

INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS AND EUROCENTRIC PEDAGOGY WITHIN  
THE ENGLISH FIRST PEOPLES CURRICULUM

by

Naryn Searcy

B.A. University of British Columbia, 1998

B.Ed. University of British Columbia, 2001

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Okanagan)

May 2016

© Naryn Searcy, 2016

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Integrating Indigenous and Eurocentric Pedagogy Within the English First Peoples Curriculum

---

Submitted by Naryn Searcy in partial fulfillment of the requirements of:

The degree of Master of Arts

Dr. Leyton Schnellert, Faculty of Education, UBCO

Supervisor, Professor (please print name and faculty/school above the line)

Dr. Karen Ragoonaden, Faculty of Education, UBCO

Supervisory Committee Member, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

Dr. Sabre Cherkowski, Faculty of Education, UBCO

Supervisory Committee Member, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

Dr. Allison Hargreaves, Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies, UBCO

University Examiner, Professor (please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

---

External Examiner, Professor (please print name and university in the line above)

April 25, 2016

(Date submitted to Grad Studies)

Additional Committee Members include:

Dr. William Cohen, Faculty of Education, UBCO

(Please print name and faculty/school in the line above)

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the incorporation of Aboriginal content and pedagogy into senior level academic secondary school courses with students of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry within the English First Peoples curriculum. The results reveal the positive relationship between Indigenous approaches, student engagement, and academic performance as well as challenges and tensions resulting from the merging of diverse educational perspectives. Both theoretical support for the use of Indigenous pedagogy as well as practical classroom examples are described. These findings have the potential to support educators as we move towards increased collective understanding of the necessity of the acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and perspectives both within our public education system and society as a whole.

The UBC Okanagan Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval number for this research is: H14-02515.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Illustrations.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Developing a Knowledge Base about Cultural Diversity .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Including Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Content in the Curriculum.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Cultural Caring and Building Learning Communities .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Cultural Congruity in Classroom Instruction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Incorporating Indigenous Pedagogy .....	8
<b>Place-Based Education .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework Conclusion.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Inquiry Design.....</b>	<b>19</b>
Participants.....	19
Data Collection .....	19
Student Reflections .....	19
Final Course Evaluations .....	20
Field Notes from Experiential Activities .....	21
Teacher Research Journal .....	22
Timeline of Activities .....	22
<b>Ethics Process .....</b>	<b>23</b>

<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Description and Sense-Making.....	24
Coding.....	25
<b>Methodology Conclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Findings and Learnings .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Data Sources .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Emergent Themes .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Theme 1: Positive Student Response to Communal Environments .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Activities That Led to a Strong Sense of Community .....	30
Differences between EFP 12 and EFP 10 in Regards to Communal Learning ....	36
<b>Theme 2: The Value of Experiential Learning.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Outdoor Learning (EFP 10) .....	41
Connections to Experiential Learning (EFP12).....	46
An Example of Experiential Activities Reinforcing a Key Text in EFP12 .....	48
Results on Standardized Assessments .....	53
<b>Theme 3: Points of Tension.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Tension in Creating a Positive Atmosphere with Emotionally Challenging Topics and Texts.....	56
Formal Instruction and Assessment with Texts of Personal Significance.....	58
Students of Aboriginal Ancestry not Engaged by Cultural Content.....	61
Tension in Scheduling.....	63
<b>Theme 4: Changing Perspectives.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Key Findings in regards to Practice .....</b>	<b>70</b>
Community in the Classroom .....	70
Experiential Learning.....	72

<b>Filling the Gaps .....</b>	<b>74</b>
Tensions/Two-Eyed Seeing .....	76
Humility vs. Anxiety in Educators.....	78
Hope (Changing Perspectives and Reconciliation).....	81
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Limitations of the Study .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Significant Contributions .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Next Steps for My Own Inquiry and Professional Work.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Suggestions for Future Research.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Closing.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: Post Activity Reflection Guide .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: EFP 12 Post Course Evaluations Questions.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: EFP 10 Post Course Evaluation Questions .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Student Assent and Parent Consent Forms.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: Examples of Coding .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: Sharing Circle Protocols .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: The First Peoples Principles of Learning .....</b>	<b>121</b>

## **List of Illustrations**

Figure 4.1	Impact on English Skills (EFP10).....	43
Figure 4.2	Preparation for Provincial Exam (EFP12) .....	53

## Acknowledgements

Many people have played an integral role in the completion of this work and I am deeply appreciative of the support I have received. First I need to thank Dr. Leyton Schnellert who has provided enthusiastic guidance, encouragement and inspiration from the very beginning.

I am also indebted to my committee members Dr. Karen Ragoonaden, Dr. Sabre Cherkowski, and Dr. William Cohen who each contributed unique and thoughtful elements that challenged my thinking and understanding.

I must sincerely thank Rosalyn Younging, Doris Young, Esther Sanderson, Brenda Towler and Richard Wagamese. The five days we spent together assured me that teaching English First Peoples was the right decision.

To my colleagues and friends Don MacIntyre and Anne Tenning, whose unwavering support and thoughtful discussions over the past three years both grounded and inspired me.

To my friend and colleague Judith King, no one has been more influential in my role as an educator or challenged me more consistently on the topic of reconciliation.

And finally, to my husband Dave Searcy, this journey could not and would not have been possible without your vigilant encouragement and patience for which I will always be grateful.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In September of 2013 I began teaching two courses that were new to our school and our district: English 10 and 12 First Peoples (EFP). The rationale behind the 2008 creation of the First Peoples curriculum was to provide opportunities for all students to engage with the “lived realities of First Peoples as evidenced in various forms of text” (Integrated Resource Package, 2008, p. 11). The courses are also the academic equivalent of English 10 and 12 with identical expectations in regards to the development of language and literacy skills required for graduation in British Columbia. Unfortunately, though the course has now been an alternative to English 10 and 12 for 7 years, only a very small percentage of students are choosing to take it. When I surveyed our district’s provincial exam results after my first year of teaching EFP, I realized that in June 2014 only 189 students wrote the English 12 First Peoples exam in B.C. compared with 26, 512 who wrote the English 12 exam (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014). That first year I offered 2 classes of EFP 12 and one class of EFP 10, and this experience became the starting point for my research.

I set a very serious tone with my first EFP 12 class. One of my fears was that the course would develop a reputation as an easier version of English 12, which was a concern cited provincially as a potential reason for low enrolment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). I felt it was extremely important that the course develop a reputation as being equally challenging (if not more challenging) than English 12. I needed the course to be difficult and rewarding for our strongest academic students, but still accessible for those who struggled. Reflecting back, I would describe the overall

implementation of the courses as successful (especially for the first year); however, there were a number of challenges that arose. The first was my own discomfort with the emotionally charged texts and content which make up a significant portion of the course. While I believe the students found the course interesting and meaningful, the general response (after extensive feedback from students at the end of the first semester) was that the course was very depressing. Students of Aboriginal<sup>1</sup> ancestry as well as non-Aboriginal students requested that I “lighten it up” a bit. I know that I personally struggled with my own fear of being accused of not respecting the history and culture if I tried to have fun with a topic or a text. As I am not Aboriginal, I was particularly sensitive that “having fun with”, could be misconstrued as “making fun of”. I acknowledged that it was no one else’s responsibility but my own to develop my understanding of Indigenous perspectives and to improve my comfort level. Humour is a key part of the English 12 FP curriculum (and there is an entire unit focused on humour in the Teacher’s Resource Guide) however at that point in time I was not yet comfortable enough to attempt teaching it. Whenever Aboriginal guest speakers and educators worked with my students (with the exception of presentations on residential school history), they infused their activities with humour and energy, yet I personally found this very difficult. With these challenges in mind I acknowledged that a key focus would be for me to increase my comfort level regarding discussions of race related issues and historical

---

<sup>1</sup> The English First Peoples 10 and 11 Teacher Resource Guide (2010) defines Aboriginal as: *a term defined in the Constitution Act of 1982 that refers to all indigenous people in Canada, including “Indians” (status and non-status), Métis, and Inuit people.* The term First Peoples is defined as: *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Canada, as well as indigenous peoples around the world.* Throughout this thesis the terms Aboriginal, First Peoples and Indigenous are used interchangeably.

injustices with ethnically diverse students. I should add that the Aboriginal educators in our district and our local Aboriginal community were incredibly supportive of both myself and the introduction of these courses. I believe that the reason I felt such pressure to ensure the success of the English First Peoples program was at least partially in response to the excitement and hope that was expressed by Aboriginal parents, students, teachers and other community members when they learned of the possibility of these courses being offered in our school. I sincerely hoped to ensure the lasting success and popularity of this program in our school and eventually our district.

I believed that the success of the English First Peoples program was dependent upon students understanding that the courses would offer them an experience that was unique and distinct from English 10 and 12, and yet would still effectively prepare them for the academic demands of any post-secondary options they chose. With that focus in mind, my research question became:

*What happens when I incorporate experiential learning prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy and perspectives into a competitive, hierarchical, and individualized Western framework?*

My sub-questions were:

*A. Will participation in experiential learning activities prevalent in Indigenous pedagogies improve student engagement and performance on reading and writing language arts tasks?*

*B. Will students see experiential learning activities prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy as valuable as traditionally expected reading and writing language arts activities?*

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

Two critical areas for improvement in my practice evolved from an analysis of my first year of teaching EFP: increasing my awareness and understanding of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), and furthering my understanding of Aboriginal pedagogy. Gay (2001, p. 106) defines CRT as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively”. According to Ladson-Billings & King (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1992), the concept of culturally relevant teaching “is contrasted with an assimilationist approach to teaching that sees fitting students into the existing social and economic order as its primary responsibility” (p. 314). Essential elements of culturally responsive pedagogy required me to reflect upon my own perspectives and biases, as well as to incorporate pedagogical approaches necessary to work with ethnically diverse curricula and student populations. Four essential elements (Gay, 2001) framed the theory for my research: developing a knowledge base around cultural diversity, including ethnically diverse content in the curriculum, building inclusive learning communities, and creating cultural congruity in classroom instruction. It was my intention to develop a deeper grasp of the fundamentals of CRT with a specific focus on Indigenous culture in order to make the EFP 10 and 12 courses meaningful, challenging, and relevant. The intended outcome was that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students would benefit from an education that emphasized Indigenous history, culture and perspective. (Kanu, 2011).

## **Developing a Knowledge Base about Cultural Diversity**

Educating culturally diverse students requires that teachers obtain knowledge that extends beyond a general awareness that students from different ethnicities will have different learning styles and value systems (Gay, 2001). In regards to the Canadian education system, “the task of decolonizing education requires multilateral processes of understanding and unpacking the central assumptions of domination, patriarchy, racism, and ethnocentrism” (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002, p.84). The “add and stir model” of incorporating Aboriginal education into Canadian teaching practices only serves to maintain the perceived superiority of Eurocentric educational values (Battiste, 2008). Although it is essential for the teacher to evaluate his or her own role within education, many teachers do not recognize the systemic and structural inequalities that are created by the system itself and must endeavor to analyze their own beliefs about cultural diversity (Gay, 2010; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). As the instructor in an ethnically diverse classroom I was required to recognize that the education system itself reflected and reinforced discriminatory methods and viewpoints that are found in society (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Through study of the literature, I recognized that in the past I had been guilty of demonstrating “colour blindness” in order to emphasize that I was not giving preferential treatment to any student based on colour (Nieto, 1994). This was one of the reasons that at times I struggled with introducing race-related topics in my classroom. I recognized that I could not expect to have success with an English First Peoples curriculum unless I became a conscientious professional who continuously reflected on my own assumptions towards education (Gay, 2010).

## **Including Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Content in the Curriculum**

According to research on CRT, 3 types of curricula are found in classrooms: 1) Formal 2) Symbolic and 3) Societal (Gay, 2001). The English First Peoples learning outcomes ensured that the formal curriculum had been Indigenized. Aboriginal educators developed the course and all required texts must have Indigenous authors or creators (Integrated Resource Package, 2008). While I continued to familiarize myself with increasing numbers of texts for my students to engage with, I was confident that all the material included the voices of individuals of First Peoples ancestry. For the first time I also began to pay closer attention to the symbolic curriculum. Previously I had not prioritized this and I had not taken advantage of the potentially powerful spaces (such as the walls of my classroom) for conveying information to students about what is or is not important (Gay 2001; Weinstein, Curan, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). While it did not factor directly into my data collection, I also furthered my efforts to represent Aboriginal world views in a more visual way within my classroom. In regards to the societal curriculum that is portrayed in the mass media, I made a significant effort to increase this aspect in my courses. My previous year's hesitation to confront media portrayals and stereotypes stemmed from my discomfort with directly confronting racist representation, but I continued to develop an understanding that the curriculum must include a "thorough and critical analysis of how ethnic groups and experiences are presented in the mass media and popular culture (Gay 2001, pg. 109). As most students are extremely familiar with mass media, it was essential that I provided opportunities for this analysis in my courses. We analyzed many aspects of media in both EFP10 and 12 including (among

others) documentaries on the historical portrayal of Indigenous people in film as well as other topics such as inappropriate mascots and team names in professional sports.

### **Cultural Caring and Building Learning Communities**

An essential component of CRT is creating an appropriate classroom climate that allows students from diverse backgrounds to flourish. Research shows that students who feel as if they are valued by their peers as members of the classroom community report higher levels of efficacy and mastery and achievement (DeBacker & Nelson, 2008), and positive relationships with other students in the class become “important resources of support and opportunity for growth” (Steinebach, Steinebach & Bredtro, 2013, p. 18). As the instructor it was also essential for me to deliberately model respect for diversity (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). One of my highest priorities was to develop a community of learners that not only valued individual student identity, but put an “emphasis on awareness of self and other in equal measure” (Integrated Resource Package, 2008, p. 12).

### **Cultural Congruity in Classroom Instruction**

#### *Incorporating Indigenous Pedagogy*

It is essential when teaching culture-based curriculum to ethnically diverse students that educators not only incorporate cultural content, but pedagogy as well (Battiste, 2008; Gay, 2010; Pidgeon, Archibald & Hawkey, 2014; Preston & Claypool, 2013; Portillo, 2013). A conscientious incorporation of Indigenous pedagogy also recognizes that embracing diversity in our schools doesn’t just apply to an understanding



of a variety of teaching and learning styles, but recognizes the differences in values and belief systems of students from various cultural backgrounds as well (Ragoonaden, Cherkowski, Baptiste, & Després, 2009). Incorporating Indigenous pedagogy into a Eurocentric system is difficult because Aboriginal and Western educational approaches often contradict one another. The key element of Aboriginal pedagogy that I incorporated into the English First Peoples curriculum was the opportunity for experiential learning. The English 12 First Peoples Integrated Resource Package (IRP) (2008) describes “experiential learning” as “incorporating opportunities for figural as well as symbolic learning” and “having students engage directly with the local First Peoples community through field studies, interviews, and the involvement of guest speakers” (p. 12). These learning opportunities were woven throughout the course to reinforce student understanding of Aboriginal perspectives as well as to strengthen student understanding of key texts that were studied. Along with a focus on experiential learning, I also adopted a holistic approach, based on the pedagogical framework of the Medicine Wheel suggested by numerous scholars (Bell, 2014; Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 2004; Brendtro, Brokenleg & VanBockern, 2005; Pidgeon, Archibald & Hawkey, 2014; Preston & Claypool, 2013). Incorporating this holistic approach into a course that was as academically competitive and exam driven as the EFP 12 curriculum was a challenge. Experiential learning is not often found in senior academic courses as there is intense pressure to cover learning outcomes and prepare for high stakes exams upon which scholarships and university entrance depend. The concept of “Two Eyed Seeing” (Hatcher, 2010; Hogue & Bartlett, 2014) was critically important in this regard. Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall describes Two-Eyed Seeing as “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of, or the best in, the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and

from the other eye learning to see with the strengths of, or the best in the Western (mainstream) knowledges and ways of knowing, but, most importantly, learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Hogue & Bartlett, 2014, p.25). Bissett (2012) also describes a similar concept of learning being a “two-way” process within the framework of a “two-way school” that respects both Aboriginal and European thought. Such a school bridges the gap between Indigenous and Western values and perceives Indigenous students as instructional resources who guide and advise the teacher with ideas for classroom instruction and approaches. Not only did the “Two-Eyed Seeing” or “two-way” approach help me and the students weave Indigenous texts, perspectives, and processes throughout the traditional Eurocentric model, but it also revealed that student knowledge and performance in traditionally labeled “academic” skills and knowledge was strengthened by Indigenization. The Two-Eyed Seeing approach was essential for bridging the gap between the distinct and often oppositional Indigenous and Western perspectives that were both represented in the EFP curriculum.

A second area of challenge was incorporating holistic Indigenous pedagogy into courses with such rigid academic expectations. English First Peoples focuses on experiential learning which allows students to engage with ideas and texts outside of the classroom environment. Although I did incorporate numerous opportunities for learning outside the classroom with our district’s Aboriginal education team as well as members of the local Penticton Indian Band, there was often a clear distinction between experiential learning and traditional academic work. It seemed that we were either outside doing a fun activity or sitting inside writing an essay or paragraph. The result was that the experiential activities were engaging, but didn’t connect or reinforce the written and text-analysis activities to their full potential. A second issue was that there was a

perception (especially among very high-achieving academic students), that traditional reading and writing activities were more educationally valid than active options outside the classroom. Some students perceived that reading and writing activities “counted” more, as they were directly applicable to skills required by the provincial exam, and therefore time spent on these activities was more valuable than time spent on experiential tasks outside of the classroom. As the academic expectations are especially challenging at the grade 10 and 12 level (the provincial exam for English 10 and English 10 First Peoples is worth 20% and the grade 12 exam is worth 40%) I considered whether it might not be more advantageous to introduce Aboriginal pedagogy into courses without a provincial exam (such as at the grade 9 or 11 level). However Gay (2001, p.113) emphasizes that in order to create true change, diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives must be integrated into the most “high stakes aspects of the instructional process on a habitual basis”. With this in mind, English 10 and 12 made the most sense as they were the most valued and “important” courses in regards to academic integrity in the British Columbia curriculum.

### **Place-Based Education**

A potential guiding approach for interweaving experiential activities more effectively with academic skills is through a focus on “place-based learning”. Smith defines place-based education as an approach that is grounded in the study of local phenomena and the lived experience of the students. It is “by its nature specific to particular locales” (Smith, 2002, p.587). This curricular focus also validates the culture and experience of students’ families by acknowledging them as worthy of study, and demands that teachers and students re-think the classroom as a fundamental site of

teaching and learning. Learning is moved out of the classroom and into the “actual social and ecological contexts of [student] lives” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 11). From this perspective, place-based education is compatible with Indigenous pedagogy, which is deeply rooted in the local landscape and community. In the local Syilx (Okanagan) culture, human existence is interwoven with the natural world, and the Syilx traditional story system (captik) which expresses cumulative knowledge, contains the guiding principles for a sustainable balance with the environment (Armstrong, 2010). The very structure of Syilx captik stories mimic the tmx’ulax (landscape) which is animated by tmixw (life-force), and the word Syilx itself “describes a people who continuously are in the process of unwinding the long-term knowledge of a right relationship within the land, and coiling its many strands into one long thread to lead, unbroken, to the future” (Armstrong, 2010, p. 43). Place-based learning is an ideal approach for the English First Peoples curriculum, as Indigenous education is fundamentally intertwined with the natural world. This approach bridges Indigenous and Eurocentric pedagogy by moving the study of the language arts curriculum out into the local landscape and community where Indigenous stories and perspectives reside.

