Athabasca University Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

by

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Abstract

According to Canadian secondary school data, the Indigenous graduation rate is significantly lower than the non-Indigenous graduation rate. As such, the education system may not be meeting the cultural needs of Indigenous students and their families. In this study, a critical foundations approach connects the multilevel explanations for low academic performance of Indigenous students, including the historical, sociological, political and philosophical factors that have influenced Indigenous schooling. Researchers have also found that academic success of Indigenous students is affected by a lack of funding for on-reserve schools, systemic factors such as racism, poverty and cultural irrelevance, as well as the need for decolonizing the Canadian education system. Limited focus, however, has been placed on the struggles endured by Indigenous students and their families in Northern Ontario. In addition, research about Indigenous schooling has generally not reflected Indigenous viewpoints. This study, with emphasis on the Indigenous perspective, offers insights about the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario. Through interviews with Indigenous people in northern communities, it has become evident that Indigenous students and their families in Northern Ontario experience challenges in the education system similar to their Indigenous counterparts across Canada. The findings of this study show that improvements have been made to Indigenous education but more work needs to be done. Through a comprehensive revision of school curriculum, organizational structure and policies, the negative stereotypes that have plagued Indigenous peoples for centuries can be addressed and resolved.

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Glossary

Aboriginal: collective term for the original peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) of North America and their descendants; used interchangeably with Indigenous and Native

Chief: an elected Indigenous official who represents his or her community in all governmental affairs

Chiefs Assembly on Education: the gathering of First Nations Chiefs where recommendations are made for educational reform; hosted by the Assembly of First Nations, a national advocacy organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada

Elders: Indigenous peoples who are recognized because they have earned the respect of their community through the wisdom, harmony and balance of their actions and teachings

First Nations: descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada; one of three Indigenous groups recognized by the Canadian Constitution

Indigenous: collective term for the original peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) of North America and their descendants; used interchangeably with Aboriginal and Native

Inuit: original peoples of the Arctic; one of three Indigenous groups recognized by the Canadian Constitution

Métis: descendants in Canada who trace their origin to First Nations peoples and European settlers; one of three Indigenous groups recognized by the Canadian Constitution

Native: collective term for the original peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) of North America and their descendants; used interchangeably with Aboriginal and Indigenous

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: an organization created in agreement between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples to identify and reveal the abuse inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government through the residential school system

A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario

According to Canadian secondary school data, the Indigenous graduation rate is 36% compared to a non-Indigenous graduation rate of 72% (Chiefs Assembly on Education, 2012). In 2006, it was reported that 33% of Indigenous adults aged 25 to 54 had not graduated from high school compared to 13% of non-Indigenous populations (Statistics Canada, 2015). This statistic is consistent with other findings that Indigenous students have the highest secondary school dropout rate in Canada, approximately twice that of other students (Fisher & Campbell, 2002). This is particularly devastating to Indigenous reservations where unemployment is already high. "Dropping out adds stress on youth, their families, and the Aboriginal community in general" (Makokis, 2000, p. 11). Indeed, the issue of academic success for Indigenous youth in Canada is an important and relevant one.

Furthermore, it has recently been reported that "only four of 10 young adults living on reserves across the country have finished high school. These figures contrast sharply with graduation rates of seven out of 10 for off-reserve Aboriginals and nine out of 10 for non-Aboriginals" (Omand, 2016, para. 3). These statistics raise questions as to why Indigenous students are achieving less academic success compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. It has been widely publicized over the years that the formal education system may not be meeting the unique cultural needs of Indigenous students and their families. For example, Makokis (2000) reports several key reasons for the high number of Indigenous dropouts within the Canadian education system, including feelings of alienation, poor relationships between Indigenous students and their peers and teachers, and a parental distrust of the formal education system.

The purpose of this project has been to examine and critically analyze the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario. The current nation-wide discussion of Truth and Reconciliation illustrates the complex and strained relationship that continues to exist between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). As a result, a critical foundations approach has been effective in connecting the multilevel explanations for low academic performance of Indigenous students. This includes an examination of the historical, sociological, political and philosophical factors that have influenced Indigenous schooling in Canada. Furthermore, a review of the literature has been beneficial for uncovering pervasive issues within the realm of Indigenous education, including funding for on-reserve schools, systemic factors such as racism, poverty and cultural irrelevance, as well as the decolonization of the Canadian education system. To identify whether these issues are prevalent for Indigenous students and their families in Northern Ontario, I conducted interviews with 20 Indigenous individuals from northern communities. It is only through the sharing of their personal stories and experiences in the formal education system that the Indigenous voice can be kept at the forefront and that the formal education system can become more engaging for Indigenous students across Canada.

Overview of Indigenous Education in Canada

According to Baldwin (2008), "the most disturbing aspect of Canada's educational system is how it treated minority groups" (p. 229), primarily the Indigenous peoples. Statistics Canada's (2011) National Household Survey indicates that 1.4 million Canadians identify as Indigenous, accounting for 4.3% of Canada's population. In the history of Canadian education, the maltreatment of Canada's Indigenous population occurred through segregated schools known as residential schools. "The residential school was… designed to separate Indian children from

their families so they could be systematically fitted with the religious beliefs, social habits, and educational training that would turn them into 'little brown white men'" (Dyck, 1997, p. 14). Indeed, Canada's history is not exempt from issues of racism and discrimination which continue to have an overwhelmingly negative impact on the present-day educational views of Indigenous peoples.

Origins of residential schools. The origins of residential schools can be traced back to the conclusion of the War of 1812 when economic changes, including a decline in the fur trade, were happening. "Now, instead of being viewed as allies, First Nations were seen as obstacles to the nation's progress" (Baldwin, 2008, p. 232). With hunting and gathering no longer necessary, European settlers decided that it would be best for the Indigenous people to convert to European culture. Key education officials, supported by the government, agreed that a religious influence was necessary to help Native people become more civilized. A recommendation from commissioner Nicholas Flood Davin, initially supported by the Native people, led to the construction of residential schools. Indigenous parents thought that their children would be learning the necessary skills to enter the world of work, but "instead the children were being primarily taught the Christian faith while being robbed of their language and cultural heritage" (p. 234). This marked the beginning of a century-long resistance for the Native peoples against residential schooling.

Prevalence of residential schooling. There were as many as 80 residential schools at their peak during the 1930s. Some children were taken away by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, some parents – brainwashed by religious leaders – sent their children, and other parents grudgingly sent their children because the family was economically strapped. This helps to explain why, in over a century of existence, residential schools housed as many as 90 000 students (Baldwin,

2008). Ongoing resistance from the Native peoples was not enough to battle against the residential schools that were filling up across the country.

