Txeemsim and A Journey of Transformation—

Decolonizing Post-Secondary Education

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to Sativa and Henessy Parnell
and Canada’s First Nations children.

For a ten year period I had the privilege of getting to know and learning from countless numbers of people as we worked together towards the transformation of Northwest Community College. There are far too many people to acknowledge to name them all; this work involved the communities of twenty-eight First Nations communities, several non-Aboriginal communities, the Métis Nation of British Columbia, students, colleagues, community members and officials, industry groups and business leaders. Communities, organizations and individuals joined the journey as we collectively strove to bring about deep and sustainable change to a College marinated in the colonial education paradigm. For many it was a profound leap of faith—the path was unclear and often murky, but the emerging successes and a vision of a better future for Aboriginal students kept all of us vigilant.

This journey and this thesis would not have occurred without the foresight of the leaders of the College’s Board of Governors. I had the privilege of working with four amazing Board Chairs who have become personal friends: Ed Harrison, Mark Newbery, Penny Denton and Irene Seguin. Annually, the Board confirmed their commitment to the changes we sought at the College and they were steadfast in their support of my leadership.

First Nations Council played a critical role in the College’s transformation—their vision started the College on its path, their guidance was instrumental and I am indebted to them for their support of me as President and the insights they brought to the journey.
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Self-transformation is one of the themes within this thesis. For me, this transformation came about on many levels as I recognized my role in the ongoing colonization process, awakened more fully to the Aboriginal education paradigm and became open to the teachings of the unfolding journey. For years I had experienced what various First Nations people have described as ‘two-eyed seeing’—viewing the
world from two perspectives—the western mainstream perspective and the Indigenous perspective. For me, this way of being in the world was unsettling and at times disruptive, as the expectations of the world in which I observed and experienced around me was in discord with the world I intuitively felt and believed could emerge. Through the College’s transformative journey, I not only discovered how the Eurocentric and Aboriginal world views could be integrated in the College setting, but importantly, also in my personal life. I am deeply indebted to those who provided me much needed insight and reflection as I learned to embrace my own Indigeneity and integrate these two very different ways of being—in particular, Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis (Irene Seguin), Alisxwm Gyoo (Ali McDougall) and Xbisuunt (Vera Dudoward).

I became immersed in the culture and traditions of the Northwest First Nations, was adopted into the House of T’xaaye by House Chief Phyllis McNeil (deceased) and became a part of the Ts’mysen Killer Whales. I am grateful for the support of Chief T’xaaye and the lessons of Ts’mysen culture she and other family members provided. I continue to learn from my sisters and brothers Ann, Pearl, Alfie, Lloyd, Dorreen, Margaret, Ken, Eddy and recently adopted brother, Peter MacKay.

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Abstract

British Columbia’s post-secondary colleges are the product of colonial government policies that established and support mainstream educational models. Eurocentric perspective dominates all aspects of these institutions and is frequently un-yielding to other Indigenous perspectives, values and educational approaches. For many years there has been increasing awareness of the need for significant change to post-secondary institutions in British Columbia in order to increase the participation and graduation levels of Indigenous people. This was a particularly urgent and pressing question for Northwest Community College (NWCC) where I was President for ten years. The College had advanced many noble efforts to enhance the engagement of Indigenous students without significant success. In the early years of my tenure I argued that without a marked ‘paradigm shift’ that would substantially alter the cultural foundation of the College, attempts to engage Indigenous learners and their communities in any lasting way would fail.

This thesis explores the following three research questions using leader observation and narrative inquiry. How could I, as President of NWCC, facilitate the process of transformative change to accommodate the Indigenous paradigm at the College? How could my professional practice as President inform my deep understanding of the possibilities for the creation of a post-secondary education institution that has moved from a non-Indigenous perspective only, to one that incorporates the Aboriginal paradigm of being? And, from my analysis of the transformative organizational changes I facilitated, what have I come to understand as the possibilities for a bi-cultural post-secondary college in contemporary Canada?
The thesis examines six key transformative projects that were initiated by the College and the communities it served, projects that moved NWCC towards biculturalism, a state in which both the Western and Indigenous paradigms respectfully co-exist. My reflections on this journey of transformation conclude this thesis. These reflections drew on the history of First Nations’ colonization through schooling, the influence of this history through to the present and the accounts of project-driven institutional transformation as narrated in the prior chapters. My reflections elicited many messages for those who share in a commitment to redress the legacy of colonization within our Canadian institutions. These messages have been incorporated into a framework of action-oriented advice for colleague’s intent on challenging the mainstream education paradigm.
CHAPTER ONE

Introducing the Problem and the Journey

The Challenge

. . . [W]e are so infatuated with the status quo, that while many universities have generally adopted the political rhetoric of 'equal educational opportunity for all,' many of the institutional efforts to convert such rhetoric into reality for First Nations people continue to fall short of expectations (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1).

This thesis explores the challenge to transform a mainstream Eurocentric post-secondary community college into a sustainable bicultural institution that would appropriately and effectively meet the needs of First Nations learners and their communities. For seven years, I was engaged with others in a journey to meet this challenge. Our task was to address head on the differences between the Aboriginal and Eurocentric paradigms for systematic education, with all the questions this task posed. What constitutes transformational change? What conditions are required for achieving meaningful change? Is it possible to shift the Eurocentric paradigm to make space for a bicultural environment within a mainstream institution, and what conditions must be present to accomplish transformational change?

Background to the Study

British Columbia’s public post-secondary colleges are the product of colonial government policies that established and support mainstream educational models.
Eurocentric perspective dominates all aspects of these institutions – the architecture, governance structures, administrative systems and practices, the learning environment, the curricula. This perspective is firmly entrenched and frequently unyielding to other cultural perspectives, values and educational approaches.

For the past 10 years, there has been increasing awareness of the need for systemic changes to the post-secondary (tertiary) system in British Columbia, Canada. Many government initiatives, memoranda of agreement, and high level political discussions and initiatives have encouraged educators to meet to explore ways of improving participation and graduation levels of Aboriginal people. In British Columbia, a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training in March 2005. In November of 2005, First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders met in Kelowna, British Columbia, and identified post-secondary education as a high priority. The Government of British Columbia signed a ‘Transformative Change Accord’ in Kelowna with federal and provincial First Nations representatives, committing to a new relationship between the British Columbia Government and First Nations, and to closing the social & economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbia residents. Premiers of Canada’s western provinces called for a Western Canadian Aboriginal Training Strategy; and in March 2006, I co-chaired, on behalf of the Post-secondary College and Institute Presidents of British Columbia and Alberta, the first British Columbia - Alberta President’s Roundtable on Aboriginal post-secondary education.

These various Memoranda of Agreement and Accords have brought increased dialogue, and some significant short-term funding initiatives, to the post-secondary system in various forms: Aboriginal Special Project grants, one-time program funds for targeted programs in areas such as health and trades; a $600,000 grant per institution for the creation of Aboriginal ‘Gathering Spaces’; and funding of up to $600,000 per year for three years for eleven institutions that submitted successful Aboriginal Service Plans.

With all of this investment, the provincial government came under increasing pressure to demonstrate significant success and accountability for Aboriginal students. But in the absence of a long-term sustainable strategy that effectively addresses the causes of Aboriginal participation and success rates in British Columbia, Aboriginal participation and success in British Columbia remains well below parallel rates for non-Aboriginal students.

On November 28, 2007, British Columbia’s Lieutenant Governor gave Royal Assent to Bill 46, entitled *The First Nations Education Act*. Bill 46 gives jurisdiction to First Nations communities for on-reserve Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools, adding further fuel to the controversies around Aboriginal post-secondary education in the province and to the defining of Aboriginal control of the education of children in their communities.

In addition to the low post-secondary participation rates of Aboriginal students, there are many other political motivations for governments to address the educational barriers facing Aboriginal people in Canada. Among them are the demands from Aboriginal communities for control and benefit of traditional Aboriginal lands and territories, a deepening nation-wide workforce crisis, and a critical shift in
demographics. (The Aboriginal population is rapidly rising, while the mainstream population is in dramatic decline.)

So the question arises: how can Canada enhance Aboriginal access and success in post-secondary education, thereby building capacity and mobilizing the Aboriginal workforce, when for generations mainstream Canada has been very effectively immobilizing Aboriginal people through colonization? This was a particularly urgent and pressing question for the northwest region of the province of British Columbia, a region served by Northwest Community College (NWCC), where I was President from September 2000 to September 2010.

Thirty-eight per cent of the population in the Northwest region of British Columbia is First Nations, many living in rural and remote villages. Eight Nations (Haida, Ts’msyen, Taltan, Gitxsan, Wet’suwet’en, Haisla, Nisga’a and Métis) and over twenty-seven different First Nation Bands (communities) were directly served by NWCC. The population of this region is unique: significantly more Aboriginal people live in this geographic region per capita than anywhere else in British Columbia.

Several First Nations communities in the Northwest have a history of alarmingly high rates of unemployment, like Kitkatla recently have had an unemployment rate of 80%. Most rural and remote First Nations communities in Canada have the fastest growing population of youth in Canada, with 50% of the population under the age of 25. They also have the highest rates of illiteracy, suicide,

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2 First Nations - This term, preferred by many Aboriginal peoples and the Assembly of First Nations within Canada, refers to the various governments of the first peoples of Canada.
3 Métis people - People of mixed First Nations and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis people and are accepted as such by a Métis leadership. They are distinct from First Nations, Inuit or non-Aboriginal peoples. The Métis history and culture draws on diverse ancestral origins such as Scottish, Irish, French, Ojibway and Cree.
4 'Band' is a term used to designate a group of Aboriginal people for whom 'reserves' of land has been provided under the Canadian Indian Act.
teen pregnancy, high school leavers (dropouts), drug and alcohol abuse, sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, foetal alcohol syndrome disorder and learning disabilities.

From the mid 1990s, First Nations leaders had called upon Northwest Community College to make changes that would encourage greater Aboriginal participation, student success and a brighter future for their children. They were adamant that the College should be a place where Aboriginal students felt supported and their culture acknowledged. Historically, Aboriginal learner participation in Northwest Community College had been low (an average of 8%) as a percentage of the total student population, and First Nations community engagement with the College had been inconsistent with mixed results. Despite growing concern and interest by members of the College community, by the time I took on the role of President, the College had yet to make changes that would address the concerns being voiced by Aboriginal peoples with the anticipated significant improvements in Aboriginal enrolments, retention and student success.

Regional demographics and the socio-economic condition of the Aboriginal population both call into question the appropriateness of having a public post-secondary institution, grounded in western values and systems, serving an essentially bicultural (two distinct cultures in the same geographic region) population (Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal). With such a large percentage of Aboriginal residents, it was arguable that the College had an obligation to become an institution that acknowledged Aboriginal perspectives, values, culture and knowledge, alongside western perspectives and approaches to post-secondary learning.
In 2005, the College’s Board of Governors released a new five-year Strategic Plan which called for the celebration and inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and practice within College operations: “. . . We celebrate the diversity of our northern and First Nations populations and reflect this diversity in our programs, services and our workforce” (www.nwcc.bc.ca/stratplan/2005).

During the development of the Strategic Plan, as President I argued that to enhance Aboriginal learner participation and success and to effectively engage First Nations communities, deeper level institutional change and strategic management was required. Without a marked ‘paradigm shift’ that would significantly alter the cultural foundation of the College, attempts to engage Aboriginal learners and their communities in any lasting significant way would fail. This idea has been expressed by others: as Sande Grande put it, “. . . it is not only imperative for Indian educators to insist on the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and praxis in schools but also to transform the institutional structures of schools themselves” (Grande, 2004, p. 6).

Over the seven-year period of this doctoral study, enrolment patterns at NWCC changed and there has been a progressive increase in the numbers of Aboriginal learners attending various programs. By the 2009-10 academic year mainstream versus Aboriginal student demographics bettered the demographic profile of the Province of British Columbia, with over forty-eight per cent (48%) of the student population being Aboriginal learners.

The increase in Aboriginal learners may be linked to many external and internal factors: the increasing importance that First Nations communities have placed upon education and training; the changing attitudes and understanding of College employees; the heightened involvement of the Aboriginal communities of the region and the strengthened relationships the College had with these communities; the
leadership of the institution; and the shift of focus and strategic directions called for in the new 2005 Strategic Plan of the College. The Strategic Plan paved the way for an innovative and transformative future for the College.

In this plan, the future envisaged for NWCC called for significant changes in the ways the College supports, interacts with and acknowledges Aboriginal students and their communities, together with a change in the mandate of the College. During the seven years described in this thesis, the College strove to move from a non-Aboriginal Eurocentric perspective, to one that incorporates and celebrates the Aboriginal paradigm of knowledge systems, including teaching, learning and knowing. Further, the College sought to have the government-legislated mandate changed to acknowledge that NWCC is neither non-Aboriginal nor Aboriginal, but rather, a college, which is a rich combination of the two—a bicultural institution. This future—a bicultural institution and identity—is a departure from current legislation that categorizes institutions as either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. Pressure for such change was undertaken with the conviction that the provincial post-secondary system had to move away from conventional ways of thinking to allow for the emergence of new and innovative institutional models.

The new directions and mandate NWCC sought were in keeping with provincial government intent. This was evident in the formation of the British Columbia Aboriginal Post-Secondary Partners Group in 2005. This Group included the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the First Nations Summit, the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, the Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia, the United Native Nations Society, the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the University Presidents’ Council, the British Columbia College Presidents, and the University-
College Presidents. The Partners’ Group launched its work with the signing of the 2005 British Columbia Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Aboriginal Education referenced earlier. In so doing, post-secondary institutions declared their intention to work collectively with Aboriginal organizations and their institutional colleagues towards the goal of improving levels of participation and success for Aboriginal learners in post-secondary education and training in British Columbia.

There is no mistaking the intent of the MOU:

The new Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Advisory Group represents an important step towards the kind of transformative change that is needed to make a real difference for Aboriginal students. The process of transformative change involves re-creating existing institutions, policies, and strategies so that they operate in fundamentally different ways, both internally and in terms of their impact on society (British Columbia Memorandum of Understanding on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education, 2005).

It is significant that the Provincial MOU on Aboriginal Education called for ‘transformative change involving the re-creation of existing institutions.’ This was substantially different from the incremental change of paying lip service to Aboriginal traditions and culture or simply increasing the number of Aboriginal students within an institution. My interpretation of this MOU was that educational structures, decision-making processes, administrative practices, approaches to governance, educational delivery, curricula, building architecture and campus life all had to be examined and reviewed in light of an Aboriginal paradigm for tertiary education.

In November 2005, the Province, the Federal Government and the Leadership Council representing the First Nations of British Columbia signed the Transformative Change Accord (TCA). The objectives were to “. . . close the social and economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbians, reconcile Aboriginal rights and
title with those of the Crown, and establish a new relationship based upon mutual respect and recognition” (Transformative Change Accord, 2005).

The research problem to be addressed by this doctoral study is embedded in the aspiration of the Provincial MOU on Aboriginal Education. This research problem is encapsulated in the three research questions:

1. Through my strategic professional practice as the President of the NWCC, how could I facilitate the process of transformative change to accommodate the Aboriginal paradigm at NWCC in order to achieve a genuinely and sustainable bicultural education and institution?

2. How could my professional practice as President of NWCC inform my deep understanding of the possibilities for the creation of a post-secondary education and training institution changing from an exclusively non-Aboriginal Eurocentric perspective only to one that would incorporate and celebrate the Aboriginal paradigm of being, including teaching, learning and knowing?

3. From my analysis of the transformative organizational changes I facilitated at NWCC, what have I come to understand as the possibilities for a bicultural post-secondary education and training institution in contemporary Canada?

This research, structured by my evolving strategic professional practice, explores the possibility of transforming a public post-secondary institution from one entrenched in Western values and systems to one that embraces Aboriginal knowledge and practice. The research therefore interrogates the deeper question: Is it possible for an educational institution to be counter hegemonic and bicultural?
The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured according to the following chapters:

Introducing the Problem and the Journey

In this introductory chapter the issue of appropriate post-secondary education for First Nations students and their communities, is summarized providing the context for my doctoral study. Here I identify the case for a journey towards biculturalism for the College of which I was President. I also emphasize that this journey was a professional learning journey for me, an aspect of the bicultural journey central to my thesis.

Northwest Community College – An Institutional Site for Understanding Biculturalism

The second chapter sets the context for the study. It begins the story of the College and the challenges it faced in meeting the education needs of the Northwest First Nations and the expectations they had of the College. It outlines the barriers faced by Aboriginal in their attempts to access and achieve success in this mainstream institution and the Strategic Planning process that began the College’s inward journey of reflection as we reconsidered the dominant education paradigm and the need to incorporate and celebrate the Aboriginal worldview.

Western Education as a Colonizing Force in Canada

Chapter 3 provides a critical look at the historical events, ideologies and practices that led to the colonization of education in Canada. Drawing from the
literature, government reports and personal communications with First Nations community members and leaders, this chapter examines the severe and lasting impact of colonization on Canada’s First Nations and the status of this history today. I describe how Canada’s residential schools were a powerful vehicle for the assimilation of Canadian Aboriginal peoples and how paradoxically, education holds the key to redressing that assimilation.

**Aboriginal Worldview and Bicultural Education**

Several key concepts are critical for an understanding of the journey set for the College. In this chapter I review the literature to gain an understanding of the Aboriginal worldview and explore the differences to that of the Western mainstream worldview. Understanding these varying points of view are essential for a deep appreciation of the unseen barriers that may be present in our efforts to provide education to Aboriginal students. I also review the literature for thoughts on bicultural education and note in particular the work that has been undertaken in New Zealand.

**Leading Organizational Change and Txeemsim as a Metaphor for Transformative Change**

In Chapter 5, I explore mainstream organizational change theory at work in many institutions as well as the literature on how to lead transformative, sustainable change. I not only look to mainstream literature for guidance on this topic, but also from the teachings of the Northwest Coast First Nations with whom I sought to more effectively work and serve. Drawing from the mythology of the Northwest First Nations, this chapter introduces a powerful metaphor for transformative change–Txeemsim.
My Methodology

This chapter addresses the methodological positioning of my study. Both participant observer and narrative research methodologies were appropriately employed for this research—I was both participant and observer consistently reflecting upon the changes in my own beliefs and attitudes about life and work as well as the changes occurring within the College and organizing these experiences and changes into meaningful narratives.

First Projects – Embarking on the Bicultural Journey

The next five chapters recount the story of six significant projects which highlight the strategic interventions of NWCC as we worked towards the vision of a bicultural institution in which both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldview might respectfully co-exist.

In the first of these chapters, Chapter 6, two projects are described: the creation of the first ‘All Nations Totem Pole’ for NWCC and the introduction and delivery of the Kitlope Field School. The ‘All Nations Totem Pole’ powerfully signalled the start to a new relationship with First Nations communities and heralds a future for the College. The Kitlope Field School was one of the first pedagogical forays into that new future. The Kitlope Field School presented the first educational model to successfully integrate local Aboriginal Knowledge and Knowledge Keepers (Elders); the School takes place in both on traditional lands of the Haisla people and within the classrooms of the College, and engages both local Elders and western academics.
Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

Chapter 8 presents the story of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art; particularly significant given the role colonization has played in the destruction of Aboriginal culture and expressions of the same. The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art not only served to support the reclamation of First Nations Northwest Coast art, it is also served to pave the way for bicultural models of education at the College. The School played an important role in breaking down the myths about First Nations people and demonstrates the power of art to foster healing.

The School of Exploration and Mining

Chapter 9 tells the story of how a new School sought to integrate the bicultural vision not only within the College but also within critical industry partnerships. The contributions of this project to the bicultural transformation of the College are substantial as the School played a key role in changing the views and attitudes within an industry in which colonial views of Aboriginal people and archaic views of sustainability were deeply entrenched. This School serves as a model of bicultural industry training for the country.

The House of Learning and Applied Research

In Chapter 10 I explore the House of Learning and Applied Research initiative. This initiative served to support the critical ongoing reflection and dialogue necessary for the sustained efforts of transformation. This chapter describes the key activities of the House of Learning and the role they played in moving the institution towards the bicultural vision.
Waap Galts’ap

In this chapter the initiation, creation and opening of the College’s first big house (longhouse) called, Waap Galts’ap is narrated. The chapter outlines the symbolic significance of the longhouse and its role in serving as a testament to the rich art and culture of the Northwest Coast First People. Matriarch and Elder, Mildred Roberts describes the importance of this Northwest Coast First Nations architecture, as the ‘Face’ of the transformation that took place within the College. Importantly, this chapter explores the responses to the building and opening of Waap Galts’ap. As Roberts notes, ‘the eyes of the people have been significantly changed’ and affirms the realization of a bicultural College.

Bicultural Northwest Community College

In Chapter 12 I review the emerging transformation of bicultural Northwest Community College and comment on the impact the key projects had on furthering the journey at NWCC. I reflect on the importance of symbolic plurality and the necessity for a bicultural pedagogy, which acknowledges the Aboriginal worldview. I further describe how these significant projects spawned other initiatives that not only led to the transformation of the College but also the role of the Board, NWCC’s First Nations Council and many who were involved in the journey. Importantly, I discuss the potent lesson of Txeemsim—that significant transformative change requires change at a very deep and personal level—particularly for myself as leader and those who sought to embody the vision. As we changed, so did the thinking and attitudes of many who worked at the College and, in they in turn, caused the structures and processes to change to support a new bicultural paradigm.
What Lessons for Higher Education in Canada?

The concluding chapter is a reflective ‘looking back’ at the changes in my own perspectives about my colonial views of education, my emerging understanding of leadership, and the necessity of transformation of self in order for organizational change to occur. The chapter seeks to synthesize the lessons this doctoral study may hold for the post-secondary system in Canada and for those seeking to shift the Eurocentric paradigm to make authentic place and space for the Aboriginal worldview.

Conclusion

This thesis is fundamentally about embracing the role of education in redressing colonization in Canada’s post-secondary institutions. Through the narration of Northwest Community College’s journey to become non-hegemonic and bicultural, important lessons for the post-secondary system in Canada emerge. It is possible to unfetter our institutions from the colonial norms but the journey to doing so requires a dramatic shift in our thinking about the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and the western education paradigm. It challenges us to examine our own belief systems and the colonial views that have shape and govern Canada’s institutions. Without personal and organizational transformation, authentic change cannot occur.

Education has been a powerful vehicle for the assimilation of Canadian Aboriginal peoples and the devastation of individuals and their families, it also, paradoxically, holds out the hope for a counter-hegemonic system.
Northwest Community College was an excellent example of a post-secondary institution built upon a worldview that was contrary to the worldview held by many Indigenous people in Canada. For over thirty years it had perpetuated Euro-centric assumptions of reality and alienated many Aboriginal people from successfully participating in higher education. This chapter provides an overview of Northwest Community College and explores the barriers such institutions pose for Indigenous learners as well as insights as to why these barriers exist.

I served as President of Northwest Community College from the fall of 2000 to the fall of 2010. I felt drawn to the position upon reading of the First Nations communities and the aspirations of the College. I was resistant to leaving the southern coast of the British Columbia to move to a remote area of the province of which I had no knowledge and no family. Despite a successful interview, it took some weeks to actually commit to the offer of the position. The deciding point came for me during a trip to the remote community of Old Massett on Haida Gwaii. I was travelling to a meeting with the College Board of Governors. There is something mystical about the group of islands known as Haida Gwaii, shrouded in fog one moment and then the next, startlingly clear and sunny as the winds off the Pacific
breathe through clearing the mist and rain. The geography is captivatingly beautiful, with its towering trees, its thick carpets of rainforest mosses that coax you to lie down and luxuriate in their depths, and its endless beaches of sand offering up agates and shells. Larger than life eagles and ravens as tall as my knees cockily made it clear that I was on their territory and engaged in playful, cheeky behaviour. I arrived by floatplane and took a quick trip to the Haida village of Old Massett. I was greeted by the Board as well as the Elders at the community hall, and invited to a lunch catered by the locals. On the menu were salmon, k’aaw (herring roe on kelp), fried bread and seafood chowder. In the evening I was greeted by more Haida Gwaii fare - crab, razor clams, assorted salmon, and halibut and smoked black cod. This was followed by a fashion show of clothing and regalia made by a local crafts woman using the crest designs created by her son. The mystery and richness of the culture and the opportunity to immerse myself in First Nations culture engulfed me. I felt compelled to join them, not really understanding why. That day I signed a five-year contract and began a journey that would forever change me.

An Overview of Northwest Community College

Northwest Community College (NWCC) is a provincially funded, comprehensive, post-secondary institution in Northwest British Columbia. It was founded in 1975 and situated within a rural and remote context. This region is home to over 83,000 people, 25% (B.C. Stats, 2008) to 38% (Skeena Native Development Statistics, 2006) of whom are First Nations and Métis. According to British Columbia government statistics 2008 census data, this is by far the largest percentage of Aboriginal population as per cent of total population of all college regions in
British Columbia. This region is one of the largest, most remote and rugged in the Province of British Columbia with over 35 different communities ranging in size from a few hundred to over 15,000. While the region is spectacularly beautiful, the geography profoundly affects travel in this area. Many people and communities are physically isolated from one another, from services, from employment and from major centres. As a result of the geographic setting, the College established ten (10) campuses and learning centres in the following communities: Hazelton, Houston, Kitimat, Village of Queen Charlotte, Masset, New Aiyansh, Prince Rupert, Smithers, Stewart (closed in 2009), Terrace and at the Bill Reid Education Centre at Kay Llnagaay.

The College is mandated by the provincial government of B.C. to provide post-secondary services and programs to the residents of the Northwest.
During the period pertaining to this thesis, the Indigenous population was the fastest growing population in Canada. This was particularly true for the Northwest region of B.C. and continues to be true today. Over 50% of the Indigenous population was under the age of 25 and was dramatically increasing at a time when the mainstream population was and continues to be dramatically declining.
The region is home to seven (7) First Nations: the Haida First Nation on the west, the Wet’suwet’en and Gitxsan on the east, the Tahltan and Nisga’a to the north, and the combined First Nations of the Haisla and Henaaksiila\(^5\) to the south. Much of the land stretching from the coast to the central interior of this region (following the banks of the Skeena River) is the traditional home of the Ts’mysyen people. Many Métis people have moved to various parts of the Northwest but are not traditional landholders.

*Figure 2  First Nations within British Columbia (B.C. Ministry of Education)*

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\(^5\) The people known as the ‘Henaaksiila’ have a population of less than 10 people. In the early 1900’s they merged with the Haisla given their extremely small numbers.
NWCC is a comprehensive community college. When I arrived at the College there were approximately 5000 learners, primarily part-time, equivalent to approximately 1400 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. The College employed 430 full and part-time staff and was one of the largest employers in the region. By 2010 the College has reached enrolments of up to 9000 learners, or approximately 1900 FTEs.
There were four employee groups within the College, three of which operate within distinct Collective Agreements: the B.C. Government Employees Union (B.C.GEU) for support staff; the B.C.GEU for Adult education, career and trades/vocational instructors; and the Federated Instructors of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) for college professors teaching at the university level. The fourth employee group was that of administrators of whom there were twenty-three. Approximately 20% of all employees at the College are Aboriginal.

A Board of Governors comprised of eight government-appointed community representatives and four internal constituency representatives governed the College. In 2000, one member of the Board was Aboriginal representing the communities of the Nisga’a Nation. A key function of the Board of Governors is the setting of the Strategic Plan for the College. The 1995 Strategic Plan described a college that was proud of its First Nations’ heritage and sought to put in place systems and strategies that would enhance student access, support student success, and moreover involve and engage Aboriginal communities in the determination of educational priorities, student services, and the design, delivery and pedagogy of educational programs.

During the 1980’s and 90’s there was increasing public discourse throughout B.C. regarding the impact of residential schools on Aboriginal people. (Residential schools were government-sponsored religious schools established to assimilate Aboriginal children into Euro-Canadian culture.) Aboriginal people were struggling for educational access and appealed to the College for change. In response the College supported the development of a study, led by a task force of First Nations Band education administrators, Elders, and College employees, who outlined specific ‘steps’ the College should take to engage First Nations students and their communities. The resultant document, entitled ‘Stepping Stones’ written in
consultation with various educational leaders of First Nations communities, reads like a strategic planning document and recommends very clear objectives and action as well as an implementation plan for the same. This document was approved by the College Board of Governors in 1996 and led to the establishment of the NWCC First Nations Council.

The NWCC First Nations Council’s stated purpose was “to regularly liaise with and advise the College with respect to First Nations educational and student support issues, initiatives and aspirations.” (NWCC First Nations Council Minutes, 1996) Additionally the Stepping Stones document called for a partnership with Aboriginal communities and organizations. By the year 2000, the College had in place two agreements with First Nations organizations: an Affiliation Agreement with Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a6 (the Nisga’a House of Learning referred to as WWN) and the Wet’su’wt’en First Nation. While terms of reference for the Council were not established until 2001, the First Nations Council of NWCC met regularly with up to eight meetings per year.

During my first year as President at the College, 2001, it became readily apparent that the directions of the Strategic Plan and the Stepping Stones document were not being strategically considered or implemented. In some instances actions were being taken without consideration of the College’s ability to meet the expectation or the precedent setting nature of the decision.

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6 Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a is legally incorporated as an education institution under the Society Act whose mandate is to develop and implement adult education for Nisga’a people where they live and work.
Frequently administrators succumbed to feelings of ‘white guilt’ as key Aboriginal leaders used their colonized circumstance and the strength of their position within their community to control the Council and manoeuvre specific outcomes. This unfortunately led to decisions and promises that the College could not keep. For example, the five-year capital plan for the College included a request for the funding of a new facility on the Nisga’a territory that would be owned and operated by the Nisga’a First Nation. This request was outside the mandate of the College, as the College could not request funding for facilities it would not own and operate. Another example was the promise to develop and pilot a two-year First Nations Public Administration program with a $25,000 grant from the provincial government; $25,000 was insufficient for development, let alone delivery.

The College had taken some steps to enhancing access for Aboriginal students. Through limited ‘targeted funding’ two part-time First Nations Access Coordinators were hired for the Hazelton and Terrace campuses in an effort to reach out to and support Aboriginal learners. Aboriginal-specific programs were developed in response to community demands: a First Nations Cultural Tourism program was initiated, a First Nations Forestry Technician and a Teacher Education program were delivered as a contract to the Gitxsan Wet’suwet’en Education Society (GWES) in Hazelton. Unfortunately, the design and scheduling of this latter program appeared to be more focused on meeting the interests of faculty than the needs of students. Budgets were over-run as expenditures ran high, and GWES quickly perceived the College as being overly expensive and ineffectual.

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7 According to Shelby Steele (2006), who wrote White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era, white guilt is: “the vacuum of moral authority that comes from simply knowing that one’s race is associated with racism” (Steele, 2006, p. 24). It is also said to be the individual or collective guilt often felt by some Caucasians (whites) for the racist treatment of people of colour by whites both historically and presently.
Although data is unavailable, anecdotal evidence indicates that throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, Aboriginal student participation at the College was low as a percentage of the student population. With the exception of the Hazelton campus, which is situated in a predominantly Aboriginal area, most campuses did not have more than 5 to 10 per cent Aboriginal students within their student populations.

Upon closer examination of the workings of the First Nations Council and the value they placed upon the Stepping Stones document, it appeared as if two separate strategic plans were at work within the College: one for the First Nations Council and one for the rest of the institution. The First Nations Council was not only ‘regularly liaising with and advising the College with respect to First Nations educational and student support issues, initiatives and aspirations’, but was clearly initiating and leading some initiatives—e.g. First Nations Public Administration—without consultation with related departments within the institution and much of the College seemed oblivious to the initiatives of the First Nations Council. As a result, the First Nations Council became increasingly frustrated with the inability or perceived unwillingness of the College to implement specific recommendations of the Stepping Stones document.

It was also apparent that the College’s Strategic plan while exhaustive in the deliberations leading to its formation and writing, was, as an internally referential document, limited. The Plan was prefaced by a thorough introduction and external analysis and outlined several goals and objectives. The document was lengthy and an implementation plan with clear outcomes and timelines was lacking. As a result, the Plan was a document to which few employees referred. Clearly the Plan was not having a significant impact on the institution.
In 2003 the College embarked on a new strategic planning process that sought to bring the goals of First Nations Council members and Aboriginal communities together with the goals and objectives of the non-Aboriginal communities and stakeholders. We engaged in the traditional strategic planning activities of a ‘SWOT’ (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis but paid more attention to fostering meaningful, collective dialogues with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, students and leaders. This process of ‘deep listening’ and dialogue (Bohm, 1990), we were later to discover, served as a critical first step in the initiation of our journey of transformation and was frequently unsettling and revealing. The process took us back to where Blackstock (2003) suggested we should go, to our beginnings, to a review of the Colleges’ values, ideologies and actions and began to make us aware that, knowingly or unknowingly, we were all engaged in actions that supported colonialism. (Blackstock, 2003) The strategic planning process had set the platform for continued dialogue, learning and change and for the unearthing of perspectives, values, systems and structures that support and perpetuate colonization within the College.

Over the next eighteen (18) months, several dialogical conversations were held at every campus engaging a range of interest groups, including College Governors, administrators, faculty, staff, students, First Nations Council members and community stakeholders. As Aboriginal students and community members

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8: "Colonization can be defined as some form of invasion, dispossession and subjugation of a peoples. The invasion need not be military; it can begin—or continue—as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments. The result of such incursion is the dispossession of vast amounts of lands from the original inhabitants. This is often legalized after the fact. Historically, First Nation peoples (defined as Status Indians by the Indian Act) lost some 98% of their original lands through various legal means such as treaties and the Indian Act. Métis Nation peoples lost some 83% of their Red River lots through the Scrip program. The long-term result of such massive dispossession is institutionalized inequality. The colonizer/colonized relationship is by nature an unequal one that benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized" (LaRoque, NFB website).
outlined their challenges with the College and their hopes for the future, the “education gap” (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998) between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students emerged, and importantly, non-Aboriginal people were there to hear the messages.

**Barriers to Aboriginal Student Access and Success at NWCC**

Aboriginal stakeholders cited academic preparedness, socio-economic issues, funding, health, geography, culture, language and lack of Aboriginal representation as barriers to Aboriginal student access and success; many linked these barriers to the continuing legacy of colonization. These factors are discussed in turn below.

**Academic Preparation and Prerequisites**

Many Aboriginal students noted that their academic preparation and success often falls short in comparison to their non-Aboriginal peers and mainstream Canadian education standards. This is upheld by B.C. government statistics, which notes the Northwest ranks among the highest region in the province for educational concerns. (Index of Educational Concerns by Regional District, B.C. Stats, 2007) In fact, statistics for low academic standards in rural and Aboriginal communities go hand in hand. In the Northwest the majority of the Aboriginal communities are both rural and isolated. This issue of academic standards is exacerbated by perceived failures in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system, and in the challenges faced by schools run by First Nations communities. High teacher turnover is common in Aboriginal community-based schools, as many of the new teachers are recent
university graduates who apply to rural and remote schools for their first posts. However, rural and isolated conditions combined with higher than average social dysfunction in the Aboriginal communities often cause teachers to seek jobs elsewhere, after only a year or two of teaching in-community schools. This contributes to the lack of continuity within the schools, further degrading the quality of education that students receive.

Many Aboriginal students stated they had not completed high school (in British Columbia, only 38 per cent of Aboriginal Canadians graduate from high school, compared to 77 per cent of non-Aboriginal Canadians) and of those that did attend post-secondary, many came as mature students. Others graduated from high school but without necessary academic courses such as mathematics and science, or lacking study skills, time management skills and computer literacy. These comments are affirmed by a report commissioned by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) which also concluded that the relatively weak standing of Aboriginal groups at the post-secondary level reflected a poor foundation at the early and secondary levels of education (Hull, 2000).

Aboriginal educators in the Northwest region cited that given the negative experiences of parents and grandparents with residential schools, few role models were available. The lack of role models meant post-secondary was generally not seen as a viable option for Aboriginal people.

**Socio-Economic Barriers to Post-Secondary Education**

Aboriginal education administrators noted that social barriers encountered by Aboriginal learners are layered and complex, and can be attributed to many factors such as overarching poverty, poor health, lack of adequate and affordable housing
and lack of support networks. They noted these barriers are symptomatic of the continued colonial existence that Aboriginal Peoples endure under the Indian Act\(^9\).

The staggering poverty in the Aboriginal communities of the Northwest has a profound effect on post-secondary education. Diminished socio-economic status of Aboriginal students was stated as an intimidation factor for those relocating to larger towns or campuses compared to the population of the Aboriginal student’s home community. In comparing on and off reserve residency and Canada Employment Insurance claim patterns, it is evident that seasonal employment is the main source of income for many Aboriginals in the Northwest region, thereby limiting their income security to only certain times of year.