With the introduction of a land-based approach, the hope was that students would not only see the value in the local Aboriginal culture and communities, but would develop their own environmental ethic needed to repair the damage that has been done by previous generations. Sobel argues that time spent in the local environment is essential for creating children who will grow up to be adults who passionately defend the natural world, and he emphasizes the importance of taking time to allow children to commune with nature (1996). He suggests, “if we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it”

(Sobel, 1996, p. 39). It should also be acknowledged however, that interacting with the local environment is more difficult for educators than teaching within the walls of the classroom. It requires extra time, communication, preparation, supervision, and equipment (Sobel, 1996). Place based learning is particularly difficult within the high school framework where the compartmentalization of subject areas and rigid timetable force many teachers (particularly in demanding academic subjects) to remain within the classroom. In the context of trying to incorporate place-conscious instructional strategies into my own practice, these were barriers that had to be overcome. Overall, I believe that place-based education, with its roots grounded in experiential learning, the appreciation of cultural perspectives, and engagement with local landscapes, would be an ideal approach through which to implement the English First Peoples curriculum. Place-based educators don't dismiss the importance of content and skills, but instead argue that the study of local places can increase student engagement through active, intergenerational, and multidisciplinary learning that is relevant to the student and contributes towards the goal of healthy communities (Gruenewald, 2003). In this way the essential reading, writing, and oral communication learning objectives of the English First Peoples courses would be preserved, but presented through methods outside the classroom walls.

### **Theoretical Framework Conclusion**

Teaching more effective versions of EFP 10 and 12 in my second year of the courses required me to further my own understanding of Indigenous pedagogy, develop a stronger grasp of culturally responsive teaching, and improve my knowledge of place-based learning. I believe I am continuing to develop courses that efficiently integrate the experiential learning prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy with academic approaches

traditionally used in British Columbia schools. English First Peoples 10 and 12 are courses that don't simply add Indigenous knowledge and practice into the regular curriculum, but truly give it equal value and respect alongside Eurocentric perspectives. Ideally, these courses will not only adequately prepare students with the literacy skills they need for post-secondary challenges, but also provide them with an awareness of various perspectives and philosophies that are necessary to be a fully functioning Canadian (and global) citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

I chose to use the method of *teacher inquiry* to pursue my question: *What happens when I incorporate experiential learning prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy and perspective into a competitive, hierarchical, and individualized Western framework?*

Teacher inquiry allowed me to explore this question that evolved from my own discomfort in attempting to fit unfamiliar curriculum and pedagogy within a structure of traditional formal assignments and high-stakes, standardized exams. Dana & Yendol-Hoppey describe teacher inquiry as a “movement that focuses on the concerns of teachers...and engages teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around a question” (2009, p.4). Teacher inquiry involves research that is carried out by teachers within their own personal contexts and is a defining element of teacher professionalism (Clarke & Erickson, 2006; Shagoury & Power, 2012). It allowed me to explore the unique challenges in my teaching assignment for the 2014-2015 school year. Inquiry’s specific perspective on teaching as a constantly evolving state of learning rather than a fixed and permanent knowledge (Clarke & Erickson, 2006) was reassuring as it reminded me to embrace the idea of teaching the English First Peoples curriculum as a journey and not a destination. In regards to data collection, teacher (also referred to as practitioner) inquiry allows for a broad definition of data including observations of students, student work of all kinds, and oral inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This allowed me to collect and analyze a wide variety of data in response to both student and teacher perceptions. Inquiry was also appropriate for the challenge of bridging the seemingly oppositional elements of my research question, (such as combining the often contrasting approaches of Indigenous and Eurocentric pedagogy as well as bridging

formal literacy tasks with an experiential approach to learning). For example, teacher inquiry acknowledges (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 22) that “questions are often born of frustration” yet inquiry also includes a “robust and inherent optimism” that reflection on practice has the potential to not only create solutions for teachers in their classrooms but for larger educational systems as well (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Teacher inquiry allowed me to reflect on the “bright spots” which existed in my first year of teaching EFP but also to directly confront the challenges that emerged (Shagoury & Power 2012, p.22).

A key element of my thesis was the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (CRT). CRT is compatible with practitioner inquiry which recognizes that students enter my classroom with unique life experiences as well as differing social, emotional, and academic needs and preferences (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). Inquiry allowed me to focus on the perspective of my students, as well as the perspectives of the school community and local members of the Aboriginal community. In most versions of practitioner research, “collaboration among and across participants is a key feature” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.41). Using a methodology that provided the opportunity for multiple participants and perspectives was essential for ensuring the representation of voices from the variety of groups in my classroom. It allowed me to engage with the diverse stakeholders involved with the implementation of the English First Peoples curriculum in a public school, and within the specific context of the Okanagan region. Battiste emphasizes that, “educators must also respect the fact that Indigenous knowledge can only be fully known from within the community contexts and through prolonged discussions with each of these groups” (2008, p. 502). Indigenous experiential learning involves moving beyond just printed materials and field visits, to include conversations with members of the Aboriginal community (Battiste, 2008; Integrated Resource



Package, 2008). Therefore it was necessary for me to focus on both “the context of the environment and the needs of the human beings involved” (Hubbard & Power, 2003, p.13).

Within the context of the EFP curriculum, the community extended beyond the Okanagan area to Aboriginal communities from the rest of British Columbia and other parts of Canada. When it came to exploring Aboriginal perspectives, providing examples beyond my local area was expected, as the course itself is global and involves viewpoints and histories of Indigenous peoples around the world. Practitioner inquiry proved to be a compatible method for this because it allowed for practitioner communities to include local as well as national and international connections. These communities were both “real and virtual, [with] their borders expanding and becoming more permeable as technology creat[ed] ever-increasing possibilities” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 56).

Teacher inquiry also required that I not only document classroom activities and student learning, but also consciously document my own perceptions, questions and changes in viewpoints over time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This complimented my focus on CRT which as a pedagogical approach first and foremost demanded that I constantly evaluate my own perceptions. Through reflective inquiry I was able to gather information about my own perspectives, (which as a settler instructor of Indigenous curriculum was essential).

The combination of culturally responsive teaching with teacher inquiry methodology proved to be an effective pairing because of practitioner inquiry’s roots in the pursuit of social justice. The vision of practitioner inquiry is of teachers who strive to challenge the status quo and change the system through their research (Hubbard &

Power, 2003). Teacher researchers who use this methodology embrace a commitment to improving the learning experiences and performance of students who have traditionally been marginalized by the education system (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This reflected the understanding that English First Peoples wasn't just an English course; it was part of a larger objective to make students more critically aware of contemporary and historical injustices faced by Aboriginal people, and to improve Canadian society to make it more equitable for all members. This was highly compatible with teacher inquiry methodology, which pursues the larger purpose of increasing teachers' sense of social responsibility and of contributing to a democratic society and larger movements of social justice and change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Another key component of practitioner inquiry is the expectation to make the "knowledge public beyond the immediate local context" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.45). It is my hope that this thesis will influence education beyond my own classroom. As one of the key problems stated in my introduction involved the low provincial participation rates in English First Peoples courses, sharing successes and setbacks from this journey with other educators in my district and around the province will be essential (as will communicating with other educators from outside my school in order to benefit my own practice).

In conclusion, my research question required that I evaluate the interplay between the often-conflicting perspectives and pedagogy of Indigenous and Eurocentric educational approaches, as well as implement elements of culturally responsive teaching. My data collection methods had to navigate the complex dynamics involved in incorporating the multiple perspectives of myself, my students, and the rest of our school

and Aboriginal community into a coherent narrative. Finally, the purpose of my research was to challenge traditional educational structures, with the goal of contributing towards a more equitable society. With these elements in mind, practitioner inquiry proved to be an ideal methodology to frame the challenge.

## **Inquiry Design**

### *Participants*

Participants included 29 students in my English 12 and 25 students in my English 10 First Peoples first semester classes.

### *Data Collection*

I collected data from three main sources over the course of the first semester in the 2014-2015 school year. These three sources were: individual student reflections/interviews, field notes collected during experiential activities, and my personal teacher research journal. A fourth source of data that I included was the provincial exam results for both the English 10 FP and the English 12 FP exam. These sources provided me with information on student engagement, and helped me determine what impact student participation in experiential activities had on academic reading and writing performance.

### *Student Reflections*

During the semester both EFP 10 and 12 students were given time to reflect on their experiences with a consistent set of questions after every experiential learning opportunity. These responses were a requirement of the course, but I did not give them a

grade. The intention was that students would not feel pressured to reflect in a particular way because their grade was dependent upon how they answered. Students were given two different types of reflection questions in response to particular activities. One type of question set was general and was used to gauge new information or connections students had made in response to an experience or guest presenter (see Appendix A for an example of post activity reflection questions). The second type of question sets were designed to determine if students had made a connection between an experiential learning activity and a traditional assignment (such as a writing activity or text analysis) or a learning outcome required for the course.

### *Final Course Evaluations*

At the end of the course both EFP10 and 12 students were given a final course evaluation. Students in my EFP 10 class completed a written evaluation on the last day of class which consisted of 7 open ended questions. Approximately one month after the completion of EFP12, students were given a set of 13 open ended response questions which they either completed in written form or in a video recorded interview where they answered the questions orally (see Appendices B and C for the EFP 12 and 10 Final Course Evaluation questions). The interviews were conducted by my colleague, a member of the research team. Interviews are another excellent option for teacher inquirers as they are able to capture student voice in both formal and informal situations (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). The reason for the one-month delay in final evaluations for the EFP12 students was that I wanted to ensure that students were aware of their provincial exam results. My initial research question asked how participation in experiential learning activities affected student performance on traditional tasks. The

EFP12 provincial exam is the clearest and most valid example of a traditional language arts assessment as it is both provincially standardized and worth a significant portion (40%) of a student's final mark. To ask students to complete an overall evaluation of the course without an inclusion of these exam results would have reduced the validity of conclusions reached from my data.

### *Field Notes from Experiential Activities*

During experiential learning activities I took field notes that documented how students engaged with particular activities, how they completed the objectives, and any comments they made. Field notes proved to be an excellent method for capturing the “action” that is prevalent in many classrooms but particularly in those involving experiential learning methods (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p.64). Although the term “experiential activities” covers a diverse range of options, most of my field notes focused on student engagement in the activity, what learning resulted from the activity, and whether or not students found the activity to be meaningful. These observations helped me reinforce the concept that Indigenous pedagogy and knowledge is academic and they also helped me connect experiential learning to other assignments that students completed. On two occasions my colleague and research team member collected field notes while I was teaching a lesson, but otherwise I completed the documentation myself. Field notes were also cross-referenced with individual student reflections.

Throughout the course I documented my own observations, thoughts, and experiences in a research journal. This journal included observations from the classroom and experiential activities as well as conversations and interactions with a group of supporting educators which included my fellow staff members, members of our district Aboriginal education team, local members of the Aboriginal Community, fellow graduate students, and my supervising professors from the University of British Columbia. Keeping a journal allowed me to both remember my interactions throughout the semester and also to capture and reflect on my own thoughts (Shagoury & Power, 2012). My notes specifically centered on the question of connecting the experiential activities to the academic skills of writing and text analysis required for the course. They also focused on changing established student (and teacher) perceptions that experiential learning, and other Indigenous knowledge is not “academic”.

#### *Timeline of Activities*

My goal for the first year of teaching EFP was to offer an “outside the classroom” experience every week. I did not achieve this goal as there were numerous factors that influenced these opportunities such as the availability of cultural experts, the availability of our school bus, and the time of day that our block fell in the daily rotation. During the semester when I conducted my research I continued to work towards the goal of offering at least one experiential activity per week for each of the EFP 10 and 12 classes. I only collected and analyzed data from one of the classes each week and the nature of the activities determined whether I chose to collect data from my EFP 10 or EFP 12 class.

## **Ethics Process**

My proposal was submitted to and approved by the UBC research and ethics committee. My ethics proposal explained that students and parents were all provided with an explanation of my research proposal as well being required to sign assent or consent forms before any information, classroom work or reflections from a student could be used in this thesis (see Appendix D for student assent and parent consent letters). All student names were removed (or replaced with pseudonyms) and no data was stored that included the use of original names. While I did take photos during the semester and conducted some of the final interviews on video, none of these artifacts have been shared and only the audio portion of the video was used. If any video footage is to be used in the future, additional permission will be required from students and parents and they will be able to screen the video before giving permission (see Appendix D for the video permission letter). My colleague was also approved as a member of the research team so she therefore had permission to observe classroom activities, take field notes, interview students and review and discuss collected data.

## **Data Analysis**

Using grounded theory, an inductive qualitative analysis method, I systematically analyzed data leading to the emergence of conceptual categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory was compatible with my use of a practitioner inquiry approach and allowed me to explore my wide range of data samples and not restrict myself only to my initial inquiry question. My thesis was designed to explore the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives into the public school system and it was possible that other

valuable insights would emerge beyond my preliminary wonderings. Teacher inquiry can “become a powerful vehicle for learning and reform” (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003) which is essential when looking at changes that will potentially be made in classrooms across the province with the implementation of British Columbia’s new curriculum. Grounded theory lends itself to the approach of embracing the questions and the journey and waiting to for themes to emerge. Following recommendations from Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003) I followed four steps for data analysis: description, sense-making, interpretation and implication drawing. The description and sense-making steps are explained here in the methodology chapter while the steps of interpretation and implication drawing are explained in chapters four and five.

### *Description and Sense-Making*

At the end of my data collection period I began by reading and reviewing all of my data. The amount of information I had collected and recorded over a five-month period was substantial and required multiple readings before I could even begin to organize it. I read through my field notes, teacher journal entries, student reflections and final evaluations 3 times. I also took both the grade 10 and grade 12 final evaluations and re-organized the responses according to each question. In other words, I typed out all 25 or 29 student responses to a particular question so I could see them all together and look for patterns. My notes from the EFP12 oral interviews were loosely typed out and not transcribed verbatim. As I reviewed the various data sources and reorganized the final course feedback I looked for patterns or trends and made notes about potential emerging themes. After my third review of the data I began to “cook” my notes (Shagoury & Power, 2012) and came up with six general themes that I used to code the data. These



themes were: 1) Community/relationships, 2) Experiential Learning, 3) Changes in attitudes or perceptions, 4) Outdoor learning, 5) Assessment, 6) Challenges and tensions. I chose a different colour to highlight each theme (blue, green, pink, orange, yellow and purple) and went back through the data and highlighted information according to the code I had chosen (see Appendix E for examples of coding).

### *Coding*

After I finished coding I re-organized my data according to the different themes. The largest amount of information collected fell into the category of experiential learning which would be expected as it was the foundation of my initial inquiry. After further investigation I realized that both the themes of “outdoor learning” and “assessment” also fell under the bigger category of experiential learning. Outdoor learning is a clear example of a particular type of experiential learning and after further analysis I recognized that it was only specifically highlighted by members of the EFP 10 class. In regards to assessment I realized that my data was drawn from the provincial exam results as well as one specific question from each of the final course evaluations. My data collected in regards to assessment was useful as a validation of the effectiveness of providing experiential learning opportunities and thus became a subcategory of that theme. After re-reading and re-organizing the information I had collected, I collapsed the six themes into four: 1) Experiential learning, 2) Communal learning 3) Tensions and challenges and 4) Changes in Perception. Each of these four themes contained sub categories acting as thematic embodiments of the larger concept and will be explained in chapter four.

## **Methodology Conclusion**

I approached this research through the method of practitioner inquiry which proved to be uniquely suited to the complex task of exploring the results of combining diverse pedagogical approaches. Practitioner inquiry was also compatible with culturally responsive teaching as both are focused on an awareness of social responsibility and a commitment to moving beyond the analysis of individual students, teachers, or classrooms into the realm of challenging traditional educational structures and systems with the ambitions of creating a more equitable society. I collected reflections from students in two classes of English First Peoples as well as the documentation of my own thoughts and observations through field notes and my teacher research journal. This data was cross referenced with results from the English 10 and 12 First Peoples provincial exams. Using the inductive qualitative analysis method of grounded theory, I systematically analyzed my data which allowed conceptual categories to surface. I was also able to organize data through the use of codes while retaining key elements of the narrative of the experience of EFP through the inclusion of student voices. After reviewing the data and coding the information, four themes emerged in the areas of communal learning, experiential learning, tensions, and changes in perception. The combination of practitioner inquiry and grounded theory allowed me to focus on specific observations relevant to my original research question, as well as to discover the emergence of patterns that will inform the general pursuit of educators who are also exploring the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives into their own practice.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Learnings**

After the extensive process of collecting and analyzing the data involved in this study, I was able to derive several themes. Within this chapter I describe how researching the implementation of the EFP curriculum offered positive validation for the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives, revealed areas of struggle and tension, and unearthed questions and possibilities for future consideration. Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum resulted in positive relationships with student engagement and academic performance, but also revealed challenges and conflicts created by the friction of merging diverse pedagogical approaches. These findings also highlight potential solutions and ways to move forward. This chapter begins with a review of the data sources used followed by a description of the four central themes that emerged from an analysis of this data, and then delves further into a detailed explanation of each of these themes.

### **Data Sources**

The results reflected in this section have been consolidated from four key sources collected over the course of the inquiry. These sources are: reflections from my personal research journal, field notes collected during various class activities, student reflections collected after activities and assignments including each class's end-of-course interviews and open-ended responses, and finally the results from the English 10 and 12 First Peoples provincial exams written in February 2015. The overall volume of information was significant, particularly the final class evaluations which consisted of 7 and 13 open-

ended written response questions for the EFP 10 and 12 classes respectively. There were 25 students in the EFP10 class and 29 in the EFP12 class. Eleven of the 29 EFP12 students answered the questions by live interview (facilitated by a member of the research team as outlined for and approved by UBCO's Research Ethics Board) with the time taken to complete the interview ranging in length from 10 to 35 minutes (the average being 15). The remaining 18 students completed the questions in written form. All 25 students in the EFP 10 class completed written responses for their final course evaluations. In the EFP12 class 9 of the 29 students self-identified as Aboriginal while in the EFP 10 class, 7 of the 25 self-identified as Aboriginal. Aside from this information I did not organize any of my data based on the ancestry of students. I do provide a few anecdotal examples that identify student ethnicity; however, when observations are discussed that relate to ancestry, the only data given is from my journal as students were never directed to reflect in regards to their own heritage.

### **Emergent Themes**

As previously mentioned I used the inductive qualitative analysis method of grounded theory to pull out the four key themes that emerged from the data. These themes were: 1) Positive student response to communal environments, 2) Positive student response to experiential learning opportunities, 3) Tensions created by combining Indigenous and Eurocentric pedagogies, and 4) Changing student perceptions.

## **Theme 1: Positive Student Response to Communal Environments**

The strongest and most consistent finding from the final student evaluation for the English 12 FP class was the positive response students had to the communal elements of the course. 28 of 29 students directly commented somewhere in their open ended written responses or interview responses (often multiple times and in extensive detail) about their appreciation of the opportunity to learn with and about their classmates. The importance of developing a sense of community is expected in an English First Peoples class as it is directly highlighted as an element of pedagogy in the EFP12 IRP as “commonly used within many First Peoples Cultures” and features of this approach include, “an emphasis of self and other in equal measure (for example, establishing a classroom environment that respects the contributions of each member and provides time and opportunity for even the most reticent students to contribute to group processes) and a recognition of the value of group process (for example, being especially sensitive for the time it takes for groups to come to consensus)” (Integrated Resource Package, 2008, p. 12).