Realities of life in residential school. It has been argued that, despite their name, residential schools were never set up to educate Indigenous youngsters (e.g. Grant, 1996). "The bottom line was that Indian children were imprisoned on the pretext of educating them, while in reality their potential to develop fully as members of either Native or non-Native society was squelched" (Baldwin, 2008, p. 241). Life in residential schools involved daily activities that were demeaning toward Indigenous children, including having to sleep in frigid cold bedrooms, taking baths in cold and dirty water, being given new names to replace their traditional ones, being forced to wear stiff uniforms and having their long hair cut. In addition to this, many Indigenous children felt compelled to steal food because they were often left hungry. Altogether, this illustrates only a portion of the prison-like conditions for which residential schools have become known.

Lasting impact of residential schools. It is widely accepted that the formal residential school period lasted from 1868 until the 1980s. "Truly the basis of the system was inadequate, demeaning, and dehumanizing, as may be substantiated by the practice in some schools of referring to students only by their assigned numbers instead of using their names. Small wonder that less than three percent of those children attending residential schools ever graduated from high school" (Baldwin, 2008, pp. 242-43). It is also evident why so many lives continue to be impacted by a school system that no longer exists. Though there are some students who have been able to maintain their self-esteem and self-worth despite their time in residential schools, many have demonstrated "an inability to express feelings, apathy and unwillingness to work, values confusion and culture shock, anti-religious attitudes and long-term negative impact on succeeding generations" (p. 243). Ultimately, many former residential school students who had

witnessed and experienced abuse have continued to parent and treat their children in the same ways as they were treated by their caregivers in residential schools. In addition, the closing of residential schools has not taken away the subtle ways in which Indigenous people still experience the struggle of assimilation in 21st century Canada.

Critical Foundations Analysis of Indigenous Education in Canada

In the realm of educational studies, "a critical foundations approach involves the "viewing [of] education analytically from a variety of perspectives… draw[ing] upon a range of theories, concepts, and methods from history, sociology, political science, and philosophy to critically scrutinize educational events, relations, issues, and practices" (Athabasca University, 2016, para. 1). This interdisciplinary approach allows for a more complete understanding of the educational process from a variety of theoretical perspectives. For the purpose of this paper, a critical foundations perspective – rooted in history, sociology, political science and philosophy – has been used to analyze the challenges of Indigenous education and to help determine areas for improvement in the formal education system.

The examination of residential schooling's impact on the Indigenous peoples helps to provide a framework for the current research question: What are the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario? Due to the complexities of the tumultuous relationship that has existed between the Canadian government and the Indigenous peoples, it is imperative to address this question using a critical foundations analysis of the historical, sociological, political and philosophical aspects of Indigenous education. This analysis provides a post-colonial view that helps to explain the challenges associated with Indigenous education, many of which have resulted from external control and exploitation of the Indigenous peoples and their land.

Historical lens. Formal education was not always a concern for the Indigenous peoples of Canada. “Before contact with Europeans, Aboriginal peoples educated their youth through traditional means – demonstration, group socialization, participation in cultural and spiritual rituals, skill development and oral teachings” (McCue, 2015, para. 1). It was the arrival of the Europeans to Canada that contributed to the beginning of the formalized schooling process for Indigenous peoples. “Schooling is the intentional, packaged instruction delivered in a particular place for the purpose of teaching information and values” (Littlejohn, 2006, p. 63). Though formal schooling for Natives can be traced back to the early 1600s, it was the end of the War of 1812 that marked a new direction for Indigenous education. With many economic changes happening, including a decline in the fur trade, the Indigenous people were no longer seen as allies but as a hindrance to the nation’s progress. Assuming that the Natives were in desperate need for basic literacy and agricultural and industrial skills, the Europeans determined “without too much analysis… that the cultures of the First Nations should be transformed into European forms of civilization” (p. 233). Ultimately, this led to the creation of residential schools through which Natives were falsely promised to receive the necessary education and skills to become working members of society.

The Indigenous peoples’ lack of trust toward the Canadian government is deeply rooted in the historical maltreatment of Indigenous children in the formal education system. This lack of trust has existed for years and continues to exist despite a current government focus on rectifying its strained relationship with Indigenous families. As part of the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b), many educational institutions are taking positive steps toward acknowledging the nation’s previous wrongdoings against Indigenous peoples, and toward celebrating a distinct Indigenous culture. Realistically, this

reconciliation process – a result of the historical hurts once caused by the Canadian school system – may alone prove inadequate in providing Indigenous students with an education that is truly geared toward their cultural needs.

Sociological lens. The overall struggles of the Indigenous peoples in Canada have been rooted in the process of assimilation, a "process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society" (Pauls, 2008, para. 1). Even before the formal Native schooling process began, there existed a belief amongst European settlers that their own ways were superior to those of the Indigenous people. "To encourage converts, [Europeans] provided Christian Natives with cheaper goods, presents, and guns. In return, the Natives had to agree to be baptized, accept Catholic views on sex, marriage and divorce, give up all good luck charms, and not participate in their traditional feasts and celebrations" (Baldwin, 2008, p. 1). The advent of the formal schooling process advanced these assimilation efforts to convert the country's Indigenous peoples to European ways.

Additionally, the eventual construction of residential schools marked over a century long attempt to strip the Native peoples of their cultural identity. From a sociological lens, it is evident how these assimilation efforts have contributed to a lack of trust toward the Canadian government, including the education system. Despite the admission of guilt from Canada's current government for its past mistakes, it can be argued that the formal education system will never be deemed a truly safe place for Indigenous families. For example, in a study of Native student dropouts, Makokis (2000) found that racism in schools was to blame, either directly or in more subtle ways such as teacher favoritism and teachers not caring. Granted, most "teachers and administrators as individuals are not racist, but rather training has shaped attitudes and methods that may be construed as prejudice by Aboriginals" (Fisher & Campbell, 2002, p. 24). This is a

pattern that continues to surface for many Indigenous students in present-day schools, which only helps to encourage the students to drop out before graduation.

Political lens. Political power and control has been exerted over the Natives since the days of New France. The Canadian government agreed with religious leaders about "the superiority of the European culture and the need to raise [the Indigenous] to the levels of the whites" (Haig-Brown, 1993, p. 29). The Natives were initially in agreement with residential schools under the promise that the schools would be places where Indigenous children would learn essential skills for the workforce. When the Natives realized that this was not the case, resistance peaked against this formal schooling – and government officials enforced mandatory attendance (Baldwin, 2008). Another way in which the government exerted its political force over the Native schooling system was through the hiring of inexperienced and unqualified teachers for the residential schools. Government-authorized commissioner Nicholas Flood Davin believed that "residential schools should be turned over to religious denominations in order to fulfill the need for teachers. He felt that though these teachers might be less qualified in terms of formal teacher training, because of their religious convictions they would work for less wages and thus save the government funds" (p. 237). These political forces drove a wedge between Canada and the Indigenous peoples, a wedge that has existed for centuries.

