhouse; Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement, which is a peer support program; and an annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium.

A contribution of this study is the extension of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s 4Rs to include Recognition, Reclamaiton, Redress, and Reconciliation. These additional 4Rs stem from the findings and emphasize the importance of doctoral studies for Indigenous students’ future leadership, policy, and self-determination contributions to their own communities and to Canadian society.
Lay Summary

This study examined Indigenous doctoral students’ journeys to and experiences at a Canadian research-intensive university that includes the doctoral application process, programmatic phases, and thesis milestones. Kirkness and Barnhardts’ 4Rs, of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility (1991) and Archibald’s (2008b) Indigenous Storywork methodology provided both theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding the Indigenous doctoral students’ life experience stories. The study discovered that some students found the higher education experience isolating and challenging, if not alienating and did not feel that the university was a place for them. However, they also experienced success through creating community, maintaining their family and cultural connections, engaging in Indigenous peer-support and mentoring programs, and receiving respectful mentoring from faculty. These findings highlight the importance of doctoral studies for Indigenous students’ future leadership, policy, and self-determination contributions to their own communities and to Canadian society.
Preface

This work was approved by The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics board, Certificate number H12-02376. This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Heather Lynn Commodore.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iii

Lay Summary .......................................................................................................................... v

Preface ................................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... xii

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations .................................................................................... xiii

Glossary .................................................................................................................................. xiv

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ xv

Dedication ............................................................................................................................... xvi

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................. 1

1.1 My Doctoral Canoe Journey ............................................................................................ 1

1.2 Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 2

1.3 Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 3

1.4 Context and Positionality ............................................................................................... 4

1.5 Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 12

1.6 “My Doctoral Student Life Experience Stories” .......................................................... 13

1.7 The Canoe, My Canoe .................................................................................................... 17

1.8 Doctorateness as a Journey ........................................................................................... 18

1.9 Outline of Dissertation .................................................................................................. 21

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................... 23

2.1 Introduction The Doctoral Experience of Indigenous Students ..................................... 23

2.2 Internationalization and the Doctoral Programs ............................................................ 24
Chapter 4: SHAPE TO THE SHORE OF UBC

4.1 Shaping and Choosing a Passage to UBC ................................................................. 74
4.1.2 Shaping and Choosing a Passage to UBC ......................................................... 74

4.2 Assumptions and Expectations Prior to Reaching the Shore of UBC ..................... 79
4.2.1 Application Process: Request to UBC to go Ashore ........................................... 82

4.3 Responsibility and Respect ..................................................................................... 85
4.3.1 Indigenous Cultural Perspectives ......................................................................... 85
4.3.2 Responsibility and Respect to Community/Community Views ............................ 89

4.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 91

Chapter 5: BEING THERE ............................................................................................ 93

5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 93

5.2 First Year Experiences ........................................................................................... 94
5.2.1 First Year ........................................................................................................... 95
5.2.2 Courses ............................................................................................................. 97
5.2.2.1 Positive Passage Experiences ......................................................................... 97
5.2.2.2 Negative Passage Changes and A Positive Mentor Appears ......................... 99
5.2.3 Comprehensive Exam ........................................................................................ 102
5.2.4 Research Proposal ............................................................................................. 105
5.2.5 Dissertation ....................................................................................................... 107

5.3 Final Oral Defence ................................................................................................. 111

5.4 Responsibility to Self: The Importance of Celebrating and Marking Milestones ...... 112

5.5 Doctoral Journey: Mentorship and Support ............................................................ 114
5.5.1 Positive Academic and Social Mentorship and Support .................................. 114
5.5.2 Positive Indigenous Academic Mentor ............................................................ 115

5.6 Positive Student’s Personal Support Systems ........................................................ 117
5.6.1 Family Support ................................................................. 118
5.6.2 Family Pride ................................................................. 118
5.6.3 Grandparents/Parents......................................................... 120
5.6.4 Immediate Family .......................................................... 122
5.6.5 Extended Family ............................................................ 123
5.6.6 Community ................................................................. 125
5.7 Conclusion ........................................................................... 126

Chapter 6: REMAINING THERE ......................................................... 129

6.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 129
6.2 Positive Institutional Support Systems .................................... 129
  6.2.1 Friends ........................................................................ 130
  6.2.2 Fellow Doctoral Journeyers (Peers) .................................. 132
  6.2.3 EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education (2006) ...................... 134
  6.2.4 The First Nations Longhouse and the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) ... 137
  6.2.5 Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) ............ 140
  6.2.6 Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS) .................. 143
6.3 Rough Waters and Moving Through the Rapids ...................... 145
  6.3.1 Lack of Resources .......................................................... 146
  6.3.2 The Hidden Cost of Doctoral Work: The Responsibility to Family, Friends, Communities and Deaths in the Family .............................................................. 148
  6.3.3 Doctoral Journey Retention ............................................. 152
  6.3.4 Responsibility to Peers and Future Journeyers ...................... 155
6.4 Conclusion ........................................................................... 157
List of Tables

Table 1 Study Participants: UBC Indigenous Doctoral Students (2006-2014)..........................67
**List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AT: U2G</td>
<td>Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate</td>
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<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCFI</td>
<td>Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education</td>
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<td>CPED</td>
<td>Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate</td>
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<td>ECPS</td>
<td>Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education</td>
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<td>EdD</td>
<td>Doctorate in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDST</td>
<td>Educational Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>FNHL</td>
<td>First Nations House of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G+PS</td>
<td>Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGSS</td>
<td>Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium</td>
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<tr>
<td>IK</td>
<td>Indigenous Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISPG</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEd</td>
<td>Master of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NITEP</td>
<td>Indigenous Teacher Education Program</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAGE</td>
<td>Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCARP</td>
<td>School of Community and Regional Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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</table>
Glossary

2006 UBC Faculty of Education Indigenous EdD Cohort: EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education is a structured program of 13 doctoral students who work full time in leadership positions in Education and Social Services.

First Nations House of Learning (FNHL): The FNHL is the administrative unit that oversees the activities and usage of the First Nations Longhouse.

Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS): Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium is an annual Indigenous student lead symposium, financed primarily by the UBC Faculty of Education with additional sponsorship from other UBC units and other universities.

Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP): NITEP is an Indigenous cohort-based Bachelor of Education degree program with an emphasis on the importance of community, peer support and cultural knowledge.

Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE): Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) is a province-wide peer support program that provides membership and monthly meetings to socially and academically support graduate students.
Acknowledgements

To my Mother (Jewel Thomas), thank you for all you have done for me throughout my entire life and my doctoral journey, I appreciate all of the sacrifices you have made for me.

My unending cheerleader, late Henry Thomas: I miss your beautiful spirit’s presence in this world. To my late grandmother Edith, Father Earl Commodore, and Uncle Joe as they always made me feel safe, supported, and special. To my brothers Jay, Drew, Earl J., and Rand thank you for your love and support. To my little sister Caroline and your beautiful children Santana and Richard you three have brought so much pride and joy to my heart, spirit, and life.

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With a special and honourable mention to my PhD Supervisory committee: Drs. Jo-ann Archibald, André Mazawi, and Tom Sork; and my Mentors: Drs. Jean Barman and Graham Smith. I am thankful to all of you for your unwavering support and the belief that you had in me throughout my graduate journey. I Raise my Hands to all you for your support and strength.
Dedication

I dedicated this work to my Mom Jewel Thomas who is the best person I have ever known, my Papa Henry W. Thomas who was the nicest person I have ever known, my Father Earl Commodore, and the UBC Indigenous doctoral student participants of this work. Their unconditional love/care, sacrifices, and support assisted me to reach a degree I never thought was possible.
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Doctoral Canoe Journey

Prior to my birth and during my lifetime my family built canoes for the purposes of transportation and canoe race competitions. I, in my lifetime have known, for some, moving on waters in a canoe is referred to as paddling with an oar and those who partake in the activity are called paddlers, but I have always known it to be called canoe pulling by means of a paddle and a participant referred to as a canoe puller. When there are two or more pullers they are referred to as pulling together.

Heather L. Commodore, 2015

As an Indigenous1 doctoral student, I knew that I would expand my academic and professional knowledge, but I did not know the significance that the support of multiple communities—family, friends, personal/academic mentors, doctoral supervisory committee, fellow students or peers, and institutional services would play in my doctoral canoe journey. Those communities and services would turn out to be of immense value, along with my own efforts, and perhaps account for my academic, professional, emotional, health and well-being. As a University of British Columbia (UBC) doctoral student the support, guidance, and services have assisted me to manage my feelings of isolation, confusion, and incompetence. It is this juxtaposition of isolation and communal2 connections that drive my interest in discovering how Indigenous

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1 Indigenous is being used in this dissertation to mean the Indigenous peoples who have lived on these lands for 10,000 years or more.
2 Communal is being used in this dissertation to mean a common but unique, to each community member, feeling of belonging, responsibility and existence to their community.
students’ community\textsuperscript{3} supports (personal, family, nation, natural and spirit worlds) and the university’s structures contribute to an Aboriginal/Indigenous doctoral student’s experience in terms of student retention. As a Stó:lō Indigenous person known as “People of the River,” our communities are located in the Fraser Valley and on or near the Fraser River in Southern British Columbia. I believe that my communities have played an enormous role in my doctoral story and my student experiences.

My emphasis on Aboriginal/Indigeneity is inspired, among other things, by those who have experienced academic ‘warfare’ before me that

\[\text{ultimately, one has to consider the role of Indigenous knowledges in the academy as primarily one of ‘resistance’ to Eurocentrism; that is, resistance to the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge as the only valid way of knowing. It is resistance to Eurocentricism masquerading as a universal body of thought. (Dei, 2000, p. 128)}\]

As an Aboriginal doctoral student studying at UBC I am aware that as I persevere in my journey, struggle and resistance are part of the academic experience.

\textbf{1.2 Purpose}

The purpose of this research is to examine Indigenous doctoral students’ experiences within a research-intensive university. This study explored student perceptions of the relationships between a student’s doctoral experience and their community connections (home, personal, and

\textsuperscript{3} Community is being used in this dissertation to mean a group of whom one has membership, affiliation, or associates with.}
UBC structured). I was interested in finding out if UBC’s Indigenous doctoral students feel that group dynamics, peer mentoring and mentorship are paramount components for program contentment, emotional support, academic success, resilience, and retention.

### 1.3 Research Questions

My study aimed to explore and understand Indigenous doctoral students’ life experience stories in terms of their retention by posing the following questions:

1. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students’ web of relationships—family, community, peers, mentors, program structures, and university structures—affect the strategies that Indigenous doctoral students engage in prior to and during their studies?

2. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students create community spaces as part of their doctoral journey as a way to remain connected to their university program and research, peers, mentors, supervisory committee, and their communities?

3. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students view tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations?
1.4 Context and Positionality

_Heather L. Commodore, 2013_

The aim of my study was to understand the doctoral experience of 13 Indigenous UBC doctoral students and how they view their journeys and doctoral student life experience stories in terms of a sense of community and community support as an anchored _sense of place_. Sense of place is being used in this work to mean a reciprocal emotional and psychological bond and in some cases a spiritual and physical bond through membership and or membership agreement. The 13 students are enrolled in both PhD and EdD programs in the UBC Faculty of Education and in other PhD programs outside the Faculty of Education. The majority of the doctoral students in this study are also SAGE members. Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) is a UBC peer support program that provides membership and monthly meetings to socially and academically supports graduate students.

I recount the doctoral students lived experience stories by using Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles (2008a) and Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald 2008b), including Kirkness and Barnhardt’s: “The Four R’s” (1991). Further, I examine how an anchored sense of place and belonging—if any—influences program retention and academic achievement of Indigenous doctoral students. I see their and my journeys as a _canoe in-the-making_ and we travel and do good work with our own life-accumulated tools as well as the tools...
given to us by our ancestors, relatives, communities, and the people we work with at UBC. The canoe in-the-making is the process of building that canoe to become a vessel or the achievement of our doctorates. I am the canoe in-the-making as I am using the tools given to me by my ancestors, relatives, communities, and the people I work with at UBC to move through the many waters of the doctoral student journey to get to the shores and acquire a doctoral degree. I further see the canoe in-the-making as the construction of prospective Doctors of Philosophy and the construction of myself as a dugout canoe to see if I can float and journey on to create more original academic research as a doctoral graduate.

In addition to traveling with my ancestors, relatives, community, and the people I work with at UBC, the paddle for a canoe, pen, and computer travel with me. These people and tools supported and helped me to continue my journey as a doctoral student. I believe that the examination of these aspects is important because it fills a gap that I found in the literature—a gap between the literature that addresses Indigeneity in exclusive organizational terms, and the consistent lack of drawing on Indigenous voices to understand the doctoral experience of Indigenous students. Through my research, it became evident that Indigenous students find the higher education experience isolating and challenging, if not alienating. Many students do not feel that the university is a place for them. I have learned that there is insufficient acknowledgment and discussion about the fact that Indigenous students do not come alone to UBC and or travel alone on their academic knowledge gathering and sharing journey. For Indigenous students their doctoral experience is not simply a personal project—they are joined by their ancestors and their numerous community members. I believe that my ancestors, family, friends, and communities have guided and encouraged me, and continue to do so, in my
academic journey. Perhaps what makes Indigenous students’ academic journeys different is that Aboriginal people are more aligned collectively, as they have “commonalities of experience” and are inclusive so no one is left out (Abate & Kronk, 2013). Inclusivity is a component that affects Indigenous students’ ways of being I often felt apart from and misaligned with my non-Indigenous peers from my doctoral program.

At the beginning of graduate programs, students are still learning the expectations and demands of the discipline and are therefore somewhat distant from faculty. At this stage, students may see their peers as unknown quantities or as competitors. As students progress through graduate programs, they ideally become integrated into their institutions, departments, and disciplines. (Baird, 1997, p. 100)

I felt at times that some of the 11 other non-First Nations doctoral students, or community knowledge PhD camp members that I entered my educational journey with viewed our doctoral cluster members as competitors as mentioned in Baird’s quote above. The competitiveness at times brought out my competitive and intense spirit and this made me feel uneasy. After our first year was completed—perhaps due to the limited organization and institutional support for our “group”—we only had random encounters with one another. I often wonder if they, too, feel disconnected, separated, isolated, and incompetent now that we are individually responsible for meeting the requirements of doctoral studies. There were times during my journey that I was sensing that my feelings of isolation, incompetency, and disconnectedness brought me to feel as though I was traveling in my canoe in-the-making without a fully shaped paddle. So I called out to a few UBC Indigenous doctoral students for peer support and to pull together and share our journey and experiences in a two, three, or more person canoe. They answered my call and we have since met on various occasions in various locations, on and off the UBC campus, for
knowledge gathering and knowledge sharing. We now occasionally travel together in larger canoes talking about our individual doctoral work and our academic journey. What I have discovered is that they too were feeling isolated and disconnected from the university. My peers repeatedly told me that they were grateful to have the opportunity to give and receive support from a fellow doctoral student as they felt their doctoral journey lacked certain kinds of reciprocal peer support and mentorship.

My peer support pullers are, as am I, Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) members but they feel that they have little contact with their academic membership counterparts beyond the SAGE knowledge gathering camp consisting of seminars, courses, or the UBC annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium⁴ (IGSS). SAGE is a UBC peer support program that provides membership and monthly meetings to socially and academically support graduate students. Tinto (2003) explains “most students experience universities as isolated learners whose learning is disconnected from that of others. They continue to engage in solo performance and demonstration in what remains a largely show-and-tell learning environment” (p. 1). This led me to wonder if other Indigenous UBC doctoral students felt the lack the opportunities to join knowledge sharing camps and to interact one-on-one with their peers. I wondered if they felt they would have benefited from said reciprocal interactions. I felt that these quandaries deserved to be explored through a more formal study and this directed my research. It deserved a project that provides answers to how the university structures could better

⁴ Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium is an annual Indigenous student lead symposium, financed primarily by the UBC Faculty of Education with additional sponsorship from other UBC units and other universities.
serve their Indigenous doctoral students to improve their levels of contentment and retention rates.

I see UBC as a new knowledge resource site that I have journeyed to on my canoe in-the-making just as many Indigenous students before me have journeyed. I imagine that they may, or may not, have experienced fair weather and perhaps they easily shared their knowledge resources without struggles. I can see other canoes with female Indigenous scholars who traveled to UBC and other academic institutions before me paddling together to make the waters that I travel easier than perhaps it was for them—Verna Kirkness, Jo-ann Archibald, Linda Smith, Marie Battiste, and Jeanette Armstrong—and the ghost canoes of those knowledge warriors that journeyed before them, and other canoes transporting our ancestors and spiritual guides. I feel fortunate as an Aboriginal person, woman, and doctoral student to learn from the role modeling and mentorship they offer, through their writing, knowledge, wisdom, and strength. I will use the tools and knowledge that they supply me with along with the ones from my ancestors, relatives, communities, and the people I work with at the University of British Columbia (UBC) to shape my canoe.

As a UBC Aboriginal doctoral student I journeyed to the academy with the understanding that the Aboriginal and Indigenous knowledges that I planned to integrate into my research may not be received in the same way that traditional Western knowledges are received. My work may at times be viewed as a form of resistance. UBC is a Western research-intensive university with certain objectives that are built into the institution based upon their Western dominant and privileged structures, mandates, and initiatives. They choose their professors for their expertise
and research interests so as to fit into their faculty, attract more international and domestic students and maintain their reputation and ranking as a world class Western academy. I forget sometimes that my Indigenous presence and the sharing of my Indigenous knowledge and intellectual input for some can be seen as interrupting and unbalancing the status quo UBC. For example, when I attended PhD courses I could feel some of my non-First Nations classmates temporarily become disengaged and annoyed when I discussed my Aboriginal and Indigenous knowledge and ways of being in relation to the seminar topic. These sorts of encounters are not new to me as a UBC student as I experienced the struggle to speak about Aboriginal and Indigenous knowledges and ways of being during my graduate and undergraduate studies.

As an undergraduate student, whenever the class allowed a comment or statement to be made that marginalized some individual students and privileged others without contention, I would have to speak up for those who I felt were being disadvantaged. Before I spoke up I could feel my intuition telling me to raise my hand, but at the same time I was filled with anxiety as I knew I would be met with glaring looks, heavy sighs, and anger. Despite these contentious knowledge gathering camp experiences I believe that some room has been made in the academy for Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges to complement each other and be somewhat accepted. As an Aboriginal doctoral student in the academy, I am conscious of my engagement in the process of decolonizing my experience, as I am constantly working at not just maintaining but reclaiming my cultural identity and forging sense of self, of history, community, and land. Often, I feel that I am expected to set out on my doctoral journey with a Eurocentric mind-set, as an individual, while leaving behind my communal ways of being.
As an Indigenous person, I am taking my community with me on my journey to acquire my PhD degree. From an Aboriginal, First Nations, and Indigenous perspective, I believe that diversity and uniqueness are important to both the development of a progressive university and also when engaging in research. I view myself as a tenacious, forceful, stubborn, and outspoken student. At times, as an Indigenous student, I feel that these are prerequisite tools in order to maintain my cultural identity and take my rightful place as a student in the academy. In this regard, I often wonder what it means for UBC to define itself as “a place of mind”\(^5\), when that place is shared by diverse cultures, knowledges, and ways of knowing. I believe that an important aspect of my Indigenous ways of being, as a researcher, educator, and doctoral student, is to search out non-conformity and resistance to ways of colonization. This way of being is woven through my research process.

Over this backdrop, my research aims to examine how doctoral students view their academic journey through their life experience stories. I feel that doctoral student life experience stories can be a way to construct or re-construct the whole picture of an Indigenous student’s academic journey in ways that capture the complex overlay of individuality, communal engagements, and intense intellectual journeys in new sites and places. My research focuses on Indigenous students’ academic and community experiences, knowledge sharing, and knowledge gathering camps to complete their studies. The study is also concerned with the relative contribution of community cohesion, peer support, and mentorship of Indigenous students and their

\(^5\) The “tag line” “a place of mind” was added to the UBC logo between the years 2009 and 2016, but it is no longer a part of UBC’s official identity.
contributes to program satisfaction, academic and emotional support, academic success, and retention.

I will also juxtapose myself to the experiences of those Indigenous doctoral students in addition to looking critically at my doctoral journey and community involvement. I would like to think with my drum in hand that I am setting out on an academic voyage with a metaphorical piece of un-shaped block of red cedar and a canoe paddle made for me when I canoe pulled competitively. I must form this block of red cedar into my academic method of travel and my paddle I see as a tool like my pen and computer to guide and keep me moving forward on my academic journey. I am my canoe in-the-making and the canoe is the result of my doctoral journey. My intention is to present the term my canoe in-the-making as an object and a double metaphor to represent the doctoral experience and journey. With the cedar block, I am to build my own one-person dugout canoe that I see myself accomplishing through my doctoral experiences and journey—shaping, traveling in and navigating with paddle in hand traveling through my doctoral experience of lakes, rivers, creeks, streams, waterfalls, and rapids to the ocean to gain a means of access to higher learning grounds.

My research focuses on the dichotomy of the UBC Indigenous doctoral students’ agency versus the UBC structures and the UBC structures versus the UBC Aboriginal/Indigenous doctoral students’ agency. How do we, Indigenous doctoral students, put structures in to modify and give agency to Aboriginal/Indigenous doctoral students? As Indigenous students we want to have agency, but there is also tension against change. I believe that the structure has to be balanced with agency and agency with structure.
My research and the documentation of these Indigenous doctoral students’ journeys provide a platform for those students who come after us and assist them as they navigate through their academic journeys. One could say, creating a survival manual for students.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The uniqueness of this research is my perspective as an insider, mentor, peer, and observer of numerous Indigenous doctoral and Masters’ student communities and educational groups. I have at various times been a temporary insider, participant, and or guest in the 2006 entrance year of the EdD Indigenous Education cohort and the entrance year of the, 2007 EDST PhD program, and SAGE. As well, depending on the locality and situation, I am an insider or an outsider within my family, Indigenous communities, SAGE, EDST Department, my soccer team, Sushi Inn restaurant, and Simon’s Kitchen. I believe I will be able to share my experiences as part of these groups or knowledge gathering camps as an insider. I am partial to feeling like an insider at times when I interact or consort with the EDST group or the EdD cohort.

My project will contribute to supporting Indigenous students and Canadian higher education institutions and policy makers. I believe that sharing of my and other Indigenous students’ academic and social journeys as doctoral student life experience stories can contribute and enlighten the university structures, faculty and staff to the Indigenous doctoral students’ academic and social experiences. This knowledge can potentially assist Canadian higher

^EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education which is a structured program of 13 doctoral students who work full time in leadership positions in Education.
education institutions and policy makers in identifying structural weaknesses and inefficiencies in the development and management of their present and future programs. It could generate or create a clearer path for Aborginizing/Indigenizing the Academy.

As part of this project, I aim to unpack my own position and insert my own doctoral student life experience stories throughout as I juxtapose and critically look at my own experiences as an Indigenous doctoral student when engaging the doctoral experiences of Indigenous students. My intention is also to show how personal experiences shaped my notions of communal experience and the possibilities embedded in drawing on Aboriginal and Indigenous Knowledge inform our understanding of the doctoral experiences of Indigenous students.

1.6 “My Doctoral Student Life Experience Stories”

My point of departure for “[t]he quest for the doctorate degree in education” is appreciating that I am setting out on “completing” an all-encompassing “marathon” canoe race and journey and understanding the Indigenous doctoral student experience stories are my own canoe in-the-making doctorate “training,” “commitment,” and doctoral life experience stories (Tareilo, 2006, para. 1). I was moved by Archibald’s (2008b) discussion of “life experience stories” and I saw it as a way to give voice, refer to, and to potentially improve the experiences of future Indigenous students (p. 375). My own academic journey started out on the bank of the

7 Live Experience Stories described by Archibald (2008b) how “[Chief] Simon [Baker] told life experience stories to exemplify leadership and political strategies that had implications for me: thus, research as storytelling” (p. 375).
Chilliwack River, my river, my peoples’ river, our river that takes me to the Fraser River that will bring me to UBC. I am a Stó:lō person and we are “People of the River” and the riverside is an important point of departure to set out to travel to visit family, to set off to gather food, or in my case to gather knowledge and experience. As I get into my metaphoric canoe and set off I have little time to wave at my family and community members who are there looking at me with pride and interest as the current quickly pulls me on my journey, my doctoral experiences. Here, I am reminded by Kovach (2009) that, “[s]tories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships” (p. 94).

Reclaiming my doctoral student life experience stories is an important part of my gathering, identifying, and putting to use those aspects of the knowledge tools that will be most relevant for my journey and experience. My doctoral student life experience stories are also important in terms of identifying the large hole and web of relationships within which my doctoral experience, as an Indigenous education student and teacher, plays out.

I wanted to be a teacher since I was 10 years old. Throughout my life those who have truly mentored and influenced me were leaders in education, and I became an educator and mentor or knowledge gatherer to pass on the good teachings that my ancestors, elders, mentors, and teachers transferred to me. At 15 years old, I was a softball coach for 10-year-old girls and in senior high school I was a tutor; I felt I had a natural inclination for teaching, mentorship and knowledge gathering. When I graduated from high school, I did not academically qualify to attend university right after graduation so as to acquire a Bachelor of Education degree; so instead, I attended college and earned an Arts and Science (Physical Education) Program
Diploma. I enjoyed my new career, but I still had my passion to become a teacher. I applied to and was accepted into the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC. NITEP is an Indigenous cohort-based program that began my journey to becoming an educator with an emphasis on the importance of community, peer support, and cultural knowledge. As an undergraduate student, I benefited from NITEP’s cohort experience. Throughout my academic journey my family, communities (Soowahlie Band, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Band), friends, and peers outwardly showed their support and pride of my endeavours.

Following graduation from NITEP, I taught for three years and after those three years, I felt that I wanted to build on my educational skills and applied to UBC’s Educational Administration and Leadership Master’s Program. Again, I felt the pride and support of my family, communities, friends, and peers throughout my academic journey to acquire my Master’s in Education (MEd). Upon completion of my MEd studies, I was a practicing principal for two years. Once again, I wanted to upgrade my educational skills and applied to the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies Program at UBC. When I again voyaged onto UBC I was not merely a youth in my twenties—I was a well journeyed adult who came with the experiences and tools I gathered during my teaching career. I had been a worker since the age of 10, and since the age of 15 as an educational worker who had led, taught, and mentored. I had journeyed on my own in my canoe to do work on the other side of the Pacific Ocean and three times up the rivers and waterways of British Columbia. Each time I had gathered more tools and knowledge from my experiences I could still hear the voices of my ancestors, family, community, mentors, and teachers encouraging me to journey on to acquire a doctoral degree.
Before entering the doctoral program, I had numerous assumptions and expectations of the world that I was entering into. I thought that when I arrived on UBC shores that I would join other land canoes and row together with academic and social cohorts and there would be numerous support systems in place. I thought I was getting access to a land without warfare and where there was productive knowledge sharing in and with many knowledge gathering camps. I assumed and expected as Nimer (2009) states that, “[t]o be a successful post graduate student is a challenging endeavour that typically includes tremendous amounts of reading, theory and research articulation, sophisticated writing, rigorous research, and learning with colleagues in a variety of educational situations” (para. 7). I expected professional development services for students, a program that clearly cultivated professional guidance and a student centre that engaged learners. I found these services through the support and guidance from my doctoral supervisory committee and other professors. But, I also witnessed through other doctoral students’ testimonies their disconnection from these services.

I look back at all of the different canoes that I have journeyed in with my ancestors, family, communities, classmates, and teammates. The first canoe I remember traveling in was with my immediate family. As I got older, I journeyed in larger and smaller canoes with my four older brothers and sometimes in an even smaller one with my brother who was like my twin. Together with my family and others, we have weathered journeys of calm, fun, excitement, and challenging waters and we did it together as we were in the same canoe. This is what families do when they travel together.
I travelled and oared or pulled in metaphorical canoes and literal ones with my neighbourhood friends, classmates, school band mates, teammates, and friends through the different channels, passages, rivers and open seas that have made up my life experiences. I also pulled canoe on a Stó:lō Indigenous woman’s competitive team with a couple of my NITEP classmates. It was through this experience and journey as a competitive canoe puller that I became aware of the steps and process (pre-training, training, and racing) of becoming a team member and community member and learning how to pull alone and together in a canoe. I feel that all of these various kinds of groups or camps were cohort like, and being a part of them gave me a sense of belonging and helped me to feel that whatever I was experiencing was less isolating and helped me to continue on my journey. Though I have journeyed alone to places that are far from my home, I am like my ancestors in that I am comfortable voyaging in large canoes with my family, communities, peers, and colleagues.

1.7 The Canoe, My Canoe

The canoe is a traditional vehicle of my people, as my people have always traveled this way, which is our traditional mode of travel. The canoe when carrying more than one puller can be a fast moving vessel. A group of pullers can create a team, family, cohort, or a new community and or a community within a community. A cohesive or interconnected community of pullers can produce a sense of connectedness.

My people are communal and resilient and I believe that our strength comes from our connectedness with nature and each other going through our journeys and experiences together.
Our connectedness is and comes from our sharing of land, language, culture, spirituality, support, commitment, challenges, loss, grief, provisions, love, humour, and laughter. All of these aspects of our relationships, relationality, and cooperative spirit can be demonstrated, shared, and observed through and during our teachings, protocols, practices, weddings, funerals, celebrations, and or other events, activities, or legacies of our people.

Just as we as a people are the legacies of our ancestors and our people so too are the Indigenous doctoral students to their ancestors, communities, relatives, and families. The future UBC Indigenous doctoral student may find that the journey may entail assenting growth and experiences, but it may also be lonely to be the only one in the canoe travelling away from their known community with its continual and steady connectedness of their communal existence. Being the only one in the canoe can affect relationships with community, family, and friends. Their journeys will be very different and the home communities may not always understand the work of the doctoral student or comprehend the disconnectedness from the home community experiences by the doctoral student.

1.8 Doctorateness as a Journey

This brings us to my current site in time, where I have once again, on the surface, travelled through the propulsion of my own ambition, alone, on my one-person dugout canoe in-the-

8 Doctorateness is being used in this dissertation to mean the point of moving beyond doctoral candidacy and the entry to having developed the competency and aptitude to acquire a doctorate.
making with my Indigenous knowledges to the shores of UBC's Vancouver campus. I believe that we as doctoral students do not journey alone to the shores of UBC and perhaps it is not only the dream for ourselves to reach for the highest degree in our chosen profession, but also the dream of our ancestors, grandparents, parents, families, and communities. I believe it is the natural flow of our familial community and others such as mentors and teachers to acquire a doctoral degree as we have others who see something in us and perhaps have a child or mentee who they want to continue her or his dream, aspirations, work that they are passing onto an individual in which they believe.

One of my most profound and multi-layered influences and support came from my first mentors, my grandmother Edith and mother Jewel, as their unwavering and unconditional love and acceptance has carried me throughout my journey to reach my potential and beyond. It was my grandmother’s mentorship that planted the dream for me to be an educator since I was 10. My fathers (Earl and Henry) as well as my entire family support have a vested interest in my academic journey. I have additionally been fortunate to have an Indigenous community female mentor since my youth, two non-First Nations high school teachers, and numerous wonderful Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors throughout my college, undergraduate, and graduate journey.