All but one of the students made direct reference to how close they felt to their classmates by the end of the course. A student described how the EFP class “[wasn’t] just another class, we were more of a family. We wanted to participate in every activity; we learned together.” Another student echoed these sentiments: “we had a bond between the class; people actually felt trusting of other students like it’s a safe environment.” Yet another student described how she “had never felt that safe and that much raw emotion in a classroom setting before. I am now friends with people I wasn’t friends with or even spoke to.” The strong sense of community in the grade 12 class was attributed to two key sources. The first was the practice of weekly “sharing circles” and the second was class

activities where students were removed from the regular classroom setting and required to complete a common objective. In regards to the theme of Communal Learning, this section is divided into three categories. The first category describes types of class activities that led to a strong sense of community which includes sharing circles, and other community building activities in EFP12. The second category under this theme is the positive results of communal learning activities which includes increased attendance, increased commitment to class activities, and increased personal engagement with material being studied. The final category describes the differences between the response to communal learning activities in the EFP10 and EFP12 classes.

### *Activities That Led to a Strong Sense of Community*

#### Sharing Circles

“Sharing circles” or “talking circles” were first introduced to me by Anne Tenning, our District Principal of Aboriginal Education. For the first two years of EFP 10 and 12, Anne came in to lead the first talking circle of the semester for each class to explain the purpose and protocols for this activity (see Appendix F for the list of protocols). Sharing circles are formal in their structure with the core focus being respect for the group and also the voice of the individual. Sharing circles begin with a topic (introduced by the teacher or facilitator) and there is always an object that is passed around the circle. Every member of the circle is provided with the opportunity to speak on the topic at hand for as long as they wish, and only the person who is holding the object speaks while everyone else is expected to listen. Sharing circles can be used to help students get to know one another, to discuss issues, to reflect on experiences or to respond to experiential activities or texts being studied in class. At the beginning of the

semester the topics for discussion were relatively simple and student responses were usually very short (and often repetitive). By the end of the EFP12 course, students were responding with thought and depth and often shared emotional information of personal significance (Teacher Journal, 2014, 2015; Interviews, 2015). Personally I have never used a teaching strategy that created such a sense of connectedness within a group of students. One very extroverted student who had multiple public speaking responsibilities in our school (often in front of large crowds) confided in me outside of class that nothing made his heart beat faster than when his turn came in the sharing circle because he was so concerned that he wanted to express himself thoughtfully and say what he really meant (Journal, 2014). One student mentioned, “I’ve never been this close with a class...the sharing circles...there are certain people I’ve gone to school with for years, since elementary school...there were things people said in the sharing circle you wouldn’t say unless you felt safe” (Interview, 2015). Another student echoed, “sharing circles were integral in getting us to bond ...at the end of the course we could all trust and connect...you could be yourself, we were a family by the end of the course we were so open with each other it was quite incredible” (Interviews, 2015).

#### Other Community Building Activities (EFP 12)

In addition to the sharing circles, students cited a number of other activities that increased the strength of the bond between them. All of these activities involved a) a location away from the school or b) some type of stress or challenge that required students to work together to achieve a common goal or to put themselves in a position of vulnerability in front of their classmates. A key example occurred during the beginning of the course when students took a class trip up a steep trail to study some local pictographs

and connect with the short story “Vanishing Points” by Richard Wagamese (2008). One student in the class (who had recently moved to our school) was in a wheelchair and thus a 25-minute uphill hike over rough terrain became significantly problematic. Helping this student get to the top of the hike was only possible with the physical contribution of each member of the class to help push and pull her in a trailrider chair. Ultimately the trip was successful, and because it was so early in the semester it solidly established the expectation that all members of the class were responsible for the well being of each individual (Research Journal, 2014; Interview, 2015). Students described vivid memories of a number of experiences in their final course reflections that included a group poetry performance at a community dinner at the local First Nations school, and a number of class performance days where students chose to take risks and perform in front of their peers in a way that revealed personal details in their lives (Research Journal, 2014; Field Notes, 2014; Student Reflections, 2014; Interview, 2015). Each of these activities contributed to adding additional layers of communication and trust within the community of the classroom. After a group performance of the poem “History Lesson” by Dr. Jeannette Armstrong (2005) at the Outma Cultural School one student wrote:

*After performing at the banquet on November fourth I got a feeling of accomplishment that I don't usually get with school projects. It felt really good to do something like that and be involved in the community. What I think went well would be the way that such a variety of people who haven't really talked a lot, really came together and did something powerful. Some of the most important things I learned during this experience would obviously be the true facts about Christopher Columbus in that he was actually the opposite of what people think he is. But more importantly I learned that through a certain process a group of people can really come together and work efficiently and cooperatively. Some challenges I had to overcome would be my fear of public speaking. I don't find performing difficult because of my many years performing dance but I struggle to speak confidently in front of a large group of people. I overcame my fear by the trust I gained in my group. We did many circles and exercises that really brought us closer and helped us gain our confidence with the poem and I think doing that process with such an awesome group of people really helped me. I think this*



*experience will help me with life after high school life because I really stepped out of my comfort zone to do this and I have a lot more comfort with myself because of it. I feel like when I have to do presentations after high school now I will have the confidence to do them at a better level. The most memorable part of this project would be the bond I have with my peers. I was very glad I could connect the curriculum to something outside of the school because it was a really special night for me and I feel like everyone who was a part of it feels the same. For me it was really important my project had something to do with the local Okanagan First Nation, and I think what we did was perfect. It was an important night and the Jeannette Armstrong poem we recited meant a lot and I think it was just overall a really great experience for everyone at the banquet. (Student Reflection, 2014).*

### Positive Results of Communal Learning

Students were asked if the strong community in the class contributed in any way to their academic performance or their understanding of academic tasks. Three mini-themes emerged from this question and each were a positive result of Communal Learning. According to the students, community in the classroom contributed to student performance by increasing student attendance, increasing participation and contributions to class activities, and increasing comfort level to allow students to connect on a personal level with the material being discussed and studied in class.

### Student Attendance

When asked why the sense of community was so important, students mentioned that their connection to their classmates was responsible for “pulling them into the class” and making them want to be there. Another student explained how she knew many students who “weren’t that connected to school” but they always came to English class. The strong community encouraged some students to attend who might otherwise not have. This obviously could have a positive effect on eventual student success, as another student highlighted, “showing up was important... I know a few students that are not too into school but [with] the bonds and the community feeling in that class, they wanted to

come to that class...so they would come to that class regularly. It gets everyone more interested in being there. You can't learn anything if you're not there" (Student Interviews, 2015).

### Commitment to Class Activities

A number of EFP12 students mentioned the commitment that students had towards making class activities successful. One student noted, "we were a very committed class...the more people committed to something the more fun it made it" (Interview, 2015). When students put effort into participating in class activities or doing performances or presentations for others or sharing their thoughts, the capacity for engaging other students was increased (Journal, 2014). Students learned more effectively when concepts were shared or reinforced or presented in an engaging manner by their classmates using their strengths. Ultimately class activities were successful because students were contributing their best efforts, whether it be to a whole class activity or to an individual presentation or performance that contributed to the learning of everyone (Field Notes, 2014, 2015). The culture in high school classrooms can often be one where pressure is put on students *not* to try too hard or show too much enthusiasm; however, once the culture of dedication to the class experience had been established by the EFP12 students, the engagement level during class days such as the multicultural banquet and the poetry café, as well as activities such as the blanket ceremony and participatory workshops such as the Metis presentation was very high. I was often surprised at the willingness of even very introverted students to challenge themselves in regards to assignments that pushed them well beyond their comfort zones (Journal, 2014, 2015; Interview, 2015).

### Personal Engagement with Material

A final way in which class community contributed to the learning environment and students' academic performance is that because students felt safe and comfortable in the class, they were able to truly engage with the material and connect it to their own lives. Many student reflections revealed how strongly they had connected with different texts we had studied in class. As an English teacher I believe I have always had the opportunity to learn more personal information about my students than teachers of other subject areas; however, the level of trust that existed in the class, combined with the personal and emotional nature of many of the texts we studied led to more personal revelations than I have experienced before, and for the first time a majority of students were sharing their stories out loud with the rest of their classmates and not just with me through written responses. For example, students who had been victims of racism felt comfortable sharing their experiences with their classmates and students who had never experienced racism gave examples of a time they had been bullied or victims of abuse or struggled with challenges such as depression. A final very powerful way in which students were able to engage more deeply with the material studied was when students of Aboriginal ancestry were able to give specific examples of situations from their own lives that mirrored experiences described by characters in a text or that reinforced concepts studied in class. This allowed class members to realize that situations for Aboriginal people that they were reading about and watching in class weren't abstract injustices from a distant past but were real issues that directly impacted their friends and classmates. Aboriginal students were able to relate to ideas and people represented in the literature studied in the course and share those connections with others. All of these

issues allowed students to connect more personally to course content. Students' willingness to share personal connections contributed to the learning of others:

*Today was a very emotional sharing circle. Students were reflecting on their novels and discussing something that stood out for them. There were many memorable comments but students who had read IH (Indian Horse), mainly spoke about their new understanding of the horrors of residential school. Just by chance, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ were almost at the end of the circle and each of them shared how their grandparents had gone to residential school and that their grandparents' experiences were very similar to the ones described in the novel. \_\_\_\_\_ even went on to explain how her grandmother had watched her best friend die right in front of her. I could tell that the other students took a few seconds to absorb the information and to make the connection between what they had read, and the lives of their classmates. I think these are the moments I need to strive for in this course. It can't just be about exposing students to the First Peoples texts. It needs to be taken further so students can connect their learning to their immediate reality and the people they interact with everyday. (Teacher Journal November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014)*

#### *Differences between EFP 12 and EFP 10 in Regards to Communal Learning*

The community connections were not reported as being as strong with the grade ten class. While there were a number of students who wrote on their final reflections that "good memories were made and the whole class connected" this theme did not stand out as overwhelmingly as it did with the grade 12s (Reflections, 2015). On the grade 10 final reflections for the question "How would you improve this course?" six students specifically mentioned the need for more activities such as "switching up everyone better" and "more team building exercises". One student explained, "I think we should have done more activities to become closer to each other. That way we'd feel more comfortable sharing things in the sharing circle". While the final comments about the overall EFP10 course were ultimately very positive, these student responses confirmed my feeling that as a group, the EFP10 class was not as cohesive as the grade 12 group. Looking back at my notes I realize there were an unusually high number of students in

that class who struggled with mental health issues including severe anxiety, depression and anger management. As the instructor I struggled with sharing circles because I wasn't sure if I was benefitting these students by forcing them into situations that seemed to cause them discomfort. Several of these students reacted very poorly to being asked to work with students they weren't comfortable with or to speak in a sharing circle and their comfort level in general did not appear to improve over time. Students always had the option of passing and a few often did. It became a bit of a vicious circle where I was reluctant to use community-building activities because certain students struggled with them and so I was not as consistent with strategies such as sharing circles and therefore we did not develop as strong a feeling of community. There were many highlights from the grade 10 class but the theme of community was clearly not as prevalent as it was with the grade 12s. Here is an example of a sharing circle from my grade 10 class:

*We had our sharing circle today right at the beginning of class. \_\_\_\_\_ was on her way to class but took off as soon as she saw the different set up of the chairs. Fortunately, with the exception of my disappointment about \_\_\_\_\_ leaving, it was a very positive sharing circle. Most of the students shared very sincere and thoughtful connections to the novel about what they found interesting or made personal connections to the book. I felt the responses had depth and it was great to hear that the students really liked their novels. \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ only said their name and then passed. When I spoke to \_\_\_\_\_ afterwards she said she was going to say something but then as soon as she looked up at the other students she panicked and changed her mind. She told me in private what she thought about the novel and at least she really liked it. A highlight was that \_\_\_\_\_ shared quite a bit. She explained how she personally connected "to the entire book and everything in the book was exactly like her own life" (she read Absolutely True Diary). I was really glad that she spoke and that she spoke for an extended time and that she shared a personal connection. She has told me quietly a few times how much she relates to this book and she is a strong reminder of how much these novels mean to some students. I was a bit disappointed that while the rest of the class listened carefully and respectfully to her comments, I'm not sure if those other students who read the same novel truly appreciated the fact that a member of their class shares the daily reality of a character in a novel who has a very challenging life. (Teacher journal, Nov. 14, 2014.)*

This reflection is a reminder that the sharing circles both create opportunities for a powerful exchange of ideas and perspectives but also require students to place themselves in a position of personal vulnerability. This can create an overwhelming challenge for students who struggle with anxiety or whose emotional stability is otherwise compromised. In these instances I learned that a) I needed to accept that certain students may never or only rarely contribute to a sharing circle and that they were giving the most that they were capable of at the time, b) particular scaffolds (such as finding a way to communicate before class that there would be a sharing circle) were helpful for students with anxiety, c) giving students advance warning about the topics of the sharing circles so they could prepare their responses resulted in more powerful sharing sessions, d) it was helpful to discuss options with the school counsellor and other members of school support teams for working with students on strategies to help them navigate the emotional challenges of sharing circles, and e) continuing to reinforce the themes of respect and risk taking in the classroom was an essential and continuous process.

In hindsight, the communal learning environment endorsed by Aboriginal pedagogy and emphasized in the EFP curriculum proved to be a positive addition to the learning environment as demonstrated by the EFP12 students, but also an instructional challenge in the case of the EFP10 class when particular students were emotionally vulnerable. I struggle as an educator as to where to draw the line in regards to my own actions and responsibility as the classroom instructor. At what point are certain strategies not helping particular students? I believe that even though the sense of community was not as strong within the EFP10 class as it was with the EFP12 students, the overall learning experience was still more positive than it would have been with a traditional individualist approach to classroom instruction. I know that the students who resisted the

sharing circles and other community building strategies ultimately wanted to feel that they belonged and that their voices were heard and valued, but at the time did not feel comfortable in situations that required them to be vulnerable.

An observation that I made in regards to the make up of my grade 10 and 12 classes was an awareness of particular students who were exceptionally effective in creating a safe and connected environment in the classroom. I came to think of these students as “boundary crossers” and I believe these types of students are extremely valuable for building a trusting environment in any group but particularly within a First Peoples classroom where difficult societal issues are confronted:

*I know I have made a number of comments this semester already about the strength of the bonds that are being made in my grade 12 class. While I attribute much of this to the commitment to weekly sharing circles and a number of activities that have pulled everyone together I am also beginning to recognize the importance of students who are what I will call right now (for lack of a better term) “boundary crossers” or “ambassadors”. What I have in my grade 12 group are students of Aboriginal ancestry who carry social weight with their peers who are comfortable speaking out and sharing their thoughts and elements of their culture with their classmates. I also have non-Aboriginal students who also carry weight with their peers who are particularly thoughtful and “open hearted” and sincerely embrace the themes of the course and the importance of respecting viewpoints different from their own. Not everyone in the class needs to be a boundary crosser (I would say I have about 6 in my grade 12 class) but these 6 are such positive forces for connection and acceptance, for teaching and learning that the remaining students are inspired and made safe through the actions of these others. I myself try to model the habits of a boundary crosser and bring in guest speakers and presenters who fit this title as well. Looking at my grade 10 class I realize that I had fewer boundary crossers, and that most of the class are introverts by nature. It made me realize that perhaps one of the things I need to do is focus more on confidence and giving support to people to speak up, however you can’t simply make someone extroverted, and you can’t just make someone become respected by their peers. I think I need to make more options available for students to express themselves to each other (such as through online platforms) so that students who are shy have other opportunities to be leaders and boundary crossers. I also need to think beyond grade 10 and focus on helping grade 10 students become boundary crossers by grade 12. (Journal, 2015.)*

While these boundary crossers ultimately made my job as an instructor much easier in my grade 12 class, the reality still exists that no matter what the nature of the students in a particular group, a communal focus should allow them to make more meaningful connections to their learning. Helping students recognize how their learning is related to both the people and the world around them should result in a more significant educational experience. An interesting anecdote to conclude this section involves a student from that grade 10 class who was one of those who would not contribute to sharing circles and who was often resistant to attempts to create classroom community. I was astonished at the beginning of the current (2015-16) school year when she asked to be a peer tutor for my new group of EFP10 students. This year it has seemed as if this student has become a completely different person. She is a strong contributor to the course and works hard to connect with students who are less socially engaged and she often speaks about her anxiety the year before. She has spoken in every class sharing circle this semester and even volunteered to perform during our poetry café (which she had no obligation to do whatsoever as a peer tutor). This student has been a powerful reminder for me that as teachers we attach success to a course's timeline and if I had judged this student in regards to social engagement at the end of last year's EFP 10 class she would have "failed". The reality was however that her personal timeline of development for public speaking, social engagement and overcoming anxiety simply did not align with the 5-month deadline expected by the school system. Ultimately the communal focus of the EFP curriculum creates a more effective learning environment for students, it just needs to be understood that students will respond to the emphasis on personal and social connections in different ways and at different rates.



## Theme 2: The Value of Experiential Learning

A theme that emerged from both the EFP 12 and the EFP 10 reflections and final reflections/interviews was that students valued and appreciated experiential learning opportunities. The English 12 FP IRP defines experiential learning as creating, *“opportunities for figural as well as symbolic learning such as having students internalize, memorize, and present oral texts [and] having students create their own oral texts, or having students engage directly with the local First Peoples community through field studies, interviews, and the involvement of guest speakers”* (2008, p.12). While both classes conveyed the benefits of experiential learning activities, there was a divergence in their explanations for this view. The English 10 FP students emphasized an appreciation for learning opportunities that were conducted in an outdoor environment, while the EFP12 students made positive references to experiential activities that were relevant and meaningful because they involved working with members of the local community. After a discussion of the different approaches to experiential learning in the EFP10 and EFP12 classes, this section also includes a specific example of EFP12 students connecting a Thomas King essay with two experiential learning opportunities, and finishes with an explanation of the connection between experiential learning and student performance on summative standardized assessments.

### *Outdoor Learning (EFP 10)*

The English 10 FP students responded strongly to the experiential activities that took them outside the school building, specifically into areas of nature. During one activity where students were working on imagery and poetry in a forest setting, student reflections overwhelmingly revealed a positive response to the natural environment. Field

notes from that day document that not only did students write more, (even reluctant writers produced more work than they usually did), but student responses also described how the natural environment allowed them to feel more alive, reduced their anxiety, connected them to the texts, and enhanced their creativity (Field Notes, 2014; Student Reflections, 2014). When students were asked directly if they saw any connection between an outdoor environment and academic objectives, one student wrote, “being outside made me feel more creative and helped me focus” while another student responded, “it was easier to think about ideas when we were outside”, and when discussing a nature-themed poem, yet another shared, “outside...we’re experiencing the poem kind of in a 4D setting... I feel I can truly connect to the poem when I’m outside” (Student Reflections, 2014).

