

# **Intergenerational Experiences in Aboriginal Education: My Family Story**

by

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# Abstract

Education is highly valued among the Stó:lō people, and has been for as far back as oral traditions record. Historically education functioned primarily within the family with Elders, parents, uncles and aunties teaching the youth. These traditions continue today, but they have been challenged and disrupted by a system of government imposed education that was directed at assimilating Aboriginal people into mainstream Canadian society and dislocating them from their Indigenous culture and traditions. Expressed most glaringly and oppressively through the Church-run federally-funded residential schools which operated in Stó:lō territory from 1860 through to 1986, an assimilative curriculum anchored in racist assumptions was also a central feature of the provincial public schools which many Stó:lō children also attended. Recent studies have documented the abusive and oppressive expressions of the residential school system and the on going racist and assimilative features of the provincial schools and their curriculum. What is less well documented and less well understood is the complex strategies that Aboriginal families used to not only defend and sustain their traditional Indigenous education processes within their homes and communities, but also the tactics (both formal and informal, institutional and personal) that they developed and deployed to challenge the overarching assimilative curricular goals of the government's education system as well as the day-to-day classroom application of those goals.

This research project examines the intergenerational impact of government Aboriginal education policies from the 1930s to the mid 2000s on one family – the author's. An exploration of the connections between the federal government's education policies and the personal education stories of the family spanning three generations reveals not only the challenges Aboriginal students faced in general, but the way Indigenous philosophies informed larger strategic and smaller tactical strategies of resistance. Through story work this family not only found strength to resist, but opportunities to try and transform the education system itself. As the intergenerational narratives reveal, the family's objectives ranged from protecting the traditional and the sacred to developing strategies to improve their chances of succeeding within the government system. Many of actions the family members took were aimed in large part in helping to transform and Indigenize an education system that had been designed to assimilate them – that is, they sought to contribute to a process of what Homi Bhabha (1994) might refer to as educational hybridity.

Key recommendations emerging from this research project include ensuring that the history of the colonial federal government's assimilative and abusive education policies be communicated to, and ultimately understood by, all Canadians. Awareness of this is important for Aboriginal students as well as for non-Native Canadians. Finally, recommended here is the meaningful involvement of Indigenous people in all levels of education decision-making associated with the education system.

**Keywords:** First Nation Education, Aboriginal Education, Stó:lô story telling, residential school, ethnography, intergenerational, education policies, colonialism

# Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, who gave their children the very best care and love that they could, especially my mother who attended residential school. To my husband, who is always there for me. To my children, who made my world a better place and who gave me my grandchildren. In my Stó:lō tradition, my grandchildren gave me the right to speak and in this case the right to speak through the written word.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors Dan Laitsch and Michelle Pidgeon for their patience and guidance. Thank you for encouraging me to honour my Stó:lō tradition of storytelling to complete this dissertation. To Keith Carlson for his work with Stó:lō traditions and culture encouraged me to acknowledge the groundbreaking work done in Aboriginal education that is reflected in the family stories to support Aboriginal student success.

I would also like to acknowledge Aboriginal researchers like Joanne Archibald, Shawn Wilson, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith to name a few who paved the way and created space for Aboriginal researchers.

It is important to acknowledge The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada for creating space and time to address the Indian Residential School legacy. Please visit the [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca) to become a “witness” to a national journey for truth-telling and healing.

Writing and research requires commitment and time that usually results as time away from family. My time and commitment to this dissertation is a direct result of the support of my husband and children. Their support, love and guidance helped me to realize the end result.



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## Glossary

Pre-colonial	Of, relating to, or being the period of time before colonization of a region or territory. (Student's Oxford Canadian Dictionary, p. 814)
Colonial	The process of sending settlers to live in an area in order to establish political control over the area or the people already living there: <i>European colonization of North America.</i> (Student's Oxford Canadian Dictionary, p. 187)
Aboriginal	A term defined in the Constitution Act of 1982 that refers to all Indigenous people in Canada, including Indians (status and non-status), Metis, and Inuit people. (Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10, p. 191).
First Nations	The self-determined political and organizational unit of the Aboriginal community that has the power to negotiate, on a government-to-government basis, with BC and Canada. (Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10, p. 191)

# 1. Introduction

In 1994, the British Columbia Ministry of Education targeted Aboriginal funds in school districts to support Aboriginal students. The targeted fund initiative is one of the most recent education policies that have had an impact on Aboriginal students in the current education system. This research project will examine the intergenerational impact of government Aboriginal education policies from the 1930s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century on one family. Addressing the expected and unexpected outcomes of the policies will frame the discourse and research. This research will document the personal stories of key participants in these events as a way to provide a glimpse of the reality that existed for Aboriginal students who have grown up in the education system in three generations of one family. This includes a mother who went to residential school; a daughter who was a First Nation instructor at a university and was an Education Manager for a tribal council for 14 years, who also worked in the education system for over 28 years; and her three children who are now young adults. This dissertation will illustrate the reality of the lived experience based on recent history that needs to be documented and perhaps be a reminder to those who work with Aboriginal students, especially those who struggle in the education system today. The dissertation also helps create a dialogue amongst Aboriginal students and families to address some of the same challenges and support student success in the current education system.

To support and honour my Stó:lō First Nation oral tradition I will use personal stories that support the notion of Sqwélqwel, which means “true stories” in Stó:lō storytelling.

## **1.1. Personal context**

It is my belief that most people are not aware that the colonization of Indian people is still an issue today. First Nation people have been working to address governance issues, known currently as treaty issues, on all socioeconomic levels, with education as one of the greatest concerns as it deals with children, who are our most valuable resource. Smith (1999) describes how “Imperialism frames the Indigenous experience. Writing about our experiences under imperialism and its more specific expression of colonialism has become a significant project of the Indigenous world“ (p. 19). Indigenous people internationally need a shared language to address the imperialism and colonialism to share “an epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle, and persistent survival” (Smith, 1999, p. 19). The notion of knowing one’s past and having alternative histories, and holding alternative knowledge, is expressed by Smith (1999), as a “critical pedagogy of decolonization” (p. 34).

I have worked in all levels of First Nation Education, from a First Nation community level to the Provincial Ministry of Education. I have worked in a First Nation community school, provincial school, local community college, and two universities. Throughout my experiences I have heard the same questions that confirm the lack of knowledge about Aboriginal issues. The questions include “What do you want to be called, Indians, Natives, Aboriginals?”, “How many of you people are here?”, “What is the matter with you people; how come your kids don’t stay in school? Don’t graduate? Don’t go on to university? Don’t get a job?” Other examples include “My dad/grandfather came to this

country with nothing and he worked all his life and he is successful – why can't your people do this? What do you people want? Why are you still crying around about something that happened over 200 years ago?" These questions came from people I worked with in the education system, people in my own higher education classes, and students that I taught in high school, college, and university. I learned to welcome the questions as they provided an opportunity to share the impact of colonialism and to share the First Nation efforts to address the historical injustices that are still a part of First Nations reality today. More important, is helping those who have questions about Aboriginal people link the past historical injustices to the current lack of success in the education system and lack of First Nations involvement in decisions being made in their children's education.

My concern is that the average Aboriginal person or student may not have the answers to these questions, leading to an incomplete dialogue. I can answer the questions as a result of a lifetime of studying the history of our people both in an academic and in a traditional setting. The responses I would receive from people as I would answer their questions would vary depending on the motivation of the questioner, depending on whether the person was asking the question to make a political statement or to learn. Those who wanted to make a statement were not interested in an answer; those who were interested in an answer usually came away with from our discussion with a changed perspective and a greater understanding of the Aboriginal experiences. Questions that are usually asked after sharing the history are, "Why don't people, average Canadians, know about this history? Why isn't the history of residential schools taught in schools?" Over the years, I have shared the history of Aboriginal education and I have always shared my own personal experiences as illustrative of the lived experiences of First Nation people. Three generations of my own family went to



residential school: my sister in the mid 1960s, my mother in the 1930s and 1940s and my grandmother in the early 1900s. I did not attend residential school because my mother would not allow the priest to take us. There were three people at the door at that time, the only two I knew was the chief and the priest. I did not know who the third person was.

It is not easy addressing the past, especially when the past still lingers in our First Nation communities today and can be seen in the eyes of family members who lived through the residential school experience. It can be seen in the poverty that exists in many of our communities and the lack of success in the education system of the day.

Sharing the local history makes the issues “real” and not abstract or something that happened a long time ago. The average Canadian citizen needs to understand why First Nations are struggling in the education system today. Battiste (1995) describes how “Aboriginal peoples began to see educators, like their missionary predecessors, as nothing more than racists, patriarchs, and oppressors who hid behind fine-sounding words or ideology. Their objectives were viewed as tainted and hypocritical” (p. viii).

They also need to understand that up until 1994, First Nations did not have a meaningful role in decisions that were being made about their children’s education. First Nations, unlike the rest of Canadians, are governed by the Indian Act under Section 114 (1), where

The Governor General in Council may authorize the Minister, in accordance with this Act, to enter into agreements on behalf of Her Majesty for the education in accordance with this Act of Indian children, with (a) the government of a province.

The Minister can enter into agreements with little to no involvement of First Nations.

What I have learned is that First Nations need to have a functional role in the decision-

making and in the governance of education to support First Nation student success. It is my hope that documenting the personal stories of one family will demonstrate the lasting negative impact government education policies have had and continue to have on Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

## **1.2. Personal research context**

My research interest is to document the impact of government education policies and the advancement of Aboriginal education in Stó:lō Territory through my family's personal narratives. I would like to use this research as a beginning point to document the broader Stó:lō history of education. It is my hope that by bringing this research to Stó:lō families and non-First Nations communities, I will help expand the awareness and realization of the link between the current social and educational reality of First Nation people in BC with the history of colonialism, in particular education policies. I further hope that this research project will help our families and communities realize that we can work towards healthy families and communities, and education can be a vehicle to this end.

This research project will contribute to Aboriginal education by bringing attention to the partnerships created in a local school district with local Aboriginal communities as a result of the Ministry of Education (1994) initiative to target Aboriginal funds. This initiative gave Aboriginal education leaders and communities an opportunity to have a meaningful role in decisions being made and in creating initiatives to support Aboriginal student success in the current education system. It is my view that the Ministry of Education made history in 1994 when the funds for Aboriginal students were targeted. The Ministry required each school district to acquire informed consent from the Aboriginal communities they worked with and mandated that designated funds were to

be spent in three major areas: First Nation language, culture, and support services. Very important is the notion of “informed consent” as school districts that did not make efforts to consult with the local Aboriginal education leaders and parents would have the targeted funds withdrawn from their budgets. The local school districts and Aboriginal people then created an Aboriginal Advisory Board to oversee the initiatives that were created by the targeted funds to support Aboriginal students.

When I was a young parent sharing my concerns and fears about our future with my grandmother, she shared these words, “our people were not afraid of change; I remember my mother was one of the first ones to trade one of her baskets for a metal pot to cook with” (personal communication, 1983). She also shared stories about the ice age era and the flood era that happened around the world. With this notion in mind, I was able to further realize that just as the First Nation people survived the ice age and they survived the flood that happened around the world, they have survived colonialism.

The late Chief George Manuel, OC, was an Aboriginal leader in Canada. He was chief of the Neskonlith First Nation and in 1970 he became the first President of the National Indian Brotherhood. He submitted the historical 1972 Indian Control of Indian Education document to the Federal government. This document laid the foundation for Aboriginal education and called for jurisdiction based on local control and parental involvement (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). Manual’s words complement this era,

At this point in our struggle for survival, the Indian peoples of North America are entitled to declare a victory. We have survived. If others have also prospered on our land, let it stand as a sign between us that the Mother Earth can be good to all her children without confusing one with another. It is a myth of European warfare that one man’s victory requires another’s defeat. (Manual & Posluns, 1974, p. 4)

This research project will document the change in governance over First Nation education in the Stó:lō Territory. The personal stories will highlight the changes and address the outcomes and make meaning for each generation.

### **1.3. Research Frameworks**

The research approach I chose seeks to honour First Nation, in particular Stó:lō First Nation, traditions of storytelling to document recent historical accounts. Archibald (2008) describes this process in her textbook *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit*. She describes her research work, what she learned from elders, and how “to find a respectful place for stories and storytelling in education, especially in curricula” (p. ix). Archibald describes “seven principles related to using First Nation stories and storytelling for education purposes, what I term storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (p. ix). These principles will be used to frame this research.

Stó:lō, like many First Nations, understand that a person is complete when they take care of their body, mind, and spirit in everything they do. If one part is not “right,” it will affect the other two, making the person “not right.” If there is something wrong with the body it will affect the mind and spirit. If there is something wrong with the mind it will affect the body and spirit and if there is something wrong with the spirit it will affect the mind and the body. Aboriginal people have been struggling as their bodies, minds, and spirits have been compromised by the imposed colonial education system. Grande (2004) highlights how education became a vehicle where, “Indeed, the work of teachers, church leaders, and missionaries were hardly distinguishable during this era; saving souls and colonizing minds became part and parcel of the same colonialist project (p.

12). The personal stories that will be shared will depict the impact of this disconnection and the struggle and challenges to reconnect to become a whole person.

The personal stories of my mother, my children, and myself will provide a glimpse of the challenges and reality many First Nations have faced. The personal stories will depict that while the residential school era ended in my generation, the struggle and challenges did not end. Rather the physical arrangement and locations may have changed, but the abuse continued at different levels, along with discrimination and racism on all levels of the education system.

Experiencing racism and discrimination first-hand I have come to know what it looks like, what it sounds like, what it feels like, and most importantly, I have learned to pick and choose what and when to react to acts of racism and discrimination. Racism looks like an outright stare, letting you know you are not welcome; or avoidance, especially in places like public restaurants where servers choose not to wait on you. The sounds can be a tone of voice that lets you know you are a bother or not worth the time. The feeling from racism has changed for me as I gained more confidence. In the early years, it felt like fear and panic, and was be difficult to control. As I gained confidence the feelings shifted to anger, which was also difficult to control. Over time I learned to control my reactions and instead challenge the acts of racism and discrimination I experienced.

A study by Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, and Veuhelers (2012) revealed that “Aboriginal students in university experience more frequent racism across a greater number of life situations than African – and Latino – American adults in the United States” (p. 617). Their research has documented students’ experiences with racism and discrimination in elementary and high school—experiences that included being told by

teachers they should “adapt to the white life” by changing their hair colour to a lighter colour because “It is easier to become ‘white-washed’ than to keep on trying to look and act stereotypically Indian” (Currie, et al., 2012, p. 620). In the study, Aboriginal students revealed everyday experiences with racism—from going to the movies and being asked if it is welfare day, to trying to rent a place to live and being turned away for being visibly Aboriginal, to being told they are not typical natives because they are in university (Currie, et al., 2012, p. 622). This study further found that “students who practised their culture faced opposition from mainstream society through more frequent experiences of racism” (Currie, et al., 2012, p. 624). I often thought of documenting my experiences with discrimination and racism for one week or one month, simply to be able to share first hand how frequently these experiences occur. I have had the experiences noted in this study and I know the stress, fear, disappointment, and distrust they cause. In the past, the fear was for myself, later the fear was for my children, and today the fear is for my grandchildren. The major difference today is I am armed with more confidence and an understanding that we have rights: rights to education, to be treated fairly, and to make decisions for ourselves.

Stó:lō, like many First Nations, have an oral tradition. Documenting and sharing using the written word is an important new step and era for Aboriginal Education simply because we have historically maintained an oral tradition. It is my hope that this research will also support and influence those in education leadership to make informed decisions, and that they will advocate for First Nations to be included in the decisions being made for their children.

My personal challenges in being a student in higher education will also be shared. This story is important as one only has to look at the history of First Nations to question why one who is discriminated against and marginalized would participate in the system?

Smith (1999) explains that “The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practises – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope” (p. 4). My goal is to share the personal challenges to give hope to those who need it.

The insider approach will be useful for this research project. Smith (1999) describes the following:

Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position. (p. 139)

The concept of insider research complements the Stó:lō notion of sharing stories. Sqwélqwel (true stories) are still used to teach about the distant and recent past. The stories are meant to inform or teach others by providing true-life examples. Rather than telling children what to do and how to behave, parents and teachers use stories to illustrate to Stó:lō children appropriate roles and responsibilities, and children are then expected to come to the correct decisions based on their own understanding of the stories.

Within the concept of sharing true-stories, the responsibility lies with the researcher to speak the truth with respect and integrity. Wilson (2008) shares, “Indigenous research cannot undermine the integrity of Indigenous persons or communities because it is grounded in that integrity” (p. 60). The researcher must explain the “intention” of the research and illustrate to the community how the research results will be used to ensure that the researcher has the support of the family or community. This “intention” covers not just the people involved. Researchers must also respect Stó:lō spiritual beliefs—beliefs that include the notion that one is not just

addressing the people present, but also their distant relatives and ancestors who have “gone to other side.”

Smith’s (1999) emphasizes the importance of being humble. The Stó:lō researcher must determine the “true” motivation for the research. Is it for self-importance? Or for self-advancement? Self-importance and self-gain are sometimes motivators, and actions undertaken for these motivations should cause concern. However, if the Stó:lō researcher can identify and show that the intention behind the research is to support others, especially future generations, then the notion of being humble is addressed. In sharing my stories and the stories of my family, my intention is to give voice to the harm done by colonial educational policies, as well as demonstrate that those policies can be challenged and changed. My hope is to remain humble, and make a positive difference for future generations.

Identifying the policies that affected each generation will be a key focus of this research. Grande (2004) highlights three eras:

(1) the period of missionary domination, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries; (2) the period of federal government domination from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries; and, (3) the period of self-determination from the mid-twentieth century to the present (Thompson 1978; Szasz 1999). (p. 12)

In British Columbia, the residential school era began in the early 1860s when the first school opened in 1863. The government legislated mandatory attendance in 1884, but it was not enforced until after 1920. There were two schools in the Fraser Valley. St. Mary’s in Mission was the first to open in 1863 and the last to close in 1984.

Coqualeetza Residential School, first operated by the Methodist and later by the United Church, was located in the Chilliwack area (Carlson, 1996). This personal, familial, and educational experiences of Aboriginal people in this era need to be shared and



understood by both First Nations and non-First Nations. It is too easy to dismiss these experiences as events that happened a long time ago.

The First Nations of this era did not have a voice or any decision-making powers. If parents did not send their children to the residential schools they were fined or imprisoned. For many families, four to five generations attended residential schools, leaving a lasting negative impact especially for those who were abused mentally, physically, or sexually. Angecone writes, "I look at that from a spiritual perspective and say perhaps the Creator is working through me to give a message of hope to our people about overcoming the impacts of colonization and the residential school system" (p. 31). He further describes how many residential school students struggled with identity issues as a result of loss of family, loss of culture, loss of self-worth, and loss of community. He also realized he lived through times of anger, spiritual confusion, cultural confusion, and a disruption of family relationships (Angecone, cited in Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012, p. 31).

Residential schools began to close in 1950, ending an era that still haunts many First Nations today. Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill (1986) sum up this era: "The dominant society's ignorance of and disinterest in Canada's Indians began to be breached. Calls grew for an end to unequal treatment in all areas, including education" (p. 13). The government began to open Indian Day Schools on reserves and many First Nation students began to attend public schools in 1960.

The federal government has jurisdiction for Indians and Lands reserved for Indians under the Indian Act first created in 1830. Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill (1986) further explain, "The Indian Act was revised in 1951 permitting the federal government to make

financial agreements with provincial and other authorities for Indian children to attend public and private schools educating non-Indians” (p. 13).

Despite this shift, under the Indian Act, the federal government continues to make decisions on behalf of First Nations Education with little to no input from First Nations. The federal government is responsible for Indians who today refer to themselves as First Nations. A First Nation student must be registered under the Indian Act and living on a reserve to be eligible to receive K-12 education support. The federal governments’ “guidelines provide direction for the delivery of the Elementary/Secondary Education Program for students ordinarily living on reserve ([www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/) p.1).” The key words are “ordinarily living on reserve.” First Nation students living off the reserve are not eligible for student support.

The provincial governments have very different responsibilities for Aboriginal students’ education. Under the British Columbia provincial government, Aboriginal students receive additional support as “the Ministry of Education provides enhanced funding to school-age students of Aboriginal ancestry. Enhanced funding provides culturally-appropriate educational programs and services to support the success of Aboriginal students” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2014, p.1).

The last era that will be explored runs from 1994 to the mid-2000s, when the British Columbia Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch targeted funds to provide Aboriginal students with additional education programs and services. Under the policies of this era, school districts were required to meet with local Aboriginal people and garner their “informed consent” regarding how these targeted funds are spent. This era will be shared from my perspective as a First Nation Government Education Manager. Local school district annual reports, along with the British Columbia Ministry of Education’s

Annual report “How Are We Doing,” will be examined for trends in grades, attendance, and graduation rates. The main focus of this era will be on examining the notion of Aboriginal inclusion in the governance of their children’s education.

The notion of voice will also be addressed in each era and how decisions were made. Each era will also be reviewed to summarize impacts of government policies.

## **1.4. Thesis Outline**

The history of Aboriginal education needs to be understood, especially by those who are involved in the education system and who are in decision-making roles. This chapter introduced some of the reasons why, as gleaned from my personal experiences working in a First Nation school, provincial schools, a local tribal council, a community college, and in universities. These experiences helped me realize how colonial government education policies and more recent government policies still exclude Aboriginal people in decisions regarding their children’s education. The dissertation is explored through three generations of personal stories that will address the impact of government education policies in each generation. This approach also honours the Stó:lō tradition of storytelling that is supported by a blend of Indigenous method of research and an autoethnographic method documenting personal narrative.

To help readers better understand the history of Aboriginal education, Chapter Two outlines the changes in Aboriginal education over the three generations, beginning with traditional Aboriginal education, addressing the residential school era in the 1930s to the Master tuition agreement in the late 1950s, and ending with the recent education agreements including the 1994 Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch targeted fund

initiative. This information is crucial to understanding the impact that government education policies have had on Aboriginal people and families.

Chapter 3 outlines the questions addressed in this dissertation that include the personal education stories of a mother, daughter, and her children to reveal what impact provincial and federal government education policies have had. The methods used to gather and analyze the data and depict the theoretical reconciliation of a First Nation tradition of storytelling, Indigenous research methods, autoethnography, narrative analysis, and ethical issues are discussed. The decision to make space for Indigenous research by using the local Stó:lō First Nation tradition of storytelling, is described and highlighted using the seven principles of storywork (Archibald, 2008).

In chapter 4 I share the personal education stories of my mother, daughter, and children. For each era, the federal and/or provincial education policies in force are described. The chapter begins with the education system prior to European settlement and considers what we know about the Stó:lō education system. The story continues as the outcome(s) of the federal government's residential school policy are examined through my mother's personal education stories. The outcome(s) of the federal government's Master Tuition Agreement and a shift to the provincial government era is revealed in my own education stories. The federal government's Master Tuition Agreement with the provincial government and the provincial government's Aboriginal Branch targeted fund initiative for Aboriginal student outcomes are revealed in the stories of my children.

Chapter 5 presents the lived experiences and personal outcomes experienced by my mother, myself, and my children, within the provincial and federal government education policy frameworks. Using Richardson's notion of encouraging the reader(s) to

“become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, and aesthetically, and intellectually” (Richardson, 1994b, as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745), the reader(s) can make meaning of the lived experiences and perhaps better understand personal outcomes as a result of the federal and provincial education policies. The reader can also determine how current government education policies impact Aboriginal students today and consider the implications of future government education policies.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, speaks to the outcomes of the education policies and the reality of the personal lives, especially for the mother who attended residential school and the daughter who witnessed the personal outcomes. This chapter also provides recommendations for future Aboriginal education policies and practices.

## 2. Indian education, contact, and today

The history of Aboriginal education reveals an imposed colonial education system that has failed Aboriginal people. In Battiste and Barman (1995), Battiste describes how “through ill-conceived government policies and plans, Aboriginal youths were subjected to a combination of powerful but profoundly distracting forces of cognitive imperialism and colonization” (p.viii). Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill (1987) further describe how “formal education imposed European values, beliefs, and roles in order to ‘civilize’ Indians who were to be provided with the skills necessary to survive in the dominant society. Education became an agent of assimilation” (p. 4).

To understand Aboriginal education today, and analyse and consider the outcomes created by past governmental education policies, it is important to know the history of First Nation people and their experiences with self-governance, imposed governance, and the current approach of on-going negotiations for self-governance.

This literature review will provide a historical overview of First Nation education. Three main eras—pre-contact, contact, and today—will frame the discourse and present a central theme of government policies taking away First Nation rights to determine the education of their children, along with the on-going struggle of Aboriginal people to regain control of their children’s education. Ultimately, as First Nations peoples have gained more control and input into their children’s education, the curriculum has begun to include more culturally relevant material to reflect First Nation traditions and outcomes have begun to improve.

## 2.1. Definitions

The terms Indian, First Nation, and Aboriginal are defined by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1998) in “Shared Learnings: Integrating BC Aboriginal Content K-10”:

Aboriginal peoples: a term defined by the Constitution Act of 1982 that refers to all indigenous people in Canada, including Indians (status, and non status), Métis and Inuit people.

First Nations: the self-determined political and organizational unit of the Aboriginal community that has the power to negotiate, on a government-to-government basis, with BC and Canada.

Indian: a term used historically to describe the first inhabitants of North and South America and used to define indigenous people under the *Indian Act*. The term has generally been replaced by Aboriginal peoples, as defined in the Constitution Act of 1982. (pp. 182-83)

This dissertation will use First Nation, Indian, and Aboriginal interchangeably to reflect the different eras.

## 2.2. First Nation education pre-contact

Pre-contact era First Nations were known by their traditional names. Today Stó:lō people are primarily located in the Fraser Valley. There are 24 chiefs who represent the Stó:lō people today, which also means there are 24 First Nation communities. Stó:lō is not the correct name for the people who lived in the Fraser Valley. Traditionally there were several main communities in the Fraser Valley, including the Qw’óltl’el First Nation (covering the Langley area); Semáth people (covering the Sumas, Abbotsford, Mission, area) and Máthexwi (Matsqui) people, (whose community extended all the way to Deroche; Ts’elxwíqw (covering the Chilliwack area); Pilalat, Popkw’em (Popkum), and part of Tl’átl’ekw’em (Hope) area; Sts’ailes (covering the lower Harrison Hot Springs,

Chehalis River, and part of the Harrison River); and Scowlitz (covering the area known as Harrison Mills today).

In the pre-contact era, First Nations maintained a viable socio-economic society with an education system that supported this end. Traditional First Nation education is connected to the land and based on an oral tradition handed down generation to generation through stories and legends. As highlighted by Kieran Egan (2002), a professor of education at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia:

to educate children effectively it is vital to attend to the nature of the child, particularly to the child's modes of learning and stage of development and to accommodate educational practice to what we can learn about these. (p. 184)

Educating Aboriginal children within their mode of learning and learning about Aboriginal modes of learning is one of the keys to support Aboriginal students. Egan's books, "Imagination in Teaching and Learning: The Middle School Years", (1992) and "Getting it WRONG from the beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget", (2002) emphasize storytelling as a way of sharing knowledge and history. Egan (1992) describes how "In oral cultures, people know only what they can remember. The lore that binds a tribe together, and helps to establish each individual's social roles and very sense of identity, is coded into the myths. The myths are held to be sacred, and they are passed on with the utmost care" (p. 10).