Currently, those who are hired to teach in Canadian schools must hold provincial certifications that deem them to be capable and qualified to deliver curriculum content and to assess student performance. While this is not the same as the days of Nicholas Flood Davin hiring unqualified educators to teach Indigenous students, one may argue that there really is not much difference in today's schools. For example, a teacher may hold a provincial certification to deliver curriculum to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike, but does that teacher

have the cultural knowledge and real-world experiences to meaningfully engage Indigenous students and their families with culturally relevant material? “Although curriculum surrounding Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives does exist, the depth of its application in the classroom depends entirely on the comfort level of the teachers delivering it” (Spencer, 2016, para. 5). With Indigenous students reporting a disconnect between their actual culture and the culture that teachers try to represent in today’s classroom, it is not surprising that many disengage from the education system.

Philosophical lens. Karl Marx (1887) maintained “that ‘tribal’ peoples represented simple forms of productive relations and were destined to disappear” (p. 51). For Marx, tribal ownership signaled an undeveloped stage of production. “It corresponds to… hunting and fishing… the rearing of beasts or, in the highest stage, agriculture” (Marx & Engels, 1965, p. 33). Despite the fact that many Natives have been dismissive of Marx’s views, it may be argued that Indigenous peoples have become enslaved within a capitalist world system. “Around the world, Indigenous lands are expropriated by states and capitalist corporations, in order to channel natural resources from above and below ground into ever-widening streams of capital accumulation” (Simon, 2011, p. 6). Essentially, the Indigenous people are transformed into the proletariat which alters their original Indigenous community and creates new identities. This notion can be used to help explain what has occurred through the process of formal Native schooling from New France and beyond. The Europeans may be viewed as the elite capitalists who overtook the tribal peoples. When the hunting and fishing skills of the Natives were no longer needed, the course of action was to assimilate Native peoples into European culture via residential schooling. The end result is that the Indigenous peoples were displaced from their communities, robbed of their cultural identity and regarded as inferior, lower-class citizens.

For centuries, the Indigenous peoples in Canada have experienced the consequences of assimilation and a lost cultural identity. This has led to the higher likelihood of Indigenous peoples living in impoverished conditions, and having higher rates of both unemployment and suicide (Assembly of First Nations, 2011). As such, Indigenous students may not have the same support and parental involvement at school as their non-Indigenous peers. This creates a vicious cycle where Indigenous students, feeling robbed of their cultural identity, will drop out at a rate twice that of non-Indigenous students. In turn, uneducated Indigenous youth "are left with few options, except to become further burdens on their communities and society" (Fisher & Campbell, 2002, p. 5). The education system continues to foster a perpetual disengagement of Indigenous students who perceive the system as threatening and untrustworthy.

Review of the Literature

Funding for On-Reserve Schools

There is considerable debate regarding the federal government's funding of on-reserve schools. While the Canadian government maintains that on-reserve schools are funded at comparable levels to provincially-funded off-reserve schools, Indigenous leaders and advocates argue that on-reserve schools are funded 20 to 50 percent less than their off-reserve counterparts (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013). In on-reserve schools, drastic underfunding has led to Indigenous students being tasked with enduring the challenges of outdated classrooms and inadequate curriculum (MacDonald & Wilson, 2013). As a result, many Indigenous students attend off-reserve schools where they are then faced with a plethora of other systemic challenges.

Systemic Factors

The structural oppressions of Indigenous students help to explain why they are graduating at a remarkably lower rate than non-Indigenous students. For Indigenous youth, these structural

oppressions are systemic and lead to consequences that perpetuate a lack of cultural identity and instances of suicide that are six times greater than that of their non-Indigenous classmates (Walls, Hautala & Hurley, 2014). According to Taylor (2013), the detrimental effects of structural oppressions against Indigenous peoples have been maintained by various deliberate processes that have legitimized and even normalized such maltreatment of non-dominant groups. The Indigenous peoples comprise a large non-dominant group within the Canadian landscape. As a non-entitled group, Indigenous students remain vulnerable to systems of inequity and may experience low academic success because they do not receive the same preferential treatment as other Canadian students (Baskin, 2007). Of the many structural oppressions faced by Indigenous peoples, researchers have identified racism, poverty and a culturally irrelevant education system as major contributing factors to the current state of Indigenous education in Canada.

Racism. The current nation-wide discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015b) *Calls to Action Report* illustrates how racism toward Indigenous peoples in Canada has become an increasingly prevalent topic. Issues of racism are documented via the history of colonization and residential schooling. Calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission include the need for an inclusive, Indigenous-focused school curriculum. Rovito and Giles (2016) suggest that such educational revisions are needed in order to counteract the negative stereotypes that continue to plague the Indigenous peoples.

Silver and Mallett (2002) conclude that overt forms of racism against Indigenous students, including name-calling and stereotyping, are commonly found in off-reserve schools. These forms of racism have been linked to the remarkably low graduation rate of Indigenous high school students. A heightened secondary school drop-out rate has been deemed just one of the consequences of racism within North American schools (Gibson, 2015). While much

literature exists about the link between racism and Indigenous drop-out rates in Canadian schools, it remains unclear how this link presents itself in Northern Ontario communities.

Poverty. Indigenous peoples often live in poverty and are "disproportionately ranked among the poorest of Canadians" (Wilson & MacDonald, 2010, p. 3). International researchers have shown that Indigenous students who come from low-income families are more likely to experience minimal support from their family network (Lahn, 2012). Similar findings have been concluded in Canada where many Indigenous students are financially disadvantaged in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers. As such, Indigenous students may not only receive less family support but they may also experience other realities like inadequate food resources. In fact, malnutrition of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students has been demonstrated as a key factor to poor functioning in the classroom (Fieldhouse & Thompson, 2012; Thompson, Wiebe, Gulrukh & Ashram, 2012).

Indigenous youth of low-income families are more likely to experience low academic achievement in school because they lack essential resources from their homes and communities (Brown & Fraehlich, 2012; Cottrell, Preston & Pearce, 2012). It has also been reported that the high birth rates of Indigenous children, combined with inadequate housing for Indigenous families, has created home environments in which Indigenous youth are unable to study and complete their homework (O'Gorman & Pandy, 2015; Romaniuk, 2008; Walker, 2003). A greater instance of learning disabilities has also been reported among children whose families lack financial resources (Cappiello & Gahagan, 2009). While much literature exists about the link between poverty and Indigenous drop-out rates in Canadian schools, it remains unclear how this link specifically presents itself in Northern Ontario communities.

Cultural irrelevance. The construction of residential schools marked over a century long attempt to strip the Native peoples of their cultural identity (Charles & DeGagné, 2013;

McKenzie & Morrisette, 2002; Toulouse, 2006). These assimilation efforts have contributed to a strained relationship with the Canadian government and an education system that has never been deemed by Indigenous peoples to be a truly safe place. Furthermore, the Indigenous culture has yet to be meaningfully infused in a majority of off-reserve schools (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder & Methot, 2013).