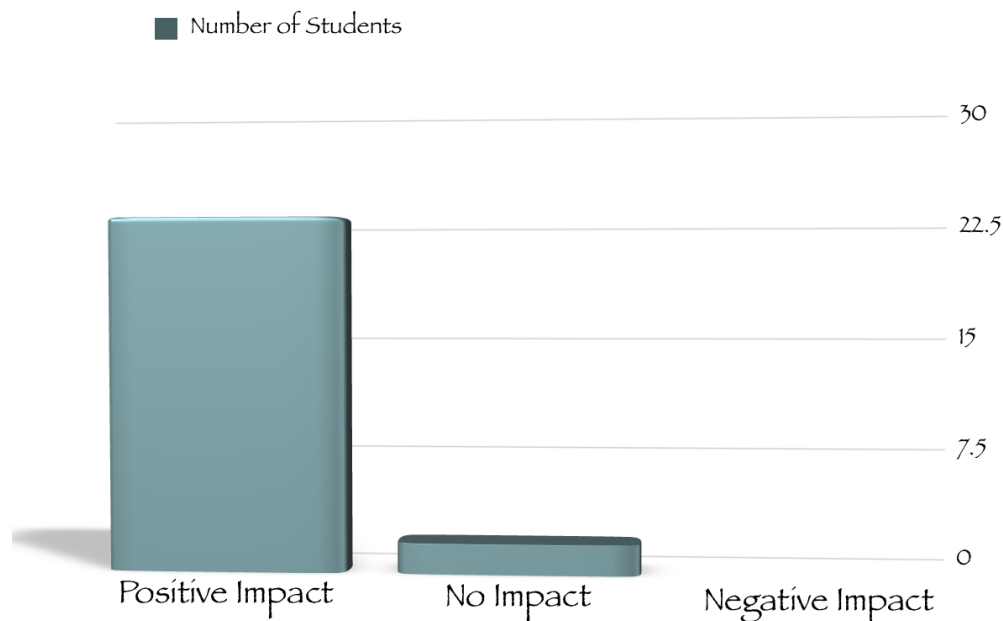
Various students from the EFP 10 class did mention other experiential activities such as guest speakers, hands-on activities (such as using whiteboards and play-doh), activities involving movement (such as relays and scavenger hunts), and having the opportunity to express themselves in different ways (for example through music, art, or dance); however, as a collective group the experience of going outside was mentioned the most often and consistently and described in the most detail (Student Reflections, 2014, 2015; Final Reflections, 2015).

On their final course evaluations, EFP 10 students were asked, “Do you feel that activities such as going outdoors, having guest presentations etc.”

- a) Improved your skills in English (reading and writing and oral communication)
- b) Hurt your skills in English
- c) Had no effect on skills in English

Please explain your answer.

EFP10: How did the experiential activities affect your reading, writing and oral language skills?



**Figure 4.1 Impact on English Skills (EFP 10)**

For this question (see Figure 4.1), 23 students chose “A” and gave a variety of reasons for their answers such as “it helped by making connections to our surroundings”, “I believe it improved my skills [because] I am a different writer and it was easier to

think of ideas when we were outside,” and, “it really helped me open up a lot like talking in front of everyone during the sharing circle.” Two students chose answer “C”. One student didn’t give any explanation and the second student wrote, “I didn’t notice any change by going outside. It was still fun though.” (Student Reflections, 2015).

In regards to learning within a natural environment, the EFP 10 student responses reflect both Aboriginal pedagogy and place-based education’s focus on the necessity of connecting learning to the local landscape. Syilx (Okanagan) author and scholar Dr. Jeannette Armstrong explains, “the landforms in the stories are teachings and are reminders to each generation that the land is at the centre of how we are to behave,” (Armstrong, Derickson, Maracle, & Young-Ing, 1993, p.4) and Jo-ann Archibald, the Associate Dean for Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia writes, “the natural context for learning stories is the land” (2008, p.73). Ojibway author Richard Wagamese also relies heavily on nature’s capacity to inspire creative thought. Wagamese explains, “only in the aloneness the land and rivers represented could I find the freedom to dream and create. Many of my stories were born along a river,” (2008, p.45). Place-based educators also strongly urge children and teachers to “regularly spend time out-of-doors building long-term relationships with familiar, everyday places,” (Gruenewald, 2008, p.316). In his book *Last Child in the Woods* Richard Louv highlights the numerous benefits of taking children outdoors including the development of creativity, the calming and therapeutic properties of nature, and the documentation of the “growing body of evidence that links physical exercise and experience in nature to mental acuity and concentration,” (2008, p.100).

I have mentioned previously that there were numerous students in the EFP10 class managing social-emotional challenges and it was interesting to note that many student reflections also highlighted the comforting and anxiety-reducing effects of being outside. When students were asked to reflect on how important (or not important) the natural world was to them, many students explained how much they preferred an outdoor setting as opposed to being in the classroom. Some examples of student written reflections are below:

*“I feel happy and free outside because I feel like I can do anything or go anywhere, and be myself cause there’s no one there to judge. The natural world is important cause everything’s at peace and the way it’s supposed to be.”*

*“[The natural world] is very important. Everyone should get a little fresh air everyday. When I have panic attacks I always go outside. It calms me down and makes me feel at peace.”*

*“Being outside makes me feel more connected to the land and makes me feel more alive and I want to go explore and learn more. It makes me feel this way because I love the outdoors and being with mother nature.”*

*“Being outside is very important to me. I’d much rather be in the outdoors than indoors. Being outside makes me feel more connected to life and I feel free.”*

*“When I am outside I feel more awake and alive. I can feel the natural energy from the earth. I also feel more focused, calm and in control of my thoughts compared to when I sit in a classroom.”*

*“The natural world is important because it is life. I feel peaceful and in the present moment being outside makes me feel like I don’t want to go anywhere else.” (Student Reflections, 2014.)*

While these quotations are a response to being in nature that do not specifically make connection to an academic focus, they are relevant to the overall well-being of the students. Research on the importance of social-emotional learning, as well as the Indigenous emphasis on a holistic approach to education suggests that any conditions producing such a positive mental effect in the students would naturally translate into an “effective learning environment [because it] pays attention to the whole child, including the physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual aspects of the learner” (Chrona, 2014).

### *Connections to Experiential Learning (EFP12)*

EFP 12 students also responded very strongly to experiential learning activities. The most significant difference in comparison to the grade 10 students is that while experiential lessons in EFP12 still involved learning opportunities outside the building, they weren’t necessarily correlated with nature. Experiential highlights for the EFP12 class in general were focused on authentic tasks (where student perceived their work as having an impact on their lives or the lives of others) and working with members of the community. Some of these activities included meeting with their kindergarten buddies at a local elementary school, presentations from guest speakers (usually off campus), participation in inquiry projects (involving members of the community), creative options during the class (such as the multicultural banquet and poetry café) and interactive presentations such as the Metis presentation and the blanket exercise. One student reflected, “I truly think opportunities outside of the classroom build our understanding of a strong culture that surrounds us [and] it gives us an opportunity to learn [in a] hands on [way] and make connections with different educators in our community” and another

student wrote, “it’s awesome to be a part of something and contribute to something more than yourself... learning something about this community and about destruction of Aboriginal rights through history has made me feel like part of the Okanagan...I think our group made a small step towards a better and healthier relationship with everyone in our community” (Student Reflections, 2014). In regards to general experiential learning opportunities, one student said she appreciated the activities because “they were hands on ...we got moving and we got to express ourselves differently ...I’m more of a visual learner and I have to do things to learn them and it helped me remember it a lot better.” (Interview, 2015.)

The English 12 FP students were specifically asked how they would respond to someone who claimed that there was no place for experiential learning in an academic, provincially examinable course such as English First Peoples. Multiple students explained that the experiential activities improved the learning conditions and their success on reading and writing tasks (Reflections/Interviews, 2015). One student stated, “you’re more engaged with your class and you can understand concepts better when given a new setting or area to learn it,” while another student wrote, “there needs to be a balance between book learning and active learning...everyone learns differently and always doing book learning gets very tiring and stressful,” (Interviews, Reflections, 2015). In contrast with the EFP 10 students who emphasized the connection between working in nature and creative expression, the EFP12 students primarily highlighted the relationship between experiential activities and their comprehension of particular texts that they studied in the course and were required to recall for the provincial exam. On two specific occasions I carefully documented lessons where students had both a creative experiential activity as well as a guest speaker to help them connect to a particular text. In

each case the student reflections demonstrated that the activities increased their comprehension of the text, their recall of the text, and their emotional investment in the text (Student Reflections, 2014; Journal, 2014). For example, when students were asked to describe if experiential activities helped them prepare for the exam, a student explained, “I feel like I really did absorb a lot...the hands on learning meant the topics were ‘in you’” (Interview, 2015). Place-based education is aligned with the community based and experiential learning praised by the EFP 12 students as it represents a “pedagogy that relates directly to student experience of the world, and that improves the quality of life for people and communities” (Gruenewald, 2008, p.315). These activities are also reflective of the First Peoples Principles of Learning which emphasize that, “a person’s experiences in school need to be an authentic part of students’ life experiences rather than be designed or experienced as a preparation for a life to be lived later” (Chrona, 2014). They are designed to create a tangible connection between knowledge and life experience (Battiste, 2002).

#### *An Example of Experiential Activities Reinforcing a Key Text in EFP12*

In order to help students understand the essay *You’re Not the Indian I Had In Mind* by Thomas King (2003) students participated in two experiential lessons. The first was a guest presentation from Paul Seesequasis who is the editor of Theytus Books and a collector of historical Indigenous photography. The second was a creative “photo booth” activity meant to help students reflect on constructing identity with visual images. King’s essay is a difficult text because of its high vocabulary and fragmented structure, but most of all because the key focus of the essay (the inaccurate construction of the identity of a race of people through manipulated photographs) is very difficult for students to grasp.



The essay specifically discusses the well known American photographer Edward Curtis who is credited with capturing thousands of photographs of Native Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Curtis is also known to have staged his photos and altered them in order to create his own romanticized vision of a tragic and vanishing race (King, 2003). Students were asked to reflect after Paul's presentation and I also evaluated the group's ability to connect the text to the photo booth activity through another written reflection. At this point (because of scheduling more than anything else), students had received very little direct instruction in regards to the key elements of King's essay. While they had read the essay, they had almost no explanation or clarification from me before participating in the activities and writing their reflections. Below is a breakdown of my evaluation of student understanding after the photo booth activity and Paul's presentation (based on student written responses):

Photo booth Activity: Present: 28 Absent: 1

**Question 1: Please explain what the purpose of yesterday's [photo booth] activity was.**

- 18 students were able to explain the main purpose of constructing an identity
- 10 students were able to make a detailed explanation of constructing identity and were also able to identify the connection with the concept of stereotyping a group of people
- 10 students made a direct reference to King's essay (they were not prompted to do this in the first question)

**Question 2: Did this activity help you understand the essay?**

- 24 students answered “yes”
- 2 students answered “kind of” (both students explained they somewhat already understood the essay and Paul’s presentation had also helped)
- 2 students did not write a response

**Question 3: Explain the connection between the “Constructing Identity”**

**Photo Shoot and Thomas King’s Essay *You’re Not the Indian I Had in Mind*. Include 2 direct quotes from the essay.**

- 23 students demonstrated full understanding in their responses
- 2 students demonstrated partial understanding in their responses
- 0 students demonstrated minimal understanding
- 3 students did not write a response

Overall the students felt that the two experiential activities had helped them understand a complex essay, and they were able to demonstrate their understanding through their written responses. I was impressed because the essay is difficult both in written expression and themes; however, students were able to convey acceptable understanding with very little direct instruction about the essay. One of my students who has a learning disability in both reading comprehension and written output wrote on his reflection that the combination of guest speaker and experiential activity was “very effective”. He explained that the ideas were “shown in both metaphor and a presentation...it was a success” (Student Reflection, 2014). I followed up with the three students who left the third question blank. All three understood the concept of the photo booth activity but struggled to explain the key ideas in King’s essay. Two of them had

not finished reading the entire essay and for these students in particular it would most certainly have benefitted them to have more explanation about the essay before they participated in the activities.

In addition to increasing understanding, certain activities also allowed EFP12 students to connect on a personal and emotional level with texts. Here is a sample student reflection in which a student connected the short story “The Boy In the Ditch” by Drew Hayden Taylor (1998) to his time spent with his kindergarten buddy and a guest presentation by a fellow student:

*Do you really see people? When you see \_\_\_\_\_ smiling in the hallways would you ever have thought that he was mentally abused as a child? Did anybody know what happened to the boy in the ditch that made him act in risky ways such as gas sniffing? When you laugh and run and play with your little buddy do you really know anything about them? The answers to these questions are indecisive. Because the truth is, we have no idea what goes on in people's lives further than what we see on the surface. (Student Reflection, 2014.)*

For the same reflection another student wrote:

*In the story ‘The Boy In the Ditch’ a young boy named Wilson ends up drowning after sniffing gasoline. No one expected this from him because he wasn't the kind of boy to do this. But no one really understood him. His own parents couldn't appreciate his curiosity for arts and astronomy. They weren't abusive parents and he had a relatively happy life. But he was missing connection with extremely important people in his life. Even his teacher didn't believe in him. He told Wilson that he wasn't good enough to be an astronomer which crushed Wilson's dreams early. His friends did not help either-they teased him and truly didn't understand his way of thinking. The truth is everyone needs someone to understand and believe in them. \_\_\_\_\_ seems like a bright and happy guy on the outside shining for everyone but he has more than one side. We got to see that yesterday and it was extremely refreshing to drop down the walls and illusions around someone and see into the depth of someone's story so that he could feel understood after his extremely hard life. We see that our little buddies have different lives behind the ones that they have at school and they're not all what they seem. Children might be problem children because they don't feel understood. We got a chance to connect with another person with many stories.*

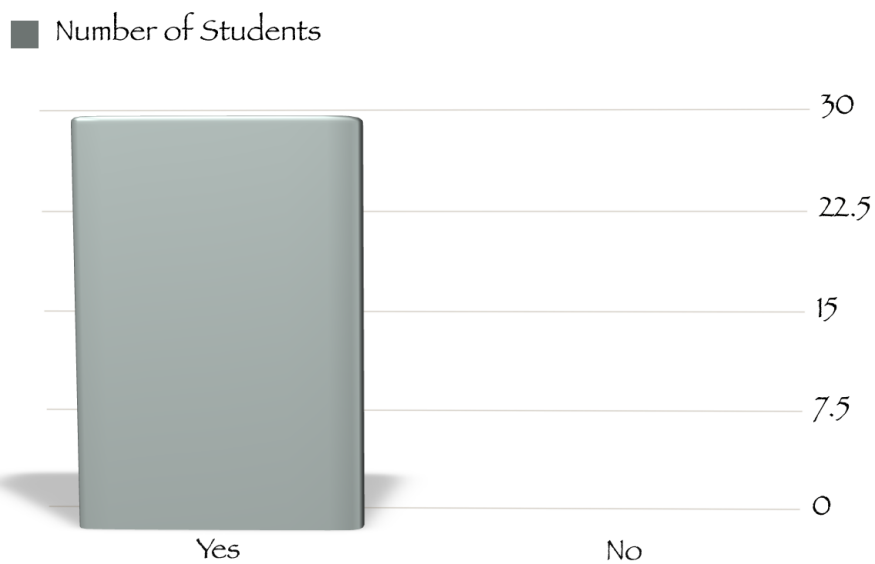
*We see in all these stories that people desire human connection and the chance to be understood because being alone figuratively and literally can be very painful.*  
(Student Reflection, 2014.)

Reflecting back on the differences in the connections made by the two classes (meaning the EFP 10 class connecting outdoor environments to creativity and the EFP12 students connecting experiential activities to specific texts), I realize it was likely because I often structured the activities for the two classes with different intentions. While both EFP 10 and 12 require students to be able to express themselves creatively, in EFP 12 there is a specific portion of the provincial exam that requires students be able to write in depth on particular texts (such as Thomas King's essay). It was important that not only would the students be able to understand the text, but they also needed to be able to recall specific details and relate the texts to larger themes. In both their final interviews and evaluations as well as their reflections after experiential activities, students reported that they were able to comprehend the texts more easily because of the partnered experiential activities. They could also recall texts more clearly which in the case of certain texts was sometimes months after they had originally been studied. In general, students believed this was an effective strategy as one student explained, "doing the activities-it made everything stick more-everything we did had a purpose and it was connected to the course" and another student stated, "the memories and learning [were] 'imprinted' even more...you [could] still easily recall the info because you had a hands on visual learning process....it will be forever ingrained in your memory" (Interviews, 2015).

## *Results on Standardized Assessments*

The final course evaluations and interviews for both EFP 10 and 12 revealed that students believed they improved their reading, writing and oral language skills. In regards to the provincial exam results, on the English 10 provincial exam student marks were on average within 2 percent of in-class marks, (the in-class class average was 80% and the provincial exam average was 78%). In the grade 12 class the in-class average was 75% and provincial exam average was 70%. It was expected that the provincial exam marks would be slightly lower than the in-class marks. Only English 12 FP students were specifically asked to reflect on whether they were prepared for the provincial exam.

EFP12: Did you feel you were prepared for the provincial exam?



**Figure 4.2 Preparation for Provincial Exam (EFP 12)**

All 29 students stated that they felt prepared (see Figure 4.2). One student explained, “I believe I was [prepared for the exam] ...throughout the year our writing assignments were all similar in style to the three writing pieces on the exam” (Interview, 2015). Another student wrote, “I felt very prepared from all the class prep and practice essays.... the movies and novel studies were done in a way that it stuck in our heads” (Interview, 2015). A number of students also stated that they felt very confident going into the exam and their confidence increased even more once they saw the content of the exam (Reflections/Interviews 2015). A number of students mentioned that they “did better than [they] had expected” or “did better than [they had] ever done before on a final English exam” (Interviews, 2015). Overall the grade 12 marks were 5% above the provincial average and the English 10 FP final exam results were 15% above the provincial average. Unfortunately, there was no district average for comparison as we are the only school in the district that offers English First Peoples. English 10 FP students completed their evaluations on the last day of class (unlike the EFP 12 students who completed written responses or were interviewed approximately 1 month after the completion of the course when students were aware of their exam results).

Ultimately what the exam results reveal is that the active learning and community building prevalent in Aboriginal instructional techniques did not negatively impact student performance on provincial standardized written assessments. Both student perspectives and actual test scores demonstrate that students were successful on their final course evaluations of academic reading and writing tasks. What is inconclusive is whether or not students *improved* their test scores (or ultimately scored higher than they might have had they taken “regular” English 10 or English 12). Some students from each class stated that not only did they improve their academic skills, but they improved more

than they would have in “regular” English (Reflections, 2015; Interviews 2015), and as previously mentioned, certain students felt they had been more successful than they had been in the past on final English exams in previous grades. A source of information that could potentially have been enlightening in this regard might have been student grade 9 and grade 11 final class marks from the 2013-2014 school year, however because of the lengthy job action and the resulting cancellations of year end final exams, those marks would not necessarily be a reliable source of information.

### **Theme 3: Points of Tension**

A third theme that emerged from the data was the realization that even though EFP 10 and 12 are provincially developed courses with prescribed curriculum and are designed to be delivered within the current public education system in this province, there is still considerable tension when attempting to combine Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum with an Eurocentric structure. Four key areas of tension that arose included: 1) The challenge to create a positive atmosphere in a class with sensitive and emotional material 2) The challenge of formal instruction and assessment involving texts that had cultural or personal significance, 3) The lack of engagement with certain activities for some students of Aboriginal ancestry and, 4) Balancing the schedule of written assignments with the unpredictable scheduling of various experiential, community-based opportunities.