First Nations values, traditions, and history were (and still are) shared through stories. Carlson (1996) describes, "In the Halq'eméylem language of the Stó:lō there are two categories of oral narratives":



- 1) *sxwōxwiyám*- myth-like stories set in the distant past which usually explain, among other things, how *Xexá:ls* (the Transformers) came to *Stó:lō* territory to “make things right” for the present generation; and
- 2) *sqwélqwel*- “true stories or news,” which typically describe experiences in people’s lives (p. 182)

An example of *sxwōxwiyám* is the story about *Xá:ls*, the transformer who travelled throughout *Stó:lō* territory, turning those who failed to listen to stone. Carlson (1996) writes the following story told by the *Stó:lō* elder Bertha Peters:

The Great Spirit [*Xá:ls*] travelled the land, sort of like Jesus, and he taught these three *sí:yám*, (these three chiefs) how to write their language. And they were supposed to teach everyone how to write their language, but they didn’t. So they were heaped into a pile and turned to stone. Because they were supposed to teach the language to everyone, and because they didn’t, people from all different lands will come and take all the knowledge from the people. Because they wouldn’t learn to write they lost that knowledge. (p. 187)

The meaning for each story is left up to the individual listener, but it is important to draw lessons from the stories. One lesson that can be taken from this story is to encourage young people to learn how to write and to learn how to listen. For example, the stone can represent a person who does not want to listen to anyone and therefore the person will be like a stone, with nothing meaningful to say or share. It can also mean that those who do not share what they know become like the stone. A First Nation value is sharing, and not just sharing material items; rather it is very important to share of oneself with others. Sharing time and knowledge with someone is highly regarded. This is still practiced in many communities today. The story also highlights how the oral tradition of education evolves and is responsive to the current context—in this case highlighting a shift from the oral tradition to one that embraces, at least in part, written histories.

An example of Sqwélqwel: true stories or news, would tell the news or the story of people in the community—if there is a loss in the community, for example, the story would encompass people leaving what they are doing and going directly to the family in sorrow to help and support them family. Each person brings his or her strength and shares it with the family. Some in the community are bakers, some are cooks, some can speak for the family, and some take direct care of the family. The time spent with the family is believed to be a medicine for not just the family, but also for those who help as well. As First Nations understand, no one will escape death. As you help someone else you are helping yourself. There is a spiritual element. Those who are in sorrow and have lost a loved one are seen as being in a sacred time as they are closest to the spirit. As their loved one journeys home, it can take up to four years to bring closure to the story of the loss of a loved one. The family is marked if they are in mourning, for example by wearing their hair short with the notion as their hair grows out their mourning is ending. The family in mourning is then taken care of accordingly, which means people may visit them more often or elders will take time and talk to them to encourage them to “carry on” in a good way.

Another example of a Sqwélqwel “true” story can be a contemporary story about people who go on a hunting trip and on the way encounter hard luck or good luck. The link between the trip and their experiences (lucky or not) can be used to help illustrate important values within the community, as well as share news regarding the participants. This dissertation can be considered Sqwélqwel as it is a current story about First Nation education. Throughout the literature, many First Nation legends and stories are being used to make connections to the current education system. Kawagley (1990) writes “In the traditional ways of the Yup;ik people, the tools for teaching a culture, a science, a way of knowing, have always been present. These form a basis for a synergistic

approach to teaching” (p. 5). Similar to the use of allegory, fable, and metaphor in Western cultures, many First Nations have traditional stories about the creation of all things and stories that teach morals and values. The stories support the understanding that First Nation people are the first people of North America. First Nations’ oral traditions are connected to their history and can be described today as “best practices” to serve the community interests into future generations. There is a teaching among First Nations peoples that people today must ensure what is enjoyed now must be enjoyed seven generations from now. As well, knowledge gained is meant to be shared and has no value if not shared.

In the pre-contact era, First Nations controlled the oral-history based educational system that sustained their families and communities. MacPherson (1991) describes,

When Europeans first came into contact with Amerindian peoples they were able to observe well-established education practices designed to ensure cultural continuity, and through which the youth were provided with the life skills necessary for their future roles in their societies...[T]his period in their history of Indian education was to date, the only period when the training of Indian children was designed, planned and implemented by Indian people for Indian children to prepare the children for the environment in which they were to live. (p. 1)

Many First Nation families and communities are returning to traditional means of raising their children to complement the education system today. For example, Stó:lō First Nations are a matrilineal and matriarchal society. It is usually the oldest daughter of the oldest daughter who is the head of the family and inherits the traditions and ceremonies that belong to the family. The oldest son of the oldest daughter is usually the spokesperson for the family. The women in the community were protected and were taken care of because they were the carriers of the history and traditions. This did not mean the women were more important, but there was acknowledgement that if a woman was killed, the history and knowledge was lost as well, whereas the men were

traditionally the warriors and hunters for the families and more at risk. Many Stó:lō families are teaching their children their family traditions and they are encouraging them to do well in school with the notion that they can be successful in both worlds. As an educator, parent, and grandparent, I have witnessed that those who embrace their traditions and ceremonies are often more confident when they attend the public education system.

The following summarizes what I have learned from elders and what I have come to understand from a lifetime of observing our Stó:lō families and traditions. In the pre-contact era, the whole family was included in a child's life so everyone in the community had a role. The grandparents were seen as the first parents of a newborn child. This enabled the parents to do the work necessary in the community. The grandparents were thought to have the patience, understanding, and time that many young parents struggle with today. They also understood that the first three years of a child's life groomed his or her character and personality, which would be with him/her forever into adult life. Therefore, the grandparents were given this special task. First Nation's culture dictated that the child would be watched by the adults, who would see what his/her special interests or strengths were. The child would then be taken by an aunt or uncle with similar interests to be trained. First Nation families defined the dynamics in a family in such a way that parents did not raise their children alone. For example, the culture believes that if a parent tells a child to clean up his or her room, he or she is not willing, but if a grandparent asks, he or she is more willing. As well, if a parent asks a son to cut the grass, the child is not as willing, but if an aunt or uncle makes the request, a child is more willing. Similarly, parents may be seen as not as patient with their children. I know from personal experience if I teach my daughter to make a basket, all I see is her mistakes, but when I teach my niece to make a basket she can do no wrong. This

communal commitment to raising children and sharing stories is a fundamental part of the traditional education structures in pre-contact First Nations.

## 2.3. Colonization

One might wonder why First Nations would allow Europeans to impose their education system on Aboriginal families. The reality is that many First Nations did not survive as whole families and nations were lost due to diseases that were foreign to First Nation people. Carlson (1996), describes

They were also [a]ffected over the course of the next century by at least three other major epidemics (smallpox or measles in 1824; measles in 1848; and smallpox in 1862). In addition, Stó:lō communities were [a]ffected by outbreaks of mumps, tuberculosis (T.B.) venereal disease (gonorrhoea, syphilis, etc.) colds, influenza (flu), and alcoholism. With each epidemic and every outbreak of disease people were impacted. Scholars estimate that 62% of the population died in the 1782 smallpox epidemic. (p. 37)

Carlson further describes how disease impacted First Nation culture and traditions. Since there was no writing system and whole families died during these epidemics, this meant the knowledge and history was lost. The epidemics compounded the losses in First Nation language and culture. Most First Nations maintained an oral tradition; the death of an elder or a First Nation person before his or her time without the knowledge being transmitted was equivalent in today's terms to another book or family library being lost forever.

First Nation people had an education system that provided them with skills and knowledge to support their families and communities. This education system was compromised and dismissed, and government education policies removed the children from their families, disrupting and crippling Aboriginal families. The residential school era that followed from the late 1800s to the mid 1900s impacted up to four generations.

### **2.3.1. Residential schools**

There was a transition from Indian control of education to Federal control as Europeans gained control of the Canadian territory. The new societies had little regard for First Nation people or their education system. The Government of Canada (2006)

*Backgrounder: Indian Residential Schools* shares the following:

The Government of Canada began to play a role in the development and administration of Indian Residential Schools as early as 1874. The Government operated nearly every school as a joint venture with various religious organizations. The schools were located in every province and territory except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Approximately 132 schools existed over time.... It is estimated that there are 80,000 people alive today who resided at Indian Residential Schools. (p. 1)

There are up to five generations of First Nations who have been impacted by Canadian residential schools.

#### **2.3.1.1. Outcomes**

The impact of this era is summed up by Kirkness (1986). Key themes include the loss of language(s) and traditions and the establishment of the residential school system, removing any control over the day-to-day education of their children for First Nation people. Even more tragic is the fact that many children who attended the residential schools were subject to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Carlson (1996) notes that, "The role of residential schools in contributing to the haunting legacy of poverty, suicide, alcoholism, and loss of parenting skills among Aboriginal people may never be fully appreciated" (p. 100). Robertson (2003) further describes,

Some scholars claim that as many as half of all children brought to residential schools died there. Many others have since committed suicide, either directly or indirectly, through the self-abuse of addiction.... Little wonder that some Aboriginal communities view the school system as the agent of their oppression and are suspicious of its attempts to respond to Aboriginal students (p. 553)

The abuse included restricting food and using Aboriginal students in experiments related to nutrition, vitamin deficiency and other diet focused interventions (Shuchman, 2013, p. 2). A Stó:lō elder (personal communication, 1995) shared that, “Every night we would go to bed hungry.” Another Stó:lō man who attended residential school a generation later shared,

We would always be hungry and after a while you learned how to steal food. I would work in the kitchen at times and I would try to be the last one to leave the kitchen as I would leave a window unlocked. I learned how to crawl down the pipes at night and I would bring back whatever I could. I would always make sure the younger ones were fed first. (personal communication, 2005)

These stories are not shared openly in most First Nation communities. These stories were shared with me as I was one of the few Stó:lō people to graduate from university. I grew up and I have worked in our Stó:lō communities all my life. I have taught courses and delivered programs directly to our First Nation communities. I have worked with individuals, families, and community groups delivering programs and workshops. I gained the trust of many of our families. I have been given permission to share their stories so others may learn or better understand our reality. The one elder who shared his story with me would talk about how he heard that those who attended residential school were going to receive compensation for what happened to them at the schools. He attended Kuper Island Residential School, also referred to as “Alcatraz” by First Nation people. He shared stories of how many children drowned trying to escape. He wanted the funds to help out his children, but died before any funds were made available.

The Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council (1992- 1994) report on *Indian Residential Schools: The Nuu-chah-nulth experience*, summarizes the impact of residential schools, including:

Separation from family and home....loss of Native Language; punishment for speaking mother tongue, Abuse; emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, Child labour; children were kept primarily as labourers, not students, Loss of Native Culture; children were taught to culturally inferior to whites and less than human, Loss of Self Respect, What was learned; submitting to authority of whites, Maintain power and control in social relations; a military style of discipline, Going Back Home; students went home unable to cope with freedom; They returned with inappropriate behaviour patterns and were disrespectful of family and village custom, They were unaware of their social position in the community and lacked parenting skills. (p. vii)

There are examples of each of the above issues across First Nations communities.

Having direct connections to the residential school era it becomes a challenge emotionally to even write down what has happened to First Nations families as a result of residential school. It can be equally challenging to read about what happened; however, it becomes overwhelming at times to hear, see, and witness the socioeconomic challenges that exist in many First Nation communities today.

Examination of this era helps us understand why so many First Nations struggle to trust anyone in authority, especially those who want to educate their children.

A family member shared how her brother struggled emotionally to deal with the sexual abuse he endured at the St Mary's Residential School. She was angry and she felt helpless because at that time no one would listen or do anything. Her brother committed suicide. He was 27 years old. Another Stó:lō man shared how he was sexually abused every night as he was given a bath. He shared the story with his adult family for the first time and he also explained how difficult it has been for him to be a good father. He asked them to forgive him. The residential school era ended in the 1990s, but the legacy still exists and lives in the hearts and the minds of those who attended and their children, who witnessed their parents and grandparents struggle to come to terms with their abuse.



The residential school era is a recent history, as it only gained attention as some students who attended began to press charges in the 1980s. Even then, it took 15 years to make significant progress. The residential school legacy needs to be shared with all of Canada, with a particular focus on its recency. While these schools started around 150 years ago in British Columbia, the last residential school closed just 31 years ago, in 1984.

### **2.3.1.2. Historical Background**

What was the reason for imposition of these schools? While many people currently believe these schools were designed to give Indian people a free education, the truth is that residential schools were imposed on Indian people to “civilize” them (TRC Interim Report, p. 26). Couched in Christianity, the system of residential schools became a primary tool for imposing assimilationist objectives, with no regard for protecting or respecting First Nation language or culture. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada noted that:

For over 100 years, Aboriginal Children were removed from their families and sent to institutions called residential schools. The government-funded, church-run schools were located across Canada and established with the purpose to eliminate parental involvement in the spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of Aboriginal Children. (<http://www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=312>)

Unless Canadians have studied residential schools, they may not know students were not allowed to speak their First Nation language and that if they did speak their traditional language they would be punished. They do not know that students were abused physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Canadians may not know that if First Nation people did not send their children to these schools they would have to pay a fine or go to jail.

Some non-First Nation people believe that First Nations should actually be grateful for the settlers and the government of the day for taking care of them. For example, 20 years ago, my youngest daughter answered our home phone and was told to tell her dad that, “you people should be grateful we came to this country first, if it was any other group you would not be alive.” The caller frightened our eight-year-old daughter. When our older daughter called the woman back to tell her she had no right to say that or to involve our daughter as she was only eight years old, the woman replied, “Well, I will tell you the same thing,” and repeated the same messages to her. My older daughter hung up on her.

My personal experiences and work in education clearly highlight that many Canadians have little or no knowledge of Canada’s colonial education policies and the impact they have had on First Nations. British Columbia joined Canada in 1871 and non-First Nation settlement is relatively recent; however, for First Nations it has been over 130 years of oppression, discrimination and racism.

The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) brought the trauma experienced by many Aboriginal students in Indian Residential Schools to national attention. The commission’s mandate was to “investigate the evolution of the relationship among Aboriginal peoples (Indian, Inuit and Metis), the Canadian government, and the Canadian society as a whole” (p. 2). The document addressed 500 years of history, highlighting how the relationship between First Nations and Europeans began with many First Nations welcoming the newcomers and, in many cases, helping them as some of them who arrived were sick and dying from their long journey. In our Stó:lō language the newcomers were called “Xwelitém,” which means “hungry ones,” because when they reached Stó:lō territory they were weak from hunger. Today many Stó:lō still call them “Xwelitém,” but the meaning has shifted. The xwelitém are no longer

hungry for food, but rather the resources and they take and take until nothing is left with no regard for the future generations. The RCAP (1996) report highlights:

The necessity of restructuring is made evident by a frank assessment of past relations. We urge Canadians to consider anew the character of the Aboriginal nations that have inhabited these lands from time immemorial; to reflect on the way the Aboriginal nations in most circumstances welcomed the first newcomers in friendship; to ask themselves how the newcomers responded to that generous gesture by gaining control of their lands and resources and treating them as inferior and uncivilized; and how they were designated as wards of the federal government like children incapable of looking after themselves. Canadians should reflect too on how we moved them from place to place to make way for 'progress, 'development' and 'settlement', and how we took their children from them and tried to make them over in our image. (p. 2)

This report is not just First Nations giving voice to Aboriginal issues; it is a commission of people that included Aboriginal people. I know how difficult it is as a First Nation parent, teacher, and a grandmother to always be faced with the injustice that exists still today towards many First Nations. That injustice can be attributed to the lack of knowledge that exists amongst the average Canadian who does not know the history of residential school. For me, personally, it is almost a relief to see the report, which makes me think, *"I have found my words."*

The most difficult and tragic words that should be shared are on the residential school legacy. The report describes how when the "government turned to address the constitutional responsibility for Indians and their lands assigned by the Constitution Act, 1867, it adopted a policy of assimilation" (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 1). It outlines how the policy was "designed to move communities, and eventually all Aboriginal peoples, from their helpless 'savage' state to one of self-reliant 'civilization' and thus to make in Canada but one community – a non-Aboriginal, Christian one" (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 1). The report further describes how the residential school was modelled after

the education system set up for Indians in the United States. The suggestion was to remove Aboriginal children from their homes as “the influence of the wigwam was stronger than that of the [day] school,” and that the children should be “kept constantly within the circle of civilized conditions [the residential school]” (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 2). The report describes,

The school system’s concerted campaign “to obliterate” those “habits and associations”, Aboriginal languages, traditions and beliefs, and its vision of radical re-socialization, were compounded by mismanagement and underfunding, the provision of inferior educational services and the woeful mistreatment, neglect and abuse of many children – facts that were known to the department and the churches throughout the history of the school system. (RCAP, 1996, p. 4)

One can better understand why many First Nations do not trust authority figures when those who were in authority did nothing about the abuse that was taking place in many of the residential schools.

In 1998, the Government made a Statement of Reconciliation – including an apology to those people who were sexually or physically abused while attending Indian Residential Schools. The Government of Canada News Release (2006) further specified its culpability and dedication to addressing the damage from this era:

The Government is committed to bring a fair and lasting resolution to this chapter of our history and move forward. The discussions led by the Honourable Fran Iacobucci have resulted in a Settlement Agreement to foster reconciliation and healing among all Canadians. (p. 1)

The settlement for those who attended residential school amounted to \$10,000.00 per person for the first year in such schools and \$3,000.00 for each year after that. The Aboriginal people who were 65 years and older were taken care of first. Others chose to reject the settlement and continued to pursue legal action because of the abuse they endured. There were mixed feelings amongst those who attended the schools and they

ranged from anger at their treatment to relief as some felt the public apology and settlement was like a burden being lifted. One of my family members did not want the funds, believing it was an insult to think that money was going to erase what had happened to him.

To tell the story of this era is to pay tribute to those who did not survive the residential school era and to pay tribute to those who did not live to hear the Canadian Government apology. I would like to acknowledge my uncle, my mother's oldest brother, who died after a few months at the residential school where my mother, her brothers, and her sisters were sent. My mother described how they were sent home with no explanation to bury their brother, and after the funeral, they were all taken back to school. I would like to acknowledge my mother, who suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and who did not want her children to participate in the traditional ceremonies because she was afraid they would suffer punishment the same way her grandmother did in her time and the same way she did in her time at residential school. My mother died of cancer at the age of 42. Her younger sister also died of cancer a few months later. I would also like to pay tribute to her two brothers, who both committed suicide.

### **2.3.1.3. Ending the Era and Changing the Conversation**

Residential schools began to be phased out in 1950 with the last school in British Columbia, St. Mary's in the City of Mission located in the Fraser Valley, closed in 1996. With such a recent ending, how does one begin to address the challenges generated by more than a century of racism and forced assimilation, and where do the resources come from to support the work that needs to be done?

The slow shift away from residential school began in the early 1950s. Assembly of First Nations Indian Residential School Unit Series (2004) timeline describes how “Integration policy recognized the failure of the residential school system and by the mid to late 1950s began the placement of Indian children in to mainstream public schools. The process happened at different areas of the country at different times” (p. 1). The timeline also highlights that in “1969 the Government assumed full control of schools. There were 52 residential schools with 7,704 students” (p. 1). The shift away from the residential schools happened with little to no First Nation involvement. It is very important to understand First Nation people are viewed as a federal government responsibility and are governed by the Indian Act first created in 1876. Longboat (1987) describes “The Canadian parliament was given the exclusive power to make laws in respect of Indians, and lands reserved for Indians. This power was ‘exclusive’ in the sense that no provincial legislature could make laws in that field” (p. 27).

Education for Indians continues today to be a federal government responsibility. This has meant that the federal government makes decisions for Indian children, habitually without First Nations involvement or input. When the residential schools were phased out and Indian students were sent to public schools, the federal government created agreements with the provincial government without input of First Nations leaders and/or the parents of school-aged children. Many First Nation parents and many First Nation leaders challenged the government throughout the residential school era. Their consistent efforts led to the phasing out of the residential schools. First Nation leaders now continue to challenge the government for jurisdiction over their children’s education.

Over time, the First Nations began to organize themselves provincially and nationally to address their socioeconomic and educational concerns. The National Indian Brotherhood (1988) describes how

First Nations worked to provide First Nations governments and parents with more decision-making powers in education. In 1973, the policy paper, Indian Control of Indian Education firmly laid out principles of local control and parental responsibility as the basis for First Nations jurisdiction over their own educational programs. (p. 1)

Many First Nations are still working to gain jurisdiction over their children's education.

There is a lack of trust of the government and the education system it supports, given the history of residential schools. The First Nations lack of trust in the education system is described by Robinson (1989), an Okanagan elder,

And that younger one,  
now today, that's the white man.  
And the older one, that's me  
That's the Indian.  
And that's why the white man,  
They can tell a lie more than the Indian.  
but the white man, they got the law (p. 45-46).

Eigenbrod (1995) explains that "from the Native perspective, literacy is associated with political power, dishonesty and injustice. The literate Whiteman did not share his knowledge but used it to manipulate" (p. 90). Education for many First Nations means one has taken on the non-First Nation's beliefs and values—and many First Nations people do not trust others who have been successful in the imposed education system. Many First Nations people educated in the imposed system share that they are not successful or accepted in the non-First Nation world because they are First Nations, yet they are not successful or accepted in their own communities because of their success in the colonial system. Personal experience confirms this phenomenon. I received a degree in education and later secured a job to manage the education for a local tribal council. I remember the first words said to me by a Stó:lō elder were, "People come home from universities and they think they are better than us." The elder also asked, "why should we trust an education system that has done nothing for our people other

than to take away our very breath by punishing us for being an Indian” (personal communication, 1987). My only response was, “only when we are meaningfully involved in every level of education can we begin to make meaningful change for our children.”

Many First Nations struggle to survive in today’s society and many First Nation children struggle in the education system. Ridington (1990) reveals what many First Nations understand.

What I can remember, I will say  
What I do not remember, I will not say  
I cannot read or write  
I can only remember  
Before the whiteman came, we were bush people.  
When they came, where we lived they said “this is my land.”  
And we have no more  
We can’t read and write.  
We can only remember it.  
Since not too long ago  
That my people started to go to school (p. 288).

Eigenbrod (1995) shares the “Words” of a Dunne-za/Cree Elder – “the words imply that those who can read & write use this power to appropriate land that is not theirs” (p. 90). Eigenbrod explains how oral communication includes the ability to remember the story and the injustice and it’s “worth noting the truth and accuracy of the spoken words is guaranteed by the personal experience of the speaker: ‘What I do not remember, I will not say’” (p. 90). Eigenbrod shares how the act of remembering is being applied to writing, “How literature is a continuation of orature” (p. 91).

In many First Nation communities today, elders have encouraged their children and grandchildren to go to school and get an education, and to take what they have learned in the education system to help their people. At the same time, they are now also encouraged to carry on their traditions. The young people today are encouraged “to



learn how to walk in two worlds in a good way.” This dissertation is an example of storytelling moving from oratory to the written word.

## **2.4. Current context**

First Nations have long questioned the content and motives of the public educational system. Antone (2001) describes learning about explorers who came to North America and questions how this history is related to her own people. She also asks, “Why do Native people have the highest drop-out rate? Why do Native people have the highest incarceration rate? Why do Native people have the highest unemployment rate? Is racism perpetuated in the education system?” (p. 31). Antone (2003) is a member of the Oneida of the Thames First Nation and a faculty member in the department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (p. 2). Like many First Nation people, Antone began to study Aboriginal people with the realization that Aboriginal people needed to learn and practice their own traditions to function in mainstream society. She notes:

I went along with the stereotypical racist ideas that Indians were dumb, and Indians were stupid and didn't know anything. I went along with the educational system that was so insistent on leading me out of who I was as an Aboriginal person and into being somebody who I wasn't: a marginalized Euro-western thinking person with very little skills and no place to belong in the Euro-western society. I could never be a European person. I am Onkwehonwe. (Antone, 2001, p. 31)

Many First Nations and non-First Nation educators now work to support First Nations success in the educational system through increasing the cultural relevance of that education. The literature now includes studies and local First Nations material on Aboriginal worldview(s); First Nations learning styles and assessment; post secondary, kindergarten, and First Nation teacher education programs; and advocacy and

empowerment (Carlson & McHalsie, 1998; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009). As Egan (2002) notes:

....that the central belief – the most fundamental tenet of progressivism – is that to educate children effectively it is vital to attend to the nature of the child, particularly to the child’s modes of learning and stages of development, and to accommodate educational practise to what we can learn about these. (p. 184)

First Nation student success in the public educational system should include students feeling welcome, safe, understood, and validated in who they are. This is not the case for many students. Many students who entered the public education system after the residential schools closed were not welcomed and not understood; nor was there any effort to understand First Nation students’ modes of learning. Attending the public education system resulted in high drop-out rates for these students.

The Sullivan Report (1988) *A Legacy for Learners: the Report of the Royal Commission on Education* is cited frequently in the current literature, as the commission supports “educational self-determination by Native people and to invoke cooperative means to assist them in realizing such goals” (p. 208). The commission validated what First Nations people had been requesting, demanding, and challenging the federal government to address since the phasing out of residential schools. The commission acknowledged the attempts to assimilate Indian people failed: “life style cannot be replaced with a formal education alone” (p. 206). The commission provides strategies to address racism, provide role models, and develop curriculum units that portray the contributions of First Nations to Canada’s history and current context. The Sullivan report recommended policies to address and support First Nation education issues from Kindergarten to Post Secondary.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) published another critically important report, highlighting the “history, purpose, operation, and supervision of the residential school system, the effect and consequences of the system, and its ongoing legacy, as required by the Commission’s mandate” (p. iii). The Commission was formed as a result of the number of “class-action lawsuits that former students of residential schools had brought against the federal government and the churches that operated those schools in Canada for well over 100 years”(p. vii). A settlement agreement was signed by the federal government, churches, and the plaintiffs, who were former students of Indian Residential Schools, with the core mandate to educate all Canadians about the history of residential schools.

The Commission’s mandate over a five-year term is outlined in the following:

Reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools, in a manner that fully documents the individual and collective harms perpetuated against Aboriginal peoples, and honours the resiliency and courage of former students, their families, and communities. (p. 1, TRC Interim Report, 2012)

The Commission’s purpose is to create a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities on a “basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect” (p. 2, TRC Interim Report, 2012).

This dissertation cannot do justice to the work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and I would highly recommend visiting the TRC website at [trc.ca](http://trc.ca). The work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has moved the policy dialogue forward and highlights the value and power of the sharing of family stories.

First Nations are still working toward the National Indian Brotherhood’s (1972) “Indian Control of Indian Education,” a process that means First Nations parents will be able to determine and be meaningfully involved in the decisions regarding their

children's education. While there has been great progress made through publications like the Sullivan Report and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, Manual's (1974) words still reflect First Nations reality in education:

Genuine integration will begin to take place when this line is apparent to everyone. Its visibility will be proof that we have control over our own destiny and are making good use of it. The respect for one another's personal and community identity will grow from there. As long as Indian people are materially disadvantaged and the decision-making over our lives lies in someone else's hands, there can be no integration. The human concept of acceptance has not yet developed to a level where people who live comfortably accept those who live below their material standard or hold a strongly different religious or political view. (pp. 246-247)

Changing from assimilation to integration will only happen when all involved begin to understand the recent history of colonialism, residential school era and the lack of Aboriginal involvement in their children's education. Change does not happen overnight and there must be a commitment on levels of education to address Aboriginal student success in the education system.

## **2.5. Changing colonial education system**

Examples from Canada and other countries where Aboriginal people impacted by colonialism have begun to see student academic success and a decrease in student dropout rates illustrate the important role Aboriginal education leaders/communities play in governing their education systems. Such governance includes creating culturally relevant and embedded strategies and initiatives to directly support First Nations student success and a decrease in student dropout rates. Reyhner (1992) describes a community school in the Navajo Nation where "the community elected a school board which contracted with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, United States Department of the

Interior, to operate it as a K-6 elementary school so they could have more control over hiring and curriculum” (p. 5).

Cummins (1989) identified four educational areas needed to empower Indian students:

1. Incorporation of the cultural and linguistic background of the student into the school and its curriculum
2. Participation of the community in school activities
3. Use of interactive/experiential teaching methods that emphasize an active role for students
4. School testing programs that recognize linguistic and cultural differences and that search out student strengths rather than being used to track minority students into special education programs. (p. 4)

The result was student success, depicted in improved test results, attendance rates (improved to 94%), and parent conference attendance rates (improved to 80%).