Inadequate housing is an indicator of poverty, and NWCC Aboriginal students are a prime example. Many students end up living in overcrowded homes with friends or relatives because they can’t find an adequate and affordable place to live. It is not uncommon to have more than two distinct families living in one residence, with one or more adults attending post-secondary courses, or to have students ‘couch surfing’ and without a consistent and secure home in which to reside.

A 40 year-old Culinary Arts student explains:

I am trying to complete the second year of my diploma. I have taken responsibility for my two nieces due to my sisters’ inability to look after them. It is difficult…. I don’t have a home to offer them . . . . we sleep at different houses, and are never quite sure

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\(^9\) The Indian Act was passed in Canada’s Parliament in 1874 and incorporated the inferior social status of native people into its language and provisions. Aboriginals were henceforth imprisoned on reserve lands and became legal wards of the state.
where we will end up at night . . . I hope to find some place we can afford soon, but it is hard to find work that fits with my school schedule (J. Wesley, personal conversation, 2004).

**Health**

Poor health is also associated with poverty, and several Aboriginal students stated that they often do not have enough money to eat nutritious meals with the amount of money they receive from educational sponsorship. Poor health in Aboriginal communities is well documented; diabetes, obesity, lack of nutrition, diminished use of traditional foods, low levels of emotional health and limited access to support services. Aboriginal students who are facing health problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse are also at greater risk of failing their courses and dropping out from their programs.

Some Aboriginal students said they felt significant levels of personal stress while attending College, and reported negative feelings about school, largely due to feelings of isolation, inadequacy and discrimination. Students from more remote communities stated the further away or more remote their community was located from their school, the harder time they have.

**Funding**

Poverty-stricken Aboriginal people do not typically attend or complete a post-secondary education. Funding from home communities is often very limited, and students simply do not have enough funds to pay for their education and live without hardship while they are studying. Social assistance benefits and seasonal jobs are often the main sources of income on some reserves and the most Aboriginal families do not have adequate employment income to pay for post-secondary
education. The majority of Aboriginal students attending NWCC rely on assistance from other sources, such as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) sponsorship or student loans to attend post-secondary. Significant scholarships and bursaries are frequently competitive, and many Aboriginal students said they simply do not have the grades necessary to qualify for these funds.

Government-based funding from INAC is very limited. There has been no change to the level of funding received by Bands for post-secondary education for more than fifteen years and is regarded by most Aboriginal students and their administrators, to be grossly inadequate. Rates for living allowances (provided by Bands as per INAC policies) are out-dated and capped, leaving students with difficult financial choices, such as whether to buy books or groceries. To be sponsored by their Band for post-secondary education Aboriginal students are expected to attend full-time, leaving little to no extra time for a part-time job to earn the extra income, especially if they have a family.

The literature emphasizes poverty and lack of financial support as barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education, (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; Helin, 2008) but there is little data on the specific financial problems of day-care, housing and relocation costs. While financial assistance such as loans, grants and bursaries are calculated to take into account the costs of housing and dependants, they often underestimate or do not allow for the specific expenses of Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal students are, on average, older than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. At NWCC, the average age of Aboriginal students is 32 years. This has an effect on the resources they need and how they study. Mature students normally
have better life skills than recent high school graduates but may lack basic academic skills. However, many mature Aboriginal students stated they are discouraged from upgrading their skills by attending post-secondary education due to funding restrictions and the added amount of time to complete their studies. According to INAC post-secondary sponsorship policy, upgrading courses are included toward their maximum allowable sponsorship amount, even though it is a non-credit year. Therefore, students will use one year of sponsorship funds for courses that do not count toward their field of study.

**Geographic Barriers**

Many Aboriginal students who attend Northwest Community College come from geographical remote areas accessible only by boat or floatplane. Many of those students were raised in small, isolated communities with networks of extended families and close ties to their ancestral lands and culture. The geographic distance for those students to leave their home communities to attend post-secondary colleges is often an inhibiting factor for many Aboriginal students. Not only do the students have to move away from their home communities, but they must also leave their social, cultural and familial networks of support.

For some Aboriginal students, leaving their home communities to attend post-secondary college marks the first time they have lived beyond the boundaries of the reserve. Depending on the program, the college they attend may also be outside of their ancestral territory, layering the social and cultural adaptations to include the local college and western culture as well as the local Aboriginal customs and protocols. This is an important but little acknowledged factor. Aboriginal students are very aware of each other and the people in whose territory they reside. Inter-tribal histories and relationships are still within the awareness of Aboriginal students,
and are occasionally a contributing factor to student selection of schools. While many of NWCC’s campuses are situated near Aboriginal communities, appealing to students who do not wish to relocate to more distant post-secondary institutions, for those students who do relocate to areas with little or no family, the geographic distance and isolation of being ‘on their own’ in a new and non-Aboriginal community are often overwhelming, highlighting the need for increased awareness around Aboriginal support services. Said one Aboriginal student:

I grew up in a small community of less than 200 people. When I moved to town to go to college, there were hundreds of people around me, but I felt more alone than ever. I missed my family and the land I grew up on. I felt like a stranger in a foreign land, even though I was only a few hundred miles from home (T. Quock, personal communication, 2004).

Lack of Aboriginal Representation

Lack of Aboriginal representation in college personnel was an often-stated complaint regarding the percentage of Aboriginal personnel at the College, as it does not accurately reflect the general population of the region. The Aboriginal population is growing faster than any other ethnicity in the Northwest and in Canada, yet there continues to be a significant lack of Aboriginal representation at institutions of higher learning. Aboriginal representation in faculty, support staff and management positions was cited as important for a number of reasons:

- to provide Aboriginal perspectives in academic and practical learning;
- to assist in developing collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organizations;
- to serve as role models and mentors within the College and wider community;
• to act as mentors to colleagues regarding Aboriginal education and issues;
• to act as advisors to students (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal);
• for general equity.

Aboriginal teachers at all levels demonstrate teaching and support strategies that have proven effective in attracting and keeping Aboriginal students. They are able to initiate more participation and interaction through the kinship of common experience and background and teach in ways consistent with Aboriginal learning. It is also critical that programs with Aboriginal-specific content are taught by credible Aboriginal people in order to address past and present colonial institutions, methods, perspectives and values that do not support the success and equity of Aboriginal Peoples.

**Cultural Barriers**

The culture of the post-secondary education system was a prevalent theme in the discussions undertaken with students and various reports (RCAP, 1996). Colleges and universities were noted as not being consistently concerned with the effects of culture on students. Almost all teaching staff and faculty are from different cultural and socio-economic groups than Aboriginal students. Most do not have any depth of understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and core values; neither do they recognize the diversity of Aboriginal communities or understand that not all Aboriginal student needs are the same. There is little recognition and understanding of the different cognition and learning styles.

To Aboriginal people, post-secondary education often represents an impersonal and hostile environment in which their culture, traditions and values are
CHAPTER TWO

not recognized. Aboriginal people are expected to leave their culture behind and assume the trappings of a new form of reality, hauntingly similar to the logic of the establishment of residential schools. As Cajete (1994, p. 134) states: “The disparity between home and school environments is so great that some Native American students experience a kind of culture shock that significantly affects their attitudes towards schools.”

Post-secondary institutions typically have long-established practices seen as serving the values and cultural norms of the dominant, non-Aboriginal society. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported as follows:

There is the question of the training and education programs themselves. Many ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values and issues and give scant attention to the work environment in which students will use their professional knowledge and skills. In the informal culture of the institution, there may be little or no affirmation of Aboriginal identity and the environment may replicate the negative features that led students to drop out of school in the first place. Aboriginal support systems—peer networks, family activities, financial, personal and academic counseling, or day-care services—may not be in place. The lack of institutional readiness to develop these supports is a significant deterrent to the completion of programs for students who do enroll. Lack of Aboriginal control, strongly evidenced in the education of children and youth, is also encountered in the education of adults (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

According to Aboriginal educators and students in the Northwest, Aboriginal student success in post-secondary classrooms is often marred by confrontational experiences with unaware and racist classmates and instructors. Basic understanding of Aboriginal issues and experiences is limited, with stereotypes and misinformation about Aboriginal Rights influencing comments and treatment of Aboriginal students in the classroom and on campus. Said one Aboriginal student:
When Aboriginal issues were discussed in class, it was always tense and intimidating. I was looked at as an example of all the negative statistics; all that was wrong in Aboriginal communities. There was no understanding by others about our colonial experience and why our communities are so dysfunctional, just racist assumptions that it is because there is something inherently wrong with us, that it is genetic. It got so that I hated talking about Aboriginal issues in class, especially when I was the only Aboriginal student. I was silenced and shamed on issues that were important to me because racism and discrimination against Aboriginal people was the norm (D. Moore, personal communication, 2009).

Not surprisingly, poor self-concept and motivation were themes of the dialogues and supported by the (RCAP, 1996). Poor self-concept was expressed as a sense of powerlessness, apathy, poor mental and physical health, anger and frustration, which frequently lead to a further cycle of despair. These manifestations impact on many Aboriginal students. Their home communities were described as having insufficient family or community services support to assist them in the development of a healthy mind and body. As another student stated:

The residential school experience robbed my family of our language, culture and traditions; we lost our identity. When you struggle with your identity, you struggle with pride, self-confidence, self-worth and self-respect. All of these issues place enormous pressure when trying to succeed at college (J. Wilson, personal communication, 2006).

Discussions with students indicate that family responsibilities also often keep Aboriginal students from staying in school. Aboriginal communities share family responsibilities communally, which can interrupt post-secondary programs. In many NWCC programs, as many as 65 per cent of Aboriginal students were female (NWCC Institutional Service Plan, 2006) and were more likely to have dependants than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. A 1999 British Columbia study of former
students of colleges and institutes affirms that Aboriginal students were more likely to have a spouse or partner, to be older than the general population, and to have children (B.C. Colleges and Institutes, 1999).

Cultural responsibilities other than caring for children also pull Aboriginal students from formal study at the College. Community roles and responsibilities regarding ceremonies, deaths, feasts, food gathering and preservation frequently ‘interrupt’ the western learning environment.

Language

Aboriginal Elders and older leaders in the dialogues raised the importance and significance of language. As will be outlined in Chapter 3, language is more than a means of communication: it is a way of interacting and living within one’s natural world; it is the key to indigenous knowledge and worldview. Dan Moonhawk Alford (2001) succinctly captures the difference in the following excerpt:

While all of us have been subtly conditioned/brainwashed/socialized by our European language/culture complex to believe in the “things” of reality as being more real than the invisible connections between them, valuing the dancers over the dancing, it’s a highly important antidote and counterbalance to know that . . . Indigenous peoples value the dancing over the dancers, believe that processes and interrelationships are more real than the ‘things’ that grow out of them—that the physical is an epiphenomenon of the non-physical, and that cyclical timing is more real than linear time. We need both descriptions for a complete picture of how reality works for everyone, as well as how language works for everyone, on this planet (Alford, 2001, Para 21).

The Elders pressed the urgency of restoring their language before the few remaining ‘speakers die away’. As the late Dr Bert McKay, a former Nisga’a language teacher and Elder, explains, “In our language, it is embedded, our
philosophy of life and our technologies. There is a reason why we want our languages preserved and taught to our children—it is our survival” (McKay, 2003). This restoration is viewed as critical for the repatriation, strengthening and sharing of the Aboriginal worldview.

Lessons Learned from the Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning process at NWCC in 2003-2005 facilitated a series of dialogues that expressed the ‘education gap’ which is well documented in the literature (Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998; Helin 2008; Cajete 1994) and numerous government documents (RCAP 1996; Federal Auditor General 2004 Report on Education Program and Post-Secondary Student Support, 2004). The education gap between Indigenous peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts is not unique to NWCC or the Canadian education system; similar problems exist in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, India, Sweden, Africa and educators and researchers from all of those countries and more, are working to find solutions to this problem.

Early literature attempted to define the “education gap” in terms of “cultural impoverishment” (Wotherspoon, & Schissel, 1998, pp. 191-214) or “cultural deprivation” (Agbo, 2002, p. 22). “Cultural deprivation applies to the inability of Aboriginal children to adapt to Euro-American content as an integral part of their own social and cultural context”(Agbo, 2002, p. 4). This view has long supported educational and societal objectives of the acculturation and expected assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and culture as the best means for improving their lives.

Current literature centres on the idea of “cultural discontinuity” (Agbo, 2002, p. 5 for example) or the contradictions Aboriginal students find between their
communities and culture and Western education philosophy and pedagogy. The outcomes of this literature call for a variety of means of incorporating Aboriginal culture in Western education, for example, curriculum changes, increased cultural awareness on the part of educators and creating culturally sensitive learning environments.

The calls for “culturally relevant pedagogy” and/or “cultural responsiveness” in Western schools (Orr, et al 2011; Kawagley, 1998 Barnhardt, Kawagley and Hill, 1998) are increasing. Much of this literature is founded on the recognition that Western education is an instrument of colonization that continues historical post-contact acculturation objectives. Urion (1991 p. 8) referring to the need for changes states:

The acculturation model has become a piece of embarrassing baggage in education; long after it has been discredited in theoretical anthropology, it is still the predominant model in academic and applied educational discourse and threatens to fuel another 50 years of discussion about conflicting values.

Battiste and Smith (2008) are more optimistic about the future. In the keynote address to the World Indigenous Peoples’ Education conference on December 10, 2008, Battiste signalled that an Aboriginal Renaissance is occurring and claims it is pragmatic and practical, reforming the attitudes and beliefs about Aboriginal people; a renaissance in which we all must be engaged. (Battiste, 2008) Graham Smith, in his keynote at the same conference, argued that Aboriginal people must be proactive and self-determined in positive action. He claimed this has been the key to Maori advancements (Smith, 2008).

The 2003-2005 Strategic Planning process at NWCC initiated the opportunity to challenge the assumptions, practices, and values that make up the way we view
post-secondary education, and to consider how the Euro-centric paradigm has shaped our institutions, and our approaches to learning. The barriers to higher learning for Aboriginal people cited by our students and community members, allowed participants to see post-secondary education from the eyes of the Aboriginal learner. It signalled the need to look inward—at ourselves as educators, as a College that was unknowingly perpetuating colonization, to reconsider the dominant education paradigm and to make shifts in the way we approached our roles in the College. As one faculty member noted:

My personal classroom experience and research activities over the last two years have brought me through frustration and anger at the social exclusion that is so visible and perpetuated in our educational institutions . . . to a reflection of my own assumptions and a recognition of a contradiction in recognizing and defining differences between cultures and the respecting and valuing of those differences (K. Downs, Personal communication, 2008).

As strategic planning participants ‘processed’ the dialogical conversations in which they were involved and their relevance to the development of an active Strategic Plan for NWCC, certain key messages emerged to challenge us:

1. That the College had been fashioned on the colonial paradigm;
2. That colonization is not over;
3. That reconciliation should not be deferred to government, that it is a personal and organizational responsibility;
4. That as educators and as a College, there was much to ‘unlearn’ about the Eurocentric perspective in which we have all been ‘marinated’ (Battiste, 2008) and it’s shaping of the western education system, and;
5. That the way forward is through the development of authentic relationships with Aboriginal people.
The fact that our Eurocentric worldview continues to shape our governments, laws, post-secondary systems and relationships with Aboriginal peoples is evident in the voices of the NWCC First Nations Council members and those of NWCC’s Aboriginal students and the communities the College serves. Through the strategic planning dialogues, and certainly every day as college educators, we see and hear of first-hand, the barriers that our educational system poses for Aboriginal students seeking to achieve a higher education. “To ignore the fact that relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are a foundational and continuing dynamic in both Canadian and American history is to participate, however unwittingly, in the process of cultural genocide . . ..” (Cajete, 1994, p. 137).

Accepting the responsibility of redressing colonization at NWCC was, as one participant stated, ‘a no-brainer’. But like much of what was ultimately written in the final Strategic Plan, (Appendix 1), the implications of accepting that responsibility proved to be little understood and a steep learning curve for all.

Knowing more about the Aboriginal paradigm of being and how Aboriginal culture is shared and experienced will serve NWCC educators and administrators to better understand Aboriginal students’ perspectives and behaviour and how educational systems could be changed to create environments more conducive to their learning. Through the involvement of the College’s internal and external communities the vision, mission, values and strategic directions of the College were reviewed and rewritten in 2005. The Board of Governors and First Nations Council endorsement of this one plan, as opposed to two earlier plans, sent a clear, supportive message that they would work shoulder to shoulder in bringing about change at the institution. In turn, these messages were, through my leadership, being embraced and lead by the formal and informal leaders throughout the College.
The new Strategic Plan has set a course that was to move the NWCC from one that was traditionally non-Aboriginal in its make-up and perspective, to one that incorporates and celebrates the Aboriginal paradigm. And in the implementation of the Strategic Plan, we were striving to work not only with the non-Aboriginal community, but also with the Aboriginal communities through First Nations Council; they were in the ‘drivers’ seat’ with us, and we were engaged, for the most part, in respectful dialogue and deep authentic change.

The 2003-2005 Strategic Planning process and its outcome established a platform for the NWCC in the form of words that set the direction for transformative change. The setting of this strategic ‘compass’ was however the first step. Transformative change is more than words in a strategic plan. It involves actions that create new ways of being, knowing and doing for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, administrators, students and community members. The issue for me as the President of NWCC was how to facilitate the transition from words to new practices and new understandings informing these new practices. How could I engage the College community and its stakeholders in the struggle of renewal and transformation at the level of their professional lives as teachers, learners, administrators and governors ultimately leading to strategic and managed organizational change?

The answer to me was to facilitate significant ‘change-agent’ projects. These projects were considered by me to be ‘significant’ in the sense that institutional movement according to the strategic planning compass was facilitated through the work of each project; practice and theoretical understandings from each project had the potential to be generalized within the College; and the projects themselves would build momentum for broader ways of doing bicultural business at NWCC.
Conclusion

In chapters 7 through 11, I present accounts of a number of projects that fit the above description of ‘change-agent’ projects and which have contributed to my own professional development and personal transformation as a President of a post-secondary college seeking to facilitate the creation of a bicultural institution. These accounts are central to this thesis which explores the possibilities and potential for biculturalism to become embedded within an educational institution, specifically at NWCC but, hopefully, with wider implications.

In the next two chapters I review the relevant literature in this exploration of the possibilities and potential of biculturalism at NWCC.
This chapter focuses on the literature, including historical accounts, foregrounding ideologies and practices forced on First Nations communities in the education of their children within colonial Canada. This review of the literature, though referring to past, but securely embedded practices, provides an essential backdrop to the core project of the doctoral study upon which this thesis is based.

Colonization has had a severe and lasting impact on the First Nations people in this country and its effects are still being felt today. In the late 19th century, the
Canadian government stripped the nation’s Indigenous people of their land and cultural rights, and imposed their own laws, customs, language and values upon the First Nations, whom they deemed “inferior.”

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes’s discussion of “the state of nature” (Hobbes, 1651) forwarded in 1651 had much to do with the western view of the Indian as “inferior.” Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000, p. 60) suggest that Hobbes’s discussion set the foundation for colonizers to rationalize their disregard for Indigenous human rights. “This rationalization projected Indigenous peoples into the past, created the vanishing-race theory, and allowed colonial legal systems to ignore Indigenous human and treaty rights.”

This chapter not only recounts the historical context of my research, but also demonstrates why the effects of colonization have been so lasting and why colonialism is still alive today.

**Residential School System**

The vehicles for colonization in Canada were many—among them, government laws, religion and education. One of the most comprehensive tools of colonization was the Indian residential school. The residential school system in Canada predates Confederation. The Government of Canada operated nearly every school as a “joint venture” with various religious organizations paying per capita fees per Aboriginal child who attended. Prior to residential schools, Aboriginal people who obtained a university degree paid a heavy price: an 1933 amendment to the
Indian Act\(^{11}\), forced them to relinquish their Indian status, a process called enfranchisement. This process, combined with a Western education, was powerfully assimilative, and alienated educated Aboriginal peoples from their families and communities, as they were taught the ideas, worldviews and values of the Eurocentric Canadian mainstream at the expense of their own social, cultural, spiritual and practical knowledge.

The intention of the residential school system was "to kill the Indian in the child" and to transform Aboriginal children from "savages" into civilized members of the Canadian society (Davin, 1879). The government’s goal was to sever the ties of culture that ran between generations sustaining family and community. “Aboriginal children were conceptualized by colonial agents as requiring transformation” (de Leuw, 2007, p. 304).

Nicolas Flood Davin (1879) was the author of a report that led to the establishment of the residential school system in Canada. Davin was a writer, newspaper journalist, and politician in nineteenth century Canada and known to then Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. Macdonald commissioned Davin to write a report on education for Indians, which later became known as the Davin Report, formally known as the *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*. The *Davin Report* was submitted in Ottawa, March 14, 1879.

Davin took his lead for the residential school system in Canada from a visit he made to the United States to determine how the Americans were handling the ‘Indian Problem’. Davin (1879, p. 1) references the Americans at the outset of his

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\(^{11}\) The Indian Act was passed in Canada’s Parliament in 1874 and incorporated the inferior social status of native people into its language and provisions. Aboriginals were henceforth imprisoned on reserve lands and became legal wards of the state.
report: “The Indian industrial school is the principle feature of the policy known as that of ‘Aggressive Assimilation’. This policy was inaugurated by President Grant in 1869.” Davin (1879, p.2) wrote further that, “The United States experience is the same as ours as far as the Indian adult is concerned. Little can be done with him. He can be taught to do a little at farming and stock raising, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all.”

In 1884 the Canadian Government passed legislation creating a system of state-funded, church administered Indian Residential Schools. Necessity for the involvement of churches was “obvious,” states Davin (1879, p. 2):

One of the earliest things any attempt to civilize them (Indians) does, is to take away their simple Indian mythology, the central idea of which, to wit, a perfect spirit, can hardly be improved upon. The Indians have their own ideas of right and wrong, of 'good' Indians and 'bad' Indians, and to disturb this faith, without supplying a better, would be a curious process to enlist the sanction of civilized races whose whole civilization, like all the civilizations with which we are acquainted, is based on religion.

The foundations of the residential school system were the pre-confederation Gradual Civilization Act (1857) and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act (1869). These acts assumed the inherent superiority of British ways, and the need for Indians to become English-speakers, Christians and farmers.

In 1884, the Indian Act made compulsory residential school attendance for status Indians under age 16. By 1920, the federal government amended the Indian Act to make residential school attendance mandatory for every child between the ages of 12.

12 “Status Indians” are registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act. The Act sets out the requirements for determining who is a Status Indian. Non-Status Indians are not entitled to be registered under the Indian Act. This may be because their ancestors were never registered or because they lost their status under former provisions of the Indian Act (e.g., enfranchised Indian). Treaty Indians belong to a First Nations whose ancestors signed a treaty with the Crown and as a result are entitled to treaty benefits. Non-treaty Indians have no such benefits.” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2014)
seven and fifteen. By 1931, the Canadian residential school system reached its peak with over 100 different schools across the country. Sixty per cent of the schools were run by the Roman Catholic Church, thirty per cent by the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada (and its pre-1925 predecessors, Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist churches) and the remaining 10% by various other religious organizations such as the Church of Jesus Christ’s Latter Day Saints (Mormons).

The Protestant churches not only spread Christianity, but also tried to encourage the indigenous people to adopt agriculture as a way to ensure they would not return to their original lifestyle after graduation (Milloy, 1999).

From their inception and up until the 1950’s, residential schools operated on a half-day system in which students spent half the day in the classroom and the other half at work. In theory, this was to teach “Indians” how to develop vocational skills so they would eventually become employable, but in reality this was the only way to have the schools run inexpensively. Funding was a continual problem for the residential schools and it was not until the affluence of the 1950s that funding increased and the schools provided all-day educational programs (Milloy, 1999).

It is difficult to place an exact figure on the number of residential schools to which Aboriginal people have been sent in Canada. While religious orders had been operating such schools before Confederation in 1867, it was not the 1880s that the federal government fully embraced the residential school model for Aboriginal education. While the government began to close the schools in the 1970s, the last school remained in operation until 1996 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2013).

The first residential school to open in British Columbia was the St. Mary’s Mission, which opened in 1861; it was also the last to close in 1984 (see Figure 4).
Within Northwest B.C., there were four residential schools; two are shown in archival photographs shown later in this chapter.

Eighteen residential schools, some still standing and others only present in peoples’ memories, provide reminders of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal relationships in British Columbia. British Columbia’s residential schools, therefore, may be conceptualized in reference to larger narratives of colonialism and settlement (de Leuw 2007, p. 27):

. . . . The broader relationships between Non-Aboriginal peoples and First Nations were fundamental to the operations of residential schools. Thus, although the schools operated between 1861 and 1984, a much longer history of contact, trade, missionization, European settlement, government policy making, and land negotiations all frame the specific sites and moments of residential schools in the Province.

Cole Harris (2002) reflects on the similar treatment of First Nations and the embodiment of the relationships with First Nations in the dispossession of First Nations land rights, and the creation of reserves. These allotments of lands, or reserves, were produced first by assuming Crown and Provincial rights to territorial ownership, then by mapping First Nations out of the Province’s landmass, and finally by deploying land surveyors and commissioners to demarcate lands upon which First Nations were to be contained.

In 1923, Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs in British Columbia, clarified his position on the purpose of Indian Residential Schools:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand-alone… Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic
and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department . . . (Leslie, 1978, p. 114).

The residential school system was designed to eradicate Native culture in the process of cultural genocide (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Like the removal of children from their homes and community, laws were made to prohibit any attempt by First Nations to organize against or fight the government for the disposition of their lands. The banning of the potlatch or feast system in 1884 (enforced by police) was an attempt to Christianise and force First Nations to submit to the federal governments’ asserted authority. In 1927 laws were passed to prevent First Nations from raising money to retain a lawyer to fight for their ancestral lands.
Figure 4 A Map of Residential Schools in British Columbia

BC Indian Residential Schools

(British Columbia Archives http://www.fns.bc.ca/pdf/Map_Recognized_IRS.pdf, 2010)
### Table 1 Residential Schools in British Columbia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential School</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Years Operated</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ahousat</td>
<td>Ahousat</td>
<td>1903-1907</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alberni</td>
<td>Port Alberni</td>
<td>1909-1973</td>
<td>United</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Anahim Lake Dormitory</td>
<td>Anahim Lake</td>
<td>1968-1977</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Christie (Clayquot, Kakawis)</td>
<td>Tofino</td>
<td>1890-1978</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Coqualeetza</td>
<td>Chilliwack/Sardis</td>
<td>1951-1975</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cranbrook (St. Eugene’s)</td>
<td>Cranbrook</td>
<td>1901-1979</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Kamloops</td>
<td>Kamloops</td>
<td>1861-1984</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kitimaat (Elizabeth Long Memorial)</td>
<td>Kitimaat</td>
<td>1922-1944</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kuper Island</td>
<td>Kuper Island</td>
<td>1890-1975</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Lejac (Fraser Lake)</td>
<td>Fraser Lake</td>
<td>1910-1976</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Lower Post</td>
<td>Lower Post</td>
<td>1951-1975</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Port Simpson (Crosby Home for Girls; Crosby Home for Boys)</td>
<td>Port Simpson</td>
<td>1893-1920’s; 1903-1920’s</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. St. George’s (Lytton)</td>
<td>Lytton</td>
<td>1901-1979</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. St. Mary’s (Mission)</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>1861-1984</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys’ Home)</td>
<td>North Vancouver</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 St. Paul’s IRS (Squamish, North Vancouver)</td>
<td>1898-1959</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Sechelt Indian Residential School</td>
<td>Sechelt</td>
<td>1912-1975</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Anglican Church of Canada General Synod Archives, 2008; First Nations Summit website; Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Canada website.

Kitimaat Residential School, Northwest B.C. - Courtesy of Royal B.C. Museum, B.C. Archives
Over the years, all school-aged First Nations children in British Columbia were targeted for removal from their homes to the Residential Schools. Children who went to residential school suffered a loss of culture, identity, language, family and emotional nurturing. Their only models on how to live, and have relationships, came in the form of institutional rules. Clergy, nuns and school staff ran the schools. The children were treated as second-class citizens or worse. Clothing, food and living conditions were often sub-standard and screening of school staff was minimal, leaving the children vulnerable to many kinds of abuse and neglect including sexual, physical and mental abuse (Vrtar, 2003).

Parental care and guidance were lost and replaced by institutionalized child care characterized by authoritarianism, often to the point of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse "bordering on (and often passing into) the realm of torture, such treatment often being rationalized as discipline by those inflicting it (Chrisjohn, 1991, p. 169).
The children who attended these schools lived with terrible conditions; they lived in cold and crowded living quarters; often ate rotten food; and endured repeated physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse. In some cases the mortality rate exceeded fifty per cent due to the spread of infectious disease, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia. Widespread sickness and death within Aboriginal communities was not limited to the epidemics of the 1860s. In many schools, it was alleged that disease was purposely spread. In 1909, Dr. Peter Bryce, general medical superintendent for the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), reported that in 1908, that over a five year period, he estimated anywhere from 35% to 60% of the children had died after entering residential schools. These statistics did not become public until 1922, when Bryce, who was no longer working for the government, published The Story of a National Crime: Being a Record of the Health Conditions of the Indians of Canada from 1904 to 1921. In particular, he alleged that the high mortality rates were frequently deliberate, with healthy children being exposed to children with tuberculosis (Annett, 2005).

Throughout the reign of the residential school system, young children were forcibly removed from their families for most of each year and were not allowed any connection to their distinct Aboriginal identity. They were prohibited from speaking Aboriginal languages, so that English or French would be successfully learned and their own languages forgotten. Students were subject to often unreasonably severe corporal punishment for speaking Aboriginal languages or striving to adhere to their own beliefs and practices. Today many Aboriginal communities have fewer than ten (10) fluent speakers of their own languages among them (e.g. South Haida). For the Aboriginal person, the language is intimately tied with their culture, their identity, and their way of knowing. Generational loss of language has profound cultural and
identity consequences. Many nuances of Aboriginal language communicate to and in the world that other languages from other countries cannot; meaning is lost in the translation. Tremendously strong connections are forged through being immersed both physically and linguistically in the landscape and community of beings that inhabit it.

As one Elder stated, “When we hear from childhood – through song, story and ceremony of the relationships of people with their world – we are connected to the natural world around us in unique and powerful ways” (Cecil Paul Sr., personal communication, 2009). And further, language is more than a mere means of communication it is part and parcel of the identity and culture of the people speaking
it. It is the means by which individuals understand themselves and the world around them (Mahe et al, 1990, p. 79).

To forbid students of residential schools to speak their language, hear ancestral stories, participate in ceremony, was to strip them of their identities. The forces of colonial education and of identity and language destruction were frequently not without opposition; many children vigorously fought back:

... Apparent is the enormity of oppositions against colonialism. In residential schools, these intimate and micro-scale oppositions were, quite literally, embodied by Aboriginal children who, with incredible tenacity and fortitude and amongst many other strategies, spoke their Indigenous languages, reached out to family members, and crafted art objects through which their cultures remained living and by which senses of self and identities as Indigenous peoples were maintained (de Leuw, 2007, p. 4).

Many students rejected or attempted to reject, the western values that were being imposed upon them, yearning for freedom and justice, struggling to return to their homes and recover their humanity. The retribution to such rejection was often severe (F. Wells, personal communication, 2008).

Fred Wells and other residential school survivors tell stories of children who actively fought the treatment they endured. The notion that children were “... passive blanks upon which various agendas played out” (de Leuw, 2007, p. 304) discredits the actions of those children and other community members who valiantly sought to ward off and resist the aggressive actions of colonial rule. de Leuw writes of Aboriginal children’s resistance and survival in residential schools, observing that

... despite colonial attempts to make this transformation [of children] a reality, children in residential schools actively and artfully (re) narrated these expectations of the project being down
[sic] upon them. They prolifically and steadfastly produced expressions that allowed them to retain aspects of their Indigeneity, even when retaining it meant adapting it in new and creative fashions so as to meet the expectations of colonial modernity and evade punishment (p. 305).

For many children however, the overall end effect of the dehumanizing treatment they endured was the creation of individuals without a strong and coherent sense of personal cultural identity. Unjust, inhumane treatment became the norm for many; they became sensitized to violence—cultural, structural and direct violence (Freire, 1995, p. 33).

As Freire (1995, p. 26) writes:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves.

By 1948, compulsory attendance at the residential schools had ended following the 1947 report of a Special Joint Committee and subsequent amendment of the Indian Act. And in 1969, the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs took over sole control of the residential schools. While these changes did little to improve the conditions of the schools and the treatment of the students, at least the Government was starting to have greater involvement and thus responsibility for the operation of the school system that they had created.

Not until 1984 did St. Mary’s Residential School in British Columbia close its doors.

Jan Hare and Jean Barman (2006) document the origins of the Residential School System in *Good Intentions Gone Awry*. They record the early efforts by
Emma Crosby, the wife of Thomas Crosby, a missionary at Fort Simpson, on the North Coast of B.C., to educate First Nations girls in Victorian housekeeping skills as chronicled in her letters to her mother between 1871 and 1881.

About Emma’s good intentions there can be no doubt. It is also the case that by the time she left the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, with her husband in 1897, her good intentions had gone dreadfully awry . . . . The girls’ home, a mainstay of the Crosby mission, grew in its capacity to take girls…While spiritual and moral direction remained the home’s goal the means of achieving that end changed dramatically . . . . The protection afforded to the girls transformed into confinement . . . . when in 1891, its administration was turned over to the Woman’s Missionary Society . . . . confinement turned to incarceration (Hare & Barman, 2006, p. xxii).

In the 1990s, the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations began to discuss the “abuses” of the residential school system for the first time. Eyewitnesses to murders began to speak out and lawsuits were initiated. In 1996 and 1997, evidence of further murders, sterilizations, severe physical, psychological13, and sexual abuse14 by teachers and school officials in British Columbia were documented by Kevin Annett (former United Church Minister from the [Port] Alberni residential school) and activists began to speak publicly in forums in Vancouver, B.C.. Through these forums the Alberni residential school, in Port Alberni, B.C. became known as one of the cruellest in Canada.

13 Psychological abuse, also referred to as emotional abuse or mental abuse, is a form of abuse characterized by a person subjecting or exposing another to behavior that may result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, chronic depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Such abuse is often associated with situations of power imbalance, such as abusive relationships, bullying, child abuse, and abuse in the workplace. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_abuse, 2012)

14 Sexual abuse, also referred to as molestation, is the forcing of undesired sexual behavior by one person upon another. When that force is immediate, of short duration, or infrequent, it is called sexual assault. The offender is referred to as a sexual abuser or (often pejoratively) molester.13 The term also covers any behavior by any adult towards a child to stimulate either the adult or child sexually. When the victim is younger than the age of consent, it is referred to as child sexual abuse. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_abuse, 2012)
By 1997 over 5,000 lawsuits were brought against the churches and the government by residential school survivors across Canada. Several prominent court cases led to large monetary payments from the federal government and churches to former students of residential schools.

In 1998, an independent Tribunal into Canadian residential schools was convened in Vancouver by the International Human rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM), an affiliate of the United Nations (UN). This Tribunal concluded that the government of Canada, the Catholic, and Anglican and United churches were guilty of complicity in Genocide, and recommended to the UN that a War Crimes investigation be held. Under strong pressure from the Canadian government, the UN did not convene this investigation.

In September 2000, a permanent body to further the inquiries of the IHRAAM was established—The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada. Organized by native and non-natives, the Commission sought to bring further charges of Genocide against churches, the RCMP, and the federal government. In 2001, the Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada published a six-year study of Genocide in Canada entitled, *Hidden from History: The Canadian Holocaust – The Untold Story of the Genocide of Aboriginal Peoples by Church and State in Canada – A Summary of an Ongoing, Independent Inquiry into Canadian Native ’Residential School’s and their Legacy*, (Arnett, 2001). This Report is the result of more than six years of research and investigation, and contains the testimonies of nearly 200 aboriginal eyewitnesses to murder, torture, sterilizations and other crimes against humanity committed at church-run residential schools and hospitals across Canada.
The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada estimates that more than 50,000 Aboriginal children died in residential schools between 1891 and 1984, (Annett, 2001), but this estimate is unsubstantiated.

The Federal Health Department recently admitted that it had used children from four residential schools [including Alberni in B.C.] in medical experiments during the 1940’s and 50’s; how many of those led to death are of yet unknown (Walker, 2014).

The actual number of children who died as a result of living in residential schools may never be known. In 2008, the Canadian Government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) “to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools (IRS) [and to] document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the IRS experience” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2008). In late 2013, the TRC was “given over 4,000 documents, including death certificates for Aboriginal children aged four to 19 who died between 1917 and 1956 in British Columbia. It is unclear how many of them were residential school students” (Walker 2014).