Teachers also receive limited training about how to meet the unique cultural needs of Indigenous students and their families (Carr-Stewart, Balzer & Cottrell, 2013). As such, Indigenous curriculum is often not implemented since many teachers feel unprepared to do so (Spencer, 2016). Indigenous students may feel that they continue to be racialized despite well-meaning teacher attempts to represent the Indigenous culture (Gebhard, 2017). These challenges may be viewed as insurmountable by Indigenous youth, leading them to an early exit from school before they graduate. While these issues for Indigenous students have been studied across Canadian populations, it remains unclear in the literature as to how Northern Ontario communities are affected by a culturally irrelevant education system.

Decolonizing the Canadian Education System

Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) argue that, despite efforts to work toward an equitable educational curriculum, Indigenous "achievements, knowledge, histories, and perspectives remain too often ignored, rejected, suppressed, marginalized, or underutilized" (p. 82) in Canadian schools. The education system is still colonized despite the introduction of countless initiatives that use words like *Native*, *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* in their titles. Indigenous scholars have elaborated on various principles and guidelines to protect the heritage of Indigenous peoples. These principles hold that the Indigenous heritage is a complete knowledge system in its own right and that its diverse elements can be fully learned only by utilizing the

pedagogical principles originally employed by Indigneous communities (Wiessner & Battiste, 2000). Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) discuss *animation* as a process of change where the abilities and gifts of Indigenous peoples can meaningfully be recognized and honored in the education system. For example, animation can help to create a postcolonial education system through meaningful discussions with community Elders and through the creation of teaching materials that promote Indigenous knowledge.

Study Overview

To determine whether the challenges of Indigenous education documented in the literature are representative of the issues experienced in Northern Ontario, I conducted interviews with First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals from northern communities so that their personal stories and experiences in the formal education system could be brought to the forefront. Through the transcription and analysis of their interview responses, the goal was to identify whether the factors that influence school performance as reported in the literature on Indigenous education are also prevalent in Northern Ontario for Indigenous students and their families.

Method

Participants

Indigenous individuals from Northern Ontario communities (n=20) were interviewed for this study. In order to be deemed a candidate for study, individuals needed to be 18 years of age or older, needed to self-identify as a First Nations, Métis or Inuit person, and needed to have experience in the formal education system (e.g. educator, current or former student). Part of the inclusion criteria involved residential school experience and/or knowledge about residential schooling, as well as knowledge of Indigenous culture in relation to education and policies that

affect this population. Participants in this study were chosen using purposive, snowball sampling. Under the guidance of two Indigenous educational leaders in the community, additional participants were recruited and selected for interviews.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Gender *Male Female Neither*	Age *Years*	Ethnicity *First Nation Métis Inuit*	Attended Residential School *Yes No*	Ontario Secondary School Diploma *Yes No*	Status *Elder Non-Elder*
01	Male	66	First Nations	Yes	Yes	Elder
02	Female	72	First Nations	Yes	No	Elder
03	Male	49	Métis	No	Yes	Non-Elder
04	Female	44	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
05	Male	40	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
06	Male	51	First Nations	No	No	Non-Elder
07	Male	45	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
08	Female	77	First Nations	Yes	No	Elder
09	Female	65	First Nations	Yes	Yes	Elder
10	Male	40	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
11	Female	31	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
12	Male	42	Inuit	No	No	Non-Elder
13	Female	40	Métis	No	No	Non-Elder
14	Female	39	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
15	Female	34	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
16	Female	50	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
17	Neutral	54	Métis	No	Yes	Non-Elder
18	Male	51	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
19	Female	54	First Nations	No	Yes	Non-Elder
20	Male	68	First Nations	Yes	No	Elder

Of the 20 participants, 16 were First Nations, two were Métis, and one was Inuit. Nine participants identified as male, 10 identified as female and one identified as neutral gender. The age range was 31-77 years. Five of the participants attended a residential school. Fourteen

participants earned an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Five of the participants identified as Elders in the community.

Data Collection

Prior to the start of each interview, participants were offered a gift of tobacco for their agreement to share their personal stories and experiences in the K-12 Ontario school system. This is the protocol in Indigenous research. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and were recorded using a standalone digital recording device. Recordings of the participants' answers were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Transcriptions were textually analyzed for key words and themes using Concordle and Voyant.

An interview guide was utilized throughout this study (see Appendix A). The script was divided into two sections: (A) Demographics and (B) Research Questions. The use of a script not only ensured consistency across the interviews but also that this study's areas of interest would be touched upon by each participant.

Procedure

As the primary researcher, I corresponded with the Chiefs of various Indigenous reservations in Northern Ontario. An initial letter of contact which described the proposed study was provided (see Appendix B). A letter of information was also made available (see Appendix C). Contact was then made with two Indigenous educational leaders in Northern Ontario who recommended various First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals for study. Candidates who met the criteria for study and who agreed to be interviewed were asked to provide their informed consent (see Appendix D). Those who were selected for interviews were also asked to suggest names for other individuals who might meet the study's criteria. Through snowball sampling, a total of 20 participants were selected and interviewed.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and followed a pre-determined script to ensure that each interview was conducted in the same manner. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. Interview responses were recorded so that they could later be transcribed and collectively analyzed for keywords and overall themes. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were provided the opportunity to edit, further elaborate upon, or remove any or all of their responses. Participants were also informed that they would be provided a copy of the study upon its completion.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the academic success of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario. Through the interview process and critical analysis of participant responses, the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario were brought to the forefront through the Indigenous perspective. Historically, the Indigenous voice has gone unheard in research that is supposed to focus on the Indigenous perspective. The following results, including keywords and themes of discussion, represent the overall messages that have come directly from the viewpoints of the Indigenous participants in this study.

Data Analysis

Concordle and Voyant, digital humanities tools used for text analysis, were applied to the interview transcripts. According to its official website, the Concordle program makes word clouds – with all of the words in the cloud clickable for further discovery (Kocbach, 2008). These clickable words serve as links with a concordance function. In the digital humanities, a *concordancer* is useful because it helps the corpus linguist to retrieve alphabetically sorted lists

of principal words along with their immediate contexts. Concordle was used to individually analyze each of the interview transcripts for keywords. Voyant, on the other hand, was utilized to provide a cumulative analysis of the texts as one group. Voyant is a web-based text reading and analysis environment that provides users with tools such as word clouds to display high frequency terms as well as summaries that provide comparative information between texts (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2003). This information includes, but is not limited to, vocabulary density and distinctive words for each document.