I was supported by and recruited to apply to the UBC PhD EDST by three world-renowned UBC professors, two Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, whom I considered exemplary professors, academic mentors, and role models. All three professors taught and mentored me during my UBC MEd journey where I achieved class one marks and completed my degree in 15 months.
When I graduated with a MEd degree and when they collectively approached me, I had no aspirations or intentions to apply to a PhD program but after reflecting on our conversation and how I deemed their amalgamated academic and professional authority I felt they saw something in me I could not grasp. After speaking to my parents and friends I reached the decision to submit my application to the UBC EDST PhD program. The non-Indigenous mentors who influenced me to the greatest degree were those who came from a place of inclusion and respect, but it has been my Indigenous mentors who have most influenced and supported me in their holistic approach. I came to realize the importance of all the people who influenced me to journey to the shores of UBC and became curious as to who the people were who were on the lands of my peers and also the people who waited for them on the shores of UBC.

I see myself as a fortunate doctoral student with access to many Indigenous and non-Indigenous geographic areas, communities, and support systems—family, community (Soowahlie and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Bands), a few close friends, professional mentors, a soccer team, and UBC-developed peer support systems. My doctoral student life experience stories are also marked by feelings of isolation, confusion, and incompetence—my canoe has also been a lonely place. I entered the doctoral environment hoping that I would be respected for my gifts, culture, and perspectives and given an equal opportunity to succeed. I hope that my education matters and will contribute to both my personal and community growth. I spoke with Indigenous doctoral students in my capacity as the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) Provincial Coordinator, and these students often said that when entering post-secondary institutions or knowledge camps, they are made to feel like their educational journey is a growing-away process from their community and culture. For instance, as an Aboriginal student
who is used to living a communal-based existence, I am now expected to adapt to an individualistic-based existence. The Western knowledge-based academic and social structures can cause students to feel separated and isolated. For some, perhaps, the more they adapt or integrate into their new community camps and develop new familial links, the less they believe they need the ties that bind them to their Indigenous community. We are a communal people, we have been for 10,000 years, and our strength, and pride comes from who we are and whom we come from.

1.9 Outline of Dissertation

Chapter 2 examines the literature on the subject of cohort models, focusing on its relevancy to the communal and collective nature of Indigenous ways of knowing. The literature about Indigenous students’ university experiences, Indigenous knowledge within higher education, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action (2015) is introduced to provide a contextual background for the main thesis topic.

Chapter 3 introduces and describes the qualitative nature of my research and incorporates personal oral histories and information collected through sharing time, space, energy, and conversations with a canoe of Indigenous doctoral students. Through the utilization of the Indigenous knowledge framework and the one-to-one conversations with students, I learned how students viewed their academic experiences or journeys through their doctoral student life experience stories and I acquired a holistic picture of the students’ academic journeys. Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four R’s (1991) and Archibald’s storywork principles (2008a) - Respect,
Responsibility, Reciprocity, Reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy with Archibald’s Storywork Methodology (2008b) guides my relational gathering and representation of these Indigenous doctoral students’ life experience stories and voices.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 share the themes that arose from the Indigenous doctoral students’ telling of their lived experience stories, and I describe how the students might have prepared themselves for their canoe journey in order to ensure that they could withstand the ebb and flow of the rivers and currents and reach the shores of UBC and complete their academic journey.

Chapter 7 summarizes the themes that arose from my research and findings and reiterates why my work is essential to recognizing and validating the experiences of Indigenous graduate students and their communities, as well as generating knowledge through doctoral student life experience stories so as to enhance the experiences of future Indigenous students. I also clarify how Indigenous doctoral experiences tend to be shaped by the intensive and ongoing tensions that operate at the junctures of the university organization and Indigenous communal life.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction The Doctoral Experience of Indigenous Students

For the most part, I have experienced my journeys and educational development as part of a cohort-based group and this has cultivated my sense of belonging, community affiliation, support, and sense of place. Yet, engaging in a mainstream or non-Indigenous doctoral program in a research-intensive university can be alienating and disconcerting, since it involves very little communal interaction or collective engagement with peers and mentors, apart from the scheduled and required program courses and if you are an actively involved SAGE member. I consider the four themes that came out Miller’s (2003) research “(a) support of other members, (b) sharing of experiences, (c) development of friendships, (d) creation of networks” are similar to the intentions of the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) initiatives and the results that come with being an active SAGE member and participation in the Indigenous graduate student community (p. v).

Indigenous PhD and EdD students are the future of this land. When they become stronger, their communities also become stronger. When they grow and succeed, their communities succeed, since those whom they lead and share their teachings and education with also benefits. Just as when you support a mother and a father as they reach for their dreams, they gain confidence and self-esteem, and in turn pass on their strength to their children. Those children can then reach for their dreams sooner with fewer challenges and more successes, ultimately passing this strength on to their children. Indigenous people are communal people and the more we allow our communal ways of being to embrace our lives, the more we gain a sense of belonging and
support. We can then be supportive and understanding of one another’s situations and feel less isolated and separate. Just as in some Indigenous communities when a family’s relative moves onto the spirit world their community members and friends support the family physically, emotionally and spiritually in the days up until and after the funeral or celebration of life. While the immediate family and some extended family members gather in the family’s home to grieve their loved one’s passing some of their community members and friends will cook, clean, sit with them as well as help them plan the funeral up until the laying to rest of their loved one.

Indigenous doctoral students can perhaps gain this sense of communal belonging, collectivity, and understanding through friendships and interaction among academic peers and mentors. This chapter examines the literature concerning the doctoral experience through this communal and collective lens. The foundation of this chapter is a discussion of cohorts. It compares the closed-step cohort model with the traditional non-cohort doctoral model. The intent of this exploration is to reveal how cohort models can be a compelling alternative to traditional PhD and EdD programming at post-secondary institutions. The literature about Indigenous student university experiences, including Indigenous knowledge in academe, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action (2015) are introduced later in this chapter.

2.2 Internationalization and the Doctoral Programs

As a student and an educator, I have witnessed how British Columbia (BC) public schools have become increasingly internationalized. The government seems to be viewing their constituents as economic viabilities that would be competing with international parents and students. This
trend for increasing international student enrolment continued in post-secondary education. Neatby and Yogesh (2017) claim that over that past 20 years “B.C.’s universities and colleges are increasingly turning to international students to make up for a shortfall in revenue caused by years of declining government funding and static domestic enrolment” (para. 1).

I have concerns that the internationalization of universities will influence the formation of programs by choosing the student who can pay the higher tuition fees instead of creating a diverse class and therefore those individuals will take priority and not the group. I have concerns that Indigenous students will be forgotten while UBC becomes internationalized so as to increase its global ranking. I am optimistic that UBC will maintain their Indigenous engagement with its newest Aboriginal strategic plan that should be released in the weeks following the writing of this manuscript. Indigenous doctoral students need to continue to have UBC faculty and Deans who are their academic and social advocates. These leaders and champions will push the Western academic boundaries and status quo so Indigenous students have access and programs that are culturally relevant. A few years ago when I knew that Dr. Jo-ann Archibald would be retiring in the near future, I made a point of speaking with the Dean of the Faculty of Education who I believe is a good advocate and ally to and for Indigenous faculty, staff, and students. I wanted to tell him that I felt fortunate and blessed to be a long-standing community member of the First Nations Longhouse, SAGE, an attendee of IGSS, and to be a doctoral student when there was an increase of Indigenous students. I also wanted the Dean to know that with the retirement of Dr. Archibald, and the immense contribution she has made to UBC as well as her world-class educational skills in teaching, supervising, mentorship, and ability to build teams and
alliances across academic disciplines and oceans, how would he assure those future doctoral students would feel as fortunate and blessed as I am.

Throughout my doctoral journey I have tried to be a respectful student, community member, and peer. Presently I am actively immersed in writing my thesis because of my experiences as a doctoral student, and inspired to try to make a contribution, potential advancement, and possible improvement for prospective Indigenous doctoral student’s journeys through my research. I began my doctoral journey as part of group of students that was referred to as First Nations or Aboriginal. We are now categorized as Aboriginal students on UBC forms and as Indigenous students in the classroom and in social settings. I believe that the categorization or evolution of the term, “Indigenous” is more inclusive and welcoming to faculty and students that are the first peoples of their homelands that are local, inside, and also outside of Canada, with the latter affected by forces of globalization more than we realize. Much like the First Peoples of Canada's UBC students' categorization, the EdD and PhD programs evolution has been affected by international influences.

In the USA, Imig, and Neel (2013) discuss how the EdD program was developed so as to provide educational practitioners curriculum and build on their professional knowledge and skills to continue work in their current job or advance in their current career. The PhD was developed to provide curriculum, build skills, and opportunities for an educator to become a researcher and work in the academy as a professor, but the EdD became a “less vigorous version” of the PhD (Imig & Neel, 2013, p. xiv, see also Golde, 2013). In the United States, Perry (2013) discusses the continued debate about the lack of differentiation between the EdD and the PhD and the
beginnings of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) and the formal discussion as to how the EdD and PhD streams of the doctorate might become more “distinctive” and how the EdD programs could assist the professional practitioners to develop the skills and “capacity to transform educational practice” (p. 114). Storey et al. (2015) discuss how between 2007-2010 in Phase I of the CPED, 25 educational institutions were part of the CPED consortium discussion (p. 6). Perry (2013) describes how the consortium works on two levels—a national level where all of the 25 educational institutions have their own faculty members attend twice-a-year gatherings to “engage in discussions and sharing ideas about their efforts and the purpose and look of professional practitioner preparation education … discussions were informed by efforts taking place on the campuses of member institutions” (p. 115). She goes on to discuss how “[a]t the local level, members identify a challenge/weak spot in their program—either an existing EdD program they wish to improve or a plan for creating a new EdD program. Ideas generated at the national level are brought back to each institution and implemented as change/improvement efforts” (p. 116). Storey et al. (2015) report that in Phase II of the CPED “26 new institutions” became part of CPED from the years of 2011–2013 (p. 8). Hochbein and Perry (2013) explain how in “Phase II, CPED members are attempting to identify the research skills and abilities educational professionals should possess and employ to impact their practice and settings” (p. 182). Storey et al. (2015) indicate that, “[i]n April 2014, the consortium’s membership increased to 84, including two universities from Canada and one from New Zealand” (p. 10).

Lee (2016) discusses how in New Zealand, “[I]ke other Indigenous peoples who continue to suffer in the ongoing aftermath of colonization, Māori are overrepresented in New Zealand in
most of the negative statistical indices measuring health and social well-being, including education” (p. 250). Lee (2016) continues to assert that New Zealand is

Increasing the number of Māori EdD students, and improving their doctor experiences through an EdD cohort-based program, is not the extent of or what is meant by ‘indigenizing’ the EdD program. Rather, such a program requires a culturally located pedagogy that is grounded in the place, space, and people of whom it claims to serve. In this regard the [Te Puna Wānanga] TPW EdD is underpinned by a kaupapa Māori approach, a framework that guides the pedagogy and seeks transformative change for our communities. (p. 263)

Māori are communal and collective people and they care about how they acquire, share, and transfer their knowledge and despite potential contention, they want programs that promote growth and respect of one’s ancestors, family, community, and future generations. Similarly in Canada the Indigenous people are communal peoples who have been affected by colonization and “the lack of of presence of Indigeneity within universities” (Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2014, p. 9). In 2005 so as to increase the number UBC doctoral student population Drs. Graham Smith of Aotearoa New Zealand and Jo-ann Archibald developed SAGE which derives its origins from the MAI (Maori and Indigenous) graduate program (Archibald et.al., 2014, p. 8).

Malloch’s (2016) study “explores the twenty-first century trends for professional doctorates in Australia, and the challenges they face for survival, with particular reference to the doctor of education” (p. 64). In Australia as indicated by Malloch (2016), Australian postgraduate institutions started offering professional doctorates “in the 1990s” (p. 63). Maxwell (2016) claims that "[t]he early structural difference between the professional doctorates like the EdD and the PhD was relevant in the 1990s. … [as the] busy professionals needed to become familiar
with relevant literature, which was addressed through the course work” (p. 80). Maxwell (2016) states "[t]he Australian PhD, following the British model, was originally 100% thesis" (p. 82). Also the current global conversation stated by Malloch (2016) is also taking place in Australia “as to the value of the professional doctorate. The PhD is generally regarded as the gold standard … even if it can be argued that it may historically be a later entrant in the doctoral stakes than professional doctorates” (p. 69). Malloch (2016) makes note that a “trend” within PhD programs in Australia is to “terminate the courses” and “emphasize more practice,” which drastically changes the delivery compared to “the first-generation professional doctorates [and] …to increase the numbers of students, the quality of their thesis, and the timeliness of their completion” (74). Malatest (2004) proclaims despite the increase of enrolment of Aboriginal post-secondary students in Canada and institutions committed to supporting said students attrition rates still remain high in comparison to non-Aboriginal students (p.5). However, a counter example occurred in the year 2012 at the UBC Vancouver campus, 11 Aboriginal doctoral students graduated from the Faculty of Education in the fall convocation, a record in Canadian universities. The record number of Aboriginal doctoral students was partially due to the success and productivity of the 2006 UBC Faculty of Education Indigenous EdD Cohort.

2.3 Cohorts

2.3.1 Closed-Step Doctoral Model (Cohort-Based Doctoral Program)

In the popular closed step PhD model, also known as the cohort approach, doctoral students enter the program at the same time and proceed through the program taking courses together “and developing a sense of community and support” (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001, p.351).
According to Brown (2011): there are two types of cohorts – a pure cohort and fluid cohort. The pure cohort’s program design requires students to follow a pre-determined set schedule alternatively a fluid cohort allows students to enter the program at any given time (Brown, 2011, p. 2). The term cohort has its modern origins from the late Middle French word cohorte and was used by Julius Caesar (1890) in his writings to describe a “military body, formed by uniting three maniples, the name cohort was given” (p. xx). Bista and Cox (2014) state that, within the last 40 years, the cohort-based model’s popularity has expanded in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and other countries (p. 1). It is my assumption that the PhD cohort experience can create a sense of belonging for student participants as well as provide emotional and psychological support and supportive relationships. I agree with Tareilo (2006) that, “[w]hile the journey taken by each individual represents a unique story, the cohort group itself equally makes its own history” (para. 3). That is why I sense the value of my work in this thesis and why it is worth examination. Though my NITEPjourney I have come to agree with the argument that proponents of the cohort-based experience put forth; student connections are important so that the student feels connected to her or his academic community. The “[s]tandard elements of a cohort designed program for completing the doctorate degree are based on the concept of creating a small, close-knit learning community” (Tareilo, 2006, para. 4). According to Bista and Cox (2014) this “cohort-based model fosters the dynamics of group cohesion … [and] educators have constantly debated and reported how the cohort-based model is successful compared to non-cohort counterparts” (p. 4).

9 NITEP is an Indigenous cohort-based Bachelor of Education degree program with an emphasis on the importance of community, peer support and cultural knowledge.
Another view is offered by Gardner and Gopaul (2012), whose focus is on surveying part-time doctoral students as a diverse group. These authors acknowledge that, “more research is warranted that better assists faculty, administrators, and policy-makers in understanding the distinct needs and experiences of part-time doctoral students” (p. 64). In a similar fashion, exploring these cohort models will help to identify how the university structures and faculty through a cohort model can support Indigenous doctoral students. Students who feel that they are supported and understood are more likely to work towards building and cultivating those connections and collectivities (e.g., Butterwick, Cockell, McArthur-Blair, MacIver, & Rodrigues, 2011; Swayze, & Jakeman, 2014). It is a widely documented finding that cohort members feel comfortable enough to meaningfully communicate and have “appreciation of the different perspectives” (Drago-Severson et al, 2001, p. 19; see also Brooks, 1998; Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, & Wright-Porter, 2011; McPhail, Robinson, & Scott, 2008; Schulte, 2002; van der Wey, 2007; Swayze, & Jakeman, 2014). For many doctoral students, the cohort is experienced “like a family,” a term that appears frequently in research findings (Lawrence, 2002, p. 87; see also Maher, 2004). A functional community or family accepts others for their unique ways of being and thinking. It provides relations of mutual support as the group encounters challenges and celebrates successes. I repeatedly came across the statement that “cohesiveness and peer mentoring [are] beneficial to students” (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997, p. 1). Peer mentoring can be an example of a reciprocal relationship if members are comfortable enough to be vulnerable with their peers.

Dorn and Papalewis (1997) found that “[d]octoral students are more likely to persist in educational leadership programs that rely on the powerful, indispensable element of peer
mentoring” (p. 2). Peer support and the expectation to keep up with the group were important for retention (Teitel, 1997, p.69). Schulte (2002) went as far as to state that, “[a]dministrators of academic programs should consider the cohort model as an important instructional delivery system because it promotes a positive ethical climate and the retention of students” (p. 37). Dorn and Papalewis (1997) noted further that through the “interdependent” relationship between “group work” and the “social aspects” of the doctoral students’ experience, a mutual sense of “commit[ment]” is developed due to the fact that students are on the same journey and thus they are “more likely to meet group goals, such as earning a doctorate” (p. 4). They add that the “support, encouragement, and motivation” that doctoral students received from their peers affected program retention (p. 4). Brooks (1998) reinforces this position when arguing that under these conditions, students feel a sense of “ownership” and “empowerment” within their professional development (p. 67). Teitel (1997) also noted, along with other scholars, that “[t]he same tight bonding and close connection that led to the level of trust … also gave the cohort members considerably more power in their relationships with faculty members” (p. 74; see also McPhail, Robinson, & Scott, 2008). When a group becomes comfortable and connected, individuals begin to protect and honour what the group has built together; they begin to feel a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is much like the communal collectivity and ways of being that some Indigenous students have known and learned from their First Nations band existence. Brooks (1998) further confirms that, “[g]roup dynamics are an integral aspect of learning cohorts” (p. 67). In this sense, the features of communal connectivity are elaborated upon when Miller (2003) describes the cohort process as one that allows students to share experiences, understand each other’s views, construct personal values, and enhance critical thought. It also promotes “risk-taking, trust, open inquiry, cohesiveness, persistence, peer
mentoring, commitment to group, nurturing [relations,] motivate[ion], and family [connection]” (Miller, 2003, p. 19). I experience connectedness and strength when I join my academic peers in knowledge camps and we support each other. In this context, I feel that another person understands what I am going through, and I can speak openly and honestly, use academic language to be clear and concise, and they can comprehend and relate to what I am conveying. I gained a strong sense of belonging when I attended the SAGE meetings or when I attended symposiums and conferences. I especially feel a sense of belonging and communal collectivity when I am in a small cluster of three to five of my Indigenous doctoral peers, and we are supporting each other emotionally and academically. I enjoy being part of a community.

Delores van der Wey (2004) conducted research that examined the educational experiences of 13 First Nations women who had been cohort members of a closed “First Nations ancestry and/or are working in First Nations educational contexts … ” or from an open “group of graduate students who are primarily but not necessarily of First Nations ancestry … from a range of disciplines” graduate level cohort provided by a Canadian institution (p. 6). Van der Wey did not limit herself to studying a single cohort, but rather she “examined the notion of ‘cohortness’” (p. 66). She inquired about their experiences and asked them to divulge how those cohort experiences were “gratifying and or challenging” and whether they had had their voices silenced within their academic institution (p. 64). The women of her study were for the most part content with their cohort experiences and how they found a sense of belonging, “shared sense of humour … and affirmation of First Nations identity” (p. 170). Some of the challenges the women in van der Wey’s (2004) study experienced at times feeling that their peers’ need for “intellectual stimulation” was absent, “but were willing to trade that off in order to contribute to a more
communal initiative” (p. 170). Van der Wey (2004) does see the benefit of a closed First Nations graduate cohort that was “working in First Nations educational contexts” and open cohorts “who are primarily but not necessarily of First Nations ancestry, and may be from a range of disciplines” (p. 171). A structural program initiative was to encourage and facilitate “purposeful and productive dialogue and intercultural encounters … and formations of alliances and coalitions … and building bridges to connect cultures” (p. 11-12). Like the First Nations women of van der Wey’s (2004) research, I too felt that the cohort-based group cultivated my sense of belonging, community affiliation, as well as a sense of place. Still, other First Nations and non-First Nations individuals and students prefer the traditional doctoral program and there is research to follow that depicts the pros and cons of cohort groups.

2.3.2 Disadvantages and Limitations of Cohorts

Throughout this chapter, I have primarily shown how advantageous and overwhelmingly positive a cohort model can be. However as Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, and Norris, (2000) explain that, Many faculty members were frustrated with the rigidity that the cohort structure placed on students and the delivery of the program. In many instances, they sensed the ‘lock step’ nature of course sequencing had negative effects on some students. For example, ‘students who drop out temporarily may find it difficult to ‘catch up’ or find courses immediately once they have exited the cycle’ or ‘students are not able to enter [a] doctoral program when they want to and could be delayed almost a year,’ resulting in reductions in enrollments and program completion rates. Their concerns suggested inflexible course sequencing that not only limited which courses students could take but also restricted faculty in tailoring programs to meet students’ individual needs. (p. 266; see also McPhail, Robinson, & Scott, 2008; Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, & Wright-Porter 2011)
This kind of strict structural guidelines can deter students from applying to a closed cohort program or prove to be another obstacle that could challenge their completion of the program. Another disadvantage is that cohorts are known to be un-welcoming environments for those seen as outsiders since cohort members or insiders have become close-knit groups and can be resistant to outsiders joining their groups learning environments or “classroom space” (Swayze & Jakeman, 2014). Santicola (2013) claims that for some students, a lack of persistence is generally caused by a feeling of isolation while they are in the program. Santicola (2013) further affirms that the intent of the cohort model is to reduce these “feelings of isolation.” If a student needs to take a one-term break the stop-out will most likely delay her or his program completion date and the student may begin to feel isolated from the community or academic family. As a result, their program satisfaction might be altered. This might cause the student to feel frustrated and discouraged and challenge their drive to carry on in their studies, as they feel disconnected from the cohort. The disconnection can be detrimental, as Lawrence (2002) found that: misunderstanding, power-imbalance and/or a lack of tolerance of perspectives can cause conflict within cohorts. Similarly “like families” cohorts can be functional and dysfunctional (p. 87). This power imbalance and intolerance may cause students to feel separated or isolated from the group, negatively impact the communal collectivity, and cliques may develop. Barnett et al. (2000) discuss the adverse effects of “cliques or factions” that form within cohorts, which can lead to the dissatisfaction of students who might “otherwise be satisfied” with their experience and produce some overpowering student leaders (p. 267; see also McPhail, Robinson, & Scott, 2008; Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood, & Wright-Porter 2011). Teitel (1997) discovered that some students had fears that any negative interactions, like the previous discussion of cliques and power imbalance with peers could linger since they are bound by a “long-term commitment to
each other” due to the program structure (p. 70). In sum, although the cohort model may foster students’ program satisfaction and combat attrition, there are also challenges to being a doctoral cohort member. This subsection has exposed some of the limitations of program structures and of dysfunctional group dynamics. Finding out why students leave the program is important. Elgar (2003) reveals that in Canada, in comparison to 30 years ago, it takes longer to complete a PhD program; approximately 50% of students who enter the program actually attain their degree (p. iii). This literature review has assisted me in better understanding the doctoral cohort experience and why at stages in the program, students might feel “isolated,” “frustrated,” “discouraged,” and experience a lack of a sense of community. I continue, however, to feel that more needs to be done to understand the experiences of Indigenous doctoral students who are part of a doctoral cohort; particularly in terms of group dynamics, peer mentoring, mentorship effects on feelings of program contentment, emotional support, academic success, and retention. I feel that the existing research is inadequate and incomplete and I believe there is a need for studies like mine.

### 2.4 Traditional Non-cohort Doctoral Model

A traditional non-cohort doctoral model, as stated by Dorn and Papalewis (1997), can be understood as an isolated type of doctoral studies where the students are individually responsible for meeting the requirements outlined in the university catalogue, with only a possible serendipitous relationship occurring between students, or between students and faculty. (p. 1)
Some individuals prefer the traditional non-cohort program structure as an alternative option with regards to community; “[i]ncreasingly, [other] Indigenous students are embracing virtual learning as a means to access higher education without having to leave their home communities” (Kovach, Bjornson, & Montgomery, 2008, p. 3). These types of cohort groups allow students to acquire the education they desire without dramatically altering their lives. Some students must relocate to a physical university to acquire a doctoral degree, meaning that the individual would have to move to a new city or place (sometimes with their families). This move is not a small feat or easy move for most First Nations people who have lived within their traditional lands or communities for all of their lives. This move can mean that they will be deprived of their emotional, psychological, and in some cases financial and spiritual support. For some, necessary relocation may be a daunting, hostile experience. Many students may feel disrespected along their academic journey. Some students have “feeling[s] of isolation [which] takes place at different stages … confusion about the program and its requirements … [or] lack of (or insufficient) … student-to-student and student-to-faculty communication” (Ali & Kohun, 2006, p. 24). Others will “struggle” while attempting to have a “balanced life” or a life outside of just being a doctoral student (see also Martinez, Ordu, Della Sala & McFarlane, 2013). Pyhältö, Toom, Stubb, and Lonka (2012) found that some students struggled to obtain a sense of “well-being” if their “problems were related to supervision and the scholarly community” (p. 5). If universities established Indigenous cohorts, perhaps the implementation of electronic alternatives might ease Indigenous students’ transition to a university environment.

Another method, presented by Samuel and Vithal (2011), is the unconventional seminar-based cohort model. This model was used in South Africa to address the under-achievement of
doctoral graduates. The seminar brought together a collective of supervisors who recognized their own strengths and limitations to collaborate by complementing and supplementing their knowledge base, and it provided space for a collective of students to think, learn, and take risks in a cross-disciplinary environment beyond methodological borders. Newly graduated doctoral staff networked to support each other and the doctoral students as a group. The innovative elements of this option consisted of three stages that are not mutually exclusive. Samuel and Vithal (2011) explained how these three stages of “‘headwork’ (epistemology), ‘fieldwork’ (methodology), and ‘textwork’ (representation) all co-influence each other as the study mutates and develops” (p. 80). The students were organized into these stages and were drawn from different disciplines to work together and support each other. There were approximately five experienced supervisors who provided guidance to the novice supervisors. The cohort met for weekend seminars from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon six times during the year. The programme greatly improved the successful completion of doctoral students and it also trained graduate supervisors.

2.5 The University Experiences of Indigenous Students

It is perhaps assumed that all Indigenous students who are accepted to the university environment are socially prepared whether they take the cohort or non-cohort program stream doctoral program. It is also assumed that the university academic environment is a welcoming place for Indigenous students; a place where they immediately gain a sense of belonging within the university’s social and academic settings. For some Indigenous doctoral students, however, the university academic environment might be an unwelcoming place fraught with
disillusionment, where peers and faculty members might feel that minority students are an imposition or burden on the institution. I discovered this negativity through my conversations with Indigenous students and others at UBC, SAGE and IGSS; Indigenous students had to endure being colonized in the workplace, public classrooms, and social settings. I know from personal experience that this experience of being colonized in these settings can be isolating, intimidating, and marginalizing. I got the feeling that others felt that my contributions when discussing my Indigenous knowledge was not necessary or appreciated. Some doctoral students—after entering the university’s academic setting—may need an initial period of adjustment to their doctoral program. This adjustment period can cause problems, especially when navigating through the social forces that can adversely affect their academic work and social lives. Others don’t adjust quite so easily to the academic environment and may be left feeling tense and stressed. These Indigenous students can feel excluded, isolated, and alienated, and they often deal with prejudice and systemic racism.

I believe that I left the shore of my home for the waterways of UBC to begin my doctoral studies at the most opportune time for me to join the many canoes that would be metaphorically pulling around the campus. In 2005, Drs. Graham Smith and Jo-ann Archibald established and provided oversight to SAGE, with Michelle Pidgeon as the first provincial coordinator; simultaneously recruitment of Indigenous PhD students and the Indigenous EdD cohort\(^\text{10}\) were underway. After Dr. Michelle Pidgeon started her academic career at Simon Fraser University I became the second SAGE provincial coordinator. I was blessed to be a witness and part of all of the

\(^{10}\) EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education which is a structured program of 13 doctoral students who work full time in leadership positions in Education.
culturally-relevant Aboriginal graduate and doctoral Faculty of Education initiatives and programs in their early stages. Almost 10 years after SAGE began the Aboriginal Transitions: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT: U2G) research team lead by Archibald, Pidgeon, and Hawkey (2014) conducted a research project in two phases that “critically examines the role of a culturally relevant peer and faculty mentoring initiative–SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement)-which works to guide institutional change for Indigenous graduate student success” (p. 1). They collected data from an Aboriginal Graduate Student Survey and SAGE [member] focus groups. The results noted by Archibald et al. (2014) are that,

SAGE … fosters supportive inter-generational relationships and a sense of belonging in academe; it creates and sustains self-accountability to one’s studies; and it provides a social, academic, and cultural network of graduate students who care deeply about working to improve Indigenous peoples and communities well-being. (p. 15)

When I was an active member, the SAGE meetings assisted me in reconnecting with my friends, peers, and mentors and it sustained me spiritually, emotionally, and the meetings gave me nourishment. There were numerous times when I was feeling isolated, weary, and incompetent and a Saturday SAGE meeting improved my mental state. Also walking on the UBC campus on a Saturday made it feel less like a colonizing place.
The realities of colonialism are most daunting when one is working towards the mandates of predominantly white culture or Euro-centric research-intensive universities, which Pidgeon challenges.

Aboriginal peoples' experiences in higher education continue to be impacted by a colonial history of educational policies and acts of symbolic violence, the objectives of which have been assimilation. It is important to question how the current structures, practices, and policies of post-secondary institutions aid or hinder Indigenous notions of success. (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 1)

These settings are not always nurturing to or for Indigenous students. Settee (2007) writes: “[i]n order for Indigenous peoples to survive and create a nurturing environment in academia, one is required to question the status quo of mainstream academia” (p. 166). It may be true what Dei (2000) says that, “to speak about Indigenous knowledges and the decolonization of the Western/Euro-American academy is to take personal and collective risks” (p. 112). This can be an uncomfortable position for those in the middle of an academic environment. Indigenous students can get caught up in questions of ethics, established institutional rules, and how these are supposed to work in harmony with each other.

People can make mistakes and get caught up in what is important to them personally. Priorities may differ based upon each individual’s needs. Decisions may be made based upon misinformation or just simply based upon following set standards of conduct. Pertinent information can be misappropriated. Some Indigenous students occasionally feel second-rate in
comparison with other students. Though there is a call for a cultural shift that can be seen in pockets of UBC’s physical and social structures there are still structural tensions that remain. Settee (2007) writes, “[i]nstitutions that make no place for Indigenous participation are oppressive and reminiscent of the colonial era” (p. 235). I believe it is essential for Indigenous students, through their existence and Indigenous knowledge contributions, to broaden non-Indigenous students’ intellects and decolonize research-intensive classrooms and institutions.

