

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

NORTHEASTERN SASKATCHEWAN ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF THEIR DISTANCE EDUCATION EXPERIENCES AND THE RELATIONSHIP  
TO THEIR ABORIGINAL CULTURE

BY

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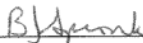
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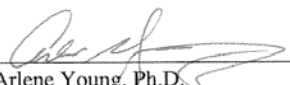
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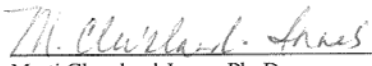
The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Athabasca University Governing Council for acceptance a thesis NORTHEASTERN SASKATCHEWAN ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR DISTANCE EDUCATION EXPERIENCES AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR ABORIGINAL CULTURE submitted by Patricia Lee Newton in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF DISTANCE EDUCATION.

  
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. To the spirit of Mom and Dad who inspired in me the virtues of sincerity, perseverance and hard work. To Dad who instilled within me the belief that I could accomplish whatever I set my mind to. To Mom whose loving care and devotion to our family allowed me to start and finish my graduate education. To my partner Larry for your love, support and encouragement and the meals you cooked so I could write, and to my children, Sol, Robin and Alyssa for their tolerance and understanding for the hours I spent away from you on this research. You had faith in my ability to persevere and provided the unconditional love and encouragement needed to complete this work.

## ABSTRACT

The central issues explored in this research were the ways in which the current Eurocentric model of education has failed to provide for the unique educational needs of Aboriginal people, and the ways in which distance education provision can be redesigned in order to provide a more culturally appropriate educational model for Aboriginal communities. The purpose of this case study was to identify the key factors relating to Aboriginal students' values, beliefs and practices that contribute to a positive distance education experience for six adult Aboriginal students studying at a community college in Northeastern Saskatchewan. These factors were compared to those identified in the literature and from this research recommendations were made for changes and additions to the support services necessary for these community college students to realize successful distance education experiences. The literature showed the importance of addressing the issues of cultural sensitivity and cultural integrity when designing and delivering distance education courses for Aboriginal learners. The reviewed literature was categorized under three broad topics: Aboriginal education and cultural factors, distance education barriers, and access issues and support issues in distance education. A case study research design was used where participants were interviewed in written and oral formats. The interview questions were based on information researched in the literature review and from these interviews general themes were identified and then confirmed in a focus group session. Research results identified the value of community, the need for a common area to study and incorporation of aboriginal beliefs and content in course curricula. Student transience and alleviation of various stressors were also determined as factors affecting distance education experiences. From this research

support services necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult Aboriginal distance educational experiences for these students were recommended. The recommendations include on-reserve distance education, tutoring, library and transportation services, cross-cultural education provision and orientation/transition sessions. Provincial distance education course accessibility and delivery would also benefit these students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“If I do not speak in a language that can be understood there is little chance for a dialogue.”

--bell hooks (hooks, 1989, p. 78)

### Background

Distance education offers access to learning opportunities to students who live in remote locations or who want to remain in their home communities with their families while studying. The field of distance education is changing as digital technology and the use of optical fibre for communication expands to more remote areas. This expansion leads to more possibilities for distance education in remote areas populated by Aboriginal peoples. Adult Aboriginal students experience varying success rates in post-secondary distance education. Numerous factors contribute to these varying success rates. Barriers are apparent in the development and delivery of distance education courses. Some are unique to Aboriginal learners and some are common to distance delivered courses. Common barriers include costs of delivery, access to reliable technology and inadequate or non-existent student support. Barriers unique to the situation facing Aboriginal learners include the lack of course materials adapted to learners' cultures and contexts and delivery methods flexible enough to accommodate the various learning styles and culture of the learners.

### Statement of the Problem

The central issues to be explored in this research are the ways in which the current Eurocentric model of education has failed to provide for the unique educational needs of Aboriginal people, and the ways in which distance education provision can be redesigned

in order to provide a more culturally appropriate educational model for Aboriginal communities.

Canadian government policies regarding the schooling of Aboriginal people were oriented toward assimilation into mainstream European-Canadian society. Negative experiences in residential schools resulted in many Aboriginal people having a mistrust of educational institutions. In Canada, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) stated the importance of Indigenous knowledge where the rethinking of education from the perspective of Indigenous knowledge and learning styles is of value to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and students. The Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable (2004) positioned education as a key investment necessary to achieve a better quality of life for Aboriginal peoples. The Roundtable found the goal of life long learning to be consistent with both federal government policies and within the traditional concept of learning held by many Aboriginal peoples. Representatives stressed the need to focus on specific cultural, linguistic and traditional values within curricula and to address educational access issues with respect to familial obligations and remoteness of many aboriginal communities. An educational context that respects and builds on both Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems is needed in contemporary modern education. (Battiste, 2002).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to identify the key factors relating to Aboriginal students' values, beliefs and practices that contribute to a positive distance education experience for adult Aboriginal students studying at a community college in Northeastern Saskatchewan. These factors are compared to those identified in the literature and from

this research recommendations are made for changes and additions to the support services necessary for these community college students to realize successful distance education experiences.

### Research Questions

The following questions have been developed to accomplish the purpose of this study.

1. What factors have a negative impact on distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students in Northeastern Saskatchewan?
2. What factors have a positive impact on distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students in Northeastern Saskatchewan?
3. How do the identified factors relate to these students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices?
4. What changes in institutional practice, in both design and support services, are necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult distance educational experiences for these Aboriginal students?

### Significance

According to the latest results of Statistics Canada 2001 census Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population (Taillon, 2003). Taillon (2003) reports that in 2001, a total of 976,305 persons including First Nations, Métis and non-Status Indians identified themselves as Aboriginal. This count was 22.2% higher than the 1996 figure of 799,010. In contrast, the non-Aboriginal population grew only 3.4% between 1996 and 2001. With the increase in population the need for educational programming will increase and distance education is one way to meet the needs of

Aboriginal adult learners in remote communities. Distance education can provide learning opportunities for both adult upgrading and post-secondary education.

Rural Saskatchewan is a sparsely populated area and population demographics are changing. Population in the rural areas is declining and the workforce is aging (Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, 2002). The Statistics Canada 2001 census enumerated 130,190 Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan which equals 14% of the province's population (Statistics Canada, 2001). One way of addressing the predicted labour shortage due to a retiring workforce is to increase the workforce participation level in the Aboriginal communities. Educational provision for this prospective workforce is necessary and can be achieved through distance education means. There is and will continue to be a need for accessible, effective distance education programs for Aboriginal adult learners in Saskatchewan.

Distance education is a means of providing educational access and equity. Using this research, a distance education initiative can be developed to meet the needs of the Aboriginal adult learners in Northeastern Saskatchewan, and the needs of their educational institutions. Various institutions in Saskatchewan such as the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Dumont Technical Institute and the regional community colleges are educating Aboriginal adults but more distance programs are needed for adults in rural, isolated areas. The increasing Saskatchewan Aboriginal population will then have the necessary educational requirements to fulfill employment opportunities. With increased employment Aboriginal people will benefit from stable incomes, diminished poverty and the positive self-esteem that result from personal achievement.

This research is intended to not only benefit the students but also the educational institutions that plan and deliver Aboriginal distance educational programming in Northeastern Saskatchewan, by identifying the factors that have a positive impact on Aboriginal learners' perceptions of and experiences with distance education, and recommending appropriate action at the institutional level.

### Limitations

The study is based on data collected on Aboriginal students who registered for at least one distance education class at Cumberland Regional College in Northeastern Saskatchewan. The limitations inherent in this study include the availability and willingness of Aboriginal students to take part in the research and discuss their experiences. The research is based on particular Aboriginal students and thus the results will not be generalizable to all Canadian Aboriginal students studying at a distance. The results may, however, indicate issues, strategies and approaches that other institutions can consider within their particular contexts. The readers of this research will be in the best position to assess the fit between these research findings and their situation.

Another limitation may be the researcher's lack of familiarity with Aboriginal culture. The background information in this proposal has been determined from research in the literature on Aboriginal culture rather than from lived experience. The verification of themes by research participants, as discussed in the Methodology section, will help to ensure the validity of data and findings.

Finally, Aboriginal students include First Nations and Métis peoples and these cultures are not homogenous. Students enrolled in the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan are a culturally diverse

group. They are from Cree, Dene or Dakota First Nations or are of Métis heritage. In a collectively created drama production “The Voices Given to Us” students wrote and participated in a play that provided personal, social, cultural and professional meaning for them. The experience allowed the students to maintain their unique cultural diversity and gave voices to each other as well as to each others’ cultures. These students describe learning both from their social and cultural differences and from what they share in common (Borgerson, 2001). Because First Nations and Métis cultures are different, conclusions cannot be drawn with regard to these specific cultures as each student’s experience in distance education is unique and specific to that individual within their respective culture.

#### Delimitations

The study participants are limited to and chosen from Cumberland Regional College as this college is located in the area of province where the researcher lives. Wolcott (1990) states that one of the opportunities and challenges posed by qualitative approaches is that the participants in the research are regarded as people instead of subjects and the research is conducted among the people rather than on them. With the participants I explored their experiences in distance education and use a first person account to report my findings. I worked with both individuals and the group to gather their perspectives, and the first person account approximates the research process where the participants shared their experiences on a personal basis with me in written and oral interviews and in a focus group discussion.



## Definition of Terms

The following definitions were obtained from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2004).

- The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people - Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.
- First Nation: Although the term First Nation is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term “First Nations peoples” refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status.
- Indian: Indian peoples are one of three groups of people recognized as Aboriginal in the Constitution Act, 1982. It specifies that Aboriginal people in Canada consist of Indians, Inuit and Métis. Indians in Canada are often referred to as Status Indians, non-Status Indians and Treaty Indians.
- Metis: People of mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people.
- Dene: The Athabaskan-speaking peoples of northwest Canada and inland Alaska.
- Saulteaux: A First Nation in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, Canada.
- Distance Education: Distance education comprises all arrangements for providing instruction through print or electronic communications media to

persons engaged in planned learning in a place or time different from that of the instructor or instructors (Keegan, 1996)

A case study research design was used where participants were interviewed in written and oral formats. The interview questions were based on information researched in the literature review and from these interviews general themes were identified. The case study participants confirmed the themes and within a focus group discussed recommendations for positive distance education experiences with the researcher.

The following chapters document current literature on aboriginal distance education, the methodology used in the research and narrative accounts of the interviews and focus group session. From this research key factors that relate to the students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices were determined and recommendations made for support services necessary for these students to realize successful distance education experiences.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts not ours.”

--Franz Boas (as cited in Patton, 1990, p. 455)

#### General Introduction

The literature documents the experiences of Aboriginal people with an education system which historically was one of acculturation and assimilation. There have been some success stories but graduation rates of Aboriginal people are lower than for any other population in Canada. According to the Aboriginal Peoples and Post-secondary Education in Canada Report (Mendelson, 2006), high school graduation rates of aboriginal people are far below those of people in the rest of Canada and the situation is particularly bad on reserves. The report, which is based on census data, found that 58 percent of on-reserve aboriginal people between the ages of 20 and 24 had not graduated from high school. Among all people across Canada, the comparable 2001 rate was 16 percent. In Saskatchewan and Alberta, the on-reserve rate for people 20-24 with less than high school was 61 percent. In Manitoba, it was 71 percent.

The literature has identified various ways in which distance education programs have provided access to education in many rural and remote communities. Aboriginal learners have had access to these programs but many factors exist that contribute to whether they are successful once they have gained access.

#### Literature Review

The literature review investigates the cultural factors important in Aboriginal distance education and the barriers that contribute to unsuccessful distance education experiences

for Aboriginal students. Many studies address Native American students in the United States and aboriginal learners in Australia with fewer studies referring to Canadian aboriginal learners. Throughout the literature references are made to the importance of addressing the issues of cultural sensitivity and cultural integrity when designing and delivering distance education courses for Aboriginal learners.

The reviewed literature is categorized under three broad topics: Aboriginal education and cultural factors, distance education barriers, and access issues and support issues in distance education. In many cases where an article addresses more than one of the broad topics it is categorized under its predominant topic.

#### Aboriginal Education and Cultural Factors

Aboriginal people want control and direction of their own futures and distance education is one area that can contribute to attainment of this control. The culture, history and environment of Aboriginal peoples are unique and distance education programs must respect and consider this uniqueness. In Canada, First Nations people have a legal right under the constitution for respect of their uniqueness. The following literature sources address the cultural factors to consider in aboriginal distance education programming on a global basis.