Through these data analyses, the following keywords were highlighted as the most prominent across all interview transcripts, in order of prevalence: *trust*; *land*; *school*; *racism*; *government*; *residential*; *culture*; *Native*; *respect*; *Indian*; *funding*; *community*; *White*; *role model*. The identifications of these keywords created a framework for the overall themes that would be extracted from the interview transcripts. Through the keywords, it became evident that issues of trust and racism between the Indigenous peoples and their "White" counterparts would be prevalent in the stories of the participants. Additionally, the high instance of the keyword "residential" helps to illustrate that all participants were affected, in some manner, by the history of residential schooling in this country.

Overall Themes

There were many themes that consistently appeared during the qualitative analysis of the interview responses. These themes have been identified based on the questions that were asked of the interview participants (see Appendix A).

Racism and mistrust. Participants indicated that many of their personal experiences in the Ontario education system were centered on feelings of racism and a lack of trust toward their teachers and administrators. They stated that they remember feeling out of place not just because

of the color of their skin but because they did not seem to value the same things as their "White" classmates and teachers. Some participants recounted how they were ridiculed by their Indigenous peers for "trying to be White" if they did well academically in school. Still, many participants stated that they felt they were excluded from day-to-day activities in class. As such, they felt ashamed to be Native and did not learn any differently at home because many of their parents and grandparents shied away from talking about the issue or from sharing their own experiences. A majority of the participants also reported that they felt they were treated differently by their teachers, a difference in treatment that was the direct result of being Native. Participants commented that it was only after becoming adults that they learned more about what it means to be "Indian" and to then take pride and responsibility in themselves, in their education and in their culture. Many participants indicated that despite the gains made in the Ontario education system, they feel racism toward Indigenous peoples still exists in today's schools.

"I was always placed in the back of the classroom. As I look back now, I feel that I was always held back and treated poorly. I didn't give 100% because of the way I was treated. It wasn't until I became older that I realized how important education was and how I had to go back to it somehow." (First Nations male, 45 years)

"I'm a product of the Catholic system. I didn't learn a whole lot about me as an Indigenous person until I went to university. Looking back to Grade 5, I remember going home and saying to my mom, 'They told us that we came across the Bering Strait.' My mom said, 'You go back and tell that school that you did not come from the Bering Strait. We've always been here.' At my all-girls Catholic high school, there were 10 of us Native girls out of 100 in my class. I'm not saying the teachers didn't like us or appreciate us, but who I was as an Indigenous person – that wasn't reflected in my schooling there." (First Nations female, 54 years)

Pervasive effects of residential schooling. The topic of residential schooling was consistently discussed by each of the interview participants. Each participant reported that they felt their educational experience was negatively affected by the history of residential schooling. Some of the participants shared their personal stories of attending residential school, including the ways in which they were physically abused for speaking their original language. Other participants recounted how they slowly learned from their older family members about residential school, and that they felt ashamed and angry at the many ways in which their family members were abused in school. All participants maintained that Indigenous students in today's classrooms are still feeling the effects of residential schooling, as the hurts that were inflicted continue to be passed on through the generations.

"I remember my grandma would drive me to [the town] where she went to residential school. We would stand silent in front of the building's remnants for a while, and then she'd tell me some of the things that had happened to her in that very building. My grandma to this day says that the biggest crime committed against our people in residential schools was the way that they took away our language. Without language, a community dies. We all died in some way because of those residential schools, and that's true even for current students who are very far removed from those awful places." (First Nations female, 31 years)

"I remember arriving there and getting a haircut. I remember sitting in the classroom and witnessing other kids getting punched by the principal. I had my tongue pinched whenever I'd speak. I remember seeing blood. My strongest memory there is when a little girl died beside me. I was sitting there in a place that they had told my family would be the best place for me. This is all a part of our history. It's important that our young children learn about what happened, know about what we went through." (First Nations female, 72 years)

Inadequate school system. Participants reported that, although gains have been made in the Ontario education system, there are still many areas in which the system inadequately meets the needs of Indigenous students. One area in which participants applauded the government was the introduction of culturally-rich programming in schools (e.g. Native language (NSL) classes, drumming lessons, etc.). Many participants, however, made note about how this programming is still presented in a supplementary way and that it does not receive the spotlight that it deserves. Many of the participants commented that true gains in Native education cannot be made until all teachers across the province feel comfortable with teaching Indigenous material. To be able to teach the material, the teachers, themselves, need to know and to understand the material. As such, many of the participants reported that the Ontario school system continues to fail Indigenous students because teachers – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – are not being thoroughly trained in the culture. Most participants articulated a need for Elders and other community members to be more readily invited into the schools so that the Indigenous culture can be authentically taught and meaningfully woven into all subject areas.

"The Ontario school system is failing Indigenous students. The government has spent lots of money with Indigenous education and with a newer curriculum. [They] put all this Indigenous material out there with the intention of bringing it to the forefront, but making the documents and having that information delivered properly are two totally different things. Many of our non-Indigenous teachers are afraid to piss somebody off by saying something wrong. People are uncomfortable to approach the First Nations for help." (First Nations female, 44 years)

"We're graduating kids but we're graduating them as numbers. We're not graduating kids to feel proud of who they are as First Nations, as Métis, as Inuit students. Our kids are still shy to go and take advanced level courses or university prep courses because they know there's

not going to be a lot of people like them in those classes. The schools are streaming them into the college level or locally developed level. There's still this stigma of not feeling proud to be Native. It's a stigma in society and our school system, sadly, is a reflection of it." (First Nations female, 54 years)

Indigenous role models. Many participants indicated that Indigenous students in today's classroom are motivated by the fact that they are starting to feel more included in the classroom. A majority of the participants cited NSL teachers as positive role models in the classroom with whom Indigenous students are able to more readily identify – both physically and culturally. These positive role models were also cited as key Indigenous figures who provide today's students with a knowledge that there are multiple paths that one can take in life. Participants reported that the traumatic home life experienced by a child could now be in stark contrast to the positive opportunities that are presented to him or her in today's classroom. As such, Indigenous students are understanding now, more than ever, that they have a choice about which type of lifestyle they would like to create for themselves and for their future children.

"What can we give our children? There are only two things that we, as teachers, parents or friends, can ever give them. We can only teach them who they are and give them their roots – where they're from. I think of the kids who have been successful in education – it's been their way out of the cycle of violence, the cycle of poverty, the cycle of alcoholism. We need to keep doing a better job of having more Native role models in our schools who can help teach our kids who they are and where they're from so that they know where they want to go." (First Nations male, 45 years)

"We need our schools to be doing better with getting our kids out into the land. Let's get them out there as they learn the curriculum. That's the type of stuff that motivates Indian kids.