## *Tension in Creating a Positive Atmosphere with Emotionally Challenging Topics and Texts*

The need for students to have positive experiences in a course with such sensitive and often serious subject matter has been something I have struggled with since I began teaching the EFP curriculum two years ago. As I mentioned in my introduction, the feedback I received from students the very first time I taught EFP 12 revealed that students found the course to be meaningful and engaging but also very depressing, and my student enrolment for EFP12 for the 2014-2015 school year dropped from 75 students to 29. I don't want students to feel that the course is so serious that they are never allowed to enjoy themselves or that they always have to watch what they say and do. At the same time, it is essential that students understand the necessity of respect for the topics and themes that we study because of the authenticity and importance of the views being presented. Over the past year I believe I have become more effective in balancing emotionally challenging topics with themes of hope and elements of humour. Over time I have also learned to incorporate more positive and relaxed elements into the course in an attempt to counter the necessary discussion of negative contemporary and historical issues. Theory on culturally responsive teaching also challenges teachers to manage the delicate balance of acknowledging the difficulties faced by marginalized groups while still maintaining an overall positive perspective. CRT cautions educators against restricting their teaching to “‘safe’ topics about cultural diversity such as cross-group similarities and intergroup harmony, and ethnic customs, cuisines, costumes, and celebrations while neglecting more troubling issues like inequities, injustices, oppressions, and major contributions of ethnic groups to societal and human life” (Gay, 2013, p.57) Yet, while moving beyond “safe” topics, Gay also advises that,



*Culturally responsive teaching requires replacing pathological and deficient perceptions of students and communities of colour with more positive ones. While the problems and challenges these populations face in society and schools must be addressed they should not be the only emphases. Educational innovations motivated by and framed only in negativism do not generate constructive and sustainable achievement transformations for ethnically and culturally diverse students. (2013, p.54.)*

This fine balance was sometimes tested when I allowed creative demonstrations of student understanding of serious or emotional texts. Allowing students creative and active forms of expression created positive engagement, yet I found that I worried about students having fun in the process of creating projects when the focus of something they had read or watched was very serious (Journal, 2014). Many students were motivated by the opportunity to create music or skits but I worried that they wouldn't be showing enough respect if there was laughter or joking around during the creation of the projects. Though these strategies are directly supported by the English 12 First Peoples IRP which includes examples of experiential learning as "having students present oral texts" and "having students create their own oral texts" and explore "alternate ways to represent understanding" (EFP12- Teacher Resource Guide, 2008), I constantly visualised what a residential school survivor or elder might think if they saw students interacting this way with the material. A specific example that comes to mind is when a non-Aboriginal student wrote a rap song to show his understanding of the novel *Indian Horse* (2012) by Richard Wagamese and performed it to the theme song for *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. His lyrics were appropriate, he demonstrated an excellent understanding of the novel, and when he performed the rap his classmates loved it; however, I was concerned that his choice of music was unsuitable for the emotional nature of the novel. After speaking with him the student explained it was simply a melody he was very familiar with, and therefore he found it easy to re-write the lyrics. It became a teachable moment and we

discussed matching the medium to fit the message (Field Notes, 2014). I plan to continue to encourage students to demonstrate their understanding in creative ways that suit their passions and strengths; however, I also hope to balance those methods by increasing awareness of the seriousness of the content students may be describing. This will require continuous discussions with students about appropriately matching creative mediums with content. I also have the ability to restrict options for demonstrations of understanding for particular texts and to be more lenient with less emotionally sensitive areas of the course. In the case mentioned earlier, I felt a rap song was a completely acceptable medium for the content; however, the choice of background music caught me by surprise.

Despite my periodic unease with incidents such as the one just described, in the final evaluations from this year's EFP 10 and 12 students, no student in either class made any reference to "negative themes" or a negative atmosphere in the course. There were many students (mainly in the EFP 12 class) who viewed the emotionally charged elements of the course as a positive and meaningful part of their semester (Reflections, 2015; Interviews, 2015). I discovered that with some caution and balance between safe and contentious topics, students both enjoyed the course and made sincere and personal connections to the curriculum.

### *Formal Instruction and Assessment with Texts of Personal Significance*

A second point of tension was between the formal expectations of assessment for EFP 12 and using stories or media that had personal significance to individual students. This was clearly demonstrated through two situations in my grade 12 class. The first was when one of my student's parents came in to do a presentation on Syilx (Okanagan)

culture. Part of her presentation included an engaging oral story about her grandmother who had an altercation with a conservation officer while picking berries. This story was very similar in theme to a Thomas King short story titled *Borders* (1993) so (with permission from the parent and collaboration in regards to how I was going to use her story), I designed a written synthesis question that asked students to make connections between the oral story and the written one. The assignment was modeled on the structure of a provincial exam synthesis response. Students responded well to the assignment and their results were consistent with other written tasks, I just felt awkward “using a personal story from a community member and reducing it to a formulaic exam question” (Journal, 2014). The students described the oral stories shared by community members as key texts in the course and they were mentioned in the final student reflections more than any other texts studied including the novels. On a final reflection question regarding exposure to Aboriginal perspectives in EFP12, oral stories and presentations from various community members were mentioned 26 different times and the stories from the parent referenced earlier were specifically described by 7 different students. One student reflected, “the guest speakers were awesome... they were so informative... those were the best like when one of our classmate’s mom...came in and gave a presentation, she told lots of stories and through her stories we learned a lot” (Interview, 2015). None of the students questioned or expressed any opposition to the use of one of these stories in a written synthesis question.

In her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Jo-ann Archibald describes a similar reaction when studying a legend during her own public school experience. In her view, “using an Indian legend to teach reading, particularly comprehension skills, was not appropriate”, and “dissecting the story for the

purpose of developing a list of comprehension questions, to be discussed first in a question-and-answer format and then in writing, felt wrong” (Archibald, 2008, p. 86). It is worth noting that later in the book Archibald does describe using written versions of an Elder’s stories in an elementary school setting and developing lesson plans (based on those stories) with the permission and input of the Elder (Archibald, 2008, p.87). I believe that “Canadian educational institutions should view elders, knowledge keepers, and workers who are competent in Aboriginal languages and knowledge as living educational treasures,” (Battiste, 2013, p. 185) and a key challenge in delivering the EFP curriculum is finding ways to highly value Elder knowledge within the public school system, when conventional instruction and assessment methods appear to compromise the significance of this unique source.

A second example occurred later on in the semester when we studied the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998) which is an examinable text (meaning it is one of the core texts students may reference on the *Response to Text* portion of the provincial exam). I hadn’t taught this particular movie before, but when I mentioned it as a possibility, a number of my students excitedly expressed their desire to watch the movie in class. Time revealed this was the correct decision, as those students loved it so much they quoted numerous scenes out loud and their enthusiasm was contagious. The tension was created when I started using the expected language arts terminology (such as theme, characters, symbolism etc.) to break down the movie and I realized that the students who loved the movie and were familiar with it were becoming frustrated. At one point when I stopped the movie to point out an element of symbolism one of my students said, “Searcy, you’re *killing* me!” (Journal, 2015). I completely understood his frustration. Taking someone’s favourite movie, pausing it, demanding he or she write notes on it and then analyze it for

literary elements sacrifices the enjoyment and integrity of the viewing experience. Ultimately I ended up spending less time on analysis than I normally would, (compared for example to the breakdown we did for the film “Rabbit Proof Fence” (2002) and I chose to provide extra notes on the class website for students to access. The overall experience demonstrated how applying formal academic approaches to texts that have personal and emotional relevance to students can be problematic in some situations. In reality, I’m not sure this highlights a contrast between Indigenous and Western educational approaches so much as it highlights a root problem in our current educational structure. When conventional methods and purposes of instruction create obstacles every time students are personally and emotionally invested in the material we are studying, I believe it reflects a serious flaw in the way we are approaching student learning.

I should note that this point of tension was not reflected in the student reflections and interviews at the end of the course. Instead it was a concern that was raised consistently enough in my teacher notes that I felt I could justify it as a trend. In an interesting twist of events, at the end of the course two students who were passionate about the film “Smoke Signals” did mention their appreciation of being able to reference the movie on the final exam (Reflections/Interviews, 2015).

#### *Students of Aboriginal Ancestry not Engaged by Cultural Content*

A third tension I noticed was that in my grade 10 class, some of the strongest examples of experiential learning such as guest speakers or activities lead by local community members, while engaging for non-Aboriginal students, sometimes resulted in the lowest engagement, or lack of attendance for a few students of Aboriginal ancestry. When I spoke to them about it they simply mentioned that they had been doing certain

activities (such as picking tea for example) their entire lives so they weren't motivated to participate (Journal, 2014). I realize that, "it is important that teachers see Aboriginal students as the diverse learners they are," as "they do not have a single homogenous learning style" (Battiste, 2013, p. 176), and a student should not be expected to connect with a particular activity simply because of his or her ancestry.

I suspected however that part of the reluctance of these students might also have been their self-consciousness in regards to having their own culture highlighted. I have been working with the Aboriginal support worker and our Aboriginal Education teacher to help give these individuals input into what class activities they would want to be a part of but so far this has not been productive. I hypothesized during the semester that it wasn't only that the students found the activities boring, but perhaps they were also responding negatively to the attention placed on students of Aboriginal ancestry during activities conducted in the local community.

*It must be very difficult for some students to take an EFP course. Being a teenager is difficult enough as it is. So many students feel that everyone is looking at them, judging them. As an Aboriginal teenager I imagine that taking EFP might be like having a course taught about your family and then having family members come in and work with your peers and classmates. That would be difficult for most students. Even if the activity is very popular with the students, or the guest speaker is engaging, for a teenager is it sometimes just easier not to have to worry about the extra stress or attention in the first place. Teenagers can be incredibly sensitive and there are so many dynamics that play into how they feel in a particular space and with a particular group. While the intention of EFP is to highlight and represent Aboriginal perspective, (and I know that students appreciate reading texts they can identify with and seeing Aboriginal issues represented), at the same time it must be stressful for students if they are self conscious and naturally concerned about any kind of attention from their peers. I feel anxiety as their teacher to ensure that not only do non-Aboriginal students demonstrate respect, but that they honestly find Aboriginal culture interesting and exciting, and become emotionally affected by what they learn. It is like teaching a course about a student's own family and being responsible for how that family's life, values, beliefs and history are perceived by the student's peer group. (Journal, 2014.)*

To clarify, there were certainly students of Aboriginal ancestry who participated and enjoyed these experiential learning activities and there were certainly some non-Aboriginal students who didn't find them exceptionally engaging. For example, while most non-Aboriginal students mentioned our two class trips to the local En'owkin centre as highlights of the semester, two students described these trips as their "least favourite activities" (Student Reflections, 2015). At the same time different students of Aboriginal ancestry mentioned the pictographs and the En'owkin centre trips as highlights and when specifically asked on their final evaluations, "What are the activities that you enjoyed the least, or that you did not find valuable?" one student wrote "I never didn't enjoy English First Peoples," and another wrote, "I liked it all" (Student Reflections, 2015). One of the key purposes of the course however, is to increase the engagement and success of Indigenous students and therefore if certain experiential activities are not meeting the educational needs of any of these students then the reasons should be explored and solutions should be sought. I realize that in order to "maximize participation of Aboriginal students in the educational process" I will need to continue to, "experiment with teaching opportunities to connect with the multiple ways of knowing [that] these students have" (Battiste, 2013, p. 176).

### *Tension in Scheduling*

While it wasn't a consistent point of criticism, when EFP 12 students were asked, "was there anything you struggled with or would change about the course?" a number of students mentioned that they often felt that they were juggling numerous assignments at the same time (Interviews, 2015). During the semester, the scheduling of various assignments was difficult because I constantly fought to accommodate particular

activities or the schedule of guest speakers within our rotating block order. The coordination of certain activities (which at times also required negotiating the booking of our school bus around the schedule of P.E. classes and sports teams), meant that I often extended deadlines or postponed certain assignments for students to make room to focus on another. While I was simply trying to be fair and allow students to have enough time to complete assignments, at times it was possible that students would have 2-3 things that they were simultaneously responsible for (though they certainly wouldn't all be due at the same time). This created difficulties both for learners who struggled with organization and time management, as well as for strong academic students balancing busy schedules and workloads. On their final evaluations, both types of students mentioned periodic difficulty with expectations for multiple assignments (or the impression that they were facing a new assignment the moment they had completed the previous one). For example one student wrote "the course moved really fast so I struggled with keeping up" and another explained, "I found it difficult to get all my assignments done on time because at times we were given 2 or 3 assignments in the same week" (Reflections/Interviews, 2015). I am unsure how to resolve this issue. The scheduling of many of the guest speakers and learning experiences outside the classroom will always be problematic within our current block rotation and timetable structure. Currently my only solution is to continue to support the students with reminders of due dates and outlines on my class website. I have also repeatedly emphasized that the constant juggling of activities and assignments is the "nature of the course".

While the overall results of both the EFP 10 and 12 courses were positive, it is worth considering the points of tension that arise when combining Indigenous and Eurocentric educational approaches. According to the Ministry of Education's stage one



curriculum framework document, “Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge have been built into the entire curriculum, not as specific courses or grade levels, but as an infusion of Aboriginal ways of knowing” (Ministry of Education, 2015). Beginning in September of 2016, many teachers across B.C. may be facing the same challenges I have described in this thesis which include respectfully introducing sensitive emotional content, finding ways to formally assess texts of personal and cultural significance, maintaining culturally safe spaces for their students of Aboriginal ancestry, and incorporating experiential learning activities and interactions with the local community within timetable and daily scheduling restrictions. While teachers may philosophically agree with the content and philosophy of the new curriculum, the expectations of infusing Aboriginal perspectives into instructional practice could be a potentially frustrating experience if teachers are not provided with support. As I have described, there will be points of tension that are unique to the implementation of Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning.

#### **Theme 4: Changing Perspectives**

English 12 FP students consistently referred to “changing perspectives” or “seeing things differently” in their final evaluations. Non-Aboriginal students referred to their increased understanding of historical injustices such as residential schools and the negative and inaccurate portrayal of Aboriginal people through perpetuated stereotypes. Students of Aboriginal ancestry described their appreciation of non-Aboriginal students learning about their culture and history. When asked to provide a few general thoughts about the course, one student replied, “you connect with people and non-Aboriginal people can find out what we all went through and it gives them a perspective of what we had to live...a lot of people had very different perspectives after the course” (Interview,

2015). Another student explained, “my best friend has no Aboriginal background and I saw her cry... I saw her cry in class...she had no idea what happened...I would definitely recommend [English First Peoples] for people who don’t have an Aboriginal background...in our class a lot of people didn’t” (Interview, 2015).

Students commented about how they now confronted inaccurate comments made by friends and family members:

*Stuff comes up about Aboriginal things and before I would just let [my mother] talk and just be...ok sure mom... I don’t know much better than you that I can say “oh no you’re wrong about that” but then I’ve had conversations with my mom where it’s just “mom like you know that’s not right at all” ...and it’s been me trying to teach her all of a sudden this new stuff that I know, so it’s for sure with my family created a lot of different conversations... a lot of times it’s almost like arguments- cause she thinks one way but I’m like “oh, but I learned this today” ... but it’s really interesting discussions...*

*(Interview, 2015)*

Students also mentioned that EFP 12 was a course that needed to be taught at Princess Margaret and in other schools across the province. Comments included, “I truly believe this course in the future will change people’s lives and will help society today with one of our biggest issues” and, “this course gives Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students a chance to learn about First Peoples’ culture, a culture that is a very important part of Canada’s past and present” (Interviews, 2015, Student Reflections, 2015). This depth of awareness was not observed to the same extent in the EFP 10 class. The grade 10 students made many positive comments about “doing things differently” but not as many observations about “seeing things differently” (Student Reflections, 2015). Changing perspectives for students in the grade 10 class were common, but they primarily focused on the appreciation of new instructional strategies (such as lessons taught outdoors). On the final course evaluations 5 students mentioned perspective

changes such as the course “made us think differently” and “taught us to see all sides of the story” and one student wrote, “[this is the only course] I have come across [that shows] the importance in teaching students about real life...school doesn’t teach you so many important life lessons and [this course] acknowledges/focuses on that and it’s so important,” (Student Reflections, 2015).

While I often felt frustrated throughout the semester with the lack of connections between students, and the occasional lukewarm response to activities in the EFP 10 course, after the careful review of my notes, journal entries and final evaluation comments I must conclude that the grade 10 students did find the course meaningful. Student comments on their final reflections were undeniably positive. Many students mentioned how much they were going to miss the class and over one third of the students complained that English First Peoples wasn’t offered in grade 11. The last question of the EFP 10 course evaluation simply asked students for any “final thoughts/comments” which was intended to avoid leading or pressuring students to write any particular response (if they chose to respond at all). Comments on this final section included, “I wish this course was for grade elevens but since it is not I will be rejoining it in grade 12” and, “I wish it lasted all year”. Other responses included: “I’m extremely happy I decided to take this course and will definitely be taking it in grade 12... I gained so much more from this class than a regular English course”, “I’m happy I took this course [because] I got to learn and have fun at the same time”, “I wish this class went all year long and you should offer it in grade eleven”, “this was an amazing course! Very glad I took it!”, and “I love coming to English! This should be offered 10-12!”

I know that the fact that my English 12 class was simultaneously making such strong connections and responding so well to the course may have influenced my perspective on the grade 10s because of relative perception, however my teacher's notes demonstrate that the semester was definitely a frustrating one for me. In my grade 12 class there was a positive energy that was tangible every time I walked into the classroom. My grade 10s did not have that same energy but perhaps the stronger connections started being made later in the course. While they didn't connect as strongly to each other, they did (in the end) collectively appreciate the way the course was taught, and the content. My journal and field notes throughout the semester also reference the introverted nature of a majority of the students in that class which may have lead me to misread their engagement levels. Looking back through my notes I recognize there were a number of times when I originally felt that students did not respond to a lesson and yet when I later analyzed student reflections or evaluated student work I realized their connections had been much stronger than I anticipated (Field Notes, 2014, 2015; Journal, 2014, 2015; Student Reflections, 2014, 2015). I became conscious of the difference between appearance and reality that may be revealed by careful analysis of research data (Shagoury & Power, 2012). I also need to remind myself that there is a 2-year age difference between the two classes and grade 10 is often a difficult year for students as they often struggle with finding their identity and where they "fit". Grade 12s (in general) are more comfortable with who they are and their stress levels are often more influenced by the uncertainty of their future after high school.

Ultimately the powerful comments in regards to the changes in perception from the EFP12 class as well as the final positive comments about the course from the EFP10 students are affirmations that these courses need to continue to be taught not only in

SD67 but in public schools across the province. The grade 12 students represented the powerful potential to challenge inaccurate historical perspectives and biases through respectful dialogue. The EFP12 course represented an opportunity for Aboriginal students to see their culture, history and world views given value within a public school setting and allowed non-Aboriginal students to question some of the foundational perspectives of their school system and society. While the grade 10 students did not clearly articulate such personal changes in perception, the reality is that they ultimately responded very positively to a course that consisted completely of Aboriginal content, and that was taught using Indigenous pedagogy. For an entire semester they were engaged with texts that represented Aboriginal views and became familiar with voices that have been largely ignored in Canada's literary history. The concluding thoughts from a majority of the class were that not only did they appreciate the course, but they planned on taking future courses that also reflected Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Combining Indigenous and Eurocentric perspectives within our public education system has been challenging, but the findings of this research will potentially contribute to both the literature on culturally responsive teaching as well as provide timely examples for educators who are faced with a new curriculum in British Columbia that mandates the embedding of Indigenous perspectives throughout all grade levels and subject areas. This chapter will discuss the key findings of this research, as well as the ways that these findings contribute to both the literature on culturally responsive teaching and provide current examples of the weaving of Indigenous pedagogies into a public school framework. Key tensions that arose from the combination of these distinctly different pedagogical approaches will be described as these tensions are particularly relevant in light of the number of non-Aboriginal educators who will be entrusted with appropriately and respectfully implementing these perspectives. The chapter concludes with a comment on my feelings of hope and optimism resulting from the findings of this research in the context of current steps being made toward reconciliation in both our education system and society as a whole.