Ingalls (2000) delineates the cultural attributes of American Indians working on reservations and outlines the difficulties experienced in distance learning because of these cultural characteristics. The author describes changes that were made in a University of Texas-El Paso distance learning program with Apache students to accommodate the cultural mores of the community. The recommended changes include flexible time

schedules, culturally sensitive education training for distance teachers and the use of group assignments to facilitate peer collaboration.

In any society the interaction of culture and technology use can be harmonious or can create tension. Decontextualized instructional design may conflict with the learning styles of some learners like indigenous Australian students who require courseware that facilitates social and collaborative forms of interaction. McLoughlin (1999) studies the interaction of the following factors: cultural awareness of the target group, instructional design decisions and educational flexibility in an on-line environment. An online unit, *Learning Pathways*, was developed based on Lave's community of practice model that integrates the cultural knowledge of adult indigenous Australian learners, academic skills for pre-university bridging courses and proficiency in computer technology. Designers can develop culturally-sensitive online instruction if they are aware of the socio-cultural background and learning styles of their learners and if they use an appropriate instructional paradigm.

Sanchez, Stuckey and Morris (1998) state that historically the education of American Indians has been a tool of acculturation and assimilation. They argue that distance education can foster the sustainability of American Indian tribal communities and also provide access to information and skills within the dominant society that can foster inclusion and educational and employment opportunities. They explore these possibilities and their implications by analyzing the use of distance education by some tribal schools and colleges. Distance education allows American Indian students to overcome many of the barriers they face in attaining an education, first of all by enabling them to remain in their communities while they learn. Family commitments and financial stresses are less

burdensome if students can be educated in their communities where they are free from the racism and stereotyping that they experience in mainstream colleges. Distance education needs to be sensitive to culture and context, however, and cultural integrity can be maintained by choosing teachers who share cultural and tribal values and teaching curriculum based on cultural beliefs and values. Using communication technologies in contexts in which learners are accustomed to face-to-face interaction and the spoken word is considered sacred is an issue that raises concerns. In addition, resources for providing learner access to these technologies and support for them in using them for learning are expensive. Though challenges exist, the authors see the potential for distance education to preserve tribal cultures and enable Indian people to control their own education.

Several studies argue that non-Native-run school systems cannot meet the goals of self-determination in education for Aboriginal people. Rozon (2001) outlines the devastating effects the European industrial model of education has had on Aboriginal people, how it devalues the contribution of Elders and undermines Aboriginal culture. She states that the goals of education for Aboriginal people can be achieved in a home-based learning environment rather than a school-based learning environment and on a community approach that draws on local knowledge and local language. The home-based learning environment provides academic support through Internet access and online communications with a teacher. Done in this way, distance education can enable students to attain an education that protects their cultural heritage and provide the academic skills needed in today's society.

A remote area teacher education program (RATEP), (York & Henderson, 2001) is providing teacher education courses to Indigenous students on-site in remote locations

throughout Queensland and Torres Strait. It was conceived to address issues of geographical remoteness, racial discrimination, educational marginalization and enforced dependency of Indigenous communities. It uses various distance education technologies like interactive multimedia courseware, teleconferences, the Internet, e-mail and print materials with on-site tutorial support. The interactive multimedia courseware facilitates these students' preferred way of learning through observation, practice, demonstration with immediate feedback and repetition if necessary.

York and Henderson (2001) report that RATEP is successful with an 82% graduation rate over nine years and this success is attributed to the incorporation of Indigenous cultures, knowledge and ways of learning in the courseware. Australian Indigenous methodologies are used where peer pressure to conform is employed, "why" questions are excluded and learners demonstrate their understanding and abilities in ways that they choose. Lecturers and students share knowledge on academic and traditional, cultural patterns which enables a cross-cultural teaching and learning exchange. RATEP facilitates teacher education of indigenous students through equitable and just means where education is learner-centered and empowering to the student.

A cross-cultural research team from the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada explored Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' memories of learning to read and write and how they differ cross-culturally and, by extension, how attitudes towards the value of literacy differ cross-culturally. Weber-Pillwax states that "the notion of a distinct research methodology for and by Indigenous people is still at the beginning stages of scholarly discourse" (as cited in O'Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe & Weenie, 2004). Therefore, the researchers chose a research methodology, narrative research,

which is credible and acceptable in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous frameworks. Narrative research uses the Indigenous research model of "research as story" based on Cajete's (1994) statement that "story forms the basic foundation of all human learning and teaching. Through story we explain and come to understand ourselves" (p. 68). The authors use memory-work methodology where students recall their memories of learning to read and write and employ personal student narratives to bridge the Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. The authors' findings indicate that students from both cultures experienced both positive and negative memories of learning to read and write and that their memories shaped them as learners. With this understanding students use their memories to construct relevant pedagogical practices in their teaching of language. The researchers learned that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous theoretical foundations can complement one another if those foundations are based on trusting and respectful research relationships.

Spronk (1995) describes an interactional as opposed to an assimilationist framework for education based on a core set of aboriginal values that remain important today, based on the work of Ross (1992). To work effectively with Aboriginal learners distance educators must respect these rules and collaborate with Aboriginal agencies and communities to provide education that builds on Aboriginal ways. Spronk describes the challenges experienced in the varied programming between distance educators and Aboriginal communities and agencies across Canada. These challenges are apparent in appropriate delivery modes and instructional approaches, curricula and course materials relevant to Aboriginal learners and political issues that arise within the collaborative programming.



Robinson (2001) explores Native American students' perceptions of their experiences in distance education classes and whether the distance education classroom becomes a subculture taking on characteristics of the Native American culture. In these distance classes Robinson ascertains that barriers to success like racism, stereotyping, lack of role models, lack of financial resources and conflict with culture and isolation are eliminated. Studying with learners of similar backgrounds and culture is instrumental to these learners' success. Her research reveals a significant gap in the literature concerning Native Americans and distance education and she recommends more research in the areas of student service needs and success rates when some on-site instruction is delivered along with the distance classes. Minority students are more successful when attending distance education classes in their own communities with students from their cultural backgrounds.

Spronk and Radtke (1988) describe education at a distance for Native women organized by Athabasca University. Study skills workshops are provided at a native education centre and the authors discuss the obstacles to the students' learning that occur because of their cultural values, special interests and life situations. Native people value one-to-one personal interaction; therefore learning in a small group rather than independently is preferred. Because English is usually not their first language and there is unfamiliarity with discussion topics a slower pace with frequent breaks is necessary. Native people have a different approach to time from people of Northern European ancestry and they are adept at engaging in simultaneous activities with more concern for the quality of their work and of their interactions with other people than for efficiency or

number of tasks accomplished. The authors advocate building flexibility into distance education programs for native people to aid student success.

Davis (2000) summarizes the literature on Aboriginal distance education, inventories distance education programs and projects by province and develops four case studies of those programs and projects. She outlines common patterns and issues that recur in aboriginal distance education including non-integration of Aboriginal perspectives or context. Factors contributing to successful distance education include delivery modes with higher levels of interactivity, community learning centres with local site coordinators and academic and counselling support. At the community level a sense of ownership and responsibility for the program is necessary with instructors and tutors who understand the skills and needs of students in specific communities. Resources are needed at the Aboriginal organizational and institutional level to develop culturally based curricula and to negotiate with external educational institutions for customized programs appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal learners. In terms of advanced technologies she advocates the infusion of distance education programs with Aboriginal values and perspectives and Aboriginal control of distance education design and delivery.

Martin (1993) states that incorporating Aboriginal values, cultural processes and perspectives are fundamental to creating biculturally oriented Aboriginal adult education programs. These programs must also combine non-Aboriginal skills, concepts and information necessary for student success in a bicultural world. Establishing, operating and managing successful programs at the local community level empowers Aboriginal communities and helps to ensure that education is relevant to community issues and needs. Interactive models of instructional design that are dialogic, incorporating small

group work and discussion, allow students and educators to cooperatively develop educational experiences tailored to individual or collective needs. Providing academic, personal and cultural counselling and instructors with cross-cultural training and warm, positive attitudes is necessary for Aboriginal students, who have experienced hostility, racism and alienation in previous educational experiences. Martin describes considerations for face to face programming but many of his suggestions are also applicable to Aboriginal distance education programming.

The central issue in aboriginal education today that emerges from the literature is the failure of the current industrial model of education to provide for the unique educational needs of Aboriginal peoples. Gruber and Coldevin (1995) believe distance education can play a prominent role in providing a more culturally appropriate educational model for Aboriginal communities. They describe two projects, the Wahsa Distance Education Program and the SCAN (Students Can Achieve Now) program which are similar projects carried out in Cree communities in Northern Ontario. The Wahsa program was successful and the SCAN project was not. The authors identify five key guidelines for introducing distance education programs into aboriginal communities. Support of the band council and local community, real ownership of the program that responds directly to community needs, qualified on-site facilitators that provide support and access to tutoring and provision of a community learning centre are necessary program components. Other important components are the use of skilled instructional designers to adapt the course materials and instructional delivery to the specific needs and context of the aboriginal community, and establishment of course completion deadlines and start dates that correspond to important community activities such as hunting and fishing.

Distance delivery allows expanded and effective use of limited critical resources, and enables the learners to live in their own cultural and physical environment and to interact with mainstream culture through the various distance education technologies.

Facey (2001) outlines the potential of the Internet in First Nations education and acknowledges the lack of information on Canadian First Nations education at the postsecondary level in traditional and distance education. She states that distance education for First Nations has to be designed with their full involvement. First Nations need control of sufficient finances to obtain internet-based education based on their individual and community needs. They need to be equally involved in the educational design and delivery of distance education. She sees the potential to make First Nations peoples' lives better if they can afford the technology, keep up with technological changes and use the technology in ways that encourage and support First Nations students and communities.

#### Distance Education Barriers and Access Issues

Distance education program design and delivery is influenced by many factors. The literature describes some of the barriers to successful distance education programs that exist in Aboriginal communities. With recognition of these barriers, strategies can be developed to effect barrier reduction and elimination and improve distance education opportunities for Aboriginal students.

Zepke and Leach (2002) explore the more appropriate technological options for distance education with the Maori, the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Maori learners in the Bachelor of Education (Adult Education) program identify more with an oral than a written culture, do not have easy access to the Internet and want to

learn in ways appropriate to them. Use of video technology with an indexing system called Quicksan provides more appropriate technology than printed study guides and the Internet. Three humanist constructs - adults as self-directed, autonomous learners, experiential learning and critical reflection - underline the project. The project applies these theoretical principles to distance learning pedagogy when developing and using the video technology medium but it is insufficient to enable learners to meet learning outcomes. Further research is needed in learning how to work cross-culturally in distance education where each other's pedagogy is valued and honoured.

Ambler (2004) describes tribal colleges in the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) that transmit and receive workshops, courses and degree programs through satellite networks, the Internet and wideband wireless Internet to service the most remote areas. The 34 tribal colleges serve Indian people who live in remote, rural areas with little access to education. Their clients are often older students with dependents who cannot leave their jobs to attend college in the cities and health workers and teachers who receive professional training. Tribal college programming is producing distance education that facilitates students to work confidently in both the aboriginal and mainstream society. AIHEC has developed a virtual library which focuses on sharing resources to empower communities to be both consumers and producers of virtual information. Lack of funding is a constant challenge.

McMullen and Rohrbach (2003) state that distance education has failed aboriginal students and that several factors have contributed to this failure. In their research which includes literature reviews, e-mail and telephone contacts and seven site visitations they discover barriers, learning styles and best practices of distance education programs in

remote Aboriginal communities in Canada. Distance education must reflect and be flexible enough to adapt to a variety of learning styles and be responsive to local needs. Best practices include the involvement of on-site tutors, flexible delivery models and development of personal relationships between involved parties. Their recommendations provide information needed to establish new distance education programs or improve existing courses and to introduce the potential and long-term benefits of distance education to those unfamiliar with this mode of education.