In Australia Trudgett (2009) recognized “[t]he disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students participating in higher education progressively broadens as the level of study increases” (p. 9). Her research focused on investigating “what support mechanisms [were] available to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia ” (p. 10). She discovered in addition to doing their postgraduate studies and sustaining a full-time career the Indigenous students also had “community and family responsibilities” (p. 11). This made her research process more challenging but I was not surprised because the UBC Indigenous students have to work as much as they can unless they have adequate funding (scholarships, loans, or community sponsorship). I was also not surprised that Indigenous students who “were part of a local community” recognized the importance of having an Indigenous supervisor and those students “not part of a local Indigenous community” did not recognize the importance of an Indigenous supervisor (Trudgett, 2009, p. 14). Periodically I have encounters with Indigenous faculty and staff on the campus and even though the meeting may have been brief the words from the supervisor, mentor, or staff were meaningful and I felt supported and encouraged. One of the issues the students encountered were Indigenous support unit staff members, who were “hostile and unwelcoming” and as Trudgett states “a culturally safe environment” is vital (p. 12). Trudgett’s
(2009) findings were that the Indigenous postgraduate students were not given access or opportunities to engage with the academic social structures and their peers in a meaningful way. Those individuals whose job it was to support them were not “culturally appropriate” or “not welcoming” (p. 17). This negativity can add to the already challenging academic journey and experience for some Indigenous students.

McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin, and Williams, (2009, 2011) investigate the challenges that the “dramatic increase in Māori doctoral registrants” face in Aotearoa New Zealand universities (McKinley et. al, 2009, p. 2). McKinley et al. (2011) discuss how for the Māori student, challenges may increase when they choose or are chosen to enter the university and integrate a Kaupapa Māori research approach both in their research in the academy and their communities. The research’s purpose was to investigate the experiences of Māori doctoral students in Aotearoa New Zealand universities and they “focus[ed] on three key themes: ‘working with(in) different knowledges,’ ‘working with research advisors [Māori and non-Māori],’ and ‘researching as Māori with Māori’” (McKinley et. al, 2011, p. 116). McKinley et. al (2009) interviewed 38 Māori doctoral students (27 female and 11 male) attending or graduated and 20 supervisors (11 Māori and nine non-Māori) “from a range of disciplines and institutions in the North Island” (p. 3). McKinley et. al, (2009) found “that there are indeed distinctive issues arising within supervision” and “[o]thers are connected to the kinds of projects the [Māori] students are undertaking” (p. 10). The supervisors, both Māori and non-Māori, found that they experienced both “pleasures and challenges” when working with and navigating Māori doctoral students progress. The pleasure of reciprocal learning and education took place between the student and supervisors while also being culturally appropriate. While the non-Māori supervisor was guiding
and supporting the Māori student, the student was introducing, exposing, and teaching their supervisor the student’s cultural knowledge, customs, community, and their community responsibilities. One challenge that came with this reciprocal relationship was some students felt their cultural identity was over exposed. Māori students at times were uneasy with the process of revealing their personal and sacred knowledge that had to be explained and translated when the task was sometimes unachievable. Also there were some non-Māori supervisors that had to adapt to not always being the expert or guide in the research team as the Māori student was the expert at integrating the Kaupapa Māori research with western knowledge. Introducing and embedding Indigenous knowledge in the university-learning environment poses additional challenges.

2.5.2 Challenging the University through Indigenous Knowledge

Integrating one’s own Indigenous knowledge systems into the academic environment involves a complex process of modifying Western views of knowledge that have had a prominent place in academe for centuries. Indigenous scholars have contested the dominance of Western knowledge as being arbitrary, racist, violent, and in need of being challenged and changed (eg., Alfred, Mihesuah, & Wilson 2004; Coulthard, 2014; Mihesuah, and Wilson, 2002). At the same time, Dei (2000) reinforces the difficulty of these challenges because IK has been excluded or marginalized within “Western academics” (p. 128). Pidgeon (2008) reinforces the exclusionary positioning of IK by stating that, "[a]nother important consideration is the fact that Indigenous knowledge remains marginalized within a system that continues to value and reinforce the dominant hegemony" (p. 2). As a result, Settee (2007) found that, “[u]niversities without
Indigenous Knowledge Systems programs have been problematic for Indigenous peoples and working within these creates many challenges… with discrimination in regards to both racism and sexism” (p. 234). These challenges have been experienced by other Indigenous graduate students, such as Māori people in New Zealand.

Grant’s (2010) research notes how a Māori student was discouraged with resistance to Māori knowledge and perspectives in the university. She stated that, “many Māori expect that their worldview will not only have to be explained to non-Māori but also defended against uncomprehending challenges to its status as knowledge” (p. 512). Grant states how Māori worldviews lack acknowledgement “within the academy where non-Western worldviews get little recognition” (p. 512).

The reaction to a Māori worldview is similar to the Canadian context for Indigenous students. Therefore, it is even more imperative that Indigenous students and students who are in alliance with Indigenous peoples continue to be tenacious and brave and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into all factions of the academy—academically, socially, and through the practice of ceremony and protocols. Those faculty and staff who have policy and decision-making roles and responsibilities can also create more academic, social/emotional, and cultural spaces for Indigenous knowledge approaches.

Pidgeon (2008) introduces an important area of the university for such change, “[c]onsequently, understanding the role of Indigenous knowledge within post-secondary education can help transform institutions as places of success for Aboriginal peoples. One site where Indigenous
knowledge is present in universities is Aboriginal student services” (p. 4). It is there that I have found support and understanding when I have felt isolated and discouraged. Other important groups that could assist with institutional change for IK are Indigenous communities. Settee (2007) makes note of how “Indigenous scholars and community-based groups are integrating their knowledge into higher learning” (p. ii). I agree with Settee (2007) that “[a]s Indigenous scholars who originate from collective societies and worldviews, we must ensure that our research and our roles in the academy serves our communities, builds strong nations, and places story at the center” (p. 163). A national commission that placed Indigenous people’s lived stories at the center is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). As a result many educational institutions are responding to these stories as an action of reconciliation.

2.6 Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015)

The TRC was formed in 2008 as a result of the largest class action law suit in Canadian history. Charged with gathering testimony and records relating to the Indian Residential School system that operated in Canada from the late nineteenth century until 1996, the Commission documented the deaths of widespread systemic abuse of Aboriginal children, many of whom had been forcibly removed from their homes and communities without their parents’ consent. (Aboriginal Engagement at UBC, 2015)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): Calls to Action Report (2015a) asks the federal government to re-commit to honour a promised commitment that they had made through treaty relationships to provide moneys that will assist in “[i]mproving educational levels of success rate,” and the “develop[ment] of culturally appropriate curricula,” for all Aboriginal peoples, parents, present and prospective students, as well as society in general (p. 2). Canadian
Universities have also been asked to respond to the TRC Final Report: Calls to Action that are specifically for post-secondary institutions to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation…” (2015a, p. 1). Education has a key role in reconciliation to improve the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through learning about the impact of colonialism, especially of the Indian residential schools, and understanding how issues of ignorance and racism stem from such a history (TRC, 2015b).

This section will discuss the ways in which for at least 40 years UBC has been a champion in identifying and addressing the educational needs of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal communities. UBC has constructed Indigenous buildings, hired Indigenous professors and staff, and implemented Aboriginal specific programs, courses, and student services that could be exemplars for the TRC recommendations. However, what UBC has accomplished must not be seen as all that it can or needs to do to improve higher education for Indigenous students. This section will also discuss a small sample of Canadian universities’ responses to the TRC final report (2015a).

The TRC Final Report identified 94 Calls to Action, however, only Call to Action 11 addressed post-secondary education, specifically. It is presented below with a short description of how UBC has addressed this recommendation.

- We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education (Calls to Action 11)

Despite limited funding from the federal government, UBC has established a few Aboriginal graduate student financial awards: scholarships, bursaries, and emergency funds. Examples
include, a doctoral fellowship\textsuperscript{11} of $18,200 per year for up to four years, Aboriginal Graduate Fellowship Bridge Funding\textsuperscript{12} and a $700.00 Aboriginal Emergency Assistance Grant at the Vancouver campus. Many of the TRC Calls to Action that related to education focus on the K-12 educational systems. UBC can contribute to these educational actions by preparing future teachers and other educational leaders, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to work within and transform educational systems. The next section portrays UBC’s educational laddering approach that could facilitate current and future students’ journeys to professions in education.

2.6.1 Laddering Courses, Programs, and Initiatives

The following laddering courses, programs and initiatives can assist Indigenous students to be respected for their cultural knowledge and identity and meet their communal needs. UBC is one of the universities that have established policies that allow admission requests from 14 Indigenous languages that are accepted for admissions to UBC and are recognized as a dual credit. High school students enrolled in these courses can earn the credit as a language requirement for admissions that may be accredited as a UBC credit. UBC also delivers the First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program (FNIS), which is “an interdisciplinary undergraduate program within the [UBC] faculty of arts”\textsuperscript{13}. Students who graduate from this program may enter the UBC Faculty of Education to complete their professional education credits for teacher certification. UBC has also delivered NITEP for 40 plus years—an Indigenous Teacher Education Program. NITEP is a teacher education program that is based in various regional sites.

\textsuperscript{11}\url{https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/aboriginal-graduate-fellowships}
\textsuperscript{12}\url{https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/aboriginal-graduate-fellowship-bridge-funding}
\textsuperscript{13}\url{https://fnis.arts.ubc.ca/roots-of-fnsp/}
in British Columbia and has an urban centre on the UBC Vancouver campus. The UBC Faculty of Education developed the Aboriginal Education in Canada course\(^{14}\) that all UBC BEd candidates must take to support them in learning about the history and future of Aboriginal/Indigenous students and to prepare them to be understanding, caring, and supportive teachers and mentors to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The UBC Faculty of Education supports graduate specific initiatives such as Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) and the annual Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS). UBC has also built the new Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre\(^{15}\) to function as an archives and to create space for open and healing dialogue about the impact of Indian residential schools.

2.6.2 Canadian Universities’ Responses to the TRC Final Report (2015)

The University of British Columbia—like the University of Victoria, University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, and University of Toronto—“have been focused on educating Aboriginal students for many years” (Timmons, 2016, para. 5). These universities, in addition to Simon Fraser University and University of Saskatchewan are all members of Universities Canada, which is a “membership organization providing university presidents with a unified voice for higher education, research and innovation.” The Universities Canada\(^{16}\) has “developed” and “adopted” 13 “New Principles on Indigenous Education” as their response to the TRC’s Calls to Action. The 13 Principles\(^{17}\) appear to be putting forward a code of conduct

\(^{14}\)http://teach.educ.ubc.ca/students/courses/aboriginal-education/
\(^{15}\)http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/indian-residential-school-centre/
\(^{16}\)https://www.univcan.ca/universities/member-universities/
\(^{17}\)https://www.univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/new-principles-on-indigenous-education/
for institutions to follow so as to take on their responsibility to pay attention and respect Indigenous students and give them opportunities and spaces to be engaged with the institutions and non-Indigenous students, faculty, services, and staff.

An example of a new university TRC response is Simon Fraser University’s Aboriginal Reconciliation Council (SFU-ARC) that released its report that “incudes 33 calls to action, organized into [the following] four clusters:

- Creating safe and welcoming spaces for Aboriginal peoples
- Curriculum innovation
- Student pathways and support
- Administration, hiring and project implementation

[and] SFU has committed to $9 million in university funding” for these clusters (para. 5). The University of Manitoba built The National Centre of Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), which opened in November 3, 2015, which holds the TRC testimonies of the Canadian Indian Residential survivors and other archives. In addition, there are other Canadian post-secondary institutions that have responded to the TRC Calls to Action with the development of consortiums, strategic plans, task forces, final reports, steering committees, and public policies. Universities and schools in the coming months will create a plan to implement their response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls of Action.

19 http://nctr.ca/map.php
2.7 Conclusion

Through my readings about cohorts, I discovered that a large quantity of literature spoke to the importance of students gaining a sense of belonging from their group as well as peer support and having a family feeling toward their cohort members. The literature was not useful, however, in capturing how to meet Indigenous students’ communal/cultural needs, as most of the research seemed to be under the assumption that cultural backgrounds are not important or relevant.

There is an abundance of literature that describes how doctoral programs are designed and implemented. Additionally, there are studies that discuss the pros and cons of cohort versus non-cohort programs (Schulte, 2002). There is also an abundance of studies that discuss student academic and social experiences in cohort and non-cohort programs. However, existing literature is not adequate in understanding the experiences of Indigenous doctoral students. Indigenous scholars and allies have presented critiques of university environments, which have been hostile and indifferent to Indigenous learners and Indigenous knowledge (Alfred, Mihesuah, & Wilson 2004; Coulthard, 2014; Mihesuah, and Wilson, 2002). More literature is needed to understand the Indigenous doctoral students’ experience that relates to their communal and collective needs.

This existing body of literature also has limited engagement with Indigenous knowledge (IK) in terms of how this knowledge could frame or impact the doctoral experience of Indigenous students. The non-acceptance or marginalization of Indigenous knowledge within the academy makes it difficult for Indigenous doctoral students to bring their ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘ways of
being’ into their research. Therefore, Indigenous knowledge is central to my project, as it seeks to draw on Indigenous epistemology and ontology in terms of how they can help us frame the Indigenous doctoral experience in the most meaningful way. Because the established knowledge is predominantly Eurocentric and all students are expected to adapt to the established institutional knowledge—how does this help an Indigenous student with their own Indigenous knowledge systems gain a sense of belonging? If their cultural practices and protocols are not respected and they accept, adapt, and assimilate into the Eurocentric-tribe, then they could grow away from their original tribe and lose their sense of belonging. Yet, if they incorporate the two into their ways of being, customs, and traditions they could walk in both tribes and be successful and gain knowledge, strength and membership. I know that when I learned the customs and traditions of both my Indigenous teachings and the mainstream Canadian social customs and protocols, I felt I could walk anywhere and feel confident and felt I belonged. Thus, I gained some sense of balance between Indigenous community knowledge and mainstream community knowledge, which is what Indigenous doctoral students, must do to survive in academe if they choose to maintain their Indigenous identity.

The effort to maintain balance, however, places Indigenous students in a challenging situation, especially if they are in a cohort program that is mainly non-Indigenous, which was my situation. Santicola and Morris (2013) in referring to the Eurocentric cohort model found that although the cohort model is intended to assist students in supporting each other, students would nonetheless branch off alone on their path. During this time, they are expected to put the doctorate first, ahead of their personal and professional commitments, face lost time with their families, or possibly face the consequence of “not completing the degree” (Santicola and Morris, 2013, p. 52).
Universities such as the University of British Columbia have established a few courses, program specializations, student funding packages, and student support to counter the challenges that Indigenous doctoral students face in academe so that they can complete their degree. The national Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) has recently provided a policy related impetus for increasing the educational success of Indigenous learners.

Although the TRC did not directly recommend a Call to Action to the university to make change to the academic or social experience of Indigenous graduate students, there was a general call for post-secondary education to assist in “closing the income and employment gap” and increase Indigenous students’ admittance to education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a, p. 151). The TRC reinforces UBC’s past and current efforts to increase Indigenous student enrollment, but more importantly, it can become a tool to realign the focus on further work that can be done to address the educational needs of Canadian Indigenous doctoral students. Unfortunately, the TRC did not mention or recognize the impact of higher education, which would have more than a financial benefit. Those who complete graduate degrees have a stronger possibility of taking on leadership positions to change policies and programs for the benefit of Indigenous peoples and society in general. I did not find any literature that discussed the leadership roles and impact of Indigenous doctoral graduates; however, I received examples of the types of roles alumni have obtained after completing their degrees from Dr. Jo-ann Archibald who worked with many Indigenous doctoral students. Using the same time period of my study (2006-2014), the following academic positions were identified: senior advisor to a university president on Aboriginal engagement; three prestigious Indigenous Canada Research Chairs; a Chair of Indigenous Education; a national director of an Indigenous research centre;
directors of Indigenous Studies programs; and deans of post-secondary institutes. Many graduates have become tenure track and tenured faculty members at universities across Canada (J. Archibald, personal communication, March 23, 2018). Working in these positions provides opportunities for Indigenous faculty to make systemic change within academe and to connect the university with the needs and interests of Indigenous communities.

Chapter 3 will discuss my research methodology using Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles (2008a & 2008b) to guide my data collection and data analysis, holistically, so as to tell students’ stories with respect. I used the framework of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four Rs and Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles jointly and sometimes interchangeably as theory and methodology to help understand the students’ journeys.
Chapter 3: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

*Oral traditions are distinct ways of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved ... Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory... one listens to the oral narratives in order to know how their voices might be heard within the communities they come from as well as the communities in which they are received. (Hulan & Eigonbrod, 2008, p. 7)*

The oral tradition of telling stories is a vibrant mode to transfer knowledge and experiences and the written word can be a useful tool to document Indigenous doctoral student journeys. Those stories can connect past and present Indigenous doctoral student speakers. Oral stories can connect the storyteller or speaker with the listener or a community in a way that will transfix their mind, body, and spirit. When I was a child my father took me to funerals throughout British Columbia, the lower mainland, Stó:lō Nation and Vancouver Island and I witnessed how cultural speakers connected the listener or community with both the loved one who passed on to the spirit world and the loved one’s families and communities. A speaker is an important person to guide ceremony, a funeral, a naming, or a communal event. I spoke with Shane Pointe (2013), Te-Tain (Sound of Thunder), from the First Nation communities of Vancouver Island and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam). He is a seasoned and trained cultural speaker. He told me that speakers were chosen for their “aptitude to speak” and were seen as those who are “in tune with other peoples’ emotions.” He said that a speaker is required to “speak to the issue” for those who have hosted the cultural “work” and to “convey the emotions of the host,” which may be “anger or sorrow.” A speaker is also required to allude to the month and year of the work while passing on personal communication. Shane said that as a traditional speaker, it is an honour to
be asked by a family to speak on their behalf because it is important and respectful work. I believe that telling of the stories the Indigenous doctoral experiences is important work and so I will respectfully examine them through the lens of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s: “The Four R’s” (1991).

Through the analysis and transmission of my data collection of Indigenous doctoral students’ lived experiences, I will bring together their stories while keeping in mind Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles (2008a) and Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald 2008b). I take on the role of speaker in a different framework, which is an academic one. Traditionally, cultural speakers are usually men and a family or community customarily asks them to speak on their behalf. The similarities between a traditional speaker and an academic speaker are that they both have knowledge and experience about something; protocols, the people involved, and both speakers share the words, thoughts, and stories of others. Whereas the fundamental differences between a cultural speaker and an academic speaker have to do with their approaches; the cultural speaker talks from the heart and is respectful of others and is expected to uphold cultural integrity whereas the academic speaker gathers and analyzes data, such as interviews, and often engages in critical and reflective thinking to gain understandings from the data.

I believe that that there are many tensions between the cultural and academic speaker. Firstly, the cultural speaker is chosen by their families, elders, and communities to humbly convey the words, feelings, plans and purpose of the work of the family or community. The academic speaker, however, is at some level self-appointed until they are tenured. Some non-Indigenous
professors are overly-assertive, direct and preach or sell the English speaking, Western, knowledge and position, while other non-Indigenous professors are critical of certain concepts concerning the Western knowledge in the academe. I have heard that two of my Indigenous mentors were chosen in their youth by our elders to go out and get an education and become leaders in the academy/Western world. Both reached high-level positions in their careers and were recognized for their excellence while also remaining connected to their Indigeneity and respectful and responsible towards their Elders, families, and communities. These mentors have inspired me to use the Indigenous cultural values in my role as an academic speaker throughout this thesis.

I, as an Indigenous academic, want to give voice to the Indigenous doctoral students whom I engaged in “conversation” and “chatted” with as we shared time, space, energy, and our doctoral student life experience stories (Archibald, 2008b, p. 377). I will give their stories voice through my research and writing while undertaking a respectful and culturally minded approach using reflection and analysis. This chapter presents the theoretical framework and methodological approaches that guide my research.

3.2 Theoretical Foundation: Kirkness and Barnhardt’s “The Four R’s” as Theory

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) ground their approaches in understanding the experiences of Indigenous higher education students in Indigenous knowledge and within the larger context of Indigenous history, colonization, identity, place, land, and culture. First, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) refer to the under-representation of Indigenous students in higher learning institutions,
advocating for systemic change in the Canadian university if this situation is to be redressed. I have chosen to mobilize Kirkness and Barndhardt’s Four R’s—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility to theoretically guide and support my research and assist me in understanding the UBC Indigenous students’ doctoral experience.

There is a new wave of Indigenous doctoral students who may or may not know what to expect from the University of British Columbia setting. They may be seeking to gain student agency and a doctoral degree. They may believe, as Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) do, that

In the context of a First Nations perspective of the university, higher education is not a neutral enterprise. Gaining access to the university means more than gaining an education—it also means gaining access to power, authority, and an opportunity to exercise control over the affairs of everyday life, affairs that are usually taken for granted by most non-Native people. (p. 12)

This new wave of students hopes to be respected for their unique perspectives when they apply and are accepted into their chosen UBC doctoral programs. Their unique cultural ways of being and perspectives can at times be seen as antagonistic and negatively impacts their success in the mainstream doctoral programs. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) advocate changing the academic institution on order to increase Indigenous student success.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) identify the Four R’s — Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility — as a meaningful way to approach the Indigenous higher education student experience. Indigenous students deserve Respect for their cultural background and cultural ways of being, but some Indigenous students may not always feel respected. Indigenous students may
feel that they are accepted merely as an individual who fills the seat within the classroom that their tuition has paid for. They may feel they are tolerated—not respected. They are expected to follow the lead of the Western academy and adapt to its structures, belief system, and social norms. They feel as if they are expected to leave their own non-Western ways at the university gates. This is confirmed by Kuokkanen (2007) when she says, “the academy does not recognize the ontologies and epistemologies held by its indigenous students. Instead, it expects students to leave their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates of the university” (p. 2). An Indigenous student who is entering into the doctoral environment knowing that they are respected for their gifts, culture, and perspectives can feel fortunate in that they are given an equal opportunity to succeed.

Indigenous students have the right to feel that their education matters and that through their education, they respectively contribute to the well-being of their community. For some, their Indigenous knowledges and values are deeply rooted in spiritual awareness and these values and beliefs do not disappear when an individual enters the educational setting or cohort group. If universities are to foster Relevance in the students' academic work, these values and beliefs must be recognized as intrinsic to Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous students are strengthened when they combine their knowledges with the pursuit of other knowledges such as Western knowledge. We as Indigenous students are strengthened when we think, write, speak, and share in our Indigenous voices, perspectives, and positionality. Perhaps then our academic participation, relationships, and interactions with professors, students, and peers will be genuine and potentially valued.
Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) third point is that Indigenous students deserve Reciprocal academic relationships with university professors. Indigenous students should not be expected to be the "passive recipient" of Western knowledge while their professor is viewed as the expert, or "creator and dispenser" of forms of knowing that are assumed as dominant (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 10). Proactive and productive "two-way processes" (p. 10) between the university student and professor is where they work together and create new knowledge that incorporates their own perspectives, as well as work to make it relevant to a broader spectrum of scholars (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 2001).

The fourth point Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) raise is that of Responsibility. Universities have the responsibility to build their structures as places of being and as knowledge gathering camps that do not make the dominant and favoured peoples comfortable and supported while rendering others marginalized and insignificant. In many cases, the university places the responsibility of succeeding within the academy on the shoulders of Indigenous students, and when they are challenged or fail to graduate, the university blames the student. The Indigenous student is seen as an unsuccessful cultural border-crosser in that they have failed to overcome their own culture to acclimatize to the dominant Western academy. Kuokkanen (2007) points out “it is up to the academy to … address its own ignorance so that it will be able to recognize and give unconditional welcome to indigenous peoples’ worldviews and philosophies” (pp. 2-3). Indigenous students would thrive in a system that gives them Respect and helps them exert Responsibility for themselves while facilitating Reciprocity in their relationships with others and supporting the Relevance of their interpretations and worldviews.
3.3 Research Methods

By applying Indigenous Storywork Methodology (Archibald, 2008b) to my research, I am weaving together traditional and academic approaches through an Indigenous lens to ensure that I uphold the integrity of the life experience stories of the doctoral students. In my role as an academic speaker, I respectfully sent out direct emails through the SAGE webmail and displayed posters inviting Indigenous doctoral students to participate in my study. Thirteen students answered the request to be part of my research. During our “talks” and “chats” they provided first-hand accounts of their personal experiences and challenges in a Western institution. I make the distinction of conversation and chat with some participants in that “conversation is characterized as an open-ended interview with opportunity for both sides to engage in talk … [and] chat occurs when the researcher is very familiar with the participant(s) and they interact on a frequent basis” (Archibald, 2008b, p. 377). I had previously travelled in a canoe with some of the students, and with others, I was not as well acquainted. These “teachers” of their doctoral life experiences allowed me to be the “learner” and “listen” (p. 379) and speak about their stories and doctoral journeys (Archibald, 2008b). In preparing for the talks and chats, I recalled and tried to follow Archibald’s (2008b) process of respect and reciprocity:

teacher and learner [relationship] had to be based on respect for each other … I also … [kept in mind] that reciprocity was essential to our working together. As learner, I needed to listen carefully and think ‘hard’ about the meanings … [of their] words. (p. 379)

I positioned myself as a beginner storyteller to show my respect and responsibility toward the research participants’ doctoral student life experience stories and perspectives.
My research was qualitative, incorporating personal oral histories and authenticated information collected through sharing time, space, energy, and conversations with Indigenous doctoral students. The intent of my research method was to apply Indigenous knowledge, remembering, storytelling, and interviews for the purpose of sharing doctoral student life experience stories. I used Indigenous Storywork principles. The use of doctoral life experience stories was inspired by Archibald’s (2008b) account of how, “[o]n many occasions, [Chief] Simon [Baker] told life experience stories to exemplify leadership and political strategies that had implications for me: thus, research as storytelling” (377).[^20] Archibald expresses how

Understandings and insights also result from lived experiences and critical reflections on those experiences. Many Aboriginal people have said that, in order to understand ourselves and our situation today, we must know where we come from and know what has influenced us. The historical and intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation still affect our people and communities today. Elders' life stories can show how we, as Indigenous Peoples, can keep our cultural knowledges intact. (2008b, p. 377)

I felt that through Archibald’s recollection of time spent with one of her “research advisors” (p. 375) that life experience stories would be a suitable method to examine and to share these Indigenous students’ experiences and journeys as doctoral students (2008b). Similarly to Archibald (2008b), “I have come to believe that bringing together cultural knowledge and research can create a better life for us and future generations” (p. 375). For this work specifically, the knowledge contained within these Indigenous doctoral students’ life stories could help future Indigenous students.

[^20]: As noted on p. 13.
The processes for sharing doctoral student life experience stories involved semi-structured and open-ended questions that allowed the students room to share their doctoral journey through remembering and storytelling. Through the sharing of these stories, I wanted to learn about and share how Indigenous doctoral students viewed their academic experiences or journeys. Doctoral student life experience stories capture a holistic picture of a student’s academic journey through conversations.

### 3.4 Indigenous Storywork as Methodology: Indigenous Doctoral Experience Stories

Archibald's (2008a, 2008b) seven Indigenous Storywork principles and practices are central to my project. As a Stó:lō and Coast Salish student, I felt that Archibald’s seven Indigenous Storywork principles and practices would be effective in understanding the journeys and life experience stories of Indigenous doctoral students, including myself. I draw upon Indigenous storytelling research traditions, conceiving stories as narratives that seek to capture the experiential dimensions of journeys. In this way, I sought to understand the doctoral experiences of Indigenous students. Each Indigenous student’s journey and experience was spoken, heard, and shared to capture all the facets of their doctoral student life experience. Stiffarm (1998) states:

> [s]torytelling is the oldest form of the arts. It is the basis of all other arts-drama, art, dance and music. It has been seen as an important part of every culture. It is necessary for the revitalization of First Nations cultures and can be a starting point for moving away from assimilationist to liberationist education. (p. 126)
The stories that I have heard my elders tell are the telling of who we are, how we came to be, and how to live on the land, mountains, valleys, and waters, where we belong and come from. Our stories are our truth. Moreover, according to Kovach (2009), “[s]tories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective” (p. 95). Stories are an important form of communication for many Indigenous students as we share commonalities in respect to worldviews. Thus, storytelling is a methodology to explore Indigenous doctoral students’ journeys as doctoral student life experiences.

Archibald (2008a) also speaks about how her work takes a holistic approach to support education. She further describes holism as, “[a]n Indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to 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” (p. 11). I feel Indigenous doctoral students especially need to achieve holism in order to have quality educational and research experiences. Holistic approaches include internal supports and connections to families and communities. Archibald explains the importance of maintaining relationships with research participants. She also discusses how respecting the territory where the interview takes place and presenting gifts to participants in respect of their time and effort are forms of holism. Archibald also embraces reverence by beginning and ending her work with a prayer. Also, to be ethically responsible, the interviewer will develop "trusting and respectful relationships," by presenting a copy of the audiotape and transcript to the participant so that they can confirm the authenticity of their doctoral student life experience stories. Archibald maintains, "[s]ynergistic interaction between the storyteller, listener, and story
is another critical Storywork principle" (Archibald, 2008a, p. 33). I strove to apply Archibald’s holism, interrelatedness, and synergy principles through my analysis and meaning-making.

By applying the seven Indigenous Storywork principles I carried out my research in a culturally appropriate fashion so as to respect the ways of my Stó:lō and Coast Salish ancestors. I did this by always being mindful that those who share their time, space, journeys, and stories are to be revered and respected. I revere oral storytelling because orality is the purest and oldest ways in which our ancestors passed on their teachings, and the passing on of knowledge through storytelling may, it is hoped, assist others in understanding the doctoral experience of the Indigenous student.

Indigenous values and beliefs are intrinsic to Indigenous knowledge and “[i]n using Indigenous knowledge as the language with which to mediate the dominant hegemony, Aboriginal scholars are communicating from their understanding of their reality, goals, and worlds” (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 10). I maintain that Indigenous knowledge is centrally relevant for understanding of the Indigenous doctoral experience within universities throughout Canada. In this project, I gave voice to Indigenous students to tell their doctoral student life experience stories and to recount their personal and communal journeys, as well as the strategies they implemented to achieve their academic goals. Most of the Indigenous doctoral student’s journeys were guided by their community’s worldview, customs, and traditions, and I believe that in order to be understood and respected, they deserve to be heard through their stories. The Indigenous perspective can be connected to a traditional value system that requires close attention in order to extract its meaning. I drew on Indigenous knowledge holistically, exploring how it can decolonize the
mainstream concept of the doctoral experience as an individual academic journey. Ultimately, I explored how to reclaim the doctoral experience as a communal experience of meanings and community building.