### **Key Findings in regards to Practice**

#### *Community in the Classroom*

My research explored, through teacher-inquiry, the results of incorporating experiential learning prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy, into the formal, structured and competitive curriculum of academic high school English. This was done through the

instruction of the English First Peoples curriculum which maintains academic learning outcomes identical to regular high school English, but uses texts by Aboriginal writers and is implemented using Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. The key findings from this thesis are the positive student response to two key classroom interventions: the intentional focus on building a strong classroom community, and the opportunities for experiential learning. The responses in particular from grade 12 students in regards to their attachment to their classmates and the collaborative experience of EFP 12 is beyond anything I have experienced in my 12 years as a classroom educator. The strong connection between students not only had a positive effect on student engagement, but it improved attendance and commitment to learning objectives, and confirmed the understanding that building relationships in the classroom must precede and continue throughout all learning (with the confidence that the learning will ultimately surpass what it would have been without any communal emphasis). These findings are echoed in the work of Kessler (2000), Cajete (2005), Noddings (1992), and Butler, Schnellert & Perry (2016). These understandings are also reflected in one of the First Peoples Principles of Learning which focuses on the “importance of relationship [and] the concept of ‘we are all related’” (Chrona, 2014) as well as being emphasized in place based-conscious theory which challenges core values of our current educational structure such as “the assumptions that education should mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy and that an educational competition of winners and losers is in the best interest of public life in a diverse society” (Gruenewald, 2008 p. 308). The success created by the communal learning environment expected in the English First Peoples curriculum should lead us to reflect and re-evaluate the individualistic and competitive values of our entire education system.

Building a safe community in a course such as English First Peoples becomes particularly important when the need to create a safe space for Aboriginal learners is taken into account. These students, while participating in a course that recognizes and respects their heritage, must also contend with potential specific focus and attention on themselves when many of the students (and the teacher) are from a majority settler group. In a classroom situation such as this, it becomes particularly crucial to create respectful and trusting relationships between the students and to allow all students to engage in their own way and contribute on their own terms because “teaching Aboriginal content to non-Aboriginal and mixed populations poses significant challenges in terms of creating a safe environment” (Grass, 2014, p.105). A next step for me as a teacher researcher involves exploring ways to expand opportunities for students of Aboriginal ancestry to directly inform instructional practice, and to share their own personal wealth of knowledge that they bring to the classroom and school community.

### *Experiential Learning*

The incorporation of experiential learning opportunities had a direct and positive impact on student learning, both in regards to student mental health and by increasing the personal relevance of the curriculum. Students consistently articulated a connection between the outdoor environment and their positive sense of well-being, and many also demonstrated increased creativity and written output. In an age of increasing social and emotional childhood struggles such as anxiety and depression, it was interesting to discover such an easily accessible remedy just outside of the school building. The link between mental and emotional health and student learning environments also clearly demonstrates the value of a holistic approach to education (Jones & Bouffard, 2012;



Miller, 2007; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). When it comes to the various factors that influence student well-being, Indigenous approaches reflect that “aspects [mental, physical, spiritual, emotional] do not exist in isolation from each other; they are viewed as equal and integrated parts of the whole, and each must be attended to simultaneously in the development of the whole person” (Chrona, 2014).

As well as activities specifically located in a natural environment, a second positive result from experiential learning opportunities was increased relevance and student engagement with texts. Often these activities allowed students to connect the texts they studied to specific places or people, or to their own lives in meaningful ways. These findings are supported by current theory on place-based and land-based education, (Armstrong, 1998; Ball & Lai, 2006; Gruenewald , 2003; Thornton, 2011; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Indigenous pedagogy emphasizes that people’s natural experiences should not be separated from their education and “learning is not viewed as an action separate from any other part of life” (Chrona, 2014). When student learning “became life”, instead of “being about life”, students found their education to be meaningful and memorable.

In these instances, student learning also took priority over negative distractions and was able to draw students into the school and the class. Once again, it was a reminder that designing these activities and working with members of the community can be challenging and complex to accomplish within the rigid structure of a high school timetable, but the results were so positive that I am inspired to continue to provide them and to engage students in designing their own in the future. Ultimately the student results on standardized provincial assessments demonstrated that students were still learning the

key language arts skills of reading comprehension, written expression, and oral language. As the new B.C. curriculum (set for a staggered implementation in Sept. 2016 and 2017) embeds First Peoples perspectives throughout all grade levels and subject areas, approaching the Language Arts curriculum through an experiential and Indigenous lens has the potential to become much more common.

### **Filling the Gaps**

The information gathered from my two classes of EFP students is significant in several ways that may contribute to the continuing conversations involving Indigenous Education and culturally responsive teaching (CRT). In regards to CRT, this thesis extends the theory in two particular ways. The first is that it specifically focuses on incorporating Canadian Indigenous perspectives into a public school setting. The defining work around CRT theory (for example the work of Ladson-Billings and Gay) is predominantly modelled on the education of African American Students in the United States. While the key focus of CRT is to recognize the unique contexts and perspectives that must be acknowledged within different ethnicities (and is therefore adaptable to students of any particular heritage), the reality for educators working with Indigenous students in a Canadian public school setting is that the context has unique difficulties related to education itself. Any interaction with students of Aboriginal ancestry within a public school will be intertwined with the uniquely destructive historical relationship between Indigenous people and formal educational institutions created by the legacy of residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The second way this thesis extends CRT research and theory is that the classes studied were composed of students of mixed ethnicities where the majority of students were not from a minority background. Much theory written on CRT discusses a teacher from a majority culture teaching a student population of mainly minority students, and in addition much of the research focused on Aboriginal Education in Canada describes institutions that are comprised mainly (or exclusively) of students of Aboriginal ancestry including the work of Battiste (2000, 2013), Archibald (2008), and Grass (2014). Within my own personal context, my challenge (as a non-Aboriginal educator) was to deliver Aboriginal content and curriculum to a group of students comprised of approximately one-third Aboriginal students and two-thirds non-Aboriginal. In this context, the use of recommended practices of CRT (such as using culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum) while serving to engage one group of students, had the potential to alienate other students if these practices were ineffectively implemented. This thesis demonstrates however that the combination of different groups of students ultimately proved to be advantageous.

While the incorporation of Aboriginal content and pedagogy into a group of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students created particular challenges, it resulted in significant improvements in decolonization and reconciliation. In the words of one of my Aboriginal students, “this course is important...it shows you a different perspective... [the majority of] our class was white and those are the people who need to learn and take this course...this will change their life” (Interview, 2015). Another, non-Aboriginal student explained, “[learning] Aboriginal perspective was really good for me and a lot of people in the class as well because it seems like society gets caught up in thinking our culture is right and the best” (Interview, 2015). In other words, educating students of

mixed heritages together was a strength of the course that enhanced the learning of all participants. In her master's thesis, Starleigh Grass wrote, "it would be exciting to examine in depth what the development of critical consciousness and reconciliation through the integration of Indigenous culture and knowledge looks like for non-Aboriginal students" (2014, p.105) and I hope that the findings of this thesis begin to answer that question.

### *Tensions/Two-Eyed Seeing*

While the experiences in EFP courses were ultimately successful both with student engagement and performance on standardized assessments, it cannot be ignored that certain challenges will arise when bringing Indigenous and Western pedagogy together and that any teacher embracing this opportunity should prepare for some adversity. Two key tensions include: the conflict between Indigenous ways of knowing and formal instruction and assessment practices used by Eurocentric institutions, and the anxiety faced by educators both in the respectful implementation of Aboriginal curriculum as well as the discussion of sensitive subjects such as racism and privilege.

A significant challenge in teaching the EFP curriculum involves protecting the integrity of Indigenous knowledge within a formal Eurocentric education framework. The paradox lies within the reality that Westernized education values knowledge by making it "worth" the most, particularly through high-stakes standardized evaluations worth a significant portion of a student's grade that are often tied to outcomes such as scholarships and university entrance requirements. Unfortunately, Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are often disrespected and compromised when taught and assessed using methods common to Western pedagogy. It is true that in a "public school setting

your imagination and practice are somewhat constricted by the expectations of others, institutional barriers, and the colonial traditions embedded in institutions which you are expected to maintain” (Grass, 2014, p. 35).

While it is to be expected that tensions will occur when attempting to combine two very different perspectives on education, a potential solution lies with a vision that moves beyond the single capacity of either of these systems and creates a new system that both acknowledges, draws from, and moves beyond each of the original visions.

*Bringing two diverse knowledge systems together needs some consideration of the assumptions underlying each foundation and where the points of inclusion or merging might seem advisable. The need then becomes one of developing “trans-systemic” analyses and methods- that is, reaching beyond the two distinct systems of knowledge to create fair and just educational experiences so that all students can benefit from their education in multiple ways. (Battiste, 2013, p. 103.)*

The combining of the two systems of knowledge has been articulated in the concept of “Two-eyed Seeing” first introduced by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall in the fall of 2004 (Bartlett, M. Marshall & A. Marshall, 2012). Two-eyed seeing approaches Aboriginal Education in our current education system from a perspective of strength as opposed to deficit:

*Two-eyed seeing [shifts us away from] “accommodating” Aboriginal perspectives because the failing Aboriginal students are a burden on the system- and Indigenous strategies and perspectives are a burden. Instead it is acknowledging that our system can be improved by combining with Indigenous ways of knowing. We are stronger together. (Hogue & Bartlett, 2014, p.26.)*

Two-Eyed seeing suggests a concept of weaving back and forth between the two knowledges with the understanding that one perspective may have more applicable strengths than the other in a particular context or circumstance (Bartlett et al., 2012).

Though the concept of “two-eyed seeing” sounds wonderful in theory, the question remains, what might it actually look like in a B.C. public school classroom? The implementation of the English 12 First Peoples curriculum could be considered an example of this approach put into practice. Both Indigenous and Eurocentric ways of knowing are valued and combined, and ultimately create an educational experience that could eventually be considered more valuable than what is offered by either system in isolation. As we move towards the implementation of a new, province-wide K-12 curriculum that integrates Aboriginal perspectives, content, and ways of knowing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015), educators who are “competent in both knowledge systems” (Battiste, 2013, p.103) will be essential in both exploring ways to successfully bring the new curriculum to life, and to provide concrete examples for other educators to envision how the infusion of Aboriginal ways of knowing will transform their own practice and the experience of their students. Truly valuing Indigenous perspectives will also lead to a critical examination of our current assessment practices and definitions of achievement. In addition to intellectual development, our definitions of academic success “must begin to take account of the social and ecological quality of community life” (Gruenewald, 2008, p.320).

### *Humility vs. Anxiety in Educators*

Another tension revolved around my unease as a classroom teacher in ensuring appropriate respect and protocols when working with members of the community or with Aboriginal texts that contained sensitive content. Initially my anxiety was very restrictive in the way it controlled my tone and my energy. Ultimately I began to relax, and after a series of consistently positive engagements with members of the Aboriginal community I

realized that I was being strongly supported. During the second year of teaching the course I also began to implement elements involving humour which allowed me to balance some of the emotionally charged aspects of the curriculum. At times I wish I could become completely comfortable in my teaching and never feel even a slight anxiety that I might misrepresent something or not cover a topic with enough sensitivity; however, I have also come to recognize that my anxiety reflects my respect for the subject matter and a sincere desire to facilitate the course properly. I was told by a member of our district's Aboriginal Education team that it is non-Aboriginal teachers who do not exercise caution and have no anxiety at all who potentially run the risk of alienating students and disrespecting or misrepresenting Indigenous perspectives and approaches. In her book "Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit" Jo-ann Archibald explains her anxiety around trying to incorporate Aboriginal oral language and stories into a formal Eurocentric framework. If Archibald, both as a highly respected University Dean and as a person of Aboriginal heritage has anxiety, then it is certainly natural that I, as a non-Aboriginal educator teaching Aboriginal curriculum to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students might have some concerns! I have come to understand that my anxiety is a necessary part of delivering an English First Peoples course in an appropriate and respectful manner, yet I must not let my fears extend to the point where I am not able to be myself in my role as an educator. Freire describes the importance of humility required on the part of any educator working with students from an underrepresented demographic:

*Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are*

*attempting, together, to learn more than they now know. Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). (2000, p. 90.)*

Any non-Aboriginal teachers who are implementing Aboriginal content will have to find the balance of healthy humility and a practical sense of caution which makes them question themselves, acknowledge their own limitations, thoughtfully consider their practice, but also still be able to be themselves and find joy in the students and material they are teaching. The worst case scenario is that teachers become overwhelmed by anxiety and choose not to implement any Aboriginal content at all, or intentionally avoid controversial or challenging topics. This would be a true loss for students of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. Educators must find an emotional balance where they understand that a certain level of anxiety may actually be a positive factor that reflects humility and a genuine concern that they will represent Aboriginal perspectives in a respectful way.

These are exciting times in British Columbia and the new curriculum has formally interwoven Indigenous perspectives and content throughout all subjects and grade levels. Teachers will be facing the tensions that I have mentioned above when they work to incorporate Aboriginal content into their teaching practice. They will need practical examples of how to do this while being respectful of culture. This thesis offers one such example.



### *Hope (Changing Perspectives and Reconciliation)*

Ultimately, after all my data analysis and review of the research, a conclusion that emerges from this work is that there is undeniable hope for the future in regards to both the positive potential for merging Aboriginal and Eurocentric educational methods, as well as the hope for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through education. This is in spite of the tensions previously described and the current rarity of finding both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students in a class that focuses on Aboriginal content. My initial feelings of hope are fuelled by the students themselves, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who voiced their appreciations for the EFP courses and their belief in the significance of what they learned from their experience. I also remain hopeful as a result of the support of many educators of Aboriginal ancestry, some who have designed the EFP curriculum and others who have personally encouraged me in the implementation journey in my school. What the successful implementation of English First Peoples demonstrates is that Aboriginal pedagogy can be combined with Eurocentric pedagogy to serve the simultaneous purposes of both acknowledging the history, culture and ways of knowing of Indigenous people while effectively preparing students for life in a complex 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian society. The Canadian Education Association recognizes that student engagement is a multidimensional concept involving intellectual, academic and social components, and that students desire to learn with and from each other as well as members of their community (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009).

Concurrently, the OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation describes an ideal socio-constructivist learning environment as one where learning is “shaped by the context in which it is situated” and “actively constructed through social

negotiation with others” (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides (eds.), 2010, p.3). This thesis demonstrates that a two-eyed seeing approach to learning aligns with current national and international research on effective educational environments.

My hope is also rooted in the understanding that English First Peoples is about more than a single curriculum, and demonstrates the acceptance of human diversity as both a reality and a strength of our existence as a species. It is rooted in the acknowledgement that “culture and difference are essential to humanity” and should therefore, “play a central role in teaching and learning” (Gay, 2013, p. 61-62). These thoughts are also reflected in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which states “that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute[s] the common heritage of humankind” (UN General Assembly, 2007). The Aboriginal perspectives reflected in the EFP courses as well as the new B.C. curriculum represent an understanding that our education system is a platform that could potentially both harness the benefits of diversity and begin to repair historical injustices committed against Indigenous populations. As educators we must focus our efforts on “the enhancement of humanity and its infinite capacities” and recognize that, “each strategy taken to rebuild capacity is a decolonizing activity that turns collective hope into insights, voices, and partnerships” (Battiste, 2013, p. 104).

While the EFP curriculum provides a foundation for educating students about Aboriginal perspectives, the strongest benefits in regards to reconciliation resulted from the opportunity for students of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry to learn together. Providing a safe environment for personal expression and the exploration of emotionally sensitive topics provided the most powerful results of the course. Students

were able to connect their education with their own lives and the lives of their classmates and fellow community members. It was in the simple structure and unscripted moments of class sharing circles where the strongest relationships were created, demonstrating that “decolonization is often discussed as an abstract thing but in its most powerful moments decolonization happens in moments of human connection and the ability to connect with others free from the manacles of racism” (Grass, 2014, p. 107).

Productive conversations between students would not have happened without the optimism of the students who believed that taking EFP was helping them make their classroom, school, community and country a better place. The numbers of students taking EFP courses at Princess Margaret during the 2015-2016 school year are higher than they have ever been, and there are currently more students taking EFP 10 and 12 than “regular” English 10 and 12.

Freire acknowledged that dialogue cannot exist without hope because “hope is rooted in men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search—a search which can be carried out only in communion with others” (2000, p.91). Our education system may be our greatest hope for reconciliation, not because of the information the curriculum provides but because of the opportunities it will create for students and teachers of all backgrounds to communicate, learn, and move forward together.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The decision to introduce the English First Peoples 10 and 12 curriculum in my school has resulted in the most challenging, yet rewarding years of my teaching career. While I would describe the initial versions of these courses as successful, they came at the cost of periods of intense self doubt and a complete re-evaluation of my beliefs about my role as an educator and the education system itself. The introduction of Indigenous content and pedagogies into a formal, structured, and academic framework resulted in various tensions including my own discomfort with particular subject matter, the difficulty in maintaining a positive atmosphere in a course with intensely emotional content, and the perception of Indigenous activities and strategies as being less important than those used in traditional language arts classrooms. With these initial challenges in mind, and through the lens of teacher inquiry I pursued the question: “What happens when I incorporate experiential learning prevalent in Indigenous pedagogy and perspectives into a competitive, hierarchical, and individualized Western framework?”

As the research began, and I incorporated Aboriginal content and perspectives even more thoroughly, further challenges arose including the protection of Indigenous knowledge when using formal assessment techniques, the anxiety that results when a non-Aboriginal educator introduces Indigenous content, and the difficulty in creating non-threatening environments for students of Aboriginal ancestry. Ultimately though, the combining of Eurocentric and Aboriginal perspectives through a “two-eyed seeing” lens resulted in a positive student reception of experiential and collaborative learning opportunities as well as successful performances on traditional language arts reading and

writing assessments. The partnering with various members of our local Aboriginal communities created many rich and authentic learning opportunities for students while simultaneously alleviating my anxiety around respectful engagement with Aboriginal content. Delivering a course with an Aboriginal focus to an audience of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students also provided opportunities to explore challenging topics such as stereotypes and racism and to ultimately move students towards reconciliation and new understandings of their own perspectives and biases. Despite the many tensions that emerged in the pursuit of this research, the overall positive response from the students justified the efforts required to merge two diverse pedagogical approaches.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations of this study include my sample size, the measurements I used for the final evaluations, and the decision not to organize data according to ethnic heritage. In regards to sample size, my choice to collect anecdotal evidence from 54 students in two classes proved to be challenging and it was incredibly difficult to maintain consistency and regularity in regards to keeping up with my own journal and field notes. My own documentation is certainly more thorough early in the semester than it was later on, but this is balanced with the extensive information collected from the final course evaluations. Perhaps a smaller student sample would have allowed me to collect more consistent and thorough information; however, it would have been very difficult to determine which sample would have most accurately represented the larger population. Nonetheless, the different experiences and sometimes divergent themes emerging from the two groups did inform and enrich the findings and discussion of this study.