### Distance Education Support

Successful distance education requires carefully designed and maintained learner support systems. The literature suggests that this necessary support is determined by program design, mode of delivery and learner needs and characteristics, and is provided by qualified, experienced teachers, staffed community centres with on-site coordinators and effective partnerships between the distance education providers and the users who are accessing distance education courses.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada fund a distance education program at the Wahsa Distance Education Centre (referred to above) that enables aboriginal students to attend high school in their communities. Fiddler (1992) describes the radio-delivered program and correspondence courses that provide grade 9-11 subjects and courses in Native culture and language. Support for the program includes a community Adult Learning Centre, community coordinator, on-air teacher/student interaction, telephone tutoring and community visits by teachers. Future development plans include coordinator training, televised classes and increased radio programming for adult upgrading, professional development for teachers and nurses and training for First Nations personnel such as

Band Administrators, Outreach workers and Child and Family Workers. Access to distance education equipment, facilities, academic programming and expertise similar to those provided to provincial school boards are recommended improvements to the program.

Stein and Jetty (2002) describe Salish Kootenai College's distance education program and the internal and external partnerships developed at the outset that contribute to its success. Internal partnerships with in-house Salish Kootenai College faculty had to be developed with respect to pedagogical issues, cultural issues, hardware, software and delivery issues before the distance learning programs could be shared with tribal colleges. External partnerships had to be developed with other tribal colleges so that their courses would not be duplicated and affect enrolment in those colleges. Preservation and enhancement of the people's language and culture is an important goal in their distance learning program and in all courses an aspect of culture is integrated through either student or teacher input. Student support is provided through a student services staff member, advising and mentoring on-line, and a distance learning computer technician.

The need for face-to-face experiences at some time during the course duration, the availability of professional technology service in rural areas and financial sustainability are challenges that the college faces. To effectively implement a distance education program initial planning is necessary, financial resources must be secured, sound technology decisions must be made and faculty time commitments must be understood and enabled. Advising, mentoring and addressing students' technical problems are issues that are difficult to address by distance.

Key factors contributing to successful distance education experiences as researched by Folgert (2002) include self-determination of the student, financial help and supportive families and instructors. Successful graduates are aware of their learning style preferences and can adapt to the distance learning environment.

Technical delivery problems and discrimination are difficulties the students experience and deal with in their courses. Folgert (2002) suggests that distance educators may need to vary their instructional techniques to educate and empower American Indian students.

### Summary of the State of Knowledge

The literature points to opportunities to increase and enhance distance education opportunities for Aboriginal people. Studies indicate that if Aboriginal students experience distance education that is culturally relevant and affirming then there is greater possibility for success. The literature identifies distance education programs that are effective and are contributing to Aboriginal students' educational achievements. Barriers to effective distance education are documented, many of them common to distance education programs in general but some specific to programs which address Aboriginal learners. Because these barriers exist, support mechanisms are delineated for successful distance education experiences and the literature describes the supportive measures that are implemented. Obstacles exist for successful aboriginal distance education programs. The literature identifies the need for community ownership of distance education programs that correspond to community needs. Provision of community learning centres with on-site tutors providing academic and counselling support, and offering courses that incorporate flexible deadlines and culturally appropriate content, will also facilitate success.



Helpful as this literature is in pointing to the kinds of measures that can make a positive difference to Aboriginal learners in general, there remains a lack of information pertaining to Aboriginal learners and distance education in the Canadian context. The present study will help remedy that gap by an in depth study of a specific group of Aboriginal students that identifies (1) the key factors related to the Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices of the specific communities that make for positive distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students studying at a community college in Northeastern Saskatchewan; and (2) the support services those students need to operationalize those factors.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

“Through story we explain and come to understand ourselves”  
--G. Cajete (Cajete, 1994, p. 78)

#### Qualitative Research Methodology

A case study research design was used to explore this research problem. Denzen and Lincoln (1998) state that a case study provides insight into an issue and facilitates our understanding of that issue. Stake (1995) observed that a case study is defined by interest in individual cases and not by the methods of inquiry used. Studying a particular case of adult aboriginal students enrolled in distance education classes was instrumental in providing insight to the research questions.

The characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation. Case studies provide multiple views where the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This aspect of case study research gives a voice to the powerless and voiceless (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). In this study the students’ perspectives on their interaction and involvement with various aspects of distance education within their cultural context became evident. This research design allowed the researcher to understand what contributes to positive distance education experiences for these Aboriginal students and to identify the necessary support to facilitate those successful experiences.

The findings in this case study are authentic, valid stories expressed by the students and are reflective of these students' experiences. They accurately reflect the real situation and the findings are backed by evidence.

This study employed personal interviews, both written and oral, and a focus group technique. These three methodologies were used to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of meaning, to provide rich data and to validate research findings. Triangulation - the use of several research methods or sources of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) - allows the researcher to achieve broader results that have greater validity than results achieved by the use of one source of data alone.

Participants were first 'interviewed' in writing. That is, the participants in the research were asked to tell the researcher in writing (1) who they are (where they come from – their community and family and their reasons for enrolling in the courses they are taking); (2) their experiences with their distance education classes, both negative and positive; (3) what changes they would like to see in the content and delivery of this education and (4) why they would like these changes. This research instrument offered a number of advantages. The written format provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their distance education experiences and provide their personal opinion on these experiences within the context of their own culture. Their responses to the open-ended questions generated data with more depth and dimension and provided a first or 'opening' picture of factors that impact both positively and negatively on their distance education experiences. This written format also provided some personal and cultural background on the individual on which the researcher could build in the subsequent personal oral interview. Finally, the written format provided the researcher with population demographics

including name, age, gender and educational site where classes are being attended.

Participant anonymity was ensured by changing names and disguising information, in order to offer participants as safe an environment as possible and heighten the likelihood of open exchanges.

The researcher attempted to utilize all of the research instruments as described but had difficulties in getting responses from the research participants. The Information and Consent for Research Participation form was sent to 17 students enrolled in a distance education class at Cumberland Regional College. From this first contact six responses were received. Each of these students was sent a personal written interview to complete but only one written interview was returned. The researcher contacted the participants and arranged to meet them for an oral interview. At the oral interview we completed the written interview with me asking them the written interview questions and audio-taping their responses. I then followed with the oral interview.

From this oral interview the researcher obtained more personal information on the participants' basic values, their worldview and what impacts both positively and negatively on their experience as Aboriginal distance education students in Northeastern Saskatchewan. With the participants' permission, individual interviews were taped and transcribed and portions are included in the study in narrative form. From both sets of data themes were identified about the students' distance education experiences.

With the data obtained from the written and oral interviews the researcher identified emerging themes present in the students' distance education experiences. The researcher met individually with the research participants to confirm the themes identified from the research data. With this validated data the researcher identified recommendations for

support services necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult Aboriginal distance educational experiences for these students.

The researcher convened a focus group composed of all the individual research participants. In the focus group the researcher discussed these recommendations directly with the research participants and gleaned information from them on the effects these recommendations would have on their distance education experiences.

The advantages of focus groups as outlined by Denzen and Lincoln (1994) are that they are inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding and provide elaboration over and above individual responses. Focus groups can also exhibit disadvantages as the group culture may interfere with individual expression, some individuals may dominate the group and the researcher's interview skills need to be more effective because of group dynamics (Denzen & Lincoln, 1994).

In focus groups, the information flows from all the people in the group (Banqura, 1992). The researcher presented the recommendations for support services identified from the research and obtained the participants' responses to these recommendations. The participants were able to react to and augment individual group members' responses. Their validation or non-validation of these recommendations provided robust data that distance education institutions can access when planning Aboriginal distance education courses. This data provided information that can be considered when designing the support services necessary for positive, hence successful distance education experiences. The focus group session was taped and transcribed and portions are included in the study in narrative form, again with anonymity of participants assured. A summary of the results is included with the interview results.

The researcher chose to use individual interviews and a focus group as they acknowledge and incorporate the Aboriginal cultural practices of working in community with others and the oral tradition of story-telling. Participants were able to tell their stories in the security of their own personal interview and in their peer student group.

From these various data collection methods – written interviews with open-ended questions, oral interviews and a focus group session - the researcher recommended support services necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult Aboriginal distance educational experiences for these students.

### Role of the Researcher

Underlying this research is my belief that education benefits all individuals. I returned to university as a woman in her late thirties to finish an education degree begun twenty years earlier and I experienced the difficulties of obtaining an undergraduate degree with family responsibilities. I had abandoned university to pursue various jobs, to retrain as a laboratory technologist and then moved to the country to raise our son and live self-sufficiently. When interviewing my research participants I was able to empathize with the women who had returned to school as mothers with young children. I travelled ten hours each weekend for two and a half years to attend university leaving my three young children at home who were parented by their father in my absence. The students opened up to me immediately when they heard that I, too, had returned to school as an adult with three young children. When classes were finished for the year my partner and I switched roles as he left to manage a tree-planting operation and I mothered my children alone in an isolated rural, bush environment. When our schedules conflicted our parents supported us and provided childcare and grandparenting in our absence. The love and

devotion provided by our families enabled me to complete my degree and pursue employment as a teacher. The students I interviewed discussed the importance of family commitments which I readily understood as I, too, had received support from my immediate and extended family while pursuing my education.

I also know the benefits of securing employment and improvement in self-esteem that ensued because of my educational accomplishments. I am currently studying as a distance education student and understand life as a non-Aboriginal adult student and acknowledge that Aboriginal adult student experiences will be similar in some ways but differ in a number of significant ways as well. Building on the results of the written interviews, I developed a protocol for the individual oral interviews based on questions that arose from the literature review that addressed the availability of community centres, on-site tutors, flexible programming and culturally appropriate curricula that correspond to student and community needs. I also facilitated the focus group discussion.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection procedures include the population sample, research instruments and ethical issues regarding student access. I collected data in the 2005-2006 school year.

### Case Study Participants

The case study participants included adult Aboriginal students enrolled in one or more distance education classes through Cumberland Regional College. Students enrolled in the distance education courses live and study in Northeastern Saskatchewan. All students who self-identified as Aboriginal when first approached about the research (17 in total) were requested to participate in the research study. Six students agreed to participate in

the study with these numbers dependent on the number of Aboriginal students enrolled at Cumberland Regional College and their willingness to take part in the research.

### Research Instruments

The first instrument used was the written ‘interview’ with each participant. Only one student completed the written ‘interview’ independently. The remaining students stated that they thought it was “just another survey.” These students were involved in completing surveys for one of their distance education classes and did not want to fill out another survey. At the oral interviews these participants orally answered the written interview questions and then participated in the subsequent oral interview. The oral interview elicited more detailed and in-depth information on the students’ individual distance education experience and built on responses from the written interview. A second oral interview was conducted to confirm themes identified from the written survey and first personal interview research data. The oral interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed by the researcher.

A focus group was used to validate recommendations for support services made by the researcher from the research data. The focus group was used to stimulate open and free responses from the students regarding their reactions to the recommendations for support services necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult Aboriginal distance educational experiences for these students. The focus group discussion was audio-taped and later transcribed by the researcher.



### Ethical Issues in Data Collection

Permission was obtained in writing from the Chief Executive Officer at Cumberland Community College to access Aboriginal students enrolled at their college. The College distance education teachers provided the names of students who were registered in distance education classes. Written consent was obtained from all student participants prior to interviewing.

The researcher fulfilled all requirements of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board before research commenced as this research project involved human subjects. Before the research began, students signed consent forms that outlined their involvement. Information from the written and oral interviews remained confidential but participation in the focus group identified the research participants to each other. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used when describing the research participants and presenting the research results. All interview documents, tapes and electronic records were destroyed after the thesis defense and production of the final thesis copy.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of the written and oral interviews was done using a coding process. A general sense of the research information was obtained by reading through the data and making notes to document the general ideas. Coding categories were created and the data evaluated using a coding process to discover the major themes contained in the data. From this data analysis the researcher was able to infer and recommend support services necessary for successful adult Aboriginal distance education experiences. These recommendations were presented to a focus group comprised of the research participants.

Participant reactions to these recommendations provided data that distance education institutions can access when planning and providing distance education courses for Aboriginal students.

### Strategies for Validating Findings

To validate the research findings the researcher used different data sources of information. This was accomplished by using both written and oral interviews with research participants. The participants also validated the research conclusions by responding to the recommendations in a focus group session. The multiple data gathering techniques and validation of the results with participants ensured that the data were robust. The researcher reported any discrepant information gleaned from the research to ensure that all perspectives of the students were presented.

### Data Reporting

An analysis of the case study research is presented in the following chapter in various formats. Summaries of the responses to the written and oral interviews are included as well as presentation of this data in table form. Quotations are included at the beginning of the chapter that relate to the chapter's content but also reflect Aboriginal culture and beliefs.