### 3.5 Research Participants

I recruited participants through posters located on message boards on the UBC campus. I also, as previously mentioned, sent direct emails and verbally invited Indigenous doctoral students. I was hoping to record discussions with 15 UBC Indigenous doctoral students. Initially, I wanted to interview five students affiliated with Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE), five students from the Indigenous EdD Cohort or the EdD mainstream program\(^2\), and five students from a PhD program in any UBC Faculty, ideally from Educational Studies-EDST\(^2\), or the Faculty of Education. In actuality, I interviewed 12 participants all of whom were SAGE members. I started with 13 participants, four were in the Indigenous EdD Cohort program; five were Indigenous PhD students in EDST in the UBC Faculty of Education’s mainstream doctoral program; one was an Indigenous PhD student in the CCFI\(^3\) program; one was an Indigenous PhD students in the ECPS\(^4\) program; one was an Indigenous PhD student in the ISGP\(^5\) program; and one was an Indigenous PhD student in the SCARP\(^6\) program. One

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\(^2\) EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education which is a structured program of 13 doctoral students who work full time in leadership positions in Education.  
\(^3\) Educational Studies (EDST)  
\(^4\) Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education (CCFI)  
\(^5\) Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education (ECPS)  
\(^6\) Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program (ISGP)  
\(^6\) School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP)
participant chose to withdraw from the study process due to personal responsibilities. In terms of participant program phases, two had recently graduated, nine were writing their thesis; and one had completed coursework (See Table 1).

Table 1. Study Participants: UBC Indigenous Doctoral Students (2006-2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty/Program</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Program Phase</th>
<th>SAGE Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 EDST\textsuperscript{27} / Indigenous EdD Cohort (2006)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 EDST/ PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 EDST/ PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 EDST/ PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 EDST/PhD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 EDST/ PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Comp. Exam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 CCFI\textsuperscript{28} PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 ECPS\textsuperscript{29} PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 ISGP\textsuperscript{30} PhD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Thesis Writing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 SCARP\textsuperscript{31} PHD</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\textsuperscript{27} Educational Studies (EDST)
\textsuperscript{28} Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education (CCFI)
\textsuperscript{29} Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education (ECPS)
\textsuperscript{30} Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program (ISGP)
\textsuperscript{31} School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP)
I had planned on conducting one to three focus groups as circle discussions, but participants were not available for such circle discussion as they felt hesitant and vulnerable in relation to their peers, losing research anonymity. I had planned on using key words, themes and experiences derived from the interviews as part of a circle discussion that examined the wider range of contexts in relation to how the participants located themselves when referring to their doctoral experiences. Unfortunately, I could not follow-through with this initial analysis.

3.6 Data Collection

Knowledge is transmitted through stories that shape-shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling. (Kovach, 2015, p. 53)

Data and wisdom were collected and reciprocally transmitted through an open-ended and semi-structured audio taped sharing of doctoral students life experience stories for approximately two hours with each participant during the months of January to November 2013. The sessions were held in the First Nations Longhouse facility in the Xwi7Xwa Library seminar room at the University of British Columbia. I also responded to and audiotaped the same research questions that I asked of the participants. I believe that my participation using this method provided reflective value and brought out some of my unique doctoral student life experience stories (as a SAGE mentor).

Participants signed a consent form that allowed them to withdraw their participation from the study at any time throughout the duration of the research. The consent form also reassured
participants that their participation would be respected, and that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, except in the potential circle discussion sessions. I showed my respect and gratitude to each participant by giving them a small gift as token of my appreciation in lieu of their time and efforts in the form of a thank you card, refreshments, and a Tim Horton’s gift card. I did this because I realized that reciprocity is paramount. I continually showed them respect for their opinions and for the sharing their stories by listening with care and understanding, and maintaining good relations with them. Prior to the individual sessions with the Indigenous doctoral students, I reminded myself that I was in one sense, an outsider to the research when I carry out the role of the interviewer. This outsider stance helped me listen without imposing my views during the session. However I am also an insider, as I am also a UBC Indigenous doctoral student. The insider stance helped me understand the students’ concerns and successes in their graduate program phases. I constantly reminded myself that I had this dual role, which was to be respected. I transcribed the participants’ stories and looked for recurring key words, terms, and themes, as well as for differences. The participants were sent their interview transcripts for approval. All agreed with the transcripts, except one who made changes. The modified transcript was used for analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis

I analyzed each of the participant’s transcripts by comparing and contrasting their doctoral experiences. I organized the transcripts into common themes, and then I selected relevant quotes from the student’s doctoral student life experience stories according to those themes. My
purpose was to understand the students’ journeys to their doctoral programs and what supported and helped them to remain on their doctoral journeys.

3.8 Conclusion

I began this chapter by explaining the difference between a cultural spokesperson and an academic speaker. I took on the role of an academic speaker in order to respectfully represent the voices of my peers and colleagues who journey alongside me in their doctoral programs. My theoretical framework was guided by Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four R’s (1991). These Rs were used to prepare me to undertake the research and guided the data analysis phase. I introduced the qualitative interview methods that I chose to assist me to explore and examine Indigenous doctoral students’ experiences within a research-intensive university. I used Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles (2008a) *respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy* and Archibald (2008b) for my methodology and to carry out the data collection and data analysis. Kirkness and Barnhardts’ Four Rs *Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility* and Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles worked well together and sometimes were interchangeable as theory and methodology. I feel these frameworks assisted me in understanding the doctoral students’ journeys and their life experience stories and ultimately assisted me in generating new knowledge about Indigenous graduate education.

I was not able to carry out all of Archibald’s Storywork methodology (2008b). I was restricted to the research procedures that I had agreed to follow in my application to the University of
British Columbia’s (UBC) Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Though it allowed the doctoral students to choose a time to chat that suited them, unfortunately, I had to reserve a location for our conversations. Therefore, I regretfully was not able to carry out the entirety of Archibald’s (2008b) “approach,” which includes the imperative to “make space” (p. 375) and have the Indigenous student “determined where we should meet, [and] I [had not] ensured that there was sharing of food and tea” (p. 378). I was unable to follow all of the approaches that Archibald (2008b) sets out in her research methodology, but as she explains, “[t]hese approaches may be very different from the story approach that I have discussed ” (p. 383). I look forward to future opportunities where I may use more of Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork Methodology (2008b). In the next three chapters, I will organize the Indigenous doctoral students’ lived experience stories using Kirkness and Barnhardt’s: “The Four R’s” (1991). I will explore the themes and points that arose from the conversations I had with the individuals who shared their personal, social, and academic experiences “in order to determine what their perceptions … [are] in respect to relationships between… [the student’s] doctoral experience and community connections (home, personal, and UBC structured)” (noted in Chapter 1).
Chapter 4: GETTING THERE

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Sharing Canoe Journeys: Collecting More Knowledge and Skills

Through the sharing of canoe journeys or doctoral paths, I illustrate how Indigenous doctoral students gained and applied their knowledge and skills as they achieved various milestones in their academic journeys. The waters were often rough as they described their academic and social challenges in these three phases, Getting There, Being There, and Remaining There—“There” being the University of British Columbia (UBC). There are several important characteristics that have supported and impacted the doctoral students’ journeys in their progress and passage throughout their programs. I was interested in knowing how Indigenous doctoral students viewed their experiences within their respective programs in terms of the tensions between doctorateness as a process and their community affiliation as a journey. To what extent did their programmatic and doctoral experiences and journey resonate with Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) Four R’s, which is the theoretical framework for this thesis? The students shared how they connected to their Indigeneity and culture, and how they persevered. The knowledge and skills that I describe are sometimes universal, yet distinct and unique based on the nature of the individual student’s experiences and backgrounds. The Journeyers (students) go on to speak about their responsibility to their support systems and their communities. Finally, they share what they understand is their personal responsibility to future Journeyers. The questions I posed to the Indigenous doctoral students were derived from my first major question:
How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) doctoral students’ web of relationships—family, community, peers, mentors, program structures, and university structures—affect the strategies that Indigenous doctoral students engage in prior to and during their studies?

My role as an academic speaker is to inquire into the doctoral student life experience stories and honour their stories respectfully and accurately so their voices and intentions correspond appropriately to the research questions. As explained earlier, sharing these doctoral student life experience stories must be done in a manner that does not lose the stories’ meaning. I am required to speak the students’ truth and affirm with each student that the doctoral student life experience stories’ reflections are accurate. I consider this to be my academic speaker responsibility.

The first subsection of this chapter speaks to the individual doctoral student’s passages and follows with the characteristics of the individual journeyers. The relevant sub-sections that follow include the personal experiences, and aspects of responsibility and respect. Of particular interest are a significant person or persons and mentors or role models in their lives. My focus of this chapter is to clear the waters of the students’ doctoral journeys through the social and academic waters.

When Indigenous students disembark from their canoe to the shores of UBC it may appear as if they journeyed there by the force of their own ambition to acquire a doctoral degree. However, I found that the majority of the doctoral students’ passages to the shores of UBC have been guided by or influenced by particular events or people in their lives. The influences and support can
come in various forms and channels such as ambition, family member(s), friend(s), communities, mentor(s), professionals, educator(s), coaches, and others. For example, I found my support from my family, communities, and friends.

4.1.2 Shaping and Choosing a Passage to UBC

I have realized through the doctoral student stories that a brief encounter that reinforces positive beliefs, supports, and respects the Indigenous identity can have lasting effects. One student tells a story of a conversation with a teacher whose words of support helped that student throughout her educational journey. The importance of the following quote is to demonstrate how this student made meaning of a conversation she had in elementary school, which turned out to be life-changing for her. It turned out to be a significant conversion in her life, which she did not realize until much later in life. It shows how a student can make meaning of an experience and the effects of a person believing in another’s potential and abilities.

I remember this man who was, he called himself a __ man and he was from [name of country]...and he was a Grade 6 teacher. He came, he was only there for about five months in my elementary school and I was 11 years old and he had parent/teacher interviews. And I am very fair as an Indigenous person, my Mom is [name of Race] … and my Dad is First Nations. And so I don’t always stand out in a crowd, but it was parent/teacher interviews and my Dad came and he sat with my teacher from [name of country]… and I remember that things changed the next day. And this teacher took me aside; … the next day and he said you know I had an interesting conversation with your dad last night. And he said you know I need you to understand that I see you as an Indian child and you know what you need to know that I think you’re very smart and I think you can be just as successful as any of these other kids and I think you can do well in school. And so when you have those days where you think you’re not doing well or things just seem really hard in your education I want you to remember this day and I want you to remember that I think you can do what and I think that that five
minute conversation probably held me interested in school all the way through into my doctoral program. So he was really the first person that really influenced me in profound ways, in ways that I remember, 40 years later. He was probably the most profound … (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

These words from the Indigenous doctoral student’s remembrance of a conversation she had with her teacher/mentor are important for through the teacher’s assessment of the student as a learner seems to have given the student the motivation to persevere through educational waters and it carried the student to the shore and lands of UBC. In addition, the teacher acknowledged and respected the student’s identity and let her know how he saw her as equal to her fellow classmates and this support and encouragement motivated the student to remain connected to school and education. Words of support are important because it shows how a single mentor can inspire a student and influence them to paddle through waters and reach their potential.

The following doctoral student was influenced by promotional material about an initiative and by a Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) program about which one of the cofounders, Graham Smith (2005), writes, “[t]he aim which is to produce 250 Aboriginal PhD/EdDs in British Columbia by the year 2010 …” (p. 21). When this individual initially saw this promotion she didn’t feel that the promotion was directed at her, as she didn't have the intention of applying to a UBC mainstream PhD program at the time. This initiative eventually however, did influence the student’s interest and indirectly affected her doctoral journey. Having shared time and doctoral student life experience stories with this student I was not surprised at how she was influenced by this article as she has deep rootedness in an Indigenous community way of thinking.
A couple reasons… UBC has a pretty high level of reputation for the delivery of education and not only locally but also internationally. And the other thing that intrigued me about the program is that it did not require a two year residency because I live up in, out of the area and I could come to the program without being forced to stay here if I didn’t want to live in Vancouver so that was attractive to me about UBC’s program. ... there were a couple of people that I know who were in programs at UBC … and I knew that they were in sort of cohort. It wasn’t called a cohort but they were in the program together at the same time. So just from listening to their discussions that it sounded like they were it was a way for them to be really supportive of one another while they were working on their PhD. ... another reason that drew me here is I saw an article in the paper and it was by Graham Smith and he had been saying that one of his huge goals was for him to support Aboriginal PhD students so that they could graduate 200 by a certain date, … I liked what UBC was doing because it seems like they had a lot of interest in supporting Aboriginal students to go into the PhD program. … (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This quote demonstrates how the opinions that are held by many both on a private level and on a multinational level can hold a strong influence on individuals to believe the promotions and then pair it with designs of being exclusively supported and selected are perhaps surprising and welcoming to historically marginalized Indigenous peoples. The following student’s course to UBC shifted when given an alternative passageway to their intention,

I applied to just the regular PhD program and I got a call from a fellow named Graham, he said … did you know about this Indigenous doctoral cohort that we are creating here at UBC? And I said no tell me about it. And he said well it’s not a doctor of philosophy, it’s a doctor of education and it’s based on a Māori model that we had in New Zealand in our plan there to put five hundred Māori scholars through in five years. And he said I’m here at UBC and we’re piloting this at UBC, might you be interested? And so I asked him about the curriculum, the design, who was going to be teaching, how was this going to be different than the PhD program that I’d applied to? And he explained the differences and it was a conversation that changed my life. And for lots of reasons and probably the biggest one is because up until that point in all of my kindergarten and grade twelve courses … My first undergraduate degree I had no Indigenous profs. My second undergraduate degree here were no Indigenous profs, my Master’s
program I had one Indigenous prof. So the opportunity to have all Indigenous
profs and all Indigenous colleagues, student colleagues was, it was mind blowing.
And I thought if I only ever had one opportunity to experience something like that
I wanted to take it and so I said yes. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The previous student was given the “opportunity” to change her doctoral journey and experience
through the offering of becoming part of a trial doctoral cohort of Indigenous peers and mentors
who would travel in the same canoe under the support and guidance of an Indigenous
curriculum. This change of academic and social knowledge sites to some could be seen by some
as a form of salvation to an Indigenous student who has journeyed through the independent PhD
streamed program. The next student did not need opinions or promotions, all they needed was an
invitation to a journey and aspiration that they perhaps did not realize they had for them self. As
the student acknowledged SAGE’s impact on their journey,

As a matter of fact I was in a Master’s program at the time and it was my first day
there I had, it was my first time in an Aboriginal class where most of the students
were Aboriginal. And I for the first time in my entire life I could see myself in
the curriculum and what we were going to be talking about for the whole year and
actually in my experience of being able to see different nations all in one room
had a profound effect on me. And so and the other thing was that we had for our
first course was on world view and, of course, that just, that was perfect because
everybody in the room had the same objective list to see how we could fit
together and work together as all nations and I thought wow, I, this is what was
missing all along. And so this was at [name] University in a cohort program.
And so I, at the end of the year somewhere towards the end of the year a group of
instructors came along and they introduced us to a program called SAGE. And
I’m not sure how widely known that is to most Aboriginal students but for me it
was a godsend or that’s a way of saying but it was just the best thing that ever
happened to me because then someone in the classroom, one of the instructors
said is there anyone here who would like to attend the SAGE group and if you
might be interested in pursuing a PhD or a doctoral program. And I don’t think at
any other point in my life I would have ever raised my hand for that. And so this
was that opportunity ... (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)
This student was given the “opportunity” or opening to make a decision for themself and they took it and it would take them on a journey they did not know they wanted to take, but it turned out to be an experience and achievement they wanted (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 11). This student’s pathway to a UBC program reminds me of how I had no aspirations to undertake this daunting journey after acquiring a Master’s degree, but I became one of the many who did. UBC’s Indigenous doctoral student enrolment has increased significantly since 2006 due to the large number of Indigenous students acquiring Master’s degrees and also the development of programmatic initiatives through the efforts of former Dean of Education, Robert Tierney and EDST professors Drs. Jo-ann Archibald and Graham Smith. Several Indigenous students whom I shared time and doctoral student life experience stories with proclaimed they had sent applications to the UBC Faculty of Education’s doctoral programs. Fifteen individuals (13 Indigenous and two non-Indigenous) were admitted to the 2006 EDST EdD Indigenous Education cohort. Dr. Jo-ann Archibald and Dr. Graham Smith led a recruiting campaign, through SAGE, directly, and through personal contacts and other networks. Other Indigenous PhD students received encouragement to apply to their respective programs from mentors, professors, and peers. Others were inspired to consider doctoral studies while attending a SAGE meeting as a master’s student. A few students said that they were influenced to apply to UBC doctoral programs because they witnessed cultural and social events that took place at the First Nations Longhouse, located on the UBC Vancouver campus.

Several doctoral students were guided and influenced by the encouragement and support they received from their grandparents, parents, family members, friends, community members, peers, and teachers. Some were inspired to apply to UBC after seeing the Indigenous doctoral program
recruitment advertised. Others viewed their PhD journey as a natural academic and professional progression, while a few were exclusively self-motivated.

4.2 Assumptions and Expectations Prior to Reaching the Shore of UBC

I wondered what Indigenous doctoral students’ assumptions and expectations were about UBC and their chosen doctoral program before they applied to and when they received their UBC program acceptance letter. Were they like me? Did they think that when they were to arrive on UBC shores that they would join other land canoes and paddle together with other academic and social cohorts? Did they think that there would be writing support systems in place? Did they think that by getting access to the lands of UBC they would acquire a site without warfare where they could carry out productive knowledge sharing in and with numerous knowledge-gathering camps? Did they expect there to be accessible and professional development services, programs that clearly cultivate professional guidance and student centres that engage them? Also, would they find access to these services through the support and guidance from their committees and other professors?

For many people the structure of a doctoral program is unfamiliar and it can feel intimidating or uncomfortable especially for the students who are the first in their families to be accepted into a doctoral program. The following student was familiar with UBC and knew and assumed that their education would be relevant to their cultural and academic needs,
For the PhD [program] I knew that there would be at least five Aboriginal graduate students and that made a lot of difference to me to know that there would be other Indigenous students who I could learn from and provide some epistemological support because I found when I go to regular classes, graduate classes and there’s no Indigenous awareness either in content for conducting research was what I considered barriers for a successful and rewarding education process. My assumption was that there wouldn’t be much support based on my education experience up to graduate school—which is why I didn’t apply for graduate school earlier. But taking courses with Indigenous scholars—one course at a time at the beginning and finding out who the instructors are, where they are what departments, what areas of expertise are available, those kind of considerations … but Education was where there was a critical mass of Indigenous faculty, mentors, that I could see were and so having options for folks to take one course at a time to build up my GPA was extremely valuable which I don't think is available to the public. You must be enrolled in a program—so that prevents access for many Indigenous folks. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

This student was familiar with UBC and they had a clear plan to move around obstacles that might get in their way of Indigeneity and strategically receive relevant Indigenous support and learn from experienced Indigenous doctoral students. It is important to be connected to the institution, program, courses, research, and dissertation in order to stay on course and finish the doctoral journey to graduation. It appears that this next student also had knowledge of and through research found what they needed from an institution that was respectful and relevant to their cultural and academic requirements to acquire their doctoral education and she explains why she chose UBC,

When I was attending […]University I started coming to the UBC SAGE meetings. I found them really affirming in terms of my Indianness because that was really lacking at […]University. And I was so happy to find the sweat lodge here because I had moved to Vancouver in 2003 to work in the industry that I was working in. And I was searching for a supportive spiritual community because I’m a cultural practitioner and it’s really important for me to be grounded in that
way. Culturally to the land and ceremonially through the spirit. So I was very, very happy to find the sweat lodge here. So I started coming to the sweat lodge even while I was doing my MA. … so I applied to those three universities and I was accepted to all three. … so then I started negotiating, just around scholarships, and there were also some other political considerations to, to think about. People, some people had told me it’s not a good idea to do both your Master’s and your PhD at the same university in case you get a job there or want to apply for a job there. I was advised that it looks better and serves you better in the long run if your degrees are all from different universities. … And so and another reason was when I was writing my MA thesis at one of the SAGE meetings I was introduced to Jo-ann Archibald’s Storywork book. And I was so excited when I read that book, I, I honest to god I almost jumped out of my skin I think I sat and read it in almost one sitting. … And so that was another reason just that, that connection with Jo-ann through her book and through meeting her at SAGE and other events. I was, I started asking her about coming here and would she work with me right? … So I spent time with her in various ways right? So I applied anyway right even though it wasn’t, it was uncertain right? … I got accepted and I was really happy about that. … Well I have to tell you that I shopped and I talked to a few people who had gone through the program here and … I needed … to be able to do the work that I wanted to do. … for instance, I was very happy about the fact that I knew that there were seven Indigenous faculty [members] here. … expectations, assumptions was that I would get courses in Indigenous knowledge and that I would have Indigenous faculty that I could turn to that was a huge expectation and a huge marker for me in terms of making the choice to be here. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

This student wanted a university that fit their needs and they would receive relevant course content and mentors who could build upon the student’s Indigenous knowledge base. This student had three choices as to where she would do her doctoral studies and chose UBC for its Indigenous initiatives. The next student was recruited and put her faith and trusts in the individual who recruited her,

I don’t know that I had expectations or that I knew very much. I just, know, there was a trust when I talked to Graham there was just a trust that if Aboriginal people were involved in it and Aboriginal people were going to be my teachers that would probably be my very best bet for, for doing well. And for things to come together in the way that they were supposed to come that they were meant to be like I just felt like there was a trust there. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)
This previous student entrusted the process because Indigenous people who would be mentoring her would be leading the program and educating her and she felt that an Indigenous program would best match her needs and learning style. The next student was also recruited and the reason they chose this passage was to acquire new professional skills and innovative knowledge, one of the things that hooked me into the program was that there was this whole thing around the discussion on transformational change and that when you went through the program not only did you change in your thinking and your Indigeneity but when you came out of that program you would change that process in your own work life and in your life. And did that happen, absolutely, yeah. In fact it’s really the basis of my thesis and the basis of my work today are still part of that transformational change. (EdD Student, November 2013, UBC)

This student was fortunate to be able acquire the skills and knowledge that they hoped for and it guided their doctoral work and their professional approach. The students who shared their assumptions and expectations were set on protecting their Indigeneity while acquiring a relevant education and applicable knowledge from Indigenous programs, instructors, mentors, and peers.

4.2.1 Application Process: Request to UBC to go Ashore

I remember writing my research intent and the application process to the UBC PhD and feeling overwhelmed, as there is a strategy and purpose for each word that is put into it. I was told by one of my UBC mentors that I needed to put my passion and self into my research intent. I was not only trying to get into the UBC EDST PhD program, but I was returning to a place where I felt safe and cared about as the staff, faculty, and my Indigenous and non-Indigenous acquaintances were on the shore waiting to welcome me back. The following quote shows how
the prospect of the shores being opened to prospective Indigenous students that are led and supported by Indigenous professors can make a whole faction of people enthusiastic about a program that was relevant and took on the responsibility respectful of their cultural needs to their Indigenous identity and she recalled that when she,

got off the phone with Graham and I told everybody...about that conversation that there was going to be this Indigenous doctoral cohort taught by Indigenous profs and for the first time. And I remember people just being so excited... because I was excited about it … (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The above quote demonstrates how the promise of an agenda that responds to the needs of a historically marginalized individual and group can perhaps bring hope and positive emotion to a community. This student explained their challenging experience with the doctoral program application form,

Well one of the things during the admission process ... I had to do a lot of hard work in putting together a statement of intent and really trying to figure out how to put that document together as a starting academic at UBC. And trying to think forward about what my research ideas and what my intent might be. And I found it quite challenging to be able to do that because I was from outside the area, I had no knowledge of this institution and I just found that a really difficult task and activity that was required of me to be admitted into the program. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

Applying for entry into a doctoral program is quite involved and it is the first opportunity for the faculty to scrutinize the potential of an applicant to their program. The collection of strong academic faculty references/referees to support the student’s application to the program is central for acceptance and success in the doctoral program. The application is looked at with the intent of determining if the student is an innovative leader or thinker with immense ambition, drive,
grades, and academic energy to bring pride to their chosen program and faculty and that they can produce original and innovative research. The following student recalls the events leading up to when she received her acceptance letter,

Well I’ve got a story that, yeah the day that I got the letter saying I’d been accepted into a doctoral program. I didn’t have a car at this time and I was running around Vancouver on the busses and whatever else and everywhere I went on the buses or I always had a book, always reading right! I mean you can’t be a graduate student if you don’t have a book and a pen. And I had been to the bus depot on Terminal to go and book a ticket, bus ticket to go home so I could get the discount. And I was walking down Main Street to catch the Cordova bus to go home and I was standing at Main and Hastings at the traffic light and I was walking this way and I, the traffic was coming this way and I saw this man and he was like really smiling at me, beautiful smile. You know and I thought what is he looking at me for I don’t even know you. And so I put my head down and I was reading waiting for the traffic light to change. In the meantime he had come up to me and he looked at me and he said you look nice, sex how much? [Laughing] And here I was at Main at Hastings in my I was like really sloppy, I had a hoodie, and I was trying to be invisible, I don’t remember if I even had make-up on right I was just like I just want to get home. And I thought oh my god, as he asked me that, as soon as that question because I didn’t really get it until because then the traffic light changed and I started walking. And I was like halfway across when I, his question got through to me and then I was like angry right? [Laughing] And I was like who the … do you think you are? And he was like a [race] man, he had … and so I just kept walking. I got on the bus and I was I couldn’t read I was just fuming right, I mean smoke must have been coming out of ears and my nose and I was just fuming, I couldn’t read, couldn’t concentrate to read. So I was like stomping home and I got to my apartment building and I opened my mail and there was a letter of acceptance saying I’d been accepted into the PhD program. And I stood there in my lobby and I just laughed out loud, I thought all in a day of an Indian woman in Vancouver right? (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

This student has gone through the application process and as it can be overwhelming as we have put our passion and self into our unique research intent and have received our duplicate acceptance letters, but just as we are all individuals with unique lives we just hope that we will be accepted on the shore of UBC for our unique cultural perspectives. Yes sadly it can be “all in
a day of an Indian woman in Vancouver” for this woman, but it shouldn’t be and she had every right to be angry about the manner of which this man approached her. The manner in which this man solicited her was racist and sexist and a stereotype that Indigenous women should not have to deal with. These kinds of racist, sexist and disrespectful behaviours and treatment of Aboriginal women is evidence that there is an urgency for the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls32 to address and examine this sad reality.

4.3 Responsibility and Respect

4.3.1 Indigenous Cultural Perspectives

For Indigenous research, there are two difficulties here. One difficulty arises from Indigenizing a Western concept, such as research, that is rigid with definitional categories, evaluative criteria, outcomes, and goals. The second relates to language and epistemology – how language influences how we think, feel, and act. (Kovach, 2015, p. 51)

There are words in the language of my Indigenous ancestors that can not be translated into the English language which means that there are perhaps ideas, teachings, or knowledge that my Indigenous ancestors could not explain to an English speaking person. So I go further than Kovach’s (2015) statement and believe “Indigenizing a[ny] Western concept” doesn’t make sense as their English words come from a far away language, they had different climate, Indigenous plant life, animals and ocean life, and we spoke our Indigenous language long before we knew them or what they would bring to our shores. Many of the student participants in my ______________________

study come from a common place of knowing and being, a place of Indigeneity that Kovach says, “influences how [they] … think, feel and act” (2015, p. 51). Some students spoke of the “pull to the earth” (PhD Educ. August 2013, Student, UBC) and how important “prayer and drumming and singing and food” (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC) and “holding hands” during their first day was to their coming to the UBC shores and others becoming oriented into their doctoral cohort (EdD Student, September 2013, UBC). Students emphasized the importance of their Indigeneity and how culture factored into their academic journeys in respect to the ways in which they persevered, struggled and resisted the influences of Eurocentricism. They may not be actively practicing their culture or even be connected to their community when they arrive at UBC but they have an innate connection to who they are as an Indigenous person. They are often drawn to SAGE and the First Nations Longhouse to nurture their sense of community or to search for the missing links. This student explains her struggle to remain holistic in a place that does not wholly celebrates her,

I still always felt this pull to the earth. And to the land specifically … [home]. I would say I didn’t believe in spirits, I didn’t believe in anything spiritual because I was indoctrinated in hard science right? … but I would always acknowledge but I feel something like on the land. And so I always like felt these things and kind of had these ways of thinking that just didn’t fit within the dominant ways of thinking I just tried to conform to it so I was normal. … connecting with my Indigeneity and allowing myself to experience that, allowing myself to be a [name of Nation] person … I’m finally myself like … I’ve really experienced a lot of transformation during this time. Not necessarily directly related to the academic work and yet also very connected to it. (PhD Educ. August 2013, Student, UBC)

This student reflects on how they found their connection to the land was disrupted after they arrived at the shore of UBC. They felt forced into the dominant structure of the institution where they might have lost themselves had they not been true to the spirit of their identity. The next
student shares how her Indigeneity is important for their transmitting Indigenous scholarship and how her doctoral studies

has helped me do some of my own personal healing work. I’ve connected more with some of my culture and in some ways I’ve grown in my level of confidence and that’s not being...like having people talk down to me too much, I think I’ve become more confident that way where I can speak up more. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This doctoral student also said that,

because it’s holistic and it reminds me ... that when I go on this journey I’m not on it alone I’ve got a lot of people that I think about and it has to be balanced and that’s why Indigenous Storywork has become really important for me. ... having a hard time ... developing the Indigeneity within the academy because ... a lot of us ... we understand those experiences and … we have the richness to be able to talk about it and to express it that maybe a non-Aboriginal scholar might not. To me there’s a difference when you’re an Aboriginal person who has lived in that context as opposed to somebody who is writing about it from, through a different lens so, yeah, those things are really important. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

Despite leaving their own home territory to undertake doctoral studies, many Indigenous students take with them their cultural and historical distinctiveness of their territory, communities, and families. Their connection and self-identification to their land, regions, traditions, beliefs, group consciousness, kinships, and nations can be what steers their journeys and research practices through the predominant Western orientation of UBC. The following student recalls a memorable experience:

it was the next morning I was walking across campus and a friend of mine [name] was walking across the campus too and she’d started in just the general PhD
program. And she stopped me and she said so how was your first day yesterday because their, their doctoral seminar started that day too. And so I told her about what, how it happened with prayer and drumming and singing and food and [name] talking to us like this. And she started to cry and I said [name] what’s wrong? And she said do you want to hear about my first day? And she’s a [Nation] person she’s [Nation] and she said she walked in, she didn’t know anybody in there in the doctoral seminar and her doctoral prof. said take a look around because 50% of you that are here won’t be at the end of your program and if you’re in a marriage or you’re in a relationship now 50% of you won’t be at the end of this program, welcome to UBC. She said that was my, that was my entry into my doctoral program and she was the only Indigenous person in there. And she said I wonder if there’s a way I can transfer into your [name of recruiter] made it so I went into this stream and she went into the other one. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

What a different experience and beginning of a UBC doctoral journey it can be for two Indigenous women who are on two different academic streams and programs. Another student from the EdD cohort recalls her program orientation,

I really liked the way when the first day was when we came together and there was a prayer one of the classmates offered a prayer … [Indigenous] language and that special … And then one of the program coordinators shared a drum song. And then the other program coordinator also sang a song in his language so it was pretty powerful. And it happened like here on campus and everything else in the western world was ticking, carrying on but here we were I thought like I remember sitting like standing there holding hands and just thinking wow, this is powerful and we've come I think quite far in this huge academic setting to be doing something like this. (EdD Student, September 2013, UBC)

This student also found her first day’s introduction to be “powerful” and felt a personal connection to the prayer and “holding hands” and the cohort’s launch of their pulling together as a community.
4.3.2 Responsibility and Respect to Community/Community Views

Doing your doctoral work is very individualistic ... you set your own schedule, you set your own time. I needed quiet space so I probably at different points in it I was less involved in family, responsibilities ... (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

A number of the Indigenous doctoral students shared how, while doing their doctoral work, they experience a pull between their responsibilities to community and their academic work. This conundrum of personal responsibilities seemed to be an issue for students and is the theme of this subsection, which is implied in the quote above. Students expressed that it was at times difficult to meet their responsibilities to attend events and gatherings held in their home communities, families, friends, peers and other social communities. It is difficult to explain the demands of their doctoral journey because many people do not understand what is involved in the completion of a doctorate. Communities, families, and friends may misunderstand the concentration and isolation required by students to complete their programs. The doctoral student is in a constant state of meeting academic deadlines and producing documents (papers, comprehensive exams, and research proposals) that are required to be reviewed and approved by instructors and supervisor(s) at several stages throughout the program. This exchange can go on for years and the doctoral student can sometimes feel that they are perpetually in a state of proving that they belong and deserve to remain in the doctoral program. This feeling can be overwhelmed by stress and separation from others inside the academy and even more so others outside the academy causing students to look for solace and some doctoral students experience a feeling of confinement working on their doctoral work in isolation. It becomes difficult for the student to maintain balance throughout their journey; balance between the demand of the doctoral student’s
academic work and community, family, social demands, and physical well-being. This can cause the student to feel pulled in many directions. The student must have the ability to balance personal commitments and the demand of the doctoral program. In addition, some of the work students take up involves communities, and the student may need to develop or strengthen relationships. The student below shared gratitude for the support they received from their community and they reciprocated by doing good doctoral work that is “respectful” and done with “humility,” and that it advantageously “benefits” and “impacts” them and other communities,

I have actually been supported by the community... I had an advisory group that I talked with ... I did a presentation to Chief and Council ... I don’t want the community thinking I’m just going to go in there and take information and expose anybody or you know just being really respectful. ...especially the Elder that I’m working with; she’s given me a lot of support. ...it’s an intergenerational study. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This student expressed how students could create opportunities through their research to return to their home communities or organizations and recruit community participation in the study. By doing so, the community becomes more informed about the research and the student remains connected to their homeland and in a sense giving back. For many students who are brought up with strong familial and community ethics, and are influenced by grandparents, parents, elders and Indigenous mentors, it is not uncommon to hear students acknowledge this as it is shared in the following quote:

I’ve come from a very strong place of humility and I never think about this as me. It’s really important that there’s benefits to other people and that it’s going to take me putting myself through this to be able to show that it’s possible then it’s worth it. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)
In the above example, the community extends beyond the student’s own community to the wider community of Indigenous peoples. The above student identifies the struggle between satisfying their own ethics with community-based considerations that many Indigenous students struggle with when they engage in community-based research. The reciprocal and responsible relationships with the community and the people involved in the study is a major consideration for Indigenous students who exercise or exemplify the Four R’s outlined by Kirkness and Barnhardt to connect to the wider community of Indigenous peoples.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I documented the students’ influences, expectations, characteristics, and responsibilities from a holistic perspective. The importance of listening to and sharing the voices of the students is to demonstrate that the doctoral journey is not as straightforward as most. Indigenous students navigate through varying degrees of waterways to reach their destinations. These include communities, family, and friends. This chapter’s main themes and points were linked to Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) principles of responsibility, respect, and relevance. Overall student relationships and interactions with their web of relationships—family, community, peers, mentors, program structures—affected the student in positive and respectful ways prior to and during their studies. One student recalled how she felt respected and encouraged during a brief conversation with a teacher in her formative years she was told that she was important and she could be academically successful. This mentor respected her for Aboriginal identity, familial connection (her father), and expressed to her that she had just as much equity and potential as any other student in her elementary school class. Conversations,
whether they were seemingly random or strategic, affected the students and inspired some students to consider applying to a doctoral program and ultimately decide on applying to a UBC doctoral program. Some of the students felt personally and culturally respected from UBC’s various recruitment strategies—Indigenous professors, SAGE meetings, articles, or posters. The responsibility that UBC took on to recruit a new wave of students through Dr. Graham Smith and Dr. Jo-ann Archibald and others to promote and carry out respectful and responsible programs and initiatives that are relevant to Indigenous student’s cultural perspective and communal needs had great impact. They recruited students to apply to the EdD Cohort in the UBC Faculty of Education and to become members of Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE). Students also applied to UBC because of services the First Nations House of Learning offered and the building structure and space of the First Nations Longhouse.