It's the activities like spending a day ice fishing and learning. These activities are happening in their Native Studies classrooms but not in the rest of their classes, which is why they're probably just sitting there quietly or slinking back in their chairs most of the time." (Métis male, 49 years)

Lack of cultural opportunities. Many of the participants indicated that a lack of academic success for Indigenous students could likely be connected to the lack of cultural opportunities that are presented to them in their classrooms. Participants stated that many non-Indigenous teachers across the province have been hesitant to inject meaningful Indigenous content into their daily lessons out of fear or ignorance. Still, many participants regarded a lack of success for Indigenous students in today's classroom as the continued result of perpetual hurts that have been passed on through multiple generations. According to these participants, the hurts experienced over the years continue to be present in today's classrooms whenever current students are unintentionally led by their teachers to feel excluded or devalued for who they are as Indigenous people. Several participants commented that they see how their children often "feel small" because of the way they are treated by their teachers.

"I look at things from my son's perspective. His favorite class without a doubt is his Native language class where there's a slower pace and much more realness to what they're learning. Everyone sits in a circle and gets to share. In his regular classroom, all the desks are set up in rows and none of the students can really see each other. The basics are important, math and literacy are important, but real life needs to happen, too. His teacher is just trying to do his job, but the nature of the job is still very insensitive to the Native culture and the way we need to learn. Are we giving them opportunities to smudge, to speak to Elders, to ask questions? Or are we just putting them through the motions of school?" (Métis female, 40 years)

"A lot of our students still don't have good role models available to them at school. We're asking our kids to stay contained all day within the four walls of the school but they've got to get out of those four walls. Schools aren't doing our kids justice by making them work on their own in a desk, learning from a textbook. Our people never wanted to sit inside and be trapped in this type of system. To this day, that's still the way the system works – it's keeping our kids off the land even though the land is where they should be." (First Nations male, 68 years)

Cultural competency. Participants indicated that the needs of Indigenous students can be better served across the school system through a more meaningful integration of Indigenous programming and initiatives. Once again, participants indicated that Elders and other community members should be more readily invited into schools so that they may share about the Indigenous culture and make it "real" not just for those who identify as Indigenous students, but for non-Indigenous students, as well. Some participants indicated that the needs of Indigenous students will only be met once school boards spend more time and money to train all staff members – from directors of education, to superintendents, to principals, to teaching staff and support staff – about the history of Indigenous people in Canada. Other participants shared their belief that it is only after learning about and understanding the intricacies of Indigenous culture that teachers will become more empowered to lobby their government about the need for improvements in funding, organizational structure and policies that better support Indigenous students and their families.

"I'm part of the Indigenous Education Committee with the school board, and I think committees such as this are a very good start to how we can better serve our Indigenous students. But I think these committees need a lot more funding in order to train more principals, teachers and educational assistants to learn the First Nations culture. We have to make sure our

staffs in all the schools know the culture so that they can pass it down, so that they can meet our Indigenous students where they're at. Every child [needs to] learn the real history, the real shame of what our government did. We can't sugar coat or 'just get over it.'" (First Nations female, 39 years)

"*We need to see Indigenous culture more in our schools. You might see some Native posters around a school, but our people are not posters. Let's celebrate Indigenous artwork, instead. Let's do smudging, let's make announcements each day that acknowledge how our schools are on Native land. All of these daily pieces trickle out into the community and give us the representation we deserve."* (First Nations female, 34 years)

Lack of funding. Many participants indicated that they were aware of an overall lack of funding for on-reserve schools and students. Several participants shared their knowledge that on-reserve schools receive significantly less funding than off-reserve schools. Two participants shared their view that the lack of supports within on-reserve schools are due to a lack of funding from the federal government. These viewpoints are consistent with current literature that maintains how on-reserve schools receive significantly less funding than off-reserve schools and that up to two-billion dollars is needed just for immediate fixes to existing on-reserve schools (Martel, 2016; Tasker, 2016). Other participants shared that increased funding is always welcome for both on-reserve and off-reserve schools but not at the expense of overwhelming Indigenous educators with an unmanageable workload. These participants shared their view that more money needs to be invested in the hiring of Indigenous educators who specialize in the culture and who can work together as a team.

"I understand that there's not as much funding for schools on-reserve as there is for schools off-reserve. Either way, I know that a lot more money is being put into the system for

Indigenous education and that is something we are all very grateful for. We have to be careful, though, where the money is going. It's nice to have funding for all these new Native programs but I think the focus needs to also be on hiring Native teachers. Invest in Indigenous people, not just Indigenous programming." (Inuit male, 42 years)

"What's really missing is the push for boards to hire Native teachers, Native social workers, Native counsellors. Put Indians in these roles and you will have instant connections with our kids. I say it to the Ministry all the time – if you want to put your money where your mouth is, put dedicated funding in for Native teachers – and put these teachers where the kids are. Our kids need to see more people at the front of the classroom who are like them." (First Nations female, 54 years)

The school system. Participants shared their concerns that the Ontario school system is still very much "too formal" in its organization which discourages Indigenous students from reaching their full potential. They discussed how improvements are being made in ensuring that there is Indigenous representation in the organization of school boards, including Native education departments with Indigenous leaders from the community serving on various committees and decision-making panels. A majority of participants celebrated that a *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* has been published by the Ontario government, clarifying the roles and relationships of the Ministry of Education, school boards and schools in their efforts to ensure high levels of academic success for Indigenous students. These participants also stated that the document is just a starting point for real-life changes in the representation of Indigenous leaders within each school board and in every school across the province, including those in Northern Ontario.

"Even though our schools are still very traditional in how they're organized and the policies that are in place, I believe we are moving toward a better future for Indigenous schooling. School boards are hiring Indigenous leaders to be consultants, Indigenous teachers who are creating and leading Indigenous teaching departments. This representation in the way our schools are organized is very much needed. These leaders will represent our voice and express our need for a better system, one that is more real, a system that encourages sharing and maybe even one where education happens at a bit of a slower pace. We're working toward a system that's hopefully less formal and more inclusive, one with more community and a sense of togetherness. It's been a slow climb but we're moving in the right direction." (First Nations male, 66 years)

"Where are our First Nations teachers? There are very few of them in the schools. We need policies in place that work toward fixing this. We need incentives in place for the organization of our school systems to change. There definitely needs to be a greater Indigenous presence in terms of teachers, administration and support staff. All the policies in the world won't change anything if our government can't find new ways to entice First Nations people to come and work in our schools, to make us feel welcome and valued to be in the schools as leaders." (First Nations male, 40 years)

Revisions to curriculum. Every participant agreed that specific curriculum changes need to be made in order for the Ontario school system to improve Indigenous student engagement. Many participants reiterated the importance of the government never taking for granted that Indigenous students already know their family's history or that they understand their Native culture. As such, it was suggested that revisions be made to the curriculum in which there is an infusion of Indigenous history into all subject areas, ensuring that Native culture gets a fair spotlight

throughout the school day. Participants commented that such an approach will result in a more accurate depiction of Native peoples, a depiction that has unfairly been more negative than positive. Some participants also maintained that the Ontario curriculum should be revised in such a way that all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, be required to participate in some form of Native education classes (e.g. NSL, Introduction to Indigenous Studies, etc.). In doing so, Indigenous students would learn more about their peoples' history while non-Indigenous students could better understand how their own culture may be similar as well as unique to the Native culture.