The original wording of student responses gathered in the written and oral interviews and focus group discussion is incorporated in the results when that wording captures the student's perspective or opinion in a unique manner.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

"To speak a true word is to transform the world."

--Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972, p. 65)

#### Review of the Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to identify the key factors that relate to the students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices that contribute to a positive distance education experience for six adult Aboriginal students studying at Cumberland Regional College in Northeastern Saskatchewan. These factors were compared to those identified in the literature and from this research recommendations were made for changes and additions to the support services necessary for these community college students to realize successful distance education experiences.

#### Review of the Research Questions

The six respondents participated in the research by completing a personal written and oral interview and participating in a focus group to determine the answers to the following research questions.

1. What factors have a negative impact on distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students in Northeastern Saskatchewan?
2. What factors have a positive impact on distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students in Northeastern Saskatchewan?
3. How do the identified factors relate to these students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices?
4. What changes in institutional practice, in both design and support services, are

necessary for promoting/fostering successful adult distance educational experiences for these Aboriginal students?

### Case Study Participants

Six students studying at Cumberland Regional College in Northeastern Saskatchewan participated in the research. I used pseudonyms for the research participants when describing their personal situations and reasons for studying at a distance as adult students. The pseudonyms were also used throughout the research results to ensure anonymity.

#### Gale

Gale, a 55 year old grandmother parenting two granddaughters aged eight and fourteen, was born on a reserve near Fond Du Lac, Saskatchewan. As a child she went out on the trap line with her parents in the fall and came back in the spring so she attended school for only a few months each year eventually completing grade five. Her first language was Dene and she was studying Communications 10 to improve her English reading skills and develop writing skills as she was unable to write well in English. She wanted to continue taking classes until she learns how to read and write in English. She liked school and is motivated to improve her literacy skills for both her own self-esteem and to enable her to help her granddaughters with their schooling.

#### Wes

A former band councillor returned to school because he was the only sibling in his family that did not have a degree and he found that all his kids were now graduating and he still had not completed his grade 12. Wes, who is now 46, quit school when he was fourteen as his first wife was pregnant and he needed to work to support his family. He

has always been working to support his families and is now providing for children from his third marriage. He adopted and parented several children from his reserve and elsewhere and of 30 children who call him “Dad” or “Grandfather” only seven of them are his biological children. It was important to him to look after his extended family and others who have no family to care for them. As Wes stated,

All my life I’ve worked from one construction site to another and never had time to go back to school. I’ve always been working supporting my family and I’ve never really had time for myself. I look at this as time for myself. I’m doing this for myself. It’s really good.

Initially Wes was apprehensive about succeeding in grade 12 classes and stated that if he had not had the excellent support of classmates, tutors, instructors and family he would have quit. Achieving personal success by attaining grade 12 has motivated Wes to further his education by studying political science at university. Before pursuing that goal he must work to become financially stable and following graduation in June Wes planned a move to Fort McMurray with his wife as they both had secured employment there.

### Donna

Donna saw herself as a role model for her teenage grandchildren. She has an 18 year old grandson who quit school and finds herself lecturing her grandchildren on the importance of staying in school and getting an education. She tells her grandson, “You got to go back to school while you’re young, while you know everything. Because later on down the road you’re not going to know a darn thing.” She sees a parallel with her own life as she dropped out of school, married and raised a family and at 51 returned to school to pursue her goal of becoming a counsellor. She thought that the best way of

teaching her grandchildren the value of education was to go back to school herself. Last year she obtained her grade 12 and is now studying Psychology 30 as a precursor to university psychology classes. Supporting her extended family is important to Donna. She missed some of her classes because of family commitments when she traveled to Saskatoon to support her nephew who was going to court. Financial concerns are always a problem as she is not receiving any financial support to take this class.

### Renee

Renee, a single mother with five children, was going through a difficult divorce while studying at the college. Three of her children lived apart from her with her 19 year old son being mentored by a Saskatchewan Roughrider team member and her daughter finishing her grade 11 in Regina. Her youngest child was cared for by her sister. Renee's eight and ten year old girls were proud that their mother was graduating. Renee moved to Tisdale to attend school because she did not feel accepted or a sense of belongingness on her ex-husband's reserve where she had moved when she married him. She wanted to pursue a career in the health profession and planned to attend First Nations University. She anticipated a move to Regina as her older son was going to become a father and she would be able to attend First Nations University and support her son in his new role.

### Janis

Janis raised five children as a single parent on a carpenter's salary for the last 20 years. She financially supported her youngest daughter who was finishing her high school and living in Vancouver with her older brother. As a working, single parent she delegated responsibilities to the older children. She talked about raising her children in Vancouver, "Number one rule. Your unexplained absence. Somebody has to know where you are."

She had to be at work by seven which was when her kids were awakening and she arrived home at six-thirty. There were a lot of necessary trust issues. She told her children,

You want me to sit and watch you 24/7, we're going to be poor. Pure and simple. And if you allow me to go out and work we'll have money. We'll have money to spend. Money to live. That choice is yours."

When Janis moved back to Kinistin Reserve her kids chose to stay in Vancouver where they were raised and where their friends resided. She moved back to Kinistin Reserve to learn about her culture and to use her first language, Saulteaux, which she has been unable to speak most of her adult life while living in Vancouver. She lived with her sister and her two sons and her elderly father. After completing her grade 12 Janis planned to finish her fourth year carpentry apprenticeship and then study engineering.

She has never really lived on the reserve as her family lived in a small rural town during her childhood. Janis spoke proudly of her mother who moved off the reserve to work in town at a chicken eviscerating plant for 30 years. She supported her family from this work while speaking only Saulteaux. Her mother conducted all the family business during those times as her father was uninvolved. During those years her mother learned much and it made her strong.

### Nancy

Nancy was much younger than the majority of the research participants and had attended high school in Vancouver. Unlike the other students she has not experienced racism at school and does not have any children. At 25 she returned to Tisdale to complete her grade 12 because she had family members living in the community and on Kinistin Reserve. Initially she felt that her family was unsupportive of her return to

school but she eventually realized that this was her own self-doubting about being able to finish her education and not her family’s doubts. She took Psychology 30 as a credit for Early Childhood Education which she wants to pursue at University and also because she wanted to experience an online distance education class.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the research participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Research Participants

Age	Place of Residence	Program Enrolled In	Cultural Group
55	Nipawin	Communications 10	Dene
46	Kinistin Reserve	Psychology 30	Saulteaux
51	Kinistin Reserve	Psychology 30	Saulteaux
40	Tisdale	Psychology 30	Saulteaux
50	Kinistin Reserve	Chemistry 30	Saulteaux
25	Tisdale	Psychology 30	Saulteaux

### Distance Education Courses

The research participants were enrolled in one of three different distance education courses. These secondary adult education classes, Psychology 30, Communications 10 and Chemistry 30, varied in their mode of delivery.

The Psychology 30 class was delivered online with the use of webcams, microphones, Voice over IP (VoIP) and real-time synchronous chat discussion via the web. The Voice over IP tools provided an informal means for students to interact with their instructor. Students also communicated to their instructor via e-mail. The Communications 10 class had online course content with a face to face instructor. Students accessed their course materials and lessons online but always had personal face to face access to their



instructor. The Chemistry 30 class was delivered used synchronous communication via videoconferencing. Students submitted assignments via e-mail and through the interoffice mail system. These classes were videotaped so students had access to the class if they were absent. None of the research participants had prior experience with distance delivered classes.

### Factors that had a Negative Impact on Distance Education Experiences

The research participants generally had a positive view of their distance education classes but there are some factors that had a negative impact on their educational experiences.

#### Aboriginal Course Content

Interviewed students were from three different courses and Aboriginal content in those courses was minimal with differences in content dependent on the course. The content in chemistry did not have an Aboriginal focus and Janis did not see any importance in having Aboriginal content in that course curriculum.

The psychology class discussed residential schools and had other Aboriginal references though they were not always positive. Where Aboriginal references did exist, the content reinforced negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people. In the Psychology 30 course there was reference to a pregnant Aboriginal woman. Donna did not like the stereotypical example presented about a real incident in Winnipeg where a native pregnant mother was taking drugs. It is not only Aboriginal women who abuse drugs when pregnant and this example portrayed in the media and used in the Psychology textbook was not representative of all pregnant Aboriginal women.

## Instruction

Students expressed concern about a problem with the instructor in one class that was resolved using the college's counselor. This instructor was not an adult educator and had been previously employed as an elementary teacher/principal on the students' home reserve. Students had little respect for her teaching abilities as she was not helpful in providing background knowledge for the course. She expected the students to have that background knowledge but many of them had been out of school for over 30 years. The class members felt they were not provided with this knowledge because they were Aboriginal. They were inadequately prepared academically for the class as the material had evolved from the last time they had studied in this subject discipline. Students needed access to more resources to supplement the textbook resource.

Students were unaware that they had access to a tutor even though they had been at school for two months. They felt that more tutor time was needed so that all students could access a tutor if necessary. A spare period was needed in order to see the tutor and some students did not have spares. Tutor time needs to be better scheduled so that all students have access. Students feel that there is a need for a full-time tutor or two tutors and an in-classroom tutor that can come in once a week to clarify any questions on class topics. Students are not comfortable with the idea of having a tutor from their reserve because it would be someone who knows them. Janis enjoyed attending classes in town and described life on the reserve as being very transparent. She said the reserve is such a small community and stated, "Everybody knows your business, everybody knows what you're doing. Everybody knows how you're doing it."

Some students expressed a need to have personal contact with their instructor at some time during the course, preferably once at the beginning, in the middle of the course and towards the end of the course. Renee wanted to meet her instructor in person because of the joking, teasing relationship they had developed online. They enjoyed each other's company while communicating online and she wanted to meet her personally because "you get a better sense of someone when you can meet them face to face." Another student never met the instructor face to face but that was not a concern. Janis remarked, "I can sit and talk to a TV. It doesn't bother me." The students did not have the occasion to meet their instructors face to face.

Students wanted faster assignment evaluation from their instructors as they needed to know how well they were mastering the course content. In some classes it took up to two weeks to get assignments back. Some class assignments were mailed in to the instructor which sometimes took four weeks to receive feedback on those assignments. In addition, students found the academic load overwhelming with more time needed for assignments as they were assigned one day and usually handed in the following day.

This was the first time the Psychology 30 class had been offered online and there were some computer problems. When the instructor used a quiz linked to and provided by the textbook publisher the quiz answers had to be in exactly the correct answer format to be correctly graded. The computer marked answers incorrectly when they were in fact correct. This problem will be addressed by the instructor in subsequent classes.

Accessing online instructors after class time was problematic. Students found this frustrating when they had a question about an assignment due the following day but could not get clarification before submitting the assignment. There was not a fast enough

response time from the instructor with daily assignment questions as they must be e-mailed to her rather than contacting her through the Voice over IP. The instructor made allowances for those times when students had difficulty with a question and could not contact her prior to submitting the assignment.

College classrooms were constantly being used and students did not have a place to work together at the school. There was no Community College library but students did have access to a joint-use library facility that was funded by the town of Tisdale and the North East School Division. This facility was housed in the same building as the Cumberland Regional College. Students used this library and its resources for homework assignments.

Students had differing opinions on class size. Renee did not like the small class size as it became boring with the teacher expecting the same students to constantly answer questions. Small class size was a positive factor for Janis because many questions could be directed to the instructor who had the time to answer them.

### Delivery Methods

Students experienced a variety of distance delivery methods. The Psychology 30 class was delivered online, the Chemistry 30 class was delivered via videoconferencing and the Communications 10 class had online course content with a face to face instructor. Some of the distance delivery tools impacted negatively on the students.

The delivery method for Psychology 30 allowed for oral conversation where the students used microphones to talk to the instructor. With these microphones there was a delay between the actual spoken word and receipt of the message. The microphones interfered with the instructor's lecture if there were too many participants on at the same

time so the students were requested to turn the microphones off during delivery of instruction. Therefore when students had questions in the class they were typed to the instructor using the real-time synchronous chat discussion option.

Most participants had no computer or typing skills before enrolling in the distance education courses. For some, computers were non-existent when they last attended school. They had to deal with the difficulties of returning to school as an adult as well as learning how to use the new technology employed for course delivery.