In the next chapter I write about the importance of community connectedness and community support.
Chapter 5: BEING THERE

5.1 Introduction

In listening to the students’ doctoral student life experience stories, I learned who journeyed with Indigenous doctoral students (community, supports, and other students) as each of them moved through their graduate program. This made me wonder how the journeyers navigated between their community affiliations and their programmatic services and structures as noted in the following question:

How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students view tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations?

These connections are important to recognize for many Indigenous students arrive on the shores of UBC with various interconnected community relationships that require continued care and nurturing due to the collective nature of communities where they grew up. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures are based on celebrating together major milestones (community gatherings, events, ceremonies, celebrations, and community and ceremonial work). This is how communities may carry out their way of life and work so that the community remains interconnected and community protocols will be practiced for generations to come and bring pride and strength to the community. For some of us our personal, professional, and social communities support us to be educated and hopefully they will want us to return to our communities and make use of our education and experiences to better our lives and do good
work in our communities. The communal perspective is apparent in the research of most Indigenous doctoral student participants. They want to bring to light challenges, deficiencies or successes of a community they come from and research those challenges and deficiencies to improve or resolve. Although their doctoral journeys are individualistic in nature, their communities are always with them in their canoes or on nearby shores as they navigate through their graduate programs.

I also believe the Indigenous doctoral students are being mindful of their community responsibility to share their doctoral student life experience stories so that their challenges, weaknesses, and successes as current doctoral students may be useful to future students. I see their willingness to share their journey and experiences as not only an act of sharing, but as a resource for future doctoral students who hopefully experience fewer academic and social challenges as they travel through their doctoral milestones (first year, courses, comprehensive exam, research proposal, and dissertation). This will be discussed next.

5.2 First Year Experiences

*New doctoral students often find the first year of graduate school very stressful. Sometimes they feel stupid and incompetent, believe that their admission was a horrible error, live in poverty, cannot imagine how they will get the reading done, and wonder whether they have not made a terrible mistake.* (Golde, 1998, p. 55)

In the first year of the doctoral program students may feel unfamiliar with the academic environment and terminology and uncomfortable in and by their new surroundings as noted by Golde above. At the beginning of my doctoral journey, I thought that I was the only student who
was unfamiliar with terms such as epistemology, pedagogy, and ontology and I was so anxious about this for quite a while. My brain seemed to be reluctant to grasp their meaning though by the end of the first year I no longer recoiled when hearing these words. I had no idea how I would long for the first year doctoral student innocence and ignorance as I journeyed through my doctoral experience. A student expressed their canoe experience in the first year as more cohesive than in the second year because in the second year they felt like an apparition. The feelings of disconnection, isolation, and separation became much stronger. These feelings occurred for various reasons. It really depends on the students’ lives as some work very hard to maintain their community and family connections, which are their priorities while completing course work. For others it is not possible to remain connected to community due to financial or travel limitations, and when there is not enough communalism on site, feelings of isolation and despair can appear. These negative feelings cause students to develop feelings of inadequacy and lose self-confidence. The collective spirit of Indigenous students’ needs consideration.

5.2.1 First Year

The first year of UBC doctoral studies is a time for students to become initiated into the life of a scholar and a researcher through structural and systemic socialization. This Educational Studies (EDST) student shared their experience of disillusionment of their program.

It was an extremely hard year to be honest with you. Very soon after I started it did not take long maybe within a week or two I started to realize that the program was not what I had been led to believe it was. And so when I think about my first year it was really adjusting to the fact that my expectations were not met in any way and that I was actually having some really negative, really oppressive …
experiences. We just had really terrible supervisors … and our professors were really close minded and conservative and that was what I think about when I remember my first year and just people, in my cohort like there was like half of the cohort that was extremely anxious and very competitive and really negative so that was also something that was really hard in that first year.
(PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

This quote is important because it shows how a student during their first year was dealing with additional social challenges that added to feelings of alienation and power dynamics. This student’s initial program expectancy was contradicted by the oppressive behaviour of the professors, supervisors, and peers. The following EdD student had a very different orientation and connection with the university and reaction to their first year in their doctoral cohort,

That first year was phenomenal for me because it was, I’ve always been a student, I love school, I’ve always loved learning and I’ve always loved campuses, I mean I have been on so many campuses but that to me was; was really exciting because it was a time when it was a time of my life where I had a lot of freedom but it was also a time when I was able to really comprehend differentness. And so I shared that with my, with my faculty, we have, I work at [name] so we have several faculties in these programs right now and two in the Ed doc programs. And we talked a lot about what that first feeling is about going back to school and knowing that this is, this wasn’t done for anybody, it wasn’t done for because I needed to do it for work or for anything it was done for me, I did it for me and that felt very different. And so I tell my students that I mean I still teach a couple of method courses and I talk about that, first experience of stepping foot in campus, that first experience of belonging to an academic community which is really for Indigenous people I think it’s a real intimidating atmosphere for us until you really get inside it and especially when you go with people you know … then the experience becomes very positive. So that was really good for me … I talk a lot about that and really about stepping back and not being fearful but stepping back and then embracing and enjoying that experience of being a student in an academic community. And to enjoy the freedom that it gives you to explore, yeah. (EdD Student, April 2013, UBC)

The adjustment phase in the first year is critical to support the student’s ability to stay in the program. These two Indigenous doctoral students had completely different first year
experiences. The first student’s program expectations and anticipations were perhaps with naiveté of her chosen program, glaringly unmet, while the latter student’s expectations as a seasoned student with an affinity to higher education institutions were overwhelmingly positive. The first student felt a disconnection from their program, mentor and peers while the second had a sense of belonging to the academic community. The stark difference between these two doctoral programs, one being an established mainstream doctoral program and the other being an Indigenous pilot program, is evident and distressing. The first student’s program did not meet any of Kirkness and Barnhardt 4Rs while the succeeding student learned to embrace and enjoy “belonging to an academic community.”

5.2.2 Courses

5.2.2.1 Positive Passage Experiences

The doctoral courses are meant to build the student’s knowledge and skill base that they will use to become an expert researcher, writer, and scholar. One student was unaware of support systems to “navigating the website … select courses” and found the process “frustrating” but through perseverance was able to steer themselves in the correct “direction” (PhD EDST Student, UBC). Another student spoke of “the racism … in my first-year courses” and the “level of competition that existed within our cohort” though they were warned by a mentor during their Master’s degree, they still felt a level of “shock” (PhD EDST Student, UBC). The following student shared a story of how a course project gave her opportunities to mobilize the knowledge they had learned in their class so that it was beneficial to an Indigenous community. The student also appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with a peer,
One of my favourite stories would be during one of the courses that I was taking it actually how, how would you say that? It actually gave me a chance to, to put into practice some of the ideas I had about how we could Indigenize the academy with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working side by side. And it was in a class I had with Dr. [name] who asked us to find a project that we thought the community might like for mobilizing Indigenous knowledge in their community. And so we, I got a chance to work with another PhD student [name] and so we worked on this project together and it was just, it was just rewarding for the mere fact that we knew, we felt we were doing something useful and not just, not just in text form so it was something that the community could actually use because as it stands in our doctoral program from the past you produce a set of writing and it goes in the library with, and that’s it. This was mobilizing it, bringing it right into the community for the people to see and the project itself was this video transcript program that Dr. [name] had developed. We took that program and we, we used the art and spirituality video and we took that video and turned it, digitized it so that it could be used in the community and I thought that was a really, really good experience. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The previous student shared the fulfilling experience of utilizing their skills and knowledge to develop a product that was relevant to others. The next student spoke of how they were initially feeling anxious, isolated, and incapable but found some solace in their course and their surprising parallel experiences with their classmates.

I remember fear, I remember feeling like I really didn’t know what I was doing, I remember a lot of confusion, different terms, epistemology, all of these things that I didn’t, weren’t in my everyday vocabulary and always feeling like I needed to check, am I saying this in the right way, does this really mean what I’m intending it to mean? I remember other, doctoral students that they brought into the class that were further along in the process than I was and they just seemed like they knew what the heck they were talking about and I just remember feeling lost. I hadn’t written a paper in probably 10 years, no, that’s not true about five years. And so getting back in the swing of APA and all of that like there was, there was so much information and so many really cool classes and they seemed to kind of come in a rush and I kept thinking this should be, I should have done this over more time right to really get into the __ that I remember feeling guilt because I wasn’t doing all the readings. And I remember, in self-preservation we set up study groups and that was when I realized I wasn’t the only one that was feeling
the same way. And then we laughed about it right and, and, as our group sort of gelled it was more, telling stories about these things that we did or, finding, finding ways to laugh through it and really using a lot of humour when we all kind of got honest with one another about what was really happening, yeah, I remember that. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

This student’s account of their initial experience in a course changed when they realized they were making assumptions about their peers and didn’t realize it until they took more responsibility for their academic journey by becoming part of a study group. This next student spoke of a specific Indigenous professor who was an exceptionally knowledgeable and capable educator,

I remember a class on Indigenous methodology that [Professor] taught and it was like lights went on all over the room for everybody. And I remember sitting beside a guy named [name] who turned to me and said you see what she’s doing she’s a master teacher. ... [Professor] knew her material so inside out and backwards that it looked effortless to teach. ... probably the class that I learned the most [from] in the entire program. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The insight provided in this discussion is important because it gave these students a superb example of a high-level professor and educator and demonstrated the impact a “master teacher” can have on students.

5.2.2.2 Negative Passage Changes and A Positive Mentor Appears

Though it should be the right of an Indigenous doctoral student to incorporate their Indigenous knowledge into their academic research, that knowledge of which is cultivated on the territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) peoples, it is not always welcome. If that Indigenous student
resists the intentional gatekeeping their perseverance may be unpredictably rewarded. The purpose of this sub-section is to discuss how a student describes a resistant professor who evolves into a positive mentor. The following student told stories of their positive and surprising experience with a non-Indigenous academic mentor. Initially the characteristics of the professor’s demeanour and attitude made the student feel unsupported, misguided, un-inspired, and causing the student to want to cease their path to pursue their doctoral program. The professor caused her to feel additional challenges in her academic progress, social connectedness, community involvement, and emotional well-being. There were also other Indigenous doctoral students who had mentioned how professors/mentors can be inefficient communicators through emails, phone calls, meetings, support, guidance, and advice. They also described the lack of the professors/mentors’ ability to role model ways to interact with faculty and students and community in a positive way. The student’s quote below shows that her professor did not make room for or respect her incorporating Indigenous knowledge to make the course content relevant,

within my program in particular... there’s just people who are not open to other ways of knowing, other ways of being ... to concepts, I don’t even like to use that word such as spirituality. ... to me are very like real and a part of my life ... in one of my courses in my first year I was talking about holistic approaches to wellness and how like that fits better for me ... And my instructor stopped me and said you know by virtue in enrolling in this PhD program you have agreed to do a degree in Western science. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The student spoke about their experience with her non-Indigenous academic instructor, who perhaps, one could say they were being irresponsible to their duty as a professor/mentor as they did not respect this doctoral student for their Indigenous perspective. The UBC professor
seemingly chose to take on the stance that the Indigenous student’s cultural ways, background, and perspective were irrelevant in the academy. This professor’s attitude and demeanour could be perceived as a form of systemic racism.

Students who enter a doctoral program and “question valued identities or seek to develop identities that do not fit the status quo may” experience challenging mentorship relationships with few or no progressive, Indigenous or non-Western thinking professors/mentors (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 60). Students may also find that it can be an oppressive and restrictive academic journey. For this Indigenous doctoral student who persisted in acts of non-conformity to express her own unique Indigenous worldview may not at first have felt that she experienced a balance of power and agency between herself and her academic mentor. However the next part of her story shows, a controlling professor with a very different knowledge perspective can change through student persistence and agency:

professor who told me, you’ve agreed to do a degree in Western science that was at the end of my first year of my studies. And so I was still in a course with him in my second year and I had to write up a critique of the literature in … in my area. And so I did and it was very critical of, all this research that’s been done that’s been, again really culturally inappropriate and irrelevant and oppressive and exploited. So I wrote up this paper and I got it back from him and he ended up giving me an A+ and just said you know [name] this is really important work and he’s like you need to publish this … So that was so huge for me that was actually like a really big moment in my degree to see this person who at first was so rigid, so narrow in his thinking but that over time because I had persisted and I didn’t conform, at the first time he eventually really came around and really became supportive of the work that I’m doing. Not that he would ever, he probably wouldn’t want to supervise my research [laughing] but that’s totally fine because we’re just coming from different places and that’s okay. … he’s a seventy something year old, very privileged throughout his life, Euro settler, male professor, right and so he’s really coming from a very conventional way … of approaching research. … while I was sort of brainwashed into that way of
thinking for a period of my life for my undergrad at least, obviously I’m not there anymore and coming from, … [my Indigenous nations] prospective it’s a very different view. So he and I just see the world in different ways … But eventually he was able to respect, to have respect for my, my perspective so that really sticks out for me because I’ve actually had a few experiences like that that one being kind of, it was just the perfect example of the oppression. But it’s also the perfect example of how persistence and perseverance can really pay off and that’s what I’ve learned again. … I learned through that right was just always to be myself to persevere, to persist despite whatever kind of forces are trying to hold me back or to stand in my way. And eventually it will all work out for the better, and it has because I’ve ended up with an academic position before I’ve done my PhD simply because I have stuck to those ways of being and doing rather than giving in, to those, I guess colonial pressures that’s how I experienced them so. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

This doctoral student despite initially feeling push-back from their non-Indigenous instructor/professor remained strong and followed her own Indigenous-oriented academic path and it paid off. The professor in the end took responsibility as an academic guide and respected the student for their Indigenous voice, perspective, and contribution to the academy.

5.2.3 Comprehensive Exam

The comprehensive exam for each department and discipline varies but the purpose is to determine if the doctoral student can independently produce a body of work in the form of both a verbal defense and written version of ideas. The work presented to the committee will be a demonstration of the student’s knowledge and abilities as a future researcher and scholar. Several students found the process to be challenging and isolating and they felt guilty that their doctoral studies took time from their families. One student shared the sequestering comprehensive exam experience,
there’s policies around what you can and can’t do during that time, can’t talk to your committee once you’ve set your questions and set your reading list. … because the overall goal of the PhD program at least for the university is that we’re supposed to make an original contribution to knowledge and so I know that could put a lot of pressure on you when you’re sitting around in a room by yourself…(PhD EDST Student, August 2013, UBC)

This prior quote reveals some of the policies and procedures of the comprehension exam as the end product of the oral exam demonstrates to one’s doctoral committee that the student is able to work independently and produce a high standard written piece of work. The next student excerpt explains another variance of a programmatic version of the comprehensive exam,

we had to do two comp exams, we had to do one in our first year … and I just remember that being such a difficult process it was a paper we worked on all year, I had to transcribe … and I had to put together my whole theory … into this hundred page bound formal kind of book that was submitted and then defended. I remember telling people about that because it just felt amazing to get that done. (PhD Educ student, August 2013, UBC)

The citation above is a short but succinct description of the process and expectations of their program’s comprehensive exam. This next student describes their journey as being difficult yet resulted in an uplifting accomplishment. This quote also shows another version of the comprehensive exam:

It was by this time I had moved away from campus, I moved back home and was in contact with my supervisor and working on getting the comprehensive exam, the back and forth with it, it was like and I kept thinking I’ll never get this done and that and then I had to choose three artefacts of my leadership and so I was writing and writing like coming up with different examples. I’d email it off to my supervisor and she, yeah, can you expand? And it was always having to expand and finally she says you know what I think you’re ready we’re going to set that
date. So the date came and I didn’t realize that when you do the comp exam you don’t have your notes in front of you, I didn’t know that. So I discovered that the day of the exam [laughing]. And then I, I sort of was, okay, no, you can do this, you, you’re ready, she wouldn’t have said that you were, she wouldn’t throw you under the bus so to speak. So there were the three people and they were asking the questions and I had my power point, I was all set for, for one, for once Raven didn’t play any tricks and technology was fine. I even had a back up USB [flash drive] yeah, and so came total prepared for it. And just presented it and then they asked me to leave and about twenty minutes later they invited me back, asked me a couple more questions and then congratulated me and I was just like and that, it was, it was awesome. And then after that was applying for ethics. … I’m a real visual person and kept being told oh you have to go look on the rise I said, yeah, okay like I know what the [UBC] RISe it right? So finally I emailed my supervisor and I said, you know what I said I’m being I just don’t understand what the RISe is? So she said to me that the link, she said this is what it is she explained it and I said, oh, okay. So it said you had to take a course to be able to apply so I took this course thing and it was all on line and I remember writing down all of the answers on how to get there. And it ended up it was almost like I wrote a book [laughing] okay, I should pass this thing and that. So I got my certificate printed that I was able to do it and that so I went onto the UBC RISe site and started applying for my ethics. And it took me two tries and I was approved so I guess writing it out for me helped me like it took hours. (EdD student, September 2013, UBC)

The prior student indicates the journey that she took with preparation for and execution of both the comprehensive exam and an ethics application. With the support of their supervisor and with hard work they were equipped to complete their comps.

After the comps … I’m trying, I’m supposed to be giving my revisions in and when I was talking to my uncle yesterday, and he started talking to me in [language] he was saying to me don’t worry, because I just feel like exhausted. It’s a level of exhaustion I mean I’m usually pretty good about keeping, I, I go to the gym, I mean I keep, I’m pretty regulated right look after in terms of self care because that’s really critical right in terms of being able to get through all of this. But I find that after I handed in my comps I was like paralyzed for a day literally.

33 “RISe is an online research administration tool that allows researchers and administrators to manage and track applications online through to approval, certification and awarding of funds.” Retrieved from https://www.rise.ubc.ca/
I just sat in one spot I think for about eight hours in front of the TV just [laughter]. And then the next day I got in my car and I drove home because my niece, auntie I’m going to be in a concert. I drove home and I was up there for five days I think and I, and I just went walking on the land my sister-in-law and I went out walking and there was still snow on the ground but I saw a buttercup I saw my first buttercup right just peeking through and we were walking down towards where our pit house is. And this hawk came and it was calling right, it was calling out and it was like this flopping its wings, just standing still. And I thought oh my thank you right I just felt so incredibly blessed, and it just felt good. It felt like he was saying, it’s about time you got here or something like that. [Laughter] So then I thought okay now I’ve been, it’s kind of like I got some energy and I can go back. And so I came back to the city but I just can’t work up the motivation to get back to writing. I mean I’ve been there sitting there in front of the computer. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

I found the student’s description of their comprehensive exam journey and the execution of their RISe application to be refreshingly honest to their challenging path of knowledge gathering. The next milestone of the doctoral journey is similarly as challenging and critical, but somewhat less isolating as they write up their research proposal.

### 5.2.4 Research Proposal

The research proposal is a ‘map’ that outlines how students are going to carry out their research. The proposal’s purpose is for the doctoral student to inform their committee about their research questions, methodological framework, theoretical principles, and data collection and data analysis tools they will be utilizing to complete their field study. The doctoral student will advance to doctoral candidacy after their committee approves their research proposal. As this student recalled their research proposal experience,
I just defended my proposal today so I guess like with any of those because … I’m going to be talking to people about and telling them about and, I guess it’s just been a challenge and something that’s really stuck out for me … the tension between the Euro western system and being an Indigenous person and doing Indigenous work in the system because both in my research comp and in my proposal defense that tension was very much alive, and I have committee members who are Indigenous and European and [race]. So it’s like this constant, it’s really hard and I, I have found so far those experiences to be really intense and really exhausting because I’m constantly answering to two worlds. … (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

In the quote above, the student communicates the ethics and issues of duality, Western and Indigenous worldviews. For many Indigenous students scholarship in the Western academy introduces the challenge of balancing an oppressive form of writing. If an Indigenous student is expected to write exclusively through the lens of the Western viewpoint than they would be forced to repress their Indigeneity and unique perception of the world.

So in my case the biggest thing that sticks out for me is I had initially written a proposal that was very much like authentic and true to me and it was written through, my whole being. And it came out in a way that was congruent with that and that process was amazing and I told everybody about it how I just kind of I started writing like a theatrical script and just wrote for ten hours and I’d written all these pages … to me it was so amazing to be able to write in my own voice but then what ended up happening was I was in a situation where one of my committee members, professor who is Indigenous made me rewrite my proposal in a standard academic format for a course. So I had to for my grade it didn’t matter that, my committee as a whole including this person was very supportive of the format I’d written in but I had to rewrite it all. And unfortunately that, that is what sticks out to me about the process of that because it was really difficult, it felt bad putting everything into boxes I was upset. And then that’s the proposal I ended up defending and that actually ended up making it much more difficult because of the voice that writing in a standard academic format put my work into so it wasn’t speaking to all of these other aspects that come through between the lines writing in a different way. … I learned, I mean moving forward really is just how well I guess I learned that I can do it so I learned that I can, I can do both but that moving forward really it’s so important for me to be authentic and to do
things in a way that resonate, for me and to do work in a way that I need to do it and in a way that’s helpful to the people that I’m working with. But that if it comes to it and I’m called upon to do something in more Eurocentric way that I do have that ability as well. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The prior student in the judgment of some would be considered to have been confronted with being censored and silenced to have the freedom to express themselves in their unique and genuine Indigenous voice. It seemed to me that she was most creative in communicating her work enthusiastically with pride and increased her creativity. It is a shame that her effort was not viewed as valid and legitimatized by their programmatic policies. The Indigenous faculty member who required a standard academic format also demonstrates that not all Indigenous faculty allow an Indigenous format. This student was forced to conform rather to be given the opportunity to create, but this student acknowledged that they were now confident that they could write in both their own unique Indigenous voice and Eurocentric approach.

5.2.5 Dissertation

The dissertation process is where the doctoral student carries out the research. The dissertation must meet the guidelines outlined by the UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies (FOGS) and the student’s departmental program. During the process, committee members supervise the doctoral candidate. An EdD student recalls an experience writing her dissertation at a writing retreat with her cohort,

I remember on a writing retreat we had in Whistler which I think might have been our third writing retreat, we had six writing retreats. This would be our third and I was in the process of writing. I think it was my third chapter which was really
about my Indiginaism of my Indigenous of the thesis. And I found it was a very difficult time, I couldn’t quite frame it the way I wanted it and I was having a hard time articulating that, that framework. And so I went downstairs and [names] were downstairs in the hotel we were writing in. And I just sat down and we started talking and laughing and telling jokes and everybody is pretty sports minded so we all, talked about hockey and baseball. And so that whole experience of just releasing all that followed that. And then, then I started talking about, the blocks I was having. So we, we problem solved that, it was really awesome but we sat there and then they were saying well you need maybe you need somebody to look it this way or maybe do it this way but it was that feedback and then it clicked for me. And I was able to go upstairs and write and I don’t think you get that from other programs. And I think that it, it was, that was a special time for me because that really started me on my journey. And I actually reframed my whole thesis after that because of that, that conversation. And actually I think it was even more because they believed that I could do it and it was that, that belief that I could do it that gave me permission to do it. And so that was really my turning point for that whole thesis. … (EdD student, April 2013, UBC)

This student was attending a retreat that was strategically designed to produce an environment that limits potential distractions so students could write their dissertations. With the support of their cohort this student gained confidence and drive to “reframe” her work. This next student also experienced barriers in her ability to write and move through the dissertation writing process. This student spoke of their dissertation-writing journey,

I learnt to write what I wanted to say and then go back and edit because when I started I was trying to write it in an academic form and I kept losing what was important to me. So I think about around the sixth draft I scrapped it and started all over and just started to write what I wanted to say. And then it was easier for me because … I didn’t own so much of it that I couldn’t let it go. And so I think for people that are writing letting things go is important … I wanted everything in there and it’s not possible. … write every weekend especially if you’re a doctoral student and you’re working make sure that you put your time to write. So my best time to write was from four in the morning till about nine then, I would rest and do my other things. But, yeah, very disciplined, I had to become very disciplined to write. I also had excellent support, I had great support with my committee and I had Dr. [name] was one of my committee members who constantly badgered me every weekend to write and would say to me by three
o’clock I want you to send me what you wrote whether it’s one paragraph or a page so it forced me to write. And because I was on a deadline as well I had to get my own deadlines and I needed to get it done because I had other things I had to do. I had other faculty going in so we didn’t have the time to play around as I was told. So, yeah, I was very focused, very, very focused especially the last eight months of my writing was very disciplined. (EdD student, April 2013, UBC)

The student discusses how they found their authentic voice and they found that the writing process went much “easier” and they spoke of the importance of being disciplined and supported by their committee. This student found the best time for them to write, which is very important and I have found that all students have a responsibility to themselves and their work to manage time and find writing techniques that work for them. I have found that I need to write away from the comfort of my home, in a distraction free environment. The following student’s quote recalls helpful advice they received from a committee member.

I remember again [committee member] saying...this is a series of papers, this is...eight chapters, 20 pages per don’t...make it more than it is, you’re not writing to get the Pulitzer prize, you’re writing to complete your doctorate. And you need to have that kind of framework around it and just get it done because the real work starts after you have your doctorate. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The importance of peer support and the advice from the committee member to write, write, write and complete the final thesis milestone knowing that it is just the beginning of an academic or research career helps to keep the work from becoming too overwhelming. The next student describes the difficulty of allowing others to review their dissertation,

I know [name] wants to read it but I haven’t, haven’t shared it with her. I’ve shared bits and pieces with my husband like I’ll ask him you know how does this sound? But I haven’t actually really showed any of it to anybody. I’ve, they know the topic but I haven’t actually said here read this. No, no, I lied, one person I’ve
sent, I emailed them a copy and asked them to read it. … I said could you help me with this and read this and critique it like write some constructive criticism, write all over the page, go crazy, and that. She sent it back to me and every page was blank like she hadn’t written on it. … keep on doing the good work she said. And I’m just like, okay, maybe you didn’t understand what I wanted. So I, after that I stopped giving it to people. (EdD student, September 2013, UBC)

Sharing one’s dissertation can be a difficult step and as the student above expresses, it is not as straightforward as one would expect. Others may not understand the thesis requirements or may not want to be critical. The dissertation is for some an extremely personal piece of work and allowing others to read it can be challenging, as well it takes faith and courage that others will be able to give appropriate feedback. The dissertation writing process like all of the other tasks and milestones is a delicate and calculative process of the doctoral students journey. Except for my best friend I have only permitted a few of my peers and academic committee members to read my work. Students need to know what is best for them. The following student has advice for full time doctoral students,

When you are in your writing stage you should only be writing, you should not be working or TAing or you should not be working period on anything else because life is already busy we already have our own responsibilities by itself. And if you do not totally concentrate on your writing chances are you’re not going to write. (PhD student, August 2013, UBC)

This doctoral student has repeated what other doctoral students have said and they have heard from their mentors the importance of getting down to writing with discipline, consistency, and dedication. At times even writing one sentence can be an accomplishment when trying to work through a writing block.
5.3 Final Oral Defence

The final milestone of a doctoral journey at UBC is the oral exam, which is an official and public presentation and demonstration of the doctoral students expertise and knowledge of their thesis work. The UBC Faculty of Graduate and Post-Doctoral Studies (G+PS) and the student’s departmental program outline the exact guidelines. The following doctoral student recalls the day of their doctoral defense, where cultural ways shaped the process.