"We need to make Grade 10 Native Studies mandatory as a replacement to the Grade 10 History course, and it needs to be taught by Indigenous people. That would address a lot of misconceptions in our world if we could have every Grade 10 student learning about the history of Indigenous peoples from pre-contact to now. I hear that this course is rolling out across the province but it's being taught by non-Indigenous people who are 'doing a good job.' No. Put a Native person in there and make it real." (First Nations female, 54 years)

"We need a curriculum that doesn't make Native kids choose to learn their language at the expense of being in one of their other classes. How come French class happens as its own block, but Native class gets randomly slotted in during a Math or Science block? This is where our kids are still feeling belittled and devalued. We also need to recognize and celebrate the culture in all aspects of the curriculum, across the entire school day. First Nations culture is typically not a culture that's celebrated… but we're working toward getting there with more pow-wows in our schools, more drumming in our schools. We're done with being an afterthought. Regardless of skin color, we all need to work together, to hear each other, and to validate each other." (First Nations female, 50 years)

Discussion

The purpose of the interview process was to gain an in-depth understanding of the problems faced by Indigenous students and their families in the Northern Ontario education system. Purposive, snowball sampling was used to identify and select participants for this study. It is likely that the majority of participants who were recommended for interviews came from similar social circles and also had similar background experiences. Though many reported having negative experiences as children in the Ontario school system, the majority returned to school as adult learners and achieved greater success. It may be concluded that the majority of participants, at some point in their lives, had positive personal experiences in the Ontario education system. As such, the selected participants may have an increased belief in the value of education as compared to other Indigenous persons who have not had any positive experiences at school.

An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that Indigenous students and their families in Northern Ontario experience challenges in the education system similar to their Indigenous counterparts across Canada. The overall themes that were identified in the participant responses are helpful in shaping our understanding of the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario. They also lend themselves to a discussion about the future of Indigenous education across Canada. In reviewing the results of this study, it becomes evident that the unifying sentiment of all participants is that improvements have been made to Indigenous education but more work needs to be done. It is only through a comprehensive revision of school curriculum, organizational structure and policies that the negative stereotypes that have plagued Indigenous peoples for centuries can finally be

eliminated. As one participant stated, *"I'm not a drunk Indian, an abusive Indian, an uneducated Indian or a lazy Indian. I'm an Indian"* (First Nations male, 45 years).

Furthermore, by animating the Native culture across all areas of the school day, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will learn more about the Indigenous peoples and their history. As such, the embarrassment and shame that has been experienced by generations of Indigenous peoples may finally cease. *"Growing up, my friends used to call me an apple – I was red on the outside but white on the inside"* (First Nations female, 44 years). With an increase of Indigenous resources being utilized in the classroom, including the presence of more Indigenous role models in schools, the Indigenous peoples will no longer feel the need to hide their status or to be ashamed about their identity.

The findings of this Northern Ontario study have also confirmed that funding for on-reserve schools, systemic factors such as racism, poverty and cultural irrelevance, and decolonizing the education system are all contributing factors to the challenges experienced by Indigenous students and their families. While individuals who live in northern communities may experience unique living arrangements that include feelings of isolation or separation, none of the participants in this study mentioned such factors. Instead, the discussion points from the participants remained consistent with what has been cited in previous literature.

Recommendations

The participants in this study expressed that the challenges faced by Indigenous students in Northern Ontario are similar to the challenges faced by Indigenous students across the country. As such, the findings of this study are useful in formulating recommendations to improve the education system for Indigenous students across Canada. Improvements to the education system should continue to be made in two key areas: the need for increased Indigenous

cultural relevancy across school communities and the need for improved Indigenous representation in school board organization and policy framework.

To build increased Indigenous cultural relevancy across school communities, it is recommended that the government increases its monetary investments to hire more Indigenous teachers so that there is a consistent Indigenous presence in the classroom. In addition to this, it is recommended that other Indigenous role models such as Elders, Chiefs, drummers, dancers, hunters and trappers be invited as regular guests in the classroom who may share their cultural knowledge and expertise. These experiences would provide authentic cultural opportunities for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students which would help to acknowledge and celebrate the rich history of the Indigenous peoples. Through these first-hand experiences, school staff would also become more accustomed to the Indigenous culture and would increase their understanding of the Indigenous perspective.

Furthermore, there must continue to be a focus on organizing Canadian schools and developing new policies under the guidance of Indigenous leaders such as Elders and Chiefs as well as other community members. It is recommended that school boards hire more Indigenous consultants to ensure that the Indigenous voice is honored across all aspects of school organization and policy development. In terms of policy, it is recommended that school board officials analyze the formal structure which currently exists across the school system and make meaningful modifications to better serve the unique cultural needs of Indigenous students and their families. One such policy that should be implemented across the country is the offering of Native Language classes in all schools for all students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This would help to reconcile the hurts that were caused by European settlers who sought to

eliminate traditional Indigenous languages from the Canadian landscape. It is also recommended that a new policy be introduced for the inclusion of Native History classes in all schools for all students. This would help to address a lot of the misconceptions that continue to exist about the Indigenous peoples in Canada. With gains in self-confidence and cultural pride, Indigenous students could then experience significant improvements in their academic performance.

Conclusion

The Canadian education system is not fully meeting the cultural needs of Indigenous students and their families. As a result, the Indigenous graduation rate has been significantly lower than the non-Indigenous graduation rate. The results of this study have highlighted the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students, including a lack of funding, systemic factors such as racism, poverty and cultural irrelevancy, as well as the need for decolonizing the education system. Other factors that have been identified as contributors to the low academic performance of Indigenous students include the pervasive effects of residential schooling, the lack of Indigenous role models in school communities, and a curriculum that includes limited Indigenous knowledge and experiences.

The future of Indigenous education must be built upon daily actions that acknowledge, validate and value the contributions of the Indigenous peoples. Though there has recently been an increase in funding for Indigenous programming in schools, more needs to be done. Improvements to the education system must not only incorporate investments in programming but investments in Indigenous peoples who can lead the programming. In other words, it is essential that more Indigenous role models be invited to school communities where they can have a consistent presence for Indigenous youngsters and where they can lead them through

culturally meaningful learning opportunities. Indigenous students can achieve greater academic success at school through this daily immersion of culturally rich experiences, and through the celebration of who they are as First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide
A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario

PREAMBLE:

"This interview guide is in two sections. The purpose is to collect demographic data as well as data on the research questions."