A second limitation is that I did not use identical questions on my final course evaluations for the grade 10 and 12 classes. While a majority of the questions were very similar, the grade 10 final questions focused specifically on whether or not the experiential learning activities had influenced student performance on traditional English language arts tasks (which is consistent with my original research question). The grade 12 evaluation analyzed this same issue, but also included specific questions about exposure to Aboriginal perspectives and asked students to reflect on any resulting changes in their own perspectives towards Indigenous world views and pedagogies.

A third limitation is that in our school both EFP10 and EFP12 are elective courses. This means that students could potentially have chosen to take the course because they were naturally more attracted to instructional practices that included experiential learning and outdoor opportunities. Students may have chosen to take the course because they were already interested in exploring perspectives that were different from their own. In a school the size of ours this is negated to a small extent by our limited timetable which resulted in some students taking EFP who did not originally select this course, as well as certain students who chose to take the course not being able to fit it into their schedules.

A final perceivable limitation is that I intentionally did not organize the data according to student heritage. Analyzing data in terms of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal students would have provided useful information in making the course more relevant and engaging for all students; however, because of ethical challenges and issues of cultural safety I decided students would not be expected at any time to voluntarily identify

themselves by ancestry. Certain students mentioned ancestry in different responses, but they were never directly required to do so.

### **Significant Contributions**

My original research question was designed to explore what effect a specific element of Indigenous pedagogy (experiential learning) would have on student performance on traditional academic tasks. From this research, student performance on traditional assessments such as provincial exams was consistent with results from classrooms where more traditional language arts instruction was used. Other themes that emerged from this research were a number of unintended, positive results from the use of Aboriginal instructional practices. These included: stronger student connections to the texts as a result of experiential learning activities used, positive student responses to communal learning environments, positive student responses (from the EFP10 students) to outdoor learning environments (including connections between outdoor environments and improved mental well being) and changing perceptions (from the EFP12 students) in regards to Aboriginal history, culture, and world views.

The discovery of the unintended benefits of these strategies is likely a result of the reality that Indigenous pedagogy cannot be compartmentalized. One aspect of Indigenous education (such as experiential learning) is that knowledge cannot be explored in isolation from other elements such as communal, holistic and land conscious approaches to learning. It is understood that an “inherent interconnectedness” exists between all nine of the First Peoples Principles of Learning, (Chrona, 2014). (See Appendix G for a list of the First Peoples Principles of Learning).

This thesis adds to the current research on culturally responsive teaching (CRT), specifically adding to the limited research on incorporating Aboriginal content and pedagogy into Canadian public school classrooms with students of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage. It provides support for previous theories on the benefits of experiential and communally focused classrooms as well as the value of place-conscious pedagogies. It also provides some concrete examples (at the classroom level) of the concept of “Two-eyed Seeing” (Anuik, J., Battiste, M., & George, P., 2010) which combines elements of both Indigenous and Eurocentric perspectives in ways that move beyond what can be individually offered by either. While there is available theory on “Two-eyed Seeing”, specific examples of the practical realities of this combination of ideas in a public high school classroom are rare. This thesis is an example that will hopefully be expanded as more teachers explore two-eyed approaches in other subject areas and grade levels.

This research also highlights specific points of tension that arose from the combining of the two pedagogies, and while the end result was positive and potentially more beneficial than what is offered in a Eurocentric English class, there were still specific challenges that may be faced by any educator hoping to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their practice, particularly if the teacher is non-Aboriginal. These points of tension include anxiety around the appropriate and respectful representation of Indigenous perspectives or knowledge, creating safe spaces for students (specifically students of Aboriginal ancestry), and finding respectful ways to explore cultural elements such as stories from elders within a Eurocentric framework of assessment. The new K-9 curriculum in British Columbia has intensively incorporated Aboriginal content and the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and information from this research has the potential



to become a valuable resource as teachers across the province begin (or continue) their journeys towards a “two-eyed” educational system.

### **Next Steps for My Own Inquiry and Professional Work**

My own personal inquiry will expand in a number of ways congruent with my professional responsibilities. This year I began a part time position as a district helping teacher in Aboriginal Education with a specific focus on working with classroom teachers to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their practice. In this role I will continue to use my experience of combining Aboriginal and Eurocentric approaches in the English First Peoples curriculum in my collaboration with other teachers of all grade levels and subject areas. As the new curriculum has embedded Aboriginal perspectives throughout, it is already becoming apparent (as increasing numbers of teachers are requesting support in regards to Aboriginal content and pedagogy) that my experience will be useful as we move forward as a district and as a province. My future personal inquiry will involve 3 key areas: a) expanding beyond the experiential aspect of Indigenous Pedagogy to include the deliberate incorporation of other First Peoples Principles of Learning including holistic approaches to education, intergenerational learning, and the connection to the local community and the land, b) expanding beyond the high school language arts curriculum to work with K-12 teachers in all subject areas, while recognizing that depending on the age of the students and on the subject being taught, different elements of Aboriginal perspectives will be easier or more difficult to implement, and c) strengthening links with local Indigenous educators and other community members to work with our teachers and advise them in regards to local Indigenous resources and perspectives.

As a result of the questions and tensions that have emerged from this research, I anticipate there will be challenges for educators looking to implement the new curriculum in British Columbia. While I applaud the designers of the new curriculum for their extensive inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives (at least from K-9) I am concerned about the probable occurrence of two particular obstacles when the actual curriculum is introduced into schools. To begin, I am concerned that classroom teachers will not have spent enough time (or been provided with enough time) to reflect on *why* Aboriginal perspectives and content are necessary and advantageous elements of the new curriculum. If teachers do not understand the purpose for implementing these ways of knowing, then they will be less likely to persist through difficult challenges. Secondly, I am concerned that teachers will not have enough guidance in the implementation of the First Peoples Principles of learning and the inclusion of any new Aboriginal content (for example the history of Residential Schools). Teachers will need both practical examples and support as they introduce new content and new instructional strategies in respectful and culturally appropriate ways. They may need assistance in creating safe classroom environments particularly for students of Aboriginal ancestry and would also benefit from a conscientious analysis of their own colonial biases both as Canadians and as educators. Teachers who do not see the value in the implementation of Indigenous ways of knowing and who are anxious about the new curriculum run the risk of introducing Aboriginal content in such a way that actually reinforces the view of Eurocentric ideas as superior.

Another danger is that teachers will approach Aboriginal content and perspectives as a box to be checked off instead of as a different way of approaching teaching and learning. In my role as a district helping teacher I hope to help other teachers recognize that the incorporation of Indigenous ideas into their practice is both a moral imperative

within the historical context of Canada, the current findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the recent signing of our district's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, as well as a practical advantage in that Indigenous pedagogy will allow students to have a more personal, meaningful and lasting educational experience.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Areas that would be helpful to explore involve expanding the subject areas in which Indigenous perspectives are integrated as well as building the capacities of Non-Aboriginal educators in the public school system while increasing the number of teachers and administrators of Aboriginal ancestry. Any investigation into ways to strengthen partnerships between Aboriginal educators in the community and public schools is also recommended. Research could include teachers investigating their own practice as they incorporate Indigenous perspectives as well as an investigation of effective methods for allowing teachers to collaborate and share ideas within schools, districts and across the province. It would be helpful to collect both teacher and student feedback on the successes and challenges of this implementation journey. Such collaborations could also involve the sharing of resources including textual resources as well as the invaluable resource of local Aboriginal community members. This research could help build the confidence of Non-aboriginal and Aboriginal educators in taking up Indigenous views and content within curriculum as well as increasing the collective capacity of teachers across the province as they transform the approach used in classrooms from one dominated by Eurocentric thought, to one that acknowledges the strengths of both

Indigenous and Eurocentric perspectives while reflecting the importance of local contexts.

## **Closing**

This research is timely at the local, provincial, and national level. Within our own district we have recently renewed our Aboriginal Education Enhancement agreement which commits us to increasing an awareness of Aboriginal perspectives for all staff and students as well as strengthening partnerships between our schools and members of local Aboriginal communities. As previously mentioned, at the provincial level there are significant curriculum changes reflecting the thorough and deliberate incorporation of Indigenous content and processes, and at the national level, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recently released its final report which included 94 “Calls to Action”. Within the TRC recommendations are specific educational proposals that include implementing Aboriginal perspectives throughout the K-12 system, sharing information and best practices in regards to teaching curriculum related to Aboriginal history, and “building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into our local, provincial and national education systems will move us in a direction that sees diversity not as a burden but as a strength and a natural and necessary extension of humanity. At this point in time incorporating a two-eyed seeing approach into our schools and classrooms is also an essential step towards repairing historical injustices and overcoming deeply rooted prejudices towards people of Aboriginal ancestry. In the words of Justice Murray

Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, education in the form of the residential school system was a devastating tool used to perpetuate the inequity experienced today by Canada's Indigenous population; however, education will also be the fundamental tool used for reconciliation as "education will create knowledge and from knowledge will come understanding [and] from understanding will come respect – both self respect for Indigenous people and mutual respect for all" (Sinclair, 2010).

## References

- Anuik, J., Battiste, M., & George, P. (2010). Learning from promising programs and applications in nourishing the learning spirit. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 33(1), 63-82,154-155. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/864885237?accountid=14656>
- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Armstrong, J. (2010). Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and Tmixw Centrism. In E. Simmons (Ed.), *Indigenous Earth: Praxis and Transformation* (pp.37-45). Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books.
- Armstrong, J. (2005). History Lesson. In D. Moses & T. Goldie (Eds.) *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)* (pp. 228-229). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada.
- Armstrong, J. (1998). *Land Speaking*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Armstrong, J., Derickson, D., Maracle, L., & Young-Ing, G. (Eds.) (1993). *We Get Our Living Like Milk From the Land*. Penticton, BC: Theytus Books.
- Ball, E. L., & Lai, A. (2006). Place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities. *Pedagogy*, 6(2), 261-287. doi:10.1215/15314200-2005-004

- Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331-340. doi:10.1007/s13412-012-0086-8
- Battiste, M. (2008). Research ethics for protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage. In N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, & L. Tuhiwai Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies* (pp. 497-509). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing Limited.
- Battiste, M. (2000). *Reclaiming indigenous voice and vision*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L. M. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian universities: An interdisciplinary, international, indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 82-95. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/230305394?accountid=14656>
- Bell, N. (2014). Teaching by the Medicine Wheel. *Education Canada*, 54(3), 14-16.
- Bissett, S. (2012). Bala ga lili: Meeting Indigenous learners halfway. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 28(2), 78-91. doi:10.1017/aee.2013.2
- Bopp, J., Bopp, M., Brown, L., & Lane, P., (1985). *The sacred tree. Second Edition:* Lethbridge, AB: Four Worlds International Institute for Human and Community Development.

- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S., (2005). The circle of courage and positive psychology. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 14*(3), 130-136. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=ca1c3f10-871b-43ae-8048-35f4c9cec6b9%40sessionmgr110&vid=2&hid=112>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2015). *Building student success: B.C.'s new curriculum*. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/home>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2008). *English 12 First Peoples: Integrated resource package*. Retrieved from [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/english\\_language\\_arts/2008eng12\\_firstppl.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/english_language_arts/2008eng12_firstppl.pdf)
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2014). *Provincial Examinations and Transcripts: Distribution of letter grades by course and public school: 2014/06 session*. p. 1-5)
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2013). Raising the profile of First Nations courses. *Learn: The Magazine of B.C. Education, 6*, 4-8.
- Butler, D.L., Schnellert, L., & Perry, N.E. (2016). *Developing Self-Regulating Learners*. Don Mills, ON: Pearson.
- Cajete (Tewa), G. A. (2005). *American Indian epistemologies*. *New Directions for Student Services, 2005*(109), 69-78. doi:10.1002/ss.155
- Chrona, J. (2014, November 26). First Peoples Principles of Learning. Retrieved from: <https://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com/>



- Clarke, A., & Erickson, G. (2006). Teacher inquiry: What's old is new again. *BC Educational Leadership Research*, 1-8.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (2009). *Inquiry as stance*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Corbin, J. M., Strauss, A. L., (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dana, N.F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2009). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Silva, D. (2003). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- DeBacker, T.K., & Nelson, R.M. (2008). Achievement motivation in adolescents: The role of peer climate and best friends. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 76, 170-187. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=501f3727-c3d5-44c1-b2f0-ae8d79b98db8%40sessionmgr110&vid=2&hid=114>
- Dumont, H., D. Istance and F. Benavides(eds.) (2010), *The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice, Educational Research and Innovation*. OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264086487-en>

- Dunleavy, J. & Milton, P. (2009) *What did you do in school today? Exploring the Concept of Student Engagement and its Implications for Teaching and Learning in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Education Association.
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2010). *English 10 and 11 Teacher Resource Guide*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.fnesc.ca/efp/Attachments/EFP%2010-11%20Teacher%20Resource%20Guide%20Final.pdf>
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
- Gay, G. (2010). Acting on Beliefs in Teacher Education for Cultural Diversity. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 143-152.
- Gay, G. (2001). Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-16.
- Gay, G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43(1), 48-70. doi:10.1111/curi.12002
- Grass, S.J. (2014). *Structures and Strategies for Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: How do Instructors in Aboriginal Controlled Post-Secondary Education Institutions Integrate Indigenous Knowledge and Culture into their Practice?* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from: <http://circle.ubc.ca/>
- Gruenewald, D. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3-12.

- Gruenewald, D. (2008). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Environmental Education Research*, 14(3), 308-324.
- Hatcher, A. (2012). Building cultural bridges with Aboriginal learners and their 'classmates' for transformative environmental education. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2, 346-356. doi: 10.1007/s13412-012-0088-6
- Hogue, M., & Bartlett, C. (2014). Two-Eyed Seeing. *Education Canada*, 54(3), 25-27.
- Hubbard, R., & Power, B. (2003). *The Art of Classroom Inquiry: A Handbook for Teacher-Researchers. Revised Edition.*
- Jones, S.M., & Bouffard, S.M. (2012). Social and emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies. *Society for Research on Child Development Social Policy Report*, 25 (No. 4), 1-22.
- Kanu, Y. (2011). *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Into the School Curriculum.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press Inc.
- Kessler, R. (2000). *The soul of education: Helping students find connection, compassion, and character at school.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A native narrative.* Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.
- King, T. (1993). *One good story, that one: Stories* (First Ed.). Toronto, ON: Harper Collins.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the Lines and beyond the Pages: A Culturally Relevant Approach to Literacy Teaching. *Theory into Practice*, 31(4), 312–320. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/stable/1476313>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & King, J. (1990). *Cultural identity of African- Americans: Implications for achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (MCREL).
- Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder (Updated and expanded ed.)*. Chapel Hill, N.C: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Miller, J. P., & Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. (2007). *The holistic curriculum* (2nd ed.). Toronto: OISE Press.
- Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance to Dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 392-426.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. Columbia University Press.
- Parhar, N., & Sensoy, O., (2011). Culturally relevant pedagogy redux: Canadian teachers' conceptions of their work and its challenges. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 34(2), 189-218.
- Pidgeon, M., Archibald, J., & Hawkey, C. (2014). Relationships matter: Supporting Aboriginal graduate students in British Columbia, Canada. *The Canadian Journal*

of *Higher Education*, 44(1), 1-21. Retrieved from  
<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/1536865858?accountid=14656>

Portillo, A. (2013). Indigenous-centered pedagogies: Strategies for teaching Native American literature and culture. *CEA Forum*, 42(1), 155-178. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1007517.pdf>

Preston, J., & Claypool, T. (2013). Motivators of educational success: Perceptions of grade 12 Aboriginal students. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(4), 257-279.

Ragoonaden, K., Cherkowski, S., Baptiste, M., & Després, B. (2009). Unravel the story, the Okanagan way. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 55(3), 382.

Shagoury, R., & Power, B. M. (2012). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers* (2nd ed.). Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.

Schonert-Reichl, K.A. & Hymel, S. (2007). Educating the heart as well as the mind: Why social and emotional learning is critical for students' school and life success. *Education Canada*, 47, 20-25.

Sinclair, M. (2010, April) *For the child taken, for the parent left behind*. Speech presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. New York, NY.

Smith, G.A., (2002). Place-based education: Learning to be where we are. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(8), 584-594.

- Sobel, D. (1996). Beyond ecophobia: Reclaiming the heart in nature education. *Nature Literacy Series, 1*, 1-45.
- Steinebach, C., Steinebach, U., & Brendtro, L. K. (2013). Positive Youth Psychology: Lessons from Positive Peer Culture. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 21*(4), 15-21.
- Taylor, D. H. (1998). *Fearless warriors*. Burnaby, B.C: Talonbooks.
- Thornton, C. (2011). The mountain in the lake: Reflections of the inner and outer landscape in the writing of northern British Columbia. *The University of the Fraser Valley Research Review, 3*(1), 130-136.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Retrieved from [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English\\_2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English_2.pdf)
- United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html> [accessed 11 January 2016]
- Wagamese, R. (2012). *Indian horse*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Wagamese, R. (2008). *One native life*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.
- Waller, R., & Barrentine, S. J. (2015). Rural elementary teachers and place-based connections to text during reading instruction. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 30*(7), 1-13.

Weinstein, C., Curran, M., & Tomlinson-Clarke, S. (2003). Culturally Responsive Classroom Management: Awareness into Action. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(4), 269-276.

## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: Post Activity Reflection Guide

#### **English First Peoples Reflection Guide**

Topic/Activity:

**Name:**

**Possible Prompts:** *(these are questions to think about for your response, but please answer in paragraph form, and not with individual answers). You don't have to answer every single point as long as you put depth and thought into the points that you do respond to).*

- What did you take away from the experience?
- What was something new that you learned that was valuable or thought provoking?
- Do you have any questions?
- Can you make any connections to something else you know or have learned about?
- Is there anything you struggled with?
- Do you consider yourself a learner? (Do you always try to learn something from every new experience or opportunity?) Please explain why or why not.



## **APPENDIX B: EFP 12 Post Course Evaluations Questions**

### **Interview/Written Questions (Post-Course EFP12)**

1. Tell me some general thoughts about your experience in EFP12.
2. Was there anything that made this course different from your experiences other English classes?
3. Can you describe your inquiry project? What did you get out of that experience?
4. What parts of the class did you find the most enjoyable? Or what do you remember the most?
5. Why do you think you enjoyed/remembered these parts of the class?
6. Which parts of the class did you struggle with? How would you improve the course?
7. Do you feel you were well prepared for the provincial exam? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel you learned about Aboriginal history and perspectives in this course?
9. Can you describe some specific parts of the course where you learned about Aboriginal perspectives?
10. English 12 (and English 12 FP) are very academic courses. What would you say to people who say that you don't have time to be outside of the building doing more "active" learning but instead you should always be focusing directly on reading and writing assignments? Do you agree with this?
11. Do you think that it is important that English 12 First Peoples is offered in this school? Why or why not?
12. What advantages or disadvantages might a student have who took English12 FP vs. regular English.
13. Is there anything else you want to say?

## **APPENDIX C: EFP 10 Post Course Evaluation Questions**

### **EFP 10 Course Feedback**

Name:

What are the activities that you enjoyed the most or that you remember the most from this class?

Why do you think you enjoyed/remembered those particular activities?

What are the activities that you enjoyed the least, or that you did not find valuable?

Do you feel that you gained academic skills (reading comprehension, written expression, oral communication) this semester?

Do you feel that activities such as going outdoors, having guest presentations etc.

- a) Improved your skills in English (reading and writing and oral communication)
- b) Hurt your skills in English
- c) Had no effect on your English skills

Please explain your answer:

How would you improve this course? If you were designing it for yourself again what would you really feel strongly about adding/leaving/changing?