Hones (2005) visited two schools in Australia “where Aboriginal cultures were honoured and where Aboriginal languages were part of the curriculum” (p. 11). The article begins with Blake (2001, cited in Hones, 2005) describing an Aboriginal community that was “created about one hundred years ago by the state, in an attempt to gather together disparate tribal groups of the ‘dying race’ and educate their members to become servants to the Whites” (p. 10). The Australian Aboriginal people were subjected to the same imposed colonial education with the same dismal outcomes, resulting in high dropout rates, low attendance, and no community involvement. Hones (2005) described the transition at one school (the Cherbourg State School), as moving “From Stolen Generation to Strong and Smart” and highlights the other school (Kuranda State School) for its work in renewing Indigenous languages, specifically Djabugay (p. 12). He describes how Aboriginal students in these schools are proud of who they are and how

students are relearning their traditional language. Hones also describes strategies to support student success, such as valuing cultural heritage, having high expectations of students, hiring Aboriginal administrators and teachers, and encouraging non-Aboriginals to learn the local Aboriginal language. He concluded with the following:

In Australia, in the United States and elsewhere, all citizens will enjoy a richer heritage when we begin to honour, and learn, the traditional cultures and languages of the land. Then, perhaps, we can learn to live together, in the words of the songwriters Yothu Yini, *UNDER ONE DREAM*. (Hones, 2005, p. 13)

To support Aboriginal student success in school a concerted effort is required from everyone involved: the teachers, the administrators, and the caregivers. Rehyner (1992) and Hones (2005) both identified key strategies that include cultural background, teaching methods, and community participation in everyday classroom learning.

## **2.6. British Columbia context**

While British Columbia's Aboriginal education history is representative of the larger Canadian experience, BC only began to engage in implementing substantive change in the mid 1990s. The Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement between Canada, British Columbia, and the First Nation Education Steering Committee purposes include "to establish a process to enable the recognition of Jurisdiction by a Participating First Nation over Education on First Nation Land" (First Nation Education Steering Committee, (2006, p. 3). While only a beginning, this Framework agreement is a testimony to substantial work done by both First Nation and non-First Nation leaders in education. First Nation communities that sign an agreement will be the first since colonialism was imposed to attain jurisdiction for education and will not be subject to the federal government's imposed Indian Act. This change will apply to First Nation students who attend a First Nations band school where the federal government has jurisdiction.

Important to note, however, is that the majority of First Nation students attend public schools, and this jurisdiction will not apply to them. The implications and implementation of policies stemming from this recent announcement will be important to document. It will be important to document how many First Nation students attend First Nation schools, how many attend public schools, and whether there are funds to support the transition(s), for example, by creating governing boards: locally, regionally, and perhaps nationally. While the framework focuses on on-reserve schools, a key component of the change will include the relationships (if any) established with the public schools. This shift will generate more questions that will need to be addressed in future research.

## **2.7. Two education systems**

The education journey for one family over three generations has been steeped in challenges as a result of colonial government education policies that did not support or acknowledge their Stó:lô First Nation traditions, language, or culture. This dissertation addresses the impacts that government education policies have had on one family over three generations. Just as important to address is the impact the family has had by challenging the education system and by working to change the system to support Aboriginal student success. My own education stories describe my participation in the higher education system by attaining three degrees, as well as by working in the public education system as an Aboriginal Support Teacher and with the public education system as the Education Manager of a local First Nation Government to support Aboriginal student success.

The imposed education system changed overtime with each generation. Initially First Nations had no involvement in decisions for their children's education during the residential school era. Longboat (1987) notes that,

Historically, education controlled by the Canadian government has worked at cross-purposes with the goals and ideals of the Indian Nations: politically, by seeking to undermine their authority of traditional governments; economically, by seeking to replace traditional ways of life with others less suitable; and spiritually, by seeking to replace Indian religion and values with Christian ones. (p. 23).

In the following two generations, the education stories reveal a change where First Nations and the education system began to acknowledge each other and work together. This does not mean the colonial and discriminatory attitudes shifted or changed altogether--it does mean that the education system was challenged and that changes supporting Aboriginal student success occurred.

Our education stories will highlight the result of combining the dominant education system with the local Stó:lô language and culture. The result is a transformation that is a melding of the dominant education system and the First Nation culture that is best described by Bhabha (1994) in "*Locations of culture*" as "Hybridity".

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism...(p.1).

I recall being told more than once that First Nation people cannot go back and live like they lived before, and asked what makes me an Indian when I wear store bought clothes and live in modern houses and not traditional longhouses? I remember not having a reply at first and feeling embarrassed simply because I knew we could not go back to our traditional way of living. I did reply, "I am always an Indian, whether I am dressed in my regalia or I am working in an office". At that time that was as far as I could



go with my understanding of our reality. I believe Bhabha's work better describes First Nation's reality with the metaphor of modern regalia—an example of hybridity as it is made of both traditional materials and store bought materials. It is seen as traditional First Nation regalia, however it is not solely First Nation materials nor is it solely non-First Nation materials. The changes and outcomes for the family revealed in the education stories can be appreciated using the First Nation term “transformation” and Bhabha's term “Hybridity”.

The term “transformation” has a spiritual and sacred meaning for many Aboriginal nations. The Stó:lô people have many transformer stories. One of the first stories my grandmother told me was about a good man who always took care of the people in his village. He did not take a wife and or have his own family. He helped all the people in the village. He would get water for some, help another fix canoes, or help with fishing or hunting. When this man died the creator said, “where this man is buried will grow a cedar tree and from the tree you will have the wood for your shelters and canoes, the roots for your baskets, and the bark for your clothing”. There are also stories where people have been transformed to stone, birds, salmon, sturgeon, and to mountains. The stories usually have lessons about listening, not listening, landmarks, and are about our natural resources to reinforce morals and values. The term “transformation” will reveal the impact the family had on the education system.

The key issues raised in this chapter have included First Nations traditional education, the colonial government education policies that include the residential school era, and two subsequent generations of imposed federal government education policies. We have two education systems that continue to this day to inform, challenge, and transform as they seek to support Aboriginal students. Last, is acknowledging the Indigenous research done by scholars such as Archibald, Battiste, Henderson, Wilson,

and Grande that provided a foundation for this dissertation and gave me the confidence to take this scholarship work further by honouring our Aboriginal tradition of storytelling. This context will be used to illustrate the lived experiences of these policies on three generations of a First Nations family using Indigenous research methods complemented by an autoethnographic approach.

### 3. Research method

This chapter outlines the questions addressed in this dissertation and the methods used to gather and analyze the data. It also illustrates a theoretical reconciliation of the First Nation tradition of storytelling and Indigenous research methods with Western concepts of autoethnography, and narrative analysis., The ethical concerns and protections employed are also discussed.

The questions that guide this research are:

- Across three generations of students in one family, what lived experiences and personal outcomes were realized within federal and provincial government education policies of the time?
- What can we learn from these stories regarding current education policies and programs?
- What are the implications for future education policy decisions?

The data used to examine these questions comes from the narratives of three generations within one family, including a mother who attended residential school(s) in the late 1930s to 1940s (my grandmother); her daughter who attended community-based schools(s) in the late 1950s to late 1960s, and who also had a career in Aboriginal education (myself); and the daughter's three children who attended public school from the late 1970s to the mid 2000s (my children). Our stories will be used to illustrate the impact of education policies on one family over the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. An examination of Stó:lō history and the impact of European settlement on Stó:lō education traditions will be used to set the context for the further exploration of the government policies in place over each generational era of the study. An overview of the federal and

provincial governments' jurisdictions over Indians that still exists today under the Indian Act will be given, and the implications of this family's educational experiences and outcomes will be explored through a process that honours Stó:lō storytelling.

### 3.1. Indigenous methodologies

The data will be gathered from my own memories using traditional Stó:lō storytelling as the main vehicle. The Stó:lō oral tradition is still being used by many Stó:lō families today to pass on Stó:lō traditions through stories and ceremonies.

Carlson (1996) describes the two types of Stó:lō stories:

- 1) *Sxwōxwiyám* – myth-like stories set in the distant past which usually explain, among other things, how *Xexá:ls* (the Transformers) came to Stó:lō territory to “make things right” for the present generation; and
- 2) *sqwélqwel* – “true stories or news,” which typically describe experiences in people's lives. (p182)

Sqwélqwel Stó:lō story telling is supported by Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous Storywork*, as she worked with a number of Stó:lō and Coast Salish elders who taught her how to “become a storyteller, cultural ways to use stories with children and adults, and ways to help people think, feel, and ‘be’ through the power of stories” (p. ix). Archibald creates a space for Aboriginal storytelling in education, especially for curricula, and describes how to do story research with elders.

Wilson's (2008) *Indigenous Research Methods* lays out a methodological approach that can be used with Indigenous communities and Aboriginal-focused research projects. In particular, Wilson highlights the utility of narrative and autoethnographic methods as appropriate for gathering and analyzing data gathered through sqwélqwel.

### 3.1.1. Sxwōxwiyám stories

The sxwōxwiyám stories are usually shared at night, like bedtime stories, where sqwélqwel stories are typically told throughout the day. Sqwélqwel stories that were shared at night were usually the scary or funny bedtime stories. The sxwōxwiyám were usually transformation stories that expressed “in a creative way: the fundamental values and accepted behaviour of the Stó:lō; how to live (for example), why gluttony and laziness are unacceptable” (Carlson, 1996, p. 185). For example, there are sxwōxwiyám stories for the “mountain that looks like a man” called “the sleeping Indian” mountain and the mountain that represents “a woman and her dog” that overlooks the Chilliwack Valley. The full story will not be shared, but the ending describes how Xá:ls, the transformer, turned the woman and her dog into stone so she could forever watch over her people. The story also shares how her two daughters became two different waterfalls that are close by. Xa:ls, the transformer, came through Stó:lō territory to set things right and has been described as the man called “Jesus,” “Great spirit,” or “transformer.” The names for the mountains in Stó:lō territory usually describe the resource or passageway in that given area.

There are many family stories that highlight our connections to the sturgeon, salmon, cedar tree, and other natural resources. Family stories teach us that everything is alive and we are just one part of our surroundings. We cannot just take the natural resources we need; rather we have to humble ourselves to the resource, say a prayer of thanks, and leave something in return. The stories share how the resources were once “good” people and they were transformed to the sturgeon, cedar tree, and salmon. With that in mind, one must ask and/or explain to the resource what is wanted and a gift is left in exchange for the resource. Taking only what is needed from the resource is integral, as greediness is frowned upon. The sxwōxwiyám stories, like the sqwélqwel stories,

were told for a reason. The man who was transformed to the cedar tree is an example of a *sxwōxwiyám* sotry. The many *sxwōxwiyám* stories have provided the Stó:lō with their many resources such as salmon, sturgeon, and the four legged. The respect, reverence, and responsibility for all living things are values that are taught and reinforced through storytelling.

Wilson (2008) also describes different levels of stories shared with him by Cree elder Jerry Saddleback:

According to tradition, there are three styles or levels of storytelling (I think that “story” is not a good word for it, as it carries an English language connotation of being make-believe, but that is the word he used trying to translate what he was saying into English). At a higher level are sacred stories, which are specific in form, content, context and structure. These stories themselves must be told at different levels according to the initiation level of the listener. Only those trained, tested, and given permission to do so are allowed to tell these stories, which must never vary in how they are told. They are sacred and contain the history of our people. I maybe shouldn’t even be talking about them here, but it’s already on the page, so I’ll leave it. (p. 98)

Wilson (2008) explains the second level of stories as “Indigenous legends that you may have heard or read in books. There are certain morals, lessons, or events that take place, but different storytellers shape them according to their own experience and that of the listener” (p. 98). Finally, “The third style of story is relating personal experience or the experiences of other people. As I talked about near the beginning of the book, Elders often use experiences from their own or others’ lives to help counsel or teach” (p. 98).

### **3.1.2. Sqwélqwel stories**

The *sqwélqwel* stories are factual stories about individuals, families, and nations. The stories can also be funny, sad, scary, or stories of courage. As Wilson’s (2008) third style of story, the *sqwélqwel* are more narratives shared by an individual for entertainment or to share lessons learned to make good decisions. This research project can be considered *sqwélqwel*, as it contains factual stories about a Stó:lō family’s education experiences.

Archibald (2008) describes a number of concerns that result from the written recording of traditional oral stories. These concerns include the interruption and detrimental influences that stem from “the legacy of forced colonization and assimilation during missionary and residential school eras and then the public schooling” (p. 13). This interruption caused difficulty for those listening to the stories “to make meaning in a traditional way,” and this difficulty affects the relationship between the storyteller and the listener (p. 14). Another concern is that “text limits the level of understanding because it cannot portray the storyteller’s gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality” (p. 17). Other concerns include misappropriation of “sacred knowledge” (p. 32). In answer to these concerns, Archibald (2008) proposes principles of respect, including reciprocity, reverence, responsibility, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. All of these support and guide First Nation “storywork” and “Storytelling.”

The family stories shared will reveal the impact that federal and provincial government policies had on family members. The key difference with the Sqwelqwel stories shared in this dissertation is that these stories are written. This dissertation is a beginning to the documenting of the education stories in a written format. To accommodate this shift from oral to written storytelling, I will seek to incorporate Archibald’s principles,

Archibald (2008) describes how she learned “about the ‘core’ of Indigenous stories from Elders and to find a respectful place for stories and storytelling in education” (p. ix). She also describes how she learned to do research with elders and “about ways to become a storyteller, cultural ways to use stories with children and adults, and ways to help people think, feel and ‘be’ through the power of stories” (p. ix). She identified seven principles that can be used as a framework for storytelling. The principles, called

storywork, are: “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (p. ix).

The following explanation from Archibald (2008) supports the approach this research will be based on:

Experiential stories reinforce the need for storywork principles in order for one to use First Nations stories effectively. These seven principles form a Stó:lō and Coast Salish theoretical framework for making meaning from stories and for using them in educational contexts. I learned that stories can “take on their own life” and “become the teacher” if these principles are used. (p. ix)

The personal stories in this dissertation are intended to “take on their own life” and “become the teacher” on government education policies.

### **3.1.3. Seven principles of storytelling in research**

Archibald (2008) describes seven principles regarding the use of storytelling in research. The principles of effective storytelling require respect for cultural protocols, honouring the mentor(s) and learner responsibilities, reverence for spirituality, practising the notion of reciprocity, and understanding the notions of holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. These principles “work together to create powerful storywork understandings that have the power to help with emotional healing and wellness” (Archibald, 2008, p. x). The first four “r” principles Archibald describes separately, and these principles will be discussed in more detail in the following sections from my Stó:lō world view. The notions of holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy are described as key principles that bring together stories that result in creating emotional healing and wellness.

It is these principles that connect who I am as a Stó:lō woman, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and daughter and speaks to the responsibilities I have as a Stó:lō woman sharing my family’s stories of education. Archibald (2008) explains



how she learned about making meaning through story from the experience of doing Indigenous story research and storywork, “Indigenous storywork brings the heart, mind, body, and spirit together for quality education” (p. 153). The principles described by Archibald will be used to frame this research project. These connections illustrate the relevance of this methodology for this research project (see Table 1, page 54).

Table 1 demonstrates how the stories in this dissertation attempt to honour Stó:lō traditions of teaching and learning through the framework of the seven principles. The following sections highlight each of the traditions that support my research.

**Table 1. Archibald's seven principles of storytelling in research**

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Archibald</b>	<b>My research</b>
Respect for cultural protocols	Respect for cultural knowledge and those who owned or shared the stories” (p. 36)	To speak to own my experience is a Stó:lō tradition Explain my “intention” and why this is important
Responsibility to teacher and learner (the learner includes those who read this dissertation)	“The voices of the teachers, their knowledge, and the way that this knowledge is shared must be in compliance with culturally “proper” ways.” (p. 38)	Acknowledge my “teachers” i.e. my grandmother Share what I have learned – the personal stories are a testimony to what I have learned Work with Stó:lō storytelling and narrative research methods to share my family’s history to elucidate the lived impact of Canadian education policies
Reverence for spirituality	“Prayers helped create a respectful atmosphere” (p. 51)	Acknowledge and give “thanks” for my mentors and that my “work” will help my family and others by understanding the reality and challenges for First Nations education is connected to government policies Acknowledge spirituality as a natural part of this dissertation Mind, body, and spirit: understanding one needs all three to be a complete person
Practising a cyclical type of reciprocity	“Being ready and culturally “worthy” to share with and ‘give back”” (p. 56)	The personal stories shared makes meaning of the family’s life lived (“worthy” to share) and the notion of “give back” will result in the potential to make changes to First Nation education initiatives that includes First Nations being involved in meaningful decision making
“Holism, interrelatedness and synergy work together to create a powerful storywork..” (p. x)	“..understandings that have the power to help with the emotional healing and wellness” (p. x)	The personal stories will support family and other First Nations families to work towards emotional healing and wellness

### **3.1.3.1. Respect**

In Stó:lō traditions “respect for cultural protocols” is acknowledging and knowing one’s place in the family, the community, and the nation. One has to earn his or her place by being respectful for oneself, family, community and nation.

I am a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I have followed my traditions throughout my lifetime. I was the first one on both sides of my family to turn to our spirituality and traditions after four generations of government laws and government colonial education policies that forbade our people from practising our traditions and speaking our language. I was raised with the stories about my family ceremonies and traditions and I was also taught by elders who knew our spiritual and traditional ceremonies. Respect begins with self, knowing who you are and who your family is, and knowing that cultural teachings are a gift from the elders that is meant to be shared.

### **3.1.3.2. Responsibility**

Stó:lō cultural knowledge was not written down, nor does anyone stand up and say “these are the cultural protocols.” The culture was not set apart or learned at a specific time of day; rather, it was a part of everyday life and learned by being a part of a family, a community, and a nation. Our cultural knowledge does have gaps today, largely because the Indian Act was amended in 1884 to include the “anti-potlatch law” that forbade our people from practising their traditions, and because of the residential school era that restricted our ability to share our language and traditions across generations (Carlson, 1996).

A key aspect of Stó:lō culture is to speak to one’s own experience, unless you are given permission to share someone else’s experience. Storytellers are encouraged to use their own life experiences in teachable moments to help or support the learning of

others. It is very important to explain *why* something is significant. One also is expected to explain his or her intention. If the intention is right or good, the individual then is listened to, the stories are honoured, and he or she is asked to retell the stories. Archibald (2008) describes this as honouring her teachers. The responsibility to a teacher and the learner is to acknowledge the teacher(s) and to share what was learned. Acknowledging what I have learned and who taught me is a cultural tradition. If a song is used in a ceremony, one has to explain why he or she has a right to use the song and who the owner is. This tradition reminds me of citing sources in academic writing. The personal stories in this dissertation are a testimony to what I have learned by analyzing the life experiences shared here, and I have the responsibility to use this knowledge to secure a more promising education for future generations.

### **3.1.3.3. Reverence**

Reverence for spirituality in Stó:lō traditions is acknowledging the higher power and our connection to the higher power. Prayer, or a form of prayer, is as natural as eating or exercising to keep the body healthy. A prayer can be in the form of a song and expression of prayer can be meditation or a ceremony. To be a complete person you need a healthy body, mind, and spirit. If one part, the body, mind, or spirit, is not right or healthy, it affects the other two. This research demonstrates reverence for spirituality by giving thanks before each writing session and at the end of each session. Giving thanks for people included in the stories are also given—that the pain or fear they felt can become strength and courage for a better future.

### **3.1.3.4. Reciprocity**

Practising a cyclical type of reciprocity supports the notion of giving back to help others. My grandmother shared that what I learn has no value unless I share that

knowledge. She also told me that what I know and understand is sand in my hands unless I share what I have learned. This supports the notion of a “give-away”; to give is important in Stó:lō traditions. At the end of a gathering or ceremony, a give-away takes place. Items are given to guests and special items are given especially to those who travelled great distances to attend the gathering or ceremony. Elders are also honoured and given special gifts because of their role in many families as knowledge-keepers. Our teaching reveals that we live in a circle and that what we send out comes back to the individual; therefore, if we send out kindness, love, and knowledge, those are what come back to us. If hatred, jealousy, or anger is sent out, that will come back to you as well. To give includes knowledge and time, and how one gives with a good mind and a good heart is also important. Throughout this research, I seek to practise reciprocity by sharing the knowledge I have gained over my many years being involved in Aboriginal Education, and by sharing what I have learned about the government policies that have not served First Nation interests. The giving of the stories in this dissertation is to promote change in the current and future government education policies that do not honour First Nation people’s abilities to govern their children’s education.

### **3.1.3.5. Holism, interrelatedness and synergy**

The concepts of “holism, interrelatedness and synergy” (Archibald, 2008, p. ix) support the intention of helping others by sharing personal experiences and stories. By sharing my stories and the stories of my family, I hope to help others by revealing the truth(s) about the negative impact of the colonial government education policies that included the residential school era that began in 1884 and ended with the last school closing in the mid 1990s. Understanding that education has not been a positive experience for First Nations is an important first step for those involved in education. The

personal stories bring holism, interrelatedness, and synergy to the history, and they also bring meaning to government policies' negative impacts on three generations.

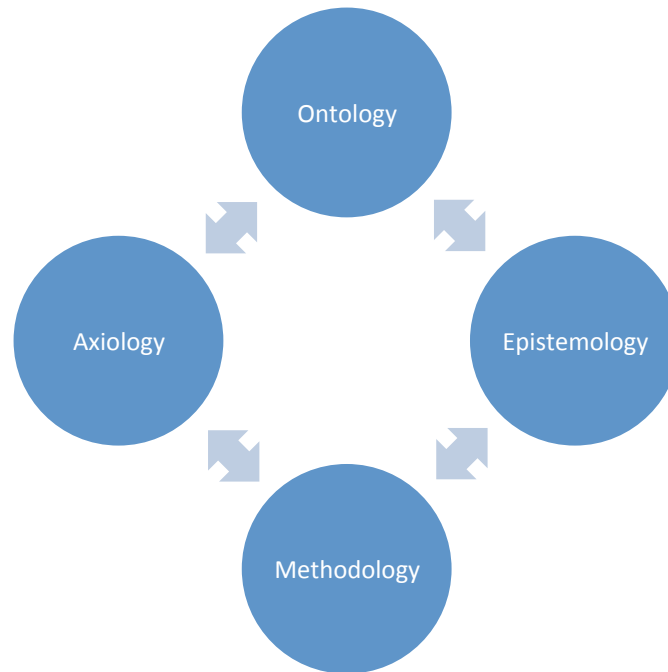
### **3.1.3.6. Indigenous research methods**

Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* introduces Indigenous research methods that support this dissertation. He describes, "the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships" (p. 7). Wilson further describes Indigenous ontology and epistemology as follows:

In an Indigenous ontology there may be multiple realities, as in the constructivist research paradigm. The difference is that, rather than the truth being something that is "out there" or external, reality is the relationship that one has with the truth. (p. 73)

Wilson explains the Indigenous research paradigm not as separate entities, but as "entities [that] are inseparable and blend from one into the next" (p. 70). He used the metaphor of the circle to show that "the whole of the paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 70).

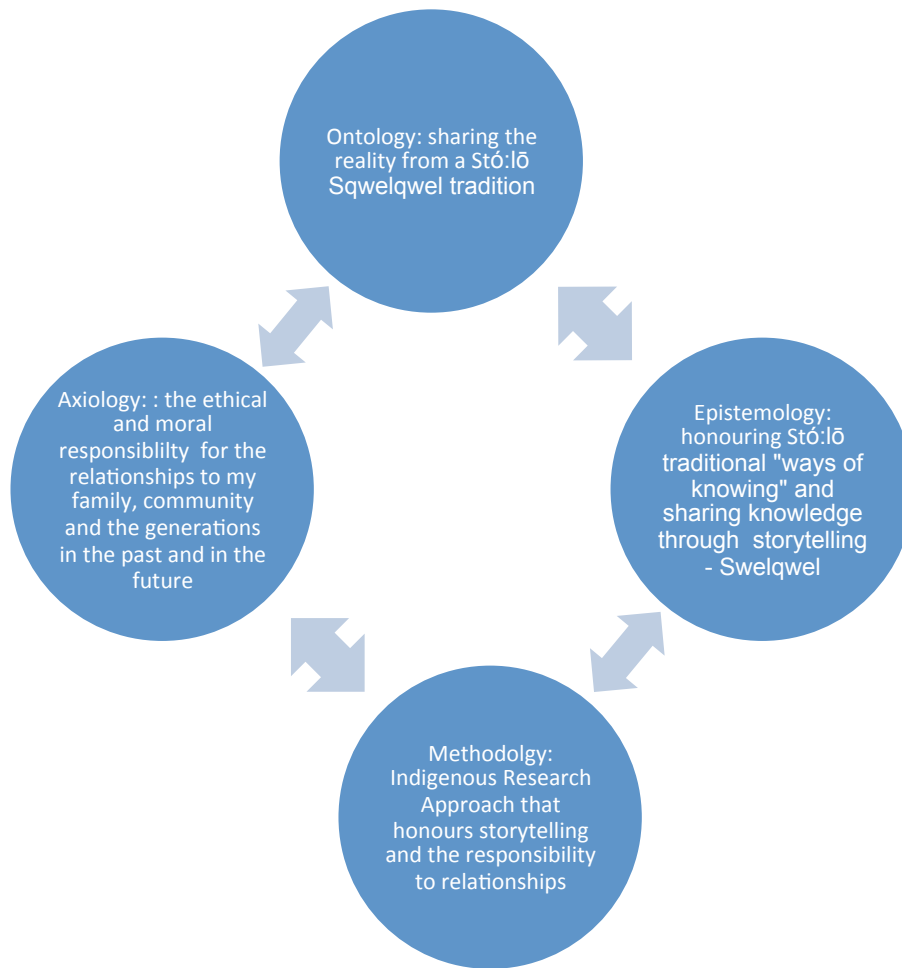
Wilson's (2008) diagram in *Research is Ceremony* depicts a circle with words inside it. Wilson explains how the entire circle is the Indigenous research paradigm. Figure 1 (page 59) shows the relationships among the separate areas of research. The relationship is imperative to this dissertation both because the circle has no beginning and no end and because each area of research will impact the others.



**Figure 1. Wilson (2008) Indigenous research paradigm**

Wilson's notion that research is ceremony fits well with Stó:lō's notion of a *Yoyes*, which means work. The word *yoyes* is not a verb in Stó:lō terminology, rather it is a noun. *Yoyes* for Stó:lō means there will be a ceremony. A ceremony for Stó:lō is the highest form of communication and the highest form of authority that something important will be shared. This dissertation is a written *yoyes* that will support the learning of others. Wilson's Indigenous research paradigm will be used to support this dissertation in that Indigenous methods will be used to document and analyze the data in a way that centralizes Stó:lō knowledge and ceremony honouring one's stories and people who share them.

Figure 2 (page 60) depicts Wilson's Indigenous research approach and how the concept of the circle complements Stó:lō Storytelling.



**Figure 2. Indigenous research paradigm and my "yoyes" - work**

Wilson (2008) explains, "An Indigenous research paradigm is research that follows an ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology that is Indigenous" (p. 38). The chart depicts how each area is interrelated with Stó:lō storytelling and responsibilities to the family, community, and the generations in the past and the future. Honouring Stó:lō epistemology and "ways of knowing" is featured in the Sqwelqwel, true stories, about my family. The methodology reflects the relationships that have existed, exist now, and will exist in the future. The stories that are shared in this dissertation will help readers understand the reality for many Stó:lō families today who have struggled in the education system as a result of government education policies. My responsibility to



future generations will be fulfilled because the education stories will address the imposed government education policies on Aboriginal families and ideally stimulate positive change. Table 2 (page 62) outlines the Stó:lō Storytelling Framework that will be used in this dissertation and shows the connections to the federal and provincial government policies for each era.

**Table 2. Education Landscape: Aboriginal Education and the control of education**

Personal Stories/Experiences		Policy Framework in Place	First Nations Control of Education
Mother 1930 -1950	Residential School	Federal Government Residential School Policy	First Nations families had no control/agency
Daughter 1953 - 1970	Residential School: direct and indirect experience(s)	Federal Government Residential School Policy	First Nations families had no control/agency
	Student at a band school and public school	Federal and Provincial Government Master Tuition Agreement	Minimal involvement in education and ability to sign off
	Teacher at a band school	Federal Government	Minimal involvement in education and ability to sign off
	First Nations Support Teacher at a school district	Federal and Provincial Government Master Tuition Agreement	Minimal involvement in education and ability to sign off
	Manager of Education at a First Nations Government	Federal and Provincial Government Master Tuition Agreement; Provincial Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch	Federal government gave authority for First nations to sign agreements with local school districts and the Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch targeted funds
Children 1970 - present	Public School until 1993	Federal Government Master Tuition Agreement	Minimal involvement in education and ability to sign off
	Public School from 1994 to present	Federal Government and Provincial Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch	Federal government gave authority for First nations to sign agreements with local school districts and the Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch targeted funds

Table 2 outlines the Stó:lō storytelling framework that will be used in this dissertation.