The most significant federal report on a wide array of Aboriginal issues was the 1996 federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The RCAP found that many of the problems encountered in Aboriginal communities today—violence, alcoholism, and loss of pride and spirituality—can be directly traced back to the experiences of generations of Aboriginal children as a result of being forcibly sent to a residential school and the conditions they endured.
Community dysfunction has been passed down through successive generations of children and only recently are the voices of survivors beginning to be heard. Many residential school survivors describe the experience as their "Holocaust" and have an over-arching distrust and hostility regarding government institutions and religious organizations.

On June 11th, 2008 the Prime Minister of Canada issued a public apology to survivors of the residential school experience. In the days prior to the Federal Government’s Apology, a gathering of Elders was held at the Terrace campus of Northwest Community College to discuss their thoughts about this news. During this session Elders spoke openly about the anger they carry and the abuses they had experienced. Fred Wells was one Ts’msyen Elder who attended the Alberni residential school for eight years. Among other horrific abuses, he described the beatings and whippings that scarred him physically and emotionally for life. He spoke of the impact these experiences have had on him: alcoholism, lack of self-respect and pride, loss of identity, language and culture and an inability to physically enter any institution of learning. (Fred Wells, personal conversation, 2008) Another survivor reflected on the broad reconciliation process:

For the Gitxsan Gimlitxwit, the association of Simgigyat (hereditary chiefs) in the Kispiox Valley, the Prime Minister’s Apology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission prompts many questions: ‘How will these initiatives heal the deep sadness and grief that is rampant in and plague aboriginal families. The government wants to know why so many survivors are silent . . . . it is because they have been beaten into submission through and by the daily and routine rituals of the Indian residential school experience; they feel shame, guilt and embarrassment” (Kali Skalun, Personal communication, 2008).

The legacy of the Canadian residential schools upon Aboriginal people and their communities is evident throughout B.C.’s Northwest. Aboriginal communities
continue to experience alarmingly high rates of poor health, suicide, teen pregnancy, and unemployment. They also have the lowest levels of education, and the highest rates of drug and alcohol abuse, sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and learning disabilities.

In the 2005 B.C. Public Health Officer Report, Aboriginal people in B.C. were cited as having a greater incidence of obesity and have a 40% higher diabetes rate than the general population. The report identified that Aboriginal young people smoke at more than double the rate of other young people in B.C. and noted many health and wellness issues associated with alcohol and drug abuse. In the Northwest region, alcohol sales per capita were cited as higher than the provincial average, making it the number one region for alcohol consumption at 131 litres consumed per person, compared with 110 litres in the rest of British Columbia (British Columbia Provincial Health Officer, 2005). Drug abuse is rampant on some reserves, particularly among youth. Drug addiction is a common health issue.

Poor health is directly associated with poverty; unemployment rates for Aboriginal communities continue to be the highest in the country; in the Northwest unemployment ranges from 40 to 80% (see Table 2). According to 2001 census data, the unemployment rate in the NWCC region for Aboriginal youth between the ages of 20-24 was 51.3% and for those 25-34, 38.3% (B.C. Stats, 2006).

Youth suicide in the Northwest has reached alarming proportions. In the week of November 10 to 17, 2007 there were six (6) reported suicide attempts in the Hazelton area alone, and one death due to hanging. Most of the attempts were from people ranging in age from 15 to 30; the fatality was a 16-year-old girl. On November 19, 2007, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (C.B.C.) radio station
addressed this issue in a noon hour talk show that featured a medical doctor from the Hazelton region. This physician estimated that he knew of over 100 suicide attempts, many successful, in the past year and noted that suicide has reached epidemic proportions in this region. Three years later the situation had not significantly improved.

Considering the abusive life which these young students led in residential schools, it is easy to see how so many unhealthy Aboriginal people came out of the residential school system and why the dysfunction continues today. “When the residential school children became adults and Elders in their villages, they often passed on the abuse or emotional damage they endured in residential schools to their own children and families, beginning a cycle of abuse” (Vrtar, 2003). Vrtar’s view is further reinforced by Lynne (1998):

Today, there are northern communities in which, the entire female population has been sexually assaulted by males who are living in community with them. These men are their brothers, cousins, uncles, fathers, and grandfathers. Some of these abusers hold powerful positions on band councils--most of them are held unaccountable for their assaults against their female relatives. Often women feel powerless to effect change, and are threatened with further violence if they attempt to stop the abuse (Para 4).

Paulo Freire writes about the cycle of abuse in Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1995). Freire identifies such behaviour when he writes:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors (p. 27).
This phenomenon of the oppressed becoming the oppressors is clearly evident in First Nations communities in the Northwest of British Columbia. The attempts of Residential Schools to assimilate children into society conditioned them to believe that power over another is the supreme power to emulate.

Given the multiplicity of social, economic and health issues challenging Aboriginal communities, it is no wonder that a higher proportion of First Nations people reside within our Canadian jails than any other population group in Canada.

**Figure 5  Highest Unemployment Rates in the Province**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Rounded unemployment rates of as (date)</th>
<th>Population percentage change 2004 to 2005 for municipalities and regional districts, 2001 Census for First Nations</th>
<th>Percentage over 19 and have access to some post-secondary education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North coast and Nechako Region</td>
<td>6.7% in 2006 (B.C. rate of %)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Rupert region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Rupert</td>
<td>12.9% in 2001 .06% decrease 55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Rupert First</td>
<td>36.7% in 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Nations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage 2001</th>
<th>Change from 1999-2000</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skeena/Queen Charlotte</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional District First</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haida Gwaii</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5.5% decline from 1999 to 2000</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haida Nation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tsimshian Villages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 – 29% growth since 1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terrace region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrace</td>
<td></td>
<td>.3% decrease</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrace First Nations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsimshian (Kitselas and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitumkalum)</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisga’a</td>
<td>41% to 73%</td>
<td>7 to 15% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>24.1% (2001)</td>
<td>3.1% decrease</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kitimat region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitimat</td>
<td>11.8% (2001)</td>
<td>1.3% decrease</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haisla</td>
<td>62% (2006)</td>
<td>8% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitimat-Stikine Regional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District First Nations</td>
<td>33.6% in 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hazelton region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hazelton</td>
<td>15.2% (2001)</td>
<td>.9% decrease</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelton</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7% decrease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitxsan</td>
<td>64 – 79% (2006)</td>
<td>9 – 13% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitanyow</td>
<td>65% (2006)</td>
<td>8% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet’suwet’en</td>
<td>67% (2006)</td>
<td>12% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smithers region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Employment Percentage</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Participation Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithers</td>
<td>9.4% (2001)</td>
<td>2.5% decrease</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet’suwet’en (Moricetown)</td>
<td>49% (2006)</td>
<td>15% growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithers First Nations</td>
<td>35.9% in 2001</td>
<td>1.5% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Houston region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>11.7% (2001)</td>
<td>3% decrease</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston First Nations</td>
<td>12.9% in 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional District</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unincorporated Areas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulkley Nechako</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitimat Stikine</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.6% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skeena Queen Charlotte</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9% increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Canada Labour Census, 2006)

**Education Beyond Residential Schools**

Not only did residential schools fail First Nations children and communities, but the Provincial education system that replaced it (from K-12 to post-secondary) has also failed to meet their needs. Across the country, improvement has been called for.
for by Aboriginal communities and leaders at all levels, as National Assembly of First Nations Chief, Shawn Atleo has expressed:

We need action now and, by working together as partners, we can ensure success for our learners, the youngest and fastest growing segment of the population. We know the importance of our language and culture and the critical role of our communities and parents in the success of our children . . . . For too long, education policy has been imposed on our people and it has failed. The tragic history and legacy of the residential schools stands in vivid testimony (Atleo, 2010 Para 4).

The collective experience in residential schools was disturbingly harmful on multiple levels and it impacts have affected successive generations of learners. Many Aboriginal students still see assimilation as a prominent feature of post-secondary education in Canada. In addition to the over-arching distrust and hostility to education in many Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal learners continue to face a multitude of social, economic, cultural, geographic and demographic barriers to their success, at both the fundamental and post-secondary levels. Racism, legislation and socio-economic disparities between Aboriginal communities and mainstream Canadian society continue to support institutions rooted in colonial thought, values and cultural reproduction.

Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (1991, p. 1) very succinctly frame this challenge in *First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's - Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility*. They state:

Aboriginal people have been historically under-represented in the ranks of college and university graduates in Canada and the United States. From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc., thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student. From the perspective of the Aboriginal student, however, the problem is often cast in more human terms,
with an emphasis on the need for a higher educational system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991, p. 9) submit that “... we are so infatuated with the status quo, that while many universities have generally adopted the political rhetoric of ‘equal educational opportunity for all,’ many of the institutional efforts to convert such rhetoric into reality for First Nations people continue to fall short of expectations.” They suggest that if we are serious in wondering why Aboriginal students continue to fall short of expectations then we must also ask ourselves some hard questions about “why we continue to do what we do when we know the results are far less than satisfactory? ... Somewhere along the way, we must be prepared to set aside some of our cherished beliefs and free ourselves to consider appropriate alternatives.”

To Aboriginal people, post-secondary often represents an impersonal and hostile environment in which their language, culture, traditions and values are not recognized. Aboriginal people are expected to leave their worldview behind and assume the trappings of a new form of reality, hauntingly similar to the logic that was responsible for residential schools. Post-secondary institutions typically have long-established practices seen as serving the values and cultural norms of the dominant, non-Aboriginal society. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, p. 22) made observations as follows:

There is the question of the training and education programs themselves. Many ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values and issues and give scant attention to the work environment in which students will use their professional knowledge and skills. In the informal culture of the institution, there may be little or no affirmation of Aboriginal identity and the environment may replicate the negative features that led students to drop out of
school in the first place. Aboriginal support systems—peer networks, family activities, financial, personal and academic counselling, or day-care services—may not be in place. The lack of institutional readiness to develop these supports is a significant deterrent to the completion of programs for students who do enrol. Lack of Aboriginal control, strongly evidenced in the education of children and youth, is also encountered in the education of adults.

Acknowledgement and respect for the Aboriginal worldview is essential for a majority of Aboriginal learners to succeed in post-secondary education. In most educational institutions and systems within Canada, Aboriginal culture, knowledge and practice is missing, and where it is evident, it has frequently been transmitted by non-Aboriginals from a Western perspective. As Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000, p. 88) note,

For most Indigenous students in Eurocentric education, realizing their invisibility is like looking into a still lake and not seeing their reflections. They become alien in their own eyes, unable to recognize themselves in the reflections and shadows of the world. In the same way that Eurocentric thought stripped their grandparents and their parents of their wealth and dignity, this realization strips modern Indigenous students of their heritage and identity. It gives them an awareness of their annihilation.

Cindy Blackstock (2003), a member of the Gitxsan Nation also notes that many people continue to see colonization as something belonging to the past, and are simply ignorant of, or ignore, the systemic barriers that continue to support colonial ideas and practices. To address this, she says,

…we must unpack the values, ideologies and actions that support colonization, expose them, and work respectfully with Aboriginal peoples … and thus develop a respectful coexistence as distinct peoples (Blackstock, p. 2).

Blackstock is extremely generous in her call for “a respectful coexistence as distinct peoples” of Aboriginal people in Canada given the history of Aboriginal
education outlined in this chapter. A more militant call for cultural recognition and action would be understandable given the historical account above.

Conclusion

While institutional education has been a powerful vehicle for the assimilation of Canadian Aboriginal peoples and the devastation of individuals and their families, it also, paradoxically, holds out the hope for the “unpacking” job outlined by Blackstock. Education that directly exposes the continuing force of colonization within the ordinariness of people’s lives both within contemporary educational organizations and within the communities of Canada must be a component of the transformative change in the provision of post-secondary education and training in Canada. This ideological and counter-hegemonic “unpacking” must also be embraced within the adoption of the Aboriginal cultural paradigm in education as defined in Chapter 1.

Embracing the role of education in redressing colonization is a component of the transformative journey in which Northwest Community College is currently engaged and is the central focus of this doctoral study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Aboriginal Worldview and Bicultural Education

This chapter addresses key concepts critical for an understanding of the journey we set for the College when I joined in September 2000. Necessarily this journey required an exploration of the Aboriginal worldview or knowledge systems, and a definition of biculturalism, particularly as these pertain to post-secondary education and the challenges these definitions hold for post-secondary institutions in Canada.

Aboriginal Worldview: A Diminishing Knowledge System

Moves Towards Acknowledgement

Our songs, our spirits, our identities are written on this land, and the future of our peoples are tied to it. It is not a possession or a commodity for us—it is the heart of our nations. In our tradition, (the land) is our Mother. We are passionate about this land, and we want you to understand that passion is not about power and individual wealth. It is reflective of the strong spiritual teachings, which our nations share, our respect for Mother Earth and all Creation. It is our life (Assembly of First Nations, 1993, p.1).

Over the course of the past century, assimilation and acculturation practices, as well as policies and laws of the Canadian government, all of which dismissed the Aboriginal worldview as being backward and unsophisticated and alienated Aboriginal youth from their traditional beliefs, led to an alarming decline in the
numbers of Aboriginal knowledge holders. Recently increasing attention has been paid to the significance of Aboriginal knowledge, referred to on the world stage as Indigenous knowledge. In Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has clearly outlined the importance of Indigenous knowledge. Since the release of its report in 1996, more and more people have not only written about the importance of acknowledging and supporting Indigenous knowledge, but also have started to bring it into mainstream education (Cajete, 1994; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000).

In 1999, the first World Conference on Science to occur in nearly twenty years took place in Budapest, organized by UNESCO and the International Council for Science (ICSU). To the surprise perhaps of some, traditional (Indigenous) knowledge figured prominently in the preparations and debates of the conference, as well as in its written outputs. (UNESCO, 1999) Over 1,800 science stakeholders from 155 countries were at this conference for six days debating major science and related societal issues. Among the thematic meetings was one on ‘Science and other systems of knowledge.’ Contributions addressed such topics as local coastal-marine knowledge systems, aboriginal fire management, traditional knowledge and small-scale agriculture, improving health care by coupling indigenous and modern medical knowledge, and educating today’s youth in indigenous ecological knowledge (UNESCO, 1999).

UNESCO’s web site on education focuses on Indigenous knowledge and emphasizes the critical nature of including Indigenous world views in educational enterprise:

ESD [Education for Sustainable Development] aims at promoting teaching, which respects Indigenous and traditional
knowledge and encourages the use of Indigenous languages in education. Indigenous worldviews and perspectives on sustainability should be integrated into education programmes at all levels whenever relevant. Local knowledge and languages are repositories of diversity and key resources in understanding the environment and in using it to the best advantage (www.unesco.org).

The web site goes on to describe various UNESCO supported projects intending to “record and safeguard Indigenous knowledge and worldviews” (www.unesco.org).

In 1998, the World Bank responded to the urgings of government leaders, civil society groups and donors to acknowledge and learn from the knowledge of local Indigenous communities. The African Department of the World Bank launched the Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program in partnership with over a dozen organizations in 1998 (World Bank, 2010).

In 1995, the United Nations Sub-Committee on the Elimination and Discrimination and Protection of Minorities ratified the Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People. These principles were incorporated in the International Labour Organization Convention (ILO) 169, by the educational sector of UNESCO, as well as in the Indigenous Treaty on the Declaration of Indigenous Rights and in the Quebec Summit of Americas Action Plan (2001). The ILO 169 is perhaps the most important document to define not only the rights of Indigenous peoples and also brings attention to the many contributions of the indigenous peoples of the world.

Through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada was a partner, along with the International Labour Organization, the World Band and KIVU Nature Inc., in the development of a publication entitled Integrating
Indigenous Knowledge in Project Planning and Implementation, written by Dr. Alan Emery in 2000. Drawing from ILO 169, this publication set out guideline goals and best practice principles that should be utilized so that “development projects have an improved capacity to benefit all who are affected by them” (Emery, 2000, p. 1).

All of the partners signed on to this publication and thus Canada, through (the former) CIDA, was viewed as being in support of the guideline goals which included the following: “All development projects should strive to have the broadest possible knowledge base to achieve the best possible results.” (Emery, 2000, p. iv) Indeed, Emery acknowledges that Peter Croal from CIDA was a principal supporter of the effort to create the Guidelines and that without his support the project would not have progressed so far (Emery, 2000, p. v).

Integrating Indigenous Knowledge in Project Planning and Implementation acknowledges that Indigenous Knowledge is time-honoured, sophisticated and complex, as well as being dynamic. “It is … constantly growing and changing with new information. To use this sophistication one must include the Indigenous people themselves as practitioners” (Emery, 2000, p. 3).

The above developments demonstrate the seriousness with which Indigenous Knowledge has begun to be viewed on the international stage. Despite these advances, Indigenous Knowledge has not significantly penetrated the post-secondary system in Canada.

Various authors, such as Cajete (1995), Battiste & Youngblood Henderson (2000), and Blaut (1993) have written about the Eurocentric view of Aboriginal people which characterizes Aboriginal people as having been frozen in time, and guided by a worldview that reinforces the past rather than looking to the future.
Battiste (2005) has written of the various strategies used by Europeans to “reinforce the myth that regions outside of Europe contribute nothing to the development of knowledge, humanities, arts, science, and technology.” Battiste (2005, p. 2) identifies strategies such as

. . . the blind reliance on and citation of Greco-Roman references despite the fact that the Greek alphabet is largely of Syrian/Lebanese origin; the manipulation of dates and demotion in importance of non-European knowledge such as Mayan, Hindu, and Arabic numerals, the concept of zero and algebraic notations, the use of decimals, and the solution of complex equations; . . . and the classification and trivialization of non-European science and technological innovations and inventions as ‘art’.

In her article entitled *Indigenous Knowledge: Foundations for First Nations* (2005, p. 2), Battiste relates ways in which Eurocentric thinkers have been prone to dismiss Indigenous knowledge just as they dismissed any cultural or social manifestations opaque to them: they found it “unsystematic and incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world.” On the other hand, when Indigenous scholars tried to apply Western knowledge to the challenges of their peoples, the result was more often than not unsatisfactory, so that “they began to question the supremacy of European thought.”

The movement to acknowledge Indigenous knowledge systems has made advancements at a higher policy level and, in so doing, has challenged the dominant Euro-centrism. But this challenge has yet to be addressed within the post-secondary education system of Canada.
Towards a Definition of ‘Aboriginal Worldview’

An awareness of the contradictions Aboriginal students find between their Indigenous environment and the Western environment of mainstream education is a necessary first step in creating learning environs that support the educational success of the students. Educational practices that are neither acculturationist nor assimilationist require, as Gregory Cajete (1994, p.137) points out, a real understanding of “the core cultural values of Native American tribal groups, and how such values differ from the implied values inherent in American education.”

Bishop, Higgins, Casella, & Contos (2002. p. 611) concur with Cajete, adding that “. . . understanding worldviews of both the targeted community and ourselves is imperative if we are going to do more good than harm.” It is difficult to understand how we can move forward without some grasp of the differences which separate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Comparisons between Indigenous and Western worldviews, as these views relate to education and learning, have been discussed and described (Cajete 1994; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 2000; Knudtson & Suzuki 1992; Williams, 1993; Little Bear, personal conversation, 2006) and illustrate the differences, but also the value in sharing and integrating these worldviews.

I was frequently asked by NWCC College staff, ‘What is the Aboriginal worldview?’ This is not an easy question, addressing as it does the need for clarity without privilege. Battiste (2005, p. 1) suggests, “the greatest challenge in answering this question is to find a respectful way to compare Eurocentric and
Indigenous ways of knowing and include both into contemporary modern education.”

In a partial list taken from a table by Kawagley and Barnhardt (2000, pp. 3-4), I offer a comparison of these two worldviews generally and specifically as they relate to education and learning:

**Table 2 A Comparison of Indigenous and Western Worldviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Worldviews</th>
<th>Western Worldviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humans have responsibility for maintaining harmonious relationships with the natural world</td>
<td>Humans exercise dominion over nature for economic and personal gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The need for reciprocity between humans and the natural world means that resources are viewed as gifts</td>
<td>Natural resources are available for unilateral human exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom and ethics are derived from direct experience with the natural world</td>
<td>Human reason transcends the world and can produce insights independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universe is viewed as a holistic, integrative system with a unifying life force</td>
<td>Universe is compartmentalized in dualistic forms and reduced to progressively smaller conceptual parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is circular with natural cycles that sustain all life</td>
<td>Time is a linear chronology of “human progress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human thought, feelings and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe</td>
<td>Human thought, feelings and words are formed apart from the surrounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for Elders is based on their compassion and on their reconciliation of outer- and inner directed knowledge</td>
<td>Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views a proper human relationship with nature as a continuous two-way transactional dialogue</td>
<td>Views relationship of humans to nature as a one-way, hierarchical imperative</td>
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While this table of comparisons is useful in shaping an understanding of Indigenous knowledge, it runs the risk of setting up divides that one cannot bridge.
And while the table provides insight into the depths and complexities of the Aboriginal worldview, it is in discussions with the Elders of the region in which my doctoral study was based that the feelings, intuitions and dynamism come through.

The Elders stress the importance of inter-relationships, interconnectedness to the natural world, the responsibilities they have to community and to passing their knowledge to the next generation. The worldview they describe sees people, landscape and living resources as a spiritual whole, often referring to stories of the Transformer or ‘Txeemsim’, a spiritual being who existed when the world was very young and it was commonly understood that various realms of existence were closely connected. Their view of the world is based on the experience of the individual and of the community, as well as knowledge passed down from one’s Elders and knowledge holders and incorporated in language; it is not an abstract ‘view’ of the world, it is a way of life. Listening to the Elders as they spoke of their experiences and Txeemsim, it is clear that their traditional connection to the land is emotional, intimate, storied and vital.

The worldview of First Nations people living in the Northwest of BC is embedded in the ‘Ayaawx’ as the Ts’msyen people call it. The Ayaawx is the ancestral law of the Northwest First Nations people. Taught directly and indirectly through the words of their language, story, song, ceremony and daily living, the Ayaawx has been around since the origins of the First Nations people of this region and embodies their values and principles.

In conversations with Irene Seguin, the former Chair of the North West Community College Board, an Educator and a Nisga’a Elder, I began to understand that many words indicate a relationship among humans, animals and the world of our ancestors. The word “wooms” for example is more than a word for the Devil’s club
plant, a plant with healing properties. It is a reminder of the need to respect animals, plants, the land, and other human beings through purification. There isn’t one particular word for reality; instead, the speaker or writer describes a process through a story. Words and phrases within Northwest First Nations languages are reminders to be in touch with the power of the place where our ancestors have journeyed.

As I listened to Irene talk about the Nisga’a language, she added, “What is also important to know is that Aboriginal knowledge is constantly being adapted to the changing environment around us; like the real world, it is not static. You can see this in our language too, which is also changing and adapting as our world changes” (Irene Seguin, personal communication, 2009).

Other Aboriginal people similarly describe the worldview described by the Northwest Elders across the country. Henry Lickers, a biologist, and member of the Seneca Nation in Ontario, explains the Aboriginal worldview as deeply integrative of humanity and the natural world: “The First Nations people view themselves not as custodians, stewards or having dominion over the Earth, but as an integrated part in the family of the Earth. The Earth is my mother and the animals, plants and minerals are my brothers and sisters” (Lickers, 2007, p.2).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (1996, Vol. 4, p.454) has defined Indigenous knowledge as “a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationships of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment.

In the historic 1984 to 1987 court case of Delgamuukw and Others versus The Queen, Delgamuukw’s (Earl Muldoe, Hereditary Chief, Gitxsan Nation) address
to the Crown in the Supreme Court of British Columbia on May 11, 1987 clearly conveyed the connections the Northwest First Nations believe exist among humans, the land, animals, plants and the ancestral world. Thoughts and relationships are not restricted to those existing between humans; rather, human beings are but one part of the surrounding living environment. Delgamuukw’s address to the Crown is a concise contemporary summary of the relationship of humans with the land and the supernatural world. In his address Delgamuukw began by outlining the Ayaawx:

For us, the ownership of territory is a marriage of the Chief and the land. Each Chief has an ancestor who encountered and acknowledged the life of the land. From such encounters comes power. The land, the plants, the animals and the people all have spirit—they all must be shown respect. That is the basis of our law (Gisday Wa & Delgamuukw, 1992, p. 7).

In Delgamuukw and Others versus The Queen one of three important findings concluded by the courts was the acceptance of oral histories as evidence. This case made its way to the Supreme Court of Canada and has not only reshaped land claims negotiations in Canada, but also precipitated a rethinking of the validity of oral histories in mainstream society.

The Elders also make it clear that the Aboriginal knowledge paradigm evolved very differently from that of Western knowledge. Transmitted orally, the Aboriginal paradigm is a more dynamic knowledge system than written theory. As stories and lessons are passed on, the stories and lessons are enriched with the specific references to the time and setting in which they are told.

Bert McKay (1999, p. 2), a Nisga’a educator and Elder spoke to a class about this:

No one knows for how many millennia these stories have been told, whether they were revealed all at once or whether they developed in the process of retelling and analysis. But this story
cycle is complex and comprises several levels of teachings. The stories can stand alone as individual episodes, as well they can also be taken together sequentially like beads strung together.

The importance of the orality in Aboriginal knowledge is worth noting. Oral knowledge systems vary greatly from written knowledge systems, which are more static, relying heavily on the abilities of the reader to decipher the written text. In contrast with oral knowledge systems, educational communication within the Western knowledge system—with its reliance on written texts—is typically more unidirectional, from the authority of the text as revealed by the teacher to the learner as the novice. Talking with the Elders it is clear that stories are powerful tools for the transmission of life lessons and ways of being in the world. Their stories tell of their clans, their origins, and how to be human.

Writer Paula Gunn Allen (1986, p. 245) suggests that the world of orality consciousness bases itself in a more holistic way of thinking. Allen says, that “traditional tribal narratives possess a circular structure incorporating event within event, piling meaning on meaning, until the accretion finally results in a story. The structure of tribal narratives, at least in their native language forms, is quite unlike that of Western fiction; it is not tied to a particular timeline, main character or event.” These concepts of holism and a close association with spirituality in Aboriginal knowledge systems are problematic for many mainstream thinkers, doubly so when these thinkers cannot (as is most often the case) access the “native language forms” so vital to the deep meaning of the knowledge-bearing narratives.

Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) caution against trying to define Indigenous knowledge and suggest instead that one should try to define the process of understanding. The process of understanding requires the inquirer to be open to accepting different realities, regardless of how one might use this term. This
approach encourages a process in which one must become personally involved, creating a more personalized and embodied view of the universe as opposed to a more objective and distanced one.

Other Aboriginal scholars and professionals take up this caution, particularly when the definitions of Indigenous Knowledge become redefined as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK has largely been defined and developed as a concept outside of Aboriginal communities, and most definitions reflect what the dominant society sees as important. With TEK the ecological aspects of Indigenous knowledge tend to be emphasized over its spiritual foundations (McGregor, 1999). We see in the case of TEK that in order for Indigenous knowledge to be acceptable to mainstream society, it has been stripped of its context, and separated from the relationships, values, processes and spirituality that give it meaning (Simpson, 1999).

Keeping in mind Battiste’s and Youngblood Henderson’s caution about looking for a definition of Indigenous knowledge, several authors have sought to identify characteristics as we saw above with Kawagley & Barnhardt (2000). Brant Castellano (2000) describes the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge as personal, oral experiential, holistic, and frequently conveyed in narrative. Maurial (1999) identified three characteristics: local, holistic and oral. These characteristics, as described by Brant Castellano and Maurial resonate with the Elders’ descriptions cited earlier.

Tony Balcomb (2001, p.23) in his presentation to the Indigenous Knowledge Conference held in Saskatchewan in 2001 identified the historical/philosophical basis for one of the most profound differences between Western and Indigenous
outlooks, is that of the object/subject relationship posed by Western thinkers, and the essentially political aims that can emerge from such relationships:

Modern knowledge systems are governed by a worldview that is diametrically opposed to this [Indigenous worldview]. As a way of understanding and ordering experienced reality, modernity is based on the objectification or depersonalization of the world. It is summed up in the famous words of Descartes—cogito ergo sum—I think therefore I am. A knowledge system based on this principle immediately and profoundly separates you as a person from the things around you as things capable of having personality. The relationship between yourself as thinker and the things about which you think becomes one of subject and object. This is what we mean by the objectification of reality. The purpose of such a system is essentially that of freedom and control.

The Eurocentric worldview has governed the political, economic, and social arenas of North America for several hundred years. The Eurocentric science that has driven human society and scientific knowledge has become identified with progress. From this context, Battiste (2005, p. 1) presents the challenge for proponents of reclaiming the centrality of Indigenous knowledge systems in bicultural education:

Whether or not it has been acknowledged by the Eurocentric mainstream, Indigenous knowledge has always existed. The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people. The task for Indigenous academics has been to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems.

Blackstock (2005), reflecting on the differences between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, concludes that “from these differences, flow very different concepts of life and morality that shape the role, construction, and processes of knowledge informing all dimensions of experience . . . .” (Blackstock, 2007, p. 1-2).
The challenge for NWCC, and for me as its President was to find a way forward towards a bicultural institutional transformation that acknowledged these knowledge system differences while working towards a new synthesis in programs and governance.

**Bicultural Education**

The journey to bicultural education in Canada is, given the circumstances of Western cultural power, a pathway catalysed by hegemonic resistance while simultaneously experimenting with pilot programs conceived as next best approximations of biculturalism within an organisational change agenda. The hegemony of the Western or Euro-centric knowledge paradigm is captured in the words of Cajete (1994, p. 78):

> The Euro-centric paradigm is founded on the Western mechanistic philosophy of control of Nature and the idea that homogenization allows greater freedom. It is based upon a body of accepted theory that underpins modern society’s assumptions of reality. It considers that reality to be the only reality . . . . This is what the hidden curriculum of modern education communicates.

For many educators, the need for a complete acculturation to mainstream cultural values and behaviour has dominated their approach to teaching. Certainly this thinking was inherent in the creation of residential schools in Canada as outlined earlier in this chapter, and we are products of this history. This line of thinking assumes that Aboriginal students, if schooled and treated the same way as non-Aboriginal students, will behave and function in society as non-Aboriginal people. This is what Arbon (2008, p. 20) refers to as “assimilative intent.”
In response to frustrations with the mainstream approach to education in Canada, there have been strong calls for Aboriginal schools, colleges and universities. The Nisga’a, Gitxsan and Haisla are but three examples in British Columbia’s Northwest region where First Nations communities have taken matters into their own hands and initiated schools at both the adult basic education and post-secondary levels. The Nisga’a university-college, Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a Institute (WWNI), incorporated in 1983, was an initiative of the Nisga’a Tribal Council (now referred to as Nisga’a Lisims Government) to provide quality post-secondary education and training to people within the Nisga’a community, and to ensure the survival of Nisga’a language and culture (Wilp Wilxo’oskwhl Nisga’a Institute, 2010). Owned and controlled by the Nisga’a Nation, WWNI frequently delivers programs in partnership with Northwest Community College and the University of Northern British Columbia, with which it has Federation Agreements.

Many chiefs and First Nations communities in British Columbia have voiced the call for separate Aboriginal educational institutions. These views have led to the creation of Band-operated kindergarten to grade 12 schools in First Nations communities as well as the Okanagan Nation’s En’owkin Centre, a First Nations post-secondary institution and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT)—a government public post-secondary Aboriginal Institute. Initiated in 1983 as a private institution by the First Nations bands of Coldwater, Nooaitch, Shackan, Upper Nicola and Lower Nicola, NVIT achieved provincial designation as an Institute in 1995.

Many First Nations want to take more control over the jurisdiction for education of their people (BCAFN, Personal conversation with Debbie Moore and Charlotte Guno, 2009). On July 5, 2006, the Government of British Columbia and
the First Nations Education Steering Committee\textsuperscript{15} signed an historic agreement to recognize First Nations’ jurisdiction over First Nations education on-reserve in B.C. Following this agreement more than 50 First Nations communities have either expressed interest or have initiated educational programs on reserve. Most recently in the Northwest, the communities of Kitumkalum and Kitselas have both started adult basic education programs. Many other northwest Nations have a long history of offering adult basic education programs, such as those found in the village of Gitamaax run by the Gitxsan Wet’suwet’en Educational Society (GWES) and in the Gitsegukla and Moricetown Gitxsan communities. These communities formed educational societies and worked in partnership with local school districts to offer accreditation. The Nisga’a Nation has a long history of providing education for their people, offering kindergarten to grade 12 in the community of New Aiyansh, Gitwinksihkw and Gingolx. The Nisga’a already had jurisdiction by virtue of self-government arrangements. Recent legislation in British Columbia has enabled First Nations communities to design and offer K-12 education programs on-reserve that they believe meet the education needs of First Nations learners.

In provinces other than British Columbia, responses to the demands of Aboriginal leaders’ calls for changes are also evident. In 1976 the First Nations University of Canada (FNUC) was established through a federated partnership with the University of Saskatchewan. Originally called the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), FNUC offers post-secondary education in a culturally supportive environment. Citing “long-standing, systemic problems related to governance and fiscal management” (CBC News Saskatchewan, 2010) FNUC was to have its funding cut by both the provincial and federal governments in April of 2010.

\textsuperscript{15} “The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is an independent society led by a strong and diverse board of about 100 First Nations community representatives. FNESC is committed to improving education for all First Nations students in BC.” (www.fnesc.ca)
However, in late March of 2010, the province of Saskatchewan restored funding, acknowledging that changes in governance were underway. The federal government followed suit, but with less funding than originally provided and with the condition that the funds be administered by the University of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has been an interesting province to watch in Canada. It has taken a slightly different approach to K-12 education and has moved towards a more bicultural approach to education or, at the very least, an acknowledgement of the importance of including Aboriginal knowledge systems. In April of 2009, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education issued a mandate to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit content, perspectives and ways of knowing in all curriculums for all students. As a result the following policy was put forward for discussion:

In order to meet the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Mandate to infuse Aboriginal content, perspectives and ways of knowing in the curriculum for all students, it will be important to engage students in course activities and/or discussion that support an awareness of the multiple manifestations of spirit in self, nature, and beyond (Elders’ Dialogue, 2008, p. 5).

The model of education that has been developing in recent decades in Aotearoa/New Zealand is important to observe. Writing about Maori educational policy, Keith Sullivan (1994) argues that culturally appropriate education is crucial to the process of re-empowerment of Maori and that it is imperative for education systems to both value and support Maori language and culture, alongside that of mainstream education. Sullivan claims that it is only through doing this that Aoteareo/New Zealand can achieve the necessary participation in and ownership of
education not only by Maori children but also by their communities (Sullivan, 1994, p. 192).

The literature on educational reform for Afro-Americans and the Maori of Aoteareo/New Zealand provides insights into a bicultural approach to education in Canada. Gentemann and Whitehead (1983) in their article regarding education for Afro-Americans in *The Cultural Broker Concept in Bicultural Education* conclude that “. . . the continued identification with one’s own cultural group not only is necessary for the social supports which are often basic to one’s physical and emotional survival but also for one’s self-image—a factor in educational success” (p. 118).

But what is meant by the word ‘biculturalism’ in an educational context?

In the Aoteareo/New Zealand context, some authors suggest that biculturalism is a *stage* of educational policy in which there is a bilateral partnership between the Maori and the Pakeha (Europeans), with the final end goal being multiculturalism. (Peters and Marshall 1989) Sullivan, however, posits that biculturalism is the end goal, citing four successive stages: assimilation, integration, multiculturalism and biculturalism (Sullivan, 1994, p. 192). While it may be useful to identify biculturalism as a stage on the way to multiculturalism in that it indicates an evolving response to a complex and difficult question, this approach is fraught with difficulties. It may be seen as denigrating the status and claims of the indigenous people, and may be used to justify the power held by the dominant group. While the concept of multiculturalism may be a convenient umbrella, it should not be used as a way of obscuring the torrent of demands for recognition and redress put forward by the tangata whenua [Maori] (p. 194).
Merriam-Webster’s dictionary describes biculturalism as relating to, or including, two distinct cultures (www.merriam-webster.com/, 2009). The Gale Encyclopaedia of Public Health states that “biculturalism implies the existence of two distinct cultural groups, usually of unequal status and power, within a society united by one economic and political structure” and elaborates that “unlike acculturated individuals, bicultural individuals identify with core elements of their culture of origin as well as the dominant culture. Bicultural individuals successfully integrate into and participate in important aspects of cultures, values, and belief systems” (Gale Encyclopaedia of Public Health, 2009, Para 1).

The issue of the balance of power and identification is important. The Maori insist that there must be equal participation and ownership of the educational model. Sullivan concurs and in attempting to formulate a definition of biculturalism, Sullivan (1994, p. 195) suggests four central principles:

1. Biculturalism is an equal partnership between two groups that values and supports cultural diversity.
2. Maori are acknowledged as the tangata whenua, the original inhabitants of Aotearoa/New Zealand.
3. The Maori translation of the Treaty of Waitangi is acknowledged as the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand.
4. Biculturalism is concerned with redressing past injustices and re-empowering the indigenous people. Implicit in this principle is the acknowledged fact that after a century and a half of cultural domination, Maori set their own path and make their own decisions about Maori development in partnership with non-Maori.