One student's poor typing skills were a hindrance to her. Donna did not pursue her questions because by the time she typed in her question the instructor had moved on to a new topic. She feels she would benefit from being able to ask face-to-face questions, videoconferencing or better communication through the existing microphones.

Synchronous communication via the keyboard was not the best option for many of the students because of their lack of computer skills. Students preferred to communicate orally rather than typing in their questions and comments.

Nancy preferred face to face classes as she was not able to ask all the questions she had of her distance instructor. She was taking up valuable online class time with her queries and she did not want the other students to wait while the instructor answered her questions. She wanted more personal contact with the teacher but because it was an online class, the instructor could not come over to her personally and explain an unclear concept.

Students experienced some technical problems with the videoconferencing. One day the phone line was unplugged and they missed 20 minutes of class and other times they lost valuable time trying to connect. Nancy preferred a face to face teacher as she found

it hard to communicate with her teacher when all the students were dealing with a website problem or the computers failed and they lost their connection. Students found the internet distracting because e-mail must be checked and people want to chat while class is online. Janis preferred to have the instructor solve a problem face to face rather than watching its solution on the televised screen.

Financial means determined the resources that students had when studying online. Many students did not have a home computer or had an outdated computer that did not enable online access to classes. Most students were enrolled in a full load of classes and this necessitated completing homework at home and not at school. Internet access and connectivity were unreliable on the reserve so students accessed computer resources only at the college. It was important that classes be held at a school facility where students had access to computers for their distance education classes.

#### Personal Challenges and Difficulties

Financial concerns were continual. During his last month at school Wes' Employment Insurance came to an end, making it difficult for him to support his family of five while attending classes. He wants to study political science at university but must work prior to attending university in order to support his family. Janis had to borrow on one of her RRSPs to make her academic year. She must return to work as a carpenter before continuing with her post-secondary education.

Provincial training assistance, PTA, is provided so that a grandmother raising her two granddaughters can attend school. Gale was expected to work when school was done for the summer but she needs to spend time with her granddaughters as all winter long she was busy with school, home and family commitments and summer is the only chance that

she has to spend time with her granddaughters. She stressed that this family time was more important to her than working. There was never enough money and she supplemented her food needs by growing vegetables and picking berries in the summer.

Finding a balance between family and school commitments was stressful. These students were interviewed one month before finishing their classes and they were experiencing the stress of getting all the work completed before final exams. Gale was up at five every morning to get chores done at home before going to school. There was never enough time for children, homework, yard work and recreation. Renee was going through a divorce and found it difficult because her husband would not sign the divorce papers. Procrastination with school work was a common student dilemma.

Many of the students initially enrolled in courses experienced marital problems and had no personal or academic support at home. They had no babysitters or were involved in excessive partying and socializing. These students did not discuss their problems with their student peers and eventually dropped out because they had to deal with the problems at home. Home and family took priority over obtaining an education.

Nancy was much younger than her classmates and at first found it difficult in her psychology class. The other class members had practical hands-on experience for reference whereas her knowledge came only from the textbook and other resources. Because of her youth she did not have the same life experience as other class members and felt inadequately prepared to discuss certain issues in the psychology curriculum that covered lifespan development.

Transportation problems were a hindrance for students in accessing classes and staying in school to finish their classes. A bus for transportation from the reserve would alleviate

access problems for classes in town and provide support for students to finish their education. Three quarters of the students dropped out of their classes in this school year and inadequate transportation was one of the main factors. Transportation problems were constant. Travelling an hour a day in inclement weather during the wintertime in rural Saskatchewan was a challenge. One day there was three feet of snow in the middle of the road and they could not get to town thus putting them behind in their classes. There was also financial hardship when Wes had to replace a motor after getting stuck in the middle of the snow-drifted road. Donna travelled with her granddaughter to town as her car had broken down.

The adult students experienced difficulties as adult learners. They found it harder to learn and remember as compared to learning in their youth. Nancy was scared to come back to school as she was out of school for eight years. She found it hard to discipline herself to study and to focus on remembering class content.

Gale was unable to write in English and five of the six participants did not have English as their first language. Sauteaux and Dene were their first languages. Students felt that instruction in their first language of Sauteaux was not viable because the Sauteaux language is limited and there were no Sauteaux words for many of the terms in the curriculum and course content.

### Flexible Programming

Students were mostly satisfied with the scheduling of their classes. Janis had a scheduling conflict with her face to face English class and her videoconferenced Chemistry class on one of the class days. It frustrated her as she always missed her English class and had to independently catch up on the missed class.



Participants were asked whether they would access classes if they were offered in the summer on the reserve. The respondents stated that both adult and adolescent students need a break from classes in the summer. Summer is a time to be laid back, for relaxing, visiting and participating in cultural activities. They considered taking a class if access was available from their homes but would not go to a school or central community location to attend classes in the summer.

### Orientation and Transitional Sessions

Students were provided with the necessary computer skills for logging on and accessing their distance education courses. Even with this instruction, Nancy did not master the technique of Skyping, the real-time synchronous chat discussion, even though it was one method of communicating with the online instructor. Students had access to computerized typing programs but participants would benefit from typing instruction before the start of academic classes.

Students felt a need for skill instruction on topics like writing a formal paragraph. Janis had to do research on writing a formal paragraph and similar topics before attempting her assignments. She had been out of school for 26 years and needed a refresher on some basic tasks expected of students.

Students expressed a need for some transitional classes before enrolling in academic subjects like Biology 30 or Chemistry 30. Many students were out of school for several years and would benefit from an opportunity to take a transitional distance class to upgrade their background knowledge in the subject before class commencement. The instructors expected the students to have some subject content knowledge and most of the students had none.

Students indicated an interest in having a counseling session at the beginning of classes which outlined the following topics:

- Community college expectations of students
- Expectations of each other in the class
- Expectations of yourself in the coming year
- Availability of tutors

### Prior Schooling Experiences

As children, many of the adult students were schooled off the reserve in small rural Saskatchewan towns. Parents of two sisters moved off the reserve to work in a small town, where the mother worked in a chicken eviscerating plant for 24 years and they went to school in town. Donna expressed concern on attending and learning in the town's white school and opted to attend a boarding school for one year. She went to that school for only one year as she did not like it. Students described those years as being "horrible years" where they experienced prejudice with one student having to overcome the internal deep-seated anger that consumed her for over 15 years. After acknowledging her anger Janis was then able to let it go and move on in her life. These students experienced much racism in their elementary schooling and were glad that today their children do not have the same experiences.

When they were young there were no avenues for them to deal with the racism they experienced. Racism was rampant throughout the entire education system from fellow students to teachers to education supervisors. There was no one to go to if you experienced problems. They believed that most people did not finish high school because of self-esteem issues. Janis commented, "You have to feel good about being in that

classroom and when you feel good about yourself you feel accepted and will continue to attend.”

Gale attended school for only a few months each year because her parents trapped and moved the family during the school year. She had only completed grade five and was studying Communications 10 to improve her English reading skills and develop writing skills as she was unable to write in English.

### Student Supports

Varied sources of support existed for these distance learners but one learner had little support throughout her life to pursue her education. Gale was unable to obtain her education as a young adult as she was raising five children with no access to a babysitter. At 55 and now raising two granddaughters she returned to school to better her English skills. She had very few adult supporters outside of school as she did not have any family members in town. She had one adult male friend with whom she shared a garden.

A lack of role models existed for many students. Most of the respondents were older adults and did not have others in their lives that they looked to for modeling and support. They were the role models for adolescent and other family members and their return to school demonstrates the value they hold for education.

Renee felt a lack of support from an instructor. When questions were asked online the instructor sometimes tried to answer them all at once with one answer which was ineffective. The technical support person helped when available but he was not always there so the lack of instructional support was difficult.

## Teachers and Their Knowledge of Aboriginal Culture

None of the participants was ever taught by an Aboriginal person so could not speak from experience on the preference of instructors with personal Aboriginal cultural knowledge. The adult students felt that they knew about their traditions and protocols therefore having a teacher with that knowledge was unnecessary.

Students felt that it would benefit some of the white teachers to have some cross-cultural training with classes that focused on Aboriginal content and to also attend classes with Aboriginal people.

Table 2 summarizes the research respondents' comments on the factors that had a negative impact on their distance education experiences.

Table 2

### Factors Having a Negative Impact on Distance Education

Factors	Summary of Comments
Aboriginal Course Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reinforced negative stereotypes of Aboriginals</li><li>• No importance in having Aboriginal content in Chemistry curriculum</li></ul>
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More tutor time needed</li><li>• Unaware of tutor access 2 months into the course</li><li>• No background knowledge provided when requested</li><li>• Would not want a tutor from the reserve who knew them</li><li>• No opportunity to meet instructors face to face</li><li>• Need for faster assignment evaluation</li><li>• More time needed for assignment completion</li><li>• Computer responses marked wrong when correct</li><li>• Problems with access to online instructors after class</li><li>• No common area to meet and work after class</li></ul>
Delivery Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Microphones interfered with lectures</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of student typing skills hampered questioning of the instructor</li> <li>• Preferred face to face class where questions could be easily asked and answered</li> <li>• Technical problems with videoconferencing and online connectivity</li> <li>• Internet was distracting as peers wanted to chat or communicate via email</li> <li>• Classes at a central location with computer access as students did not own computers</li> </ul>
Personal Challenges and Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of life experience made class discussions difficult</li> <li>• Constant financial concerns</li> <li>• Procrastination with school work</li> <li>• High dropout rate because of family and transportation problems</li> <li>• Difficulty learning as an adult</li> </ul>
Flexible Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face to face and distance class scheduling conflict</li> <li>• Would take summer classes if access was from their homes</li> </ul>
Orientation and Transitional Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided with basic computer skills for course access</li> <li>• Skill instruction needed on paragraph writing</li> <li>• Would benefit from typing instruction before classes started</li> <li>• Student did not master real-time synchronous chat</li> <li>• Need transitional class to upgrade academic background knowledge</li> <li>• Counseling session needed on student and college expectations and tutor availability</li> </ul>
Prior Schooling Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not positive with much racism</li> <li>• Extended absence from school for traditional trapping</li> </ul>
Student Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little support for parenting grandchildren</li> <li>• No access to childcare to upgrade education when younger</li> <li>• Lack of role models</li> </ul>

- Lack of instructor support
- Need for cross-cultural training

Teachers' Knowledge of  
Aboriginal Culture

### Factors that had a Positive Impact on Distance Education Experiences

Students spoke highly of the distance education classes offered at Cumberland Regional College. There were several factors that contributed to positive distance education experiences for the research participants.

#### Instruction

Students had differing opinions about instruction from an Aboriginal person. Some felt there would be no difference in whether their distance education teacher was Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal and attributed the lack of impact to the impersonal online environment. Others felt that Aboriginal distance education teachers were a good idea and commented that having aboriginal teachers in a face to face environment would be good role models for their children.

Their current experience with their distance education teachers was positive and race had no bearing in their situations. Donna worked better with people from a different race therefore having non-Aboriginal instructors and tutors was a positive factor. Students had not experienced instruction or tutoring from an Aboriginal person therefore could not form an opinion based on experience.

The idea of anonymity surfaced as students were not comfortable with having a relative, such as an aunt or cousin, as teachers or tutors. They approved of an Aboriginal person from a different community as a teacher but not someone from their own community because they might have personal issues with that person.

Janis and Wes liked the lack of face to face contact with their instructor in their distance education classes. They appreciated the impersonal relationship they had with their teacher. When serving on the band council as a councillor Wes had employed his current face to face instructor as a teacher on the reserve. This student appreciated the lack of personal contact with his online teacher because of his prior experience with his face to face teacher as a band employee.

Janis preferred the Chemistry videoconferencing course because of the anonymity she had through the videoconferencing delivery. If there were any negative connotations made in the class she did not have to deal directly with the instructor at the precise moment when the incident occurred. She had the option to deal with it later individually with the instructor. She could formulate her reasons at her own pace and speak with the instructor personally about the situation. She also had the option of turning off the television if she wanted to work on her assignments or if the instructor was helping another student with an individual problem. The instructor could also mute his students to facilitate independent instruction with one student. He was then not disturbed by the conversation going on at another site location.

### Delivery Methods

With online computerized instruction personal issues were not a problem. Because the instruction was not face-to-face students did not have to deal with any personal issues with the instructor that might arise in the face-to-face classroom. Students just had to listen to the instructor for a short period of time and if there were problems they were mediated by having the two parties in two different locations communicating through the online environment.