Writing my mother's, my own, and my children's personal education stories and making the connection to the government education policies for each era will address the research questions:

- Across three generations of students in one family, what lived experiences and personal outcomes were realized within federal and provincial government education policies of the time?
- What can we learn from these stories regarding current education policies and programs?
- What are the implications for future education policy decisions?

To support the Stó:lō storytelling and Aboriginal research approach, this dissertation will use autoethnography to provide meaning and as a way to analyze the personal stories.

## **3.2. Blending with Western methodologies**

There are many different types of qualitative research that include biographies, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, autoethnography, and case studies.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe,

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practises, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. It is understood, however, that each practice makes the world visible in different ways. Hence there is frequently a commitment to using more than one interpretive practise in any study. (p. 4)

The history of qualitative research is extensive, and qualitative methods have not always been seen as a reliable way to conduct research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note that, "The challenges to qualitative research are many. Qualitative researchers are

called journalists, or soft scientists. Their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or subjective” (p. 7). The dismissive attitude towards qualitative research has not stopped this type of research, rather the rich history by authors like Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and qualitative research strategies created by Wolcott (1990) and others have provided a foundation to address qualitative research as a meaningful research option.

Vidich and Lyman (2000) indicate the history of qualitative research is extensive, dating back to the Greeks noting, “users of qualitative research have displayed commitments to a small set of beliefs, including objectivism, the desire to contextualize experience, and a willingness to interpret theoretically what they have observed” (p. 31).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) summarize the field of qualitative research in the following:

This is the postcolonial world. It is necessary to think beyond the nation, or the local group, as the focus of inquiry. Second, this is a world where ethnographic texts circulate like other commodities in the electronic world economy. .... Global and local legal processes have erased the personal and institutional distance between the ethnographer and those he or she writes about. We do not “own” the field notes we make about those we study. We do not have undisputed warrant to study anyone or anything. Subjects now challenge how they have been written about, and more than one ethnographer has been taken to court. Third, this is a gendered project. Feminist, postcolonial, and queer theorists question the traditional logic of the heterosexual, narrative ethnographic text that reflexively positions the ethnographer’s gender-neutral (or masculine) self within a realist story. ....Fourth, qualitative research is an inquiry project, but it is also a moral, allegorical, and therapeutic project. ...Fifth, although the field of qualitative research is defined by constant breaks and ruptures, there is a shifting center to the project: the avowed humanistic commitment to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual. ....Finally, qualitative research’s seventh moment will be defined by the work ethnographers do as they implement the above assumptions (p. xv).

This brief summary of qualitative research does not reflect the work done by so many who have contributed to making a place for qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this space and place today as follows: “We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental

works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation” (p. 24).

Autoethnography is a qualitative approach that surfaced in the last thirty years. Ellis and Bochner (2000) note that “the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition and application difficult” (p. 739). Ellis and Bochner (2000) list of over 40 autoethnographic approaches and social scientist who include, personal narratives (Personal Narrative Group, 1989), narratives of self (Richardson, 1994), personal essays (Kreiger, 1991), native ethnography (Ohnuki-Tierney), and Indigenous ethnography (Gonzales & Krizek, 1994) in their research (p. 739).

Autoethnography complements the Stó:lō concept of storytelling as Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.....Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, .....personal essays... (p. 739)

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), “In [autoethnographic] texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, ...” (p. 739). For example, an autoethnographic researcher would write “starting with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feeling, thoughts, and emotions....to try to understand what I have been through...I hope to understand a way of life” (p. 737).

This approach, like Stó:lō storytelling, can start with the personal life and includes key features of self-consciousness and spirituality, and this approach can be done

through personal essays. Understanding a way of life and making meaning from the stories are important aspects that support the notion of healing that is needed for many First Nation families that have experienced the residential school era. Education for many First Nation families has not been a positive experience and this recent history needs to be understood by both First Nations and non First Nations.

The autoethnographic approach supports both the research and analysis in this dissertation by providing a space to share the family stories in a subjective manner supported by a framework that allows for an objective interpretation. Parts of the family stories were difficult to write, as some of the educational experiences were demeaning exposing the vulnerable self. This approach was very difficult to do emotionally and at times tears were shed for my family and all those who struggled with the imposed education system. It was also important to weave the Indigenous and Western research approaches for this dissertation to support making space and demonstrate ways the two worlds can work together to overcome the colonial legacy in Canada. Indigenous research is about bridging two worlds. Table 3 depicts the relationship of autoethnography and Stó:lō storytelling outlining the data for this dissertation.

**Table 3. Comparison of autoethnography and storytelling**

<b>Western Methodology</b>	<b>Aboriginal Methodology</b>
Autoethnography (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)	Stó:lō Storytelling (Archibald, 2008, Wilson, 2008)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feelings thought, and language”.( p. 739)</li> <li>• Includes personal stories going from wide angle lens social and cultural experiences.</li> <li>• Written in first person and exposing vulnerable self.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share what I have learned – the personal stories are a testimony to what I have learned</li> <li>• Acknowledging spirituality as a natural part of everything</li> <li>• Mind, body and spirit: Understanding one needs all three to be a complete person</li> <li>• The personal stories shared makes meaning of the family’s life lived (“worthy” to share)- that include the notion of “relationships”</li> <li>• Stó:lō Storytelling – Sqwelqwel is told in the first person sharing personal factual stories</li> </ul>

Table 3 outlines what autoethnography and the Stó:lō storytelling approach have in common, including the notion of spirituality and how institutional stories are affected by history. Spirituality is a natural part of Stó:lō traditions and is not always included or honoured by the education system. Bochner and Ellis (2000) highlight a variety of forms of autoethnographic texts: “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (p. 739). The Stó:lō storytelling, Sqwelqwel, approach to be used in this dissertation can also be described as an autoethnographic personal narrative approach. The table also reveals how autoethnography includes writing in the first person, revealing a vulnerable self, just as a Stó:lō storyteller is expected to share personal stories that can also reveal a vulnerable self. Showing the similarities and how autoethnography complements Stó:lō storytelling strengthens the characterization of this dissertation as Indigenous research methods, as described by Wilson (2008):

Many things in our modern world try to force us to be separated, isolated individuals. We separate the secular from the spiritual, research and academia from everyday life. It is my dream that we may turn away from this isolation to rebuild the connections and relationships that are us, our world, our existence. We need to recognize the inherent spirituality, as well as the everyday applicability, in our research. Indigenous research needs to reconnect these relationships. (p. 137)

As the storyteller in this dissertation, I have sought to include Stó:lō spirituality to support the Stó:lō storytelling approach. Prayers and traditional offerings were made in a ceremony giving thanks for the opportunity to share what has been learned. Traditional Stó:lō spirituality is not separate from one's daily life, rather it is like Wilson's (2008) described relationships(s), a part of everything one does. Giving thanks and humbling one's self in any situation can be considered the highest form of respect and acknowledgement of one's place.

Stó:lō storytelling, Archibald's (2008) Stó:lō Storywork, Wilson's (2008) Indigenous Research Methods, and Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) autoethnography provide the theoretical framework that supports this dissertation. The following diagram brings them together to depict the conceptual approach used to document and analyze the data.



**Figure 3. Research Framework**

Figure 3 highlights the integrated research framework using the notion of the circle that supports the interconnected Indigenous ways of knowing. Wilson (2008) explains,



An Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves.... These relationships are with the cosmos around us, as well as with the concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationships. (p. 74)

The notion of relationship forms the foundation for this dissertation across the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, ethics, data collection, and analysis. The theoretical framework addresses the relationship between the federal and provincial governments' imposed educational policies and the lived experiences of a family over three generations. The Conceptual Framework honours Stó:lō traditions and Indigenous research methods, as the education stories and education policies will be written using a Stó:lō storytelling approach. Wilson (2008) addresses ethics, data collection, and analysis in the following:

An Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability. Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy; value judgements lose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship – that is being accountable to your relations. The researcher is therefore a part of his or research and inseparable from the subject of that research. (p. 77)

The data shared in this dissertation is written using Stó:lō sqwélqwel storytelling sharing a my own memories of my mother's experiences in residential school, my own education experiences, and my children's education experiences. There are no interviews done, nor will any names be used in the stories. The applicable historical context and a description of the relevant federal and provincial governments' education policies will be introduced for each era and each story in the following sections.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

#### **3.3.1. Indigenous method**

To analyze the data, Wilson's (2008) notion of relational accountability will be used to frame the governments' policies with outcomes in each generation. Wilson (2008) also describes the notion that the data and analysis blend together as one. He describes, "As I was listening, I was learning, and as I was learning I was sharing" (Wilson, 2008, p. 131). The government's education policies across the three generations will be examined to reveal the outcomes of the policies and determine to whom the government was accountable. The education experiences will be analyzed to reveal themes and outcomes of the lived reality in each era, as well as across the three generations. Relational accountability in ethics means the researcher is accountable to self, to the family, to the community, and to the nation. In First Nation tradition, it is expected that we share personal experiences as a way to create meaning and explore options to determine solutions. This dissertation is written to support the family, the community, and the nation and to explore what options can be explored by examining the personal stories in relation to government education policies. Sharing our recent interactions with education through the lives of one family will help create a better understanding about the reality and challenges First Nations have experienced as a result of the federal and provincial educational policies.

The analysis will blend Indigenous and Western methods to create a more credible and respectful examination of the lived educational experiences of the family. The notion of the circle will be used to depict the analytic approach.

### **3.3.2. Western analysis**

The discussion by Ellis and Bochner (2008) demonstrated autoethnography first hand and the challenges faced by those who use autoethnography. These authors describe how difficult it is at times to make the transition from traditional academic writing to writing in the first person. The discussion helped to put the challenges in perspective for this dissertation. I realize that I will need to explain and create a place for my academic research that includes an ethnographic and an Aboriginal approach. The Aboriginal approach, like ethnography, is a recent approach in academia that is being increasingly embraced and appreciated. To fairly explore the questions in this dissertation requires an autoethnographic and an Aboriginal approach—for my question, context, and culture, this blending of methods is the right approach for this dissertation.

Richardson (1994, cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000) shares how “The authors privilege stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations. They ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually” (p. 745). The personal education stories written in this dissertation will ask the readers to feel the truth and to engage in the reality presented in each of the situations—linking the personal stories with the government education policies to see what the outcomes were for each era.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) address the concept of validity: “I start from the position that language is not transparent and there’s no single standard of truth. To me validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude: it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (p. 750). They are concerned with whether the writing helps “readers communicate with others different from

themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). These concepts support this dissertation and it is hoped that readers will engage deeply in the content and my story, and in doing so use my story to make a difference and improve lives.

Figure 4 (page 73) illustrates the shift from Western analysis methods to Indigenous methodologies, in that it frames the concepts in this dissertation in a circle, which has no beginning and no end, showing that everything is interconnected.



**Figure 4. Indigenous and autoethnographic analysis**

At the centre of the figure are the primary research questions examined in this study. Encircling those research questions are the frameworks that will be used to address the questions. This figure demonstrates that the relationship between these many elements is not linear, and that the research questions cannot be addressed without all of the

approaches, policies, and stories being considered. Many First Nation people believe that what you say and do today impacts seven generations from now. The number seven is a special number for Aboriginal people, emphasized through the seven sacred laws, and knowing seven generations of your family on both sides of your family. Thus, the words and deeds of the government will have impact on seven generations. The intergenerational stories in this dissertation demonstrate part of that effect. According to First Nation traditions, the government education policies' will continue to impact First Nations until they are fully acknowledged and addressed.

Wilson's (2008) Indigenous axiology and methodology includes the following explanation:

What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship – that is, being accountable to your relations. The researcher is therefore a part of his or her research and inseparable from the subject of the research... The knowledge that the researcher interprets must be respectful of and help to build relationships that have been established through the process of finding out information. (p. 77)

Wilson's indigenous approach supports the approach in this dissertation as the personal stories shared are written with respect of each family member in order to process information, make meaning from the stories, and make connections to the government education policies. I have a direct connection as the storyteller, a commitment to sharing the stories in deep and rich detail, and triangulating the stories with other writings and historical documents. Blending Indigenous and Western autoethnographic analysis methods strengthens the approach and supports addressing the questions in this dissertation.

## **4. My family's education stories**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three main eras that include my mother's era, my era, and my children's era, spanning over several decades from the 1930s to 1990s. To set the context for each era, an overview of Aboriginal education and the federal and provincial government educational policies will be described. A general discussion of the policy implementation and the outcomes for each era will be revealed. To illustrate the lived experiences that played out within those policies, I will then share the stories of my mother, myself, and my children. To start, an overview of Stó:lō education prior to colonization will be depicted, including a summary of the federal government's jurisdiction over Indians and the creation of the Indian Act that has governed First Nations since mid 1860s.

### **4.2. Stó:lō education**

The Stó:lō maintained an education system prior to European settlement with storytelling as a key component. Stó:lō, like many First Nations, have maintained an oral tradition. This means the knowledge and history have been passed down to each generation through stories and traditional ceremonies to document important occasions. The knowledge shared here is a lifetime of listening and learning from both mentors and elders. Stó:lō people are a matriarchal society. This meant that the head of the family was a woman and she carried the knowledge and history of her people. The oldest

daughter of the oldest daughter was trained from birth to assume this role. The oldest son was trained from birth to be the spokesperson for the family. The matriarch was also protected since she carried the knowledge and ceremonies that belonged to her family. The men were the hunters, fishers, and protectors of the people; therefore, the knowledge and ceremonies were not kept by them, simply because they could be harmed or killed while hunting, fishing, or protecting the family and the history and knowledge would be lost. My grandmother shared that some longhouses had a smaller door that a visitor had to go through and the men would go in first so that if anything went wrong the woman would be safe from harm. This is still practised today: as people enter a longhouse for a ceremony, the women will follow the men into longhouse.

First Nations maintained an education system that complemented their way of life, one that included living off the land by gathering resources. The main care-givers of the children after they were born were the grandparents. This allowed the parents to do the necessary work each day for the extended family. The grandparents were said to have the patience, the time, and the understanding to care for the children. My grandmother shared with me how the families understood that the first three years of a child's life were the most important; how a child is treated in the first three years forms his or her character.

The grandparents shared *sxwōxwiyám* (creation stories) and the *sqwélqwel* (true stories) with the children. The notion of listening was an important lesson for children to learn. My grandmother would ask me, "How are you going to think about what you seen or heard today if this [pointing to her mouth] is going all the time?" The grandparents would share stories with the young children until they were old enough to learn from their aunts or uncles. The parents were not responsible for teaching their own children. If a parent tells a child to do something, many times he or she is reluctant. However, if an



aunt or uncle makes the same request the child is more willing. As well, many parents seem to have less patience with their own child. First Nations understood these relationships in a family and used this understanding to support their communities. The aunties and uncles became the main mentors and the children were groomed to be fishermen, hunters, weavers, or canoe builders.

Youngblood Henderson (1995) further describes, “Traditionally our elders and parents taught the children our way of managing and prospering in harmony with the environment. Our communities were our classrooms, our families and our sacred order provided the methodology” (p. 247). Archibald (1995) further describes, “First Nation people traditionally adopted a holistic approach to education. Principles of spiritual, physical, and emotional growth, as well as economic and physical survival skills, were developed in each individual to ensure eventual family and village survival” (p. 289).

The stories in this dissertation are an example of a family surviving an education system that was not part of their reality prior to contact. We survived government education policies that forcibly removed children from families and then punished them for speaking their language, stripping them of their identities. This is far removed from the traditional Stó:lō education provided prior to European settlement.

Education for First Nations doesn't start at a certain age and end at a certain age, rather, it is a life-long process that begins at birth and continues throughout one's life. Sharing what was learned is just as important as learning it. My grandmother shared with me that what one knows has no value unless what has been learned is shared. There are protocols in Stó:lō traditions that support the notion of sharing what was learned. For example, if one has learned to weave a basket or carve a canoe, then the individual is expected to give away the first object he or she makes. The notion(s) of not

becoming attached to material items and being able to give them away are important principles that are taught in this gesture. To make a basket or carve a canoe might not sound like very much to someone who has not done this before. However, these tasks involved gathering the raw materials needed at a certain time of year. Knowing where to gather the materials and knowing how to collect the materials are essential skills. Then preparing the materials and knowing how to weave or carve is another skill that is learned by years of watching and helping. To make a basket or carve a canoe can take up to a year to complete. To give away something that took time and effort is not easy to do. The give-away was, and still is, an important lesson taught amongst the Stó:lō people.

I have observed that one of the educational strategies used by parents and grandparents raised in a traditional setting that is most do not tell a child what to do; rather they might ask if the child would like to help to do something. This left a child or young person to make up his/her own mind. Most of the time the child or young person would start helping without being asked. The same was done with the stories being told. The storyteller did not tell what was important about the story. It was up to the listener to figure out why the story was important. The meaning will change for each individual as he or she matures. I watched in fascination as my grandmother shared the same story with younger siblings and cousins and they would have the same response and questions that I had when I was their age. This is an example of a Stó:lō child's education. An education in which a child was encouraged to listen, watch, and learn. An education free from judgement or tests other than the test an individual placed on him or herself.

The traditional Stó:lō education cannot be fully appreciated or described in this dissertation. Stó:lō people maintained an education system that supported their families and communities.

The Stó:lō people today are one of the 198 First Nation communities in British Columbia and the Halq'emeylem language spoken by the Stó:lō is one of 35 distinct First Nation languages in British Columbia. The Stó:lō share cultural attributes with the rest of Canada's Aboriginal people as described by Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill (1986),

Whatever their ecological base and specific lifestyle, Canada's Aboriginal people shared certain cultural attributes, including a belief in the unity of all aspects of life and consequent lack of distinction between the "secular" and the "sacred". The responsibilities of family life were valued highly, particularly the obligation to educate children in a holistic fashion. (p. 3)

Education for Aboriginal people reflected who they were and where they lived. It was functional and meaningful, and "An emphasis was placed on maintaining reciprocal relationships between the individual and the natural environment in order to ensure the provision of the substance required to live" (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987, p. 3).

### **4.3. The Indian Act**

In this section I present an overview of the imposed colonial governing system known as the Indian Act, a system that is still being used to govern Indian communities today. I start with a description of the Indian Act as it was first implemented to assimilate and civilize the Indians<sup>1</sup>. Sections of the Indian Act on education will reveal the federal government's jurisdiction over education for Indians with no First Nation involvement.

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<sup>1</sup> While "Indian" is the legal term used by the Government of Canada to address our people, most First Nations refuse to be called Indians today. One of our elders explained to me that the real Indians are from India. The first explorers who travelled to North America were looking for a shorter route to India for their silk and spices. They came across our people who were covered in red ochre on the east coast and called us Red Indians. Our people joke about this today and have said they appreciate the explorers were not looking for Turkey.

First Nation people are still under the jurisdiction of the federal government, governed by the Indian Act created in the late 1800s. Carlson (1996) explains the beginning of British jurisdiction in the following:

By the late 1700s the British Government claimed undisputed sovereignty over most of the northern North America. At the same time, British common law still recognized that Aboriginal peoples, as the original occupiers of the territory, had special rights to the land and its resources. (p. 58)

Carlson (1996) further explains that “The British recognized that to ensure peaceful and profitable relations between Aboriginal people and the new settlers, these rights had to be protected” (p. 58). The British Government issued a “special proclamation known as the “Royal Proclamation of 1763” (Carlson, 1996, p. 58). The Royal Proclamation reads:

Reserving...under British Sovereignty, Protection and Dominion for the use of the said Indians, all lands and territories not included within...(existing Crown colonies or those lands set aside for the Hudson’s Bay Company in central Canada). (Carlson, 1996, p. 59)

The Proclamation also read:

Several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom we are connected and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us are reserved to them... as their Hunting Grounds...(Carlson, 1996, p. 59)

First Nation leaders understood this proclamation as a promise to protect their people and that in order for their land to be used by settlers, the land would need to be purchased. Lands not purchased would belong to the Indians. These purchases were formalized through treaties signed in every province in Canada (except British Columbia), and throughout the United States. There were 14 small treaties signed between First Nations and the federal government on Vancouver Island and a treaty with

the BC government signed by the northwestern British Columbia First Nation during the early 1900s.

More recent treaties were signed between the federal government and the Nisga'a in 1999 and Tsawwassen in 2006. No treaties have been reached for the rest of British Columbia. In fact, through the mid 1990s British Columbia refused to acknowledge Aboriginal rights. "Only now are the federal and provincial governments beginning to negotiate with the Aboriginal people of British Columbia..." (Carlson, 1996, p. 59). A number of key court cases, beginning with the 1973 Supreme Court of Canada's Calder decision, served as the turning point to address treaties in British Columbia (BC Treaty Commission, 2008, p. 6). As a result, the federal government recognized Aboriginal title and began the treaty process, however British Columbia refused to participate. Five other court cases, with the most recent Supreme Court case(s) in 2005, further endorsed Aboriginal title along with providing guidelines for negotiation. The most recent court cases forced British Columbia to recognize Aboriginal rights and title to the land (BC Treaty Commission, 2008, p.14).

Treaties are a complex issue and cannot be fully addressed in this dissertation. What is important for the purposes of the stories told here is the fact that the British Columbia provincial government and the federal government, along with most First Nations, are finally trying to address the long overdue treaty issues that should have been addressed when the first settlers arrived in British Columbia. Equally important is that for most of my stories, the province of British Columbia refused to acknowledge Aboriginal rights and claims for the period in which we were attending school, whether public or residential. First Nation people have been marginalized in their own country with education policies dismissing their language and culture as inferior.

As noted in the Library of Parliament, “Subsection 91 (24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 granted Parliament legislative authority over “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians” (Hurley, 2009, p. 1). The Library summarized the Indian Act from 1876-1996 and notes while there have been a number of “legislative changes,” the Indian Act continues to be maintain federal jurisdiction over “status Indians,” that continues to “govern most aspects of their lives” (Hurley, 2009, p. 1).

First Nations were not viewed favourably by the European settlers. A department inspector of schools in mid 1880s described, “the need for government intervention to liberate these savage people from the retrograde influence of a culture that could not cope with rapidly changing circumstances was pressing and obvious” (RCAP, 1996, p. 313). The British Parliament “passed several laws designed to ‘protect’ and ‘civilize’ (or assimilate) Canada’s Aboriginal population” (Carlson, 1996, p. 94). This was the beginning of the Indian Act that governs First Nations people today. Indian is the legal term used by the Government of Canada. Most First Nations refuse to be called Indians today. Many First Nations prefer to be addressed as First Nations simply because we were here first, or as Aboriginal, since this term is inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

The early federal government laws included The Civilization Act that began in early 1800s described as “central tenets of Indian policy and legislation for the next 150 years” (Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada, 2013, p.14). Carlson (1996) describes how, “It defined ‘Indians’ or Aboriginal people as wards of the government. They were not citizens, and they did not possess all the rights of Canadian citizens” (p. 97). In order to become a full citizen and be recognized as “civilized,” First Nations had to be able to “read and write, be free of debt, and of good moral character” (Carlson, 1996, p. 97). These same standards were not required for the settlers and Canadian

citizens moving in to British Columbia. Other laws that were imposed included The Gradual Enfranchisement Act, applied in British Columbia after Confederation in 1871 (Carlson, 1996, p. 98). The civilization policy removed traditional First Nation leaders and appointed leaders that followed the church, usually selected by the missionaries.

One of the most damaging amendments to the Indian Act imposed in the early 1880s was the potlatch law that forbid the First Nation people to gather for “ceremonial dance, funeral, marriage, naming ceremony, or any traditional event where gifts were given out” (Carlson, 1996, p. 99). Those that did were jailed or fined, and since many First Nations did not have money they were jailed “for a term of not more than six nor less than two months” (Carlson, 1996. p. 99). Assimilation was the key objective for the imposed laws. The First Nation ceremonies and spirituality was considered heathen and immoral.

My grandmother and my grand uncle both shared stories about this difficult time as my grandmother’s sister and my grand uncle both belonged to the winter ceremonies. My grandmother said the authorities would arrive at a gathering and ask whose gathering it was. Whoever invited the people had to pay a fine or go to jail. Most First Nations did not have money, so the individual would go to jail. She shared how some spiritual people died in the jails. She also explained how younger people would claim the gathering was theirs in order to protect the spiritual people. My grand uncle said they would hold the ceremonies in an underground pit house to hide from the authorities, and if you did not know where the pit house was you could not find it. The underground pit-house looked like a small hill and only family and or community members knew where they were. The underground pit houses were traditionally built as a refuge if a village was raided and they were also used as winter dwellings because they were warmer. The underground pit house also had natural sound barrier. The elders would have a young

man sit at the start of the main trail with a rope hidden in the grasses. The end of the rope had cans tied to it at the top of the underground house. When the young man would see the authorities coming down the trail he would pull on the rope and the cans would move and make noise. The people would stop singing or stop the ceremony and as a result, the authorities would not be able to find the gatherings held in the underground pithouses (personal communication(s)).

The potlatch law was lifted in 1951; however, the damage was done, as many people were afraid to practise their traditions and ceremonies and much of the knowledge and capacity to hold these ceremonies was lost. Many people were concerned the authorities would change the law again and felt the ceremonies were lost forever. Those who attended residential schools believed what they were told: that their traditions were the work of the devil. There were a few like my great uncle and my grandmother who kept the winter ceremony and traditions alive. My grandmother shared the ceremonies with me and would describe in great detail the regalia and sacred ceremonial gifts used.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the government combined several acts into one: the “Civilization Act,” “Gradual Enfranchisement Act,” and “Advancement Act” were merged into what became the “Indian Act” (Carlson, 1996). The main goal was assimilation, and the combination of the acts was done without any consultation with First Nation people. Further, to prevent the Indians from taking any legal action, the government amended the Indian Act that became know as the “No Lawyers Act” in 1927, and this law was not lifted until 1951. The laws were created to control the Indians with education becoming the main vehicle to control and assimilate the Indian children.



The federal government's colonial laws were unjust and demoralizing, and they crippled many First Nations people emotionally. As many children would continue to learn from their parents and grandparents, the federal government targeted children by enforcing the Indian residential school policy, forcibly removing children from their families.

### **4.3.1. Indian Act – education**

Longboat (1987) explains, “section 114 to 123 of the Indian Act deal with education. They apply only to Indians ‘normally resident on reserves’ – an indication of the tendency of federal policy to state that Canada’s obligations are only to those people who satisfy both bloodline and territorial requirements” (p. 31). Longboat further describes,

The most important sections of the present Indian Act relating to education are Sections 114 and 115. Section 114 authorizes the minister to “establish, operate and maintain schools for Indian children.” It also allows the cabinet to authorize the minister to enter into education agreements for Indian children with:

1. The government of a province
2. The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories;
3. The Commissioner of the Yukon Territory;
4. A public or separate school board; and
5. A religious or charitable organization. (p. 32)

Historically, First Nations were not a part of the governing processes that controlled their lives and lives of their children. The federal government would not allow First Nations to create school boards on the reserve, as school boards could only be formed under provincial laws. Aboriginal peoples were caught between policies however,

as they could not participate on provincial school district boards because they lived on the reserves that were governed by the federal government. We had no power Provincially, and as Longboat (1987) concludes, “Legally, control is concentrated in one person: the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. There is no right of appeal or review” (p. 33).

The Indian Act education policies have not served First Nations students. Rather, the education policies dismissed parental involvement and stripped children of their cultural traditions. Battiste (1995) states, “For a century or more, DIAND attempted to destroy the diversity of Aboriginal worldviews, culture, and languages” (p. viii). The Indian Act education policies were unjust, and an abuse of power (INAC, p.1).