Central to the principles outlined by Sullivan is the idea that the inequalities between the Maori and the Pakeha (non-indigenous New Zealanders) be addressed and rectified within a bicultural society.
I was frequently asked during my tenure at Northwest Community College as to why our journey of transformation focused on ‘biculturalism’ as opposed to ‘multiculturalism’. Many initially suggested that by taking this approach we ran the risk of alienating people from other nationalities -new immigrants to Canada for example. Others insisted that if we were going to acknowledge the culture and knowledge system of First Nations then, in fairness, we needed to also do the same for other cultures.

In talking about biculturalism and multiculturalism with First Nations students of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art at NWCC, their answer echoed that of Sullivan: students stated that “there needs to be a correction in the relationship First Nations have with non-First Nations people; our culture and traditions, as the first people of Canada, must be given acknowledgment and respect” (J. McNeil, personal communication, 2007).

Sullivan also argues that ‘focussing on multicultural concerns and policies are seen as a way of dissipating the strength of focus that biculturalism brings’ (1994, p. 196).

The key issue of biculturalism is the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship. As John Ralston Saul explains, the early years —from 250 to 350 years—of European incomers into Canada were characterized by a level of mutual understanding between fur traders and Aboriginal peoples, and the society they shaped was consciously built on the Indigenous ideas of mutual dependency and partnership’ (Saul, 2008, p. 7). Over the years as the non-Aboriginal population grew, and settlement rather than trade came to dominate newcomer aspirations, the
spirit and respect of this partnership drastically eroded and finally came to be consistently ignored.

The colonial history of Aoteareo/New Zealand resembles that of Canada. Sullivan (1994, p. 199) asserts that this does not mean that the issue of biculturalism should be abandoned, but rather than the bicultural partnership being established between the Maori and the descendants of the Pakeha, the modern partnership should be between the descendants of the Pakeha who settled from England and Europe together with all new immigrants. “In other words, in order to accurately represent our contemporary ethnic makeup and political system, the concept of a Maori/Pakeha partnership in a bicultural context should be replaced by a Maori/Tauwi [all non-Maori Aotearoa/New Zealanders] relationship.”

The main goal of residential schools in Canada and elsewhere was to teach Aboriginals the values and behaviour of the European culture. In large part, this still remains the objective of mainstream education in Canada. To achieve this requires that Aboriginal people surrender their beliefs, culture and language as was expected in the colonial past and, as many have argued above, in the colonial present. To change this expectation, important lessons may be drawn from the Aoteareo/New Zealand model of biculturalism as described by Sullivan. This model is characterized as an educational partnership of equals between two main groups, Maori and Tauwi. It is about power-sharing and mutual respect for cultural histories and identity claims. It acknowledges that the Maori were the original inhabitants of Aoteareo/New Zealand, and accepts the need for past injustices to be redressed. These were important tenets for NWCC to consider as we moved towards the creation of a bicultural college for the northwest of British Columbia.
Organizational Change and *Txeemsim* as a Metaphor for Transformative Change

Chapter 5 explores the literature in organizational ‘change management’ and how others have gone about the task of leading significant ‘transformational change’ within an institution. The section addresses what is meant by transformative change and the implications for the culture of an organization. Finally the chapter introduces a metaphor for transformative change in the mythical Northwest First Nations figure, Txeemsim, who figures predominantly in oral tradition.

Theories of Organizational Change and Change Management

Bringing about change within the College necessarily led me to reflect upon the prevailing theories of organizational change and change management. Kurt Lewin’s (1947a) foundational work on “change management” provided a model for change within organizations that is still prevalent today. Using the metaphor of a block of ice, Lewin (1952, pp. 188-237) outlines a process of change with three distinct stages:

1. Unfreezing—overcoming inertia and challenging the current way of doing things typically by presenting a problem or event that demonstrates the need for change or the need to find new ways of doing things;
2. Change (or Transition)—bringing about change in how things are typically done or thought about. This may occur through a change of structure, process, or by developing new values, attitudes and behaviours; and
3. Freezing—crystallizing a new order. This step emphasizes the need to reinforce the new ‘reality’ in order for the change to ‘stick’ and to assist employees to regain previous levels of comfort. This may occur through the establishment of new policies, procedures and/or processes and other formal mechanisms.

Lewin’s model of change is very rational, planned and goal oriented. It attempts to analyze the forces (driving or restraining) that impact change and to strategically direct change. In theory, Lewin’s approach to change appears sound, but its implementation is problematic as it fails to take into account the behavior of the participants who are engaged in the change.

Since Lewin’s time, many writers have expanded upon Lewin’s foundation of change management (Hesselbein, et al, 2002), each outlining steps or phases of change that leaders may ‘apply to’ an organization. As the theories of change management have evolved, focus has moved from the process itself to the importance of the leader as ‘change agent’ (Barbuto, 2005; Hall, Johnson, Wysocki & Kepner, 2002; Kelly, 2003).

Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958) for example, build on Lewin’s Three-Step Change Theory, and emphasize the role and responsibility of the change agent rather than the evolution of change itself. They outline seven steps in which change may occur and stress that the leader must continuously exchange information throughout the process:

1. Diagnose the problem.
2. Assess the motivation and capacity for change.
3. Assess the resources and motivation of the change agent. This includes the change agent’s commitment to change, power, and stamina.
4. Choose progressive change objects. In this step, action plans are developed and strategies are established.
5. Select and clearly understand, on the part of all players, the role of the change agents so that expectations are clear. Examples of roles are: cheerleader, facilitator, and expert.

6. Maintain the change. Communication, feedback, and group coordination are essential elements in this step of the change process.

7. Gradually terminate the helping relationship. The change agent should gradually withdraw from this role over time. This will occur when the change becomes part of the organizational culture (Lippitt, Watson and Westley, 1958, 58-59).

Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958, pp. 58-59) point out that changes are more likely to be stable, or better rooted, if they spread throughout the organization and are not localized. For example, a member of the organization may see how the change implemented can be applied to other problems or other departments, or how several businesses might adopt the same innovation. These writers contend that the more widespread imitation becomes, the more the behavior is regarded as normal.

While Lippitt, Watson and Westley’s phases of change focus on the change agent rather than the process of change, they too fail to take into account the behaviors and attitudes of the people involved in the change process.

There has been increasing awareness of the inadequacies of these traditional approaches to change management. More recent organizational change management theorists suggest that change is dependent not just on the leader and the level of senior management commitment, but also the type of intervention used; people’s readiness for change; the level of resistance, and the organization’s culture (e.g. Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Goodman, 1984; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Importantly these theorists focus our attention on the conditions and circumstances that influence individuals to produce new behaviors (Porras & Silvers, 1991).
At Northwest Community College, moving from a Eurocentric mainstream institution to one that is bicultural, called for significant change throughout the College. John Kotter (1995) speaks about change of this magnitude as ‘transformative,’ and stresses that transformation is a process, not an event. Kotter defines ‘transformation’ as the “adoption of new technologies, major strategic shifts, process reengineering, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring into different sorts of business units, attempts to significantly improve innovation, and cultural change” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. ix).

In his book, *Leading Change*, Kotter (1996) writes about his research into transformative change. His research looked at what more than 100 companies did to transform themselves. In *Leading Change*, Kotter notes, “the most general lesson to be learned from the more successful cases (companies) is that the change process goes through a series of stages that build on each other” (p. 2). He specifically notes that leaders who successfully transform businesses do so in eight stages, and in a sequential order. Further, Kotter cautions that transformative change can take years to achieve and that taking shortcuts is a sure way to fail (pp. 3-8). Kotter’s stages are as follows:

Eight Stages to Changing Your Organization

1. Establishing a Sense of Urgency
   • Examining market and competitive realities
   • Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities
2. Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition
   • Assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort
   • Encouraging the group to work together as a team
3. Creating a Vision
   • Creating a vision to help direct the change effort
   • Developing strategies for achieving that vision
4. Communicating the Vision
• Using every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies
• Teaching new behaviors by the example of the guiding coalition

5. Empowering Others to Act on the Vision
• Getting rid of obstacles to change
• Changing systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision
• Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions

6. Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins
• Planning for visible performance improvements
• Creating those improvements
• Recognizing and rewarding employees involved in the improvements

7. Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change
• Using increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that fit the vision
• Hiring, promoting, and developing employees who can implement the vision
• Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

8. Institutionalizing New Approaches
• Articulating the connections between the new behaviors and corporate success
• Developing the means to ensure leadership development and succession

In a subsequent book, *The Heart of Change*, Kotter acknowledges that his book, *Leading Change*, did not focus on the “core problem people face in all of those steps” (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. x). In *The Heart of Change*, Kotter and Dan Cohen present their research addressing this core problem and how people successfully deal with it, concluding, that “the central issue is never strategy, structure, culture, or systems;” all these, they contend, are important, but “the core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people” (p.x). Further, and most importantly, “behaviour change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people’s feelings” (p. x).
Kotter & Cohen go on to explain that in those organizations in which significant change was highly successful, “people found ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought. Feelings then alter behavior sufficiently to overcome all the many barriers to sensible large-scale change. Conversely, in less successful cases, this seeing-feeling-changing pattern is found less often, if at all” (p. x).

Kotter’s acknowledgement of the feelings and emotions of participants engaged in change initiatives contrasts with previous change management theories (Lewin, 1951 and others), which suggested that emotions should not “get in the way of change.” Through the writings of Senge, 1990; Quinn, 1996; Wheatley, 1999; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Peat 2008 and others, greater understanding and attention to the attitudes and behaviours of people affected by change has occurred and has led to new ways of thinking about how change occurs within organizations.

Wheatley writes extensively about the management, leadership and process of change. President Emerita of the Berkana Institute, a non-profit focused on leadership development projects, Wheatley and her colleagues’ approach to change is refreshing. They argue that like all of life, organizations are living systems. And like all living systems, they are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, and ‘meaning-seeking’ (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996, p. 3).

Wheatley’s writings are provocative. She refers to the “neat sequential steps” of traditional change theory as mechanistic (1998, p. 3). She encourages us to change our thinking about organizations and how they change at the most fundamental level. “The dominant worldview of Western culture—the world as machine—doesn’t help us to live well in this world any longer” (1999, p. 172). Wheatley, like the Elders of
the Northwest First Nations, looks to the earth’s living systems for clues on how to rethink organizations and how change occurs within them.

If we understand how life organizes, how the world supports its unending diversity and flexibility, we can then know how to create organizations where creativity, change, and diversity are abundant and supportive. If we shift our thinking about organizing, we can access the same change capacities that we see everywhere around us in all living beings. But learning from life's processes requires a huge shift (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998, p. 2).

Wheatley and her colleagues present a new simplicity to the complex topics of leadership and change management. Because organizations are filled with living beings (people), they view organizations as “living systems.” A living system is “a world of interconnected networks, where slight disturbances in one part of the system create major impacts far from where they originate” (2006, p. 1). In this world, chaos is a part of life, but it is also a world that seeks order. “When chaos erupts, it not only destroys the current structure, it also creates the conditions for new order to emerge . . . . Everywhere, life self-organizes as networks of relationships” (p. 1).

As within all living systems, change occurs all the time. It does not occur in neat, linear, increments, it occurs in tangled webs of relationships. Unlike traditional models of organizational change, which suggest that change is something that is ‘done to’ the organization, Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers (1998) describe change as a process that materializes from the inside out (p. 15).
Through observing how living systems organizes, Wheatley & Myron Kellner-Rogers (1998) suggest four principles of ‘practice’ when thinking about strategies for organizational change.

1. Participation is not a choice

People only support what they create. We have no choice but to invite people into the process of rethinking, redesigning, restructuring the organization. Enormous struggles with implementation are created every time we deliver changes to the organization rather than figuring out how to involve people in their creation.

2. Life always reacts to directives; it never obeys them

It never matters how clear or visionary or important the message is. It can only elicit reactions, not straightforward compliance. If leaders invite people to react, the relationship is changed to one of partnership rather than boss.

3. We do not see "reality." We each create our own interpretation of what's real.

No two people are alike and thus no two people will have the exact interpretation of what is going on or needs to be done. We need to engage with colleagues... Not to come to agreement, but rather to become open to new ways of thinking, agree on a concerted course of action and collectively decide what to do next.

4. To create better health in a living system, connect it to more of itself.

When a system is failing, or performing poorly, the solution will be discovered within the system if more and better connections are created. A failing system needs to start talking to itself, especially to those it didn't know were even part of itself.

This principle embodies a profound respect for systems. It says that they are capable of changing themselves, once they are provided with new and richer information.

This principle also implies that the critical task for a leader is to increase the number, variety and strength of connections within the system (pp. 7-12).
Wheatley (1998) encourages those engaged in change to focus on relationships and the building of critical connections or networks. In their article on *Emergence*, Wheatley and Deborah Frieze (2006) state, “We don’t need to convince large numbers of people to change; instead, we need to connect with kindred spirits . . . Our work is to foster critical connections” (p. 1).

David Bohm’s writings on ‘dialogue’ provide additional insight into the critical connections and conversations that Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers highlight in their third principle. Bohm describes “dialogue” as a free flow of meaning among people in communication. He states that a key difference between dialogue and discussion is that in the latter, people usually hold relatively fixed positions and try to convince another or others to accept their point of view. Frequently this is done to prove one is right. In dialogue, Bohm argues, a person may prefer a certain position, but he or she is ready to listen to others with sufficient sympathy and interest to understand the meaning of others’ positions properly, and is also ready to change his or her point of view if there is good reason to do so (Bohm, 1990).

The distinction between discussion and dialogue is important according to Bohm, who stresses that discussion emphasizes the idea of analysis and frequently has the goal of trying to ‘win the game.’ Dialogue however, which comes from the Greek word *dialogs – logos* meaning ‘the word’ or in this case ‘the meaning of the word’ and *dia* meaning ‘through’ suggests “a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us” (p. 2). Bohm goes on to say that dialogue thus makes “possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding. It’s something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together” (p. 2).
Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers (1998) concur and like Bohm note, that in what they refer to as “critical conversations,” nobody is trying to win. People are not engaging in debates—conversations welcome the perspectives of everyone present. “In dialogue,” Bohm says, “everybody wins” (p. 2). Furthermore, as Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers put it,

If we remain curious about what someone else sees, and refrain from convincing them of our interpretation, we develop a richer view of what might be going on. And we also create collegial relations that enable us to work together with greater speed and effectiveness. When any of us feel invited to share our perspective, we repay that respect and trust with commitment and friendship (p. 11).

In moving Northwest Community College from a mainstream perspective to a bicultural perspective, the journey has been decidedly ‘un-linear’ and non-conforming to traditional change management theory, which outlines a structured approach that enables transition from one state to a future desired state. (Lewin, 1951) During the Strategic Planning process at the College, we purposely initiated dialogues as described by Bohm and encouraged the continuation of these conversations throughout implementation acknowledging them to be critical to the journey of change.

To encourage dialogue about the changes at play within the College, we made place and space for conversation. The agenda and composition of monthly Management meetings were revised to include the entire administrative team to enable ‘Roundtable’ discussions during which managers were encouraged to talk about changes they might be noticing within their areas and themselves, as a result of the Strategic Plan. Such conversations were also held at the meetings of the College
Board of Governors, First Nations Council and Campus Department meetings. Sometimes the conversations highlighted the subtle but significant changes noticed in attitudes towards, for example, our efforts to reach out to First Nations communities, the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and the importance of First Nations Council.

The Management Meeting ‘Roundtables’ conveyed Administrators’ changing understanding of leadership. Over time we realized that we were no longer regarding the College as a mechanistic bureaucracy, but rather something closer to the living system Wheatley describes.

Over time, additional dialogues emerged; groups of individuals began working together to engage Aboriginal students and their communities, and we learned as we pushed forward. Our successes and failures taught us invaluable lessons, which we immediately sought to build upon and we frequently changed our approach to ensure our actions were respectful, relevant and effective for the situation or context in which we were operating.

Leading Transformational Change

Northwest Community College was invented by Western Eurocentric thought, designed and constructed to teach students in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible to graduate the skilled workers required by the economy of the province. Guided by legislation outlined in the Province of British Columbia’s Colleges and Institutes Act, the College was governed by a Board of Governors who, through the President, administered the day-to-day operations. The College
operations were tightly controlled by policies, procedures and operating practices and regularly scrutinized by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Training. Like all post-secondary colleges within B.C., the role of the President as leader is to create stability, to maintain control, to manage employees, to ensure there are standard operating procedures for every situation, to give directives, and to achieve key performance targets.

The journey upon which Northwest Community College had embarked required that we view not only the organization as a whole differently, but also the role of the leader. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers’ ‘organization as living system’ closely aligned with our vision of the College. Their writings provided many parallels to the Aboriginal worldview we were attempting to incorporate into the College. For example, Wheatley and her colleagues placed emphasis on finding clues about organizational life from the natural world, and recommended that leaders pay more attention to relationships, critical conversations and community than managing employees aligned; these recommendations aligned with the guidance of the Elders and the First Nations Council who assisted the College’s journey of change.

Viewing the College as a living system helped us to shift our thinking about how significant change might occur at the College and about the contributions the leader might make to that change. The literature speaks to the need for a transformational leader (Kotter, 1996; Barbuto, 2005; Hall, Johnson, Wysocki & Kepner, 2002; Kelly 2003) in bringing about significant or transformational change and offers that transformational leaders must build confidence and trust and be a role model that others seek to emulate (Bono & Judge, 2004, p. 901; Simic, 1998, p. 52; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003, p. 3). Confidence in the leader, they argue, provides a foundation for accepting radical organizational change.
Gellis (2001) suggests that a leader must also be charismatic to instil confidence and to inspire others to follow (Gellis 2001), a characteristic Kelly (2003) suggests is required of transformational leaders particularly during times of crisis.

Kouzes & Posner (1995; 2002) are frequently cited in discussions on transformational leadership. Their research suggests that transformational leadership is evidenced in the practices and behaviours of leaders who ‘get extraordinary things done’ (p. 2). They conclude that the practices of transformational leaders (which they note they derived from years of empirical research) include challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart (p. x).

Within this body of literature, transformational leaders are viewed as those who make clear an appealing view of the future, offer followers the opportunity to see meaning in their work, challenge them with high standards and appeal to their emotions. They encourage followers to become part of the overall organizational culture and environment (Kelly, 2003; Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003, p. 3). How leaders inspire others to follow them might be done through a variety of means - for example, through speeches, public displays of optimism, or through the highlighting of accomplishments. Whatever the means, transformational leaders encourage their followers to imagine and contribute to the development of attractive, alternative futures (Bass, Avolio, Jung & Berson, 2003, p. 208).

Simic (1998, p.52) supports those who make particular note of the importance of motivating individuals to bring about change. Besides conveying the larger vision for the organization, Simic notes the transformational leader must also
comprehend those things that motivate followers individually; for example, by providing individual recognition and praise.

Appealing to the intellect of followers, in other words arousing and changing followers’ awareness of problems and their capacity to solve those problems is noted as being important by Bono & Judge (2004) and Kelly (2003). Transformational leaders question assumptions and beliefs and encourage followers to be innovative and creative, approaching old problems in new ways (Barbuto, 2005).

The above authors write about the role of the transformational leader as one who empowers followers by persuading them to propose new and controversial ideas (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2003, p. 3). Wheatley et al again take a different approach, describing the leader as host, and note that the leader’s role is to invite people to participate and contribute. Such leaders they state are

. . . . candid enough to admit that they don’t know what to do; they realize that it’s sheer foolishness to rely only on them for answers. But they also know they can trust in other people’s creativity and commitment to get the work done. They know that other people, no matter where they are in the organizational hierarchy, can be as motivated, diligent and creative as the leader, given the right invitation.

Leaders as hosts know that people willingly support those things they’ve played a part in creating—that you can’t expect people to ‘buy in’ to plans and projects developed elsewhere. Leaders as hosts invest in meaningful conversations among people from many parts of the system as the most productive way to engender new insights and possibilities for action. They trust that people are willing to contribute, and that most people yearn to find meaning and possibility in their lives to get complex, intractable problems solved (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Wheatley and Frieze (2010) state that it is an illusion to think that someone can be in control; organizations as living systems are complex and inherently,
uncontrollable (p. 2). This doesn’t mean that leaders have nothing to do; on the contrary leaders have a great many things to do.

Hosting leaders must:

- provide conditions and good group processes for people to work together.
- provide resources of time, the scarcest commodity of all.
- insist that people and the system learn from experience, frequently offer unequivocal support—people know the leader is there for them.
- keep the bureaucracy at bay, creating oases (or bunkers) where people are less encumbered by senseless demands for reports and administrivia.
- play defense with other leaders who want to take back control, who are critical that people have been given too much freedom.
- reflect back to people on a regular basis how they’re doing, what they’re accomplishing, how far they’ve journeyed.
- work with people to develop relevant measures of progress to make their achievements visible.
- value conviviality and esprit de corps—not false rah-rah activities, but the spirit that arises in any group that accomplishes difficult work together (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010, p. 2).

In a living system such as the one described here, the leader becomes a facilitator; the leader is the one who acts spontaneously and independently to embrace risk and offers help to others on the team with the achievement of their related tasks.

Robert Greenleaf (1970) was among the first to write about leaders as facilitators and stewards of organizations, coining the phrase ‘servant-leadership’. He describes servant leaders as individuals who seek to achieve results for their organizations by giving priority attention to the needs of their colleagues and those they serve and as stewards of the organizations resources.
The servant-leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions . . . The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature (Greenleaf, 1970, p.1).

Senge (1992, p. 3) noted the importance of Greenleaf’s concept of servant leadership and its message for those serious about true leadership:

Our traditional view of leaders – as special people who set the direction, make key decisions, and energize the troops – is deeply rooted in an individualistic and non-systemic worldview. So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events and charismatic heroes rather than on systemic forces and collective learning.

Covey (2002) and Senge contend that servant-leaders operate on two levels: concern for the people they lead and concern for the vision of the organization (Senge, 1990b, p. 6).

Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell (2002, p. 141), concur with Senge, stating servant leadership requires deep listening to understand the needs and concerns of others. They contend that the focus of servant-leaders should be “on sharing information, building a common vision, self-management, encouraging high levels of interdependence, learning from mistakes, encouraging creative input from every team member, and questioning present assumptions and mental models.” Wheatley & Frieze (2010) endorse this view, emphasizing that leaders need the freedom to respond to their own understanding of circumstances, going beyond what is policy or procedure. Their concept of the leader’s task is that the job is to ensure rapid distribution of resources to the appropriate people; to trust others to come up
with solutions; to value the creativity of others; and to evaluate the unique responses of every community in their care, rather than overseeing compliance to a singular model or standard. These radically different behaviours require that we free official leaders to act wisely and trust people to self-organize effective responses. We can rely on people to self-organize quickly to achieve results important to them. Together, people act creatively, take risks, invent, console, inspire and produce (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010, p. 3).

This literature sheds new light on how we might view the College and the process of change; particularly significant or transformative change. Acknowledging the College as a living organization, I found my role to be quite different than the one the College community was used to. As President, I kept in close touch with the conversations occurring within the institution and sought to nurture relationships (internally and externally); to foster critical conversations; to provide support; and to encourage key projects that might lead to broad-based change (Wheatley 2008). What we found is that as networks of people and relationships formed and strengthened, more people joined in to work on the significant projects that were at the leading edge of transformative change. As a result, new knowledge, practice, courage and commitment emerged and expanded change occurred.

**Txeemsim – A Metaphor of Transformation**

As the College community worked to implement the Strategic Plan, it was clear to many (both inside and outside of the College) that our work was transforming not only the College, but also our view of our work and our relationships to the communities we served.
Transformation is an important theme in the traditions of the Northwest Coast First Nations people and is frequently portrayed in their stories, past and present. Transformation stories were a critical way in which the Northwest Coast First Nations made sense of their world and connected themselves to their environment. Frequently these stories do not distinguish between the physical and supernatural because these were viewed in the light of a vast continuum:

Whether it is animate or supernatural, the world existed in ‘real time’ and in a conscious state of existence. Every living thing was a member of one large family: the four elements (earth, air, fire and water), plant, animal and human worlds were connected to each other in often complex and sophisticated ways. In other words, every object that existed in the physical world or sprang from the rich imaginations of the storytellers was in effect in possession of ‘real’ life and co-existed in perfect harmony with other living beings – all were considered human (Thunderbird, 2010, p.1).

First Nations stories of the world’s origin differ from European stories. While the world was created from nothing in European stories, Northwest Coast First Nations believe a world exists beyond this one, and was previously home to mankind. For the Haida, Nisga’a and Ts’msyen, a central figure in this ‘other’ world was the transformer, known to the Nisga’a as Txeemsim.

Txeemsim is a cultural hero of the Nisga’a; a supernatural figure that could assume forms—animal, human, or even a geographic feature of land—when the world was still in twilight.

He is a revered and benevolent transformer figure, who helps the people and shapes their world for them, but at the same time, he is also a trickster character and many Nisga’a stories about Raven have to do with his frivolous or poorly thought out behaviour getting him into trouble. Txeemsim is the hero’s personal name pronounced similar to ‘chaim-sim’ (Nisga’a Lisims Government, 2010, Para 3).
Txeemsim is frequently referred to as a Raven. The stories of Txeemsim are playful and challenging. Txeemsim draws you into his antics as he prompts his listeners to think more deeply about issues that confront us in life.

The role of Txeemsim was well summed up by the late educator and historian Sim’oogit Ax-dii Wil Luu-g-ooda, Bert McKay. “I tell you about Txeemsim,” Bert explained, “because he is the touchstone of our identity, our history. Txeemsim and Nisga’a are one in the same” (Nisga’a Museum Backgrounder, 2011).

Txeemsim has generated many stories:

One story tells of Txeemsim’s encounters with a distant Chief who had stolen all the light – all the stars, the moon and the sun, leaving the earth in darkness. Txeemsim, in the body of Raven, flies to the Chief’s land and turns himself into a tiny seed floating in a stream, from which the Chief’s daughter has taken a drink. She swallows the seed and in time gives birth to a son, who is really Txeemsim in disguise. The boy begs his grandfather, the Chief, to give him the stars and the moon as toys. The Chief, unable to refuse his grandson, gives them to him and Txeemsim releases them into the sky. The boy then cajoles and begs the Chief for his dearest possession, the Sun, and finally tricks the Chief into giving it to him. Txeemsim then turns back into Raven and flies away, taking the Sun with him and bringing light to the world (Seguin, personal communication, 2010).

Bert McKay speaks about the significance of the Txeemsim stories to the Nisga’a people:

Although the stories are widely enjoyed for their entertaining and generally instructive qualities, they have long been known to function as a complex and treasured collection of symbolic teaching stories that relate to the mysterious interconnections between the physical world and the invisible world of spiritual forces and realities.

These are esoteric stories that shed light both on how the world is constituted and how we as humans can live in it properly.
We are cautioned about the possibility of making real mistakes and we are encouraged to behave properly so that our lives will be positive and full.

Beyond that, the Txeemsim stories can serve as guidance as we try to live in community and understand reality. Like Txeemsim we must struggle with problems and generate strategic and tactical approaches, but beyond that, we have a duty to quest toward the light of day rather than the dark of night. It can also happen that our lives bring us to a conscious desire to undertake the spiritual quest. We believe that these are ultimate realities, and that we are fundamentally spiritual beings. We know that we must follow along a path that will teach us how we can make connection with that reality. In this regard the Txeemsim stories can also encourage instruct about realms of ancient wisdom that can be found nowhere else (McKay, workshop presentation, 1999).

In the story of Txeemsim transforming the darkness of the earth into light, Txeemsim’s actions ease the suffering of humans who were living without light and warmth, benefiting not only humans but also all living things on earth. To the Nisga’a people, this story emphasized their connection to the physical world and their responsibility to be stewards of the land. The story encourages them to act in the interests of the community, to show compassion, to care enough to take action, to have courage, to take risks, to be resourceful and creative, and to go to great lengths to bring about needed change.

The Txeemsim story held important messages for our journey at the College. First, that to embark on a path of significant change we must “...leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In so doing, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. This is not a cute abstraction; it is an elusive key to effective performance in all aspects of life” (Quinn, 1996, p. 9). Like Txeemsim, we had to reinvent ourselves. As we changed ourselves, our relationships with others changed.
Transformation of self, or more accurately self-transformation, was rarely addressed in the literature on organizational change management. Self-transformation could be mistaken for changing what we are doing rather than how we perceive our reality. The Txeemsim stories place the focus of our attention squarely on what is required to achieve significant, sustainable change—self-transformation, or as Bert McKay states—having a ‘conscious desire’ to see that there are many “realities.” Without questing to understand the various realities in which we live, we run the risk of making real mistakes (McKay, 2011).

Emerging literature regarding bringing about change in the culture of health care systems speaks more specifically to the transformation called for in the Txeemsim stories. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) developed the concept of ‘cultural humility’ and describe a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique in which health care providers are encouraged to give “careful consideration…to the assumptions and beliefs that are embedded in their own understandings and goals in the clinical encounter” (p. 120).

Secondly, the story of Txeemsim speaks about what it means to be a transformational leader – to create significant change in an organization someone (the leader) must have the courage to take some significant risks. Txeemsim took such a risk when he transformed into a seed and then into a little boy. These actions held an unpredictable outcome and the possibility of failure or death. Like Txeemsim, NWCC journeyed into the unknown with the possibility of failure a reality not a metaphor.

A third message of the Txeemsim story also became evident when considering the literature on organizational change, specifically that top-down
change processes seldom succeed. This sequence of change, which is assumed in much of the literature on organizational change strategy, blinds us to an opposing model of change described by Wheatley (1999), Quinn (1996) and others—the model of bottom-up change. As Wheatley and Frieze (2006) and Quinn (1996) suggest, change all starts with an individual, often quite ordinary, which takes an extraordinary step, as the Txeemsim story demonstrates. In the story Txeemsim noticed that something needed to change, and took it upon himself do something about it. Through these actions Txeemsim demonstrates that “each of has the potential to change the world” (Quinn, 1996, p. 11).

Txeemsim also conveys a fourth message: that we need to ‘learn’ our way, to continually create new solutions and creative responses to challenging or new situations. After announcing a new Strategic Plan and a commitment to bicultural education, the College couldn’t ignore the responsibility of acting upon its implementation. However, the implications of accepting that responsibility proved to be little understood and presented a steep learning curve for all staff. Robert Quinn (2004, p. 9) talks about embarking on such a path. “When we commit to a vision to do something that has never been done before, there is no way to know how to get there. You simply have to build the bridge as you walk on it.” We likened our journey (the process of building our bridge) to canoeing the Skeena River—the waters are fast moving, frequently turbulent and sometimes unforgiving; we learned to focus on our vision, trust that we would reach our destination and continue to push forward. The story of Txeemsim provides encouragement for the creativity required in taking such a journey.

There is a final, important message to be gleaned from the story of Txeemsim, that of servant-leadership. Txeemsim’s motivation for bringing light to
the world was not self-motivated although he stood to benefit; rather it was about
giving priority attention to the needs of others. In the world of Northwest Coast First
Nations, stewardship of the community is a highly valued tenet and held important
lessons for the College’s leadership style.

I first heard the stories of Txeemsim from Irene Seguin, a Nisga’a Elder and
educator, and the former Chair of the Board of Northwest Community College. Over
the years, Irene introduced me to many stories about Txeemsim, and on one
particular day driving to Prince Rupert together, we spoke about the profound change
that was occurring at the College. Irene spoke of my role as President in this process
and suggested that a better name (title) for me would be ‘Txeemsim’.

Reflecting upon what she meant by this, I realized that the journey upon
which NWCC had embarked had required that as President, like Txeemsim, I needed
to transform myself, and have the courage to take risks and quite possibly fail. I
needed to leave my world of certainty and embark on a journey to a place both
strange and unfamiliar. To do this successfully, I had to step outside of the paradigm
I had acquired and think differently about my world and my role within it. Viewing
the world differently also caused me to view myself differently – a message implicit
in the stories of Txeemsim.

As President, in the work of implementing the Strategic Plan, I hosted
people—invited and encouraged more and more people to participate in the
conversations. I facilitated opportunities for engagement, and created ceremony to
acknowledge and celebrate our successes. Key to this leadership role was the
building of trusting relationships and the acknowledgement that building trust took
concentrated work and effort.
In creating an environment where trust was paramount, I found people came forward to share ideas and help out. This occurred, not, as Wheatley predicts, because they are told to, but because they are invited into meaningful conversations and, because most people yearn to find meaning and possibility in their lives and work (Wheatley, 1999).

Through this work at the College it was evident that one of the most empowering things that happen to people when they are given the opportunity to confront complex, intractable problems is the ability to create and be innovative, and in the end look back with pride and say, ‘I was part of that.’ This happened frequently over the course of the next few years at NWCC; we all began to do things quite differently as we reinvented ourselves and, through ourselves, the College.

Northwest Community College, once quite ordinary and out of touch with the First peoples of the region, became quite extraordinary. More Aboriginal learners started to enrol at NWCC than any other college in Canada and it became a leader in the field of Aboriginal education.

Why this change occurred defies what is written in many textbooks on management and leadership. The kind of change that occurred at NWCC is what I believe Robert Quinn (1996, p. ix) writes about when he talks about engaging in ‘deep change’—change which “ . . . defies common understanding and practice. It is . . . promising . . . in that it suggests that every one of us has the capacity to transform our organizations into more positive, productive communities . . . .” Such change Quinn notes can also be painful, because it frequently requires us to “ . . . confront our own insecurities, selfishness, strongly held views and opinions and our lack of courage” (p. ix).
Chapter Five

Txeemsim transformed himself to bring light to the world; and that I believe was the Txeemsim message Irene was conveying to me—transformation requires self-reflection and a personal, as well as organizational commitment to change.

This thesis charts the transformative journey I, with my colleagues and community participants and advisers, undertook in leading the Northwest Community College towards biculturalism.
My Methodology

The Trickster is a powerful figure of transformation in many societies, including Native Canadian and Māori cultures. As a supernatural being, the Trickster has the ability to assume the shape of a variety of animals and humans, but is typically associated with one particular form. In Native Canadian tribes, the Trickster is identified as an animal and can range from a Raven to a Coyote, depending on the tribal knowledge systems from which he/she is derived. The authors, Thomas King, Lee Maracle, Witi Ihimaera, and Patricia Grace, all use the Trickster figure, and the ‘Tricksterish’ strategies of creation/destruction, pedagogy and humour to facilitate the decolonization of culture within the textual realms of their novels. The Trickster, as a knowledge metaphor, enables the destruction of stereotyped representations of colonized peoples and the creation of revised portrayals from an Indigenous perspective.

The research I undertook for this doctoral study was essentially and necessarily grounded in my role as the President of the NWCC. The research was integrated with my professional practice as an educational leader and the outcomes of this research were continuously informing my professional development, my professional learning, over the period of my study. From this perspective, appropriate methodologies for this study included participatory action research, participant observation, or more accurately, leader observation and narrative inquiry.
Participant Observation versus Participatory Action Research

In participant observation, the researcher approaches participants in their own environment and tries to learn what a set of experiences are like for an “insider” while remaining an “outsider” to the transformation underway. In this study I was trying to learn through the observation of others both within the College as well as within the communities the College served. The unfolding journey of the College’s transformation—and the meaning this transformation had on the College community, was the crux of my learning. As President, I was also, necessarily leading and facilitating this change, and as such, was intimately involved in the change process itself.

Over the seven years of this research, I was being transformed as an educational leader to one more attuned in both identity and practice to a bicultural post-secondary setting.

Participatory action research was an appropriate methodology informing my research because while I hoped to address the challenges presented to the College (McNiff, 2002), I also aspired to contribute to the scholarly literature in educational leadership, educational reform and Aboriginal education. College personnel were active participants with me; we shared the journey towards biculturalism with one another. Although power differentials ethically constrained me from interviewing College personnel as part of the research process, by working closely with the people in the study on a daily basis for seven years, I was able to learn a great deal more
related to my investigation than I could have through distant observation or in-depth interviews in which the interviewee and interviewer were strangers.

While there are different approaches to participatory action research, there appears to be general consensus that it is based on principles such as the need for justice and democracy, and the right of all people to be heard (McNiff, 2002).

Participatory action research also requires the practical self-reflection of your own work and actions to ensure that what you are doing is what you set out to do. This theme of self-reflection is central in participatory action research and a central theme in my research. As participant in the thesis research, I consistently reflected upon my own life and work and questioned why I was doing the things I was doing, as well as who I was, and how, through the process of my work, I was changing both professionally and personally.