Distance education classes allowed students to work independently. Students appreciated having the instructor at a distance as personal issues were kept to a minimum. Wes liked communicating through the computer and not having to communicate face-to-face. Online classes enabled students to access their class from wherever there was an internet connection. Donna was able to visit her newborn great granddaughter in Moose Jaw and still not miss any classes. For her this was a very positive aspect of distance education.

The distance education delivery methods allowed students to submit assignments and communicate with and access their instructors in a variety of ways. Assignments were online and students worked on them independently. Students submitted assignments via e-mail as well synchronous journal entries where the instructor accessed their responses online during class instruction time. Assignments were also submitted through the college's interoffice mail system.

Students liked to express answers via the computer because of the spell check feature in the word processing programs. Computer quizzes allowed for immediate feedback which students viewed positively. Distance education courses allowed several students to develop computer skills that were non-existent before enrolling in their classes. Because the word-processing programs had spell check features this helped them with their spelling and writing skills because they were made aware of their mistakes and the computer provided a spell check solution.

The use of a variety of media supported communication between the student and the teacher and enabled distance course delivery. Videoconferencing allowed Janis to see problems visually solved step by step by the instructor. Students found it easier to ask



questions using the videoconferencing communication. Janis found that using the camera made her feel more anonymous and she could ask stupid questions and not be embarrassed by asking them. She saw it as an advantage for shy people who did not like to speak up in class. They asked their question to the television set and not to a class of face to face people. She liked the two way contact that the video camera provided.

Lectures were recorded so if students missed a class they could access it at their convenience. The use of microphones and webcams allowed the students to hear and see the instructor. When they typed in a question the instructor provided an oral response which many students appreciated. Voice over IP (VoIP) and real-time synchronous chat discussion via the web allowed the students to contact technical support people as well as the instructor. The technical support person was online when the class was in session.

The Communications 10 course had an online component where students accessed their lessons in a print format but also received face-to-face instruction. Because the lessons were online the student could review as much as necessary to understand the course content. Gale appreciated having a teacher in the classroom as her written English skills were poor and she needed individual instruction from her instructor.

When questioned about oral evaluations students were positive about the concept of expressing answers orally on an exam but had never experienced oral evaluation. Students did not fill out my original written interview forms because they compared them to another survey that needed to be completed. In their online classes they had been completing several surveys and when they received my form they assumed it was another survey. The student not involved in these online surveys did fill out my written interview

form. Students preferred to communicate with me in an oral interview rather than in written format.

Students described the distance classes as a different way of learning but they found them beneficial. They were able to reread difficult content and accessed the internet for clarification on topics where they wanted or needed more information. Wes described taking distance classes as a great experience and compared it to starting a new job and going to a new work site. He did not know what he was getting himself into but once he made the transition everything worked out well.

Students appreciated class delivery from a smaller rural centre close to their home reserve. They did not have to move by themselves or with their families to take classes. Donna did not like big cities and was not ready to move to a city to pursue her education. Distance education options at Cumberland Regional College provided her with an alternative to upgrade her education so that she can eventually work as a counselor. Nancy was able to live at home and not move to get her grade 12. This was a benefit because her husband was employed in the community. Wes had a family of five living on the reserve and was able to live at home and not disrupt his family with a move in order to finish his education.

Donna attended upgrading classes at SIIT in Prince Albert but preferred her distance course at Cumberland Regional College because the classes were smaller and more personal. She had better access to the computers there as she could use them all day if necessary. In Prince Albert students had to share computer access. Even if there were other classes going on in the classroom the online psychology class had a bank of

computers with webcams that were dedicated for these online students. They used headphones when other classes were being conducted in this classroom.

### Personal Challenges and Difficulties

The participants were adult students who had experienced many problems throughout their lives. Because of their life experiences they felt confident in dealing with problems that arose. The adult learners developed coping strategies and mechanisms to deal with life's problems and dealt with problems at school in a similar manner. Their life experience provided them with internal resources to utilize when necessary. For Wes, school was a break from the problems he dealt with as a councillor on the reserve band council. He states,

I guess it's sort of like experience. Dealt with problems before. I was a politician for 14 years before. So I know how to deal with problems. Stress and distress. Yeah, I've had to deal with that for years. Coming to school here was a big break to me.

When Janis experienced any difficulties in the class she just worked hard. She did the best with what she had.

### Orientation and Transitional Sessions

Cumberland Regional College provided some orientation sessions for the adult students. Students were provided with the necessary computer skills for logging on and accessing their distance education courses. Individual help was available from technical support instructors when students were unfamiliar with computer usage and students were satisfied with the extra help they received. Even if they were not taking a class that required the use of a computer the computer support was there for them.

### Prior Schooling Experiences

Nancy attended grades seven to eleven in Vancouver and liked the cultural diversity she experienced in the city but she found the city too big for her. She experienced no racism while attending high school which differs from the other participants' past schooling experiences. Attending school in Vancouver exposed her to many different cultures and impacted her view of white people. She stated that she never felt any different from others in her class.

### Student Supports

Students who resided on Kinistin Reserve had a supportive network that included family, friends, elders and teachers on the reserve. Many participants were from Kinistin Reserve and had collegial friendships and familial ties before they attended school. Knowing others made it more comfortable when starting classes at the college. Students were able to car pool to classes and this helped financially as they shared car and gas expenses. Classmates helped each other academically as they discussed and shared information about class assignments and supported each other with computer problems. The students were always laughing and joking around and if a student was having a bad day and feeling gloomy they helped to pick up her spirits and make her feel good about herself. Students grouped together and approached the school counselor to resolve racism issues with an instructor. With this network among them they had a peer support group they accessed at school and on the reserve that was effective and instrumental in their school success.

Family provided strong support for all of the students. Gale received assistance from her granddaughters who helped her with her writing skills on class assignments as they

sounded out the words for her so she could learn to write them in English. Wes' wife attended Cumberland Regional College for the last four years and was able to understand the difficulties he experienced as she had similar difficulties when attending school. She was able to help him with his homework. Donna's husband helped her by doing the laundry and the cleaning and her sisters on the reserve provided recreational diversions as she played Yahtze with them on weekends. Renee, who lived in town, had support from her nieces as she talked to them about her classes. If she could not get home on time from school her boyfriend was responsible for childcare and he also helped with meals and cleaning.

Janis had four sisters living on the reserve and one of her sisters was taking the Psychology 30 class so she had a lot of familial support. She stated, "So yeah, I guess we support each other. All of us do. We're a big family." Her five children were thrilled that she was going to graduate with her grade 12. Her youngest daughter was in grade 11 and Janis was proud that she would graduate before her daughter.

Nancy's family was pleased that she returned to school and would graduate at age 25. Her parents did not graduate and are proud that she will pursue a career while still young. Her husband supported her decision to go back to school as he too wanted her to have a career.

Guidance was provided by a Wes' ex-wife and his elders. His former spouse is now a social worker living away from the reserve and counseled him by telephone. When life got him down he called her for support. This student had direction from the elders on his reserve. They gave him their blessings and an eagle feather for good luck so that he would finish his schooling. He consults his elders for advice before starting something

and acts on their advice. He stated that they said their prayers and assured him that things would be all right. He had a positive experience with his adult distance education class as they foretold. Wes accessed teachers on Kinistin Reserve for homework support. His sister was a teacher and vice-principal on his home reserve and he went to her home in the evenings when he needed help.

Support from the Cumberland Regional College staff was constant. Teachers, educational assistants, tutors, counselors and the instructional technology consultant provided necessary support for the distance students. One instructor had single-parented while teaching and upgrading her qualifications. Because of her life experiences she empathized with the various difficulties that her adult students experienced as students.

A tutor paid by the students' Aboriginal band council was available for individual tutoring support. This tutor was available once a week for five weeks to provide academic support for the Chemistry 30 class. The tutor was a teacher at the College prior to her tutoring position and was familiar with course content. Students praised her for her tutoring assistance and knowledge that she shared with them about the course content. Wes stated, "I couldn't have done it without her."

Students accessed the counselor at the college when they were stressed. They felt comfortable discussing their problems with her as one student commented, "You can pretty much talk to her about anything." The counselor helped the students resolve an issue with one instructor where the students' academic needs were not being met in the class.

Students accessed the instructional technology consultant who was also trained as a teacher. This person provided computer technical support to the students when they

needed help with the technology and also helped them with their academic queries. The technological support provided by the college in using computer technology helped one student overcome his fear of computers. Wes expressed, “I was kind of scared of computers when I first got here but now I have no trouble with them.”

Table 3 summarizes the research respondents’ comments on the factors that had a positive impact on their distance education experiences.

Table 3

Factors Having a Positive Impact on Distance Education Experiences

Factors	Summary of Comments
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No difference if Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal teacher</li> <li>• May have personal issues with instructors from their own reserve</li> <li>• Liked the lack of face to face contact and impersonal relationship with their instructor</li> <li>• Liked the anonymity of videoconferencing</li> </ul>
Delivery Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance education allowed for independent work</li> <li>• Online instruction minimized personal issues with instructor</li> <li>• Online delivery enabled students to access classes from any computer anywhere</li> <li>• Variety of ways to submit assignments</li> <li>• Computer quizzes provided immediate feedback</li> <li>• Developed English skills through spell check functions</li> <li>• Computer skill development</li> <li>• Videoconferencing allowed for oral questions and visual problem solutions</li> <li>• Absent students could access recorded classes</li> <li>• Microphones, webcams and videoconference enabled oral and visual learners</li> <li>• Online print resources enabled lesson review</li> <li>• Distance education allowed students to live at home</li> </ul>
Personal Challenges and Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life experience provided internal resources for school challenges</li> </ul>

Orientation and Transitional Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer skill instruction and technical support available</li> </ul>
Prior Schooling Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School experience in Vancouver facilitated acceptance of all cultures</li> </ul>
Student Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collegial friendships and familial ties among students</li> <li>• Car pools and collaboration on assignments</li> <li>• Constant support from teachers, educational assistants, counselors and technology consultant</li> <li>• Tutor paid by the students' band council</li> <li>• Family, friends, elders and teachers on the reserve</li> </ul>

### Factors that Relate to Students' Aboriginal Cultural Values Beliefs and Practices

#### Value of Community

Many participants were from the same reserve and had collegial friendships before they attended school. Knowing others made it more comfortable when starting classes at the college. The research participants appreciated the community of learners that they created at the college. Robinson (2001) stated that studying with learners of similar backgrounds and culture is instrumental to Native Americans' success. Students at the college liked to work in a group environment where they discussed assignments and helped each other but they preferred to be graded individually on their assignments.

Wes was training to be an elder and was known as a helper, an *oskybeyoss*. It was an honour to be training as an elder in his reserve community. It is a long process and he stated that it sometimes feels like you are in training your whole lifetime but you eventually get to where the elders are. You choose the direction you want to follow and approach an elder about teaching you. He was always involved in his cultural traditions



and would sit with his grandfathers to learn from them. Being involved in his cultural traditions helped him throughout his life. He compared it to the non-Aboriginal practice of religious beliefs and affiliations and practicing rituals like praying. These practices help us in a similar way that being with his grandfathers and elders helped him.

Spronk and Radtke (1988) observed that native people value one-to-one personal interaction. Renee developed a positive relationship with her online instructor by joking around with her in their daily class communication. She expressed an interest in meeting her personally because they had this comfortable, casual, joking relationship.

The research participants experienced difficulties with transportation to school in the town of Tisdale. One solution suggested by Wes was that the adult students could travel to school on the same school bus that their children used to attend school. This would eliminate the transportation problem that many Aboriginal people had when they attended classes off the reserve. Working in community is an important Aboriginal value and these students recognized a community solution to their school transportation problem.

#### Community Ownership of Distance Education Courses

The literature identified the need for community ownership of distance education programs that correspond to community needs. Davis (2000) advocated that at the community level the provision of community learning centres with instructors and tutors who understand the skills and needs of students in specific communities is needed. The research participants expressed an interest in having classes on the reserve as it would require no traveling thus eliminating gas and automobile expenses and problems due to adverse winter weather conditions in Northeastern Saskatchewan.

Having distance education classes on the reserve would be viewed as a positive accomplishment for the reserve. The adult students felt that a centre on the reserve offering distance education classes would provide another educational option for young adolescent reserve members who had dropped out of school because of racism and feelings of alienation experienced in their non-Aboriginal school and town communities. It was another avenue to finish their high school education.