This education history cannot be dismissed or ignored. Education leaders, teachers, and those who work in education must know this history in order to better serve current Aboriginal students. Canadians need to understand that First Nations are still governed by the federal government Indian Act for all aspects of their lives, including education, health, and housing. I do not believe the average Canadian knows that First Nations are governed by an Indian Act. When I was younger, I often heard people remark that First Nations people “receive special treatment.” Today, I tell them I didn’t create this special treatment; rather, it was imposed without our consent and there is nothing special about being dismissed or marginalized.

## **4.4. My mother’s school era**

### **4.4.1. Residential school policy**

The first residential school was opened in Stó:lō territory in 1863 by “Father Florimond Gendre, a Roman Catholic priest, [who] established St. Mary’s residential

school at Mission in the Fraser Valley” (Carlson, 1996, p. 101). The name St Mary’s was taken “after the biblical prostitute ‘Mary’ who had been ‘saved’ from a life of sin by Christ” (Carlson, 1996, p.101). The colonial government invited the missionaries to open a school to save the Indians “from the “whiskey pedlars” and other “unscrupulous Xwelitem who had followed the gold miners in to Stó:lō territory during the 1858 gold rush” (p. 101). The government legislated mandatory attendance in 1884 and began to enforce it in 1920. The St Mary’s school was one of the last to close in 1984. I have personally witnessed the intergenerational legacy of residential school that still exists in many First Nation communities today as families struggle with issues of poverty, suicide, high drop-out rates, and abuse issues that include drugs and alcohol, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. My mother’s story in this dissertation is an example of this legacy. The impact of residential schools can be found on The Truth and Reconciliation Canada ([www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)), website. First hand accounts from students who attended residential school highlight the depth and despair they endured and their personal struggles. Other resources like the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (1996), *Indian residential schools: The Nuu-chah-nulth experience*, also provide first hand accounts of students who have attended residential school and the struggles after leaving the school. The following is a story shared by Watts and his struggle after leaving the residential school.

And of course, that’s where my drinking began and promiscuity started. And there’s no doubt in my mind that it’s all because of what happened here in the Residential school, you know. I’ve been an alcoholic, and I choose not to drink anymore, but I’ve been an alcoholic most of my life (Nuu-chah-nulth, p. 97).

Decisions made for the education of Indian children were imposed by the colonial government of the day. There was no consultation with the Indian parents and no regard for their culture or spiritual beliefs. The removal of children to the residential school was

to keep them away from their parents and their traditions. Burns (1998) explains how “First Nations children were herded into residential schools where the themes of civilizing, Christianizing, and domesticating education was carried out in segregated facilities” (p. 54). The Indian beliefs were considered heathen and children were not allowed to speak their language when they entered schools. Those who did were punished and many children suffered emotional, sexual, and physical abuse at the hands of those who were supposed to be taking care of them. Burns (1998) describes, “the schools were instruments of the federal government in pursuit of cultural genocide” (p. 54). The recent apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper to those who attended residential school was an important step for Canada and First Nation communities to begin to address the legacy left behind from the residential school era. He notes that:

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history. For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870's, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child". Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2008, para. 1)

My mother attended residential school at the time when children were forcibly removed from their homes and communities. Her mother also attended residential school. When and where her mother attended is not known. My mother's education is reflected in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's words above. She was isolated from her family for years as punishment for speaking her language and she refused to have anything to do with our First Nation traditions or culture. What the school failed to do is

assimilate her into the dominant culture. The pain and fear my mother experienced have given me the courage and strength needed to share a small part of what she experienced with the hope that those who read this will better understand why many of our First Nation families struggle today.

#### **4.4.2. My mother's story**

My mother was born in 1933 and she had five brothers and two sisters. Her mother died giving birth to the youngest child when she was 28 years old. My grandmother died in 1941, when my mother was 8 years old. Her youngest sister was at least two years younger, which means she would be at most 6 years old. The information I share is from what has been shared with me by my mother. My mother passed away in 1975; she was 42 years old. She did not openly speak about her school experiences or her family experiences. She would make comments that her childhood experiences were not good and over time I realized they were times of hardship, loss and abuse. My mother's words sum up her reality after her mother died: "the only person that showed us any love or affection after our mother died was our grandmother" (personal communication). I remember my mother's older sister sharing the same words with me when she talked about her childhood.

When her mother died, the children were all taken to residential school. Her oldest sister was able to stay for a while with her grandmother because of her age at the time. She was later sent to residential school. Her grandmother wanted to keep all her grandchildren but the authorities would not allow them to stay with her. My mother shared how after one month at the residential school they were sent home with no explanation and when they arrived home they found out their oldest brother had died at the residential school. Nothing was said to them. There was a funeral, and after the

funeral, they were taken back to the school. When my mother did share, I am not sure if it was her voice, her body posture, or the look in her face that indicated to me not to ask questions. Perhaps it was all three. I would look at my older brother and my siblings who were very special to me and I remember being afraid that people would come and take us away and that bad things could happen.

She shared how they arrived at the residential school and they separated her from her brothers. The youngest sister was with her on the girls' side of the dormitory. My mother explained how the youngest sister was, in her words, "thin and sickly" (personal communication). My mom would worry about her and try to take care of her.

They were not allowed to speak their traditional Halq'eméylem language. She said if they were caught they would be punished. She said she was caught a few times and they would make her kneel in the main stairway holding books on outstretched arms so the other children would see her. My mother said it would make her angry and she would openly speak the language so they would punish her by strapping her. I concluded my mother was stubborn, as she would openly speak the language and get punished frequently. My mother said one day they made her pack what few items she had and sent her to another residential school by herself. She was separated from her sister and brothers. In her words, "I never spoke our language again" (personal communication).

I did not know my mother could speak the language, since she did not speak our traditional language at home. My father's mother would visit our home and stay with us from time to time. I grew up hearing the language and speaking the language with my grandmother until I went to school. One day while my grandmother was visiting us, she asked my mother a question in the language. I understood what she was asking but knew I could not respond. My mother answered her in English. My grandmother asked

the same question in Halq'eméylem and I thought that was odd. My mother responded in English once more and the way she responded made me uncomfortable as the tone indicated she did not like being asked twice. I did not understand what was going on. My grandmother, who could be stubborn, asked my mother the same question again, and much to my surprise, my mother responded in Halq'eméylem, again in a tone that clearly said she was not pleased at having to speak in the language. Unable to contain myself I looked at my mother and said out loud, "I didn't know you spoke Indian!" Her look told me to be quiet and I turned away. After that, my grandmother would talk to her in the language and she would reluctantly respond. We knew well enough not to say anything, but we did not know why. It would be years later that she shared her story about being separated from her sister. She believed the nuns would watch her to figure out how they could punish her, as she would always speak the language no matter how many times they punished her. She said after they sent her away from her sister she would never speak the language again.

My mother also shared how she and her siblings went home only to find out their grandmother had passed away. They were not told when she passed away or what happened. She did say they had no reason to go back to their own home community. She shared how her grandmother was a spiritual person who practised our Stó:lō traditions. One day she followed her grandmother into the woods and witnessed her as she performed a ceremony. She did not understand what she was doing and waited for her to finish. When her grandmother saw her, she told her to go back to the house and not to say anything to anyone. At that time it was against the law to practise any spiritual traditions. The 1884 Anti Potlatch Law made it illegal to hold ceremonies or gatherings. Anyone caught would be sent to jail or fined. The law was lifted in 1951. My great-grandmother's husband was also against the traditions and he would beat my great

grandmother if he found out she did any spiritual traditions. I heard other stories from community members that when her husband would leave, a few people would gather to take care of my great grandmother so she could do what she needed to do. Later, my mother would share that this was why she did not want anything to do with our traditions or ceremonies, and she certainly did not want her children to follow our traditions.

My mother did not openly share the sexual abuse she suffered either. What happened to her was revealed to me while she was under the influence of drugs she was given for her cancer. My mother found out she had cancer that started out as ovarian cancer. She knew something was wrong, but she would not go to the doctor until it was too late and the cancer had already spread in her body. She was told there was nothing that could be done. I would visit my mother in the hospital and she had good days and bad days. On one particular bad day she was be very, very cold and she would shiver, and I would be holding her, trying to warm her up, and the next minute, she would be too hot and kicking the blankets off. It was so difficult watching her struggle. She would then relive what happened to her and she would be begging them to stop. I could not stand her pleas as she tried to move away from whoever was hurting her. She would ask them not to use objects on her and describe what they were doing in detail. Then she would look at me and beg me to stop them. I would feel so helpless and overwhelmed. She would be crying and I would be crying. Later, we both looked at one another and silently agreed not to speak about what happened.

She suffered for three years with cancer when one day the hospital called and informed me that she suffered a massive heart attack and she was in a coma. They did not expect her to last much longer or regain consciousness. My husband and I went to the hospital and met my sister there. I was the first to arrive and as I walked into the room I thought she had passed away, as she looked so peaceful and not in any pain or



discomfort. The nurse came over and told me that if I spoke to her, she could still hear me. As my husband and sister came into the room the decision was made to bring in a medicine man from the Lummi First Nation in Washington State. We didn't know him personally but we knew of him and that he could help people who were sick. My husband drove down and he shared how he did not know where the medicine man lived, but he drove onto the reservation and stopped for directions. He pulled the car up to two young children and asked if they knew where this spiritual man lived; they responded that their grandfather lived next door. As he knocked on the door he was told to come in, and there across from the door was this elderly man holding onto his hat and coat. His wife explained that he had been waiting for someone to come and get him.

I explained to the hospital staff that we had sent for a medicine man and that we would need a private room where he could help my mom. The hospital staff provided the room and they informed us that a nurse would need to be present because my mom was under their care. The nurse that agreed to be present was the nurse who took care of my mom for the three years. The medicine man arrived and he positioned himself on one side of the bed and he had me on the opposite side. He was a man who worked with water and he sang a traditional song as he worked. I held my mother's hand and I watched her face as he worked. He would splash her with water from time to time. As he splashed her she blinked, and I thought that perhaps I blinked, so I decided I would try not to blink as I watched her closely. He splashed her and she blinked, opened one eye and slowly turned her head towards me and whispered, "tell that man to quit splashing me." The reaction in the room was elation and surprise. The nurse at the door could not believe what happened. The elder finished working and the nurse came over. My mother looked at everyone and began talking. She also wanted to sit up. The nurse called the doctor and he came in to check my mother over and could not believe that she was up

and talking. They took my mother to her room and the family followed. My husband, my aunt, and I stayed back to speak to the elder. When we were alone, the elder started to cry and he said he was sorry that he could not take all the illness from my mom because it was too far along. He said if we had seen him even three to six months before, he might have been able to help restore her health. He shared how she would be with us for three months and she would be gone. I believed in the back of my mind that perhaps another miracle might occur at the time. However, true to his word, she was gone three months later.

As a young girl I did not understand why my mother would not speak our language, nor did I not understand why she would not have anything to do with our traditions and ceremonies. I grew up with my mother's anger, and her anger would be directed at me from time to time in the form of physical abuse up until I left home or I would find refuge at my grandmother's home, my father's mother. I was the first one in four generations from both my mother and my father's family to practise our ceremonies and traditions. My mother was taught that our traditions were pagan and devil's work. After spending time with elders and mentors learning about our Stó:lō ceremonies and traditions, I went home to visit my mother. My mother stood at the door and without any emotion she asked me, "do you know what you are doing is the devil's work?" (personal communication, 1971). I could not say anything, nor could I look at her. I could see my younger brother and sister behind her and they did not know what to do. I realized she did not want me to go into our home and I was not welcomed. I left my home community that day and never returned.

The three months in the hospital gave my mother and me time to mend our relationship. When she was released from the hospital, she came home with me for a while and in that time she apologised for what she said to me then and for the physical

abuse when I was young. She explained she knew I would follow our spiritual traditions and was so afraid of what could happen to me. She also did not want my brothers and sisters to follow me.

My mother and her sisters all married and two of them moved away from their reserve, vowing not to return. The older sister married and stayed on their home reserve until her husband died, and then she moved away vowing not to return. Her daughter married in the United States and she lived the rest of her life there. The one brother committed suicide. The second brother died a violent death as well. The second oldest and the youngest brothers moved away and they both will not move back to their home community.

## **4.5. My school era**

### **4.5.1. Indian day schools, residential schools and public schools**

In the 1950s there were more options for Indian children as there was a transition from residential schools to public schools or Indian Day Schools. Regardless of the options, First Nation parents were still not part of the decisions made regarding their children's education. Parents of students who attend provincial schools have Parent Teacher Associations and/or are involved directly with the schools their children attend. This option did not exist for First Nation parents when I was in school. According to Longboat (1987),

Bands that have sought to control their own education under this legislation have explored setting up their own school boards but have been told by the Department of Indian Affairs that the act intends only school boards established under provincial laws. They have been told by provincial authorities that the province cannot establish school boards for Indian bands, since they are purely a federal matter. (p. 32)

St. Mary's Residential School continued to operate and was the last school to close in the Fraser Valley in 1984. Burns (1998) describes, "Education moved from federal government policy of segregation and assimilation to a theme of normative integration of First Nation students into publicly funded schools" (p. 55). He further described how the

1950s marked the beginning of the Master Tuition Agreement approach to schooling, which was negotiated bilaterally between the Department of Indian Affairs and the local provincial school boards on behalf of First Nations. Although the federal government moved away from a policy of segregation toward a policy of integration of Aboriginal children in the regular provincial school in the 1950s, the overall approach to education was also notably paternalistic, coercive, racist, discriminatory, and assimilative. It resulted in tuition agreement schooling that was, and continues to be, paternalistic, coercive, racist, discriminatory, and assimilative. (Burns, 1998, p. 55)

Parents were no longer forced to send their children to residential school during this time, although students who attended the residential school had a choice to stay there or move to their home community. Parents were encouraged to continue sending their children to residential school. The children in my home community either went to the Residential School, the Indian Day School on the reserve, or to a local public school. There was an Indian Day School on my home reserve with Grades 1 to 7. The school, like St Mary's Residential School, was operated by the Catholic Church with nuns as the teachers. As the residential schools were being phased out in the 50s the Church no longer operated the Community Day School. The federal government controlled the operation of the school. Burns (1998) indicates "The Indian Act continues to grant the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs and Northern Development jurisdiction over the education of Indian children" (p. 55). The federal government met with school boards and negotiated on behalf of First Nations with little to no involvement of First Nations parents.

### **4.5.2. My early school years**

I attended the Indian Day School on my reserve and the first two or three years the Church was still operating the school. I can remember being afraid to go to school for the first time as my older brother and cousins would talk about how mean the nuns were. They would talk about some students getting strapped or having their ears pulled for not printing neatly or for talking in our Indian language. My brother told me not to say any Indian words. I do not remember getting reprimanded, but I know I was so scared. I can also remember going to church as part of the school day and being glad to be away from the school. In time I could say the whole mass in Latin, not really knowing what I was saying until I learned to read.

I did not attend residential school. This was because my mother would not allow the authorities, who arrived at our home after my dad's funeral, to take us. I remember my mother standing (or, to me, towering) at the doorway as if to shield anyone from looking into our home. I heard the voices and I moved to hear what was being said. There was the local priest and the chief speaking to my mother. The priest said, "it would be much easier for you if your children were in the residential school. You have five children with three under the age of ten. How will you support them?" I remember thinking that perhaps it would be fun to go to a boarding school, having no understanding of the history of the schools. My mother replied, "I want you to leave and if you come back I still have my husband's gun and I will use it if you try to take my children." I knew the anger in mother's voice and I moved away from the doorway.

Later my younger sister was sent to residential school and I was selected to travel with her. We were both young and afraid to question anyone. We were sent to Kamloops by train and I remember my sister looking at me as they took her to a dormitory as if to

say, please don't leave me. I can remember not knowing what to do and feeling helpless. I left the next morning and I cannot remember how long she stayed there, but she did not come home until years later.

I found school to be easy and I believe it was because I had ear problems and could not necessarily play outside or swim like all the other children on the reserve. I would read anything and everything from my mother's magazines to any book I could find at school. Books were not common in most of our homes simply because we came from an oral society. At one point I was hospitalized for three months at a holding hospital for Indians. I would attend a classroom whenever I could, and I would be able to read anything I wanted to. The instructor would get me books to read. When it came time for my operation, I was sent to a Vancouver hospital. There was a wall of Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys novels that I started to read. The doctor would come in every day and see me in the same place reading a different book. It was difficult for me to stop reading, and I was always disappointed when the light would be turned off at 8pm and I would have to go to sleep. I remember the doctor coming in and finding out I had to stop reading at 8pm; he ordered the nurses to allow me to stay up as late as I would like if I wanted to read. I was a straight "A" student in grade school and the Grade 1 to Grade 7 school I attended was on my home reserve.

Attending school on my home reserve had many challenging experiences even for a good student. Some of the principals and teachers were verbally, physically, and sexually abusive to students. The principal actually lived right at the school. There seemed to be a new principal and teachers each year. There were three classrooms. The one class held Grades 1 through 4 and the second class had Grades 5 through 7. At times there would be a third classroom that took care of Grades 3 and 4. After Grade 7, students had to travel off reserve for high school.

I was in Grade 5 and my youngest sister was in Grade 2. I took care of my youngest sister and my brother would take care of the sister next to me. The youngest brother was too young to attend school. Each morning we would walk or run to school from our house. In the Fall, Spring, and early Summer, the teachers and students would watch the road to see if there were any bears around. If there were no sightings then we would be allowed to run home for lunch.

My Grade 5 school year was not a good experience. The principal was a woman and she spoke loudly, like we were deaf. She would yell standing behind the class. The students closest to her would always cringe, waiting for her to hit them. She would also slam her books down and swear in her language. I can still remember exactly what she said and we would repeat what she said. She used the words "Jesus Christ" quite a bit. She stomped around the room and it seemed she would randomly stop, say something, and if she did not like your response, she would smack the student. My first encounter with her happened as she was standing to my right just behind me and she had said something to me. I did not hear her because I had ear problems and was a bit deaf on the right side. She slapped me very hard across the head directly on my ear. I was knocked to the floor and all I remember is a searing pain and being doubled up on the floor holding my head. She was trying to move my desk so she could get at me – to do what I do not know. When I looked up, dazed and scared, I saw her turn around and yell at a Grade 7 boy. He yelled something else to her and she charged over to him like an angry bear and started smacking him around. The boy actually put up his fists to her and I thought he was so brave. I was so grateful to him. He was one of the boys that my brother would take home and he would always have meals at our home. My brother was always taking care of others that needed help. This sure helped me out that day. As a result my ear problem did get worse and I was hospitalized for three months and later

had an operation. I told my mother what happened at school. She asked me if I was behaving or if I had done something wrong. At that time we did not know I had lost some of my hearing. I could tell my mother was unsure of what to do. My mother told me the next time the teacher has anything to say, she needs to say it to her.

The second incident happened on a snowy morning. I started out to school with my younger sister. We trudged through the snow and it seemed colder with each step. I walked to the back door of the school and there were other students waiting for the school door to open. Usually on cold mornings the previous principals would let students go into the school and wait for class to start. This principal was upset that there were students a bit early for school. As we were waiting outside, I opened up my coat and did my best to cover my sister to try to keep her warm.

The door flew open and it banged hard against the wall and this frightened the students standing at the bottom of the stairs. I thought the principal was going to make everyone go inside for warmth. Instead she yelled at everyone in her language. I pulled my sister closer to me as she glared at both of us and said something in her language that I could not understand. I looked at her and told her “that if she had anything to say that she should speak to our mother.” It was my hope that if I mentioned my mother’s name she would stop being so cruel. Instead she marched down the steps, grabbed my sister, and yanked her away from me and dragged her up the steps. I was so scared, I did not know what to do. I was scared for my sister, wondering what the principal was going to do to her. The door flew open again and she grabbed my arm and started dragging me up the stairs. I really wanted to know what she had done with my sister, and as she dragged me into the classroom, I saw my sister kneeling right up against a heat vent. She looked uncomfortable and scared. The heat vent was just as big as her



body and the hot air was blowing against her. The teacher flung me into a desk, muttered some words in her language and stomped out of the room.

When I looked up there were three older Grade 7 girls in the class and one of them was my older cousin. They all looked embarrassed and uncomfortable. One of our traditions is that an older family member is expected to help you and take care of you. I knew my older cousin did not know what to do. If she tried to help me, both of us would suffer the consequences. I looked around and without a second thought knew I had to get out of the school. I walked over to the window and jumped out. It was a two-storey building and I was grateful for the snow as it softened my landing. I ran all the way home.

My mother was surprised to see me arrive home and out of breath. I told her what had happened. I was afraid of my mother because her anger would often be directed at me, or my youngest sister if something went wrong, and it did not help that both of us were in trouble with the principal. She told me to stay at home and she put her coat on and started walking to the school. I did not know what to think. It seemed like an eternity before she came back. She looked at me and told me to go back to school and to behave. There was no explanation of what had taken place and I was unsure of what to expect. As soon as I walked in the door, the principal took me and walked me to the back to her teacherage. Then to my surprise, she grabbed me and started crying. I did not know what to do or think. She gave me a cookie and told me I was one of her best students. I was grateful we did not get yelled at or slapped any more.

There were other incidents where I was strapped or made to write lines, but they seemed minor compared to my Grade 5 year. We did have some good principals and

teachers at our school. One principal who honoured our singing and dancing traditions brought a few of us to dance at a canoe festival at the end of the school year.

I was a good student and I loved to learn. My mother would always tell other parents and elders that I had straight “A”s. Elders would say kind words to me and tell me how much my parents meant to them as my mom took care of many of them by bringing them meals, baking, and making them preserves. I remember delivering meals to elders close by and elders stopping by for my mother’s fresh-baked goods. She would also make rugs out of old clothes and patch quilt blankets for the elders or families who needed them. My dad helped elders with their mail by reading and writing letters for them. He had great penmanship that my grandmother attributed to the four years in the tuberculosis hospital where he spent time reading and writing, and where he learned to make beautiful leather purses and wallets with our Indian designs on them.

When I became an elementary school teacher, my thoughts went to my own experience and I wondered how a teacher could treat children the way we were treated. I also wanted to address the abuse that took place at our band school. I certainly wonder what happened to my Grade 5 teacher. Where is she? Where did she go? Did she teach at another First Nation school?

My home community brought students who attended the Indian community school together to address the abuse that took place during that era. I went home to join others who gave testimony to the abuse that took place at Indian day school.

The Prime Minister of Canada apologised in 2008 to residential school survivors and their families. When I heard this I think about how many times I wanted to write a letter. I did not know who to address the letter to. I remember writing Dear Canada and then changing it to Dear Prime Minister. I would always stop simply because I did not

expect to get an answer or if I did it would be the words I heard over the years. What do you want? That happened years ago. Not everyone was hurt at the schools.

### **4.5.3. My high school years**

I looked forward to attending the high school off the reserve, as I knew they had a library of books. I was proud of my good grades. What I was not prepared for was the attitude of many students and some teachers towards Indians. I did not realize that many white people did not like Indians, and I certainly did not know the stereotypes that existed about our people – that we were lazy, poor, drunks, and a burden to society. I was angry when I came home as some students made fun of me because I did not have nice new dresses and I did not have nice shoes or nylons like the rest of the girls. I did not get my hair cut at a salon. My grandfather moved home after my dad died so he could help my mom out from time to time. I would frequently visit him after school. This particular day I was still angry and I asked him, “Why didn’t our people fight the white people when they first came? Why did our people allow them to put us on reserves and take away our hunting and fishing grounds? Why do white people think they can treat us the way they do?” When I looked at my grandfather I immediately felt ashamed for saying what I did as his eyes filled with tears and he shared this story,

You do not know what happened to our people. I was a little boy and my grandmother would travel on a canoe from the head of the lake to Chilliwack every year at the beginning of the summer to get me. I would go and help her collect berries, plants and cedar roots for the winter. One year as we returned to Chilliwack we could see smoke coming from our village and as we came around the last bend of the river people on the shore were telling us to go away and do not land as people were dying. (Dick Felix, Personal Communication, 1967)

The smoke and the stench they smelled were the burning bodies of the dead. Those that survived were piling the bodies in underground pit houses that were used in the winter months and they burned the bodies to try to stop the disease from spreading. This was one of the last

smallpox outbreaks that killed whole villages in Stó:lō territory. My grandfather explained this is why our family ended up living in Chehalis instead of Chilliwack, as he was raised with his grandmother and she remarried into the Chehalis reserve.

I tried to look past how I was being treated and concentrate on my studies, but it was difficult. It was devastating when I received my first report card and I had a D and C- in most of my classes. I thought I could not do this. To make matters worse, we had our annual school photographs done, and when I was called down to take my photo, I pulled my hair forward trying to cover my face and I pulled my bangs down as much as I could. At that time I did not know what I was doing. When my photographs came back, I was more embarrassed as only a small portion of my face could be seen and my hair, to me, seemed to be ugly. I certainly didn't look like the other girls with their salon-styled hair, make-up, lipstick, and nice clothes. I would hear girls snicker and make fun of me when I walked by them. Some would look at me and feel sorry for me and for some reason this made me feel worse. I hid the photographs from my mom and I knew she spent money we did not have for the photographs. I did not want her to be embarrassed at my photographs.

I was fortunate, since my mother decided to live with her sister who moved to Bellingham, Washington. She took four of us, and my older brother stayed back, not wanting to leave our home reserve. This worked out well for me because I was sent to an all Grade 8 school. At first I was reluctant to go, thinking I was going to be treated the same as at the other high school. My first day in class, I wanted to be invisible and not be noticed by anyone. The teacher was very pleasant and gave me a desk right in the middle of the class. She started class by asking who would like to say the allegiance. I had no idea what she was talking about. She looked at me and announced that there was a new student starting today and perhaps she would like to say the allegiance. I felt

my face go hot and everyone was looking at me. The students were all smiling at me and they seemed proud that I was there. The teacher asked where I was from and I told her Canada. She apologised and told the class that I would not know what the allegiance was. Then the boy in the next row came and stood right next to me and said with great enthusiasm, "I can say the allegiance for her!" I was even more embarrassed. The teacher smiled and nodded at him and he said allegiance with all the students holding their hand over their hearts.

The lunch break came and I walked down the hall against the wall to the cafeteria. I did not have any money to buy anything, but I thought I would go and see what was there. One of the girls from class came rushing over and was so pleasant asking me where I went to school before and if I was a real Indian. She then remarked with much enthusiasm that she thought the young man who said the allegiance for me actually liked me. I was really taken aback by this and for the first time I looked at her and I could not believe the difference between my other high school and this school.

The rest of the school year was no different. In my PE class, students wanted me on their team because I was an Indian. We had an archery class and I remember them saying out loud that I would be very good at this because I was an Indian. I had never seen a bow and arrow before other than the one my brother made. I certainly hadn't used one. I did make the first shot and I hit the bull's eye. Everyone cheered and I was pleasantly surprised. The school had a track and field team, and I was chosen to be on the team. My classmates were my greatest supporters and again made remarks that I would be a good runner because I was an Indian. Our team did win the races. At the end of the school year, I was at the top of my class and I won many awards, both academic and athletic. I also won a citizenship award. My mother and aunt were so proud sitting in the audience. The principal spoke to my mom and asked if I would take a test that might

give me a chance to attend a university program being sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation for minority students. I took the test and scored above average. I attended the summer program and I lived at Western Washington University for the summer, attending courses and meeting other students. It was the best summer, and the instructors and supervisors were so encouraging.

Unfortunately, we moved back to my home reserve in Canada. I thought it wouldn't matter. I would go back to the school with renewed confidence that I could do the schoolwork. I made up my mind that no one would make me feel ashamed. I tried to keep my mind on my work and ignore the looks and stares. They would only make me angry. To make matters worse, my younger cousin started in Grade 8 and she reminded me of myself. She knew girls were making fun of her. My cousin was not afraid to challenge the ones making her feel uncomfortable and she would outright ask them, "What are you looking at?" In between classes in the crowded hall, my cousin was walking ahead of me, and I saw two girls behind her. A boy stuck out his foot and the one girl pushed my cousin and sent her and her books flying. Everyone started to laugh at her, but I ran up behind the girl and pushed her against the wall. My cousin was trying not to cry and I told her to go to her class. I held onto the girl, who had a grin on her face, and I told her to meet me in the girl's washroom and I pushed her again. I went to the washroom and I was shaking. I did not know what to do if they came to the washroom. I was glad when the bell sounded and the girl had not shown up. They did leave my cousin alone after that, but I became a target for their taunts. My report card again was disappointing and once again, to my relief, my mom moved us to the United States to live with her sister. This time I was in a high school and there again I was the only Indian. I did not get the same attention, but I did do well in all my classes. My math

teacher would ask me to generate the class questions, since I was so far ahead in all my classes. Again I ended the year with straight "A"s.