The research process as experienced by my colleagues and myself met the “16 Tenets of Participatory Action Research” outlined by McTaggart (1989), particularly through “improving social/educational practice by changing it, involving “authentic” and “collaborative” participation”, establishing a self-critical community, and engaging a systematic learning process while involving people (College personnel) in theorizing, evaluating and testing their practices (McTaggart, 1989; Wadsworth, 1997, p. 79).

As leader observer, I initiated strategic projects; participated in many meetings; oriented and counselled the management team, faculty and staff to the challenges at hand and the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and praxis in the College; and worked with College personnel to dismantle cherished institutional structures. I met with numerous First Nations Elders, Chiefs,
communities, community leaders and organizations, as well as internal college employees about the importance of redressing colonization and working together to find ways to create alternative structures and models of education that would respect and celebrate First Nations’ perspectives.

As some First Nations Elders claimed, I was called upon to be not only Chief (President), but also Firekeeper - an honoured and humbling role I had yet to learn. Firekeepers traditionally play a dual role in First Nations ceremonies: they are tasked with keeping the fires burning, as well as teaching/conveying the spiritual meanings of the fire. In many First Nations cultures across Canada, Firekeepers keep the fires burning in ceremonies such as vision quests, sweat lodges and Sun Dances—ceremonies designed to foster transformation in the participants, as we were striving to do at the College.

As the famous Ojibway novelist, Richard Wagamese, has said,

> In the traditional way, a Firekeeper is an honoured role. You build the fire that heats the rocks used in the ceremony. Your prayers around that fire are the first prayers in the process. You prepare the ritual. You take care of everything so that the teacher can focus, and when the time comes, you watch over the participants. You stand guard outside that lodge while the ceremony runs, attentive, ready to serve and you pray along with the petitioners in the lodge (Wagamese, 2008, Para 14).

Various First Nations cultures claim that ‘fire represents the spark of Great Spirit to which everyone is connected.’ (Casey, 2010) The fire also provides a place of gathering, talking, telling stories, and an opportunity for renewal. Consequently, I came to associate the role of Firekeeper with some of the reflective qualities of ‘action’ researchers.
Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry directs the researcher to inquire how humans experience the world, collect their stories and speak or write narratives about their experiences (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, pp. 226-240). This methodology is particularly fitting to my research study for four reasons:

1. Narrative, or storytelling, figures prominently in First Nations culture. The oral narrative was and is an important process for providing social, cultural and historical contexts, and for sharing beliefs and teachings.

2. The narrative is a helpful way of structuring experiences, including those that occurred as changes took place at the College. Without the continuity of narrative, dialogic interactions can at times be overwhelming in their complexity. The use of narrative encourages reflection and greater participation.

3. Organizing the experiences and dialogues of the journey into meaningful stories or narratives has been a powerful way of capturing the experiences and lessons that arose and sharing the significance of them with others. Stories also display the significance that events have for one another, binding action and outcome and creating clarity from the often, chaotic interplay of lived daily experiences.

4. Powerful stories, referred to by Stephen Denning (2011) as ‘spring board’ stories, can ignite organizational change, embody and transfer knowledge, innovate, build community, promote individual growth
and communicate complex ideas. They can build trust, unlock passion, and inspire action. Most importantly, stories are enduring.

Moen (2006) suggests that we continually produce narratives to order and structure our life experiences for ourselves and for others. Polkinghorne (1988) states that people without narratives do not exist.

My main sources of data for this thesis were a variety of events, projects, programs, observations and testimonies from participants that occurred over a seven-year period.

Through the process of leading and observing, strategic non-linear steps were taken, projects initiated, and changes nurtured. I frequently verified my narratives with the First Nations Council of the College and specific Elders, who not only served as participants in the journey, but also as guides and mentors to my leadership. The Firekeeper also symbolizes determination and commitment: keep the fire burning, don’t give up, and don’t give in. And certainly, with the innumerable challenges we faced, that passion and determination was crucial.

I was accountable to the many in the transformative research process of data collection, making meaning and conveying the stories or narratives: formally to the Board of Governors of the College and to the College community, but more broadly and more importantly, to the First Nations communities and to their hopes that a new College would emerge and a new reality take hold in the post-secondary education provision within the Northwest of British Columbia.
Conclusion

The methodology for this thesis represents a meld of participant observation, participant action research and narrative inquiry. These three qualitative research approaches supported me through my studies and collectively, were generative to the body of work within this thesis. The outcomes of this methodological approach to my doctoral study are included in the following chapters. The next five chapters are narrative accounts of significant bi-cultural change projects introduced through my period as President of NWCC. A chapter that distils the professional insights I gained through the participant observation and participant action research elements of my research methodology follows these chapters. This chapter, while providing leadership advice for others considering organizational transformation according to a bi-cultural agenda, is premised on my reflections about my own personal professional development journey whilst undertaking this research.
All Nations Contemporary Totem Pole at Northwest Community College, Terrace Campus, 2009
First Projects – Embarking on the Bicultural Journey

This chapter contains recounts the story of the first two projects that mark the initial strategic interventions of NWCC as a post-secondary educational institution embarking on the transformative change envisioned for the College as outlined in the Strategic Plan. The following four chapters of this thesis present key projects that emerged from within the College and that built progressively on our understandings of the possibilities for bicultural education as each new project was reviewed and reflected upon by me, the College staff and College Board and, most importantly, by the College’s First Nations Council.

This chapter begins with an account of The First Totem Pole, one of the most powerful symbols of the journey of transformation on which the College was embarked, which is followed by an account of The Kitlope Field School.

The Creation of a Contemporary First Nations Totem Pole

The word ‘totem” comes from the Europeans. In the Ts’msyen language, the word for totem is ptsan, and that word is older than the knowledge of what it means (Vickars, 1996, p. 13).

Robin Wright, Curator of Native American Art at the Burke Museum and a Professor of Art History at the University of Washington in Seattle explains, that “the word totem is derived from the Ojibwa word, ototeman, called totem by European explorers. Totemism in anthropological terms refers to the belief that a kin group is descended from a certain animal and treats it with special care.” (Wright, 2004, para.1)
Totem poles are a form of communication for First Nations societies on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. Originating with Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations, particularly the Haida and Tlingit, the totem pole is an arrangement of symbols created to commemorate significant individuals or events; to convey a clan’s lineage, privileges, songs, or story; to proclaim the prestige and status of a family, and; to pass knowledge on from one generation to the next.

The carvings on the pole are not a language to be read; the characters remind one of a story or event. Anthropologists have described totem poles in detail:

. . . . tall multiple-figure poles were first made only by the northern Northwest Coast Haida, Tlingit, and Ts’msyen peoples in Southeast Alaska and British Columbia. Large free-standing human welcome figures and interior house posts were made by the Kwakwaka’wakw and Nuu-chah-nulth people further south, and the Coast Salish people in Southern British Columbia and western Washington also carved large human figures representing ancestors and spirit helpers on interior house posts and as grave monuments” (Wright, 2004, p.1).

Without written records, First Nations people relied on oral narratives to pass on stories, histories and inheritances. These narratives were recited at various events from family gatherings associated with deaths, births, and marriages to potlatches involving whole communities. Inheritances went beyond just material objects. “Inheritances include ‘things’ as well as crests, songs, dances, names and stories. Like land, stories often belong to particular families, who own the rights to tell them as they wish. No one else may use those stories without family consent” (Alfie McDames, personal communication, June 2004).

Totem poles were thus physical markers of a family’s inheritances, to be ‘read’ by knowledgeable others within the First Nations communities of the Northwest. As Vickars (1996, pp. 13-14) explains,

“Totem poles come in many forms: mortuary poles, heraldic poles, house poles, and ridicule/shame poles. Traditionally the totem was used to inform passersby about the people who lived in a particular village and what it was they had to say. The mortuary pole was similar to a tombstone, the heraldic pole was akin to a crest or a family story, and the house pole was used to hold up the beams in a longhouse and tell the story of the owner, the chief of the house. To announce an unpaid debt, address a grievance, or express anything else that was worthy of shame or ridicule, a chief

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would commission a ‘shame’ pole. When restitution was paid the pole came down. Whatever the type of pole, the main characters were always carved in a column on a cedar tree so that people walking by could look at them. And if they had knowledge of that village and the legends of the people who lived there, they would understand what the pole said.

Consolidating this view, Chief Jim Hart said, more succinctly: “from the moment a tree is selected for carving until the final details are applied the pole is integral to the community from which it comes, to its history and to its future” (Chief Jim Hart, Personal conversation, May 2004).

Prior to contact with European explorers it was common to see totem poles near and in the dwellings of rich and powerful First Nations families. Trading with the early explorers brought more wealth and as a result, totem poles flourished. Some explorers document seeing hundreds of totem poles within First Nations villages. The art of Emily Carr also documents such scenes, as do many photographs from the late 19th century. This all changed with the banning of the feasting or potlatch system, which was integral to the raising of a totem pole(s). Shortly after the outlawing of potlatches, the era of residential schools began; residential schools interrupted the practice of passing the skill of carving from one generation to the next. Carving was banned in the residential schools, along with the speaking of native languages, the sharing of stories and the practising of cultural skills. As a result the art of carving of totem poles began to die out.

Despite the banning of carving and the decline of totem poles, Europeans and North Americans became fascinated with totem poles. Many poles were bought or stolen from native villages for private collections or placed in museums around the world. For example, the University of British Columbia (UBC) acquired poles as early as 1927. In the late 1940s, the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology initiated a display of poles on the grounds of the Museum. The collection started with some carved house posts collected from the Musqueam First Nations near the university. The totem pole project sought to create a collection of poles to represent the various First Nations of British Columbia who practiced the art of pole carving, and to have these surrounded by plants important to First Nations. A number of poles were bought and shipped to the Museum and an ambitious restoration project ensued employing Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka’wakw) carver Ellen
Neel.\textsuperscript{16} It was later deemed to be more prudent to carve replicas of the poles instead of engaging in the time consuming work of restoration, and as a result, Mungo Martin, a master carver from Prince Rupert, began to reproduce several poles.

As a result of the UBC totem pole project, native and non-native scholars set about rebuilding the significance of totem poles. Today, many repatriation initiatives are underway to return totem poles and other artefacts to their original First Nations communities. The Haida Nation in particular has been very active in the repatriation of their art and the remains of their ancestors, which were also stolen from gravesites.

In the past 14 years the carving of totem poles in the Northwest has seen resurgence. In 2000, Hereditary Chief and carver Jim Hart of Haida Gwaii carved a 50-foot pole in memory of Bill Reid. In 2001 prominent Haida artists carved six totem poles for the Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay. These poles represent six traditional Haida village sites. Other poles have been carved and raised in Prince Rupert, Terrace, the Hazelton’s and Smithers.

Northwest Community College’s First Nations Council Stepping Stones document (1996) provided the impetus for the carving of a totem pole for the Terrace campus of the College. This project proved to be one of the first significant change agents in the College’s bicultural journey. For several years, the Council sought to have a twenty-five (25) foot totem pole carved to commemorate the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the College and also to achieve other goals:

- to signify the mutual commitment of the College and the First Nations of the Northwest to work together in providing appropriate educational opportunities for their people now and for future generations;
- to redress the cultural silence that was imposed upon First Nations of the Northwest and serve as an acknowledgement and expression of the Adawx;

\textsuperscript{16} Traditionally, restoration of poles was not done. If an artist restored a pole, the ‘pole raising’ had to be done again. Typically totem poles are left to decay naturally and return to the earth.
to enhance the learning environment and make the College more welcoming and supportive of Aboriginal students (NWCC First Nations Council Minutes, 2003).

In 2003 the Terrace Campus was chosen as the site for the totem pole, as it was the first campus of the College, and home to the central administration of the College. Never before had a totem pole been raised at any of the NWCC campuses, and the significance of this pole and the process of its creation in 2004 proved to be tremendously powerful as an opening to a bicultural future for the College.

As discussions ensued with First Nations communities and First Nations Council, it was agreed that the proposed totem pole would be representative of the seven First Nations of the northwest and contain symbolism from each of these First Nations. Creating a pole that represented more than one House or Clan had never been done before, and certainly the request to create a pole on the traditional territory of a particular chief that would recognize more than one Nation was extraordinary. Through consultations with the house of Chief Wudi Wyi, Laxibuu (Wolf) Clan of the Kitsumkalum (People of the Robin) Band on whose traditional territory the Terrace campus resides, and subsequently various hereditary chiefs and leaders, understanding of the need for a symbol of unity and commitment of all Nations was accepted. Approval was granted for a ‘contemporary’ totem pole that reflected a unified commitment to post-secondary education, to be raised at the College and for it to be named the “All Nations Education Pole.”

A Planning Feast was called in January 2004, during which the contemporary pole and its rationale were discussed, and Chiefs, Elders, Matriarchs, and First Nations leaders gathered to publicly give their approval and discuss how the crests and symbols that would represent their Nation on the pole would be chosen. A liaison to each Nation was identified for the purposes of communicating the Nation’s wishes and it was determined that the crests or symbols chosen would be communicated to the President of the College; any conflicts were to be addressed by the President. These decisions were then communicated to the head carver who incorporated these requested symbols into the design of the totem pole. The final design would be reviewed and approved by the traditional hereditary chiefs of Kitsumkalum and the House of Chief Wudi Wyi.
The process of consultation was inordinate; never before had a project of this nature been attempted or achieved, and at first I did not appreciate the magnitude or the importance of the journey in which I became, thoroughly and necessarily engaged. First Nations leaders saw me as a ‘chief’ of the College and as such it was imperative that I should follow traditional Ts’msyen protocols and processes of consultation, of which I had almost no understanding at the time.

The determination of symbols for the pole was not a simple process for some Nations; the Haida, for example, wanted to have the three watchmen represent their Nation and proposed the watchmen be positioned at the top of the pole; a spot the hereditary chiefs of Kitsumkalum wished to reserve for the Eagle. Some First Nations had similar crests, and determining which Nation would have their crest on the pole and how the crest would be clearly distinguished took respectful dialogue and patience. As a result, the design consultations took months to successfully complete and several in-person meetings with Elected and Hereditary Chiefs, Elders and Matriarchs; in the end, one person stated that I should now be eligible for a negotiator position with the United Nations!

The Planning Feast was one of the first traditions to be observed and strict protocols were followed. Witnesses were identified to take note of the proceedings. The need and importance of witnesses and witnessing arose in the absence of a written language. At public ceremonies, such as the Totem Pole Planning Feast, a witness or a group of witnesses was formally appointed for each portion of the ceremony. The ‘witnesses’ were entrusted with the duty to watch and listen carefully and are able to recount precisely what transpired at the feast. The witness(es) could then be called upon at a later date to verify that a request had been granted or decision made. Kramer (2008, pp. 47-48) located this practice of witnessing within the customary practices of First Nations. “To ensure that the witnesses paid attention during particularly long ceremonies, they were given elaborate gifts. Gifts were also given to thank the witnesses, to make them feel included, and to pay them in advance should they ever need to bear witness to the proceedings of a particular event.”
Feasts are organized in a manner that permitted people who wished to speak, to have their say. In the end, the spokesperson for Chief Wudi Wy, Laxibuu Clan of the Kitsumkalum community, addressed the attendees. The spokesperson summarized the proceedings of the feast and made public the Chiefs’ approval of the ‘contemporary totem pole’:

"We were encouraged to see the seven Nations of the Northwest coming together for this project. Education is important to all First Nations communities, and we are all dedicated to ensuring our people receive the education they need for today and for the future. The creation and ‘raising’ of a totem pole of this nature in Kitsumkalum Wolf territory is a unique project and we look forward to working on this with our hereditary chiefs, stated, Xbisuunt (Vera Dudoward), Laxibuu Clan Matriarch, House of Wudi Wyi (Dudoward, speaking at the Planning Feast, January 2004, Terrace campus of NWCC)."
This sanction by the house of Chief Wudi Wyi, along with the hereditary chiefs of Kitsumkalum was essential; to be authentic, a totem pole needs to be sanctioned by the proper people.

The Planning Feast also featured a traditional blanket dance (Amm Hana’ax), which helped to raise over $1,000 for the expenses of the potlatch that would follow the pole raising. The Amm Hana’ax dance is a tradition observed by the Ts’msyen and other Northwest Coast First Nations. The dance is initiated as a means of collecting donations to pay for a feast or an event. Guests at the feast are invited to dance up to the blanket and contribute money.

Heber Reece, a Ts’msyen carver from the Wolf Clan was chosen as the lead carver, and he prepared a drawing of the sequence of the crests identified by the various First Nations. These crests represent the animals used by each Waap. “The ancient people were given animals to be used as crests by each Wilp [Nisga’a for house]. The crest animals are the ones, which showed them how to live, what to eat, and how to catch and prepare the different food animals.” (Vera Dudoward, personal conversation, 2003)

The figure at the base of the pole holds the most important position—it is the strongest figure as it holds up the weight of the pole. For this particular pole, the base position was reserved for the crest on whose traditional territory the pole was to be raised—the Wolf Clan of Kitsumkalum. As a result, at the base of the Terrace Campus totem pole is a wolf (which symbolized the House or Waap of Chief Wudi Wyi) holding a copper shield (symbolizing the People of the Robin—Kitsumkalum). The top of the pole was deemed to be a second prominent position on the pole; this too was reserved for a crest chosen by the hereditary chiefs of Kitsumkalum. Eagle, a crest shared by many First Nations in the Northwest and denoting mindfulness and wisdom, and known for its keen eyesight, was placed at the top of the totem pole to keep a watchful eye on the work of the College and the Nations.
Figure 6 The final design for the NWCC Terrace Campus ‘All Nations Education Pole’ 2004 Artwork by L. Nordstrom, NWCC
Like other resources, trees cannot be taken from just anywhere: the Waap on whose territory the trees were found owns them. Cedar in particular was and is a carefully managed resource. Each tree harvested is carefully selected and only taken when it is to be used in its entirety. Traditionally the choosing of a tree for a totem pole was a solemn process. Taking the life of something is never a time for celebration and must be done with respect and care for the land. Typically a blessing ceremony accompanies the taking the life of a tree. This was done when we harvested the tree for the College totem pole.

The tree selected for the NWCC totem pole was a Western red cedar. It was chosen for its straight grain and relative absence of centre rot, knots and cracks. The log came from the local forests, harvested and donated by West Fraser Forest Company and transported to the Terrace campus and placed in the carpentry shop. The work began on the pole in January 2004; the log was stripped of its bark and then knots and branches were chain-sawed to make way for the carving of the tree by hand. The back was hollowed out with saws and adzes, the design was drawn onto the pole, and then the hard and lengthy work of carving began. Using hand-made tools—adzes, chisels, knives, and gouges—the lead carvers and students carved the pole.
An advisory group was established to facilitate the hiring of a master carver for the totem pole. This group advised the College of the protocols to be observed, for example, how to conduct the blessing of the tree at the mill site and guided the College on who should be consulted and involved from the communities. The group led the discussion to decide the location for the totem pole; outlined the process by which the carver would be selected; engaged the Elders to gain their input and approval; and advised and led the ceremony to bless the pole and the carvers. Later, the lead carver, Ts’msyen Heber Reece, made the first cut into the cedar pole to the singing and drumming of local Ts’msyen dance groups. The ‘first cut’ blessing ceremony once again brought together representatives of the seven First Nations in the Northwest to show their unity and commitment to work with the College. More importantly, this blessing ceremony reconfirmed the Colleges’ commitment to working respectfully with First Nations.
Chief Wudi Wy (with headdress), surrounded by Chiefs, Elders and Matriarchs from the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas communities, observing the first cut of the pole, 2004
Above, Ts’mysyen carver Heber Reece, from the Wolf Clan of Kitsumkalum, makes the first cut into the cedar pole, Spring, 2004.

Left, Matriarch Mildred Roberts (in black jacket) Wolf Clan, Kitsumkalum, looks on as the first cut is made, 2004.
The process of carving the totem pole presented various challenges. The totem pole project was incorporated into a new educational program—*The Northwest First Nations Carving Program* at the College. Designed according to accepted western traditions of program prerequisites, objectives and outcomes, the program struggled. The experience levels of the students varied greatly. Some students had only rudimentary skills and did not have the necessary background experience to undertake a monumental carving project. Others had worked on a previous pole under the guidance of Freda Diesing, a highly influential and respected First Nations artist. There were expressions of racism as occasionally non-native students ridiculed the work underway and minimized its importance. The lead carver was put in a Western teaching role and yet did not have any experience with teaching others except in the traditional master-apprentice model of learning. He was challenged to fit into the regime of a 9-5 workday; he felt obligated to hire his younger brother as an assistant; and, he frequently was called away on family matters. These challenges took a toll on the class and also on the lead carver.
Sandra Wesley, Wolf Clan, Kitumkalum, student, working on the ‘All Nations Education Pole,’ 2004
Heber Reece, Wolf Clan, Kitsumkalum, Lead Carver, working on the ‘All Nations Education Pole,’ 2004
The pole was carved in the carpentry shop of the Terrace Campus at NWCC.

I frequently visited with the students and carvers and occasionally joined in to try my hand at carving, 2004
Shirley Bolton, Wolf Clan, Kitumkalum, at work, using a handmade block hammer, 2004

Eventually, the Chief Councillor of the community to which the carver belonged was called upon to speak to the lead carver, and the lead carver was subsequently replaced by Murphy Stanley Senior, an Elder and respected artist. These challenges set the project back by several months and instead of a fall pole raising as originally planned, it was not until November 12, 2004, on a freezing, snowy day, that the pole was raised to a crowd of more than 500 people.
Robin figure and copper shield depicted at the base of the ‘All Nations Education Pole’
The first contemporary NWCC ‘All Nations Education Pole,’ Terrace Campus, November 2004
The raising of the ‘All Nations Education’ totem pole was the first physical sign that change was emerging at the College. The ceremony began with a blessing of the pole and acknowledgement by a spokesperson for the House of Chief Wudi Wyi. Many prominent hereditary chiefs and leaders were in attendance including the chiefs from Kitsumkalum and Kitselas Bands, the Nisga’a Nation and Delgamuukx (Earl Muldoe) and Spolx (Geri MacDougall), from the Gitxsan Nation.

After the pole was blessed, it was carried from the carving area to its position in the central lawn of the College, led by drummers, dignitaries and followed by the public. Many hands were needed to hold the support beams to carry the pole, carved side facing upwards, across the lawns of the College. Once at the site, the lead carvers walked around the pole and ‘blew life into the pole;’ it was now ready to be raised.

Delgamuukw, also a master artist and totem pole carver, coordinated the raising of the pole. He called for it to be turned, hollow-side down so the pole would rest against the support beam erected. Using a series of ropes and braces as was traditional, volunteers pulled on the ropes according to the instructions of Delgamuukw. Once raised, the pole was secured and fastened, all of the carvers danced around the pole with their carving tools to signify its completion. Then people from all Nations were invited to join the dance in celebration of the successful raising and the realization of the dream. At the prompting of the Many Nations and the Gitselasu dance groups, Wolves, Eagles, Killer Whales, Ravens, Butterflies (non-Aboriginal guests) and the sub-clans of the same were called to join in the dancing. It was an incredible moment in time; the pole radiated strength and power and its impact on the crowd was tangible. It was obvious to me that something significant had transpired; something we couldn’t see, but felt. We were all being called to look at our world differently.

A potlatch of feasting, singing, dancing and speeches at the Kitsumkalum Hall commemorated the event. (Traditionally the potlatch, or huge feast, served to increase the owner of the pole’s social reputation; the totem standing as a reminder of the great potlatch that was held.) Along with barbequed salmon, College staff served moose meat stew, fry bread and desserts. Many staff were present from across the College and offered to help host the event. Everyone in attendance was
called upon to be a witness of what was taking place and in return, each guest was presented with a commemorative print of the totem pole and its story as a reminder of the day.

Many chiefs spoke at this event. Gerald Wesley, "Xpilaxha" Ganhada (Raven), Hereditary Chief of the House of Xpilaxha, commended the College for the work they were doing, and challenged us to not only increase access and support of Aboriginal students, but also to hire more local Aboriginal employees.

Irene Seguin reminded us of the significance of totem poles in First Nations culture. “This pole tells all of us (that) this is the commitment made today; we are united for the purpose of education; we are committed to the changes these symbols imply—to work together with the College to improve post-secondary education for First Nations people” (Seguin, address given at the Pole Raising Feast, Kitsumkalum Hall, Kitsumkalum Village, November 12, 2004).

The pole raising provided an extraordinary opportunity for hundreds of people, First Nations and non-First Nations, to witness a tradition thousands of years old and to participate in a traditional feast replete with speeches and gifts. The pole stands as a unique and powerful reminder of the commitment of all Nations and the College to work together to enhance educational opportunities. For the College, the pole is a testament to the start of a new relationship with First Nations of the northwest and the start of a new journey that would challenge the well-established education paradigm that had shaped and directed the institution since inception.

Many people, employees and members of the public, have articulated the change they felt the pole raising symbolized, as is evidenced in the following testimonies:

I am a non-Aboriginal faculty member at Northwest Community College (NWCC). I took on the duties of the Chair of the College’s Education Council a number of years ago which led to my direct involvement with the College’s First Nations Council, a group of education coordinators from First Nations communities throughout the geographic region the college serves. First Nations Council members through these meetings, and later informally, began to open my eyes to the racism that I, and many others, denied or were/are oblivious to, in northwestern BC communities.
First Nations Council members also urged the College to understand how difficult it was for students from their communities to attend the College where there was little support or understanding of the cultures and communities from which they came. First Nations Council members spoke of erecting a totem pole as both a symbol of the importance of education for the future of their communities, and as a sign that the College would begin to value and welcome into the institution the diversity and complexities of First Nations cultures in the northwest. (M. Brown, personal communication, 2004)

Another comment:

The raising of the pole was a special day for many of us at the college and for many days following, discussions were stimulated about the meaning of raising the pole at the college. It seems the pole-raising was the beginning of opening a long overdue dialogue about the relationships between racism, education and social justice at the college, a dialogue that continued and led to expanded dialogue in communities throughout the northwest. (S. Ronaasen, 2004)

Here is another comment:

Since the pole raising, I believe the college environment improved and became more open and inclusive of the contributions made by First Nations students and their communities. Increasingly the college embraced and began to learn about First Nations culture in a variety of ways. The college environment was uplifted by this event and relationships with all communities were noticeable improved. The realization that we could work collectively with our First Nations communities began to be internalized by many at the College, and optimism about the College’s future was voiced. Perhaps that is the point we have currently attained on this journey initiated by the raising of the All Nations pole at the college—we are beginning to understand Australian Aboriginal leader Lila Watson’s words; “If you think you’re coming here to help us, you’re wasting your time. If you see your liberation bound up with mine then let’s work together.” Hopefully the awareness is growing at NWCC and if so perhaps we are providing an example for others. (K. Downs, personal communication, 2006)

And another, from a local civic figure:
I am convinced that the raising of the All Nations Education Totem pole at the Terrace Campus was the culmination of a very important process that changed the history of Northwest Community College and its relationship with the First Nations communities in the huge region it serves in Northwest British Columbia. I don't know whether you realized when you proposed a contemporary pole just how difficult it would be to pull together a consensus on design and imagery. I think that the discussion and negotiations that necessarily had to be done, involving each of those Nations, finally made the first breach in the walls of distrust and misunderstanding that had kept NWCC from being a truly Community college in an area where First Nations population is such a large part of the population. All of a sudden here was someone who valued and recognized the true culture of the people enough to make it an important part of the only post-secondary education facility in the Northwest. Suddenly, too, the collective Aboriginal cultural voice had a body, and it was a body designed by the people it belongs to. It hasn't happened anywhere else in the north. I always chuckle to myself that it was like a birth from start to finish; all the illness and bad feelings that had to get dealt with and finally the wonderful birth of the real being. And what a literally hostile, cold and bitter world greeted it. I thought it was like all the evil forces of the universe were fighting to keep the evidence of unity and enlightenment from surviving in our educationally deprived environment.

Anyway, you won. And whenever I see that pole, I see your vision of being a college that knows its people and their needs and makes huge efforts to deliver hope and success. (Alice Maitland, Mayor, Village of Hazelton, personal communication, 2006)

I learned much from this first step by the College into the world of biculturalism. I gained a new appreciation and understanding of negotiations across the interface between the Euro-centric normality of the College and the intricate cultural-political world of the seven First Nations in the Northwest. Much was also learned from the experience of this first attempt at teaching First Nations art at the College. These lessons informed a new art program launched the following year - the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art—a story to be told in the next chapter of this thesis. But before moving to that chapter, there is another story to be told: that of another project that was foundational to the College’s bicultural transformation, the Kitlope Field School Program.
The Kitlope Field School Program

Aboriginal people in Canada are sharply under-represented in occupations requiring a university education; and . . . more must be done to increase the relevance of learning and engagement of Aboriginal students in these areas, particularly in science and technology (Council of Learning, 2007, p.2).

The carving project of the All Nations Education Totem Pole had an impact on many people throughout the College, furthering the discussion of potential projects for change. One faculty member, who had previously come to know some of the last remaining Henaaksiala people of the Kitlope territory, approached me in February 2005 with the idea of creating a Field School that would engage the Elders of the Henaaksiala and Haisla people.

It was proposed that this ‘field school’ would be offered by the Social Sciences Faculty in conjunction with First Nations people and would feature the coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and faculty. Importantly, the Field School proposal included amongst the faculty, a 70+ year-old Henaaksiala Elder who had been born and lived much of his younger life in the Kitlope—the proposed site for the field portion of the School. After consultation and planning with the Haisla and Elders from the Haisla and Henaaksiala First Nations, along with internal discussion with both the Education Council and the First Nations Council of the College, the Kitlope Field School program was established. Launched in the summer of 2005, it was offered annually for the next five years.

The Kitlope Field School attempted to increase the engagement of Aboriginal learners by taking a different approach to learning. Non-Aboriginal learners were also encouraged to enrol so they might experience a worldview different to their own. The program sought to bridge the cultural mismatch that frequently occurs between the values and philosophy of Western science and the values and philosophy held by many Aboriginal communities. While the Aboriginal worldview sees people, landscape and living resources as a spiritual whole, the Western Science approach
seeks greater understanding of the world through breaking apart the whole and analysing it into its smallest parts. As Urion (1991, p. 7) notes, these cultural differences can create difficulties for Aboriginal students in classrooms dominated by the Western science perspective. This unique field-based program was set within the traditional territory of the Henaaksiala people known as the Kitlope Valley. The Kitlope, the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world, was protected in 1994 as a safeguard to biodiversity and Henaaksiala cultural heritage. To the Henaaksiala, the Kitlope is known as “the source of milky blue water”, and the place where their way of life originates.

Cecil Paul Sr., pictured here traveling into the Kitlope, is an Elder with the Kitlope Field School and is one of only six (6) Henaaksiala people living today, 2005
The Kitlope Field School program was not only designed to recognize and provide a respectful sharing of these two paradigms, but also to facilitate learning in an applied, experiential way—a method in keeping with Aboriginal ways of learning. Students and Field School leaders travelled to the Kitlope by boat, and lived in tents and cabins as they journeyed through the valley. This five-day trip immersed students within the traditional territory and lifestyle of the Henaaksiala and in so doing provided them a first-hand glimpse of the Aboriginal paradigm of knowledge and learning.

For many participants, particularly the non-Aboriginal students, this new perspective may have been a long journey from their accustomed way of viewing the world. But for the duration of the Field School students were asked to suspend their beliefs so that they might entertain a different perspective on the environment in which we live.
Sherry Ronaasen, Cultural Anthropology Professor, NWCC Faculty, 2005

Student learning to start a fire with dried moss, 2005
Elders speak to Kitlope Field School students, 2005

At the entrance to the river leading to Kitlope Lake, 2005

For the Haisla/Henaaksila people, the priorities of the program were several:
• to heighten awareness, importance and stewardship of the Kitlope;
• to repatriate lost culture and traditions;
• to learn traditional perspectives on science, culture and the importance of the relationship to the land;
• to gain insights into modern perspectives of science and anthropology, and;
• to build sustainable leadership skills amongst their people.

The design and offerings of the Field School focused explicitly on these priorities, and additionally sought to:

• demonstrate mutual respect for traditional Aboriginal knowledge;
• invite insight in the importance of “place” in the Aboriginal worldview, and to;
• facilitate learning in an applied, experiential way – a method in keeping with First Nations ways of learning.

The Kitlope Field School program acknowledged the Aboriginal worldview and the knowledge of the Henaaksiala/Haisla people by involving Elders in the teaching of university level courses alongside western academics. Cecil Paul Sr., one of the last Henaaksiala Hereditary Chiefs and Elders alive, along with Gerald Amos, Elder and Haisla Chief, was an integral part of the faculty team leading the first two offerings of the Kitlope Program. The Elders’ rich knowledge and understanding of the ecological, geographical and cultural aspects of the Kitlope was acknowledged by the academic faculty at Northwest Community College despite the Elders absence of formal, western, educational credentials. Many Henaaksiala and Haisla Elders, as with other First Nations knowledge-keepers in the northwest, have a deep understanding of the local geography and ecosystems, based on thousands of
years of observation, deduction, and trial and error in the use of plants and the
development of personal relationships with the land. As Cecil Paul explained,

My first ways of thinking and knowing had to do with this
physical place, the Kitlope. I was taught to live in harmony with it,
to take care of it, to nurture a relationship with it. This is what it
means to me to live ecologically – to live in a harmonious
relationship with the land (Elder Cecil Paul, in conversation with
the Kitlope Field School students, 2005).

The Kitlope Field School was specifically designed around the geography of
the Kitlope and served as the learning context for the delivery of courses such as
Cultural Geography and Ethno-botany. In so doing, the program exposed students to
39) writes about the importance of learning within the context of the land and ‘on the
land’. “For Indigenous people,” he says, “Nature and all it contains formed the
parameters of the school.”

The Field School’s model of ‘place-based’ educational design and delivery
presented a unique opportunity to combine the descriptive knowledge of western
33) explains that the foundations of the earliest sources of human teaching and
learning relate to

“... a subjective experience tied to a place
environmentally, socially, and spiritually. Tribal teaching and
learning were intertwined with the daily lives of both teacher and
learner. Tribal education was a natural outcome of living in close
communion with each other and the environment.”

The importance of ‘place’ to the Aboriginal worldview cannot, argues Cajete,
(1994, p. 47) be underestimated:

The origins of this special and essentially ecological relationship
are usually represented in the guiding story or myth, which the
group holds sacred. The community embodies the essence of that
“place,” which is really the place of the spirit referred to in the
guiding myth. Through their central myth, each Indigenous community identifies itself as a sacred place, a place of living, learning, teaching, and renewal; a place where the “People” share the breath of their life and thought. The community is a living, spiritual entity that is supported by every responsible adult.

During the Field School program, the Elders shared insights on their experiences of the land and provided glimpses into their acquired knowledge through the telling of stories. Non-Aboriginal faculty were educated alongside of students with respect to cultural teachings and Aboriginal perspectives.

The Kitlope Field School provided a unique ‘bringing together’ of western social scientists, First Nations Elders and Hereditary Chiefs. Throughout the learning process, the student was witness and participant in the dialogues that occurred between these varying viewpoints and perspectives as traditional deductive knowledge and western descriptive knowledge was shared and discussed. The design of the program facilitated the destruction of boundaries and barriers to cross-cultural knowledge transfer. Urion (1991, p. 7) suggests this transfer “is not a ‘translation’ of one worldview to another . . . . but access to the multidimensionality provided by two pairs of eyes.” The new knowledge landscape would be one of a web of interactions devoid of and resisting hierarchical relationships. As Kawagley & Barnhart (1999, p. 8) state so eloquently:

The tendency in most of the literature on Native education is to focus on how to get Native people to understand the western/scientific view of the world. There is very little literature that addresses how to get western scientists and educators to understand Native worldviews. We have to come at these issues on a two-way street, rather than view the problem as a one-way challenge to get Native people to buy into the western system. Native people may need to understand western science, but not at the expense of what they already know. Non-Native people, too, need to recognize the existence of multiple worldviews and knowledge systems, and find ways to understand and relate to the world in its multiple dimensions and varied perspectives.
The Kitlope Field School presents a model of educational design and delivery that attempted to do as Kawagley and Barnhardt suggest—provide a setting in which western academics are challenged to understand the Aboriginal worldview. The success of this program paved the way for others who sought to integrate local Aboriginal knowledge into mainstream educational settings. In doing so, it also provided insight into Aboriginal approaches to learning and knowing and successfully grounded formally mainstream curricula in traditional Aboriginal knowledge and values. This was an important first step in actualizing the educational processes and goals outlined by First Nations Council and the College’s new Strategic Plan.

The success of the Kitlope Field School program was evident in the words of Haisla Elder Gerald Amos and the experiences described by the students. Speaking to the participants and leaders on the last night of the June 2005 Field School, Gerald Amos described one of the benefits of the Field School as a ‘healing of colonial wounds:’

Our culture, our spirit, and our traditional views of science have been damaged . . . and, as we speak now, it is under repair. As we get together in circles like this, in this spiritual place . . . with students and teachers . . . we are healing’ (Gerald Amos, speaking at the Field School, June, 2005).