Section A: Demographics

1. Do you identify as an Indigenous person? If so, do you identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit?

2. Are you a Canadian citizen?

3. What gender do you identify as?

4. What is your year of birth?

5. Which of the following applies to you?

    □ "I am an educator who currently teaches in the Ontario school system."

    □ "I have attended a residential school at some point in my life."

    □ "I have graduated from an Ontario high school."

    □ "I have dropped out of an Ontario high school."

    □ "I am an Elder in the community."

Section B: Research Questions

6. What are your personal experiences in the Ontario education system, and how do you feel they've influenced you as an Indigenous person?

7. How do you think the history of Indigenous education has affected current Indigenous students?

8. Is the Ontario school system meeting the needs of Indigenous students?

9. What motivates Indigenous students to achieve in school?

10. What do you think are the factors that influence Indigenous students who have not achieved academic success in the Ontario school system?

11. How can the Ontario school system better serve the needs of Indigenous students?

12. How does current funding impact Indigenous schools? Are there any ways this could be done differently?

13. How does organizational structure and policy framework affect Indigenous schooling in Ontario?

14. Do you have specific changes to Ontario curriculum that you can recommend to improve Indigenous student engagement?

POST-SCRIPT:

"Would you like to add, remove or alter any of the responses that you have given in this interview?"

Appendix B

Initial Letter of Contact
A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario

Dear _____,

I am conducting a research project about the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students, as well as ways in which the Canadian public school system may better serve the needs of Indigenous students.

You are receiving this letter as my personal request for you to be a third party helper with recruitment of participants for this research.

I am looking for approximately 10 Indigenous volunteers (18 years of age or older, males and females) to be interviewed as part of my research. As you are a respected leader in the Indigenous community, I humbly ask for your help in seeking individuals to participate in this study.

The project requires Indigenous participants in the following categories:

- educators who currently teach in the Northern Ontario school system
- individuals who have attended a residential school at some point in their lives
- individuals who have graduated from an Ontario high school
- individuals who have dropped out of an Ontario high school
- community elders

Attached to this letter, please find more information about the project along with the accompanying informed consent form. It is my hope that, upon your review of the project's details, you will assist me in recruiting participants.

Please contact me at should you require any additional information. I am hopeful that I may count on your assistance with recruitment. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Mario J. Rocchetta

Appendix C

Letter of Information
A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled *A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario*.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand enough about its risks, benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?
You are being invited to participate in this project because you are a member of the Indigenous community, 18 years of age or older, who has some form of experience with the Ontario education system.

What is the purpose of this research project?
The purpose of this project is to determine the factors that influence school performance of Indigenous students in Northern Ontario and to identify meaningful ways in which the Ontario school system can better serve Indigenous students.

What will you be asked to do?
You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview which will be audio recorded. It is expected that your interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview would be arranged for a time that is convenient to your schedule. Should you, as the participant, wish to alter or clarify any of your comments made during the interview, you are welcome to contact the researcher up to one week following your interview.

What are the risks and benefits?
There are no physical risks associated with this research. The psychological risks implied by participation is no greater than those encountered by participants in aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research. Interviews conducted for the purpose of this project will not focus on painful or traumatic events. You will be encouraged to share information and your viewpoints with the researcher at whatever level you feel comfortable in doing so. As such, you are given full control of what you choose to share during the interview. Should the interview process lead

to any personal distress, you will be provided with a list of Indigenous contacts/resources so that you may seek the appropriate support.

The benefits of this proposed research to its participants is that the project will lead to the creation of recommendations for the Ontario school system to better meet the needs of Indigenous students. As you, the participant, identifies as an Indigenous person, you will be involved in research that is directly helping to increase academic achievement for members of your own Indigenous communities. The scholarly benefits of the proposed research are similar to the benefits for its participants. Across Canada, a great deal of attention is currently being given to the Truth and Reconciliation process - particularly in Canadian schools. This research will provide more information for policy makers and curriculum developers across the country who directly impact the creation of meaningful curriculum for Indigenous students.

Do you have to take part in this project?
As stated earlier in this letter, involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. If at any time prior to or during the interview the participant wishes to withdraw their participation in the research, the participant is free to indicate to the researcher that he/she is terminating his/her participation in the research and does not need to provide a reason for doing so. If any partial or full audio of their interview has been recorded, that recording will be permanently deleted from the recording device. None of their interview answers will be used in the research project.

Withdrawal has no consequences of any kind for the participant.

Should you, as the participant, wish to alter, clarify or withdraw any of your comments made during the interview, you are welcome to contact the researcher up to one week following the completion of your interview. This will allow participants ample opportunity to reflect upon their responses in the research without compromising the integrity of the research (e.g. the researcher having to re-do the interview process with a new interviewee and/or re-gather data once the final report has already been completed).

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure.

- To respect privacy and confidentiality, all interviews will be conducted in a one-on-one setting.
- A master list that identifies the interviewees will be password protected, fully encrypted and securely stored on the researcher's personal computer at all times.
- No direct identifying names or characteristics will be used in the final report.
- Audio copies of the interviews will be password protected, fully encrypted and securely stored on the researcher's personal computer at all times.
- All information will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported.

How will my anonymity be protected?
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

- All data will be collected in a one-on-one setting, protecting your anonymity throughout the research process.
- Direct quotations may be reported, but no direct identifying names or characteristics will be used in the final report.

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity; you will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

How will the data collected be stored?

- A master list that identifies the interviewees will be password protected, fully encrypted and securely stored on the researcher's personal computer at all times.
- Audio copies of the interviews will be password protected, fully encrypted and securely stored on the researcher's personal computer at all times.
- All encrypted data will be securely stored for a minimum of five years. Should the data be disposed of following this time period, it will be digitally shredded (completely removed from the hard drive upon which it was stored).
- A copy of the final report will be submitted to the Athabasca University Research Centre.

Who will receive the results of the research project?
Results of the research project will be disseminated and made available to interested participants. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available. Information on the research project will be made available to participants after the project is complete. Any participant wishing to obtain a digital copy of the final report may contact (by e-mail or telephone) the primary researcher.

If you are ready to participate in this project, please complete and sign the attached Informed Consent Form.

Thank you,
Mario J. Rocchetta

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form
A Critical Examination of the Factors that Influence School Performance of Indigenous Students in Northern Ontario

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research project.
- You have been able to ask questions about this project.
- You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
- You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection (your interview), any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw **after** data collection (your interview) has ended, your data can be removed from the project at your request, up to and including one week following the completion of your interview.

Please indicate your permission levels by highlighting/marking YES or NO for each of the following statements:

	YES	**NO**
I agree to be audio-recorded.		
I agree to the use of direct quotations.		
I allow data collected from me to be archived in the Athabasca University Research Centre.		
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript.		
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this project.		

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records; and
- You agree to participate in this research project.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Principal Investigator's Signature:

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, any potential risks and that he or she has freely chosen to participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date