We did move back to our reserve and again I believed I would be able to do well at the high school. After all, I had two years with good grades. I did have fairly good clothes and I would not let anyone make me feel ashamed. This was not the case, however, and I did not even last a month; I was very angry and I believed that all white people were the same. I tried to live with my aunt in the States by myself and go to high school there, but it was too difficult to be away from my family, so those experiences ended my education for a number of years.

I moved to Chilliwack to look for work and could not get a job. I would go into a place that had a sign for help and I would be told they had filled the position. I realized after a while that no one was going to hire me. I made up my mind to try one more time, and I went to popular fast food drive-in that used carhops to serve customers. I asked to speak to the manager. The manager came out, to my surprise, and I told him I was looking for job. He took me aside and very kindly said, "I would hire you in a minute. I can tell by looking at you that you are a good worker, but if I did hire you and put you out there," he pointed to where the car hop service was, "you would be harassed and I would lose business. Even if I put you in the back where no one could see you, I would still lose business." I looked at him and thanked him for his kindness because he had been the first person to tell me the truth. Even though I did not get the job, I felt like there was at least one honest and kind person. I went back to picking berries in Washington State that summer.

I encountered the same problem when I tried to rent a place to live in Chilliwack. No one would rent to me. I would phone ahead be told the place was available but when

I would arrive the place was already taken. At a couple of places, the people would not even answer the door. I finally was able to rent an old house that needed many repairs. A distant relative who worked in Vancouver owned the house. I also secured a job working for local First Nations as a janitor. I was fortunate to meet my husband and after we were married, we both decided to pursue our education.

#### **4.5.4. College, university, and graduate work**

Each term at the local college I would take a course working towards my Grade 12. One of the advisors encouraged me to write my GED and then apply to a program. She said, “you have what it takes to do well.” I knew I wanted to learn and it meant so much to me to hear what she said, and more meaningful was that she spoke with sincerity and kindness. I remember sharing her words with other students that needed encouragement, and it was very important to me that it was said in the same kind way. I wrote my GED and passed, and I also received my first academic achievement award for one of the courses I completed. I would receive academic achievement awards and scholarship awards each academic year in my undergraduate program. I enjoyed my college courses, since there were other Indians in the class and I was not the only mature student. The instructor asked what we wanted to pursue in higher education. Up to that point, I had only wanted to get my Grade 12, so I did not know how to respond. Some students were saying social work and others education, and I wanted to say “I will do them all.” I did say social work when it came to my turn.

The instructor then explained that there was a Native Indian Teacher Education Program that could possibly be delivered at the college. Someone from the native community would have to write a letter and get other letters to support the request. Everyone was talking about it, but no one would offer to do the letter. I looked around the



class and told them I would write the letter. The instructor smiled and said she would help me write the letter. We wrote the letter, added the support letters, and sent the package off to the University of British Columbia. Later that year, before our class was over, the instructor asked to speak to me because there had been a response from the UBC Native Indian Teacher Education Program. She asked if I was going to apply to the program. I told her no, as I only wrote the letter because no one else would. She encouraged me to apply, since I could always withdraw if it did not work out for me. She shared the news with the class and asked who would be interested in applying. The next fall term I was a student in UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program. I loved the program as it was two years in my home community and then the last two years we went to campus.

I did very well academically for the most part. The challenge for me to this day is writing. I did not understand why I did well in Math, Science, and even reading, but I struggled with writing. I did not understand why I could not write. The first two years were so painful. I was lucky to have an excellent first-year English teacher, who was a tough marker. His first words to the class were, "half of you will not be here by the middle of the term." He did say it would be helpful to submit to him something before the next class and he will provide feedback. I did write and submit a short paper and it was the best thing I could have done. My paper had so many writing errors. He met with me and went over my paper with me, explaining my writing mistakes. He encouraged me to keep writing and told me that I would learn the mechanics for writing. I did get a "B" in his class but it was like an "A" to me. I was not the only First Nation student struggling to write; many fellow Aboriginal students were struggling with writing academic papers. This did not make me feel any better. Rather, I had a nagging shame as if it was somehow only First Nations who could not write, and what were we doing trying to

learn? Those feelings of not belonging and that we were a burden would be there like a dark cloud ready to burst.

We were fortunate to have a First Nation Coordinator who worked with a communications instructor, and they figured out that we were trying to write on topics that had no meaning or relevance to any of us. They then created writing sessions and everyone wrote about key moments or traditions that were meaningful to each of us. This was successful, as many came to understand how to frame and identify key writing elements and learned the basic rules for writing an academic paper. This did not mean the struggle for me was over, as the first two years were painful. I was fortunate to have someone who would proofread my papers.

It was not until my third year in university that I attended a lecture on First Nations learning styles, and as the presentation went on I became more excited. For the first time I felt validated. I had come to believe the words that were said about Indian students—that we would overhear through teachers' remarks or from other students. The remarks included, "you Indians are dumb and stupid," "Indian students are slow," and "they will never learn," and these were the kinder remarks. The Indian students would sometimes be put in classes with slow learners or disabled students, and the result was the Indian students would drop out of school. I know I did not want to quit school, but it was as though students were made to quit because of the way they were treated. I spoke to the presenter after class and it was the first time I felt confident and understood the topic being discussed. I told him I appreciated and understood what he shared and that I struggled with the very notions he presented. He shared the following,

You need to learn how to read and write in this academic setting and know anyone can learn to do this. If you have made it this far you obviously are surviving. You also need to keep the way you traditionally think and learn and this is very important. It is like having another

language. You will be ahead of everyone else because you can process and think in two different ways. (personal communication, 1988)

I no longer doubted my abilities, and I began to process my work and in my own way, transfer this concept to the academic expectations. The first time I did this, I wrote my paper and I had it proofread. Usually when it was proofread I would get it back with corrections that needed to be made. When my paper was returned to me I thought something was wrong and I asked if perhaps the proofreading was not done. The remark back was “it is a perfect paper and I enjoyed reading it.” I handed my paper in and I received my first A+.

It was just before my third year when we would have to move onto campus for the third and fourth year when I began to feel afraid and unsure of myself. The first two years, the classes were with fellow NITEP students who were all mature students. We had great support from instructors and an advisor who supported us. I did not know what to do. I phoned my grandmother and told her I did not think I could go to the university in Vancouver. My grandmother asked me why and I told her I was not sure if I could leave and go to Vancouver. She asked me why, and I had a difficult time admitting that I did not think I could face the discrimination and racism that I knew I would encounter. I also didn't want to uproot my children and end up quitting because I would not be treated right. I knew it would be embarrassing for me and family. My grandmother was quiet for a while and then said,

You will be okay. Don't forget who you are. You go and learn as much as you can. But you are not allowed to stay away like some people who do not come home after getting an education. Rather, you come home and use what you have learned to help your people. (personal communication)

I was still reluctant to go but my grandmother's words helped me to carry on. I did have instructors who were racist. My very first class on campus, the instructor looked

directly at me and said, “some people should not even be in this class and I hope the next class not to see you here” (personal communication). There must have been up to 100 students in his class and I kept hoping he would look somewhere else. He made sure I understood he was speaking to me. It was one of the first times I decided to sit close to the front, excited to be in my first class on campus. I believe before I would have felt like crawling under a rock, but for some reason his comments did not bring up the usual feelings of shame or doubt. I also made up my mind that not only did I belong there, but I had a right to be there. Fortunately for me, he had such a big class that he did not mark any of my papers; his teacher assistant did the marking. One day, I saw him walking from the library and I intentionally walked towards him trying to think of what I could ask him. He didn’t see me until the last minute. I asked him if I could speak to him. He responded by backing away from me and he looked afraid. I put my hand up and he flinched as if perhaps he would melt if I touched him. I thought, *you poor, poor man* and I walked away.

It was that academic year I took a multiculturalism class and I learned about overt and covert racism, discrimination, and stereotypes. Understanding the terms has helped to identify when there was a mistreatment based on race. Addressing the racism and discrimination are trying, tiring, and at times overwhelming, as it has continued to happen to this day. Many people like to dismiss that it happens or deny that racism or discrimination exist today. I experience some form of discrimination and racism on a daily basis. I have suggested to folks who do not agree with me to follow me around for one day, or perhaps I should have a hidden camera to depict the incidents as they happen. I know it is not my imagination that a server will not notice me if I am the only person in line, but if a non-Indian comes in the door they are ready to serve. When you do get service people look annoyed as if you are wasting their time.

When I was younger I could not deal with the discrimination or racist experiences very well. This was especially true after I realized what happened to our people because of the imposed residential schools, reserve system, and on-going denial of our Aboriginal title to the land. I was angry for what happened to my mother and sister, and even angrier that we could not address the mistreatment. I was angry and at times would challenge anyone who looked at me the wrong way.

My husband helped me to change my perspective. We were young and struggling financially. We needed to buy a car and we had a budget \$2500.00. We were driving to my home reserve and spotted a very nice car for \$2100.00 and we stopped to look at it. This was perfect, as it meant we would have funds left after paying for the car. We went into a garage to see if we could speak to anyone. There was a man who was working on a car at the far end of the garage. He saw us enter the garage and he just kept working. I felt uncomfortable and looked around to see if anyone else was there.

Then the man looked up again, and this time he let us know he was annoyed and threw his cloth down and spoke very loudly, "What do you want?" My husband went to respond, but the man came closer to us and did not let my husband finish what he was going to say and again spoke very loudly, "Don't bother me, you do not have that kind of money." I was angry and embarrassed for my husband. My husband said "That is fine, thank you." We left and walked to our car. I was angry and as we were driving, I looked at my husband and could not understand his calm manner. I asked him, "How can you sit there and not be upset? I am so angry and I am tired of people thinking they can speak to us like that and treat us like we are nothing." My husband very calmly said, "Well, it is difficult, but I am not the one with the problem, nor did I do anything wrong. That man has a problem, and besides, we still have our \$2500.00." That was what

Oprah Winfrey would call a “light bulb” moment for me as it helped me to see things differently. I have learned to pick and choose what to respond to.

In my last term I had two instructors for one course. The first instructor had a major paper that was worth most of the 50% for his part of the course. I did not like the feeling I was getting from the instructor, as he was dismissive towards me and he let me know indirectly that he had no time for me. I turned in the paper not feeling confident but knew my work was okay. My mark on my paper was a fail and it was full of red marks. I was devastated, as I believed I had finally mastered writing academic papers. I caught up to him in the hall and he tried to wave me off, but I told him I wanted him to tell me what was wrong with my work. He would not look at me and said what I wrote was not university level work. I didn't know what to do and I did not want to fail a course. I couldn't say anything to him and all my insecurities came back and I felt so defeated, thinking that perhaps he was right. I did not belong there and even if I make it to graduation, who is going to hire me? I couldn't even get a job at a hamburger place where no one would see me. No one will rent to us in Chilliwack or in Vancouver. All the negative things that had ever happened to me went through my mind like it had just happened again. I walked away and cried. I didn't even care if anyone saw me.

I did not know what to do as the second half of the class was going to start and we would have another instructor. I could not see myself going to class. I did go to the next class hoping I could withdraw somehow. When the instructor walked in he was wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat and shared that he just came from Alberta. He was so casual in his approach and so upbeat that somehow this made me feel better. He talked about his part of the course and the assignments. After class I waited to speak to him. He looked right at me and asked me if everything was all right. It was one of the few times I ever felt comfortable and safe to speak. I explained what happened with the

previous instructor and made my request to withdraw from class. He looked at me and apologised for what happened. He asked to read my paper and he offered to negotiate a better grade if he thought it should have a higher mark. He also said he had confidence that I would be okay in his class so long as I did the work. I did get a better mark on the first paper, and for the second half of the class, my grade was the best grade that academic year. I was reminded that there were people who were racist and there was not much I could do about them. There was only one person I could control and that was myself, and how I responded to negative behaviour. I also realized that there are just as many, if not more, good people who are not racist. I needed to stop being afraid.

As I pursued a higher education it was exciting that I could choose what to study. I made up my mind that I would learn about my own people. No matter what course I took, each year I would find a way to focus on my people. In my history class I studied the Métis, and in Canadian Art History I studied a First Nation artist, Bill Reid. I told my instructor my choice and she cautioned that I would not be able to speak to Bill Reid. I looked up Bill Reid that evening and called him and he answered the phone. I told him what I was studying and he said he would be happy to chat with me. The instructor was surprised and I felt it was a good day to be an Indian.

I selected every course that would fit my studies on Indians. One course was called Indians of North America and the assignment was to compare and contrast two different Indian groups in North America. It was suggested not to do our own area. I chose the Newfoundland Beothuks and the California Yana Indians. I thought about comparing clothing, housing, or transportation. As I began my research I was not prepared for what I learned about both groups that I had chosen. The books were in the basement of the library and they were huge and old. I also had to read the material in the library as the books could not be loaned out. I remember sitting in the library and the

sun light from the window was streaming in and seemed to be shining on me. I sat there reading about the Beothuks and I began to cry. The tears were flowing down my face and after awhile I could not see. The library was filled with students but I felt so alone. I didn't learn about what they wore or their housing. I learned about how they were hunted down. I learned that Indians did not introduce the notion of scalping but rather the authorities at that time paid bounty hunters for every scalp of an Indian they brought in. The authorities wanted the Beothuks rounded up and relocated. As some did not want to leave their traditional territories they were hunted down. The most difficult part was reading about how the last Beothuks were backed against the ocean and how many of them went into the ocean and drowned rather than allowing themselves to be taken in by the authorities. The children were described as nits and louses, and the book depicted how the bounty hunters would slit the throats of the women and children, as they did not want to waste their bullets on them. It was 28 years ago that I read this book, and unfortunately I've lost the reference over time. Much information about Beothuks can still easily be found--Higgins (2008) gives a general overview of who they were and their way of life, and offers some information related to the violence that occurred between the settlers/explorers (p.1).

I thought perhaps learning about the California Yana would be easier. I was wrong. Like with the Beothuks, the army was assigned to bring in all the California Yana to relocate them and put them on reserves. The Beothuks lived on an island and the ocean was their means of escape, where the California Yana escaped to the mountains. Like the Beothuks they were hunted down with the same genocidal mentality. Again, I was sitting in almost the same place in the library and the tears were streaming down my face as I read how the army did not want to waste their bullets on the women and children, and the children were referred to as nits and louses. When I wrote the paper I



wrote about their location and other details but when I wrote about them being hunted like animals it was done through tears streaming down my face. I understood the notion that “my heart is breaking” as it hurt so much to think about what the Beothuk and Yana Indians went through. I also could better understand the fear my parents and grandparents must have gone through in their time. What was difficult to comprehend is what happened to the California Yana was at least two hundred years after what happened to the Beothuks. My mind was racing as I questioned who the savages were. Why wasn't this history being taught?

As I finished the course, I visited the Union of BC Chiefs office to borrow a video. Many of the chiefs in British Columbia came together in 1969 after the Honourable Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development presented The Statement of Government of Canada on Indian Policy, 1969 known today as the White Paper policy that would do away with Indian rights to the land, and would do away with Indian reserves. The plan was for “education for Indians being ‘absorbed into the provincial system and mainstream society’” (Battiste, 1995, p.viii). The policy reads promising for Indian people with equality being the main focus, but it was more about assimilation than equality.

Aboriginal people wanted and still want the responsibility to administer educational programs for their children with a focus on their traditional language and culture (Battiste, 1995, p. viii). As a result, the BC chiefs responded with National Indian Brotherhood's (1972) the Indian Control of Indian Education policy paper known as the Red Paper. The Red Paper challenged the government to uphold their fiduciary responsibility based on the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Eventually, the Prime Minister did revoke the White Paper policy.

The chiefs continue to work together to address land rights and other socioeconomic issues. I met the President of UBCIC and he explained he was leaving to speak to Indians on the east coast including the Beothuk people. I was surprised as I thought they were all gone. I told him about my paper and he asked to read it and perhaps share my paper with them. I felt like all the hurt and tears had not been in vain. Later, I received word that my paper was well received at the conference.

As I continued to pursue higher education I began to hear the same questions from colleagues where I worked, fellow students in my classes, administrators and some instructors. I would also see the same negative attitude towards Indians in some of my colleagues I worked with and went to school with. Their attitudes spoke louder than words, questioning my abilities or my right to be amongst them. In particular, one high school counsellor was not afraid to let me know what he thought. It was my first year working in a school district and I did not have much confidence. As I was walked down the crowded hall, he said, "Here comes Gwen Point, who is going to save the Indians." I was embarrassed and some who heard what he said looked at me. Another time, he came over to me, speaking loudly: "Explain something to me, I have an Indian student who I met with and he said he does not want anything to do with you; he does not want to talk to an Indian helper." Again, I was embarrassed and I looked at him and told him that was his choice and I walked away. I understood how the student felt, as I remember feeling the same way. I did not want to be an Indian. I was ashamed to be an Indian when I was younger. People would ask me what nationality I was and I would be reluctant to tell them. I felt defeated not being able to address this counsellor and I questioned whether I was the right person for the job. I worked at the school for three years and after awhile I figured out which student did not want anything to do with me.

After the first year I created a First Nations student club and we would have bannock sales to raise funds for a pow wow dance competition and the student would walk by and see all the students lined up for the bannock. Bannock is a popular baked or deep-fried bread. After the bake sale, the student stopped me and asked what we were raising funds for. After I finished explaining what we were doing, the student shared how “we” could make twice as much funds by getting baked goods from the local grocery chain. I welcomed the student to help and our revenue increased at every bake sale. The student was not the only one who struggled with being an Indian. I would have Aboriginal parents call and ask to speak to me and they would tell me to stay away from their children. They do not want anything to do with Indian ways. I would assure them that it was okay and students did not have to participate in any of the activities. Over time there was a very positive response from students and teachers and more and more Aboriginal activities became a natural part of the school activities. Then one day, there was the counsellor who said very loudly in the hall, “Here is Gwen Point who is going to save the Indians.” This time I looked at him and replied, “Yes, I am going to save them from you.”

To address the many questions I would receive, I realized it was important to share stories about the smallpox epidemics in the early to mid 1800s that wiped out 2/3 of the Stó:lō people. My grandparents and elders shared smallpox stories as the disease impacted our families. When I shared some of the stories with a historian a timeline was created that depicted how the smallpox stories matched the documented material written in early journals. There was more than one epidemic and smallpox was not the only disease to take a toll on Stó:lō people. Other epidemics recorded by Duff (1965) include “measles, influenza, tuberculosis” (p. 43). The population for Coast Salish went from 12,000 in 1835, to 5,525 in 1885 and the lowest point 4,120 (Duff, 1965, p. 39).

I also would explain how the imposed reserve system was originally created to protect the Indians from the settlers and how the government of the day imposed laws that would restrict our people from leaving the reserves unless they had written permission from an Indian agent. I shared personal family stories about my dad who would work in the United States so the government could not track that he left the reserve for a long period of time. I would share about the potlatch law imposed in 1880s that forbade our people from practicing our ceremonies and potlatches. Kehoe (1992) confirms that “By 1884 the missionaries had induced the Canadian Parliament to amend the 1880 Indian Act to include a statute making it a misdemeanour, punishable by imprisonment from two to six months” (p. 434). The law was lifted in 1951 but the damage was done, as most of our elders believed our ceremonies would never return (Kehoe, p. 434). After the potlatch law was lifted many families that witnessed family members jailed for practising their traditions were also reluctant to have ceremonies afraid that perhaps the government of the day would reinstate the potlatch law. To protect our spiritual people and the elders, the young people would claim the gathering was theirs and they would go to jail instead of the spiritual people and elders.

It was also important to share how the federal government amended the Indian act in 1927 “to make it illegal to raise funds to pursue land claims and thus prevented land claims activity” (BC Treaty Commission, 2008, p.4). I shared about the residential school era policy that was meant to civilize the Indians and resulted in generations of cultural genocide where physical, mental, and sexual abuse took place. The more I learned about the challenges our people faced, the more I recognized the strength in my parents, my grandparents, and my great grandparents, as regardless of what they endured, they did their best to support their families and maintain our traditions at all costs.

To summarize this era is to share a story that gave me hope as a young person in university, where I attended a forum to hear a young First Nation woman speak. The elders from her United States community sent her to find support for their families as the contemporary Indians on their reservation wanted to develop sacred lands that they believed connected all First Peoples in North America with the rest of the world. The young woman travelled with little financial support and held an eagle feather. She explained how we were all meant to be here and how each race of people has a gift that is to be shared with all people. Indian people come from the east, the colour red, and have the gift of vision. This enables them to see into the future and into the past. The people from the North, the white people, have the gift of travel and this was proven as they have travelled throughout the world. From the south come the Asian people and from the west come the black people, and their gift is one of understanding.

The young woman shared how all the races needed to come together to share their gifts in order for the world as we know it to survive. She further explained how First Nation people would take their rightful place in society and it will be the fifth generation. When the eagle lands on the moon, First Nation people will stand up, return to their traditions and take their rightful place in society. When the first astronaut landed on the moon, his first words back to earth, heard throughout the world because of television, were “the eagle has landed.” I am the fifth generation and I was the first one on both sides of my family to return to our traditions. What does this represent to First Nation people? I know for me, it meant hope that I am supposed to be doing what I was doing and that I needed to continue sharing our education stories with whomever would listen, and more importantly, know that their suffering was not in vain.

## **4.6. My children's school era**

### **4.6.1. Education policies 1979 – 1994**

In this section the federal and provincial education policies in my children's school era will be described, followed by my children's education stories. The education policies in this era include the federal government's Master Tuition Agreements negotiated with Provincial Ministry of Education for First Nation students who resided and were members of a First Nation community. The 1994 Minister of Education Aboriginal Targeted Fund initiative will also be described.

### **4.6.2. National Indian Brotherhood: 1972 Indian control of Indian education**

My two older children were born in 1973 and 1976 just after the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) "Indian Control of Indian Education" policy paper was presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The policy outlines the following:

Based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: *Parental responsibility and Local Control of Education*, Indian parents seek participation and partnership with the federal government, whose legal responsibility for Indian Education is set by the treaties and the Indian Act. (p. 3)

The following response was given:

The Minister gave official recognition to INDIAN CONTROL OF INDIAN EDUCATION, approving its proposals and committing the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to implementing them. (p. iii)

The Minister of Indian Affairs recognized the need for Indian Control of Indian Education in 1972. It was 1994 before the same Indian Affairs gave some, not all, First Nations the ability to negotiate education agreements for their children. The first school

districts in BC to enter into an agreement with a local school district was in late 1990s. Since then a generation of Aboriginal students have attended the school system and part of that time my own children were in school. Their experience illustrates both the promise and the pitfalls stemming from this change in policy.

### **4.6.3. The Master Tuition Agreement 1990s**

The federal and provincial governments were still negotiating The Master Tuition Agreement that did include some First Nation people in the process, but was still described as being paternalistic, with First Nations not having any real decision-making involvement. This trend changed, Burns (1998) describes, “Yet as of September 1994, the factual order is normatively different. The federal government (in fact DIAND) is no longer a mandated participant in First Nations/provincial school boards tuition agreement negotiations” (p. 55). In Stó:lō Territory, there are 24 First Nation communities and several school districts who all received tuition dollars directly from the federal government. In 1994, the federal government gave First Nations the opportunity to negotiate directly with school districts. Once the agreements were in place, the federal government agreed to transfer tuition funds to the First Nations where the funds would then be transferred to school districts to complete each agreement. This was a significant change, as for the first time school districts had to speak directly to the First Nation communities about the education services being delivered to First Nation children.

### **4.6.4. British Columbia Ministry of Education 1994 Aboriginal targeted fund initiative**

My youngest daughter was born in 1984 and started school in 1990. She benefited both directly and indirectly from the British Columbia Ministry of Education Aboriginal

Targeted Fund initiative in 1994 that began to deliver language, culture, and support programs to support Aboriginal students attending public schools. The provincial government Ministry of Education targeted the fund for Aboriginal students who attended the public school. Aboriginal students who self-identified were counted in each school district, and each school district had to get informed consent from the Aboriginal families for services provided to their children. The funds were targeted to three main areas that included Aboriginal language, culture, and support services. British Columbia Education Policy statement (2002) reads:

...provides enhanced funding to school age students of Aboriginal ancestry. Enhanced funding provides culturally-appropriate educational programs and services to support the success of Aboriginal students. (para. 1)

What does the tuition and targeting funding mean to each school district in terms of financial support? Has this helped to Aboriginal students? Do Aboriginal parents know and understand the policies? Why did it take 20 years for the federal government to transfer negotiations with school districts to First Nations? These are just a few questions that come to mind when looking at this policy shift. Education success is key to any family or community looking to create a future for themselves.

#### **4.6.5. My children's education stories**

My husband and I have three children, with our son born in 1973 and older daughter born in 1976, and our youngest daughter born in 1984. We are very proud of all their accomplishments. I remember my husband recently commenting that, "I believe we have made it. Our children are all at a good place where they have secured a good future."



The academic part of their education has not been difficult for our children. I believe my love for learning helped. Both my husband and I spent time with our children helping them with their homework. I shared my love for reading with my children by making sure they had books that interested them. My husband spent time with each of our children helping them with their math homework. He made sure they understood their basic math skills and I remember him telling them, "if you know your times tables, addition, and subtraction, this will help you with division." We both encouraged them to pursue what interested them and to enjoy their learning experiences.

Some negative school experiences did create challenges however. The first incident came unexpectedly in our son's first year in school. We were watching the news and he was sitting in front of the television. A news story came on about Indians. Our son said, "When I grow up I do not want to be an Indian." I did not know what to say and I immediately felt the familiar feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear. My husband asked my son what he said and he repeated that he did not want to be an Indian. My husband asked him why he did not want to be an Indian. My son said that they were dirty, lazy, and drunks. My husband told him that he was an Indian, both of us were Indians, and my son said, "No, I do not want to be an Indian!" My husband tried again trying to make him understand that "you are an Indian." My son started to cry and repeated, "I do not want to be an Indian." Then my husband asked our son, "Is your grandpa a drunk?" Our son said "no." He asked, "Is your mom dirty?" Our son replied, "no." I could see his body language change and he looked at his dad making the connection that we were not drunks, lazy, or dirty. We did not follow up or do anything about what happened.

Three years later in our daughter's first year at school, the same scene played out in front of our television as something about Indians came on. Our daughter, who is a lot

more matter of fact and not afraid to challenge anyone, remarked, "When I grow up I am not going to be an Indian." My husband and I looked at each other in disbelief that this was happening again. She then said, "Indians are dirty, have old cars in their yards, and they are drunks." My husband told her that "You will always be an Indian, your mother and I are Indians." He asked her if we had old cars in our yard or if we were dirty? She looked at both of us and with her matter-of-fact attitude agreed that we were not. Later my husband and I discussed where our children heard the stereotypes about Indians. We wondered why the topic came up after they both started school.

It was 13 years later that our youngest daughter started school. Her older brother and sister were already in middle and high school. We would travel to local pow wows each year in BC. We planned to attend the Kamloopa pow wow and we needed to be on the road by 3 pm to make it to the official grand entry opening. We also had to be dressed in our regalia. This was a challenge as we all came home from different places and different times. The family plan was whoever arrived home first would start packing the vehicle and have things ready to go. I arrived home first with our youngest daughter and I started packing the car. My daughter was in elementary school at the time. I asked her to put her suitcase in the car and to get herself a snack. She began to draw pictures on the sidewalk with chalk. I asked her as I was running by to please get her things and a snack and she would casually reply that she would. I was hot and tired as other family arrived home and helped to finish the packing when my daughter asked me to look at what she drew. When I did not respond she held onto my hand and said, "please mom, look at what I drew for you." She had drawn a tipi with our family standing in front and a traditional longhouse. She also wrote, "Proud Indians live here: Steven and Gwen Point."