In reports presented by students about the Kitlope Field School, many students spoke of the ‘life transforming experiences’ of this unique program and cited many new discoveries—among these, were a respect and appreciation for the traditional First Nations approach to learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Whereas Western science seeks answers to questions about the world and our place in the universe by keeping everything separate from us, First Nations sought to
understand their world and their place within it by looking to nature. Believing that all existence is connected, they sought to understand by affirming wholeness rather than creating separateness (Gerald Amos and Cecil Paul Sr., Kitlope Field School discussion, 2005).

For many students in the School, this approach was a departure from mainstream education, which portrayed Western insights and discoveries as the only valid sources to knowing. Willie Ermine (1995 p. 102) writes about this reality in an article entitled *Aboriginal Epistemology*. “In viewing the world objectively, Western science has habitually fragmented and measured the external space in an attempt to understand it in all its complexity. Fragmentation of the universe has led to what Bohm (1980, p. 103) calls a ‘fragmentary self-world view.’” Such a fragmented approach Ermine contends, “... restricts the capacity for holism.”

As a result of the Field School experience, some students came to believe that the Aboriginal worldview held out the possibility for a new ecological orientation that has been absent from modern societies. Amongst their conclusions, they noted that the accumulated knowledge of the remaining Henaaksiila and Haisla Elders represented a body of thought and experience that should be honoured and preserved as a vital storehouse of environmental wisdom important for ecological restoration throughout the world.

All of the students, as well as the non-Aboriginal faculty, achieved insights into the First Nations worldview, leading the faculty of the Kitlope Field School to recommend that the College begin the development of a professional development Field School for staff to develop greater cultural awareness of First Nations in the northwest.
The Kitlope Field School successfully interwove traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom with Western science. The success of this initiative spawned other, similar Field Schools at Northwest Community College. In the latter years of my term at NWCC, similar, bicultural Field Schools were being hosted in Haida Gwaii with the Haida and off the coast of Prince Rupert with the Ts’msyen.

The Kitlope Field School held exciting possibilities for new approaches to programming at the College and served to emphasize that education has a vital role to play in reversing the trend from one of destruction to one of renewal. The successes of this program heightened our belief in bicultural education serving as a potential solution to the respectful engagement of Aboriginal students.

With the two projects described in this chapter, the All Nations Education Pole and the Kitlope Field School, NWCC started to move from a planning phase exploring biculturalism to concrete action. The All Nations Education Pole manifests the first enduring, physical presence on NWCC’s campus representing biculturalism in terms of symbolic plurality and inclusiveness. Through the Kitlope Field School, the curricula and operation of which involved Henaaksiala and Haisla Elders and Watchmen, as well as regular College faculty, NWCC engaged in a process leading to world view/knowledge outcomes that begin to define biculturalism in terms of challenging participants'/learners' accustomed understandings of themselves, and of shifting their society/culture/knowledge-bases. The Kitlope Field School and the All Nations Education Pole were the first of several projects that emerged from consultation between First Nations and College personnel, and which challenged customary understandings of ways to find common ground between traditional and Indigenous worldviews. These projects gave us confidence in what would be subsequent steps: the founding of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art,
the School of Mining and Exploration, the initiation of a House of Learning and Research, and the building of a long house, Waap Galts’ap. Together, these projects place Northwest Community College at the forefront of bicultural post-secondary education in British Columbia.
The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

In our world, it is understood that you cannot separate the land and water; they depend upon each other to make the whole. An ancient Haida saying, “everything depends on everything else,” drives this point home. In the same way, you cannot separate Haida art from our way of life, for without this context it has little meaning” (Collison, as cited in Bartels, 2006, p. 57).

Logo for the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art - a depiction of an Eagle with the face of a Woman (Freda) in the body of the Eagle Designed by Stan Bevan and painted by student, Dean Heron 2006
The Artist in Residence program, initiated to create the first All Nations Education Pole for the College, set the stage for a much larger initiative at the College. The power and momentum of change that the Totem Pole project sparked promoted new conversations and networking among people and led to discussions about the importance of art to First Nations culture. One outcome was the perception of a need for a School focused on First Nations Northwest Coast Art.

In an effort to support First Nations communities in reclaiming their cultural artistic heritage, Northwest Community College, together with First Nations artists and community stakeholders, launched the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. This School was initiated with the renowned artists who worked with Freda Diesing and were challenged with the responsibility of carrying on her legacy of teaching. In September of 2006, the first class of 13 students entered the School.

The School focuses on First Nations Northern Northwest coast art of British Columbia, and currently features a wood carving program and course offerings from certificate to diploma levels.

The new Art School is having a profound impact on the students, instructors and the College as a whole. The School has become a powerful vehicle for transformative change in the College, as it seeks to redress the impact of colonization on the lives of the students and instructional staff while expanding a cultural presence not previously validated within the College as an institution.

Many graduates have described their success and the value of the program, not only in terms of the academic and artistic skills they have acquired, but in terms
of personal growth, development, self-respect and pride as they reconnected with the teachings of their culture through their own art traditions in contemporary times.

In this chapter I describe Northwest Community College and the development of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. I briefly describe the forces that led to first alienation and then a renaissance and revitalization of First Nations art and culture. I situate the impacts of the School in the larger context of post-secondary education and the preservation of traditional knowledge, language and culture. Finally I assess the impact of the School on students in the School, on the College and on the surrounding community as well as on the future of Aboriginal education.

This account of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art begins with a brief biography of Freda Diesing herself.

**Freda Diesing**

Maria Alfreda (Freda) Diesing (1925-2003) was a Haida woman born in Prince Rupert. For most of her life, she lived and worked among the Ts’msyen people. Her Haida name was Skil Kew Wat, on the trail of property woman or magical little woman. (Her artistic transformations are indeed magical). Great granddaughter of Simeon stihihdáa, the distinguished artist and carver whose life spanned most of the 19th Century, Freda came from an illustrious Haida family. A leading artist in the Northwest Coast tradition since the 1960s, Freda was among the first artists to work at K’san, later the home of the famous Gitanmaax School of Art (Wright, 2004, p. 323). She coordinated the K’san dance group, taking it on tour to
Ottawa. She created cultural displays, served as interpreter and carved her first mask with artist Tony Hunt. She was one of the first women to carve in wood and has the distinction of being the first Haida woman to become a pole carver. As a courageous ground breaker she was and continues to be a role model for women, artists, and people everywhere, but particularly so in the Northwest Coast of British Columbia.

Her portfolio exemplifies Northwest Coast design and includes totem poles raised in Prince Rupert and Terrace, a wall mural for the Prince Rupert Hospital, a ‘House Front’ and totem poles at Kitumkalum, masks, head-dresses, bowls, and exquisite raven rattles. Recipient of the National Aboriginal Achievement Award, she is now known worldwide as the incarnation and true purveyor of the form, the soul and inspiration of the traditional art of Northwestern British Columbia.

In the winter of 2002, Freda Diesing died in a single car accident on the Terrace-Prince Rupert highway one icy night. Many people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mourned the loss of this beloved role model, mentor and teacher.

Diesing taught design and carving in schools, prisons and museums in Prince Rupert, Terrace, Ketchikan and Sitka for over three decades. Through her work, she took every opportunity to teach about the art while continuing to create it. She was extraordinarily generous with her time and talent—teaching many of the young artists who are at their peak today and are pushing Northwest Coast art form to new heights of creativity. Her students include acclaimed artists working in the form today; for example, Dempsey Bob, Don Yeomans, Stan Bevan and Norman Jackson among many others. These artists credit Freda with inspiring and making their own work possible. At a ceremony to celebrate Freda’s life (2002) at Kitumkalum,
Dempsey Bob, a world-renowned artist and instructor at the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, said this about Freda:

Freda was our school. She was a great teacher for our people—she saved us, she saved our work. She gave us a basic understanding of our culture. In the beginning, Freda was our only school. She taught us who we were, what our art is, what great art is (Bob, speaking at the Celebration of Life for Freda Diesing, 2002).

As a teacher, Diesing was one of the leaders of the great artistic and cultural renaissance in the Northwest and a carrier and preserver of the magnificent tradition of Haida and Northwest art and culture. As observed by John Ralston Saul (2008), it is perhaps ironic that what Diesing preserved and promoted is also a large part of non-Aboriginal history and sense of place in B.C. and Canada. This was perhaps never demonstrated so well as at the ceremonies of the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, most events of which were held on traditional First Nations territories. The Olympian ceremonies celebrated the revival of one of the greatest art forms the world has known—the art of the Northwest Coast. (Several of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art students and graduates performed at the opening ceremonies and one was chosen to create an Olympic legacy artwork for the City of Vancouver.)

Prior to, and for much of Freda’s life, it was against Canadian law for First Nations to make any works of art, engage in traditional ceremony or speak their own language. Legislation (1885) banned the potlatch or feasting system and thus undermined the knowledge systems and traditional institutions that had historically governed them. The potlatch was the basis of governance of most First Nations in the Pacific Northwest. Banning the potlatch meant banning the art and culture, as well as the governance process of the First Nations. This process of governance outlawed
with the potlatch ban was one that had hitherto conferred legitimacy, assigned rights
and responsibilities for territories and resources, and ensured sharing of benefits and
governed access, harvesting and conservation. Many First Nations people were
jailed, fined, and persecuted and eventually alienated from their relationship to their
cultural, linguistic, and artistic heritage as well as their connection to the natural
world. The potlatch ban began the devaluation of traditional knowledge and culture
and laid the groundwork for continuing bitter conflicts among communities in the
Northwest.

From the late 1800’s to mid-1960, thousands of ceremonial art works were
confiscated and burned and centuries-old customs, stories, songs, and ceremonies
were banned. Freda Diesing undertook to restore the art of carving to her people and
set about researching and learning the cultural basis for the art and practice of
drawing and carving.

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art was established at NWCC
to honour and recognize Freda’s legacy to the First Nations communities and to the
art world and, further, to support and perpetuate the rich culture and tradition of First
Nations Northwest Coast art. The School was initiated with the renowned artists
who worked with Freda and were challenged with the responsibility of carrying on
her legacy of teaching. First Nations students have the opportunity through the
School to learn the traditional art of drawing and woodcarving. Stan Bevan and Ken
McNeil, two distinguished carvers, are teachers and mentors to the students and
Dempsey Bob is the Senior Advisor to the program. Students share the instructors'
knowledge and experience while working alongside them and other respected visiting artists to develop a solid foundation in both the knowledge of First Nations Northwest Coast art and its creation.

In September of 2006 the first class of students entered the School. Following in Freda’s footsteps, students begin with basic drawing and design techniques and study the history of designs and crests; they then progress to tool making and traditional wood carving techniques.

The First Nations Art program seeks to recognize and support the rich culture and tradition of First Nations art in the Northwest. In keeping with tradition, each class produces a substantive work of art to pass on to the next ‘generation’ of learners. These works of art are permanent legacies placed at one of Northwest Community College campuses and serve to enhance the learning environment, to make the College’s campuses more welcoming and supportive of First Nations learners, to build awareness and to serve as testimony to a rich art history and culture.

The School is unique in that, while supported and embraced by the College, it is led by a Committee of external advisors, primarily of First Nations descent; it has the involvement and support of the First Nations communities in the region. Elders’ Gatherings are held to provide feedback and to share the stories and history required by individual students and/or groups of students. Several community events are held throughout the year requiring students to take the lead in sharing their learning with their communities and the Elders. A sense of ownership of the School by the First Nations communities served by the College is apparent: at the opening of the School, and at subsequent exhibitions, First Nations people have dominated the audience.
The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art seeks to serve several objectives. These are to:

Teach and transfer the traditional knowledge of drawing and carving

1. Reclaim First Nations knowledge

2. Celebrate and validate First Nations art

3. Reclaim the role of art within the First Nations Knowledge paradigm

4. Encourage greater understanding and appreciation of Northwest Coast art

An account of the School, structured by these objectives, is presented in the following pages.

**Teach and transfer the traditional knowledge of drawing and carving**

The majority of students who first attended the new art School were First Nations individuals who frequently struggled on their own to learn to carve. Much like the days when Dempsey Bob was starting out, there were previously few opportunities for aspiring artists to learn traditional First Nations Northwest Coast art forms. With the exception of a privately funded Gitamaax School of Northwest Art housed at K’san Heritage Centre in the Village of Hazelton, which closed in 2006, no publicly funded art school specializing in First Nations art had ever existed. Students would pick up a bit from watching others carve, and if they were lucky someone skilled might take them on as an apprentice, but far too often they were left on their own to try to make sense of the complexity of the forms, designs and stories behind the art they sought to access.
As Dempsey Bob related at the launch of the School,

This [School] is like a dream come true for us. I started learning from Freda in 1969. There was nowhere to go . . . there was nobody teaching at that time . . . there were a few elder carvers but they weren’t teaching. So we [people who wanted to learn to carve] really started in the wilderness. We didn’t have the tools; we didn’t know where to get the wood or what kind of wood . . . Later I joined Freda in teaching others. We were trying to revive our art because it was so beautiful. We didn’t want it to die (Dempsey Bob, 2006).

Many students enter the School with the desire to be successful carvers, to earn a living through their art, to reclaim what was taken during the height of
colonization and to make visible the pride and richness of their communities' traditional forms of cultural expression.

**Reclaim First Nations Knowledge**

“Indigenous arts are a potent way of presenting, representing, and reclaiming indigenous knowledges” (Iseke-Barnes, Jiménez Estrada, 2008, p. 2).

While teaching, Freda would push her students to learn their culture and history. As Dempsey Bob recounts: “Freda told us to go back to your people; talk to your Elders and learn your history; learn as much as you can, because that’s who you are.” (Bob, Speaking at the launch of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, 2006) It wasn’t enough for Freda to show students her methods and designs because as a Haida woman her culture was not identical to that of the other Northwest First Nations. She knew that her students needed to go back to move forward, to return to their roots so as to understand their place on the continuance of their own ancestral traditions. In other words, by coming to understand who you really are as a person, you build confidence and personal power.

All First Nations have their own stories and knowledge systems. This knowledge is carried and shared through various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication—in ceremony, storytelling, dance, song, painting, weaving, and visual arts. Peter McNair (2006) elucidates when writing about Haida art in Raven Travelling:

Haida art can only be fully understood and appreciated in the context of mythic history and its place in Haida culture. The iconography on totem poles, house frontal paintings, chief’s settees, bentwood chests, mountain goat horn spoon handles, canoes, tunics and blankets is not limited to simple representations of killer
whales, grizzly bears, moons, ravens, beavers, frogs, cumulus clouds, eagles and supernatural beings. Rather, the stories and context behind these images explain and proclaim the jealously guarded clan privileges they display (McNair, as cited in Bartels, 2006, p. 91).

At the Freda Diesing School, students engaged with their Elders, knowledge keepers within their communities and other artists to learn about their history, their stories, and their cultures. This was critical on several levels, as various students have explained:

The residential school experience robbed my family of our language, culture and traditions; we lost our identity. When you struggle with your identity, you struggle with pride, self-confidence, self-worth and self-respect. Through this program, I regained a sense of self and identity. I could hold my head up high as a First Nations artist (G. McKay, personal communication, 2010).

For me, this program was also about healing. For years I was taught and made to feel that I was lesser than by being First Nations. Through this program, the importance and spirituality of our ceremonial masks and utensils, our poles and regalia, which only recently were seen as ‘art’, were made clear. Things I had felt, but not understood (T. Auckland, personal communication, 2010).

There is a healing power at play when I am carving. I am thinking of the stories of my people, my relationships with our land and my community. Through the stories that I am learning, many for the first time, I am reconnected to everything around me. I feel energized, creative. I feel pride in myself and in our people. It helps me overcome what I have been through and gives me hope for survival (J. McNeil, personal communication, 2010).

Iseke-Barnes and Jiménez Estrada (2008) write about the power of Aboriginal art to heal. “For Aboriginal artists, art is also about healing, and this
comes through ‘righting’ history by making clear the silences and negations of Aboriginal peoples in the history of Canada while simultaneously maintaining their distinct culture and identity” (p. 19).

First Nation students’ voices and perspectives are being expressed through their art, and in so doing for many, healing is also taking place. As they reclaim the traditional practices of using copper, abalone, sea lion whiskers, hair, cedar and alder in their art pieces, they are preserving culture, reclaiming the knowledge of their people, and reclaiming their own identity. With reference to Haida art, Collison (2006) reinforces this point as follows: “Haida art is part of Haida culture, introduced by the supernaturals and developed by our people over thousands of years. In its truest function, our art represents who we are and where we come from” (Collison, as cited in Bartels, 2006, p. 57).

**Celebration and validation of First Nations Northwest Coast art**

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art is rooted in the First Nations cultural and knowledge paradigm and focuses on Northwest Coast First Nations art. It has the distinction of not placing European art as the central theme and foundation, thus making Indigenous art the other.

Othering is done through the mythical creation of a centre (Europe) that makes Indigenous knowledges the ‘other.’ Making western European art as ‘central’ and Indigenous as ‘other’ presumes that the goal is to eventually make the ‘other’ gravitate toward the centre and become one with western European art (Iseke-Barnes, Jiménez Estrada, 2008, p. 11).

By focusing exclusively on the art of the Indigenous Northwest Coast people, there is little room for European art’s colonizing influences to interfere, the School re-centres Indigenous stories and perspectives in a modern world.
“Our people were great sculptors,” stated Tahltan-Tlingit carver and sculptor, Dempsey Bob (2006) at the School’s launching ceremony in February 2006. “They knew as much about sculpture as any of the other great cultures in the world. Our culture and art in the northwest was very rich . . . and we almost lost it all” (D. Bob, personal communication, 2006).

The Freda Diesing School emphasizes the validity of studying the history of Northwest Coast First Nations art and its rich history, despite the interruptions and attempts at control by Euro-centric influences. For many years, Euro-centric Canada excluded Aboriginal artists from fine art exhibitions and later claimed, under its own terms, what is “real” Aboriginal art. In British Columbia, this frequently meant “Haida” art, given the predominance and profile of Haida artist, Bill Reid. This static notion of what constitutes First Nations Art or Native Art is another example of the colonizing influence of Eurocentric attitudes (Iseke-Barnes, Jiménez Estrada, 2008).

Through the Freda Diesing School, First Nations instructors and students are taking ownership of the process, aims and interpretation of First Nations art.

Reclaim the role of ‘art’ within the First Nations Knowledge Paradigm

For First Nations of the Northwest what today is considered ‘art’ was traditionally created and used for very functional purposes, whether it was for ceremonial, domestic (e.g. eating utensils) or livelihood uses (e.g. items used to hunt or gather food). As David Suzuki (2002) observes in his book, The Sacred Balance,

> In many societies art is practical (because it is powerful), a design embedded in the necessities of life; carved posts that hold up the roof and guard the dwelling place, rituals for healing, rain

17 Dempsey Bob is one of Canada’s most sought after First Nations artists by galleries and private collectors.
dances, sand paintings. These are ways of rendering visible the designs of the universe, the cables that tie us to Earth. In Western society, this intrinsic value has been expunged from art (p. 203).

The interrelationship between and among all things is fundamental to the Northwest First Nations worldview. Knowledge is found in life itself, and passed orally through song, story and the interplay of life from one generation to another. This interrelationship acknowledges four dimensions from a Euro-centric perspective—the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual—but refuses to compartmentalize; all things exist in relation to one another.

The late Dan Moonhawk Alford (2001) a linguist, eloquently described the importance of this interconnectedness through the metaphor of dance and states that Aboriginal people place more value on the dancing than the dancers; claiming that the processes and interrelationships are more real than the ‘things’ that grow out of them.

In my discussions with Elders of the Ts’msyen Nation, the importance of inter-relationships is stressed, as is connection to place (land), the responsibilities they have to community and to passing their knowledge to the next generation. The
Graduating student art work – alder ceremonial mask

Worldview they describe sees people, landscape and living resources as a spiritual whole. This worldview is similarly described by other First Nations across the country. “For traditional Indigenous people around the world, Spirit is real. It is physically expressed in everything that exists in the world” (Cajete, 1994, p. 48).
Henry Lickers, a biologist, and member of the Turtle Clan of the Seneca Nation in Ontario, explains the Aboriginal worldview in this way: “The First Nations people view themselves not as custodians, stewards or having dominion over the Earth, but as an integrated part in the family of the Earth. The Earth is my mother and the animals; plants and minerals are my brothers and sisters” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, Para. 1).

Roy and Morgan (2008) elucidate when discussing the Obijwe language, “For example, when something is miskwaa, or red, it does not merely indicate colour, but the essence of being red and being permeated by red. It also references blood and how it moves through the body” (Roy and Morgan, 2008, p. 237).

Cedar and alder are the traditional mediums for First Nations wood carvers of the Northwest; First Nations people in particular viewed cedar as a living spiritual source of power. To the Haida the towering trees were believed to form the axis of the world, and the red and yellow wood was used to make houses, canoes and canoe paddles.

Traditional uses of cedar, alder, wool, abalone shell, and other natural resources in the making of bentwood boxes, totem poles, ceremonial regalia, mats, blankets, hats and other functional wares were lost during colonial rule. Only for a short period in the 1920’s did the Department of Indian Affairs allow residential school students to produce and exhibit what they termed ‘art products’; the production of which was thought to demonstrate the ‘civilization’ of students and the success of the Department’s policy of assimilation (McMaster, 1989, p. 209).

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art celebrates the return of these lost arts and seeks to ensure that their return is not only enduring but that they
are rooted in the culture of their communities. This is not to say that Indigenous knowledge is static—quite the opposite. As Cecilia Haig-Brown (2008) points out, “. . .[k]nowledge is in flux, reciprocally influencing and influenced by its context—land, spirit, mind, and emotion” (p. 257). ‘In response to those who see Indigenous knowledge as frozen in some ideal of long ago traditions, Métis scholar Carl Urion (1999 cited in Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 35) simply states, ‘Traditional knowledge is living knowledge’” (Haig-Brown, 2008, p.13).

Graduating student art piece – alder moon mask

Encourage greater understanding and appreciation of Northwest Coast art

Now in its eighth year, the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art is having a tremendous impact on those who come in contact with its students and the
program. Through exhibitions and special events, the School and its students are making known what was once silenced through the laws of the Canadian government; it is making visible a history that was never written and expressing the richness of a culture that was previously destined to be destroyed.

Art exhibitions are an integral part of the educational experience within the School and serve as a way for students to convey their culture, their struggle, and their journey. During the exhibitions, students talk about the history behind their work and the statements they are making today. In so doing, the exhibitions have become one tangible way to share ideas, beliefs, and traditions.
The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art would like to thank the following organizations for welcoming us on field trips:

**Where our Ancestors Walked**

*nii nah wil’lii waalxsa nu ‘nagyetgm*

**Freda Diesing School Of Northwest Coast Art**

**Where the Spirit Begins**

*nii wil sit’aat gu na(a) didulsan*

Student Exhibition 2008
Since opening its doors, the School has held annual graduating exhibitions organized by the instructors and the students. These events are strongly tied to history, experiences and culture of the instructors and students. Each exhibition seeks to honour a particular aspect of the journey of art reclamation. For example, the first exhibit in 2007 honoured the realities of past generations and the expression of new realities through a new generation of artists. The Exhibition was entitled: Su-gagyêt—A New Generation. Despite the forces of colonization, the students’ culture and traditional knowledge are continuing. “With each generation, culture and its reality are invested anew” (Cajete, 1994, p. 31). The second exhibition—Where the Spirit Begins—honoured the First Nations worldview, the spirituality of the First Nations culture and the students’ interrelationship to the world around them. And in the third exhibition—2009: Artists of the North: In Honour of our Ancestors —
students and faculty sought to acknowledge the lessons of their ancestors and the
importance of carrying on the stories and knowledge of those who have come before.

Iseke-Barnes and Jiménez Estrada (2008) address the role of First Nations
artists as advocates for recognition of their culture and traditions and worldview.
They refer to Joanne Cardinal-Schubert, a Blood (Blackfoot) and Peigan artist,
writer, curator and activist, who has argued for the advocacy role of artists because,
as they are in the “front line of this battle,” they are in a position to take a stand, and
to “carry forward the voices of the ancestors” (Cardinal-Schubert (2004) p. 33 cited
in Iseke-Barnes & Jiménez Estrada, 2008 p. 19). Cardinal-Schubert’s voice joins
those of scholars and non-academics previously mentioned who all see the role of the
artist as one of advocacy, both reflecting and contributing to a cultural continuum
that is anything but static.

Graduating Student art piece – alder spoon

From the beginning, the student exhibits have been highly attended and rival
those of exhibits in galleries and museums from around the world. The testimonies
of students and the quality of the art produced speak to the importance of the work that has gone into their learning. As a result, the Spirit Wrestler Gallery in Vancouver now hosts an annual NWCC graduate exhibit each June. The Vancouver Airport sponsors four scholarships for emerging artists from the School and exhibits their work at the International terminal. Other exhibitions have been held in New Zealand and Australia. All of these exhibitions encourage participants to engage with the history and culture of the First Nations students.

Graduating class of 2009
Graduating student art piece, alder ceremonial mask

Graduating student, Dean Heron, working on alder paddle, 2004
The Impact of the School

In 2006, Northwest Community College created the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art and now the school is helping to re-create the College.

Without trying to claim too much for this one initiative that was undertaken in concert with several other initiatives to transform this formerly mainstream community college to a bicultural institution, I believe that the creation and operation of the School has served as a significant cultural change agent for the College as a whole and on the surrounding communities of the Northwest.

The first impact is on the students of the School engaged in an educational process that strives to acknowledge and celebrate the rich traditions and practices of Northwest First Nations. It is principally derived from, and informed by, the thoughts, orientations, and cultural philosophies of the Northwest Coast First Nations. It is education First Nations people can relate to; education that strives to reconnect them to their roots, to strengthen their connections to their culture as opposed to being assimilated into a foreign culture (Aikenhead, 2001). It offers resistance to the assimilative intent (Arbon, 2008) of mainstream education. It is education that supports experiential learning, honours traditional knowledge and relationships in the human, natural and spiritual worlds. In so doing, it opens the door for those students who have been alienated from their culture, in order that they learn about the traditional knowledge of their people, and come to understand their roots as well as the role and importance of art as an expression of self in relation to their community. For other students, it facilitates the healing of the “ethno-stress” that many have suffered — “a psychological response pattern that stems from the
disruption of a cultural life and belief system that one cares about deeply” (Cajete, 1994, p. 190).

The School is also having a significant effect on instructors of the College community. Every day, as College educators, we see and hear firsthand the legacy of the residential school system and the barriers that our mainstream educational system poses for First Nations students. The initiation of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art was a deliberate attempt to address those barriers and to create an educational model that builds a bridge between two entirely different systems of knowing the world; a model that moves us away from our reliance on Western pedagogy, draws upon traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and begins a process of establishing a new educational paradigm which redresses colonization and honours First Nations traditional knowledge.

Initially there were many skeptics, as well as those who challenged the validity of the pedagogy being employed. Now, eight years later, the success of the students and their art, and the far-reaching public support and praise for their accomplishments, are serving to encourage many non-First Nations College members to rethink their approach to post-secondary education. As one faculty member stated,

My personal classroom experience and research activities over the last two years have brought me through frustration and anger at the social exclusion that is so visible and that is perpetuated by our educational institutions . . . to a reflection of my own assumptions and a recognition of a contradiction in recognizing and defining differences between cultures and the respecting and valuing of those differences (K. Downs, personal conversation, 2007).
The School is also changing the physical look and feel of the College. This in turn is having a profound impact on students attending the college and surrounding communities in both First Nations and non-First Nations communities. This demonstration of value of, and commitment to, First Nations culture provides a two-way learning process for non-Aboriginal students as well as the communities at large.

The School is also having a reflective impact back to First Nations communities and is reinforcing and extending a process begun over the past few decades to reclaim and pass on First Nations cultural heritage. Thus the School is contributing cultural richness to our neighbours recognizing the important role that first Nations culture plays in the non-Aboriginal culture of the region. It is also reinforcing the struggle to preserve First Nations languages in the region. This has a ripple effect. In First Nations communities art is not separate from culture, environment, fate, control, or cultural integrity; all are seen to integrate to create quality of life in the region and to promote better relationships between the cultures.

The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art has played a key role in paving the way for new, more appropriate models of education at the College and elsewhere. Such models will revitalize the relationship between First Nations and education—a relationship so badly damaged by the bitter legacy of residential schools and the abuses therein. In A Fair Country John Ralston Saul (2008) argues that the lived history of Canada has been deeply influenced and enriched by the dialogue between First Nations and subsequent waves of English and French settlers. This is surely nowhere truer than in BC. The Freda Diesing School and, by extension, the College demonstrates and recognizes our indebtedness to First Nations, not simply just accommodating First Nations and making them feel better
about themselves, their culture and education, but for the richness of North western BC culture and sense of identity they have brought to the institution.

Carving tools created by students in the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art

For deep, transformative change to occur at NWCC, there must be shared vision and meaning for our broader collective community. For the Aboriginal communities of the Northwest, this is best reflected in the following words of Dempsey Bob at the launch of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art: “This is a dream come true, for us.” Over the subsequent years this ‘dream come true’ has borne fruits much richer and nutritious than initially envisaged. These fruits are fruits of knowledge about the possibilities for biculturalism grounded in a post-secondary College, knowledge at a greater depth than I appreciated in 2006. My learning journey, in parallel with that of others, continued to be influenced by the bicultural projects described in the next two chapters of this thesis, focused on the School of Exploration and Mining, and on the House of Learning and Research.
CHAPTER NINE

The House of Learning and Applied Research

Support for the Bicultural Journey

“. . . It is essential for Indigenous and our non-Indigenous allies to identify and locate one another so that we can stand in support of one another” (Wilson, 2004, p. 80).

Northwest Community College’s new Strategic Plan required the organization to journey into the unknown and trust that the vision that we had collectively conceptualized not only could be achieved but also was worth the risk of re-examining and changing the way we had traditionally thought about education, and about the running of a community college. To successfully engage in this journey, I knew we had to step out of our old paradigms so we could be open to new ways of being and doing, or as Robert Quinn would say, ‘reinvent’ ourselves. “[To embark on such a] journey is to reinvent the self. It is then that our paradigms change and we experience an ‘expansion of consciousness.’” We begin to realign our self with our surrounding environment” (Quinn, 1996, p. 45).

‘Reinventing’ or transforming our selves is also the message of Txeemsim and the Elders with whom I spent considerable time seeking guidance and counsel. Reflecting on these times with the Elders, I realized I had immersed myself in a new way of learning and being, and a new “learning community.” I will address this realization further in Chapter 9.
This Chapter introduces the House of Learning and Applied Research, a strategic initiative deliberately constructed to foster and support the critical conversations needed to secure the new form of biculturalism across the College. (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010) It was evident from the Strategic Planning dialogues in which the College had engaged, and from the raising of the All Nations Education totem pole that these events held meaning for people within the College and that important conversations were beginning to occur across the College. Many staff took to heart the change that the Strategic Plan and the All Nations Education Pole signalled; even some of the most skeptical of staff began to ask questions. In pockets of the organization, clusters of people were exploring, questioning, seeking new information and embarking on new approaches to their work. The Kitlope Field School for example was indicative of the change that had begun to occur within the College both in perspective and in action.

There were also many staff for which the new vision for the College was not clear, and for whom the call to seek new ways of working, being and doing that acknowledged and included the worldview of our local First Nations was very unsettling. Requesting that we might ‘unlearn’ what we had learned from our Eurocentric worldview about education and seek to explore a new education paradigm meant people were being called upon to leave their zone of comfort.

The new Strategic Plan required that we let go of who we thought we were as a College and that we allowed a new ‘College’ to emerge. Faced with this situation, pockets of resistance throughout the College were evident. Some people resisted and wanted to hang on to what they knew: the views, behaviours and approaches that had brought them success in the past. Many acknowledged the need to change but not knowing how, reverted to familiar approaches and practices. To further complicate
matters, the new ‘vision’ for the College was decidedly unclear; few had ventured down this path. We were as Quinn (2004) describes, ‘building the bridge as we walked on it’ or as we would later describe it, ‘mapping the river as we canoed it.’

Though the new Strategic Plan called for new approaches, in the absence of new knowledge, our tendency was to revert towards what we knew - the old culture.

Quinn (1966, p. 54) writes about such reactions:

People seek solutions to new problems in the same places where they found the old ones. In the face of stress and pressure, when the attention span diminishes, there is a tendency to become rigid. Instead of responding creatively, when innovative action is most needed, people increase their commitment to their old patterns. They implement their most ingrained natural response.

The tendency to return to the familiar was pervasive; the College had to keep operating as we journeyed and it was far easier to keep doing the same than to ask ourselves if there might be a different approach given the change the College was seeking.

Various people put up arguments that biculturalism was a narrow, exclusive vision for the College. Some faculty suggested that the Board and I were trying to create an “Indian” college and were attempting to drive away “white” people. Others staff made reference to the perceived “dysfunctions of First Nations communities” and inadvertently made racist comments suggesting that “those people (First Nations) haven’t got what it takes to become educated.” While such comments were infrequent, it would have been naive not to believe others held these views in different areas of the College.

The new Strategic Plan required all of us not only to engage in learning but also to support each other in that learning as we re-examined our attitudes,
behaviours and actions. The House of Learning and Applied Research proved to be an effective and strategic vehicle for this shared learning and support.

Considering the literature about change within living systems I knew that, as President, I played a key leadership role in this ‘unlearning and learning’ and in setting the stage for an environment that supported and encouraged movement towards a new educational paradigm. But not only did I need to model my commitment to change and effectively propagate the message of biculturalism; I also needed to find consistent and sustainable ways of continuing the dialogue within and external to the College around this new and, in some cases, contested concept of biculturalism. I also had to find additional ways to assist those within the College who did not understand the need for change to connect them with those who did and to create an environment in which learning and the sharing of emerging new practice could occur. Our past experiences and successes were an asset, but learning was essential to bringing about change. The House of Learning and Applied Research became a key mechanism for this strategic work.

Viewing the College as Wheatley and Frieze (2010) suggest, as a “living system,” I recognized that change could not be managed or controlled according to the belief systems of rational management theorists (Lewin, 1952a; Lippitt, R., Watson, J. and Westley, B. 1958; Kotter, 1996). Rather I had to trust that change in the College would emerge as people found meaning and possibility in the vision of a bicultural institution. Taking my cue from theorists such as Wheatley and Frieze (2010), Greenleaf (1970) and Quinn (1996), I embraced my role of ‘host’ and continually sought opportunity to “invite people to participate, to contribute in the creation of the new vision” and “. . . to engender new insights and possibilities for action” (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010, p. 3). Involvement in the creation and celebration
of the All Nations Education Totem Pole was one such opportunity for engagement and conversation; another was the hosting of a conference, or as it was soon after called—a Gathering—on decolonizing post-secondary education in October of 2007. These initiatives demonstrated effective ways to encourage further dialogue from which change began to emerge.

**Of One Heart**

To continue to build momentum on the dialogue resulting from these initiatives, the House of Learning and Applied Research was launched at the 2007 “Gathering.” The House of Learning and Applied Research was a new resource for the College and provided an environment for staff to discuss and share the ‘unlearning’ of the old education paradigm and their ‘learning’ of new ways of being and working. It was also a way of capturing the excitement of new innovation and learning occurring within the College and moving these lessons to other departments.

With the vision of a strong and sustainable bicultural College as its operational premise, the House of Learning and Applied Research (HLAR) was focused on the educational agenda of the Strategic Plan and proved to be an effective way of getting more and more educators acculturated to the bicultural agenda. Specifically HLAR was designed to encourage and support the transformation of the educational practices of the College such that more programs appropriately engaged First Nations students through the incorporation of the Aboriginal worldview. Guided by the values of the College and in particular the values of respect, relationships, community and responsibility, the House of Learning and Applied Research soon adopted the First Nation philosophy “Of One Heart” or Sayt k’üülm
goot in the language of the Ts’msyen. The phrase, “of one heart” has a profoundly important meaning for the First Nations people of the Northwest Coast of British Columbia.

‘Of One Heart’ is an ancient expression that conjures excitement and enthusiasm: Sayt k’üülm goot speaks of the area’s culture and the importance of carrying the people’s ancestral heritage on to their youth. It transcends differences in clans and house systems and brings people to a visionary and spiritual place, where they can rise to new roles and new strengths. Sayt k’üülm goot reflects the First Nations view of the world, in which everything is one.

Heart means many things. Physically, the heart is the pump that brings life and energy to the body. A person with “the heart of a lion” is courageous. Someone with “a heart of gold” is generous. A person who has “a good heart” is one who cares for people. The heart of a people is their spirit and getting to “the heart of the matter” means getting to the core (Innes, as quoted by Jane Morley, 2006, p. 3).