Final thoughts/comments:

## APPENDIX D: Student Assent and Parent Consent Forms



**a place of mind**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

### Student Assent

#### Research Study: Combining Aboriginal and Western Educational Perspectives

##### I. Who is conducting the study?

###### Principal Investigator:

Dr. Leyton Schnellert, UBCO Department of Education Tel: 250.807.8654 Email: leyton.schnellert@ubc.ca

###### Co-Investigators:

Naryn Searcy, UBCO M.A. Graduate Student, Department of Education

Tel: 250.770.7620 Ext. 6210 Email: nsearcy@summer.com

Judith King, District Helping Teacher School District 67 (Okanagan Skaha) Email: jking@summer.com

This research is being conducted for a thesis for a Master of Arts in Education degree. Information from this research may also be used to inform other educators in the district and the province of British Columbia.

##### II. What is the purpose of this study?

We are currently conducting research on incorporating active and community-based activities into the demanding academic expectations of the English 10 and 12 First Peoples (EFP10 and EFP12) courses. EFP expects that students participate in a variety of activities that are outside of the classroom, and yet are also adequately prepared for the rigorous demands of post secondary education. We are interested in learning how to most effectively deliver these courses.

Your work and reflections on class activities could potentially provide us with essential feedback to continually make the EFP curriculum as meaningful and beneficial for students as possible.

### III. What happens if you say “Yes, I give permission for my work to be used in this study?”

The project is in the early stages of development, and samples of your work and your reflections on class activities may be collected for inclusion in the research. Attendance records and grades on assignments may also be used. From time to time photographs and video recordings of whole class lessons will be taken. Samples of your writing, projects, reflections, or other examples of your work could be used in the final publication. All samples will be collected anonymously and your name will not be included at any time. If photos or video recordings are to be shared with other educators then you will be asked for further permission and you will be shown the photos or video before you give approval. If you change your mind in the future, you may revoke your permission at any time. If you revoke your permission then any footage of whole class activities that include you will be deleted.

Some students may be asked to participate in interviews or participate in a focus group to provide us with feedback about the course. These interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed and student names will not be used. These activities would not take more than 30 extra minutes of your time during a lunch hour.

### IV. Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles.

The main study findings will be shared with other educators in School District 67 and around the province. Results of the study will also be made available online for participants to access.

### V. Is there any way that being in this study could be bad for you?

There is nothing in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. All samples will be collected anonymously and your name will not be included at any time.

### VI. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

In the future, other students and other educators may benefit from what is learned from this study. The English First Peoples curriculum has the potential to offer options beyond a regular English class that could benefit a wide variety of learners. It is our hopeful intention that this research will contribute towards the development of EFP 10 and 12 courses that are as meaningful and beneficial as possible for students.

### VII. How will your identity be protected?

Your identity will be protected. A pseudonym or a number will be used to identify all of your work. In the case of video being taken, your name will not be used, and extra permission would have to be provided by you. At no time will you be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

VIII. Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you would like to discuss this study further, or if you require further clarification, please contact the Principal Investigator or one of Co-Investigators. The names and numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

IX. Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about this study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating, please contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics toll free at 1-877-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. It is also possible to contact the Research Complaint Line by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca).

X. Participant Consent and Signature

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your experience in your English First Peoples class or any impact on your grade or other assessments in the course.

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

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

---

Student Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of the Student signing above



**a place of mind**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Parent Consent Form

Research Study: Combining Aboriginal and Western Educational Perspectives

I. Who is conducting the study?

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Leyton Schnellert, UBCO Department of Education Tel: 250.807.8654 Email: leyton.schnellert@ubc.ca

Co-Investigators:

Naryn Searcy, UBCO M.A. Graduate Student, Department of Education

Tel: 250.770.7620 Ext. 6210 Email: nsearcy@summer.com

Judith King, District Helping Teacher School District 67 (Okanagan Skaha) Email: jking@summer.com

This research is being conducted for a thesis for a Master of Arts in Education degree. Information from this research will be used to inform other educators in the district and the province of British Columbia.

II. What is the purpose of this study?

We are currently conducting research on incorporating active and community-based activities into the demanding academic expectations of the English 10 and 12 First Peoples (EFP10 and EFP12) courses. EFP expects that students participate in a variety of activities that are outside of the classroom, and yet are also adequately prepared for the rigorous demands of post secondary education. We are interested in learning how to most effectively deliver these courses.

Your son or daughter's work and reflections on class activities could potentially provide us with essential feedback to continually make the EFP curriculum as meaningful and beneficial for students as possible.

III. What happens if you say "Yes, I give permission for my son or daughter's work to be used in this study?"

The project is in the early stages of development, and samples of student work and student reflections on class activities will be collected for inclusion in the research. Attendance records and grades on assignments may also be used. From time to time photographs and video recordings of whole class lessons will be taken. Samples of your child's writing, projects, reflections, or other examples of student work could be used in

the final publication. All samples will be collected anonymously and your child's name will not be included at any time. If photos or video recordings are to be shared with other educators then you will be asked for further permission and you will be shown the photos or video before you give approval. If you change your mind in the future, you may revoke your permission at any time. If you revoke your permission then any footage of whole class activities that include your child will be deleted.

Some students may be asked to participate in interviews or participate in a focus group to provide us with feedback about the course. These interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed and student names will not be used. These activities would not take more than 30 extra minutes of a student's time during a lunch hour.

#### IV. Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.

The main study findings will be shared with other educators in School District 67 and around the province. Results of the study will also be made available online for participants to access.

#### V. Is there any way that being in this study could be bad for your son or daughter?

There is nothing in this study that could harm your son or daughter or be bad for them. All samples will be collected anonymously and your child's name will not be included at any time.

#### VI. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

In the future, other students and other educators may benefit from what is learned from this study. The English First Peoples curriculum has the potential to offer options beyond a regular English class that could benefit a wide variety of learners. It is our hopeful intention that this research will contribute towards the development of EFP 10 and 12 courses that are as meaningful and beneficial as possible for students.

#### VII. How will student identity be protected?

The identity of students will be protected. A pseudonym or a number will be used to identify any student work. In the case of video being taken, student names will not be used, and extra permission would have to be provided by you. No students will be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

#### VIII. Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you would like to discuss this further, or if you require further clarification, please contact the Principal Investigator or one of the Co-Investigators. The names and numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

IX. Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about this study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating, please contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics toll free at 1-877-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. It is also possible to contact the Research Complaint Line by email (RSIL@ors.ubc.ca).

X. Participant Consent and Signature

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your son or daughter's experience in English First Peoples or any impact on his or her grade or other assessments in the course.

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

Please check one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I grant permission for the use of the material as described above.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not grant permission for the use of the material as described above.

Child's name:

---

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of the Parent or Guardian signing above





**a place of mind**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Parent Consent for Photo/Video

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Earlier in the year you provided consent for your son or daughter to participate in a research study regarding combining Aboriginal and western educational perspectives. In the original consent form it was assured that if any photos or video taken of your son or daughter were to be included in our research then further permission would be requested from you.

Your son or daughter appears in a photo or video that we would like to share with other educators. After you have seen this image or images please decide if you are willing to allow it to be included as part of our research. Your son or daughter's name will not be used at anytime. If you do not allow these photos or videos to be used in our research there will be no affect on your son or daughter's experience or grades in his or her English First Peoples course.

Please check the following once you have seen the photo(s) and/or video(s)

\_\_\_\_\_ I have seen the photo(s) and/or video(s) that include my son or daughter

Please check one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I grant permission for this material to be included as described above

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not grant permission for this material to be included as described above

Child's name:

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian signing above

## **APPENDIX E: Examples of Coding**

### **EFP 12 Final Course Evaluation (Consolidated Responses) (Coded)**

#### **Question #2: What made this course different from other English courses you have taken?**

##### **Code Key:**

Experiential Learning (EL)

Community/Relationships (CR)

Outdoor Learning (OL)

Assessment (A)

Challenges/Tensions (CT)

Changes in attitudes/perceptions (CA)

##### **Student Responses:**

(EL) More active/hands on activities (8)

(CR) We came together as a family (1)

(CR) Lots of interaction with classmates vs independent work (1)

Mrs. S (3)

Was fun no matter what (1)

(CR) Sharing circles (4)

(EL) Presentations (1)

Food (1)

(OL) Got to go outside and do things (4)

(EL) Field trips (4)

(CR) Multiple chances to get to know each other (1)

We had fun while we learned (2)

(CA) First peoples literature (1)

(EL) Little buddies (3)

(EL) We didn't sit in a classroom every minute of the course (1)

(CA) Different perspectives (7)

(EL) Performing in front of the class (1)

**Interview student 1:** (CR) sharing circles-integral in getting us to bond at the end of the course we could all trust and connect-you could be yourself (family)

(CR) By the end of the course we were so open with each other it was quite incredible

(CR) I wasn't friends with everybody before-we have a bond

(EL) the way we tackled each of the projects- for example the Thomas King/photo shoot connection

(EL) the blanket exercise (CA) (describes the exercise in detail)

(EL) visual learning opportunities

**Interview Student 2:**

(CR) We had a bond between the class/people could actually feel trusting of other students like it's a safe environment-we do these things called sharing circles and usually like whatever we do within that week we have a sharing circle around Thurs/Friday at the end of the week we talk about what we did and how we felt about it-that builds trust-in other classes I don't talk to any other kids except my actual friends but in that class I could talk with anybody about like anything

(EL)We took a field trip to Armstrong-play about 2 winds-horse drawn carriages/bus ride was awesome

**Interview student 3:** (CR) talking circles-when she first said that by the end of the course we'd all be so comfortable I was like "yeah right" but then it did, it happened and we all shared personal stuff and we all trusted each other

**Interview Student 4:** (CR) and face to face with people instead of in desks we all became so close-it was emotional the last day

(EL) a more visual way of learning we actually get to go out and experience what we read about we went out and saw pictographs-better than seeing it in a book-we had \_\_\_\_\_-we put her in this ...everyone helped \_\_\_\_\_-she was so happy and smiled the whole time

(CA) it's from an Aboriginal perspective-we don't learn about Shakespeare-describes the blanket exercise

### **Interview Student 5:**

(CR) We had our first sharing circle and I really didn't understand the concept-as the course progressed and we talked to each other the more we sat in a circle the easier it got to talk to everyone. There's still people I talk to in the hallway-it was nice bring back that (kindergarten) -at first you don't share the full story for example of the person in the class giving them a compliment -her eyes starting to water- "it's very personal" (EL) it's comforting-makes you enjoy the class-instead of sitting in a chair we would get up and move-on video clip/pictographs-we carried her up the hill-sleigh ride-bus ride singing-pictures/videos/performers-the more we did things together the more (CR) fun it was-a very committed class-the more people committed to something the more fun it made it-even doing the essays/assignments together was fun

(CT) Taking regular English-you know poetry, you know essays, punctuation/you had an idea of what English was-(CA) you were never given an idea of what English COULD BE on a different spectrum-I went into the course knowing absolutely nothing about that culture at all-it was nice not knowing what we were going to do

(CA) not just poetry-but learning a culture you learn so many things outside. I think it was better stepping outside the box-it's so different-it depends on how open minded you are

it was hard-FP was hard (A) I felt very prepared for the exam though

### **Interview Student 6:**

(EL) more active/get out more instead of just reading things-went to an elementary school/hung out with them-friendship centre-my inquiry project friendship centre-explain -memories

### **Interview Student 7:**

(EL) The learning environment was completely different we do a lot more activities-(OL) a lot more outside (EL) one of the best ways to learn stuff is through actually doing it-everything was fun-everything was enjoyable-I'm not a big fan of just sitting in front of a teacher learning from him/hands on instead of writing it is a lot more memorable

(EL) So you'll understand it more/remember it more/key on things-understand it better

(CR) the sharing circles were huge/every single person had an equal share/everybody has a voice/an opinion/we don't allow everyone their voice of opinion

(CR) We had to have trust-tell them personal stuff

my little sister getting bullied...racism still exists today/it starts with the older generation/must inform the older generations

(CA) this course is important/shows you a different perspective/class was 3/4 white those are the people who need to learn and take this course-this will change their life-this course in the future It's one of the... I truly believe that this course in the future will change people's lives and will help society today with one of the biggest issues-people not knowing about it-we understand

### **Interview Student 8:**

(CR) Classmates-sharing circles...started out pretty tame with short answers...one word answers...people were more comfortable...something we didn't know about each other-it just brought everybody really close together...I got to see a lot of kids who were really shy to going from being shy and reserved to all of a sudden having all these friends in this class...it was very powerful-

(CA) Aboriginal perspective-that was really good for me and a lot of people in the class as well because it seems like society gets caught up in thinking our culture is right and the best...don't give First Nations a chance and once I saw their perspectives-the past-how resilient they have been-we're all equal-in any culture you can connect to

(CA) I learned a whole new respect

### **Interview Student 9:**

(EL) The fact that she likes to take it outside the class a lot and we went to the En'owkin centre and that was so cool you're learning a lot but you're not just sitting in class

(EL) We went a lot of different places-really cool element compared to sitting in a class writing an essay

### **Interview Student 10:**

A lot. So much I remember from English first people- (CT) like English last year all I can remember is hard work, very classroom thinking-the difference between these two classes this class added so much colour-the (EL) teaching style would help so many more people a different style of learning.

**Interview Student 11:** (CR) The sharing circles were something I've never had before... we all got to know each other so well and... no other English class like that... (EL) we got to do cool stuff like working with little buddies... guest speakers (OL)...climbing up to the pictographs... (CA) all the Aboriginal stuff... never knew about so much stuff before....

## **Teacher Research Journal (Coded)**

### **January 2015 EFP 12**

#### **Code Key:**

Experiential Learning (EL)

Community/Relationships (CR)

Outdoor Learning (OL)

Assessment (A)

Challenges/Tensions (CT)

Changes in attitudes/perceptions (CA)

### **Journal Entries:**

**(EL) Anne's presentation on Residential Schools** (Jan 12, 2015): (CA) see written feedback for reflections

**Smoke Signals Movie:** (Jan 14/15/19<sup>th</sup>, 2015) General observations: The only students who had previously seen the movie were students of Aboriginal ancestry. (CT) They were VERY excited to watch it (why I picked it even though I had done all that prep work on Whale Rider!!!) Most of the students who had seen it had trouble not basically saying every line before it happened. The class got a kick out of them laughing hysterically at a number of parts. As a teacher I really struggled with things like discussion of key themes and symbols because I was taking a movie these kids really love and crucifying it with "English class terms etc.". Would you want your English teacher to pick apart your favourite movie? Jake (pseudonym) at one point said "Searcy, you're killing me!!" when I paused the movie to point out some symbolism. (A) At the same time these kids need to be able to reference key elements of this movie on the provincial exam. (CT) This is something I have struggled with throughout the course. So much of the course is real and immediate. How do you take something (for example a story told by (guest presenter) about her grandmother) and turn it into a synthesis question? Does the academic "English class" part of the course destroy the enjoyment and authenticity of the Aboriginal component??

In general, most of the class was engaged in the movie and when we shared out about it students said they really liked it. I do believe that most of them liked it (I was watching them as they watched it) but at the same time I doubt that anyone would have criticized the movie when a group of students in the class was so obviously enthusiastic about it.

**Sharing Circle (Tuesday Jan 20<sup>th</sup>):** Topic "something most people might not know about you". I chose this topic as something related to the personal narratives that students had written the previous Friday. Students shared some very personal experiences in their essays so I was curious if they would share them with the whole group. (CR) I think we are at a place where there is definite trust in the group, at the same time it really just depends where kids are at. I started by demonstrating that you could share something really emotional or just quirky or humorous so I gave a personal example of both types. (CR) (For the record, it was a bit nerve wracking sharing personal stuff with the class-even though I really didn't go into much detail!). After that we went around the circle. Interesting observations: Some really personal stuff was shared. A girl shared that her parents were getting a divorce (she is a popular student with lots of friends and I could tell that most students did not know that info), a student shared that his/her home life was

horrific and thanked the class for being there for him, one student shared he/she had considered suicide, one shared that he/she hadn't smoked marijuana since the beginning of 2015, some students shared embarrassing or humiliating moments and some shared humorous anecdotes. 2 students didn't share anything. I know that both of these students are comfortable sharing (in general) with the class and in sharing circles but they said they simply couldn't think of anything interesting about themselves worth sharing. It was a reminder to give students more time to think about what they want to share instead of putting them on the spot.

### **Kindergarten Visit: (Friday Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>)**

(EL) The kids were awesome today. I can't really pinpoint particular students because it is all kind of a blur. I am always amazed by the maturity and gentleness that even the "toughest" kids demonstrate around younger students. My kids were attentive and very creative in ways to involve their little buddies in the overall project. I think the final result will be very satisfying and the students will have lots of connections to make to "The Boy In The Ditch Story". (CR) An interesting detail is that Patti (pseudonym) showed me a posting she made on face book where a student had posted "so are we all going up to Apex for a grad skip day" and she had posted "does that mean we're all ditching English class and our little buddies?". I was incredibly impressed and surprised that she did that. She has been so on the fringes of our class community and yet here she was pushing to bring people together to come through. (EL) I know that she really liked the last class with the little buddies so I'm glad she enjoyed this experience. I thought we were going to lose this particular student back in November. Right after we all signed the big card for her she disappeared and I thought the social pressure (even though it was positive and encouraging) was too much for her to handle. But she is still here and is going to finish the course she has definitely been a part of our class community.

### **Conversation with Conrad (pseudonym)**

(CR) Earlier (before Christmas) Conrad had mentioned that speaking in the sharing circle actually makes him more nervous than any other situation he speaks in. This is a student who had a lead role in the school musical, speaks regularly at public events such as the Remembrance Day ceremony. He said it's just so personal and so he wants to think carefully about what he says. He specifically mentioned he was more nervous for the sharing circle than his speech in the Remembrance Day ceremony.

(CR) On Friday (Jan 23<sup>rd</sup>) Conrad mentioned that one of his favourite things about the course is the sharing circles and how close the class has become. He said it was just really awesome how close everyone is in the class.

## **APPENDIX F: Sharing Circle Protocols**

### Protocols for Sharing Circles (As shared by Anne Tenning, School District 67 District Principal of Aboriginal Education)

1. Once the circle has begun no one must leave or enter the circle. (Appropriate signage should be posted so the circle is not interrupted by students who are late etc.)
2. Only the person who is holding the designated sharing circle "object" (for our class it is the mini-drum) may speak. All other members must listen respectfully and there is no "cross-talk" in response.
3. What is shared in the circle is safe within that circle. No one has to worry about anything being repeated outside of the circle.
4. Any member of the circle has the right to "pass" if they are not able to contribute on that particular day.
5. Appropriate language and expression must be used. No profanity is permitted.
6. Members should begin by introducing themselves and providing some information about their family or background.
7. The leader of the circle will acknowledge the traditional territory that the circle is being held on (The Okanagan Nation's territory in our case).
8. In according to local tradition, the drum is passed clockwise in the summer and counter clockwise in the winter.



## **APPENDIX G: The First Peoples Principles of Learning**

### First Peoples Principles of Learning

First identified in relation to English 12 First Peoples, the following First Peoples Principles of Learning generally reflect First Peoples pedagogy.

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

Because these principles of learning represent an attempt to identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Peoples societies, it must be recognized that they do not capture the full reality of the approach used in any single First Peoples society.