I remember my youngest daughter coming home when she was in grade two or three mentioning that she had an Indian person working at her school and he told her

that if she had anybody not being nice to her because she was an Indian she could talk about it. I asked her how she felt about this and she said, "I like it because some of the students are mean." What is the difference between my older children and my youngest child and how they felt about being an Indian? It is my hope the difference will be evident through the stories that will be shared.

In my family, birthdays were important and I carried this tradition on with my children. Each year my son would invite a few school friends and he would get an invite to some of his friends' birthday parties as well. Then one year they stopped. His closest friend was having a sleep over and my son was looking forward to going. I went to the school with his overnight bag and a present, and I could not find him. I found his sister, and I asked her if she had seen her brother. She replied that he was at the back of the school. I found him and he wouldn't look at me. My son is normally bubbly and happy, and always has a smile. I asked him what was wrong and saw that he was trying not to cry. I told him we needed to go find his friend to go to the birthday party. He then told me he wasn't allowed to go. I felt the familiar feeling in the pit of my stomach that happens when you get afraid. I asked him why he could not go and he said with his head down, "Because I am an Indian." I knew that what I would say would make the difference for how my son would respond in the future. I knelt down and told him that it was okay and he didn't do anything wrong. He needed to think about his good friend and how difficult it was for him to have to tell him that. I told him what my grandmother told me, "You need to stand up straight and stand up tall, hold your head up but keep your eyes down out of respect for your parents. In other words you are not better than anyone else and you are not any less than anyone else." I gave him the gift and told him he needed to give his friend his gift before he left. I can remember crying and being angry when I was alone. I

thought it was difficult for me to deal with this in high school. My children have to face discrimination and racism when they are in primary grades.

One of the challenges that had a brighter outcome for my son was also in elementary school. His first report card in grade four came and he was unusually quiet. I opened up the card and he had all “N’s” for need improvement for his behaviour and his letter grades were not good. I looked at him and asked him what happened to his good grades. He didn’t have an answer and I didn’t understand as the previous year his grades were very good. I went to the parent-teacher interview and stood by the door to wait my turn. I started to feel anxious and nervous while I was waiting. Here I was in a Teacher Education Program and I was afraid to see my son’s teacher. The teacher did see me, and she had another parent with her. As the parent left, I went to the door. The teacher did not look up or acknowledge me. After a few minutes, I felt awkward standing waiting for the teacher to invite me in. Finally I walked in and up to her desk. She still would not look up or acknowledge me. When I went to say something, she cut me off and said, “Yes, you are here for your son. He is a behaviour problem. I do not know what to do with him. His work is sloppy and he does not know how to sit still. I had to send him to the office before PE class and I told the class one of them would have to be a partner with the young man I sent to the office. I had to say this; otherwise, no one wants to be his partner.” She continued on but I could not listen to her any longer and I hit the desk. She looked up at me and glared, insulted that I would interrupt her. I asked her, “Can you least have the decency to look at me while you are talking about my son. You have to explain to me why he is having a difficult time in your class. He did so well up to now. He even was invited to his teacher’s wedding last year. I would like to take his other report cards and compare them to yours. I do not think my son has a problem. You have a problem.” I walked out, not wanting to cry in front of her.

As I walked out, there was a parent waiting at the door, and I thought okay, I will now get reported on and perhaps my son will get kicked out of school. The parent said as I walked by, "Way to go." I was surprised at the comment. I did not hear anything from anyone and I was worried about my son having to go back to that teacher's classroom. However, I was in my first year in a Teacher Education Program and we had guest speakers from the local school district. As one of the guest speakers started to speak, his first words were, "There is no racism or discrimination in our school district." I remember putting my head down and I felt like I was hit with something. After the speakers were done, they asked if anyone had any questions or comments. I raised my hand and I was so afraid that my legs were shaking a bit. I said, "If there is no racism or discrimination in the school district, then how can this happen." I then shared the story about the parent-teacher interview and my concern with my son. They looked at me and asked which school my son went to. I can remember feeling anxious like I did something wrong. The administrator apologised for what happened to my son. Nothing else was said and there was no follow up.

Later that month my son was bubbly and happy again. I asked him how he was doing in school and he said, "Good mom, guess what, I have a new teacher!" The next report card was good and the parent-teacher interview was positive as the teacher shared how my son was very good at math and he was a very good student. I can remember being thankful and thinking that my son was fortunate that I was able to speak up about the teacher. Even so, what about all the other students who do not have anyone to speak up for them? I knew how difficult it was for me to say something. There are many First Nation parents who do not attend parent-teacher interviews; have had negative experiences themselves in schools; and do not feel they can challenge the system on behalf of their children.

Our older daughter was not afraid to challenge anyone or to speak her mind. She was always looking out for her cousins and other First Nation students, and her older brother and older cousins looked out for her. In an elementary class, she recalls a teacher not treating another First Nation student very nicely. She explained, "The teacher talks to some students in a nice way and then she speaks to this one Indian student in a mean way." The teacher told the Indian student he had to move his belongings to another place in the classroom. So I asked the teacher, "I hope you are not moving him and treating him badly because he is an Indian." This made the teacher stop and she looked at me. The teacher said, "Oh no, that is not why I am moving him. He can stay where he is." My daughter then explained how the teacher treated the student better and spoke to him in a nicer tone.

One of the incidents I regret to this day not doing anything about was my daughter's experience in high school. She played on the grass hockey team and she became the captain for her team. The next school year, the students found out that their team was going to Europe. My daughter was again the captain of the team. She came home upset because she was told she would have to try out for her position as other girls were now interested in playing and going to Europe. In the end it turned out she did not get in. What was even more difficult was the other girls did not have to try out for their positions. They would try out for the team, but not for a particular position. All the other girls made the team except my daughter. It did not sound right and my daughter was so disappointed. She was the only Indian on the team. I felt like I needed to do something but did not know what to do, and I felt like I would be dismissed or not listened to. What was interesting is after the Christmas break there was political unrest in Europe where the team was going to play and the trip was cancelled. The teacher then approached my daughter to play again as she did not have enough players. When my

daughter explained this to me, I asked her, "What did you say to your teacher"? She said, "I told her I am not interested."

There were a number of incidents with other students. The one that stands out in my mind was when my daughter came home upset with me and at what happened at school. I finally was able to convince her to wear a dress for one of the school dances. She was upset because she listened to me and wore a skirt and top. When she was walking up the steps to the school I did see two boys say something to her as I was driving off. I thought perhaps she knew them. She said, "The one boy asked me how much. I didn't understand what he meant so I asked him, 'For what?' The other boy replied, 'how much do you want for some sex; you look like a prostitute.'" She would not wear a dress again until her graduation. I did not do anything, nor did we share what happened with anyone.

There was another incident on the bus that my daughter did not tell me about until after she graduated. She explained how the Indians sat at the back of the bus. She did not say why but this is where they sat. As she started high school she had a number of older cousins and her brother riding the bus with her. After a couple of years her older brother and cousins graduated and a couple of her older cousins dropped out of school. She boarded the bus by herself and went to the back of the bus. A boy moved to the back of the bus and sat across from her, where he opened up his pants zipper and peed on the floor while staring at her. I asked her if she said anything to anyone at the school, and I asked her why she did not tell anyone, including her dad and I. She said she did not know why, but she felt ashamed and afraid. She did tell a younger cousin who told her older brother who had dropped out of school.

The older cousin and two other cousins were at the school the next day and boarded the bus for the drive home. They sat on either side of the young man, lit a cigarette, and questioned him about what he had done. They told him what he could expect if he were to approach their cousin again. I was surprised and I asked what the bus driver did, as surely the bus driver saw and smelled the smoke, and what the other students did. My daughter explained the bus driver knew but he did nothing. The next day the bus driver asked her to tell her brothers they were not allowed to ride the bus as they were not students. My daughter agreed she would tell them. My daughter also explained how her cousins did not say anything to her nor did they speak to her about what happened. On one hand I was hurt and upset for my daughter, yet I knew why she didn't do anything. There is almost an expectation to be mistreated, and somehow if you do say something to someone in authority it will end being my daughter's fault. I also thought about how my nephews addressed the situation and I wondered what would have happened if they had not intervened.

My older daughter's high school science teacher told her not bother with his class because "you are only going to have babies". We did have a discussion about this and I asked what she wanted to do. I also told her that there were people who believed women did not belong in the science field and that she was an Indian was like two strikes against her. She mentioned that the teacher did not talk to her at all; it was like she was invisible. She later attained a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology.

My youngest daughter had her trials and tribulations as well. We would always have the cousins and friends at our home. I would ask them how they were doing in school. The younger cousin shared, "There are these boys who are mean and make fun of us because we are Indians." I asked them how they felt about that or what they did. They replied matter-of-factly, "We don't care." The girls shared how my daughter started



to sing one of our traditional songs and told the boys she was putting a curse on them. The boys believed her and never bothered them again.

My youngest daughter commented one day, "Mom you make bannock at everyone else's school but mine." I looked at her and said, "Do I?" She then replied, "That is alright; we are having a bake sale and I volunteered you to make bannock at my school." Another time she said, "Mom, you dance at everyone else's school but mine." I looked at her and said, "That sounds familiar. Does this mean I have to dance at your school?" She smiled and said, "No, can you ask dad to tape our songs and I have my cousins who are going to come to my class and dance. My teacher is going to help me."

Later, as she went to middle school, she came home one day and said, "Mom, I need you to help me get an expert witness for our traditional burial sites and our sacred ceremonies." I asked her why and she said, "Oh, I am role playing an Indian lawyer who is helping our band to stop the development on our sacred grounds". I did get her an expert witness who was a colleague of mine. I asked her if I could attend as well. In confidence when I spoke to my colleague I told him about my experience in high school where I sat on a panel representing the Indians. It was a terrible experience where I was asked questions that I had no answers to. Questions that I still get asked today. Why don't your people fix up your yards? Don't you get a free education? Why don't your people stay in school? I was so embarrassed; I left the classroom, packed up my belongings and never did go back to school. I told my friend that I did not want my daughter to have a similar experience.

We arrived at the school and the classroom was set up. My daughter wore one of my business suits and she had her hair done up very nicely. She did look like a lawyer. The teacher explained what the students were presenting to the local city council. One

group of students were the developers who wanted to build a mall on a piece of property and other group were the Indians trying to stop the development because they believed it was their sacred grounds. The teacher explained that the expert witness would be called to testify only if the student thought he was needed. The students all had to stay in their roles and then he turned it over to them. The developers stated why they wanted to develop the property. They cited job opportunities, revenue for the city, and the fact that they had no record that the land was in any way connected to local Indians.

Then my daughter started. She began with quotes from famous First Nation spiritual leaders and chiefs. She gave the local history and she had maps that showed the traditional territories. She gave first-hand testimony and shared artefacts that were taken from the site that was going to be developed. She spoke for quite awhile. My friend leaned over to me and whispered, "She does not need any help and I want her on my team." When the developer was given a second turn to speak he declined. The city council left the room to make a decision. When they returned they unanimously voted in favour of the Indians and not to develop. The teacher then stood up and spoke to the students about their presentation. He asked the student developer why he did not stay in his role as the student was supposed to counter the Indian claims. The student looked at the teacher and exclaimed, "I could not bring myself to because [pointing at my daughter] she was so convincing that I agree with her." It was an amazing experience watching my daughter, as I could see confidence in her that I didn't have when I was her age. Even today, I do not have the confidence. I always feel like I do not belong and I do not have a right to do or be.

To end this section I will share an experience with my son that highlights the changes in Aboriginal education from when he was in school to the time my younger daughter was in school. My son is 11 years older than his youngest sister. My son

phoned me and asked me to have lunch with him. I told him I was busy during lunch as I had a Grade Four Longhouse Program where Grade 4 students from the local school district came to learn about our people. The students would go through eight stations learning about the Stó:lō people that included fishing, carving, weaving, transportation, storytelling, plants, bannock (treat), and slahal (game). This program started in 1995 and is still offered. An average of 1100 Grade Four students visit the program each year learning about the local Stó:lō First Nations. If one does the math from 1995 to 2012 that is  $1100 \times 17$ , or 187,000 Grade Four students learning about local Stó:lō First Nations.

He then asked if we could get together for coffee or tea in the afternoon. I told him I was going to be busy visiting the alternate program we had on site for our students who have dropped out of school. He asked, "Do you get a break at all?" I told him, "Come and follow me around for the day; we can chat in between the sessions and you can bring me a tea or coffee." He did come and he watched as we presented the Grade Four Longhouse Program. Then he followed me to the Alternate Program for our First Nation students that dropped out that year and previous years. I also took him to our First Nations Adult Program to support those working to get their Grade 12. When we left the Adult Program my son stopped me and said, "Mom, tell me something. Why didn't we have these programs when I was in school?" I told him that was a very important question and he needed to follow me around another day in order for me to answer that question.

It is not easy addressing the past, especially when the past still lingers in our First Nation communities today and can be seen in the eyes of family members who lived through the residential school experience. It can be seen in the poverty that exists in many of our communities and the lack of success in the education system today.

Sharing the local history makes the issues “real” and not abstract or something that happened a long time ago. The average Canadian citizen needs to understand why First Nations are struggling in the education system today. They also need to understand that until 1994, First Nations have not had a meaningful role in decisions that were being made in their children’s education.

## **5. Analysis**

The first question in the dissertation is analyzed using the analytical framework table to identify the lived experiences and personal outcomes for each area within the federal and provincial education policies of each era. The second question will be addressed by summarizing the personal outcomes for each era to determine what can be learned regarding the current education policies and programs. The final question will be addressed in the conclusion section of this dissertation as it addresses implications for future education policy decisions.

The government education policy and the purpose for each policy will frame each era. The outcomes for each era will be determined using the analytical framework.

### **5.1. My mother's education era**

**Table 4. Analytical framework of mother**

Education Policy	Mother's lived education experiences	Mother's Personal Outcomes
<p>Residential School Policy – (recent apology from Prime Minister of Canada) Two primary objectives Residential schools</p> <p>Remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families and traditions</p> <p>Assimilate the children into the dominate culture (www.ainc.inac.gc.ca)</p> <p>Government legislates mandatory attendance in 1920</p> <p>Most children sent outside traditional territory i.e. children from north sent to south – children from the Fraser Valley sent to the Island or Interior</p>	<p>Mother : born in 1933</p> <p>Her mother died in 1928, she was 8 years old</p> <p>Sent to residential school with her brothers and sisters. Brother dies first month of attending school – brothers and sisters not told – sent home for funeral and brought back after funeral – no explanation given of how or why brother died</p> <p>Mother fluent in traditional Halq'eméylem language when she started at the residential school – punished for speaking Halq'eméylem language</p> <p>Sent to a second residential as a punishment school for speaking Halq'eméylem language – separated from her sister as punishment</p> <p>Taught First Nation traditions were pagan and the devil's work</p> <p>Endured physical, emotional and sexual abuse at the residential school</p> <p>Witnessed grandmother being beaten for practising traditional Stó:lō ceremonies</p>	<p>Mother stopped speaking Stó:lō traditional Halq'eméylem language - Vowed never to speak Halq'eméylem language again after being separated from sister at residential school</p> <p>Would not have anything to do with traditions, ceremonies - Physically abusive to daughter who demonstrated at a young age connection to Stó:lō traditions and spirituality</p> <p>Would not teach language or Stó:lō traditions to children</p> <p>Would not allow children to attend residential school in 1960's</p> <p>Children did not learn Stó:lō culture or language at home</p>

Table 4 summarizes my mother's lived experiences and personal outcomes, and depicts the relationship to the federal government policy on residential schools to assimilate

Indian children into the dominant culture. My mother's lived experiences and personal outcomes are taken from her personal stories. Wilson's (2008) notion of "relational accountability" is used to examine the relationship between the federal government and the Indian families during my mother's education era and identify what the outcomes were as a result of this relationship. Making meaning from the lived education experiences connects with the personal outcomes as a result of the federal government policy. A sub analysis determines what involvement First Nations had in decisions regarding their children's education and the education landscape that supports the outcomes of the education policies.

The federal government's Residential School Policy to assimilate Indian children into the dominant culture is now considered a dismal failure. Table 4 reveals my mother's experience that included being punished for speaking her traditional Halq'eméylem language. As a result of defying rules by continuing to speak the language, she was sent to a residential school on Vancouver Island, separating her from her sister as further punishment. The outcome of this is my mother's vow never to speak Halq'eméylem again.

Reader(s) are encouraged to "become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, and aesthetically, and intellectually" (Richardson, 1994b as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). My mother was eight years old when she was sent to residential school. As a co-participant, I ask each reader to think about an eight-year old girl they know, especially a close relative like a daughter, a niece, or a sister, and consider that they are forcibly taken away, separated from their brothers and sisters, knowing they will be punished for speaking their own language. They will always be hungry and most likely suffer physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Consider that you are the one taken away from your family, in this case your grandmother, because your

mother died. If you are a grandparent, then imagine your grandchildren being taken away from you after your daughter has passed away giving birth to her youngest child and the Indian Agent, priest, and police have arrived to take your grandchildren. Imagine your daughter was taken away when she was a child by the same authorities. This is the second generation to be forcibly sent to residential school.

Examining what happened to my mother from an emotional place and as a co-participant is both difficult to imagine and heart breaking—and someone did this to my mother and her brothers and her sisters. It is more difficult emotionally knowing my grandmother was also sent to residential school. My mother's experience leaves me with feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and loneliness. As a mother and a grandmother, I cannot bring myself to think about one of my daughters or granddaughters going through this. The tears roll down as I write this but I can barely cry; rather I get this pain in the pit of my stomach and there is pain in my face around my nose. If it hurts me and makes me cry to think about what happened, I wonder what this experience did to my mother as a parent and as a person? It is difficult to think that her time in residential school was her education experience.

Knowing her experience, I better understand my mother's anger and I better understand why she would not teach us our traditional language or our culture. I now wonder, was it anger my mother displayed, or was it fear? Perhaps it was both anger and fear? Fear that your child will be beaten for following spiritual traditions. Fear that the government of the day will reintroduce the anti-potlatch law that forbade our people from practicing our traditions and ceremonies. Fear that her child would be jailed if caught practicing traditions. I understand that fear from my own education experiences and I know that the fear still exists in our communities today. It becomes a common feeling that surfaces speaking with someone in a position of authority, especially if they



have Eurocentric attitudes, which in my view is far too common. I have learned that the opposite of fear is courage. I have witnessed courage in my mother as she told the priest and chief who came to get her children when her husband died that she would not send her children to residential school, and when she had to question a teacher about the physical and verbal abuse her children experienced in the Indian Day School. I have also witnessed this courage in my communities from various First Nation people and leaders who have worked towards gaining control and jurisdiction over their children's education.

Making meaning morally, aesthetically, or intellectually of my mother's education story results in more questions. How could this happen? Who did this to children? Why wasn't anything done sooner to address the abuse that took place throughout Canada? There is nothing moral, aesthetic, or intellectual about what happened to my mother in residential school. The federal government and the churches' Eurocentric attitude is summed up by Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000):

Eurocentrism is the imaginative and institutional context that informs contemporary scholarship, opinion, and law. As a theory, it postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans. It is built on a set of assumptions and beliefs that educated and usually unprejudiced Europeans and North Americans habitually accept as true, as supported by "the facts," or as "reality." (p. 21)

Understanding that the government during my mother's era and the churches who ran the residential schools fundamentally believed Aboriginal people were uncivilized, Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) summarize, "Indigenous peoples need the diffusion of creativity, imagination, invention, innovation, rationality, and sense of honour or ethics from Europe in order to progress" (p. 21). Taking children to educate them so they can take on the European values and traditions might be seen as a way for the Indians to become successful and be able to function in the dominant society. However,

this did not happen. The children were not given an education; rather, like in my mother's story, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse were commonplace and the education was substandard. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) summarizes the outcome of residential schools that is reflected in my mother's story:

The truth about the residential school system will cause many Canadians to see their country differently. These are hard truths, but only by coming to grips with these truths can we lay a foundation for reconciliation.

The Commission has concluded that:

1. Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal children.
2. Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal families.
3. Residential schools constituted an assault on Aboriginal culture.
4. Residential schools constituted an assault on self-governing and self-sustaining Aboriginal nations.
5. The impacts of the residential school system were immediate, and have been ongoing since the earliest years of schools.
6. Canadians have been denied a full and proper education as to the nature of Aboriginal societies, and the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. (p. 25)

The Commission's conclusions reveal the assault Aboriginal people have endured as a result of the residential school policies. My mother is just one example of the outcomes of these assaults on our communities. Perhaps it would be fitting to put Number 6 first because it speaks to part of the issue that needs to be addressed. Canadian people need to have the "full and proper education...and the history of the

relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people” (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, p. 25). The public needs to be informed that when the first residential school opened in the late 1800s and the last one closed in mid 1990s, four generations had been subjected to constitutional assault that took away their children, their dignity, their way of life, and, for many, their will to live.

The outcomes for my mother resulted in not speaking her traditional Halq'eméylem language for she was repeatedly punished each time she spoke, not teaching her children the language or culture for she was forced to believe the traditions and ceremonies were heathen and the work of the devil, and being physically abusive to her daughter who followed the traditions and ceremonies to discourage her from pursuing those traditions and ceremonies. The outcomes reveal that the government was successful in stopping the children who attended residential school from practising traditions or speaking their language. It stopped them from practising their traditions and speaking their traditional language not because many of them wanted to, but because they were afraid of the authorities.

The education landscape during the residential school era depicts First Nation education being determined by the federal government under the Indian Act. First Nations did not have a voice in the decisions being made. There was no consultation or any regard for First Nations language, culture or traditions. The federal government gave the responsibility to educate and civilize the Indians to the churches. The federal government also imposed the Anti-Potlatch Law in 1884 that prohibited Indians from wearing their traditional regalia, from holding ceremonies, or from gathering. This law was not lifted until 1951, around the same time the residential schools were being closed down. The Potlatch law complemented the Residential School Policy to assimilate the First Nation People.

The Potlatch Law ended in 1951 and the Residential School Policy began to be phased out around the same time. However, the damage was done as four generations of First Nation people attended residential schools. I was born around that time and I know first hand there was no information given to our elders or families about the Anti-Potlatch law changing or that the residential school policy would end. After four generations, many First Nations struggled to take care of their families. Their world changed from freely living off the land to becoming dependent on the government because they could no longer hunt or fish. The salmon-rich diet was taken away. The First Nations people were not able to access the natural resources because reserves were created and laws were imposed, stipulating when and how long one could leave the reserve. A Stó:lō leader summarized the reality: "If you chain an elephant up, that elephant will fight to free himself. After awhile the elephant will stop fighting. You can take the chain off and the elephant will stay without the chain. First Nation people have been in chains for four generations. Just because the government decided to remove the chains, don't expect my people to know what to do. As far as many of them are concerned or understand, they are still chained" (personal communication).

## 5.2. My education era, a daughter of a residential school survivor

**Table 5. Analytical framework of daughter**

<b>Education Policies</b>	<b>My lived experiences</b>	<b>My Personal Outcomes</b>
<p>Residential School Policy –</p> <p>No longer mandatory to send children to residential school</p> <p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential school</li> <li>• Band School - if available</li> <li>• Public School</li> </ul> <p>The Government of Canada – Federal Government – Indian Act</p> <p>Sections 114 &amp; 115</p> <p>Authorize Minister to “establish, operate, and maintain schools for Indian children.”</p> <p>...authorizes cabinet to enter into education for Indian Children with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The government of a province</li> <li>b) The commissioner of Northwest Territories;</li> <li>c) The Commissioner of Yukon Territory:</li> <li>d) A public or separate school board; and</li> <li>e) A religious or charitable organization</li> </ul> <p>Master Tuition Agreement – “The Master Tuition Agreement... a negotiated bilaterally between the Department of Indian Affairs and local provincial school boards on behalf of First Nations.” As a second phase in this era “DIAND acted as a co-representative with First Nations band councils and/or education authorities in negotiations with school boards.” (Burns, 1998, p. 54).</p>	<p>Daughter born in 1953</p> <p>Attended school from 1958 – 1967: Age 6 to 15</p> <p>Attended band controlled school from Grades 1 – 7</p> <p>Physically abused at band school</p> <p>Authorities – priest and chief arrived at home to persuade mother to send children to residential school after father passed away in 1963 – daughter was 10 years old – Mother told them to leave and not return and threatened that she still had husband’s gun</p> <p>Younger sister was later sent to residential school</p> <p>Attended high school Grades 8, 9 &amp; 10 off reserve – discrimination and racism from some non-Indian students in local high school</p> <p>Left local high school in Grade 8 for school in United States – no discrimination against Indians – successful – awards and opportunity to attend summer program at local university as a result of academic achievement</p> <p>Back to local school for Grade 9 –again struggled with racism and discrimination – left for school in US – again successfully completed Grade 9</p> <p>Back to local school for Grade 10 – could not deal with discrimination and racism – dropped out and did not return</p>	<p>Afraid of most of the teachers at the band controlled school</p> <p>Did not understand why mother did not want to send children to boarding school</p> <p>Enjoyed school in the United States – excelled in grades</p> <p>Angry and confused as a student in high school off reserve- Identity issues – did not want to be an Indian</p> <p>Dropped out of school in Grade 10</p> <p>Attempted suicide</p>

Table 5 summarizes the federal government's Indian education policies and the relationship to the daughter's lived education experiences and the outcomes of her education experiences. The sub analysis addresses First Nations limited decision or limited involvement in their children's education. Burns (1998) describes this era as follows: "Education moved from a federal government policy of segregation and assimilation to a theme of normative integration of First Nations students into publicly funded schools" (p. 55). My lived experiences and personal outcomes are taken from my personal stories. Wilson's (2009) notion of "relational accountability" will be used to examine the relationship between the federal government and the Indian families during the daughter's education era and identify what the outcomes were as a result of this relationship. Making meaning from the lived education experiences will connect with the personal outcomes as a result of the federal government policy. A sub analysis will determine what involvement First Nations had in decisions regarding their children's education and the education landscape that support the outcomes of the education policy.

The personal outcomes summarized in Table 5 were realized over a number of years. It took years to understand that growing up as an Indian child attending a federal government band-controlled school, attending an integrated high school off the reserve, and being raised by a mother who was a second-generation residential school attendee would present challenging outcomes in my life. Studying First People throughout university helped me to understand what Indian people encountered from the first settlers, to the Eurocentric and manifest destiny attitude that dismissed, marginalized, and colonized Indian people in province after province in Canada, with British Columbia being the last province to be settled and join confederation in 1867. Many communities

in British Columbia are celebrating 150 years of settlement with little or no recognition of the First Nation people or their history.

This history helped me to reflect and put in perspective my reality growing up. I was angry with my mother for a number of years because of the physical abuse I endured growing up. I better understood why my mother struggled and I was able to forgive my mother after learning about her own abuse in residential schools. Residential school took away her childhood and made her afraid to speak our traditional language. The sexual, physical, and emotional abuse took away her parenting skills and instilled a fear that would turn to anger. I also shared my concerns with my husband after our first child was born, as I did not want to be abusive to my children. I also better understood why I did not want to be an Indian once I started high school—why I was ashamed to be an Indian, and why I did not even like to hear the word. I believed what some students said about Indians: that we were dirty, lazy, drunk, and dumb. I recognized the racist attitude from adults that told me in no uncertain terms Indians were not welcome, or that we did not have the right to be in their presence. The abuse from adults was stronger than the hurtful words said by students. I realized the students and the adults believed the stereotypes that were created about Indians. There was no effort by the federal or provincial governments of the day to address the wrongs done by residential school and no effort to address treaty issues in British Columbia. There was also no effort to educate the public about these issues.