James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson (2000, p. 259) further explains. “The Aboriginal worldview asserts that all life is sacred and that all life forms are connected. Humans are neither above nor below others in the circle of life. Everything that exists in the circle is one unity, of one heart.”

Symbolizing a heart that beats for the well-being of all people, the phrase “of one heart” was used by the House of Learning and Applied Research to describe the coming together of educators, Elders and other adults to reflect on redressing colonization within the College and the ‘lifting up’ of all First Nations communities through education.
Key Activities

The importance of the House of Learning and Applied Research to the transformative change process across the College became apparent within the first year. Offering a variety of services and supports, the House of Learning and Applied Research brought staff together for further discussion, learning and the sharing of emerging practices and approaches through a variety of activities described in the following.

The Dialogue Series

The Dialogues Series was initiated in January of 2008 and was accessible to the broader College Community (including First Nations Council, the Board of Governors, other post-secondary educators and community members) in person and via video conferencing technologies. The Dialogues were structured in two ways:

Conceptually oriented dialogues/lectures

The first type of ‘Dialogues’ to be initiated focused on conceptually oriented conversations intended to build understanding regarding the Aboriginal worldview, Aboriginal ways of being and knowing as well as barriers to this understanding such as racism and myths about Aboriginal people. These conversations were facilitated by a variety of people, myself, the Executive Director of the House of Learning and Applied Research (a former faculty member from the University of Northern British Columbia and an adopted member of the Killer Whale clan of the Ts’msyen Nation), or by an member of First Nations Council. Often, these conversations involved
opening comments by an Elder. The dialogues were designed to be free flowing and encouraged questioning and probing to promote greater understanding. The conversations generated discussion on a more personal level than is the norm in academic life and encouraged the questioning of western perspectives and beliefs.

**Emerging Practice**

These dialogues were designed to share the experiences and success stories of faculty from throughout the post-secondary system in the north with other educators and community members. Through discussions and seminars these sessions built understandings and actions for how post-secondary educators could move forward in building culturally responsive schools, learning environments and nurturing healthy learners. The dialogues raised issues about effecting cultural transformations within mainstream institutions and had the added benefit of breaking down walls in the College, and generating cross-College (and even cross-institution) networks and initiatives.

Occasionally these sessions would host educators from other institutions, such as Ross Hoffman, PhD Native Studies, a Professor at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) who spoke about *Dancing to the Beats of Different Drums: Indigenous Knowledge and the Success of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Education*. Engaging educators from other post-secondary institutions gave credence to our journey and broadened the learning community that was emerging at NWCC.

**Brown Bag Lunch Series**

The applied research role was a new strategic role for NWCC as an institution even though many individuals within the College had engaged in formal
or informal applied research projects for several years. The House of Learning and Applied Research was a place where applied research undertakings by staff could be acknowledged, supported, and the findings collected and shared. Applied research projects focused primarily on activities with community relevance, where partnerships led to benefits for the students, communities and the College. Given the College’s focus on Aboriginal student engagement, success and education there was an emphasis on applied research that involved issues as defined by Aboriginal communities as well as the indigenization of mainstream education.

In an effort to build awareness of these activities, support critical conversations, share learning and encourage innovation, a series of ‘brown bag lunch’ sessions were organized throughout each academic year (September to April.) Various research papers and projects were undertaken by staff and other post-secondary educators from neighboring institutions such as the University of Northern British Columbia and shared within an emerging learning community. As outlined below, the research conducted was almost singularly focused on furthering the bicultural agenda, aiding the transformation of curricula and developing new bicultural education opportunities at the College. As a result, the Brown Bag Lunch Series proved to be an excellent way of building a strong learning community, developing networks, building relationships between staff and other institutions, and encouraging greater innovation.

Local applied research projects activities have included:

- Sustainable building techniques and traditional architecture of the Northwest First Nations
- Aboriginal Community capacity building
- Creating a Tahltan Research Paradigm
Chapter Nine

- Indigenous Cultural Geography
- Indigenous Ethno botany
- Indigenous Gardens, food production & processing
- First Nations Culinary Arts
- Aboriginal language recovery and delivery
- Creating cultural tourism sites
- Northwest Coast Art
- Archaeology and Heritage research

Papers and presentations that have been shared by NWCC staff include:

- Two-eyed seeing – bridging the Aboriginal and non-aboriginal worldview
- Bicultural education
- Indigenous Pedagogy
- NWCC: The Transformative Journey
- The Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art: decolonizing education and engendering healing

Summer Culture Camps—Learning from Place

Staff who had experienced the Kitlope Field School recommended the offering of an annual summer culture camp, entitled Learning from Place. In 2008, the first of these camps was initiated for members of the internal College community and was based on the value of engagement with the local landscape. The underlying assumption of the Camp was that the indigenization process is facilitated by an understanding of Aboriginal worldview and paradigms, which are intimately attached to the territories and landscapes of the Nations. Accordingly, the culture camps exposed participants to the land and the relationships of local First Nations to their
geographical surroundings and the expressions of the same through story, song, 
ceremony and cultural activities. Marianne Jones (Haida) describes the relationship 
to the land in the following:

Today the Haida relationship to Haida Gwaii still runs 
through the clans, from root to leaf or from clam to salmon, 
depending upon what you are gathering that day. It pervades us in 
our Elders’ constant remarks on the weather and predictions for 
what will happen later that afternoon, in the exhilaration in a 
fisher’s face after a good catch and in the cook’s pride at having 
prepared a meal from the catch. It’s in the strength of a pole carved 
from a beautiful massive cedar tree and in the prayers of thanks 
offered up by a weaver for her bundles of spruce root. Quite 
simply, it is tangible for us (Jones, as cited in Bartels, 2006, p. 29).

As a model of professional development for staff, the summer camp proved 
to be very effective and soon culture camps were scheduled twice a year in different 
First Nations territories in the Northwest. The camps enabled the College to provide 
insights into the seven First Nations that were served by the College and emphasized 
that while many similarities existed among the First Nations of the Northwest, their 
cultural expressions varied as much as their landscapes.

Through the culture camps, participants were encouraged to see the world 
through First Nations eyes— to view the world as whole, interconnected, and 
interdependent. In so doing, it was hoped that participants would begin to experience 
“... the life force that makes anything and everything possible” (Ermine, 1995, 
110). The Camps asked participants to set aside the ‘fragmentary self-world view’ 
(Bohm, 1990) that permeates the Western education systems and encourages people 
to keep everything separate and instead, try to understand how all of life is 
connected.

Willie Ermine (1995) writes of the importance of “... being in relation to 
the cosmos” stating that the cosmos “... possesses intriguing and mysterious
qualities that provide insights into existence” (Ermine, 1995, p. 103). Ermine cites that “the Old Ones [Elders] focused on [the cosmos] for guidance and as the foundation of all Aboriginal epistemology” (Ermine, 1995, p. 104). Ermine explains that the Cree, for example, have a word for the capacity to connect with life’s stream of consciousness—*Mamatowisowin*—that describes the capability of tapping into the universal ‘life force.’ Ermine notes that the Cree believe that this ‘life force’ is present “in all existence… because all of life is connected, and all of life is primarily connected with and accessed through the life force . . . . It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge itself. The experience is knowledge” (Ermine, 1995, p. 104).

I have learned from the Elders that First Nations’ understandings, languages, teachings and practices developed through direct interaction with the natural ecology in which they lived (Irene Seguin, personal communication, 2009). These experiences intimately connect their worldviews and knowledge with their environment and the surrounding geography resulting in more than just ecological knowledge, but importantly, a living relationship that is not conceived of as either universal or conventional (Gerald Amos, personal communication, 2008).

*Learning from Place* culture camps always engaged the Elders and/or knowledge-keepers from the respective traditional territory. In Haida Gwaii and the Kitlope, these knowledge-keepers also included Haida or Haisla Watchmen. The “Watchmen” (literally meaning people who watched over the traditional territory) were hired members of the First Nations on whose territory the Camp took place. The Watchmen were skilled in wilderness guiding and survival techniques as well as knowledgeable about particular cultural sites, stories and history. Over the next few years, *Learning from Place* culture camps were scheduled in Haida Gwaii (Haida
Nation territory) the Kitlope Valley (Henaaksiala/Haisla territory), and the Kispiox Valley (Gitxsan territory).

Celebrating the wisdom of the Elders

*Indian elders often remind young people to live the myths by saying, “These stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn”* (Cajete, 1994, p. 41).

Every two months, The House of Learning and Applied Research hosted a *Gathering of Elders* to acknowledge and celebrate their wisdom. These Elder events would be held in conjunction with a particular campus or department of the College and brought Elders, students, First Nations Council members, and Board members together with College staff to build understandings of First Nations perspectives and to explore ways in which the College could be more responsive to issues confronting Aboriginal students at the College. Inviting different campuses or departments within the College to host these events encouraged College staff and students to take ownership of and be present for these Elders events.

The hosting of the Elders Gatherings within the College was significant. Within traditional First Nations society, Elders hold respected roles. Among First Nations people, it is frequently Elders to whom the community turns for guidance and teaching. It is customary for an Elder to offer these teachings only when asked or when it appears the learner has reached a state of readiness; teachings are never forced upon a learner. As Agnes Grant (1995, p. 220-221) describes matters, “Elders encourage and support; they do not hover and give advice or criticize...Even wrong decisions, and the person’s right to make them, are respected . . . . Elders do not push learners into learning, but wait to instruct the learner when the learner signifies readiness.” Grant (1995, pp. 212-213) goes on to say that
Elder wisdom is at the core of Native education... A dichotomy exists because white, middle-class society devalues the elderly. Knowledge that is respected by formal institutions only comes from within their own ranks. Obviously, a great gap separates mainline societies from traditional societies in attitudes towards elders. This presents a great challenge to the university.

The Elder events at NWCC demonstrated an acknowledgement of the traditional role of Elders, and the importance of their wisdom and engagement in the learning community. Rather than alienating the ‘old ones’ from the educational process, Elders were encouraged to participate with the college community and with the students. The importance of involving Elders in the education setting became more noticeable as time progressed. Elders have long experience with all aspects of human life and this experience helped support Aboriginal students. As Cajete (1994, p. 48) explains, “This way of thought requires learning that comes only from maturity. It leads to a knowing that includes, but also moves beyond knowing just through the physical senses towards wisdom. Wisdom is a complex state of knowing founded on accumulated experience.” The wisdom of the Elders proved invaluable not only to First Nations students who often as a result of these events formed supportive relationships with the Elders but also to College staff. Several staff developed relationships with various Elders that they found they could turn to as they strove to better understand First Nations ways of viewing the world and gain new insights to teaching First Nations youth.
In October of 2007, the first *Challenging the Paradigm: Decolonizing Post-Secondary Education* Gathering was designed to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education staff, leaders and administrators, Board members, First Nations Council members, and Elders together from around the Province and beyond, to discuss the need for the decolonization of post-secondary education and to share emerging practices and challenges. Importantly, this Gathering also brought a heightened awareness to the College community that we were not alone in our quest to address the barriers to post-secondary education for Aboriginal students. Attracting over a 130 participants from the northern region in its first year, the Gathering played a very strategic role in furthering the bicultural goal of the College. In discussions reviewing the benefits and outcomes of the Gathering, Chiefs, Elders and First Nations Council members and College staff commented on the rich
dialogues, the shared best practices, the formation of new relationships, the spawning of new innovative ideas to further the College’s new vision and the desire to keep the conversations going. As a result, the Challenging the Paradigm Gathering became an annual event.

While the first Challenging the Paradigm Gathering was primarily focussed on Northwest Community College staff and designed to assist employees with the transformative journey underway at the College, subsequent Gatherings took on a provincial and even international focus. A Steering Committee was initiated to guide the theme and format of this annual event and included Aboriginal Elders and scholars from British Columbia and Alberta. Dr Leroy Little bear, a well-respected Blackfoot educator and Elder who initiated the Native American Studies program at Harvard University offered his support to the Gathering and became an ad hoc advisor to the Steering Committee. To handle logistics, and engage local educators

Left to Right: Stan Bevan, Coordinator/Instructor Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, Dr. Leroy Little bear, Professor, University of Lethbridge, Ken McNeil, Instructor, Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, Challenging the Paradigm Gathering, 2009

Harvard University offered his support to the Gathering and became an ad hoc advisor to the Steering Committee. To handle logistics, and engage local educators
and communities, an organizing committee was formed and included members of NWCC First Nations Council and partner Aboriginal Institutions in the region. With the creation of the Northern Post Secondary Council (made up of the three northern British Columbia colleges—NWCC, New Caledonia and Northern Lights College and the University of Northern British Columbia), the target audience for this annual Gathering was enlarged. And after a very successful first conference, the Gathering attracted Aboriginal educators and interested educators from across Canada.

The ‘Challenging the Paradigm Gathering’ was clear in its stated objectives. It was designed to address several goals:

- Provide the opportunity to challenge the assumptions, practices, and values that make up the way educators view post-secondary education, and to consider how colonization has shaped our institutions, and our approaches to learning.
- Encourage participants to see post-secondary education from the eyes of the Aboriginal learner.
- Explore how Aboriginal and mainstream teaching practices can be integrated to the benefit of the student.
- Foster dialogue between educators and communities that would lead to change.

To support these objectives, the Gathering incorporated dialogues in which sitting was arranged in circles to emphasize that no one person held more power or position over another—all were coming together as learners and teachers. Exhibitions of cultural talents were hosted, from student First Nations art exhibitions to the sharing of First Nations dances and songs.
‘How-to’ workshops were held with local First Nations artisans and included drawing, cedar bark weaving, drum making and the sewing of moccasins.

The Gathering attracted First Nations artists from across the region who came to display and sell their art, including cedar and spruce root hats, cedar weavings, clothing, drawings, jewellery and carvings. Organically, a small artisan market sprung up and attracted the attention of the general public as well as Gathering participants.
Cedar weaver, Sandra Wesley, assists students (College staff) in the traditional art of cedar bark weaving 2009

A local drum-maker demonstrates how to make traditional Ts’msyen drums, 2009
A finished cedar basket made by Virginia Cooper, a workshop participant, 2009
First Nations artists display their cedar weaving artwork, 2009. These hats are still worn today during ceremonies, feasts and special events, and they are highly valued.

Throughout the three-day ‘Gathering’, a fire was kept burning in a fire pit built for the occasion, encouraging people to gather and reflect on the discussions and the experiences of the day. The fire, even on the warm fall days, proved to be a
focal point of the Gathering and attracted people to its embers well after the day’s activities had concluded.

The Challenging the Paradigm Gathering had a profound impact on the College. Drawing educators from across the country, it served to nurture interconnected networks, strengthen the growing culture of learning within the College and provide staff with the time to engage in conversations that were critical to moving the bicultural vision forward. Importantly, I was highly visible in my support, involvement and encouragement of this event and was an active member of the Steering Committee. As President (Chief) my participation and visible support was necessary to emphasize that these dialogues were important, valued and that, like our students, it was critical that as staff, we took time to learn and explore.

Time is an important and scarce commodity in western culture. Yet the journey upon which we had embarked required us to be disciplined enough to take the time, to ask questions, to reflect on the changes that were occurring. As Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1998, pp. 20-12) note:

[Too often] we feel compelled to act rather than to inquire. But by now, many of us in organizations want to turn away from this history of act-act-act which has led to so little learning and so much wasted energy. All other forms of life stay watchful and responsive they learn so continuously that science writer James Gleick notes that, "Life learned itself into existence." Physicist and author Fritjof Capra states that there is no distinction between living and learning, "A living system is a learning system." If we don't begin to seriously focus on learning in our organizations, there is no way we can bring them to life.

The ‘Challenging the Paradigm Gathering’ provided a unique opportunity for the College community to come together to learn, grow, and network. The fact that this little College in a remote part of the country could attract scholars and
learners from as far away as Toronto and even Australia was both a source of pride and an acknowledgement of the value of our journey.

Faculty and Staff Professional Development Programs

At the writing of this thesis, the House of Learning and Applied Research had embarked on the development of an Aboriginal Worldview course to be included in the College’s accredited instructor and staff development programs—for example, within the Administrative Assistant Development Program. The inclusion of this course was recommended by First Nations Council and was approved by Education Council, the program and course approval body of the College. This course, which seeks to further imbed the bicultural vision within the College, was further indication that change was beginning to take hold.

Conclusion

Research and learning were seen as foundational both to the delivery of the College’s bicultural vision and to the sustainability of this vision in practice. The House of Learning and Applied Research provided space and place for this research and learning, conveying a clear message across the College, that these activities were crucial and valued. Wheatley and Frieze (2010, p. 2) write about the need for the leader-as-host, “to provide the conditions and good group processes for people to work together, the resource of time and, to insist that people and the system learn from experience—mistakes and successes, confident in the knowledge that the leader is there for them.” The creation of the House of Learning assisted me in providing
these conditions and in so doing captured the excitement and learning underway and moved these discoveries throughout the College.
CHAPTER TEN

The School of Exploration and Mining

Field Bus for the School of Exploration and Mining, 2006

Introduction

In the fall of 2003 the Smithers Exploration Group (SEG) approached the College regarding the shortage of skilled workers in the exploration and mining industries. A non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of geology, exploration and mining in Northwestern British Columbia and representing several geologists, exploration and supply/service companies, SEG relayed the increasing need for entry-level and technical staff. Their request coincided with a research project the College had underway investigating the education and training needs of
the mining and onshore energy sectors. This research was completed in December 2003. It forecast a critical workforce shortage and confirmed the need for training and education for exploration and mining in the North. In early 2004 the SEG Executive, along with community leaders such as the local Member of Parliament for the Stikine area, a chartered accountant for local mining companies and industry leaders, began working with the College to create the School of Exploration and Mining at NWCC.

This project proved to be a significant initiative in moving the College further along its journey towards biculturalism. The School of Exploration and Mining was charting new territory, not only within the College, but also within an industry in which colonial views of Aboriginal people were deeply entrenched. The School of Exploration and Mining played a significant role in changing the views and attitudes of many industry and College people, particularly the College’s trades and technical staff, and brought meaningful employment to hundreds of Aboriginal people living in the Northwest.

The Rebirth of the Exploration and Mining Industry in British Columbia

After many years of inactivity, increased global demand for minerals renewed the exploration and mining industry in British Columbia. Historically, gold and silver deposits played a key role in the attracting non-Aboriginal people to British Columbia and led the development of towns and communities, which still exist today. For over a hundred years this resource rich Province had boasted some of the most experienced and skilled exploration and mining people in the world. In the mid-1990s, exploration spending in the province dropped precipitously. The
political environment tended to be unfavourable to the industry and exploration/mining companies, and as a result much of British Columbia’s exploration and mining talent departed in the pursuit of international opportunities. As the 2006 Mining Industry Advisory Committee (MIAC) report to the British Columbia Government noted, “The expertise and experience of British Columbia exploration and mining companies, of those British Columbia companies serving the industry, and of individuals in the mining business are second to none on a global scale. Everywhere in the world that minerals are being sought and mines being developed, British Columbia know-how is there” (MIAC, 2006, p. 2).

In 2003, demand for minerals and metals around the world, but particularly from China and other countries in the Pacific Rim, dramatically increased. This demand for commodities drove up mineral prices. By 2004, expenditures by British Columbia mining and mineral operations in 2004 were in the billions, with 4.5 billion in gross revenues in 2004; the forecast for future growth was staggering. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2004) The PricewaterhouseCoopers’ 2004 report on the British Columbia minerals industry noted increased demand for metallurgical coal, copper, molybdenum, zinc and zinc concentrate, lead, gold and silver, all of which is found in B.C., much of which was still available, yet untapped in British Columbia’s northern regions. The total expenditures just for mineral exploration in 2004 were approximately $130 million, and this was predicted to increase to $220 million by 2005. This reflected an overall increase in exploration worldwide – the highest since 1997. During 2005, over 650 projects were underway in the province, 191 of which were in the Northwest region of British Columbia. In addition to the exploration expenditures, dollars were flowing into environmental research, technical consulting, assaying, and the service and supply sector in British Columbia that provides goods
and services to the industry both within the province and around the world. The exploration and mining industry also dramatically improved the business of many service suppliers in sectors such as accounting, legal, brokerage, information technology, construction, research institutes, and laboratories. All in all, the exploration and mining industry was rapidly becoming a substantial economic contributor to the entire Province and held significant economic impact at the community and regional levels in the form of high-paying jobs and immense economic spin-offs.

By 2004, more than 25,000 people were employed in mineral exploration and mining-related activities in British Columbia, including 10,000 direct and 15,000 spin-off jobs, respectively. Estimates at that time suggested that an additional 8,500 jobs would be available in the industry by 2010. Salary plus benefits paid to employees of main producers in 2004 was $610 million; however, as total employment in the industry was approximately 25,000, the overall figure was much higher (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2004).

Additionally, by 2004, the shortage and demand for skilled workers in the exploration and mining sector was rapidly reaching critical proportions; skilled workers at every level were desperately needed and the lack of such was inhibiting growth.

It was interesting to observe the emergence of various factors making for an almost perfect storm, which forced the exploration and mining industry (which had a negative reputation for being racist) to work with First Nations communities. Much of the mineral deposits were on the traditional lands of First Nations in British Columbia. For mining companies to access these rich deposits, First Nations took the
position that appropriate consultation, environmental assessments and agreements with First Nations leaders had to occur. Frequently these agreements sought to have companies commit to the involvement of First Nations in environmental assessments, a share of the profits and the hiring of First Nations people, not just as labourers, but also as managers, geologists, technicians, supervisors, and in other employment roles.

I was involved in various discussions with First Nations leaders at the time and we discussed the opportunities and the challenges that the renewed exploration and mining industry held for their communities and for their members. While the economic and potential social opportunities might be there for First Nations communities, it was evident that the two worldviews (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) were colliding—both the exploration and mining industry and the provincial and federal governments failed to acknowledge the traditional role and perspectives of First Nations in accessing particular tracts of land. Many exploration and mining companies strove unsuccessfully to gain access to First Nations lands through colonial understandings of ‘consultation’ and viewed First Nations as unreasonably ‘holding hostage’ rich resource lands. First Nations groups had for decades been engaged in lengthy and as yet unresolved battles over original land title issues with the federal and provincial governments. These two levels of government continued to assert that they held exclusive possessor interests to the exclusion of First Nations and failed to acknowledge the traditional territory and perspectives of First Nations. These unresolved land claim and treaty issues presented an uncertainty that for years negatively affected the level of investment in B.C.’s mining sector. Mining companies were not prepared to risk millions of dollars on resource
investigations and development with the prospect of these outstanding issues playing out in decades-long court battles.

These were not the only issues causing tension between First Nations of British Columbia and Canadian governments and the exploration and mining industry. Sustainable employment and the requisite training for the same was a significant issue for First Nations. Previous resource ‘booms’ in Canadian history had seen thousands of skilled people migrate from other parts of the country to fill jobs. In Newfoundland, for example, the offshore oil and gas employment experience was a bitter pill for local residents to swallow. While communities reaped the benefits of increased revenue in their communities, too often local residents without requisite skills or opportunities to achieve the same were overlooked as skilled workers flooded into the province. This was a scenario that the College and many First Nations leaders in the Northwest were determined would not occur with the resurgence of the exploration and mining in the first decade of this century. With as much as 93% unemployment in some First Nations communities my colleagues and I believed it was an imperative to fill northern jobs with northerners, including First Nations northerners.

The Emergence of a Bicultural School of Exploration and Mining

The discussions the College had been having with First Nations leaders and various industry representatives regarding training converged in a meeting with the Smithers Exploration Group in 2004. At this meeting we were all in agreement that there was an urgent and pressing need to provide training and educational
opportunities to increase the number of skilled workers for the exploration and mining sector. We were not however, all seeing the way forward in the same way. The College, with representation from its First Nations Council, was emphasizing the need for environmental stewardship and enhanced understanding of First Nations views and perspectives about their lands and culture. Cautious about this perspective, SEG initially stated that it might be better to ‘go it alone’ and start up its own training centre, saying that too many of their members had unsuccessfully attempted to employ First Nations people; their experiences had reinforced prior biased and racist perspectives (SEG representatives, Personal communication, 2004).

The College stayed the course on requiring the inclusion of First Nations knowledge and practices. It was critical that this knowledge was included; the new generation of prospectors and industry personnel needed to be acutely aware of First Nations perspectives and their concerns. It would be impossible to comprehend why First Nations were concerned without some insight into their worldview. It was also critical for the College to take the position of inclusion. We needed to be vigilant in demonstrating our commitment to the First Nations of the Northwest, and it was imperative that we made our values clear to these potential new partners from the outset. This was a risky stance to take and for some months various industry representatives did not take kindly to our insistence. They were skeptical of our ability to successfully engage First Nations in learning and were reluctant to support the College’s approach.

The focus on First Nations students and our sustainable environment values were eventually accepted by SEG largely because of the shortage of skilled workers and because the lands upon which the resources resided were almost exclusively on the traditional lands of First Nations. The successes of some of the larger companies,
such as Barrick Gold, also paved the way. Barrick Gold had been filling entry-level positions almost exclusively with First Nations people from the Tahltan communities in mines since 1995 and their experience contradicted that of some of the smaller companies who did not have a human resource development strategy that focused on the hiring and training of Aboriginal people. In contrast, Barrick Gold had been offering an, ‘in-house’ training program in underground mining for Tahltan people since 1995.

Over the next two years many more exploration and mining companies and their associations came to understand that their future success was tied to the development of respectful relationships and agreements with First Nations. In a 2006 report from a provincial government-initiated Mining Advisory Committee, the Committee made the following statements:

Much of the province’s success, including that of the mining industry, is dependent on much greater levels of certainty in the province around treaty issues and the roles and responsibilities of industry with respect to “consultation and accommodation”

Considerable effort has been made by the British Columbia government and First Nations representatives to forge a new relationship with B.C.’s First Nations people. The British Columbia mining sector fully supports the Premier in his effort to build a “New Relationship” with the province’s First Nations people.

While settling land claims may be a long way off, the mining industry’s immediate priorities related more to—

- The need for direction in the area of resource revenue sharing;
- Defining what is meant by adequate consultation – duty and obligations of industry and government to meaningful consultation;
- The lack of any clear direction on how First Nations are to be involved in the Environmental Assessment process—the
role of First Nations in the permitting of new projects—increasing capacity within First Nations communities to adequately deal with mining projects, the environmental assessment process, and the need for timely decision making:

- Training and education to allow First Nations people to fully participate in the modern economy.
- Advancing a constructive dialogue and developing partnerships with British Columbia’s First Nations community ranks as one of the top priorities for the British Columbia mining industry (British Columbia Mining Advisory Committee Report, 2006, p. 9).

This change in attitude towards First Nations was also echoed by the 2005 report from the Mining Industry Human Resources Council (MiHR), Prospecting the Future: Meeting Human Resources Challenges in the Canadian Minerals and Metals Industry. This report outlined that in 2005 First Nations workers made up approximately 4.8% of the national minerals and metals industry workforce. The report called for those figures to be improved and noted that the continued building of relationships with Aboriginal workers and developing long-term and sustainable skills for these workers will be key to maintaining a skilled labour force in the industry (MiHR, 2005).

MiHR further reported that 90% of British Columbia mining companies were committed to hiring locally and that most of the companies were specifically committed to hiring workers from the First Nations on whose traditional territory the property is located (MiHR, 2005). The reference to ‘traditional territory’ was a further demonstration of the change in perspective.
NWCC School of Exploration & Mining—An Overview

On the strength of qualitative and quantitative research, in which the College had engaged we pursued discussions with the Smithers Exploration Group. In the previous year Northwest Community College had engaged the services of a research consultant, Ecos Environmental Consulting Inc., to undertake an education and training needs assessment in the Mining and Energy Sectors. Among the eight recommendations outlined by the Ecos study was the following: “The College should establish a school or institute of energy and mining to serve as a focus for establishing programs for these sectors” (Ecos, 2003, p.41).

The Ecos study interviewed all of the major mining and energy producers active or emerging in the north. Many of these companies indicated a strong interest in working with the College to address training needs. For example Northgate Exploration Ltd. was very interested in partnerships with NWCC to address training needs related to several aims:

- an increase in Aboriginal workforce participation;
- heavy industrial / mine operator training, and;
- professional and supervisory staff skills upgrading

Many companies outlined both the need to strengthen and expand programs and relationships with local First Nations, and to assist industry to increase Aboriginal workforce participation. As the Ecos study (2003, p. 42) stated,

Provision of Aboriginal employment opportunities has become an essential part of doing (successful) business in much of Northwest British Columbia. Aboriginal communities are demanding a share of the wealth generated within their traditional
territories. Many companies (e.g. Barrick and Northgate Exploration) have shown a genuine interest in seeing local aboriginal communities benefit from their operations through direct workforce participation and associated skills development. Commitments to provide Aboriginal employment have often been successful in increasing Aboriginal community support for new developments. Unfortunately, lack of education and training within Aboriginal communities (particularly those that are remote) is a barrier to maximizing Aboriginal employment opportunities.

In 2004, a draft memorandum of agreement was crafted that partnered NWCC with the Smithers Exploration Group and, at the 2004 annual Minerals North Conference held in Smithers, we collectively announced our intention to launch a School of Exploration and Mining.

However it was not until March 8, 2006 that a Memorandum was finalized and signed. (In the interim, both parties agreed to work together as if the drafted partnership was in place.) This first tentative partnership forged new ground for both organizations and both took joint responsibility for the School through a joint Steering Committee that provided strategic direction to the School. This Steering Committee included members of the Colleges’ First Nations Council, executive members of SEG, NWCC representatives, as well as key stakeholders from the community and industry, all jointly agreed to by the College and the Smithers Exploration Group (NWCC/School of Exploration and Mining Agreement, 2006).

The new School of Exploration and Mining sought to address specific educational goals outlined by the Smithers Exploration Group and other mining companies as well as those outlined by the First Nations representatives. The School would be part of the existing College structure within the Continuing Education Division, overseen by the Dean of Continuing Education and Industry Training. The NWCC Smithers campus served as the administrative hub for the School as the town
of Smithers had become a centre for mineral exploration in the Northwest. As such, Smithers had, at this time, a strong pool of experienced industry and government personnel that were willing to serve as instructors and advisors. The School would seek to serve as the northern nucleus for exploration and mining training and be part of a larger provincial network of training activities undertaken to address the education needs of the exploration and mining sector and strive to be recognized as a centre of expertise for exploration and mining in the Northwest.

The School proposed to offer a range of courses and programs from one-day workshops to longer certificate and diploma programs that would ladder into degree opportunities available at provincial universities. Many of these offerings would be delivered in partnerships with First Nations communities across the north, and with SEG and industry players. Initially programming would focus on entry-level skills urgently required by companies the summer of 2004; skills such as field, prospecting and driller helper skills. However in subsequent years, programming would be developed to provide a broad range of training from entry-level to professional skills and, over the course of time, to attract students from farther afield.

In the first year, the School’s Steering Committee collectively took on many operational responsibilities in an, ‘all-hands-on deck’ approach, to ensuring a smooth first season start-up. In the summer of 2004 industry orientation sessions were offered throughout the Northwest and a short 8-day intensive Mining Exploration Field Assistant program was piloted.

One of the first programs to be offered at the new School was the Mining Exploration Field Assistant (MEFA) program. This program was offered entirely in the field in a remote outdoor tent-camp environment replicating those in which
employees would find themselves when working for exploration companies. The hands-on field training provided transferable skills for resource-based industries with a focus on exploration and mining. The MEFA program covered various basic skills, including courses as listed below:

- Navigation skills using compass, GPS & maps
- Field Communications
- Sampling rocks, soils & silts
- Splitting & labelling core
- Grid Layouts & Line Cutting
- Camp Assembly & Operations
- Bear Awareness
- Basic Wilderness Survival skills
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Equipment knowledge, handling & safety
- Helicopter safety
- Teamwork, Employer Expectations & Field Protocols

Priority was given to First Nations applicants for this all-expenses-paid program, the costs being borne by a federal government grant, First Nations communities and industry. To receive a MEFA certificate, students had to not only successfully achieve skill competency in the courses, but also had to have at a minimum a valid Occupational First Aid Level 1 certificate and a Transportation Endorsement ticket within one year of completing the program. In the summer of 2004 four pilot offerings of this program were delivered in different locations of the Northwest.
The program staff included a lead instructor, an assistant instructor, industry specialists, a First Nations Elder, mentors, an on-site counsellor, and a cook.

An industry liaison officer was also hired to work with program graduates and industry. This position was vital to the success of the MEFA students with the appointee working with each of them to ensure they were ready to look for work when the program finished. The position also provided a point person for companies that were looking for job-ready exploration assistants. In addition, the industry liaison officer provided statistical tracking of the program recording both graduates and employers.

In the next three years the MEFA program trained nearly 600 people for work in the industry. Looking at the statistics of 2007, it is evident that the program was having a profound effect on the employment levels of First Nations communities: 48.3% of the students were First Nations, and 48.1% of the graduates were First Nations. Of those graduates, 79.65% went on to jobs in the mining or resource-related positions and 13% went on to further education (SEM Statistics, 2007). By 2012, 75% of the School’s student population were First Nations (SEM Statistics, 2012).
NWCC School of Exploration and Mining 2006 - Mining Exploration Field Assistant Program
Sunset over the School of Exploration and Mining MEFA Program, 2006

MEFA student searching for rock samples, 2006
The MEFA Program was designed with the needs of the whole learner in mind and thus sought to support the physical, emotional and cultural aspects of the students. It was delivered in a manner in keeping with traditional First Nations ways of teaching and thus strove to impart technical skills and knowledge in an applied and experiential way but also with an emphasis on giving prospective industry applicants insights into, and first-hand experiences in, assisting field workers and prospectors. Thus the program was offered in the context of First Nations culture as
these courses addressed, upfront, First Nations perspectives and understandings of their lands and resources. Cultural teachings were also provided by knowledgeable First Nations College staff, and an Elder (who was also a secondary teacher). The Elder lived at the camp and additionally provided student support and guidance as well as end-of-day cultural workshops on beading, drum-making, the use and design of First Nations crests and their meaning, and how to sew a traditional ‘button’ vest.

Camps were typically located on traditional First Nations territory. Students lived at ‘camp’; healthy nutritious meals were provided; drugs and alcohol were not permitted and students had to make a commitment to stay in the camp for the entire eight days as they would when working in industry.

An on-site counsellor from the College was also available to participants in the evenings. The counsellor provided support to those who may be struggling with anything from handling the stress that can come from living in isolation of family and friends, in close proximity with strangers and in sharing a tent with people not necessarily of your choosing, to coping with the fatigue of long intense days in the outdoors in unpredictable weather. The minerals industry needs worker’s who can get along in close quarters, can learn to develop community and work in teams. But in addition to developing these attitudes and work skills, being immersed in the outdoors can evoke students’ capacity for self-reflection. As one student noted, “this program helped me find myself.” (John Wilson, Personal conversation, 2005).

The supports and expense of this program were unusual, but the results spoke for themselves. The MEFA program ensured a high success rate by acknowledging upfront the barriers many First Nations learners faced when attempting to access
post-secondary education and by putting in place supports and methods that helped to overcome those barriers.

The camp approach to this program became a model for other longer programs offered through the School. For example, the Environmental Monitor Assessment Program (EMAP), an eight-week program, offered in through the camp approach with a break every three weeks for students to return home for a visit. For many students this model of education proved to be invaluable. The program provided them with the opportunity to be removed from access to drugs and alcohol, and/or the challenges of home life that would be significant barriers to their successful completion. While it was difficult for many to be away from home for three weeks at time, the results proved the success of this model of training delivery.

In the following years, further courses and programs were launched by the School of Exploration and Mining, courses such as Mining Exploration Camp Manager, Drill Core Technician Basic Training, Surface Diamond Driller’s Helper, Prospector Basic Training, Also over this time, as well as industry related trades and apprenticeship programs, the School launched new Associate Degree opportunities in geology and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). These new educational opportunities included the following programs:

- Applied Earth and Environmental Studies Certificate – Geoscience specialization
- Associate of Science Degree – Environmental Geosciences specialization
- Associate of Arts Degree – Archaeological & Cultural Resource Management specialization
- Associate of Arts Degree – Sustainable Communities specialization

Of particular note was the Reclamation and Prospecting program (RAP). This program, along with the Environmental Monitor Assistant program, became
provincially and nationally recognized for its success. Seventy-six per cent of the students enrolled were First Nations, and 89% of the RAP graduates found employment in the exploration and mining industry. Both First Nations leaders and students note that the program gave graduates the confidence, knowledge and skills to effectively manage their communities’ resources.