When I did the defense and all of my, a lot of the colleagues could come, my student colleagues it was a Friday of a long weekend and so I thought nobody could come. And about fifty people showed up [laughter] including most of the people in my cohort. And they said well we have lots of hard questions for you and I said just remember … I will come to yours and I will ask hard questions. So when it came time for the audience to ask questions there weren’t any from my colleagues, my student colleagues, my cohorts. … And I looked out and there were colleagues and friends and family and students and, people from all different parts of my life there to support me on a Friday night on a long weekend. And colleagues from my cohort were there because they knew they were next up right? And that final day I asked [name] to come and drum and sing, I asked a friend of mine to start us off with a prayer. There was a young woman that gave me a [gift] to commemorate that day, … she was there and a lot of the people that I interviewed there was probably about seven of them there. And that sense of responsibility to get their rewards right, to say things in a way that they had said it that they, agreed were right. There was gifting afterwards, there was feasting … And that was really important for me to do because that’s the way that whole program started was with drumming and singing and prayers and feasting and I wanted to end it the same way. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

This doctoral student recollected how she was surprised by the attendance at her oral defense of her dissertation and she shared how important it was to finish her doctoral journey in the cultural way she started, with a prayer, drum, song and food. The next student recalled their final oral defence where support and confidence facilitated success.
The dissertation defense was extremely scary for me but it was also, very, it was a part of my life where I shared great pride. My family came, my son and my daughter both came, my mom and dad had since passed so they weren’t there but, they were there in spirit. And I had friends who I’ve had since childhood who came and were in the audience and it was really I have to say I felt really, really smart. [laughter] I felt really smart because there were all these committee members and external examiners, all these people asking me questions and I could answer all those questions. And I felt really, I felt a lot of joy although at the beginning I was very apprehensive and scared. Once I got into it, it was like I know this, this is not hard, this is not intimidating, this is easy. And whether there was no way, there’s no way I’m going to fail because they wouldn’t allow me to come this far if I was going to fail so I knew I wouldn’t fail but I also knew that I did a good job … (EdD Student, November 2013, UBC)

This student was also blessed to have their family and friends attend the event. The defence can be the first opportunity for community members to get a clear and full picture of their community member’s doctoral work. The student expressed their understanding of the magnitude of the occasion and the process and how she felt “joy” and fear, but in the end she felt confidence in her ability to express and defend her doctoral work for she trusted her committee to have prepared her for this experience.

5.4 Responsibility to Self: The Importance of Celebrating and Marking Milestones

Some experts believe that doctoral study differs from earlier educational pursuits in two ways: intellectual and psychological. ... it involves doing a number of intensive researches and completing area-focused studies. ... doctoral students also have to deal with difficult feelings such as boredom, frustration, and loneliness. (Mujtaba, Scharff, Cavico, & Mujtaba, 2007, p. 10)

Each doctoral milestone is important to celebrate as it measures the doctoral student’s academic and social development on their journey and can ease students feelings of “boredom, frustration,
and loneliness” noted in the quote above. The milestones also mark the beginning of the next stage of the doctoral path. Each progression comes with its own challenges and successes that are structured and positioned to evaluate the student’s academic and social aptitude. This student expressed how they felt,

Well what I found ... is that each level is really something to celebrate, but then after the celebration, I quickly found out that at the next level there is just as much work...as the level before so it’s kind of a really happy event, but then for a fleeting moment because there’s so much more work that’s involved in the program and not having an idea because I don’t know anybody else that went through a PhD program so I had no idea as to what the expectations were and all of these kinds of things so I found out as I moved along in the program. ... I really felt that each level is very challenging and when we reach those milestones it’s really necessary to celebrate them. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This quote is important because it shows that doctoral students need to take time to acknowledge that they have made progress and gained headway in their academic journey—their canoe is taking shape and milestones can be an opportunity to celebrate with others and to be social. The doctoral journey can be isolating and this can be an opportunity to be social. Food, celebration, gathering, and sharing time and doctoral student life stories with others can assist doctoral students and their support systems to stay interconnected. Setting aside the demands and work of the doctoral journey for even a couple of hours can be challenging as there is always work to be done to keep moving in the currents such as reading, writing, editing, or even resting. I found most community social engagements whether they are for family or community dinners, birthday celebrations, family reunions, or statutory holidays could be stressful. Even taking time, with my family and friends, to acknowledge the progression in my academic journey through a celebratory social event after the completion of a milestone as a full time doctoral student gave
me immense stress. I felt that because there were so many more milestones ahead of me to complete that I didn’t deserve the accolade and in addition it was stressful to talk about my work with family and friends. I remember a time during my doctoral journey that it was more comfortable celebrating milestones and breakthroughs with my academic peers when it felt like we were on the same watercourse of our doctoral journey.

5.5 Doctoral Journey: Mentorship and Support

5.5.1 Positive Academic and Social Mentorship and Support

The purpose of this sub-section is to discuss how the students describe the attributes of a good mentor or UBC faculty mentor and if the student feels their mentor(s) “shaped and challenge ... [their] emergent identities as researchers” (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 61). These characteristics are the contributing factors that assisted Indigenous students to feel well-situated, supported, guided, inspired, and that encouraged Indigenous students to continue on their path to pursue their doctoral studies. These mentors assisted Indigenous students to make progress, be socially connected, be involved in the community, and maintain emotional well-being. The students talked about their mentors being effective communicators through emails, phone calls, meetings, support, guidance, and advice. They also described good mentorship through effective role modeling, for example, the manner in which they interacted with other faculty members and students and the community.
5.5.2 Positive Indigenous Academic Mentor

I respectfully share the positive Indigenous academic mentor’s practices and how they imparted their cultural knowledge to doctoral students and learned ways of knowing as well as being a professor, instructor, leader, and or administrator. These mentors may or may not have been hired for the purpose of being a role model or academic pathfinder for Indigenous and non-Indigenous doctoral students. In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the definition of academic is "a teacher or scholar in a university" (Hawker, 2006, p. 4). In addition the OED definition of mentor is "an experienced person who advises you over a period of time"(Hawker, 2006, p. 430). I view positive Indigenous academic mentors as those individuals who are supportive, positive, verbal or action pathfinders for Indigenous doctoral students and also individuals who have directly or indirectly given them academic support and taken an interest in their academic journeys. The doctoral students I spoke with described some of their Indigenous academic mentors as being "like family" and a "great support." The word Indigenous coupled with academic mentor, I believe in real life is more complex and as such I consider that for the purpose of this dissertation that an Indigenous academic mentor is someone who the Indigenous student can work with and rely on for support in relation to their development as a scholar. I consider their connection with mentors key. Also an Indigenous academic mentor will be defined and referred to differently between individuals, as I believe there is no single way to define a positive Indigenous academic mentor. The term positive academic mentor is related to lived-experience and a mentorship and mentee-ship can also be fluid. Also individuals make use of or have access to Indigenous academic mentors and in some cases, what they have or do not have can be limiting. Some of the doctoral students I spoke to were disappointed with what they
perceived to be the lack of or limited access to Indigenous mentorship they received on their doctoral journey.

The following student demonstrates how grateful they were for the “support” from their mentor to find employment especially in their area of study as a continuum of their development in the field they were training for, as follows:

Through [professor] … was a great support in terms of … looking for work that would actually complement my area, my discipline. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

For students who face financial challenges to have this level of support from a mentor adds immense value to their academic experience. This next student attributed increased confidence by gaining knowledge and being given the opportunity to express her/his gifts and ideas as a leader, in the presence of Indigenous peers during Aboriginal events and locations.

my supervisor creates ... through her invitations to different Aboriginal events... I ... feel the confidence to speak about my own identity ... the last few years I’ve had small increments to do that. And now I feel so comfortable … be who I am… an Aboriginal person pursuing education and so it just takes that one coat or that one mask away so that you can be who you are... at the Longhouse to be able to do that in small increments … (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The student above attributed increased confidence by gaining knowledge and being given the opportunity to express their gifts and ideas as a leader, in the presence of Indigenous peers during Aboriginal events and locations. The following student shared the support and “driving force” of their advisor,
I trusted [name] would guide us and … was the supervisor of the 13 people in our cohort and I always … reviewing dissertations, supporting people, guiding people, pushing people, … how is that for you? [name] said oh it’s all right, I’ll get through it, it is a lot of work but I can do this. And so I learned a lot about that too …[name’s] also somebody that doesn’t start something unless … can finish it. So those kinds of experiences kind of stand out for me. (EdD Student, August 2013)

The students’ perspectives show how positive mentors can make the difference in assisting them move through their challenges and they credited their mentors for their pursuit of their doctoral goals. The needs of Indigenous doctoral students vary as some seek community, others seek employment, and others seek encouragement to be drawn out and “be who I am… an Aboriginal person pursuing education” (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC). It requires great intuition and experience from mentors to realize what level of support is the best to offer their graduate student in order to retain their interest in the program.

5.6 Positive Student’s Personal Support Systems

The purpose of this sub-section is to discuss the ways in which the students described their positive and effective student supporters (family, partner, children, parents, grandparents, community, friends, peers, others). There was a range of positive characteristics or contributing factors of said supporters that assisted individual students to feel endorsed, driven, inspired, sustained, strengthened, comforted, and connected. A further review explores how these supporters and support systems helped them academically, professionally, financially, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.
5.6.1 Family Support

I refer to the term family to encompass a group of individuals who are from the same ancestry, grandparents, parents, genetic pool, and who are from the same lineage. For the purpose of this dissertation family is also linked to home or community and UBC. Home is the location from which the doctoral students arrive. They associate their family connection with what they carry or bring with them in their canoe as they journey to UBC. The term family is defined and referred to differently among students. All the Indigenous doctoral students I shared time, space, and words with identified as being from a specific family, but not all of them grew up with their family of the same ancestry. The doctoral students I spoke to talked about and described family to be partner, husband, wife, son, daughter, grandparents, parents, mom, dad, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, nephew, elder, friend, peer, mentor, committee, academic advisor, SAGE, and Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium for instance. It is apparent that students have their personal concepts of family that extends beyond the recognition that family means only people who are immediately related through birth or marriage.

5.6.2 Family Pride

Family pride is a very important factor for an Indigenous doctoral student, for them to feel that they can endure the challenges of their doctoral experiences and journey, to become a stronger and more confident and successful doctoral student. The Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED), definition of pride is the “deep pleasure or satisfaction felt if you or people close to you have
done something well” (Hawker, 2006, p. 543) as well as “a source of pride…” (Hawker, 2006, p. 543). The following student describes how their family member shows pride in them,

mainly my husband because my children are kind of grown up and moved away although they do talk about being proud of what I’m doing. … I’ve been away for going on [number] years so my husband has been really supportive and he understands the importance of the work and he doesn’t get too impatient which is quite surprising because he just knows that there’s going to be value at the end when I’m finished. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

The holding up of this doctoral student and the support they felt by their family understanding the demands of a doctoral degree helped them continue. The following student explains how their brother’s pride and “bragging” about their doctoral journey seemed to surprise them,

I have one brother who is now telling me that he looks up to me and usually people don’t tell me that. We get so focused on what we’re doing and just go and driving through to get to the end we sometimes might not think about the effects that we have for other people… (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

The next student had a similar experience about her brother,

I get a text from my one brother at home what did you say you were doing your work on ___? Because he was at a conference at home and apparently someone with ___ and I said why he said oh I’m just bragging about you... (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

The two previous quotes reminded me of when my brother was showing his pride of my doctoral journey one sunny afternoon when we were out getting a coffee together. The holding up of a doctoral student to feel their families’ support and that they are proud of the doctoral student
throughout their doctoral experiences of challenges and successes can make the difference for the doctoral students’ progress and program retention.

5.6.3 Grandparents/Parents

I apply the term grandparents and parents to mean individuals who are our elders, mentors, leaders of our family, and people from whom we have direct genetics and ancestry. Tomlin (1998) claims, "Grandparents' actions within the family systems have wide-ranging impact on grandchildren's outcomes, including social, emotional, cognitive and identity development, behaviour, and family relations" (p. 165). My mother’s mother had an enormously positive impact on my life and my decision to become an educator. The word grandparent is complex and as such for the purpose of this dissertation grandparent is also linked to individuals who gives of themselves in a way that is usually different than a parent. A grandparent can be an individual that the doctoral students have a “connection” and a “bond” with and they have a spirit “connection” as well (Tomlin, 1998). Parents can also “impact” doctoral students' lives and journeys in “positive” and “influential” ways (Tomlin, 1998). The doctoral students are coming from the shores of their homes and or communities, and they look back at their grandparents/parents’ spirits or the life lessons they inherited. There are many they carry with them in their canoes as they travel to UBC with the gifts and teachings their grandparents and parents gave them. When I asked students who were the people who gave them the most support, they replied their grandparent(s) or parent(s). The following student expressed the importance of their parents holding them up,
The most important, [support is] probably my parents....because they live here and that’s why I’m here. ...they have just been so helpful ... just supporting me on this journey ... and my husband ... (PhD Interdisciplinary Studies Student, April 2013, UBC)

This student reflected on their grandmother’s support,

my grandmother …my dad’s mother ... she didn’t speak a lot of English ... I always...sort of channel her and she came and visited me in a dream the day before she died … I’ve always felt definitely a connection and a bond and she had a great sense of humour... So I often channel her and energy and her spirit and feel like she is there. (PhD Interdisciplinary Studies Student, April 2013, UBC)

These students made it known to me that their parents and grandmother were the significant people who supported them and the second student vocalized how a long-standing connection and bond with the grandmother is an extremely important relationship in her doctoral journey.

The next student also spoke of their connection to grandparents, their teachings, and guidance,

my grandfather … taught me he was, when they were raising me, he taught me how to have a really strong work ethic. And one of the things he always told me is if I wasn’t going to finish a job that I shouldn’t have even started it. So basically he was telling me if I’m going to start something I better finish it so that I always remember that he said that to me … I think that it’s still really important for Aboriginal people to have these designations and just show that we’re capable. We can be just as competitive as anyone else and I think we need to have more people achieve this level of education so that’s another reason why I think it’s really important to continue pushing forward and to be able to go to these tables where they’re having negotiations and all of these other, all the high level decisions that are being made and have Aboriginal people be able to talk the same talk as some of these non-Aboriginal people. And just be, I don’t know for some reason it feels like you need the paper to be considered equal to them and I would just think, I think it’s just fun being able to show that we’re quite capable. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)
As this student above declared the guidance, teachings and support from grandparents can assist them in doing good doctoral work and provides motivation for students to continue on their doctoral journey.

5.6.4 Immediate Family

I refer to the term immediate family to mean individuals to whom we are directly related and people who assume family responsibilities and relationships—even though we may not be related to them. I view my immediate family to be my parents, siblings, sibling’s partners, and nieces and nephews. The doctoral students I spoke with described some of their immediate family members as their husbands, children, and family and friends. This student spoke of their relationships with immediate family member(s) as follows:

I have probably the most supportive husband on the face of the planet and the most supportive children … they just know that Mom is not one of these people that can, have the TV on, the radio going, answering the phone that I need quiet and my family and my husband really made space for that. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The student identified their husband and children as a strong support system. It is important to point out; part of the support system is that the family understood the importance of space the student needed to pursue their doctoral studies. Similarly, the next student declared the importance of their families’ support but unlike the previous life experience story, the space aspect required from the family differed,
my number one support … through distance because I don’t have my family here ...
I’ve kept in touch with my family and friends … I’ve found at times that I went
home to be particularly rejuvenating and... I really get energy from them,
sustenance...it fills up like my spirit and my heart and body and mind … and at
the same time it’s been limited support… I won’t talk to them for a month. …
don’t necessarily understand everything either. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013,
UBC)

This student affirmed their number one support was from their immediate family but this student
in particular received support from a distance. They felt their family did not fully understand all
of their doctoral experiences and journey. This next student participant repeated how their
family helped them with the teachings of their culture,

family to help me understand cultural protocols, my mom in particular. I’ve had
to call her a lot and talk to her about just some of the family stories and history
and who I should talk to in our community. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013,
UBC)

This student’s doctoral journey was supported through following their cultural protocols. They
did this by seeking the guidance of their elder (mom) to attain the knowledge of their ancestors
and they needed guidance to obtain further knowledge from within their community.

5.6.5 Extended Family

I use the term extended family to mean individuals who are directly and indirectly related to the
student. I view my extended family as my parents, siblings, sibling’s partners, and nieces and
nephews, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and the people who live in the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm
(Musqueam) Band community and Soowahlie Band community. The doctoral students I spoke with described some of their extended family members as their cousins, niece, nephew, auntie, "my family," "my community," and "my friends" (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC). For the purpose of this dissertation extended family is linked to an individual's personal reference and connection to other groups or individuals in their lives. Important to an Indigenous worldview is that close or extended family member may not be related by blood. The student determines whom they consider family. Individuals make use of or access extended family according to their values. The following person spoke of and about their extended family member(s),

I talked with one of my cousins in particular ... when I was in places where I struggled I would go ... see him and for ceremonies. ... And when I was feeling like I was living too much in my head I knew that I needed to go and reconnect spirit and body and mind and... I talked a lot about this dissertation the writing … (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

The previous student needed to be reconnected to their community in a holistic way and their cousin gave them a reprieve from just being their cognitive self and provided them an outlet to converse about their doctoral work in a healthy manner. For them it was a healthy way to deal with their feelings at the time and throughout the duration of their doctoral journey. Their cousin helped by listening to their spiritual needs. The next student was also spiritually reconnected with their community,

every once in a while I’ll get a text from my ... niece or my ... nephew and it will be like auntie when are you coming home? … I have an uncle ... and I call him every once in a while … I’m feeling really, really alone ... he always talks to me about remember what your mom would say she would say this, she would say
that. And then he talks to me in Indian . . . Absolutely my family, my community ... may not understand … (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

This student recalled how their absence from community was communicated through their niece and nephew. The uncle assisted them in feeling less isolated and helped the student remain spiritually connected to their mom and their culture. This participant as well as the others felt that although their family may not be able to grasp their academic journey they were aware and the community showed support.

5.6.6 Community

I use the term community to include a group of individuals who are from the same area such as a town, village, city, territory, reserve, or band. The word community is linked to home and UBC. Home is where the doctoral students come from and what they associate with and continue to carry with them in their canoe as they travel to UBC. The Indigenous doctoral students I shared time, space, and conversations with identified as being from a specific Indigenous territory, reserve, and or band, but only some of them said they grew up in their band community. The doctoral students I spoke to talked about and described community to be partner, husband, wife, son, daughter, grandparents, parents, mom, dad, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, nephew, elder, friend, peer, mentor, committee, academic advisor, SAGE and IGSS, etc. The above groups of people are also immediate and extended family members as well as community because the concept of family and community are interchangeable when an individual grows up or associates their community, territory, village, reserve, or band as my family and home. This next student refers to her community to mean "where my entire family... most of my family live:
I’m trying to position my work more in a positive light and for development and growth rather than staying in a realm of oppression and colonization. I really feel that it’s necessary for our people to begin to move beyond that. ... I’ve moved away and but that’s where my entire family or not everyone but most of my family live. And to be able to go back to the community to do this work and have them believe that I’m going there with a good heart that I’m not going there as some other researchers who have, who go in and take information and don’t give anything back. So I think that’s really walking a fine line because trying to let them know that my, my interests lie more with the community than with the academy so that’s very difficult. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This student’s experience is another illustration of the challenge between them as the researcher and the logistics of positioning their research within a community context. The challenge for the researcher is to ensure that the community and research participants will feel comfortable about participating in the study—relationships formed with community are really important for actively collecting data in an Indigenous community.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that each step in the Indigenous doctoral students’ journey includes academic and social progress. In each milestone, the doctoral student experiences social, academic, or personal challenges. The students discussed how they viewed the tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations. They indicated that their experiences could be “isolating,” “alienating,” “distressing,” and “intense.” Even though the waters of the Indigenous doctoral student can be commanding, crushing, colliding, and demanding the stages and milestones are essential and positioned to evaluate each doctoral student’s academic and social aptitude and “when we [doctoral students] reach those milestones
it’s really necessary to celebrate them” (PhD and EdD Students, January–November 2013, UBC).

Most students I spoke to mention that they do not go into great detail when talking to others who are not in academe about their doctoral journey, as most people do not understand. I know for me at the beginning of my journey I would go into more detail about my journey and how I was getting along but it became too painful to share as I felt vulnerable and it increased my feelings of isolation and anxiety. I also saw this look come over my family members or friends faces as if I suddenly was speaking a foreign language and they could no longer understand me. That is why programs and peer support are so important.

I discovered that the significant people and influences that supported students throughout their academic, social, and personal challenges were grandparents, parents, spouses, immediate and extended family members, Indigenous and non-Indigenous social and academic mentors. The students recalled how these support systems together, constructively and effectively held them up so they could continue to project their voices and viewpoints into their academic work. These supports helped the students to be resilient and determined despite challenges, pushbacks, hardships, frustrations, insecurities, and loneliness, which they experienced throughout their doctoral journey.

Some doctoral students were negatively affected by the disappointment they felt towards the program that they were accepted into, as it did not meet their expectations academically or socially. They found their professors were lacking and their classmates were overly anxious and
competitive. Some Indigenous EdD cohort members had the converse doctoral experience as they expressed satisfaction with their professors, mentors, classmates and program delivery. They appreciated that their cultural, academic, and social needs were met and respected.

These valuable support systems helped them financially, spiritually, and emotionally so they could advance their doctoral voyage. The main themes and points that resulted from students’ experiences and stories were linked to Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) principles of responsibility, respect, and relevance. In the next chapter I will write about the university support systems that hold the Indigenous doctoral students within UBC and the UBC communities and help them stay on the journey toward a doctorate degree.
Chapter 6: REMAINING THERE

6.1 Introduction

It perhaps takes an Indigenous student's academic and social community to carry her or him through to the completion of their doctoral journey. I was interested in who were the significant person(s) within the structures of UBC who held them up and in addition; I wanted to know about those institutional influences that supported the Indigenous student throughout their academic, social, and personal challenges so as to recreate community spaces in the academy, to support them to achieve their academic goals. Therefore I examined the question,

How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students recreate community spaces as part of their doctoral journey as a way to remain connected to their university program and research, peers, mentors, supervisory committee, and their communities?

6.2 Positive Institutional Support Systems

The purpose of this sub-section is to discuss the ways in which the students described positive institutional (UBC) support systems—friends, peers, First Nations House of Learning (FNHL), SAGE, and Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS). I asked who and what the positive characteristics of their support systems or the contributing factors of said supporters were that assisted the individual students to feel endorsed, driven, inspired, sustained, gain strength from, comforted, and remain connected to UBC and their doctoral studies academically and socially. In addition, how have these support systems supported them professionally, financially, emotionally, and spiritually?
A number of doctoral students shared their stories of attending SAGE meetings and the Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS) and how they were introduced to Indigenous professors and speakers during their masters’ journeys. The professors and speakers inspired and or recruited them to apply to a UBC PhD program. There were others who after sending in their application to the PhD program were further recruited to apply to the Indigenous EdD cohort.

6.2.1 Friends

The term friend means an individual(s) or person(s) who we are connected to because we have known them for a duration of time, we have a history with them, and we have a level of trust and admiration for them. The doctoral students I spoke with described their friendships and relationships in terms of personal transformation, sharing with and without judgment, suggestions or ideas, emotional support, talking, mentoring, and teaching each other. The following student spoke about a friendship that would have an unforeseen multileveled effect on them,

I also remember other people in my cohort who were great and I established these amazing relationships and so part of the thing for me in my first year is that’s when I met my good friend [name]. And started having conversations with him because I came here and I was wanting to do the research that I am focusing on. I’m looking at changing … with Indigenous people, but at the time I did not identify as Indigenous because even though I had this like vague sort of sense it wasn’t something I was raised with and it wasn’t something I felt entitled to. So I remember in the first semester having a conversation with [name] about my research and mentioning to him like, yeah, I think I’m [nation] and he was like talk to your grandma and find out and it was like whoa. And so that’s also something that sticks out for me because it was really the catalyst for a huge personal transformation I’ve had during my PhD. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)
This individual’s friend affected them in a personal way in that they encouraged them to get more information about their Indigenous identity, which caused a shift of their doctoral experience. This one friend was a channel in making a positive and lasting contribution to the aforementioned students’ academic journey. The next student also describes what kinds of unconditional support they received from their doctoral friends,

I do have supportive friends that I have developed here and that’s really a good thing because I do have a couple of friends that I can share with, without judgment because sometimes we really need that, we just need to vent sometimes about some of the things we’re going through either academically or personally. And it’s nice to have people just listen and not form any opinion and just let me go through and sort things out on your own or maybe give some suggestions or ideas or whatever so that’s been really good. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This student appreciated the reciprocal and “non-judgmental” environment and reciprocal relationships they established with this small group of friends to move through their academic and personal challenges. Another student also speaks of the positive reciprocal friendships and the impact of a supportive friendship,

my friends definitely the emotional support of talking to them and talking about what’s going on in the program and supporting each other and mentoring and [we] teach each other. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

The reciprocal and relevant support and mentoring that these previous students spoke of getting from their friends is extremely important to assist a doctoral student to feel less isolated and can relieve stress and take responsibility for their doctoral work. To have a non-judgmental ear to share the stresses and challenges of their doctoral journey by someone who understands their
experiences is an optimal situation as sometimes other family members, friends, and community members do not understand the doctoral process. To receive relevant academic or personal suggestions that can be applied successfully to their moving through their challenges can rejuvenate a doctoral students’ motivation to continue their doctoral journey.

6.2.2 Fellow Doctoral Journeyers (Peers)

The term peer(s) means one or more individuals who are around the same age and have the same academic and social goals. The students I spoke to, like me, may view their peers or peer group to be the doctoral students who along with them attended first year required core courses, the doctoral students who also utilized their department computer lab, the EDST Indigenous EdD doctoral cohort, SAGE members, IGSS student attendees, the Indigenous doctoral students of this research, and their small personal makeshift cohort groups. The doctoral students I spoke with described how their peers and or their peer groups supported them and how this support constructively created a sense of community that contributed to their academic and social journey. I asked the students what their most important peer supports and support systems were in their community at UBC and how they felt this support helped them move through academic and social challenges. This individual shared how she took the initiative to create a small group of peers to support each other academically and socially for a phase of their doctoral journeys,

I set up a supportive network of people, a circle of people so we create a space so what we did was a bunch of us started a writing group. Where we come together and when we’re writing we, we read over each other’s stuff. But it also ends up being like a check in kind of thing too right with each other and to help each other with suggestions or stories of whatever happened to us when we were at that
stage. And so I’ve been missing that lately actually because my, my group that I had been meeting with everybody is at all various stages right so we’ve been not meeting as regularly. Because for a while we were, when we were all writing and we were all doing course work we were meeting once a week because we would read over each other’s papers and give feedback. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

The next student also spoke of how important peer support was to their mental well-being,

it’s just been like an inspiration to be again primarily a part of the Indigenous community at UBC right? … so that’s just helped me, again in those times where I felt like oh this is too much or this sucks [laughs] I just look to these other people and I see they’re doing it, they’re doing good work and we have each other, and I’ll just talk to people about oh this thing happened to me and, they’ll be able to have empathy for me and say oh that’s terrible or hear stories of their experiences that they’ve been through. And it helps me get it off my chest and move forward and, again just having good mentorship people to say you just need to let that go or don’t worry about that or you’re going to come across that like a million times in your career, you can’t let that get to you. So all of these different messages that, people who typically I think for the most part at least from what I can think of right now are people who are older than me so they have more life experience in some ways and everyone has different experiences so it’s just really helpful to hear from other people’s perspectives and it just kind of again puts things into perspective that this isn’t the end of the world. And this is something you’re going to encounter throughout your career as an Indigenous academic so keep on keeping on and I do. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The above student echoes how their most important support again comes from individuals who make room for them to share their academic and social journeys in a reciprocal fashion and have a comprehension of their doctoral experience and the stages and milestones they move through. Like these students who got together, a few of my peers and I tried to meet once a week at the First Nations Longhouse to support one another academically and socially. We planned it ahead of our meeting to have each individual bring ample sandwiches, drinks, or fruit for all three group members. We would first discuss the happenings of our lives outside our studies and then
we would share our doctoral work and talk about our present challenges or successes of our doctoral journey. This peer support group is no longer running as my peers have graduated. At times I wish for opportunities to be part of a peer support group.

6.2.3 EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education (2006)

The UBC EdD Cohort in the Faculty of Education began in July 2006 and I began my doctoral journey September 1, 2006, so I am somewhat acquainted with the cohort members and the program coordinators. I was also fortunate enough to participate in a class and I attended one of their writing retreats. When I attended the retreat I was witness to their group cohesiveness and what an exuberant cohort they were.

The following student spoke about how she doesn’t believe she would have applied to a doctoral program had it not been this specific program,

I think if it wasn’t an Indigenous cohort I probably would never have thought of … and doing my master’s with an Indigenous cohort as well there was that sense of family, that sense of belonging with and I don’t know I could be wrong I’m not sure if I would have been able to feel that if it had not been an Indigenous cohort. (EdD EDST Student, September 2013, UBC)

The student is already aware of the benefits of an Indigenous centred cohort (throughout a master’s program) and its potential for its familial connectedness and the social and academic structures that would exist. Thus it doesn’t appear that she would not have settled for a graduate program that offered her less than she had become accustomed to. How fortunate for this
individual to have had the opportunity to do all of her graduate work as part of Indigenous centered programs. The next student of the EdD cohort also became well aware of the positive impact of being in the Indigenous centered cohort.