I believed what we were told by the church—that our traditions and ceremonies were heathen. I was confused and afraid for my grandmother, as everything she told me about our traditions and ceremonies seemed to be so special and I was afraid the authorities would find out and my grandmother would be in danger. I believed what the nuns and priests said about going to hell if we followed our traditions, and I sure did not

want to go to hell. I was confused for a number of years. In the midst of this confusion and my failure at school, I attempted to commit suicide. I remember thinking what is the use? I believed that I did not belong here and no one cared. I told my mother I was going to stay over with a friend, since she was going to stay with her sister for the weekend with my brothers and sisters. After they left I took pills and went to bed. I woke up the next afternoon. I remember being disappointed that I did not die. No one knew, and I did not tell anyone. I had just turned 15 years old.

I realize that the reality was not of my making, rather it was imposed from different levels, from the federal government's racist Indian Act Education policies, the provincial government's education system that reinforced Eurocentric attitudes, and an education that dismissed and marginalized First Nations students and so encouraged the high drop-out rates and limited success in education.

It is evident that First Nations did not have any decision-making power in the 1950s and 1960s since the federal government gave the Minister of Indian Affairs the authority to make the decisions and negotiate education agreements during this era.



## 5.3. My children’s education era

**Table 6. Analytical framework of children**

Education policy	Children’s lived education experiences	Children’s personal outcomes
<p>Residential School Policy – No longer mandatory to send children to residential school</p> <p>Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential school</li> <li>• Band School - if available</li> <li>• Public School</li> </ul> <p>The Government of Canada – Federal Government – Indian Act</p> <p>Sections 114 &amp; 115</p> <p>Authorize Minister to “establish, operate, and maintain schools for Indian children.” ...authorizes cabinet to enter into education for Indian Children with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f) The government of a province</li> <li>g) The commissioner of Northwest Territories;</li> <li>h) The Commissioner of Yukon Territory:</li> <li>i) A public or separate school board; and</li> <li>j) A religious or charitable organization</li> </ul> <p>1994 Ministry of Education Aboriginal Branch targets Aboriginal Funds for Provincial Schools</p> <p>First Nation language, culture, and support programs are introduced as part of Provincial Education Aboriginal programs in many public schools.</p>	<p>Years 1979 – 2002</p> <p>Children attended local public schools</p> <p>Racism and discrimination from some teachers and some students</p> <p>Oldest child started in 1979 and graduated in 1991</p> <p>Second oldest child started school in 1982 and graduated in 1994</p> <p>Third child started school in 1990 and graduated in 2002</p>	<p>Children stay in school and graduate</p> <p>Older two children struggle with discrimination and racism from some teachers and students</p> <p>Youngest daughter benefits from 1994 decision as culture is introduced in her Intermediate School Years</p>

Table 6 summarizes the federal and provincial Indian education policies, the relationship to the children’s lived education experiences, and their personal outcomes as a result of

these experiences. The sub analysis addresses the First Nations involvement in the decisions being made about education programs and services in the provincial schools. The education landscape provides an overview of Aboriginal control of education in my children's era.

### **5.3.1. My children's stories**

My children's stories are examined from my perspective as their mother and through my involvement in their education experiences. Richardson (1994) states that autoethnographers "ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants, engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually," (p. 745) a practice that will complement and make meaning from my children's stories. Wilson (2008) describes how data and analysis blend together as one. He describes how "As I was listening, I was learning, and as I was learning I was sharing" (p. 131). This blend of data and analysis gives validity to what was learned over a number of years as my family education experiences were shared to better understand how to address the challenges and support education success for my children and all Aboriginal students.

The children all attended and graduated from provincially run schools, from Grades 1 to 12. The common themes experienced by all three children include stereotyping, racism, and discrimination from some of the teachers and some of the students. Each child's response to the challenges and the outcome for each child are obviously different. For example, when my oldest child could not attend the birthday party of his best friend, he hid away behind the school, hurt and embarrassed for not being able to attend his best friend's birthday party. My second oldest child challenged a teacher who was mistreating a First Nation student in her class. My youngest child sang

a song to boys who were bullying her and her cousins told them a hex was being put on them. What is the difference between the three children? As a parent and as an educator I have shared my children's education stories in different presentations to help others understand the challenges many Aboriginal students face today. There can be many different interpretations taken from their experiences; perhaps the most important is my children having to deal with racism and discrimination as core part of their education. The school should be a safe place for all children. All parents want their children to be safe and happy. I believe children know and understand when they are not welcome. As an Aboriginal parent there is a feeling of dissonance. As an Aboriginal parent I did not feel safe, nor did I feel like I belonged when I went to the schools for my children's activities. What is wrong with this picture? You want your child to have a successful education experience but the feeling that you do not belong is strong. You feel helpless as your child goes to school because as an Aboriginal parent you know they will be mistreated, stereotyped, and discriminated against because they are First Nations. My children's stories reveal that what was feared by me as an Aboriginal parent did in fact happen. As an Aboriginal parent, you feel like a failure for not being able to protect your child.

The personal stories reveal the two older children coming home in their first school year and stating they did not want to be Indians. My third child did not come home in her first year with the notion that she did not want to be an Indian. She came home in Grade Four and Five drawing pictures of teepees, sweat lodges, and longhouses on the walkway, writing "Proud Indians live here." What is the difference between the older children and the younger child? Why did the older children come home not wanting to be Indians? Where did they learn that Indians were lazy, dirty, and drunks? Who said this to them? As an Aboriginal parent, I did not feel like there would be any support from the

school to address what was being said. I was also afraid the children would be mistreated if anything was said.

The oldest child started school in 1979, the second child started school in 1982, and the youngest child started school in 1990. The two older children graduated before the Provincial Minister of Education 1994 Targeted Aboriginal Fund initiative was implemented. The two older children did not have any language, culture, or support programs in elementary school that reflected First Nations. In high school, they did have access to an Aboriginal Support Teacher that provided limited support.

The youngest child was in elementary school and benefited directly and indirectly from the Aboriginal targeted programs and support services. For example, the youngest child learned and had support from the Aboriginal Support Worker in her school and the Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs. She would dance every school day for a month when the local Grade Four Longhouse Program was offered as an extra-curricular activity. To participate, the students had to have good grades and good attendance. As a mother, I know this gave my daughter confidence and pride in being First Nation. I believe my youngest daughter has more confidence simply because she is the youngest child and has enjoyed the support from her parents and her older brother and sister. I also believe the school district Aboriginal Language, Culture, and Support programs enhanced her confidence and gave her a sense that she belonged and she was proud to be First Nation.

### **5.3.2. Education landscape**

As an Aboriginal teacher, I know the Aboriginal Language and Culture Program and Support Services served to also educate school district staff, teachers, and parents directly and indirectly about the local First Nations, as some attended cultural events and

First Nation cultural events were brought to most of the schools in the district. The school district Aboriginal Advisory Committee included school administrators, local Aboriginal Education leaders, Aboriginal parents, and a school trustee. They met regularly to make decisions about the Aboriginal Language, Culture, and Support Programs. Annual reports have been written since the 1997/98 school year highlighting cultural activities, school district grade averages for Aboriginal students, Aboriginal award nominees, provincial & district statistics, school district Aboriginal budget, and the local education agreement. The report is shared with the local Aboriginal leaders in education. The Chilliwack School District (2008) Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee Mission Statement reveals what I as a parent witnessed over my youngest daughter's school years.

The mission of the Aboriginal Education Department in the Chilliwack School District is to increase student success leading to graduation, for all Aboriginal students. As well, we will increase awareness and understanding of Aboriginal people, the culture, language, and histories among students, educators, parents and community members of the Chilliwack School District. (p. 4)

The mission statement highlights creating awareness and understanding about Aboriginal people amongst everyone connected with the school district, from students to administrators. Addressing stereotyping, racism, and discrimination needs to occur with all school district staff, not just Aboriginal students.

I experienced racism, stereotyping, and discrimination when I worked in the school district, and I was made to feel unwelcome in some of the schools and in some staff rooms. I remember thinking, "I do not want to be here," and I would remind myself that the students need support. If I did not feel welcome, how would the students feel? I would overhear teachers talking about First Nations students and their parents in the staff rooms. Sometimes they did not know I was there, and sometimes those talking did

know I was there. In my first year, I did not have a lot of confidence and I would get embarrassed and ashamed because what they were saying was true: many Aboriginal students were chronically late or absent from school, and some of them did not have a lunch, or were academically behind in their grades. Over time I was able to either challenge the teachers who made comments or I would choose to ignore them. I learned to pick and choose my battles, understanding that some folks would not change their mind set no matter what was said or done. I made a conscious decision to work with those who were willing to make a difference for Aboriginal students.

It became important to support those involved in education and working with the students to learn about Aboriginal people, especially the local First Nations. Cultural awareness workshops and sharing about the residential school era helped create a better understanding about Aboriginal people, their socio-economic challenges, and their mistrust towards the education system. A First Nation teacher overheard a teacher share how nervous she was to go to the local reserve for a meet and greet with the local First Nation parents and leaders. The First Nation teacher spoke to the teacher, saying, “Now you know how the First Nation students feel every day.” One of the most common questions I was asked over the years is, “What can we do to help Aboriginal students be successful in school”? Early in my education career, I did not know the answer and I would get overwhelmed even thinking about where to begin. Today, I respond that there is no single answer. It is going to take the Aboriginal Language, Culture and Support Programs. It is going to take workshops and in-service training on the history of Aboriginal people. It is going to take Aboriginal Advisory Committees making decisions about Aboriginal Programs and Services. Most importantly, regardless of what level of education is being discussed, it must have Aboriginal people involved in decisions being made. I believe the days are gone when decisions regarding Aboriginal people, whether

related to education, health, social services, or sports, are made without Aboriginal people. I believe making a difference and supporting Aboriginal student academic success must include Aboriginal people in decision-making on all levels of education.

It is my view that program or student academic success does not just happen—rather it takes time. It has taken three and four generations to marginalize and strip Aboriginal people of their language and culture. It is going to take an equal amount of time to restore what was taken away. In the meantime, pride, dignity, and a sense of belonging are being restored. I witnessed this first hand when I watched Aboriginal parents at a school assembly where their children were dancing and singing their traditional songs. At this same school prior to the Minister targeting funds for Aboriginal programs, the principal asked me how he could get more Aboriginal parent participation. The principal was so excited to see his gym filled with Aboriginal and non Aboriginal parents. I recall the words of my students at a high school when they requested to have a pow wow at their school. “We want the teachers and the students here to see that we have something special and we are not all lazy.” I also remember words from a parent who attended the first pow wow at the high school, “I could not believe the energy when the pow wow started. The singing and drumming was like magic. I could feel and see how special this is.” What did she feel and see? I know she witnessed the pride, dignity, and respect that was in the room as dancers and drummers shared their special and unique songs and dances. Previously, this pride did not exist for Aboriginal students in the schools. They did not see themselves reflected in the curriculum or teachers. There were no Aboriginal teachers or support staff. The 1994 Provincial Aboriginal targeted fund changed the landscape for Aboriginal Education. Schools with a high Aboriginal student population have Aboriginal support staff. Aboriginal parents and education leaders are involved in the decision-making to support Aboriginal students.

### 5.3.3. Summary

What can be learned from the experiences of my mother, myself, and my children's education stories? An important first step is understanding the history and role of residential schools in the education system. There should be required courses for teachers, police officers, social workers, and health workers across agencies so front-line workers and professionals can better understand the socioeconomic challenges faced by First Nation people and the links to the residential school era. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2010) Accord on Indigenous Education provides an example for other disciplines to consider and use as a guide to support those working in their field. "The time is right for a concerted and cooperative effort that creates transformational education by rejecting the "status quo" moving beyond "closing the gap" discourse, and contributing to the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities" (ACDE, 2010, p. 2). Anyone who works with Aboriginal people in the helping profession should know the residential school history and the history of racism in which four generations of Aboriginal people lived. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012) recommends the following:

The Commission recommends that each provincial and territorial government undertake a review of the curriculum materials currently in use in public schools to assess what, if anything, they teach about residential schools.

The Commission recommends that each provincial and territorial department of education work in concert with the Commission to develop age-appropriate educational materials about residential schools for use in the public schools.

The Commission recommends that each provincial and territorial government work with the Commission to develop public-education campaigns to inform the general public about their history and impact of residential schools in their respective jurisdiction. (p. 28)



The Commission addresses an important notion about recommending a public education campaign to inform the general public about the history and impact of residential schools. As an Aboriginal educator, I have heard questions from both well-meaning and not so well-meaning people from legal, education, and health profession backgrounds: “Why can’t First Nations people get jobs? Finish school? Go to university? Take care of their homes?” It can be disheartening and overwhelming simply because they are talking about my people: my relatives. I know what poverty looks like, I know what it feels like, and I know all too well why so many First Nations are still struggling today. The difference between me and many other First Nations people is that I have knowledge about what happened to us—including the colonial government’s imposed laws such as the 1884 Anti-potlatch law that prohibited practising our culture, and the 1884 residential school policy that separated children from the families to “civilize” the children.

It is an important first step to educate the general public that First Nations are still governed by a colonial Indian Act policy—that First Nations do not enjoy the same decision-making powers that every other Canadian citizen enjoys. Many First Nations do not own the land they live on, and they cannot borrow money against their land to improve their lives or homes. They cannot improve their homes or borrow money unless they have a guarantee from the Minister of Indian Affairs. The public should also know why The British Columbia Government did not settle treaties with a majority of First Nations as did the rest of Canada or North America. What does this mean? In my mind it means that First Nations still technically own all the land. No transactions were made to purchase the lands, certainly not in the Fraser Valley. No treaties were signed. I was raised with stories from my grandmother that we own cranberry fields in the New Westminster area and how my grandmother’s family would travel each year to harvest

cedar and spend the summer at fishing sites and berry sites. My oldest daughter was given a traditional name of one of the local mountains that reveals her family connection to the mountain. While treaty issues cannot be addressed in this paper, they are nonetheless important as they are directly connected to First Nations struggle to gain recognition of their inherent right to self-government. The right to make decisions or be a part of the decisions being made is a necessary first step. I share with those who will listen that First Nations are not going away. It is important that everyone needs to have the same information about the local history in order to make informed decisions that benefit everyone. I have had concerned people who have settled here ask me, "What do your people want? Are we going to lose our land? Why do we have to pay for something we did not do?" I have learned to ask them the questions instead of trying to answer them. I ask them, "If you were told that all the land in the Fraser Valley and 100 km north of the Fraser River belonged to you and your people, what would you want? If your mother and grandmother were forced to attend residential school and were punished for speaking their language and abused sexually, physically, and emotionally, what would you ask for in compensation? We know we cannot take land away from anyone. What do we want? We want to be treated with respect and to be a part of decisions that are made." There should be compensation however, and those involved should make informed decisions based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

These education stories reveal that parents must be involved in decisions being made to support their children's education. The BC Ministry of Education 1994 Targeted Fund Initiative, in my view, was history in the making since for the first time Aboriginal people were asked to be part of the decisions about the education programs and services provided for their children. Has this initiative made a difference? As an

Aboriginal Teacher and a parent, I feel the answer is yes. I have witnessed the difference the programs and services have made for Aboriginal students.

My three children all attended the same elementary and high schools. Key moments revealed in their stories include the two older children coming home in their first year at school not wanting to be Indians. Yet just eight years later, my youngest child did not come home with the same attitude; instead, she shared how she had a First Nation support worker tell her that if anyone mistreated her because she was First Nation, she should tell him. My youngest child saw herself as part of a proud Indian family.

#### **5.3.4. Current education landscape**

I worked for three years for the local school district and I worked with the local tribal office as the education manager for 14 years. Ten First Nation communities are directly connected to the local school district and as the Education Manager I was responsible for the majority of the local First Nations K-12. This meant meeting with the local school district to address education needs and concerns. It was difficult, as the school district had no funding to create programs, curriculum, or support services that were needed to support Aboriginal students. The 1994 BC Minister targeted funds for Aboriginal students was like winning the lottery, as there were now funds for the much-needed programs. More importantly, the school district was required to consult with First Nations regarding the programs and support services.

Throughout my time as Education Manager, I would go into schools to do storytelling and cultural presentations. I spoke at teacher and administrator education workshops and in-service sessions about Aboriginal education and I provided cultural presentations. I would never decline a request and took every opportunity to create

awareness about local Aboriginal culture and education issues. One day toward the end of my time as the Education Manager, I was asked to present two different sessions at the local elementary school on Aboriginal Day. One was storytelling and one was a Stó:lō hand game. The school request came in two months before the event. The week before the event, the Aboriginal support person called, apologizing that she did not need me to do the presentations. I told her not to apologise as it gave me extra time in my calendar. She explained that they had the most pleasant surprise as students who had previously attended the elementary school and were now in high school had offered to run all the workshop sessions. This was very special to me, as the high school students had attended and participated in my own cultural presentations. They were the first generation of public school students to learn about their culture and language.

The support teacher did ask if I would go into the half day Kindergarten program to do story-telling, as they had not planned anything for them. I agreed and requested to drop into the workshops the students were presenting as well. I dropped in quickly to see the high school students sharing local First Nation stories, playing traditional games, and singing songs with the students. I was so proud of them. I then went to the Kindergarten class and shared traditional Stó:lō stories. As I was finishing, the room filled up with the high school students as they finished up their sessions. They all sat down and listened to the stories as if it was their first time hearing them. I finished up with a song, and some of the students helped me sing the song and some of them danced for the Kindergarten students. I comment from time to time that I would like to shake the hand of the 1994 Minister of Education who targeted the Aboriginal funds. The decision has had a positive impact on Aboriginal people, and will continue to help Aboriginal students for generations to come.

I remember a teacher in 1993 asking me one time, “Why don’t the students in my class know about the stories you share or the songs that you sing? Why are they not proud of who they are?” I remember looking at the teacher and thinking, where do I begin to explain why so many of our families do not know our traditions or why many of our students are ashamed to be an Indian. I did tell her about the residential school era and the destruction of our language and traditional practices. She asked, “Didn’t that happen a long time ago”? I told her the last school closed in the mid 1990s in Mission. I also shared with her the child “welfare” practices adopted by the BC Ministry in the 1960s and 70s, when Indian children were taken from their families without their consent and adopted to other families. Many children were sent outside of British Columbia and never knew their families. Johnson (1983) describes the event: “Many critics argue that the Indigenous children welfare era of the 1960s and the 1970s, which saw so many children removed from families and communities, was another colonial project” (Johnson, 1983 as cited in Sinclair, Anthony & Bruyere, 2009, p. 20).

The teacher commented on how she was embarrassed to know this happened. I wonder where this teacher is and what she thinks about the changes, and if she can appreciate the difference. I believe we can say with confidence that many students in this school district are now proud to be Aboriginal and that they feel a part of the school community. The education landscape has changed. I witnessed this as I was recently asked to speak to school district In-service for teachers. I asked the question, “How many of you have been to an Indian reserve?” To my surprise every hand went up and I looked at the School District Administrator and he smiled. To an Aboriginal teacher, parent, and now a grandparent, the dissonance I felt when my children went to school is disappearing, and I feel hope for the future.

## 6. Conclusion

This has been a difficult, emotional, and challenging dissertation. It has been emotionally draining, painful, tiring, and depressing. I realized that I could not write for days, weeks, months, and years because I did not want to revisit and write the difficult personal family struggles. Tears are flowing again and I am not crying; I feel the hurt, pain, and fear like it was yesterday. I better understand my feelings, as they include my disappointment and anger towards an education system that took away not only our language and culture, but our pride and dignity as well. I better understand the fear I have had for my children and my grandchildren, and I remember the helpless feeling that I could not protect them from discrimination and racism. I remember what my mother went through as a young widow with five children and how she stood up to authorities who wanted to take her children away to residential school. My mother attended residential school where she was punished for speaking her language and where she was sexually abused. She died at 42 and I witnessed her struggle to protect her children with little and no support. She did not hear the Prime Minister's apology in 2008 for the residential school era.

I am no longer afraid of the government or of anyone in authority, but I am disappointed because people in authority continually change and each time we have to once again educate those in authority about the history of First Nations.

Writing this dissertation has caused personal dissonance simply because it is one thing to share the stories orally and it is another to write the stories for an academic

program. I come from an oral tradition and I understand the protocols. Academia relies on the written word. More importantly, the written word must be validated by other academics who have also written about the same topic. Making space for First Nations or Aboriginal education in academia is a recent venture. I struggled in the academic system and many times felt out of place. Battiste (2008) explains,

Today, Indigenous people throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a modern conventional education system that has taught them not only to mistrust their own Indigenous knowledge and elders' wisdom but also their own instincts, creativity, and inspiration. (p. 498)

Aboriginal students do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Certainly written and research material about Stó:lō people is limited. It is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. It is not going to work unless something changes. Necessary changes include involving Aboriginal people in decisions at every level of education. Education about Aboriginal history—at all educational levels—is a start.

I was taught by my great-grandparents and my grandparents. I was raised with the oral tradition. I remember my grandmother saying, "Don't you forget this," and she would count on her fingers back five and six generations. I remember asking her, "How am I going to remember this?" Her reply was "If you hear something at least four times, when you need to remember, it will be there." I know many of our Stó:lō stories go back to the ice age and the great flood that happened around the world. I was fortunate to hear the stories about our ceremonies. Battiste (2008) shares,

This knowledge has been embedded in the collective community's oral and literacy traditions: transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their Indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their elders. (p. 497)

Many of our elders did not think our ceremonies would return because of the 1884 Potlatch ban. My generation was the first to return to our ceremonies, and this was not

without challenges and difficulties. I was raised a Catholic and I loved going to church because it was peaceful there. My husband was also raised a Catholic and served mass when he was young. When we were preparing to be married, the priest who came to my reserve at the time said he could not marry us as I practised our “Indian traditions.” I felt like I was a bad person. I could not understand how something so beautiful as our ceremonies could be bad, since the ceremonies taught us to respect ourselves, our elders, and all living things. The difference between my generation and my children’s generation is, I was raised hearing the stories about our ceremonies. My children and grandchildren have been raised participating in our ceremonies.

I cherish my time and I give thanks every time we attend a ceremony with my family in our communities. It is music to my ears when young people are eager to learn how to sing or they want to learn how to make regalia to dance. It is very special when I see young people graduate from the education system and some are wearing a graduation cap made out of cedar. Many Aboriginal people are taking the best from both worlds by successfully attending the public education system and practising their cultural traditions. This is an example of cultural hybridity where many First Nations are using their long held traditions and using non-traditional methods in almost every aspect of their lives. Bhabha (1994) uses a stairwell to best describe cultural hybridity in the following,

The stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between the upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (p. 4)



This has not happened overnight, nor has it been an easy journey. This dissertation is one example of the struggles and challenges one family endured as a result of colonial education policies. In order to be successful in the education system I had to put aside my traditions and First Nation way of learning. I remember feeling dumb many times as I struggled to learn, and in particular as I struggled to write. I could read and I could do arithmetic, timetables, geometry, and I loved algebra. I later learned that arithmetic and using numbers supported First Nations learning styles as it complemented our oral traditions because numbers and letters represented symbols. Symbols complemented First Nations use of pictographs. Over the years I learned that First Nations do learn differently simply because we have had an oral tradition and most Aboriginal people did not have the written word. This does not mean the written word cannot be learned but it does put those who were not raised with the written word at a disadvantage. A professor at university shared that anyone can learn to write and be successful in higher education. He encouraged me not to lose my traditional way of thinking and learning as this puts me at an advantage. He explained it is like I have a second language. I appreciated this as it gave me hope that I would be successful in university. I shared this message with Aboriginal students and for those who were raised traditionally I would see that same sense of relief in them as I had.

I was fortunate to teach in my own home community and I used many of our traditions while I was teaching. I used students' experiences at home for writing stories. The stories included, fishing, helping with cutting salmon, or helping to get wood. Writing out their stories and then reading their stories helped them to connect with the words. The words became their words and they became successful at both writing and reading. I have held the messages that elders shared with me to take the best from both worlds, not to give up my traditions, and to come back home and share what I have learned to

support our people. It is my hope that the words in this dissertation will help educators and my own people to better understand First Nations struggles and challenges today, and that we can collectively work together to support an education system that includes First Nations history on all levels of the education system.

I am grateful to Aboriginal researchers such as my mentor Joann Archibald who wrote *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* based on our Sto:lo storytelling and Shawn Wilson who helped create a space in academia in his work *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. There are many other Indigenous researchers that also paved my way and I give thanks to them for creating a space for and understanding of Aboriginal traditions. Creating space for Aboriginal research needs to be done by and with Aboriginal researchers. This dissertation has used existing Indigenous research as a foundation to expand and demonstrate that Indigenous research methods complements existing research methods.

Throughout my career in education I have been creating awareness and educating people about the history of First Nations prior to contact with the settlers, through early contact, and today. This includes presenting at conferences, giving workshops, or working directly with students, teachers, parents, and school staff in Aboriginal Education. I share about the colonial federal government's education policies that resulted in the residential school era that spanned from the mid-1800's to the mid-1980's. The education policies did not include First Nations in the decisions that were made for their children. Sharing First Nation education history usually ends with the comments 'I did not know this happened with residential schools, I didn't know Indians still lived under the federal government Indian Act.' Why don't people know about the 1884 Potlatch ban? Why don't people know that treaties were not settled with a majority of British Columbia First Nations? Why isn't this taught in schools?"

I agree with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2012):

That each provincial and territorial government work with the Commission to develop public-education campaigns to inform the general public about their history and impact of residential schools in their respective jurisdiction. (p. 28)

As a First Nation educator, mother, and grandmother I welcome the public-education campaign. First Nation people need this information as well. I remember one leader sharing, “If you ask a fish in water how they like living in the water, the fish would not know what to compare to—they have always lived in the water”. Many Aboriginal families have up to three generations of living in poverty after residential school and many do not realize what happened or why. Sharing this history with both First Nations and Non-First Nations is an important first step in creating a future based on respect and understanding.

I see this dissertation as a public campaign to educate people about our education history and lived experiences of one First Nation family—experiences that mirror the reality of many First Nation families. This dissertation also honours our Stó:lō tradition of storytelling as a means to educate others. As a Stó:lō woman I have the right to share my personal story and the story of my family. I do this with a *éy te moʔ* and *éy te sxwálewel*, a good mind and good thoughts/teachings, so those who work with Aboriginal students and families may better understand why many Aboriginal families still struggle in the current education system. I remember thinking when I first started teaching and working in the education system that if I could help one First Nation child be successful, then standing up and challenging those who need to be challenged is worth the effort.

I also believe Aboriginal people need to be educated in the same history, for many of them do not know about the colonial federal government policies and the negative

intergenerational impact the colonial policies have had. Many are struggling to survive, and know poverty all too well. I remember a woman involved in education asking me, “Why don’t Indians have books in their homes and why don’t they read to their children?” I have learned to redirect the question as follows, “If you do not have enough money to buy groceries, what would you do? Buy a loaf of bread? Or buy a book? If you went to residential school and were not taught to read but instead were punished for speaking your language and were sexually abused, would you be interested in teaching your children to read?”

I did not understand as a young person why there were negative and racist attitudes toward First Nations. I learned to believe the stereotypes, and as a youth, I was ashamed and embarrassed to be an Indian. I felt worthless. I learned to be afraid of authority and to know all too well that look in a person’s face or tone in their voice that told me I was not welcome, I was not good enough, or I did not belong. Learning about First Nations history helped me to understand that what happened to First Nation people was not right. I know this history would help many First Nations know they do belong and they do have a right to be a part of the decisions made regarding their children—in education, health, or any area where their children are involved.

I am getting near retirement and question why am I doing my doctorate. I can easily finish off my career and enjoy the rest of my time without the stress and time commitments away from my family. I hear the words of the first elder that spent time with me saying, “One of the greatest teachers is one of example.” First Nations are under-represented in all professional areas, including education, law, and health. We are over-represented in school drop out statistics and in the number of children in care. It is my hope that Canadians will learn about the history of Canada starting with the First People. That history includes colonization, and the idea that colonization is still happening and

will continue to happen until all governments recognize that First Nations need to be a part of decisions being made about their lands, their lives and their families.

We cannot change what happened in the past, but we need to make sure people understand what happened and its impact. An elder shared, “The decisions you make today impact seven generations from now.” It is my hope that First Nations will be a part of decisions being made for their families and communities, and that will create a promising future for all Canadians.

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