There was a need for literacy classes for many of the reserve residents. Many residents on the reserve are non-literate, that is, they cannot read and write in English. Distance literacy classes need to be online classes located on the reserve because many of the non-literate people are embarrassed about their illiteracy. They want to learn how to read but would not attend classes off the reserve because they do not want people to know that they cannot read. They would not come into the college because they would be identified as nonliterate when attending literacy classes. Janis described these residents as not fully themselves because they hide behind their illiteracy. She says “they’re so proud, they don’t want anyone knowing they can’t read.” A community learning centre would provide these services for nonliterate, adolescent and other reserve residents who want to improve their education.

Nancy felt that more Aboriginal people would take education seriously if the classes were offered on the reserve. A daycare on the reserve would allow more parents to pursue their education at a community learning centre.

McMullen and Rohrbach (2003) stated that the availability of on-site tutors and development of personal relationships between involved parties are factors that contribute to student success. Research participants wanted more tutor time so that all students

could access a tutor if necessary. At present a spare was needed in order to see the tutor and some students did not have spares. Better scheduling of tutor time was needed so that all students had access and there was a need for a full-time tutor or two tutors.

### Aboriginal Perspectives in Curricula

Group work allowed students to complete a dissection assignment that did not observe the practice of their cultural beliefs and values. Aboriginal students did not support the practice of dissection in biology classes because their beliefs state that taking a life that God creates is wrong and sinful. A lack of a respectful, spiritual dimension in the dissection activity may have influenced that students' lack of participation and negative opinions towards that activity. One student refers to her Aboriginal cultural beliefs,

“Everything is created by the creator so everything is loved equally by him which means that we're no better than the frog we're cutting up. So might as well take the small kid and go cut that one up you know. Like that's wrong. It's kind of like making a mock of that carcass, of that soul, the thing that used to hold that soul. Out of respect you don't do that.”

Students discussed the idea of payback where what goes around comes around. They did not participate in dissection because their beliefs state that the same thing would happen to them. They used the Saulteaux word for payback *pahtawone*.

Working in a group that included non-Aboriginal students allowed them to complete the assignment without having to actually practice the dissection. They performed another task like taking notes. Students actually failed previous traditional face to face classes because they would not dissect an animal. Distance education techniques that incorporate computer dissection now facilitated completion of their assignments while

observing their cultural values and beliefs. Davis (2000) acknowledged that integration of Aboriginal perspectives in curricula development is necessary for positive distance education experiences.

### Value of Family

Gale was raising her two granddaughters who were in grade three and grade eight. She found it a challenge to raise them because there was never enough money and the teenage granddaughter was reluctant to help out at home as are many teenagers. She had raised five of her own children and was still raising children. Social services were providing provincial training assistance (PTA) to attend school but wanted her to work when school was done for the summer. She needed to be with her granddaughters as all winter long she was busy with school, home and family commitments and summer was the only chance that she had to spend time with her granddaughters. She stressed that this family time was more important to her than working.

Large extended families provided emotional support for individual students but having many dependents was a hardship because they needed to be supported financially by their adult student parents. The students' educational plans were constantly being interrupted because they had to go back to work to support their families. Students also missed class because they had to provide emotional support at times for family members who required it.

### Aboriginal Worldview

Donna stated that “the things that matter I learn at home” referring to the importance of her cultural values and that she learned those values at home on the reserve. The

students reflected on their perception of the world as compared to the white people's view. They were accustomed to working with white people and viewed white people as having a broader or different worldview. The students stated that their culture was more holistic and defined it as being situated in one place which is on the reserve. They were just starting to become involved in the culture off the reserve and attending Cumberland Regional College was one way that fostered that involvement.

### A Transient People

Most of the respondents had moved several times in their lives. They moved for work, to attend school or to be closer to their families. This transient behavior had both positive and negative facets. Students did not finish their schooling because they moved to obtain employment or had difficulty integrating into a new school and dropped out. Family was very important to these participants so moving to be closer to family or to reconnect with family members on the reserve to learn more about their traditions and language was a positive influence.

### Conclusions

This research identified the factors that had a negative impact on distance education experiences and the factors that had a positive impact on distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students studying at a community college in Northeastern Saskatchewan. The identified factors were related to the students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices. The findings from this research reinforce the importance of identifying those factors and relating them to these students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices.

From the research findings the researcher was able to make support services recommendations that would enable these students to realize successful distance education experiences. These recommendations are presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”

--Mahatma Gandhi (as cited in Cashman, 2003, p. 5)

#### Introduction

The literature indicates that there is a demand for distance education for and about Aboriginal people. Not that long ago Aboriginal distance education meant education at a distance at residential schools where students were isolated from their families. Today Aboriginal peoples are accessing distance education courses on their home reserves, at regional colleges and at universities.

Most educators know very little about how Aboriginal students are raised and socialized in their homes and communities and even less about how Indigenous heritage is traditionally transmitted. (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). To enable effective distance education for Aboriginal learners this knowledge is necessary so that curricular adaptations and appropriate technology can be employed to ensure that courses are culturally relevant and that staff affirm Aboriginal values, practices and viewpoints. Much has been written on the American Aboriginal distance education experience but there is a lack of research on the Canadian Aboriginal experience.

Many Canadian Aboriginal students live on reserves in rural, sparsely populated, isolated areas of Canada. Their remote locations and travel conditions in our harsh Canadian winter influences their access to distance education. Aboriginal students on reserves in the United States (with the exception of those in Alaska) have fewer difficulties accessing distance education because of more favorable weather conditions and less isolation.

Rupert Ross (1992) describes a set of values suggested by Dr. Clare Brant, a Mohawk and practicing psychiatrist, which inform “the Old Ways”. Dr. Brant outlines the rules or ethics that he believes were important to Aboriginal life in traditional times and remain important today. When comparing those values or ethics to the themes outlined by Granberg (2002), who interviewed Anishinaabe elders, there are commonalities. Granberg describes eight themes as important to the Anishinaabe including respect, stories, Ojibwe language, maintaining or reviving culture, ceremonies, spirituality, learning from the elders and emotionality. Ross’ description of the notion that the time must be right corresponds to the Anishinaabe theme of spirituality and emotionality. The ethic respecting praise and gratitude is likened to the theme of respect as described by the Anishinaabe elders.

The many Aboriginal cultural groups in the United States and Canada have various beliefs, practices and traditions that are drawn from their own traditional ways. Each group can only see the other through its own rules and interpret the behaviours of others from within their own perspective. Interview responses from my Saulteaux and Dene students on their distance education experiences are informed from the practices and beliefs of their specific cultures. There are many research studies focusing on the American Aboriginal distance education experience but a lack of Canadian Aboriginal distance education research exists. Therefore this research contributes to the literature on Canadian Aboriginal distance education and specifically to Aboriginal students studying at a distance in northeastern Saskatchewan.

The following conclusions are presented from investigating six adult Aboriginal students studying through distance means at Cumberland Regional College in



Northeastern Saskatchewan. Recommendations are suggested for changes and additions to the support services necessary for these community college students to realize successful distance education experiences.

### Conclusions

The researcher concludes from the findings of this research that there are key factors that relate to the students' Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices that contribute to a positive distance education experience for Aboriginal students studying at Cumberland Regional College in Northeastern Saskatchewan. One factor is the value participants have for working with and in community and being supported by community. Students who experience success have family, elder and peer support. Interaction with Aboriginal role models such as Elders is valuable as they are regarded as the most knowledgeable people in Aboriginal societies.

The regional college classrooms are constantly being used and students do not have a place to work together at the school. There is no community college library but students do have access to a joint-use public/high school library facility that is funded by the town of Tisdale and the North East School Division. Additional research resources are needed to supplement the distance education textbook resources but the lack of a Cumberland College library with resources specific to curricula make it difficult to research or get clarification on some topics.

Acknowledgment of Aboriginal cultural beliefs by instructional staff and provision of positive examples of Aboriginal people in some curricula is lacking. All of the participants except one do not have English as their first language with Saulteaux and

Dene as their first languages. The distance learning opportunities using generic course materials are not serving the needs of the Aboriginal learners in some instances.

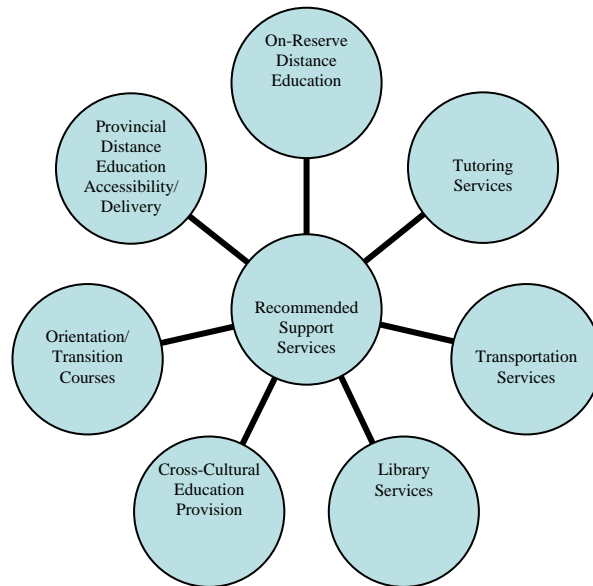
Aboriginal people are transient and this transience impacts negatively on their educational achievement. Distance education provides a viable option for these transitory students to pursue their educational goals.

Transition to school is challenging for adult Aboriginal students and is compounded when classes are being delivered at a distance. Students' inexperience with computer technology, difficulties in accessing tutors, lack of face-to-face meetings with instructors and the extended period of time since their last school attendance are difficulties they encounter. The stress of taking academic classes and maintaining a home and family are at times overwhelming for adult students. Students express a need to find a balance between home and school commitments. For many of the adult students the inability to deal with stressors is great.

### Recommendations

Key factors contributing to positive distance education experiences for Aboriginal students are determined from the research. As shown in Figure 1, the necessary support services to operationalize those factors are identified by the researcher.

Figure 1. Recommended Support Services



### On-Reserve Distance Education

Provision of distance education opportunities on the reserve will enhance student access to education. Classes offered at an on-reserve community learning centre with the appropriate technology, reliable internet access and tutor and elder support will facilitate learning opportunities for adults and adolescents who have dropped out of school and literacy development for nonliterate reserve residents. Arrangements for a bank of laptop computers that students can access and sign out to take home will promote computer literacy and enable homework completion. A community daycare will allow young parents to attend distance education classes, provide uninterrupted study time and ensure that children are being cared for in their own cultural milieu.

### Tutoring Services

The Aboriginal distance education students need access to a tutor. Provision for a full-time tutor is recommended for both on-reserve and off-reserve distance education classes.

Students have no preference for Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal tutors but prefer tutors who are not from their reserve and those who they do not know.

#### Transportation Services

Transportation problems to distance education classes in town are constant. It is recommended that if students continue to attend classes off reserve that Cumberland Regional College pursue bus transportation arrangements with the Northeast School Division so that adult reserve students can ride the same bus that their children ride to public school.

#### Library Services

The research participants do not have access to a common area to work on homework or access research resources. It is recommended that Cumberland Regional College provide a library area where students can work in consultation with each other and access research resources to supplement the curricula.

#### Cross-Cultural Education Provision

Successful curricula for Aboriginal learners incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and traditions delivered by staff with cross-cultural and anti-discrimination education. It is recommended that staff cross-cultural training be provided for all teaching and support staff at Cumberland Regional College. Institutional providers of distance education programming need to be sensitive to the beliefs and values of their particular learner populations. Adaptation of curricula that increases awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples' cultures and acknowledges that the students' first language is not English will benefit adult Aboriginal distance learners. If the curricula were more

culturally sensitive and affirming there may be more Aboriginal people who would chose this mode of study. It is recommended that curricula adaptations be culturally sensitive and incorporate the advice and wisdom from traditional experts, the Aboriginal elders.