I wish every Indigenous student had an opportunity to be in an all-Indigenous doctoral cohort. What I see is a lot of people in, that have master’s degrees in education … then people stop there. And if there was a way to have a master’s or a doctoral program all Indigenous doctoral program that’s what UBC is known for and I think people would flock here to attend that kind of a program…. So I know it can be different for Indigenous doctoral students I think it can be different for a lot of the doctoral students. And I think that, this throwing down the challenge and saying, you have to commit to this wholeheartedly or, or you’re not going to finish it or your, your marriage isn’t going to survive, I think is absolute … [nonsense]. And it can be done differently, it can be done in a more humane way and I’m proof because I was in that program. … Oh I think there were people that came into the cohort that had known each other for a long time or worked together for a long time those kinds of things. I guess when I think about it the people that I sort of connected more to were people …I think of all those people I mean I still have good connections with … is really opened my eyes to the possibilities. And, entering that program was the day that my Western education, my traditional education and my, my own Indigenous identity connected for the first time in an academic institution ever and that needs to happen for lots of other people. (EdD EDST Student, August 2013, UBC)

The previous student felt blessed to have had the “opportunity” to be in the Indigenous centred cohort and she hopes that other Indigenous students have the chance to be part of such a program that creates an environment for individuals to be connected to their Indigenous identity and where Indigenous knowledge was respected within a Western education setting. The next student felt the program was responsible for advancing her professional knowledge and skill.

what I find after doing that program here is that it really helped me develop a much thicker skin than I had before I started it and it takes a lot to rock me professionally anymore. And it’s because I listened to all the … and abuse and racist crap and discrimination that people that I hold in high esteem experienced
and I think it’s just more of the same, I’m just getting the same I’m not getting more it’s not worse, it’s the same. And but there are people that have broken trail already and they can be successful so I look at them and know that, when people say oh, don’t bother applying for that grant [name] because you’re so new you’re never going to get it. And I don’t want you to be disappointed and they try to undermine my feelings of confidence. Six years of listening to … that rained down on people’s heads just makes me, I’ll listen politely and then I’ll just go and do what needs to be done. And those instructors, those professors you know that talked about political interference under active undermining roadblocks that were put up unnecessarily racism and discrimination that they face at every turn that was probably some of the most important learning that I did in that program. Because it’s there but when it’s articulated and you hear it from Australia and you hear it from New Zealand, you hear it from China, you hear it from the States, you hear it from Canada and then those instructors look at you and say you know we’re going to get ready to retire and you’re not going to be far behind and so who’s coming up behind you? Like they always have their eye on the future and nobody thinks, this is where we are today and that’s where we’re going to be in 30 years. They encouraged us to really look back and see, people had to give up status to come to school almost. In their lifetimes they were one or two people that were chosen to go and do the work and they’ve done it and, they’ve held up their end of the bargain and they look at us and like the expectations are there. And yeah that was some of the best learning, and it was never anything done in a lecture way it, it just, the stories they told, the experiences that they shared and they never told us what you should take out of this right, you’re an adult figure it out. …. (EdD EDST Student, August 2013, UBC)

The previous doctoral student spoke about how the program provided her the chance to have acquired professional knowledge that increased her confidence to no longer be held back to apply for funding that others had deterred her to do so in the past. She spoke of the gift she received from program instructors and mentors transferring knowledge responsibility through the stories of their experiences of professional racism and discrimination. Their mentors conveyed to them in a manner without pressure but understanding that they have a responsibility to support and pass on the good teachings and assistance they had obtained.
6.2.4 The First Nations Longhouse and the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL)

I love First Nation’s House of Learning, this was one of the reasons I decided to come to UBC was because of this structure. And because of how safe it feels here and how at home it feels here. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

The UBC First Nations Longhouse (Longhouse) and the UBC First Nations House of Learning’s (FNHL) spectacular building structure attracts many Indigenous and non-Indigenous elders, students, faculty, staff and, tourists. The FNHL university structures offer Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous students support, programs, services, resources, a space for relationship building, and a place to feel communal connection to UBC Indigenous and non-Indigenous elders, staff, faculty members, professors, colleagues, students and peers. The FNHL is the administrative unit that oversees the activities and usage of the Longhouse. The FNHL for the past four years has been facilitating a FNHL “Aboriginal Student Lunch and Information Session”34 that is hosted by UBC Aboriginal and mainstream Academic departments and institutional services that want to have an opportunity to speak with UBC Aboriginal students about their structures and services. I have attended these lunches but I was disheartened by how the luncheons’ attendants were approximately 10 % Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous students and the remainder was non-Aboriginal students. I felt the initiative had lost its purpose or mandate and to me it felt like I was being colonized in my own “Home Away From Home” so I stopped attending the lunches. Though I am glad to say the FNHL during the first luncheon of the subsequent year was hosted by FNHL and they took the opportunity to rectify this status quo and reclaimed the FNHL student lunches to meet its original mandate. Since 1993 I have been

34 http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/2013/03/07/student-lunches-bring-together-aboriginal-student-community/
appreciative of the FNHL administrative unit and honoured to be part of the First Nations Longhouse community. So I was not surprised by the respect and connection that the Indigenous students had to the First Nations Longhouse for as a longstanding community member and past First Nations Longhouse host I have been witness to many individual sentiments of positive feedback and admiration to its structure, cedar scent, and welcoming environment. When I asked students where they found community during their doctoral journey some students spoke of the FNHL. The following student explained their sentiments and gave their description of the FNHL,

the First Nations House of Learning on campus was designed as a home away from home and I feel that that’s really important to support Aboriginal students. And I found that a place to go to it’s kind of like for an Aboriginal student I feel like it’s sort of a place of refuge sometimes because you can get lost in this big place and I really feel that it’s necessary for us to have that level of comfort to be able to go to a place that we can feel like we’re at home or welcome. So having that on campus is really important. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

This student I believe understands and appreciates the intent of the First Nations Longhouse as an inviting sanctuary and support system to provide Indigenous UBC students a place and space to be a part of a community. The next student echoed some of the prior student’s sentiments about the Longhouse and they also spoke of it in a holistic fashion and spoke of their deeper personal connection,

[the First Nations Longhouse]… spaces that allow for groups, a group of interaction but also, that there are corners or, little spaces that where you can be studying or reading. But also, that is a welcoming space so that if you bring your mom, your mom can be knitting because there was, I clearly remember once there was the nicest lady, kids and she brought her mom and she would be crocheting
and looking after the kids while she was and then it was very nice to go and chat with so a space that’s intergenerational. (PhD Student, August 2013, UBC)

Another student tells of their feelings of the FNHL,

It’s [First Nation Longhouse], the structure, the architecture, I mean it’s the way it’s built, the trees that it’s made from, it’s not white walls like you get in most of the buildings on campus. And where it’s situated, the fact that there’s, that ceremony happens there, oh I don’t remember what it’s called, undergraduate Indigenous health student sciences, whatever it is they started, I know that they started doing talking circles at lunch and things and that, there are sweat lodges in the back which I know that those are not from this place but they are something that’s from where I come from and so I know that I’m not at home but just having that, that kind of reminder at home and that connection to home. You know it feels good because the land is being treated well and that there are a lot of offerings that happen there. I, it’s and it’s just nice and quiet, there’s big cedar trees in the back like it’s just really beautiful and it feels good and I think it’s the energy there, it’s the people there, it’s the events that happen there. I say things like the IGSS, like the student lunches, so that that has really been the place where I have felt good on campus. And I guess too in Ponderosa G because that’s where we had the SAGE meetings but that felt good too … (PhD Educ. August 2013, Student, UBC)

This student’s sentiments and the following one show how they valued the First Nations Longhouse’s structure and its capacity to build community.

to share in the drumming and singing at the closing and the opening of events at the Longhouse that I think, I think I have a special attachment to the Longhouse because of the way we’re able to come there as a, as a group and share. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The students were grateful for the structural support the Indigenous students viewed the First Nations Longhouse as a safe and welcoming space to have a home away from home and place
that can contribute to their cultural, spiritual and academic success and gave them a sense of belonging.

### 6.2.5 Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE)

The SAGE Program, since May 2005, has been a province-wide educational support system that provides opportunities for the growth of Aboriginal and Indigenous masters and doctoral students. Students are given the opportunity to gather for monthly meetings to share their academic journeys, present their work, become more knowledgeable about how to better navigate those academic journeys, be with peers, colleagues, scholars from various UBC disciplines and from beyond UBC grounds. SAGE is for graduate students involved in Indigenous research, in any discipline and any university. Non-Indigenous graduate students are also welcome to participate in SAGE. Students spoke of SAGE as being a “godsend” (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC) and it is a space where they received “peer support” (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC), and a “supportive spiritual community” (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC). The following student shared their academically relevant knowledge gathering and experiences and support they received from SAGE,

> Through the university I still have been, well I’m still a little bit, but I have been quite involved with the SAGE program but I’m nearing the end of my time now so I’m not as involved as I used to be, but I find that a great support because we do get a lot of information like really good information that helps us to develop in a lot of ways so there’s a lot of peer support that comes out of that program. And the food, too, it’s nice to go and be fed every once in a while I really appreciate having that nutrition. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)
This student shared how she was grateful for the support and relevant academic knowledge and professional growth, peer support, and food that she received while being an active SAGE member. I can attest to the fact that SAGE has relieved my feelings of being isolated, uninspired, and hungry. Even though at times during my doctoral journey it took great effort to get up certain Saturday mornings, but once I got there I felt a release of feelings of trepidation and incompetence. As I walked home after a SAGE meeting I always felt lighter and hopeful and blessed to have a sandwich, piece of fruit and drink for dinner. The next student also felt SAGE positively affected them,

SAGE and I think it’s made a big difference. … I mean even knowing that SAGE is there it’s like comforting. … knowing that there is support there for people if they need it. (PhD student, April 2013, UBC)

The student felt “comforted” that SAGE existed to which they could turn to if they needed support. The next student is grateful for the SAGE initiative she recalls,

when I started SAGE and when I started talking to other grad students that is, that is when I really started making progress because before that … there was nobody, I was by myself … Well just sharing experiences, sharing experiences in courses and most of all sharing the experience with committees, with supervisory committees which have been so useful… (PhD student, August 2013)

The student was grateful for the creation of SAGE as it gave her a support group that she had not known before its establishment. Before SAGE her doctoral experience was isolating. She attested the change in her doctoral work productivity was due to becoming a member. The next student found the spiritual aspects of SAGE meetings to be helpful to ease her mind.
In SAGE meetings we started with prayers so, yes, spirituality was very much a part of our whole being as a cohort. … it calmed me down, it centered me, I guess well maybe I get that feedback, you, you become very centered and you become very open to learning, open to new ideas. I think that centeredness really was about calming your spirit so that you opened up to the new ideas coming in …. (EdD student, April 2013, UBC)

This student found the opening spiritual activities of the SAGE meetings were those in attendance—SAGE members, faculty, staff, and guests—were all brought together in a circle and began the meeting in a good way. Perhaps when students are too much in their heads, they find it hard to relax. I found the SAGE circles assisted me in becoming grounded and fully present to receive the support and transfer of knowledge and to share my academic progress without hesitation. I remember when I was walking away from the Educational Studies Ponderosa Lounge I felt less stressed, less alone, and more prepared to return to my doctoral work. The next student vividly expressed that she, would tell people is the work of SAGE program and how its responsivity allowed for successful transitions and develops student leadership and mentorship as a group. … SAGE was invaluable to my success as a grad student because it brought more students and the academic communities from the provinces and was open to national and international academic exposure -so it’s not a closed environment and had flexibility to respond to the needs of the student and academic learning communities. So the program responded to the intergenerational needs of students, the faculty and community and demonstrated how a lot of success could be nurtured in a short but consistent time frame. The ideas shared informed us on how you might design a program for a research project. There was room for that negotiating and sharing of ideas in SAGE … SAGE in some ways is a micro community, it for me role modeled what a real academic community is like an intergenerational learning community -younger scholars, older scholars, faculty, the sharing of, of what people are doing can be inspiring, it can be big, it can be small so, so the variety of, of workshops, interactions was extremely helpful. … SAGE was absolutely an essential program and having Indigenous faculties and courses absolutely crucial components.
SAGE is a space where all of the supports can interface, the cultural components, demonstrating the cultural navigation through role modeling, ... SAGE community project creates extended family, builds community networks, establishes colleagues and friends and supervisors, mentors, and as a collective of folks who shared how they navigate the structures and we learn from each other as we have all had to interface with the various aspects at one time or another so we could be successful … (PhD student, Educ, April 2013, UBC)

The student captured the structure, purpose, objectives, and affects of SAGE to support graduate students and recruit Indigenous Master’s students to continue on to doctoral studies. The SAGE members were appreciative for the intergenerational community support of SAGE and how it nourished them spiritually, socially, academically, nutritionally, gave them a sense of belonging and to not to feel that “you’re not alone.”

6.2.6 Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS)

[Attending IGSS] I heard everybody’s research, other people’s research and that gave me ideas and gave me methodological approaches … IGSS, you know that we have breakfast, lunch, and I think sometimes dinner or usually dinner. ... that we work together as a community, as a sharing community again it was not top down it was just the same, it was we are all there to share and faculty and students we’re all there to share our research... (PhD Interdisciplinary Studies Student, August 2013, UBC)

IGSS is an annual Indigenous student lead symposium, financed primarily by the UBC Faculty of Education with additional sponsorship from other UBC units and other universities. In 2017, the IGSS reached its 15th year. It gives Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduate students the opportunity to gather and present their research that relates to Indigenous scholarship in any discipline to peers, colleagues, professors, and community members. Students have the chance
to promote their scholarship as an individual or as part of a group. There are poster sessions and oral presentations. The following student described their interpretation of IGSS,

I really enjoy the graduate student symposium that happens every year and that’s where graduates around the province get to showcase their work and that’s really nice to meet and hear from other students. Actually it’s not only in B.C. it’s across Canada anybody can come, any graduate student can present there so it’s really nice to learn and hear about what other people are doing. (PhD EDST Student, January 2013, UBC)

The next student echoed the sentiments of the prior student of how they enjoyed the opportunity and experience of gaining more knowledge about the academic research that their Indigenous peers were engaged in. The student also felt that witnessing the good work of their peers reinvigorated them and helped them to feel less isolated, and understood,

IGSS, the Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium has been huge because it’s just amazing to come together with all these Indigenous scholars, that are just doing amazing work and that also rejuvenates me and refills me and, just keeps me reminded that like I am not alone in any way there’s, a lot of us who are going through these same challenges who are persevering, who are doing, work that’s congruent and that’s what, our particular community need.. (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

The students that attended IGSS were appreciative for the opportunity to see the endeavours of their fellow Indigenous graduate students’ work and to feel a sense of belonging and interconnectedness to their peers.
6.3 Rough Waters and Moving Through the Rapids

Earning a doctorate degree is one of the highest honors in one’s journey of academic progress; yet very few candidates actually achieve this rank. Part of the reason for some of the challenges in achieving such a rank can be the time requirement, the rigorous and focused research process, passing the comprehensive examinations, ... and successfully finishing ... the dissertation. Of course, the dissertation journey can be an unpredictable and an uncertain trip as it involves many uncertainties. (Mujtaba, Scharff, Cavico, & Mujtaba, 2007, Abstract)

The purpose of this sub-section is to discuss the “rigorous and focused research process” elements of the doctoral journey and the added challenges to the students feeling committed, supported, guided, inspired, and which hindered “one’s journey of academic progress” to pursue their doctoral studies as introduced in the quote above. The lack of support from UBC- can include limited financial support, job opportunities, professional growth, and access to mentors, courses, faculty, counselling, running groups, and writing retreats, etc. The students told their doctoral student life experience stories of how particular elements were detrimental to their moving through their doctoral journey experiences. They also spoke about challenges in their academic milestones and they gave suggestions of structures that might improve their journey or future Indigenous doctoral students’ journeys. This section addresses the third major question:

How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students view tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations?
6.3.1 Lack of Resources

When students are forced to seek outside employment to support themselves, they are unable to devote full time to their studies. (Elgar, 2003, p. 24)

As Elgar stated above I, as a full time doctoral students, also had to find jobs to be able to pay my tuition and other bills. However, Elgar does not mention implications of not being able to devote full attention to doctoral studies. I did not feel a sense of relief when finding employment, in fact I felt additional stress, embarrassment, and it increased my feelings of academic incompetence. I use the term lack of resources to mean not having access to the basic tools or space required to carry out a task. The following doctoral students spoke of and about their lack of financial resources,

it affects my studies ... constantly looking for money ... it’s difficult to concentrate on what you’re doing because you’re hungry ... trying to find ways to pay your rent. And, of course, I have a family and trying to support them too, support their well financially support them. I think money is the big thing because during my studies the only money I was able to access for travelling was the initial amount that you get as a graduate student but I had to do quite a bit of travelling for my research, to gather my research and that was out of my own funds. ... Well it’s an unbelievable worry if you have a really creative and excellent idea to pursue your research but you don’t have the means to do it I think that’s detrimental to university because if you’re wanting to produce highly creative and intelligent doctoral students and their research in innovative then you have to give them room for that and if a student is has a great idea but can’t pursue it because they don’t have the funds to, it would be silly to do that. But so for me I, I think that has been my biggest delay is that although, although my idea, I just have a persistent mind that does I don’t care what it costs I’m going to wait till I do it, until I can, I’ll borrow money here, borrow money there so it’s all, for me it’s all about, been the whole time it’s about balancing how much money I can get to get to travel to make sure that idea I have is, is going to follow through and sometimes it’s at the cost of waiting like I think I could have got my compa a lot sooner if I didn’t wait if I hadn’t waited so long to secure the money to go talk
to the right person you know what I mean? (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

I can certainly relate to the prior student’s struggles, challenges and stresses with the lack of money as it reminds me of the numerous times when this status made me feel even more isolated, stressed and not wanting to engage with other people inside and outside UBC.

I have to say that one of the things that I really miss here is that I mean I love First Nation’s House of Learning, this was one of the reasons I decided to come to UBC was because of this structure. And because of how safe it feels here and how at home it feels here. However that said since I’ve been in my graduate program here I’ve discovered that there isn’t really a place where graduate students can come and just hang out with each other. Whereas at [University] … we had a graduate lounge where we had computers and desks and couches and a fridge like all that kind of stuff where … a phone, a couple of phones actually. And I found that really useful because if, because everybody is at various stages because I TA’d a lot when I was up there too. So I’d always go to the grad lounge, because somebody inevitably would be hanging out there right or, or just if I had an hour, hour and a half or something to kill on campus before the next thing I had to do. Because I lived down the mountain, I could easily go to that lounge and just hang out. And then you’d get to visit and socialize with other graduate students. … Well that’s the thing we have to make it right, we make that so that’s what I’ve done is I mean and I do this wherever I live and even when I’m not in grad school. I set up a supportive network of people, a circle of people so we create a space so what we did was a bunch of us started a writing group. … we come together and when we’re writing we, we read over each other’s stuff. But it also ends up being like a check in kind of thing too right with each other and to help each other with suggestions or stories of whatever happened to us when we were at that stage. And so I’ve been missing that lately actually because my, my group that I had been meeting with everybody is at all various stages right so we’ve been not meeting as regularly. Because for a while we were, when we were all writing and we were all doing course work we were meeting once a week because we would read over each other’s papers and give feedback and … But I think that it would be valuable if the university provided the space, I mean just, when I was here because as I said I was here at quarter to two I walked all through the long house and I was looking at all the space an just, I mean I really love this place. So it’s like it just feels good when I first drop in. And that’s exactly what I was thinking about, it’s like it’s too bad there’s not a room here for us. … For graduate students and doctorates. … Because it’s like you look at all those workstations it’s like it’s all under grad. I mean we use the lab, the computer lab
some of us, but still it’s dominated by the undergrads. Which I think is great, I mean it’s like the undergraduate students need a place but we also need a place. It would be great if we could, if we knew a place that we could go all the PhD students in all the disciplines across campus. … And then I mean because it’s always so exciting like to go to SAGE or to go to IGSS . … Yeah annually to find out what people are researching it’s always so exciting to hear about and read … Yeah to read other people’s work. Whereas if we had a place where we could congregate and hang out and just hear about other people’s stuff. You know I know the law people have got their own little thing going on but it’s, it would be nice if we could like cross discipline. (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

There was a stage in my doctoral journey that my level of mental, emotional, and monetary anxiety kept my doctoral journey from progressing that I took a leave from my studies. At the conclusion of my leave I returned to my doctoral studies and remain on my doctoral journey.

6.3.2 The Hidden Cost of Doctoral Work: The Responsibility to Family, Friends, Communities and Deaths in the Family

The hidden costs of acquiring a doctorate to an Indigenous doctoral student can at times be immense, overwhelming and heartbreaking. The doctoral student’s required responsibility, determination, resilience, and the time needed for their doctoral work and their requirements to be a supportive and reliable family member, community member and friend to the extent they once were are sacrificed. A past or present doctoral student can only comprehend the effects of the sacrifices and the astonishing amount of hard work in their specific situation. The hard work and sacrifices can be detrimental to a doctoral student’s well-being and cause them to feel like an isolated, weary, ashamed, frustrated, and incompetent student and family and community member.
As I sit here alone writing at the First Nations Longhouse at UBC in the computer lab, I feel like a frustrated and incompetent daughter. For at this moment my mom is sitting in her dining room eating her dinner and she is in excruciating pain and she may at any moment be calling 911 for an ambulance to take her to the hospital. But today before I had to leave for UBC, to complete my work that has to be sent to my committee, I assisted my mother to put in place the support she requires. My brother cooked her dinner and our sister is on call to ride along with our mom in the ambulance and be with her at the hospital. At this moment my heart is breaking as I want to be with my mom, but I have a responsibility to prepare my work to be sent to my committee. My mother’s ailment is not life threatening, but a year ago at this time I was in grief over the death of my stepfather. He was my Papa since I was three years old, and two years ago at this time I was grieving over my dad’s death. Before my fathers’ deaths I was there for him and my mother, but today at this hour I am here.

At this moment the cost of the doctoral journey with its sacrifices feels immense, but this is where I must sit as I try to concentrate on my doctoral work and try not to cry. Fortunately my mom has her children and my best friend to take care of and support her in her time of need. I texted one of my dear friends while on the bus travelling to UBC, she lives across the road from my mother, to let her know why an ambulance today might be at my mother’s house. And because she is my dear and trusted friend I let her know that I was struggling with not being responsible at this time to my mother. My dear friend texted back, “Oh Heather I am sorry. Remember one thing your mom would want you to get this life work done. Your mom will be in amazing hands…” I am comforted by the love and care that my siblings have for our mother and my dear friends have for my mom and I appreciate their encouraging words they have for my
I would get emails from classmates ‘oh I haven’t heard from you in a while are you okay’ and things like that. And when I had a death in the family people would … check up on me that was I really appreciated that. … Like somebody cared and that it wasn’t, it wasn’t phony, it was they cared because I also received phone calls from some of them or emails from some who are far, far away, different province. … a joke would come just at the right time just when I needed to hear something funny, yeah, so it was good. … there’s been a lot of deaths in the family, sisters and nieces and nephews and that so it hasn’t been, it hasn’t been an easy journey. (EdD Cohort EDST Student, September 2013, UBC)

This student expresses how important it can be to be intermittently contacted by one’s cohort peers as well as being supported and cared about during the grief-stricken stages of mourning the death of a loved while on their doctoral journey. An illness and death in one’s family can sometimes be unexpected and shocking and can bring about change as this student shares,

Doing your doctoral work is very individualistic … I was less involved in family, responsibilities … That all changed though, when my mom got sick and my mom got [medical diagnosis]. I defended in [date] when my mom was diagnosed with [illness] in [date] And I was just finishing, pieces and sending it off, I had just sent it off and her diagnosis happened. … those months of doctor’s appointments and hospital visits and chemotherapy and all of that that goes with it really put in perspective, things that are really important and things that can wait. And there was one person in my cohort [name] whose [parent] died … and really had to deal with a lot at that time and keep up with everything. I, I’d already sent my last draft in so I didn’t need to keep up with anything more. I defended [date] and my mom died [date]. …And it is those kinds of things, really can derail student progress because it’s not just this happens and then the following weekend everything was back to normal, life is never the same ever again … Again my cohorts, I mean everybody was supportive but it was, kind of defining for me and for me it really, really clearly identified for me, while it seems really overwhelming and then all encompassing and, you’ve got to keep to these deadlines and everything has got to be done a certain way life just comes along and shows you what’s really important. So I mean there, nothing probably as dramatic as
that really the rest of the piece. But I remember defending and phoning my mom couldn’t come since she was having [medical treatment] but phoning her afterwards and talking to her and my dad and telling her that I was done. And I went to a doctor’s appointment with her about two weeks after that and we walked into the doctor’s office and her doctor looked at me and said are you [name] and I said yes. And she said oh it’s very nice to meet you, Dr. [name] and I looked at her and I said ‘how did you know that’ and she said ‘well your mother is my patient and she’s very, very proud of you.’ (EdD Cohort EDST Student, August 2013, UBC)

The above student has shown the realities of losing a parent can be life altering and have “overwhelming” effects, but she additionally acknowledged that the doctoral student responsibilities remain. The next student was also overwhelmed by the death of her mother and she expresses how she continued to be responsible to her work’s advancement and endured it,

Impossible for two years [after mothers’ death] … I kept busy doing research but I just put it, organized my mind, forget about writing, because writing you have to organize what you have to write, I just organized my mind. … Well because I really did it slowly I think it was more the community support … (PhD Student, August 2013, UBC)

This student was devastated by her mother’s death and she described it as “impossible for two years” for her and she remained in the program and did not take an academic leave. She was unable to write, which is an extremely long time to not produce, which must have been frustrating for her, but she endured and found other ways to be a responsible student and to keep her work progressing and stay connected to her doctoral journey.
6.3.3 Doctoral Journey Retention

About 50% of all individuals who enter doctoral programs finish. Although many studies exist concerning reasons people fail to finish doctoral programs, few studies related to the reasons people finish doctoral programs have been conducted. (Colon, 2012, p. ii)

I had often heard the statement that 40% -50% of doctoral students do not graduate. I do not know the exact numbers because institutions seem to make a practice of not publicizing their graduate attrition rates. So one could see how it “is poorly understood” as it is an embarrassing secret that universities aren’t discussing in the open. Kohun and Ali (2005) claim “Doctoral faculty initially placed the blame of attrition on the students exiting the program. Cited reasons such as lack of preparation on the part of the students.” (p. 380) Instead universities talk about student retention. Indigenous doctoral journey retention means that Indigenous individuals remain on their doctoral academic and social path to the end of that journey. Indigenous doctoral students achieving their goal of program completion and graduation is of immense importance to the doctoral student, UBC faculty and department, and their families, friends, and communities. Though resilience and persistence may not always be enough as Lovitts (2001) found that, “[i]t is not the background characteristics students bring with them … it is what happens to them after they arrive… The causes of attrition are deeply embedded in the organizational culture of graduate school and the structure and process of graduate education” (p. 2). Therefore, perhaps Indigenous doctoral students require support, guidance, and services to assist them to achieve their academic and social goals and milestones. Some students require support to battle their academic, financial, social, and personal challenges during their doctoral journey and remain on their academic and social path to the end of their journey by completing their intended goals.
This next student’s response derived from my asking them to recall a time when they wanted to withdraw from their doctoral program:

in my first year. I went home that summer to [name] and … I was so happy and I was why am I doing this, I am frigging miserable in Vancouver in this program because the program here did not meet my expectations whatsoever in my first year… So I definitely considered quitting … (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

When I asked the student what changed their mind about quitting, they said:

I didn’t want to throw away the work. I considered going to [name of university] and doing their program but I knew I’d have to start from the beginning … I just didn’t want to waste the work that I had … (PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

This student decided that their responsibility to the work superseded their need to leave behind their thus far “miserable” doctoral program experience. The next student also considered the work they had done was more important than the struggles of poverty and their wanting to leave.

The following student recalls a similar challenge in their doctoral journey,

It was a year ago … it was two things. One on a very basic level of money I had a scholarship but we just weren’t making ends meet. My husband … [employment] so it’s not like he makes a lot of money but we were just having a hard time making ends meet. And then more important than that it was I was wondering because … there is some work being done right now … in the communities and doing all this great work and I just thought why am I doing a PhD when I could be doing that work … I could be out there. So I was really struggling with that idea but then I realized that spending this time … one of the few times I think in my life I’ll be able to really be engaged, really get a good understanding of all of these things that I think, I believe in my heart are so important to, to our livability and our strength as Indigenous people. So I think that I have a lot to offer actually if I can do this in a good way and build up a really good foundation of knowledge
and share that knowledge and … So I came to realize that it’s a good place to be and I got a good scholarship. (PhD Interdisciplinary Studies Student, April 2013, UBC)

Despite this student having the financial support of her husband it was not enough to be comfortable. She contemplated the idea of leaving and working in the field but she re-committed to her doctoral and work and was blessed to receive a scholarship. I can relate to the last two students’ excerpts as I took an academic leave not only to work and earn money, but I also considered it necessary to rest and regain my strength so as to carry on and resume my doctoral journey. The following student shared their academic journey staying power and responsibility to self,

I mean so I can’t say that I want to quit but I feel like I need a rest, I mean I need a deep, deep rest that’s what it feels like. So I don’t know what I have to do about that I’m trying to figure that out right now. But I, I’m not a quitter, so it, it’s like I can’t say I’ve reached a place like … I haven’t reached that place with this and I don’t think I will because it’s like I actually love stuff that I’m researching because I really I mean I, I feel like I have been in the designer’s chair right from the beginning, … Because I knew what I wanted to research before I came, because I have a vested interest in because I worked in the industry for all those years and I wanted to make sure that Indigenous perspective gets out on this so that some white people don’t write about us, about us, for us, right! (PhD EDST Student, April 2013, UBC)

Another student reflected on their reason to stay on their journey,

the sense of responsibility … of the people that I interviewed that told me their stories, cried, laughed. … not to just hold onto those stories for myself but to share it in a way, in a way to honour them … their words and their experiences, their lives forward and make it matter. And not finishing it would mean that those words would stay with me … they trusted me to do something with what I told them … (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)
The previous students recognized that they felt challenged, but they knew that they intended to remain on their doctoral journey for they knew themselves to be fully committed to their responsibility to themselves and their participants in the completion of their studies.

### 6.3.4 Responsibility to Peers and Future Journeymers

Current students may feel alone in their canoe as doctoral students and this can be a very isolating experience especially during the writing phase and moving through their doctoral milestones (application process, first year, courses, comprehensive exam, research proposal, research ethics, and writing dissertation). While they are in the institution and navigating through their academic challenges the separation from their homeland will affect their relationships with their home community, family, and friends. The affect it has on the student is as varied as the students themselves. These doctoral students came to UBC at various stages in their lives with different connections and responsibilities. Some students are single and others have families with added responsibilities. For everyone, it is a major undertaking and commitment, therefore the students search out ways to remain balanced.

I remember the first day of our program like it was yesterday. And, it was over in Ponderosa and it was Jo-ann Archibald was there, Graham was there. Lee Brown was there and there were a bunch of Aboriginal people that were students that I didn’t, I knew a few of them but not all of them. And I remember the first thing that Graham said to us, he said take a look around because from this day forward you need to look after one another. You need to start to think about one another as brothers and sisters and if you see somebody struggling in this program, it’s your responsibility to reach out and help that person. And you need to understand that if one of you fails we all fail because we didn’t reach out to help that person. And that day started with, Lee welcomed us there, Jo-ann was there, there was food, there was drumming, there was singing, there was a smudge, there were
prayers and then Graham said this to us. And I remember the immediate impact on me that it was, that sense of responsibility for the collective, for everybody in the room that really had the impression of bringing us altogether like it really quickly. And there was no … [fooling] around with, this is all about me, it’s like it was on the table we were in this together … As a cohort, yeah. Grahams’ words those were really true because it wasn’t, it wasn’t like everybody became the best of friends or anything like that, it wasn’t like one great big love in or anything but it was I knew that these were people I could count on, these were people that I could trust and it was a collective. (EdD Student, August 2013, UBC)

By nurturing respectful relationships students can continue to maintain positive relationships while the research enhances the community’s development as it pertains to reciprocal research and possibly first time exposure to participation in a study. The next student’s experiences were different and difficult but they became motivating factors to become responsible and respectful future faculty member for some Indigenous graduate students as shown in the next quote.

I had zero interest in academia, zero interest in research I just wanted to like get out of here … and be done and go and … actually work with people and help people, but coming here and doing my PhD I’m going into academia and so what was influential for me and that actually was my experience of coming into my program, having it be so conservative and so oppressive that I felt motivated to become a faculty member who would be there for students who need someone to support them in being who they are. So it was more that I felt this greater responsibility…(PhD Educ. Student, August 2013, UBC)

Like this student, I was affected by my doctoral experiences and journey, which consequently led to my interest in sharing my doctoral student life experience stories but to also share the doctoral student life experience stories of my peers navigating the academic waters of a UBC doctoral program. I feel a responsibility to share our journey so that future Indigenous doctoral journeyers have the support we had and that they experience fewer challenges than we did.
6.4 Conclusion

With resolved buoyancy through the various waves of my own doctoral journey I realized it takes various levels of commitment and understanding from others to hold up an Indigenous doctoral student. Through sharing time with the UBC Indigenous doctoral students it became clear as to who were the positive and significant UBC institutional support systems and persons that held them up throughout their academic, social, and personal challenges to recreate community spaces. The institutional support systems that were holding them up were their fellow Doctoral Journeyers (Peers), EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education (2006) (program, faculty, peers, cohort members), First Nations House of Learning (FNHL), First Nations Longhouse, Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE), and the Indigenous Graduate Student Symposium (IGSS). The majority of the support systems were Indigenous specific. Students did not mention or talk about general services offered by the university. In this chapter, the students recalled how these support systems respectfully, proactively and productively held them up so they could continue on their doctoral journey. These support systems, because of their cultural relevance, the students proclaimed, helped them academically, spiritually, culturally, and socially and assisted them in remaining connected, and grounded. The students felt that these support systems gave them guidance, support, rejuvenation, sustenance, energy, safety, a sense of belonging, and increased their determination to achieve their doctoral goals. Doctoral students appreciated the respect they felt from being held up by their communities outside and inside of UBC; the support assisted them in staying afloat during their doctoral journey. It was evident to me sometimes the glaring difference in the respect and support they felt they were receiving from their doctoral programs.
The EdD cohort members spoke of how they felt the program was a self-contained support system and community that provided them personal connections after graduation and into her professional journey. One student was appreciative of the opportunity they had to be part of “an all-Indigenous doctoral cohort” (EdD EDST Student, August 2013, UBC). The Indigenous students who were not members of the EdD cohort discussed the importance of Indigenous faculty and peer support they experienced being an active SAGE and Indigenous community member. Most likely the experiences are dissimilar due to the difference of their programmatic tuition fees and as a result the programmatic structure. These mainstream doctoral students are fortunate to have access to the aforementioned Indigenous specific support systems. One student expressed how the cultural aspects of SAGE of “prayers … spirituality was … calming your spirit so that you opened up to the new ideas coming in …” (EdD student, April 2013, UBC).

Some students experienced financial and personal hardships and it affected them academically and socially. They found it difficult to be focused on their studies, as they had to find work, and they attended fewer SAGE meetings and Indigenous community events and gatherings. There were a few students who had fleeting thoughts of leaving their doctoral programs, but they felt a responsibility to their communities and research participants to continue. Students also discussed the importance of responsibility to their communities, themselves and future doctoral student journeyers through their actions and their research. In the next and final chapter my work illustrates the limitations, findings, future considerations contributions of suggestions for prospective Indigenous doctoral students.
Chapter 7: PULLING TOGETHER IN THE ACADEMIC CANOE

7.1 Introduction

I come from the peoples of Soowahlie First Nation and Ch’iyaqtel First Nation (Tzeachten) of the Stó:lô Nation and from the Lax-Kw’alaams (Port Simpson) of the Tsimshian Nation in British Columbia, who have lived for more than 10,000 years on these lands. Since 1858, these lands have been referred to as British Columbia, and since 1867, as Canada. My peoples have, long before and after 1858, journeyed on open waters, rivers, and lakes in the canoe. The canoe has been predominantly and purposefully constructed from the red cedar tree, which is revered as an organism of our forests and lands. As I have written before,

my family built canoes for the purposes of transportation and canoe race competitions … for some, moving on waters in a canoe is referred to as paddling with an oar and those who partake in the activity are called paddlers, but I have always known it to be called canoe pulling by means of a paddle and a participant combining as a canoe puller…” (see Chapter 1)

A canoe puller uses two hands to pull; one hand is on the grip of the paddle and the other hand is around the shaft of the paddle. The blade pulls the water back so as to move the canoe and puller through the water and currents. Pullers compete in single, double, six, and 12 person canoes. I have been a competitive canoe puller, which has taught me many lessons. I had to complete many milestones to truly understand what it took physically, technically, mentally, and emotionally to be a team member and proficient puller. When, however, there are two or more team members or pullers in a canoe, they are referred to as pulling together. This is the source for the title of this work. I saw myself and the other doctoral students as being on the same
journey and going through similar experiences and pulling together in our academic canoe(s) towards what I refer to as milestones: Getting there, Being there, and Remaining there.

As I, metaphorically, am on the open waters of the University of British Columbia in the final days of my canoe journey, I feel that the journey is not quite complete. Many of my fellow journeyers have since completed their doctoral degrees and moved on and begun or continued their careers. We no longer “gather for monthly [SAGE] meetings to share … [our] journeys, … [and] become more knowledgeable about how to better navigate those academic journeys …” (see Chapter 6). I miss them and their friendship and the academic and social support I received from those SAGE meetings. SAGE continues with other students. While encircled by the ebb and flow of the undercurrents that rippled from the movement of my paddle, the rhythm reminded me of my doctoral experiences. I learned a lot, during the talks and chats, about the Indigenous doctoral students’ experiences and journeys and how their viewpoints connect them with their communities and the process of attaining a doctorate.

I examined the doctoral experiences and journeys of a group of the Indigenous UBC doctoral student population: four EdD Cohort members35; five PhD students from Educational Studies (EDST)36; two PhD Faculty of Education (one CCFI37 and one PhD ECPS38); and two PhD

35 EdD Cohort UBC Faculty of Education which is a structured program of 13 doctoral students who work full time in leadership positions in Education.
36 UBC Faculty of Education’s mainstream doctoral program is one Department in the Faculty of Education
37 Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education (CCFI)
38 Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education (ECPS)
students undertaking Interdisciplinary research (one ISGP\textsuperscript{39} and one SCARP\textsuperscript{40}) in a UBC traditional doctoral program. I analyzed their experiences as journeys and stories in terms of the sense of community and community support anchored in a sense of place.\textsuperscript{41} I pulled together their lived experience stories while keeping in mind Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork principles (2008a) and Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald 2008b) while also examining them through the lens of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s: “The Four R’s” (1991). I further examined how an anchored sense of place and belonging influenced their program retention and academic achievement. I believe that this dissertation fills a gap that I found in the literature between research that addresses Indigeneity in exclusively organizational terms, and the consistent lack of drawing upon Indigenous knowledge, particularly its communal/collective nature, to understand the doctoral experience of Indigenous students.

To understand Indigenous student success and challenges, this final chapter aligns specifically with the context of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) Four R’s; Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility. The canoe metaphor guided my understanding of how our lives – past, present, and future – can connect with being in a relationship with my family, Elders, community, friends, peers, mentors, and the university while also meeting the requirements as a doctoral student. While doctoral students set out in their canoes from many shores and homelands with various lived-experiences, our shared motivations were to obtain doctoral degrees. The doctoral journey is comparable to the canoe journey in that the waterways are

\textsuperscript{39} Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program (ISGP)
\textsuperscript{40} School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP)
rough at times and almost emotionally and physically impossible to navigate. The journeyers, however, found the necessary strength, supports, and energy to keep pulling in their canoes. With the help of many others, the canoe journey represents a great sense of achievement and connectedness to family, community, nation, culture, and place. The mentorship, teachings, and supports shared in this dissertation represent the journeys and voices of Indigenous doctoral students alongside my own and identify how we all persevered in our canoe in-the-making throughout our academic journeys. They engaged with their programs in their canoes separately as individuals, at times in a very competitive way, while they also had opportunities to collaborate as a team of pullers supporting each other as a cohort during SAGE and IGSS gatherings.

7.2 Purpose

The purpose of my dissertation research was to explore the experience of Indigenous doctoral students within a research-intensive university in order to determine what their discernments were in respect to the relationship between their doctoral experience and community connections (home, personal, and UBC structured). I set out to examine the juxtaposition between isolation and communal connections and how community roles and university student services (home, personal, and UBC structured) have contributed to the experiences of Indigenous students at the University of British Columbia. I argue that group dynamics, peer mentoring, and mentorship are paramount components for Indigenous doctoral students’ program contentment, emotional support, academic success, resilience, and retention. Through my Indigenous viewpoint, I
sought to represent the experiences and voices of Indigenous doctoral students alongside my own in order to identify how we persevered to reach our goals.

In addition to learning about their Indigenous doctoral student life experience stories in terms of a sense of belonging, I sought to discover who was in their canoes with them (community members, support staff, or other students) and to speak about who was in my canoe. I wanted to know who and how those people who travelled in their canoes shared in their experiences, celebrating successes, academic milestones, while discussing and moving through the challenges of their journeys. I wanted to give them the opportunity to remember and tell their doctoral canoe adventures and how they created community during their studies. By listening to, and sharing the experiences of Indigenous doctoral students through storytelling, I aimed to articulate a sensitive conceptual framework that meaningfully captured the tensions and contradictions underpinning the Indigenous graduate student experience in Canadian higher education.

I wanted to know if there were opportunities for Indigenous doctoral students (2006-2014) within the University of British Columbia structure to be engaged in or to develop a sense of community through sustaining supports and relationships on their journeys. I also wondered if their doctoral student life experience stories were similar to or different from mine and I wondered how they navigated in their canoes through the waters and seasons of their doctoral voyages. As well, I wanted to know if a disconnect had formed between Indigenous doctoral students and their home communities. Lastly did their communities go on without them and how did Indigenous students get used to not being able to attend funerals and other important community functions?
7.3 Findings

The findings provide a strong basis to implement new ideas and sustain current programs, initiatives, and conferences within the university like the EdD cohort, SAGE, and IGSS. The actual experiences of students were as diverse as the communities they evolved from and that supported them. The outcomes and findings are primarily with education students along with insights that may be relevant for graduate students in all disciplines. Through my research, it became evident that Indigenous students found the higher education experience isolating and challenging, if not alienating. Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001) wrote about “sense of community” and “support” and the importance to students of feeling connected. The Indigenous doctoral students I chatted with also spoke of the importance of being connected to their peers and Indigenous doctoral community. The students from the EdD cohort expressed how they were connected to their peers “like family” (Lawrence, 2002) and most doctoral students saw the benefits of “peer mentoring” (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997) so I could see how connectedness and communalness are important to their program contentment. Van der Wey’s (2004) research outcomes were similar to the students I chatted with as they found value in the development of a “sense of belonging” and a “shared sense of humour” which increased their feelings of connectedness and relieved stress. There were disadvantages that Swayze and Jakeman (2014) discussed such as the development of “cliques” but the Indigenous doctoral students I spoke with did not identify cliques as an issue. However they experienced challenges in their peer interactions with non-Aboriginal peers. Often these challenges centred on non-recognition of Indigenous knowledges by students and instructors. Both Dei (2000) and Pidgeon (2008)
discussed how Indigenous knowledges are marginalized leaving the Indigenous student feeling that their academic contribution was devalued and disrespected.

Many UBC Indigenous PhD students did not feel that the university was a place or space where they had a sense of belonging for them and were affected by social and cultural isolation. Brayboy (1999, 2004) discussed the experience of three Indigenous students (Tom, Debbie, and Heather) who attended Ivy League institutions who completed their academic journey by strategizing when to be either invisible or visible. Their institutions were predominantly attended by white students and Indigenous students felt conspicuous and isolated. One student (Debbie) added 30 minutes to her walk to class in order to avoid crossing paths with other students (Brayboy, 2004, p. 126). Brayboy (2004) explained how Tom, who was also isolated from fellow students, in order to remain on his academic journey had to go to the near by town to be connected with other people (Brayboy, 2004, p. 138). Heather was more “strategic[ally] visible” (p. 144) both socially and academically so as to build relationships as a “form of activism and advocacy… ” (Brayboy, 2004, p. 143). Heather saw her professor as an Elder, so was somewhat invisible in class, as she would not think of interrupting him or question him in class, but instead she made appointments to meet at his office (Brayboy, 2004, p. 143). A peer mentor gave Heather advice on how to prepare for meetings with her professor so as to show her proficiency, knowledge-base and competency (Brayboy, 2004, p. 142). Heather also joined her Indigenous peers at an Indigenous student organized “Columbus Day … ‘awareness day’” where she voiced her feelings of the “injustices of the past” experienced by Indigenous people (Brayboy, 2004, p. 143). Heather was fortunate in that she had peers to support her and share her academic and social experiences. I found that some UBC Indigenous EdD students had
memorable shared experiences with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous doctoral and masters students in terms of connectedness, interconnectedness, communal relations, isolation, satisfaction, retention, and challenges that affected their academic, social, emotional, relational well-being, and resilience. I also found that not all students were equally connected to their place of origin nor did they all participate in their communities’ social or cultural activities or events. Yet, many did.

The continual absence of doctoral students from community memorial services, celebrations, events, and activities took its toll on the lone canoe pullers and their community members. Their family and communities were allowed the time and space to grieve, respect, or celebrate community events or activities. While the doctoral students did not always have the time or room to be with their families at these times, an individual can feel isolated and feel disconnected from their family and community when they needed to honour, comfort, and empower each other. Yet, they paddled on and their communities assured them they understood and wanted them to weather the storm from their temporary academic camp, UBC. Recently a dear man, a member of my community, who was my Papa’s best friend’s son, whom I had known most of my life, and was my dear friend’s cousin/brother, passed away. I was fully committed to spending 20 hours a day working on my dissertation, but my loyalties shifted making room to attend the funeral of this dear man. I was also asked to support the family and, when asked, I have been taught by my family and community to answer this request with a definite “yes.” I saw it as an honour to be asked to support the family in their time of grief whilst showing the respect he deserved.
It is important to note that Indigenous doctoral students are not all the same; some of the students were not connected to or affiliated with the land or community to which they have origins or membership. During my conversations with some Indigenous university students within and beyond my research, I noticed that their communities, though proud to have individual members attend the UBC-Vancouver campus, often felt somewhat intimidated, jealous, and wary of their professional advancement and may have become distant to those who acquired a postgraduate degree. For some Indigenous doctoral students who initially enrolled in graduate study because of community encouragement to do so, paradoxically were not encouraged to return home and seek employment within their community. Perhaps their newly acquired skills might create an imbalance within the established structure of the community band office. In this case, the new graduate may seek employment in the office that oversees the larger Indigenous territories or work within the academy. The newly graduated individual felt that she/he is more comfortable within the Western academic camp structure as they now have more knowledge of its inner workings.

I feel fortunate, like a few of the students I chatted with, that as doctoral students, we have experienced ongoing support, sustenance, and connectedness from and with family, friends, Indigenous communities, supervisory committee, the Faculty of Education, the First Nations House of Learning and Longhouse, UBC faculty and staff, peers, and Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE). These support systems frequently inquired of students: “how are your studies going?” When students struggled and felt challenged, these supportive gestures and comments took some of the anguish away. The student support systems say: “keep going, it will all be worth it in the end.” Students’ grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings and extended
family members either directly or indirectly spoke of their pride for students’ past and present academic accomplishments. My brother once told a complete stranger at Starbucks that “[his] sister is studying to become a doctor at UBC” and they proceeded to have a short chat about my endeavour and me. I could see my brother’s pride. Such gestures of pride resulted in students feeling both supported and humbled. We realize that even though we were the lone pullers for most of our journey, we were not alone; we had many forms of support all around us, which is what kept us going. The support and pride we felt were tools that we used to build and shape our canoe.

7.4 Revisiting the Research Questions

This study is the result of gathering the Indigenous doctoral student stories, perspectives, and responses to the major thesis research questions.

7.4.1 Relationships and Agency

1. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) doctoral students’ web of relationships – family, community, peers, mentors, program structures, and university structures – affect the strategies that Indigenous doctoral students engage in prior to and during their studies?

The doctoral students describe how they disembarked from their communities and arrived at the bank of UBC to gain further knowledge, skills, and to acquire a doctoral degree. One student recalls a brief talk of support and encouragement from an elementary school teacher that carried
her to UBC. Other students were influenced to apply to a UBC Indigenous doctoral program by
a promotional poster, SAGE group invitation, and another by a impressionable talk with Dr.
Graham Smith. Brayboy, Solyom, & Castagno (2014) developed an alternative way to select a
student to the cohort that was not based on the traditional selection process where a student is
selected for their proven accomplishments. The Indigenous student is selected for their
connection and commitment to their community and their community building capacity. These
authors describe the Tribal Nation Building project, which is concerned with the collective and
to serve the “needs of the tribal nations” (Brayboy, et al., 2014, p. 579).

The UBC Indigenous doctoral students spoke about how their communities, families, the
importance of their families and how their spouses and children inspired them to continue on
their academic journey when they felt isolated and the cost of the doctoral journey was too much.
At times they missed their families and longed to be temporarily released from the demands of
their academic journey. Waterman, (2007, 2012) interviewed a total of 54 Haudenosaunee
college graduates. Through her research she found that even though the Indigenous students
lived in campus residences most went home every weekend. Waterman (2012) referred to the
students’ “home-going behavior” (p. 194). The home-going kept the students connected and
supported and enabled them to maintain their spiritual responsibilities to their families and
community. Even though Waterman’s study did not focus on doctoral students, her findings
support my study.

The UBC Indigenous doctoral students also valued the supporters and support systems that
assisted them academically, professionally, socially, emotionally and spiritually. They also
expressed the importance of community (town, village, city, territory, reserve, or band) support that assisted the students to be resistant, resilient, and persistent despite their challenges, pushback, hardships, frustrations, being misunderstood, and feeling insecure and isolated which are the emotions they experienced throughout their doctoral journey. Their peers also gave them academic and social suggestions or ideas, emotional support through talking, mentoring and teaching each other. University community peers and peer groups who mutually supported the students through constructive contributions to their academic and social challenges that arose on their journeys also supported the students. The doctoral students valued the caring and effective mentorship they received from Indigenous faculty that helped shape them and challenged them academically and socially as prospective scholars. This support assisted the students to feel well-situated, supported, guided, inspired, and encouraged so as to continue on their path to pursue their doctoral studies. These mentor(s) also assisted them to achieve better academic progress, social connectedness, community involvement, and emotional well-being.

7.4.2 Recreating Community

2. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students recreate community spaces as part of their doctoral journey as a way to remain connected to their university program and research, peers, mentors, supervisory committee, and their communities?

The students recreated community during their academic journeys through the development of an extended family of friends, fellow doctoral journeyers, and EdD cohort members. The students attribute their personal transformations to the sharing of academic and social experiences with
their peers without judgment. The students valued mentors who were effective communicators, academic guides and role models when interacting with other faculty members and students and the way they created a sense of community through their involvement. The mentors also demonstrated role modeling and community values by organizing various opportunities and projects that created a sense of community caring and support. They also provided students positive academic and social mentorship and support and created a sense of community by inviting the students to Indigenous events. The students were also grateful for UBC Indigenous-based support of SAGE and IGSS to have the opportunity to gather with Indigenous students. During SAGE and IGSS events they shared their academic journeys, presented their work, became more knowledgeable about how to better navigate their academic journeys, be with peers, colleagues, and scholars from various UBC disciplines and from beyond the Vancouver UBC campus.

7.4.3 Tensions Between Program and Community Affiliations

3. How do UBC (Vancouver, 2006-2014) Indigenous doctoral students view tensions between their programmatic experiences and their community affiliations?

The students spoke of the politics, colonization, and contradictory discourses of the university. UBC has taken on the practice of attending to the needs of international students while Indigenous students are not attended to in the same manner. There are also inconsistencies of the doctoral programs (all kinds) program structures as some respect Indigenous students for their perspectives and input while others remind them that they have chosen to study in a Western
knowledge academic site. There are additionally, tensions in the classroom settings where non-Indigenous faculty colonize students by not valuing their cultural perspectives or liberating Indigenous students by giving them power, authority, or community. Therefore, I don’t believe the university consistently enables the Indigenous viewpoint to matter or facilitates positive authority for Indigenous people and their cultures. The academy oppresses the Indigenous approach and creates challenges to the Indigenous doctoral students academic experience. Indigenous doctoral students’ journeys are shaped by these intensive and ongoing tensions that they experience.

7.5 The Conceptual Resonance of the Four R’s

Conceptually, Kirkness and Barnhardt’s four Rs—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility - formed the theoretical and methodological basis of exploring the doctoral students’ holistic awareness of their journeys. Through gathering, proclaiming, and representing doctoral student life experience stories in this study, the Indigenous students received respect for their cultural backgrounds and ways of being. Their Indigenous knowledges and values were celebrated rather than denied. The evolution of these values and beliefs presents more opportunities for the university to create relevant space for Indigenous doctoral students to grow in the academy. The appreciation of Indigenous knowledges between professors and Indigenous students supports reciprocal relationships that are embedded in the students’ spiritual awareness and affiliated values and beliefs, which Archibald (2008a) regards as holistic and synergistic. The doctoral student’s life experience stories can facilitate the university’s understanding of how they can be more responsible and responsive to ensure that Indigenous students are given
recognition and not marginalized. Embracing the conceptual framework of Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) four R’s leads to the respect of Indigenous students’ cultural integrity, the recognition of the relevance of their perspectives and experiences, and the acknowledgement of reciprocal relationships with all those who support them throughout their educational journeys. This cumulates in the students’ drive to intensify their space within the institution. The realization of Indigenous student achievements can be more fulfilling if the institutions understand their communal nature and the needs of Indigenous students.

I believe that any UBC program or initiative can be improved through the development of an Indigenous cohort modeled on the teachings of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991). The cohort model can be a positive method of guiding doctoral students through what can be an isolating and challenging academic journey. The EdD Cohort members in this study felt that when they became a member of their cohort it kept them more engaged, supported them to remain at university, and increased their opportunities to complete their degree. Students found that they could strengthen their support systems by creating an informal cohort made up of their peers, mentors, or others. Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) bring to our attention that within the university environment, “survival often requires the acquisition and acceptance of a new form of consciousness that not only displaces, but often devalues their Indigenous consciousness, and for many, this is a greater sacrifice than they are willing to make” (p. 7). One particular student did leave the university and did not return for 15 years because they did not feel that there was a place for them at UBC. In recent years, UBC and a few other institutions such as Trent University and Carleton University have shown that they can “reconstruct themselves to be more relevant to, and accepting of, First Nations students' perspectives and experiences, [and now]
they will be that much more relevant and responsive to the needs of all students” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 9). It has been proven that if a student is given respect, agency, and the topic of learning is relevant to them, then the learning process will flow and the knowledge will build upon the already acquired knowledge and “cultural background of the student” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 10). Hopefully more universities will begin to recognize that not all doctoral students have the same needs.

I believe that through its 2006 EdD cohort program offered by the Faculty of Education’s Department of Educational Studies, UBC has placed, “[f]aculty members and students in such a reciprocal relationship [that they] are in a position to create a new kind of education, to formulate new paradigms or explanatory frameworks that help us establish a greater equilibrium and congruence between the literate view of the world and the reality we encounter when we step outside the walls of the ‘Ivory Tower’” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 10). UBC and other traditional institutions that have elected to respect the cultural integrity of First Nations students and communities, hopefully] adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of Indigenous knowledge and skills, … respect for Indigenous knowledge, as well as … help students to appreciate and build upon their customary forms of consciousness and representation as they expand their understanding of the world in which they live. (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 8)

I know from personal experience that when the student is respected for their uniqueness, they feel accepted by the university.
7.6  My Contribution: Extending the Four R’s

Some students enter the process of doctoral education valuing institutional expectations and desiring to meet these regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Universities have the duty and capacity to ensure that all Indigenous students feel welcome and supported along with their perspectives, knowledges and voices. Doctoral programs must offer content structures that make room for Indigenous students to challenge the status quo of the academy. In developing an Indigenous knowledge framework and conceptual guide towards presenting a better account of the experiences of Indigenous doctoral students, I believe there are four additional aspects which I propose to add to Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four R’s: Recognition, Reclamation, Redress, and Reconciliation.

First, I believe that institutions of higher education should design doctoral programs that offer Recognition and make room for Indigenous students to challenge the status quo of the academy. I believe Indigenous voices should be heard and their presence acknowledged and accepted and not systemically silenced and censored by faculty members and peers. UBC needs to do what they claim they are doing by becoming an equal “Place of Mind” for all students and where Indigenous knowledges and other knowledges should be considered equal. I have heard from students that the slogan has been criticized for being too narrow on how it emphasizes university learning. Intellectual knowledge is not the only knowledge that is being researched and advanced. The Indigenous doctoral students who are accepted to UBC doctoral programs deserve recognition for their resilience, determination, and for being leaders of their families and communities.
Indigenous voices and Indigenous presence must be recognized because knowledge comes from Indigenous lands and ancestors. Institutions need to recognize that Indigenous peoples such as myself are the First Peoples of these lands and when students are respected, the land will be respected and in turn, good work will be done. The institution needs to recognize Indigenous students for we are the leaders from and for the land and when we lead we ask others not to follow, but to walk beside us. With our honoured Indigenous student guests, we build place, space, and a world of equal opportunity to share, succeed, and grow. I am reminded of Archibald’s (2008a) reciprocal teachings and the words from xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) elder Tsimilano Vince Stogan of “hands back, hands forward,” as he expressed,

My dear ones,

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

Tsimilano’s words remind us that we have the responsibility to ensure that the teachings of our people are recognized, received, practiced, and shared and that we are interconnected whether we are adults, children, or even if we have passed on to the next world.

Second, it is the responsibility of doctoral programs to make room for Reclamation that enables Indigenous students to achieve communal self-determination by claiming and creating a common space. Indigenous graduate students need a place to gather with one another, share time, and space, and to create more opportunities to give each other support. The creation of physical
space for doctoral students would assist the students and help them to feel less isolated through the development of community and a sense of belonging. Perhaps the FNHL or another space could have a small office to serve as a dedicated meeting place for Indigenous graduate students. Institutions have the responsibility to celebrate the Indigenous students who journey to the university, who want to better their community camps, and who desire to improve the future of all peoples. Universities need to celebrate Indigenous students for their knowledge just as educational systems have always celebrated high achieving students. They need to celebrate Indigenous students who reclaim space and place and choose to sit at the front of the class and share their cultures and ways of being. Universities and doctoral programs need to celebrate those who are not afraid to challenge the status quo through structural improvement.

Third, programs must provide Redress to Indigenous students and our suffering in that we have often been deprived of community cohesion, equality, and a sense of belonging by educational systems. They need to recognize how the institutional structure is unjust in that it disrespects Indigenous students when it does not see the value of Indigenous voices, knowledge, cultures, and perspectives. They must provide redress by making room for equity and social justice that would allow Indigenous voices, drums, knowledge, and perspectives to be heard and to have a meaningful place in university courses and programs. The institution and doctoral program have the power and responsibility to rectify the imbalance and unjust situation through social justice considerations and a vindication of our rights. If they are not willing to do this, perhaps it is time come together and take our rights. Reformation and institutional reconstruction need to take place to show respect for the Indigenous student’s contribution to the university and to make progress towards reconciliation.
I also propose an eighth R: *Reconciliation*. This will follow when all of the previous seven R’s are applied towards improving the Indigenous student’s academic journey and experiences. The discrimination and social injustices that have been inflicted upon Indigenous students need to be set right by the institution. UBC has the opportunity to respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* in relation to Education and Reconciliation, Calls to Action 62-65. These Calls to Action cover modified curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada, to make an annual contribution to Aboriginal student education, and to collaborate and establish a national Aboriginal research program (2015). The institution must strive to be structurally functional according to the needs of Indigenous students. Indigenous doctoral students will then be able to speak freely with our authentic voices and from our authentic positions to construct our own knowledge. The university needs to begin to repair the damage that has been done through the public school structures, enabling the systemic racism that colonizes Indigenous student. I believe that these four additional requirements that I propose to add to Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four R’s will assist towards developing an Indigenous Knowledge framework that can better account for the achievement of Indigenous doctoral students.

### 7.7 Limitations of the study

Some possible limitations relate to my prior associations with the participants, and/or knowledge of their experiences. I was the SAGE Provincial Coordinator while the doctoral students I interviewed attended UBC. When I was no longer in that job I remained an active Vancouver SAGE member. I understood that my perspective and life knowledge is continually changing,
both with my interior and exterior self, and as such, I was self-reflective and self-aware of my associations in order to tell their doctoral student life experience stories respectfully. Because some of the students became my friends and I had personal knowledge of their experience, I tried not to let my personal knowledge or viewpoint influence how I represented their answers. I was conscious of my biases and recognized my positions of knowing and tried to represent their perspectives as accurately as possible without adding my knowledge of various situations so that the data I collected was not misinterpreted.

Because this study involved a relatively small student sample, the findings cannot be generalized to how all UBC Indigenous doctoral students are affected by the demands and stresses that are encountered during the various stages of their university programs and Indigenous communal life. During the interviews, I noticed that the students’ emotions and stresses varied according to certain places and times throughout their journeys. Some students had to take breaks during chats to go to the washroom, to care for their child, lights being too bright or due to being overcome with emotions. There is no one aspect that can be associated with a particular process due to the differences in programs, cultures, lived-experiences and the overall diversity of students who have common and competing needs.

7.8 Future Considerations and Recommendations for Research

This study affirms that the literature in respect to Indigenous graduate student success is extremely limited and therefore, student voices add a major contribution to the body of knowledge as primary research. A prospective research endeavour would be to take a closer
look at the 2006 EDST EdD Indigenous Education cohort and extend the study’s ideas into mainstream universities, SAGE, and IGSS. Doing this will advocate an appreciation and support for current and future Indigenous students since these voices are creating new knowledge through doctoral student life experience stories. Additional elements that could be considered for future research are future trends. For example, from 2006 to 2016 there was a great influx of graduate students entering doctoral programs at UBC especially in the Faculty of Education. This is an area of research that would be of interest to UBC in terms of student success and retention. A similar study could be conducted within the various Faculties independently or as a campus wide initiative.

The results of the study show the importance of appreciating and supporting the experiences of Indigenous graduate students and their communities to encourage graduate student success and retention. The canoe in-the-making is a fitting metaphor as the study results show that Indigenous students pull together in many ways and at many levels. The students’ doctoral life experience stories shared in this dissertation highlights the importance of inclusion and community connection for students’ success. The shared doctoral student life experience stories will inform higher education institutions that wish to improve supports and success rates for Indigenous students.
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