#### Provincial Distance Education Course Accessibility and Delivery

Distance education course development and delivery at Cumberland Regional College can benefit more Aboriginal students if the courses are accessible from and transferable to any Regional College or reserve location in Saskatchewan. Students can continue with their education if a move is necessary. It is recommended that Cumberland Regional College pursue course development with asynchronous delivery methods that are accessible throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

#### Orientation/Transition Courses

It is recommended that Cumberland Regional College provide orientation/transition sessions for students studying through distance education methods. The sessions will provide adult Aboriginal students with skills and information needed to address the following:

- typing skill instruction
- computer skills development
- bridging programs for academic classes like Biology, Chemistry or Math that rely on current background knowledge in the subject area.
- introduction to instructors through face to face meetings
- skill instruction on topics like writing a formal paragraph
- stress reduction counseling to help students maintain balance in their lives

- college, class and personal expectations awareness

### Gender Analysis and the Recommendations

The research respondents consisted of five females and one male and although they are studying the same courses their distance education experiences are different because of their gender. Women's and men's lives are not the same and therefore their experiences, needs, issues and priorities are different.

Gender analysis, which examines the differences in women's and men's lives, can provide more information on which to base support services recommendations. Spronk and Radtke (1988) examined the issues faced by Aboriginal women who attempt distance education. They typically have several dependents, a demanding family and community life with constant financial concerns. Kim Anderson (2000) describes how contemporary Aboriginal women continue to value their role in influencing the future. Through their responsibilities as mothers, grandmothers and aunts they create and support healthy families. This role as well as the role of a student is demanding and female students can benefit from support services that ease those demands.

Interviews with Wes showed that he had a broad base of support for dealing with any problems he experienced in his distance education classes. He spoke of support from his current wife who was a former Cumberland College student, from his ex-wife who was now a social worker and counselled him when necessary and from his elders who gave him their blessings when he returned to school. In contrast, Gale, a 55 year old grandmother raising two grandchildren, found the strength from within to pursue her studies in English to enable her to help her grandchildren with their schooling. Because she had single parented five children she was able to continue in that parenting role with

very little monetary or family support. Janis had single-parented five children on a carpenter's salary in Vancouver away from her familial supports. Donna was absent from class to assist an errant nephew and welcome the birth of her great granddaughter. In all these instances it was women who were providing support for other women, children and even the lone male distance education student. Recommendations for on-reserve distance education with community daycares, tutor support, stress reduction counseling sessions and courses accessible throughout the province would benefit these female students.

### Suggestions for Further Research

The scope of this research is limited as it dealt with six students studying in three different distance education courses at one regional college in Saskatchewan. Many students initially enrolled in these courses but in the second last month of the academic term very few students remain. Additional research that focuses on those participants who discontinue distance education programs is necessary. More research is recommended to examine ways that culturally sensitive distance education courses can be developed and delivered to Aboriginal students wherever they are located in Saskatchewan.

Adult aboriginal students study and drop out of courses at various regional colleges throughout Saskatchewan. This study represents one instance of Aboriginal distance education in a particular community so it is not possible to generalize from the results. This study or a similar study needs to be replicated throughout the Saskatchewan regional college system using a larger number of adult Aboriginal students studying through distance education means. This additional research can provide information on why students leave their distance education programs and what supports are necessary for

them to continue their studies. It will provide important information to assist the regional college system and other learning institutions in setting priorities and planning the development and delivery of distance education programs for Aboriginal learners.

The distance education courses discussed in this research fulfilled requirements for a Grade 12 standing from Saskatchewan Learning. Many learning institutions use the same curricula developed by this department. These learning institutions include the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Saskatchewan Regional Colleges, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Dumont Technical Institute and Saskatchewan Learning. Collaborative research is necessary among these institutions to investigate ways that these curricula can incorporate awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples' cultures and adapt for learners whose first language is not English. Curricula adaptations that are culturally sensitive and incorporate the advice and wisdom from traditional experts, the Aboriginal elders are needed. From this research, distance education courses can be developed that all the institutional learning partners can use for both adult and non-adult students studying at a distance.

A comparative study of aboriginally controlled and non-aboriginally controlled distance education course development and delivery may provide information that all learning institutions can use when planning their distance education courses. In Saskatchewan this comparison could be done between the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST). SIIT is an educational institution of the Federation of



Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and SIAST is a government funded post-secondary institution in Saskatchewan.

Effective distance education focuses on the learners, course development and delivery specific to the learners' needs and the student services necessary to realize successful distance education experiences. This study validates that providing distance education courses to adult Aboriginal learners through the regional college system in Northeastern Saskatchewan contributes to their successful distance educational experiences.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Information and Consent for Research Participation

I am a student studying in the Master of Distance Education program at Athabasca University and am in the process of completing my thesis as a final requirement for my degree. The title of my research thesis is “*Northeastern Saskatchewan Aboriginal Students’ Perceptions of Their Distance Education Experiences and the Relationship to Their Aboriginal Culture.*”

My thesis research proposal involves case study research to identify the key factors related to Aboriginal cultural values, beliefs and practices that contribute to positive distance education experiences for adult Aboriginal students studying at a distance. From this research recommendations will be made for changes and additions to the support services necessary for these students to realize successful distance education experiences.

I am inviting you, along with the other Aboriginal students of Ms. Goertzen and Mr. Kulpa, to participate in my research. If you agree to participate you will be asked to answer a written interview of approximately 30 minutes and to meet for two oral interviews of approximately 30 minutes each to be arranged at a time and location that is convenient to you. The first oral interview will clarify and expand on the written interview and the second oral interview will confirm themes identified from the research data. A last meeting of all the participants in a focus group session of one hour will provide feedback on the recommendations for support services identified from the research. I anticipate that your total time commitment for participating in this research study would be approximately 2 to 3 hours.

The information from the interviews will be coded and remain confidential. However, your participation in the focus group session will identify you to the other participants, and confidentiality of discussion within the focus group cannot be guaranteed. Your name will not be identified in any written statements or publications arising from this study.

All data gathered from participants will be securely stored in a locked container or a password-protected computer (depending on the format of the data), and will be accessible only to the researcher, or to her project supervisor for verification purposes only. Once the project has been completed and the final copy of the thesis has been produced, all interview documents, tapes, and electronic records will be confidentially destroyed by May 2007.

The final results of the study will be published in a thesis that will be available worldwide on the Internet through the Athabasca University Library’s Digital Thesis collection. The results may also be further disseminated through academic and professional papers, journal articles, and conference presentations. Research results will be shared with Cumberland Regional College, and will also be available to participants, upon request.

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, and your decision to participate or not to participate will have no impact on your marks or availability of student services. If you choose to participate, you have the right to refuse to answer individual questions, or to withdraw completely from the research at any time during the data collection period. Should you choose to withdraw completely, any data you have provided to that point will be returned, upon your request.

If you have any questions please contact me at:

Pat Newton  
Box 945, Nipawin, SK S0E 1E0  
Phone 862-2324 (Home) or 862-5227 (Work)  
E-mail: [patnewton@sasktel.net](mailto:patnewton@sasktel.net)

My project supervisor is Dr. Barbara Spronk. The contact information for her is:

Email: [bspronk5043@rogers.com](mailto:bspronk5043@rogers.com)

Phone: (519) 747-9423

-----  
**If you agree to participate in this study, your signature indicates that you have read the information provided on this form.**  
-----

**CONSENT:**

I agree to participate in the research that is being conducted by Pat Newton, entitled *“Northeastern Saskatchewan Aboriginal Students’ Perceptions of Their Distance Education Experiences and the Relationship to Their Aboriginal Culture.”*

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I can end the process at any time without a reason. I understand that there are no negative consequences if I decide to withdraw, and that I may take back any or all of my contributions.

Signature of the Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B

### Written Interview

All information that you provide will be disguised to protect your identity. Your name and personal information will be treated confidentially and will not be connected to individual remarks or results published in the final research report. Please respond openly and honestly and with as much detail as you can.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Your Cultural Group: First Nation \_\_\_\_\_ Métis \_\_\_\_\_ Inuit \_\_\_\_\_

Community you live in \_\_\_\_\_

Community/Communities in which you were raised \_\_\_\_\_

Location of your classes \_\_\_\_\_

Distance Class in which you are enrolled \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did you enroll in this distance education class?
2. How does distance education fit with your:
  - a. Academic needs
  - b. Your goals
  - c. Your cultural background and social needs
3. What have been your positive experiences in this distance class?
4. What have been your negative experiences in this distance class?
5. What supports, both at school and at home, do you have while taking this class?
6. What are your plans when you finish this class?
7. If you would like to add any comments, please feel free to do so here.

8. If you think of any other comments later on that you would be willing to share with me about your distance education class please feel free to email me at

[patnewton@sasktel.net](mailto:patnewton@sasktel.net).

## Appendix C

### Written Interview/Oral Interview

All information that you provide will remain anonymous. Your name and personal information will remain confidential. Please respond openly and honestly and with as much detail as you can.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Your Cultural Group: First Nation \_\_\_\_\_ Métis \_\_\_\_\_ Inuit \_\_\_\_\_

Community you live in \_\_\_\_\_

Community/Communities in which you were raised \_\_\_\_\_

Location of your classes \_\_\_\_\_

Distance Class in which you are enrolled \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why did you enroll in this distance education class?
2. How does distance education fit with your:
  - a. Academic needs
  - b. Your goals
  - c. Your cultural background and social needs (class offered opportunities for meeting new people and created a sense of belonging for me)
3. Do you feel that you fit into the distance education classroom? (the classroom offered a comfortable, non-threatening environment)
4. Did you come to your distance education site, other than class time, to study with your classmates?
5. Were the majority of your classmates in the distance education class Aboriginal?
6. Did having fellow Aboriginal students in your distance education class contribute to your finishing this class?
7. Did you feel that the distance education class offered a supportive community for you?

8. Please tell me if you encountered any of the following in your distance education class:

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Lack of financial resources	4	3	2	1
Inadequately prepared academically	4	3	2	1
Conflict with culture	4	3	2	1
Feelings of alienation	4	3	2	1
Lack of role models	4	3	2	1
Lack of support from instructor	4	3	2	1

9. Did any of the following contribute to your finishing the class?

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Supportive classmates	4	3	2	1
Supportive instructor				
Ability to live at home and attend class	4	3	2	1
Classmates were from the same culture	4	3	2	1
Small class size	4	3	2	1
Scheduling of classes	4	3	2	1
Supportive staff at local site	4	3	2	1
Family support	4	3	2	1
On-site classroom facilitator	4	3	2	1

10. What have been your positive experiences in this distance class?

11. What have been your negative experiences in this distance class?

12. What factors helped you to succeed in your distance education classes?

13. What factors made it difficult for you to succeed in your distance education classes?

14. What supports, both at school and at home, do you have while taking this class?

15. If you could change anything about this class that would help contribute to your finishing, what would that be?

16. How do you deal with any difficulties or problems related to completing your distance education class?

17. What recommendations or suggestions for administrators and teachers do **YOU** have to improve the distance education classes you have taken through Cumberland Regional College?

18. What are your plans when you finish this class?
19. Have you anything else you would like to tell me?

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Questions

1. Would you like to see more Aboriginal content in your classes?
  - more examples with Aboriginal peoples' issues
  - more local knowledge/local language examples
  - more Aboriginal perspectives/values
  
2. Before you actually started your specific classes did you have an orientation session? Did you have some time where you were introduced to using the computer and the technology needed for this class? Did you receive instruction on communicating with your instructor?
  
3. As a class would you like to be able to meet your instructor face to face? If so, how often?
  
4. How do you feel about your reserve community having community ownership of distance education programs that correspond to your specific community needs? For example would you like to see learning centres on Kinistin:
  - where distance education programs could be delivered
  - with on-site Aboriginal tutors for academic and counselling support
  - with more flexible programming times and datesWould there be better times and dates for the courses? Would you like to have summer session courses?
  
5. Would you like to have teachers who are more knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture – your specific Saulteaux culture?
  
6. Would you like to have Aboriginal distance education teachers?
  
7. Did you have both group and individual assignments in your distance education classes? What do you prefer and why?
  
8. In your classes do you prefer written or oral assignments? Do you get immediate feedback on your assignments?
  
9. For my research only one student filled out the written form but you all did the oral interview with no hesitation. Why?
  
10. Why do you think students dropped out of your classes?
  
11. Is English your first language? If not, do you think having some instruction in Saulteaux would be better for you to help with explain various concepts and ideas?

12. Is there a need for literacy classes for Aboriginal people? Are there people on your reserve who would like to learn to read and write but won't come to town for literacy classes?
13. Would you have benefited from some transitional classes to improve your skills and knowledge before you enrolled in a credit class? For example, typing instruction and refresher courses in Biology or Chemistry, not for credit but just to improve your skills?
14. What else would have eased your transition back to school?
15. Were there any racism issues?