Conclusion

The fledgling School of Exploration and Mining has grown into a significant provider of bicultural education for an industry sector previously criticized for its Eurocentric exploration and mining practices and attitudes towards Aboriginal people. NWCC School of Exploration and Mining has played an important role in encouraging and supporting greater understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and sustainable environmental practices. It is interesting to note that in the 2012 presentation by the President of the Mining Association of B.C., Karina Brino, to the Minerals North Conference; Brino emphasized ‘Aboriginal Relations’ and ‘Sustainable Mining’ as two key priorities of her Association (Brino, 2012, www.mineralsnorth.ca/conference 2012). These essential objectives, which the College initially had to persuade industry to support, were now being heralded by that same industry as critical priorities and indicators of their successes as an industry.

In addition to industry associations, many more companies have come to the same conclusion. Rio Tinto Alcan for example, operating an aluminium smelter in the Northwest town of Kitimat, reached an unprecedented labour agreement with the Haisla First Nations entitled the
Haisla Legacy Agreement and have committed to making British Columbia home to one of the “cleanest and greenest aluminium smelters in the world.” (Brino, Minerals North Conference, 2012).

With the successes of NorthGate Exploration Ltd. and Rio Tinto Alcan, positive relations between First Nations and the minerals industry are now seen as key to continued exploration and mine development in northern British Columbia. The industry commitment to work towards this goal is further evidenced through documents such as the Association for Mineral Exploration British Columbia’s (AME B.C.) *Aboriginal Community Engagement Handbook*. This Handbook was prepared with First Nations consultation and provides direction to exploration companies in how to approach First Nations when planning a project on traditional territory.

Since 2004, the School of Exploration and Mining has laid the groundwork for improved relationships in the next generation of industry workers and worked to assist the development of existing industry personnel. Professional development workshops and courses that focus on the importance of understanding First Nations perspectives have helped to enhance greater understanding of what is meant by ‘appropriate consultation’ and ‘respectful’ relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. For local First Nations communities, the benefits are also being felt as their members are returning with a stronger voice in which to speak with exploration and mining companies about securing their communities interests in mining operations on their traditional lands and in the skills and knowledge with which to seek employment for their own community members. The School of Exploration and Mining has paved the way towards a new model of industry training within a bicultural paradigm.
Waap Galts’ap—The Face of Transformation

Longhouses

The architectural structures known as long houses (or big houses as they were traditionally called) remain a powerful symbol of the social and political systems of the Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations. Much more than a residence, the long house is an expression of the clan system of the Nation, and served as a place for many social, governance and cultural events.

The clan system for First Nations of Northwestern British Columbia was a complex system of clans and house-groups or Waaps and was the social and economic unit that has managed Northwest coast peoples for thousands of years (McNeary, 1994). This system still exists today. For the Ts’msyen people, for example, there are four major clans characterized by specific animals: the Blackfish or Killer Whale (Gispuwada), the Raven (Ganada), the Eagle (Laxsgiik), or the Wolf (Laxgibuu). Within each clan there are several Waaps each lead by a head chief or other lesser chiefs (Marsden, Anderson, and Nyce 2002: 275).

Each Waap has a specific crest, which may be symbolized by an artistic rendition of the family’s ancestral experiences or more recent encounters with their clan animal. The house-group name and the crest serve to immediately identify an individual. For example, through adoption, I have become a member of the
Ts’msyen Nation. My name is Biyaalsim Jiiyuus18 (Morning Star), I belong to the Killer Whale Clan and I am from the House of T’axaye. My crest is a killer whale with a grizzly bear rising from the whale’s back. This crest refers to following specific story:

There was a trout camp at Seely Lake where we would gather during trout fishing season. After chores the singers and dancers of the family would practice for the coming season. One day the leader of the singers and dancers saw a neatly piled set of trout bones at the camp and imagined what it would be like to make a headpiece out of it. The leader and each of the girls in the dance group began to make a headpiece. According to the Ayuk [law] it was wrong to mishandle the bones of the trout as these girls were doing. The Elders watched with amusement but did not stop them. This carried on for days. One day the village was alarmed by shaking and rumbling but after a while it stopped and the girls carried on with their dancing. Then without warning the villagers watched in horror as there was a mighty roar and trees began falling left and right and a huge grizzly bear appeared and killed approximately 30,000 people that day in Temlaxam. All of this was done to avenge the disrespect shown to the trout. The moral of the story for us is a reminder to respect the law (Ayuk) of the Creator. People have tried to manipulate the Creator’s laws in our territory and there have already been consequences. The Creator’s order of Chiefs and territories has been in place for thousands of years and are not to be tampered with. Tampering with the established order will bring consequences. This particular site belongs to the territory of our Waap (Alfie McDames, personal communication, 2009).

18 The name of ‘morning star’ is an old killer whale clan name. Each of our regions has one person in the clan with a reference to the sacred name of morning star. At one time in our clan history, the ‘star’ people captured one of our clan members. They came from the sky one day and took the young one away. Eventually, the young one returned with a great deal of mystical knowledge. The ancient killer whale clan matriarchs proclaimed the essence of the star as their emblem. The name of morning star is a woman’s name, coined to relate back to the story of the young one who was captured by the star people. The name and crest are symbolic reminders within the killer whale clan history about the thirst for knowledge and the spiritual growth that accompanies it. You are for this time, Morning Star. (Personal conversation with my brother, Peter Thomas McKay, who assisted our mother, Chief T’xaaye, in selecting a name for me, 2014).
Crests are not only associated with symbols displayed on things (robes, head-dresses, totem poles, etc.); there are at least three other meanings meant by the word crest in Ts’msyen culture.

The crest also symbolizes the family that has rights to the crest. Another meaning is the ptx (the actual animal or spirit-being or sun etc.) named by that crest. The most important meaning is the ayuks - the rights to the crest. The crest does not have to be shown on a physical thing for the rights to show the crest in different ways to exist (The Tsimshian Nation, para 1).

The clan system and accompanying crests provide the basic foundation for not only the social organization but also the system of property ownership for Northwest First Nations. In other words, the clan system defines the two most fundamental kinds of relationships: the relationships between people, and the relationships between people and the land (Ayuukhl Nisga’a Vol II, p. v).

The Long house represents the earliest form of permanent structures among many Northwest Coast First Nations. The Long house provided living quarters for chiefs and their immediate and extended family, as well as serving as centres of ceremony. The fronts of long houses were often very elaborately adorned with drawings of faces and crests as well as carved support poles. Frequently totem poles were erected in front of the long house, sometimes a totem pole would be used as part of the entrance way. The symbols, crests and totems demonstrated the spiritualism of the First Nations and their interconnection to both the visible and ‘invisible’ worlds and served as a means of transmitting stories and understanding from one generation to the next.
The artwork on the long house and the accompanying totem pole(s) also represented the family’s history, identity and position within the society, and their clan.

The worldview of the Northwest coast First Nations held that long houses had a spirit and were living beings, “... with both skin (made of removable cedar planks) and bones (the house posts, beams, and rafters, ... considered to be arms, legs, backbones, and ribs)” (Mackin, 2004, p. 74).

Long houses were constructed on specific lands over which particular clans and families were known to have ancestral rights. “No one man ruled a piece of land. Rather one chief held the rights to land and shared the land with his people” (Gadeelibim Hayatskw, 1897, as cited in Ayuukhl Nisga’a, Vol. I, xviii).

Long houses were more than shelter to the Northwest First Nations; they were cultural repositories. As Alfie McDames explains,

Within the long house, a chief’s clan would host feasts to witness important events. People throughout the region would be invited to pass on names, conduct adoptions, or resolve issues important to individuals and communities including the transfers of lands. The long houses were frequently the place where stories were shared orally and passed from one generation to the next (Alfie McDames, personal communication, 2002).

With the passing of the Indian Act in 1880, the world changed dramatically for First Nations people. The concept of ‘land rights’ was extinguished to make way for British settlers accessing and acquiring large tracts of land (Tennant, 1995). From 1884 to the mid 1952, hereditary chiefs were deposed and epidemics of smallpox and other diseases swept across First Nations communities. As a result many traditional long houses were vacated and later dismantled, their architectural components
shipped to museums around the world. House fronts, chief and house poles depicting crests, and support beams and planks were taken; little remained of these important physical and symbolic structures.

Long houses today are no longer used for living, but as places for ceremonies and gatherings.

Many chiefs and Elders have recognized that bringing back the architectural expression of the communities is an important part of bringing back the Adaawak and Ayuk, “life values which can form the basis for high self-esteem, self-identity, self-reliance, and self-determination” (Sim’oogit Daaxheet, Alvin McKay, in School District 92, 1996, xii). Slowly, over the years, long houses are reappearing in First Nations villages, typically as a community or cultural centre in which ceremonies, social gatherings and other important gatherings occur. Modern frame houses have replaced residential family homes for most First Nations people, but the dream of rebuilding a long house is still a strong and present desire amongst many communities.

The architecture of the Northwest long house is distinctive not only in style—long wooden structures with a vent to accommodate a central communal fire pit for cooking—but also in its use of cedar. For the Ts’msyen peoples of the Skeena River valley, cedar is Simgan, meaning real tree, sacred tree or the tree of life and believed to be a living, spiritual source of power.

Cedar was also chosen for its structural, practical, and artistic qualities. Western red cedar, *Thuja plicata*, was an important wood for building long houses because of its relative lightweight, great height, resistance to decay, and malleability. Red cedar can be split into planks and the poles can be carved to form precise connections or detailed images of crest animals” (Mackin, 2007, p.66).
Structural cedar poles, varied-width exterior cedar cladding, carved poles and crests, crest-painted interior walls, and entrance canopies were all features of traditional long houses. These cedar components render visible northwest coastal Indigenous peoples’ physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual interrelationships with the universe.

This chapter describes the building of a long house on the first campus of Northwest Community College. Its creation acknowledged the importance and significance of traditional architectural structures to local First Nations. The NWCC long house is a proud and prominent expression of the Ayuuk, and a significant achievement in the bicultural journey. To the College community, the long house became the physical face of a College transformed.

An Overview of the Longhouse Project

The long house is . . . a symbol of the partnership between First Nations and Northwest Community College. First Nations communities entrust NWCC with the education of our community members and future leaders . . . . (Mildred Roberts, Kitsumkalum Matriarch of the Ts’msyen Nation, in an interview regarding the Opening of the Long House at NWCC, May 8th, 2010).

In the winter of 2006, I met with the First Nations Council to discuss the changing face of the College and what they viewed as an ultimate step in securing that change. A motion was passed at the January 13, 2006, meeting to create a “big house” or “long house” as these had come to be known, for the Terrace campus. In July of 2003, the Council had previously suggested building a long house and passed a motion to encourage the College to build such a structure, but funds for it seemed out of reach and the dream was put on hold. The announcement of a new provincial
government “Gathering Place” grant renewed that dream and discussions about the creation of a long house. A proposal was prepared and an application submitted for the construction of a 5,600 square foot, traditional Ts’msyen long house.

The NWCC long house project was a partnership and collaborative initiative undertaken with elected and Hereditary Chiefs, Elders, Matriarchs, and representatives of NWCC’s First Nations Council. Hereditary chiefs were consulted to determine their opinions and approval and Elders and Matriarchs met to discuss the proposed long house with the College. Once approval was received, an Advisory Group of Elders, Matriarchs, College staff and First Nations Council representatives (see Appendix 10-1), met on a regular basis to consider the selection of an architect, the location for the long house, and to review emerging sketches and floor plans.

The need for a long house at the main campus of Northwest Community College was articulated as follows:

1. To increase First Nations participation and retention through the creation of a welcoming and supportive learning environments for First Nations students;
2. To build community awareness and enhance learning of the First Nations architecture and culture;
3. To acknowledge, reclaim and celebrate the rich culture of Northwestern First Nations;
4. To provide an inclusive, accessible and culturally sensitive learning environment;
5. To facilitate greater Elder and community involvement in the College.
The receipt of a $600,000 grant from the provincial ‘Gathering Place’ provided a start to the funds required for the long house. Between donations of labour, funds, College capital dollars and in-kind resources, an estimated two million dollar building budget took shape. The selection of the architect and others who would work on the building was carefully considered. Priority was given to those of Indigenous descent, particularly First Nations from the region, and local residents. Dr Nancy Mackin, MAIBC PhD, was secured as the architect. Dr Mackin was chosen for many reasons: her work with the Nisga’a Nation, her doctoral research of Nisga’a long house architecture, her Indigenous Icelandic (paternal grandfather) and Swedish Sami (maternal grandmother) ancestry, her expertise in both building and landscape architecture and her acceptance by people of the region. She is an adopted Ts’msyen Killer Whale; her Indigenous name is Hla hii gum’ Hloks and means Morning Sun.

To honour traditions associated with long houses, and the use of cedar, several protocols were observed in the initiation of the project. Vera Dudoward, a Matriarch chose the building site on behalf of the Hereditary chiefs. The Laxibuu Matriarch, Mildred Roberts, of the local First Nations Kitsumkalum community blessed the site and the trees that were used for construction. The Elders, along with the Advisory Group, reviewed, made amendments and approved the architectural plans, and considered the designs proposed for carved cedar poles, sculptures and painted walls.

“Traditionally long houses would be built facing water. Our river and ocean were important means of transportation and it was important to be close to a waterway. By building near the water, you would also be able to see who was approaching the village” (V. Dudoward, Long house Advisory Group
The location chosen for the long house was on the west side of the Campus facing towards the Skeena River. The site chosen was optimal in that it faced the Nisga’a Highway making the long house highly visible and welcoming to traffic passing by.

The floor plan of the long house features many similarities of traditional long houses. On the main floor there is a large 50’ x 50’ great hall or gathering space for ceremonies and feasts, and a backroom traditionally belonging to the head of the clan and his family which in this case will be used by Elders to provide support, encouragement and advice to students as well as a place for dance groups to change. Copper (a symbol of wealth, status and privilege) adorns the bases of the support posts and the covers of exterior light fixtures, the great hall floor resembles the earthen floor of traditional houses and contains a sunken gathering ‘pit’ with wooden box benches. Thick (1 ½ inches) red-cedar cladding of varying widths —10”, 12” and 18”—provides superior thermal insulating value. The main floor also contains a small preparation kitchen, washrooms, a room for dancers to gather and change for events or Elders’ to meet and gather with students and a seminar room that opens into the great hall.

Unlike traditional long houses, the NWCC long house has a basement containing mechanical and electrical rooms and furniture storage and a smaller (40’ x 50’) second, loft-like, floor which overlooks the great hall and also provides a seminar room, offices, a resource room and accessible washrooms. The building meets current building codes and standards and utilizes various green building materials, fixtures and supplies. The design optimizes sustainable building practices
including those of traditional building practices and those recommended by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification\(^\text{19}\).

The building has two entrances: a ceremonial entrance into the gathering space and a second entrance that is oriented towards other buildings on campus. There is also an entrance directly into the serving kitchen.

The floor plans for the long house are pictured on the following two pages.

The entire long house further serves as a gallery for the rich art of the Northwest Coast First Nations produced by Freda Diesing and the instructors and students of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art situated at the Terrace campus of the College: prints and carvings, striking wall paintings on exterior and interior walls, exquisite welcome poles and stunningly beautiful crest sculptures. Of particular note is the decorative artwork that expresses the collective history and connections of the Northwest Coast First Nations through the four main clan animals of the Ts’msyen: killer whale, eagle, wolf and raven.

Throughout the Northwest, one or more crests of the killer whale, raven, eagle or wolf may be found within the culture of the First Nations people. Traditionally a long house would be built for a particular chief or house group of a particular clan and crest but due to the immense graciousness of Chief Wudi Wy and his family, on whose traditional territory the Terrace Campus resides, along with the Laxgyihets [tribal leaders] of Kitsumkalum community, the College was allowed to build a long house depicting all four major crests. The inclusion of all four crests symbolized that

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\(^{19}\) LEED is a third-party certification program and an internationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.
the long house is for all people, as well as the collective history and interconnection of the Northwestern First Nations.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Waap Galts'ap (Community House)  Northwest Community College
Main Floor Plan  Mackin Tanaka Architects
The sculptures, poles and wall paintings were designed and coordinated by renowned First Nations Artist and Coordinator/Instructor of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, Stan Bevan. Stan assembled a group of artists
including fellow master carver and instructor Ken McNeil, as well as current and former students to undertake the work. The decorative art includes poles, crests, sculptures and paintings, as follows:

- Two poles representing human figures holding copper shields standing as welcoming figures outside the front of the long house. These were carved by graduates, Titus Auckland (Ts’msyen) and Ken Haans (Haida);
- Four crests painted on the outside of the front of the long house created and painted by Dean Heron;
- Four sculptures of the four crests, in frontlet form, mounted on support posts inside the building designed and overseen by Stan Bevan and Ken McNeil. Each sculpture is 7 feet high x 30”; and
- Painted wall designs on interior walls depicting human welcoming figures, human figures and the four crests designed and overseen by Dean Heron.
Eagle sculpture carved by Ken McNeil, Freda Diesing School of Northwest Art, 2010.
Construction of the long house began in earnest with the blessing of the building site by Kitumkalum Elder, Mildred Roberts supported by Laxgibuu Clan Matriarch Vera Dudoward, and numerous Elders, and representatives from Kitselas, Kitumkalum and the College community. By September 2009, the building really began to take form. NWCC log and timber frame instructor Higgs Murphy, students and a selection of industry professionals and trades people (all of whom were NWCC students or alumni) used 36,000 board feet of cedar for the siding, spruce and hemlock for the rafters and roof structure, very large cedars for the support posts and 160 linear feet of 16”x33” glulam beams to support the rafters.

The Gathering Hall, main floor, in NWCC Waap Galts’ap Long house, 2010

Indigenous gardens complete the long house project. In keeping with the environmental agenda of the College and local First Nations values, the gardens will convey local and indigenous people’s knowledge about plants and the ecology of the region, as well as the importance of the environment in day-to-day life.
The Naming of the Longhouse

From the earliest discussion, a primary purpose of the long house was voiced as being a place where people could gather together in community to create greater awareness and understanding of moving forward with one heart. Thus, the title “community house” or “house of the community” was quickly adopted. In the Ts’msyen language, Smalg’yax, this translated to Waap Galts’ap, waap meaning house and galts’ap meaning community.
At the opening of the long house, Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis (Irene) Seguin, Nisga’a Elder and Chair of the NWCC Board of Governors stated, “Nisga’a protocol stipulates that the name of a house or building must be officially “called out.” Seguin is from the Laxgibuu (Wolf clan) of the Nisga’a Nation and wears the hereditary title Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis from the House of Baxk’ap. She recounted how as a very young girl, the late James Gosnell, Hereditary Chief and first President of the Nisga’a Nation, taught her to call names and to always be loud, so that the mountains, the river, the trees—everybody—would know its name. She emphasized that the long house was for everyone, hence the name Waap Galts’ap, and proceeded to call out the name loudly three times.

**The Opening of Waap Galts’ap**

In the days leading up to the opening, anticipation and excitement mounted. Xpilaxha (Gerald Wesley), NWCC Board of Governors member for Terrace and
Hereditary Chieftain of the Ts’msyen Kitsumkalum community, stated, “I look forward to seeing hundreds of students, Native and non-Native, standing with their families and community leaders witnessing the opening of a truly wonderful new structure, and (to seeing) that all of us will stand with a sense of pride that a dream can become reality with perseverance, hard work and clarity for what we want” (Wesley, personal interview, 2010).

Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis (Irene Seguin), Chair of the College Board of Governors, added,

My role in the Waap Galts’ap project has taken many forms. At the very beginning, when the First Nations Council began there was always discussion of a ‘safe place’ for students, advisors, and Elders to meet with them. Waap Galts’ap is a dream comes true; it has exceeded the First Nations Council’s expectations. As a Governor on the College Board of Governors, I was honored to attend planning meetings. I am honored to be able to offer some assistance to the actual opening. It will be another historic moment for the College, for Terrace, and for British Columbia. I have also been blessed to have been able to visit the long house at various stages of its building. The spirit in the building is beautiful and I’m sure that there will be those who will be overcome with emotion at the opening.

I’m looking forward to the positive energy, the refilling of spirit that comes with positive energy. I’m looking forward to the gathering of many Nations in a common celebration. And I’m looking forward to the positive ripples that will begin on that day” (Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis, personal communication, 2010).

Mildred Roberts, Matriarch, Kitsumkalum community, also anticipated the opening of the long house with high hopes:

At the invitation of NWCC, I sat on the planning commission for Waap Galts’ap. I was asked for input on many issues to do with the planning and to do a blessing for the opening. I’m looking forward to
Waap Galts’ap, May 2010. Its completion is viewed as a crowning achievement in the transformative journey, the College’s 5 year-long quest towards becoming a bi-cultural institution of higher learning. Photo credit: Molly McNulty, Terrace Standard, August, 2010

the celebration and the recognition that the relationship between First Nations and NWCC has a positive impact on the local economy, health and quality of life in the Northwest (M. Roberts, personal communication, 2010).

On Saturday, May 8, 2010, over 800 people gathered to witness the opening of Waap Galts’ap and to celebrate this memorable point in Northwest Community College’s transformative journey.

A series of events commemorated the historic occasion of the opening of the first long house to be opened on a Canadian Community College campus and the first long house to be erected within the City of Terrace, British Columbia. The day’s events included the raising of the two house poles at the ceremonial entrance, the opening of the long house, the ‘calling out’ of the long house name, the unveiling of the sculptures and a celebratory feast. It was an historic event, attracting First
Nations representatives and dignitaries from all eight Nations in the Northwest as well as non-First Nations leaders and community members, College staff and students.

Raising the house poles for Waap Galts’ap

The events of the day began with a welcome to the traditional territory of the Laxibuu people, followed by a blessing of the house poles by Elder and Chief T’axaye. Using the cleansing properties of red cedar boughs, Chief T’axaye blessed the poles, as they lay ready to be carried to the front of the long house. The Xbisuunt and Gitselasu dancers led the procession, accompanied by the house pole carvers—Titus Auckland and Ken Hans. Next came the pole carriers, followed by the Chiefs, Elders and Matriarchs of the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas communities as well as the Board Chair and President, all other Chiefs, Elders and Matriarchs, followed by dignitaries, College Board members, First Nations Council, College staff, and the public.

Once at the longhouse, the carvers followed the traditional protocol expected at pole raisings. The lead carver, Titus Auckland, a Killer Whale from the House of T’axaye, explained the designs on the poles, the poles were then blessed again by Chief T’axaye as both carvers proceeded to ‘breathe life into the poles’ to the beating of a single drum. This time honoured ritual invokes the spirit of the pole and its story to come to life. The poles were then lifted into place with the help of many hands, and safely secured upright. Finally, to signify the successful raising and to celebrate their accomplishments, the carvers danced around the poles with their carving tools as the Gitselasu Dance group sang the Killer Whale song.
The next day, emails poured into the College Administration offices. To quote just two of these—

Hi - Thank you so much for the day on Saturday - the most recent highpoint as you ‘breathe new life’ into the College and the communities of the Northwest! What an amazing day (Ken Downs, Instructor/Coordinator Guardian Watchman and Tourism programs, Northwest Community College, Email transmission, 2010).

Hi Stephanie, today was huge. With each step we take towards decolonization, I gain a deeper understanding and respect for true territory and the many different first nations that are represented here in the Northwest. My eyes are opening and learning, and I am truly proud and committed to be part of this necessary journey of transformation and healing (Cindy Harmel, Director, Facilities & Maintenance, NWCC, Email transmission, 2010).

Opening the doors of Waap Galts’ap

The Chair of the College Board, accompanied by Matriarchs from Kitsumkalum and Kitselas, cut the braided cedar rope made for the occasion, and declared the long house opened. Chiefs, matriarchs, Elders, dignitaries, artists and those who played a significant role in the creation of the long house were then drummed in. Close to 300 people filled the large gathering space, with more than 500 viewing the proceedings on televisions under the cover of a large tent outside Waap Galts’ap.

Mildred Roberts conducted a traditional blessing of the long house, motioning to the four directions of the earth with cedar boughs. Calling upon the Creator, she acknowledged the spirit of the ancestors and the importance of the long house. Stan Bevan, artistic director and lead artist for the art on the long house and the exceptional crest carvings, spoke of the wall paintings produced by the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. Graduate Dean Heron and unveiled the four
sculptures mounted on the support posts. Then, joined by Dempsey Bob, Dean Heron, Ken McNeil and other Tlingit/Tahltan Laxibuu (wolf) artists, Stan sang a sacred wolf dance while a visiting Tlingit artist and relative danced to recognize and honour the artists’ achievements.

A celebration feast and dancing followed the opening of Waap Galts’ap and continued for five hours.

A Feast commemorates significant events in the lives of First Nations of the Northwest Coast and requires much planning and preparation. In this contemporary feast held to celebrate the opening of Waap Galts’ap, Elders, chiefs and matriarchs and representatives of the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas Bands gathered with the President and a group of College staff to plan the feast. Several meetings were held to discuss matters of protocol, invitations and the gathering and preparation of food and gifts. Many donations of food were received: seaweed from the House of Chief Wudi Wyi, halibut from Elected Chief Don Roberts, oolichan and oolichan oil from Hawgillo K’am Saxwhl Giis (Irene Seguin), vegetables and fruits from local supplier J&F Foods, coffee from Seattle’s Best, among others. A call was put out for volunteers to serve at the feast and Charlotte Guno from the First Nations Council was instrumental in gathering and organizing servers to work with NWCC’s Culinary Arts students and Food Services team.

Close to 1000 people came to the Feast, including chiefs and representatives from every First Nation in the Northwest. Dignitaries spoke throughout the evening noting the importance of the long house and the changes being made at the College to enhance education for Aboriginal people. A blanket dance was held to help pay for the construction of the long house in which over $11,000 was raised. Gifts and acknowledgements were handed out and exchanged recognizing the support of the First Nations and the work of the artists, architect, the project manager and all who worked on the building and feast.

Dances and songs continue to occupy an important position within the traditions of the Northwest Coast First Nations and provide a vital link to a way of life that was nearly destroyed by colonization. Often passed down from one generation to the next, songs and dances
have spiritual significance and value. Songs breathe life into the subtle connections between human beings and nature; dances express the importance of honoring mother earth and the importance of stories, and; drums replicate the heartbeat of the earth and transport the listener to mystic realms.

Dance groups at the Feast represented eight Northwest Coast First Nations. Songs and dances of celebration, peace, storytelling and hunting were performed in honor of the opening of Waap Galts’ap. The quality of the music and the emotions they conveyed captivated the audience, affording many a first glimpse into the rich cultures of the First peoples of the Northwest.

The beautiful sounds of drums, rattles, and singers voices permeated the Terrace Sportsplex, transformed for the evening into a feast hall. Children and adults of all ages performed into the night, each group different from the one before it and each acknowledging the craftspeople that made their outfits, instruments and masks (Forsyth & Savage, 2011, pp. 100-101).

The pride in the room was unmistakable, and the dancing and singing lasted well into the evening.

**Na Gamaaytga ‘Nawa’ana—the Face of Transformation**

On behalf of the College, I received many emails, phone calls and cards following the May 8th opening of Waap Galts’ap. It was clear that the events of that day had touched many lives. The College Communications department and local media interviewed various Matriarchs and College Board members for their reactions to the long house. They commented as follows:

**Mildred Roberts**  
**Kitsumkalum Matriarch**

Waap Galts’ap is important to the students because it is there for them to
use, it is a step towards bridging the gaps between First Nations and non-First Nations of the Northwest. It is also a symbol of the partnership between First Nations and Northwest Community College. First Nations communities entrust NWCC with the education of our community members and future leaders. Waap Galts’ap symbolizes the spirit of collaboration and inclusiveness and a new era towards First Nations autonomy (M. Roberts, Interview with NWCC Communications Office, 2010).

Irene Seguin, Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Giis, Nisga’a Matriarch and educator, Chair of NWCC Board of Governors, Education Administrator for Gitwinksihlkw Village Government, past Chair of NWCC First Nations Council

The Waap Galts’ap initiative is symbolic in that it signals that First Nations have something to contribute and it acknowledges that First Nations contributions are positive. It’s a signal to the rest of Canada about the acceptance of the First Peoples of Canada and, in particular, the acceptance of Northwest First Nations architecture and culture. It demonstrates that together, we can build the best place in the world. Here we have a public institution acknowledging First Nations, their knowledge, their culture. Waap Galts’ap is a symbol of education taking an active part in decolonization.

The most important signal to area First Nations with the creation of Waap Galts’ap is its visibility. It’s kind of like displaying a coat of arms. Waap Galts’ap is there for the world to see that we—First Nations—matter. For a long time, we have been in the background and it added to the multitude of issues that we already face. This long house is more than a building it is an acceptance of us—our life and our history. It is showing that we are an integral part of the College. So it is very important not just to First Nations but to everyone as the long house demonstrates that we are here and we are part of the College as well. It will go a long way to facilitate healing. It is also important in that it will provide a welcoming meeting place for the public as well as for the
First Nations Education Coordinators or Administrators from the 26 bands in the NWCC service area; these education professionals can meet with their sponsored students in a comfortable, welcoming setting (Irene Seguin, Interview with NWCC Communications Office, 2010).

NWCC made a conscious and bold decision a number of years ago to find ways to elevate the stature of a very prominent student population base reaching out more intensely to community needs, with the establishment of Native motifs, creation of a First Nations Council, commissioning and raising of totems and now, the Long house. The College isn’t looking at making this an Aboriginal only institution but wants to make it stand out for this area and within the Province of British Columbia for its vision and a willingness to make change happen that will be beneficial to the whole area and the province. (Gerald Wesley, College Board Member, Interview with NWCC Communications Dept., 2010)
First Nations should take pride in knowing that this is the first modern day long house situated on a NWCC campus in the Northwest. While Waap Galts’ap is a modern day version of a ‘long house,’ the user groups will feel and enjoy the serene atmosphere from within as Indian tribes and clans do from time to time when hosting meetings and/or feasts. The Waap Galts’ap initiative by Northwest Community College is a symbol for uniting students, faculty and the community. Not only did we (the Laxgibuu Hereditary chief Wudi Wyi and Laxgyighets [tribal leaders] of Kitsumkalum with the other three clans of Kitsumkalum) support the initial concept of the building, location and design; we supported and provided a cultural advisory role throughout the whole process. (Vera Dudoward, interview with NWCC Communications Office, 2010)

Conclusion

The creation and opening of Waap Galts’ap was profoundly important to the College and the First Nations communities in the region. Since the beginning of the transformative journey many pedagogical, symbolic and ritualistic changes occurred; the Waap Galts’ap initiative was viewed by many as the as the climax of this significant phase of the transformative bicultural journey we had all been on since 2003.

It was a great day - the opening of the long house. I can still hear the drummers and Irene's call and I can visualize Dempsey [Bob] dancing with the carvers. The completion of the long house is a great accomplishment and a time to pause and reflect. It is a unique point in time for you [as President] and the College . . . a true high point . . . in many ways it is the end of one journey and the beginning of another” (A. Herman, Vice-President, Academic and Student Services, North Island College Email transmission, May, 2010).
For years, Canadian governments attempted to desecrate First Nations people, their way of life, their Adaawak and Ayuuk. Traditional house structures built not just for residence, but for the gathering of community and hosting of cultural events, were all but obliterated in the process of colonization. The opening of Waap Galts’ap was a deliberate step to redress colonization and reclaim the right of First Nations people to live by their laws and values and to not have to set them aside and walk in two worlds to further their education. In the creation of Waap Galts’ap, “we have a public institution acknowledging First Nations, their knowledge, their culture” (I.Seguin, personal communication, 2010). Seguin elaborates further,

Waap Galts’ap is a symbol of education taking an active part in decolonization. When the First Nations Council began, there was always discussion of having a ‘safe’ place for students, advisors and Elders. Waap Galts’ap is a dream come true, exceeding Council’s expectations. (Irene Seguin, as cited in Forsyth & Savage, 2011, p.16).

Waap Galts’ap signals to the world that Northwest Community College is an institution listening to the First Nations and working with First Nations to lift up generations of people that mainstream education has sought so long to suppress and assimilate. As Hagwilook’am Saxwhl Gaiss said, “The most important signal to our area’s First Nations of the creation of Waap Galts’ap is its visibility—it’s like displaying a coat of arms saying, “Here we are!” (Forsyth & Savage, 2011, p. 16).

In the months that passed since the opening of Waap Galts’ap, it is clear that the building is having a profound impact on many people. The designing and building of Waap Galts’ap engaged First Nations Elders and community members in a process that generated significant pride, ownership and emotion. Through this building, the College helped to bring back the physical expressions of a culture,
which was almost lost due to previous Canadian laws and policies. Waap Galts’ap has become a testament to Northwest Coast First Nations architecture and art, providing a glimpse of the traditions of the first peoples of this region and the strikingly beautiful symbols and expressions of their timeless culture.

The opening of the long house has also provided an indigenous learning environment that stimulates discussion of the Adaawak and Ayuuk. It is difficult to enter the long house, with its magnificent sculptures of Raven, Killer Whale, Eagle and Wolf sitting high on support posts watching over you, and not feel the power and strength they exude. It is hard not to sense within the gathering space, the ‘life-force’ the Elders say is within everything and everywhere; the building’s spirit is unmistakable. It is impossible not to appreciate the richness and beauty of the wall paintings, human figures welcoming you with open hands, and know that you have entered a place where learning and reflection are encouraged. It is a powerful learning environment that encourages understanding, respect and awareness. Over the days and months following the opening, Waap Galts’ap has emerged as a unique learning place appreciated and used by the students and communities the College serves.

The building of Waap Galts’ap has prompted the creation of a book and a video. When discussed with Matriarch Mildred Roberts, language teacher and keeper of cultural knowledge, what the title of the book should be, she thought about it and then returned a few days later with the title: *The Face of Transformation*. The word *face* indicates the *eyes* of the people, *transformation* means *significant or powerful change* and is an important theme in the traditions of the Northwest Coast peoples and is frequently portrayed in their art, past and present. In the Smalg’yax language, there is no translation for the words, *the face of transformation*, so Mildred chose the
words: Na Gamaaytga ‘Nawa’ana. These words reflect upon what has occurred to prompt the transformation process—seeds have been planted in an educational setting, they have helped people expand and grow and develop; they have become the fruits of a seed planted or the face of the transformation that has taken place.
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Bicultural Northwest Community College

Introduction

Seven years into the journey of transformation, Northwest Community College was a significantly different organization than it had been in 2000. From the Boardroom to the classroom, the vision of becoming a bicultural post-secondary education institution had been firmly rooted.

The key transformational projects described within this thesis sparked innumerable conversations and gave rise to additional initiatives that advanced the College’s journey. In 2007, the Provincial government launched a new 3-year funding opportunity and in 2008 NWCC was awarded the first of three annual grants of $600,000 to support Aboriginal initiatives—these funds provided welcomed resources to advance the work underway and support new initiatives. By the spring of 2010, the College had undergone significant change, and a critical mass of staff and external community members recognized and expressed those changes.

For the College and the Northwest region, the path we had set for ourselves as a College had come to fruition with few disappointments.

This chapter provides an overview of the emerging bicultural Northwest Community College.
Txeemsim—a Metaphor for Transformation

The story of NWCC’s transformation is the story of challenging the western education paradigm and of redressing the legacy of colonization in one British Columbian post-secondary institution. The motivation for this journey was the acknowledgement of the barriers the western paradigm posed for Aboriginal people and in particular those attending or seeking to attend Northwest Community College. Understanding why Aboriginal people were not effectively participating at Northwest Community College and affecting meaningful change to enhance participation required the College’s leadership to consider the message of Txeemsim and to acknowledge that we were looking at the ‘barriers’ in entirely the wrong way.

Despite many efforts by the College to enhance Aboriginal student engagement the graduation statistics for Aboriginal learners continued to be well below the Provincial average. Over a period of years, the College dedicated time and money into replications of earlier failed approaches somehow believing that determination and greater effort would help make Aboriginal students better fit into the system created for them. In accordance with this orientation to the ‘problem’ of low levels of Aboriginal participation, First Nations Access Coordinators were hired to assist students to integrate into the College; mainstream educational programs were offered on reserves; and First Nations graduates of mainstream education programs wrote curriculum that fitted Western curriculum templates. Not surprisingly, the results did not match the effort.
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According to John Ralston Saul (2008, p. 12), the efforts of the College to ‘help the Aboriginal student’ are ‘classic Western behaviour’, which takes “an approach to the Aboriginals designed to show that they’re not up to it, or they’re a problem . . . . It’s the new way of being racist about Aboriginals.”

By perpetuating approaches that continued to demonstrate the inadequacies of the Aboriginal student, we were reinforcing colonial perspectives to our employees and the public. To the Aboriginal student, we were reinforcing at least two significant messages: “you are a personal failure” and/or “you are not worthy of participation.”

Colonialism according to Freire (1995) “occurs in the mind” of the colonizer and the colonized and must first be overcome in the internal mental spaces. The stories of Tłı̨ę́ɛɛmsim echo Freire’s viewpoint; transformation occurs in the deeper realms of one’s thoughts and inner being.

As the lessons of Tłı̨ę́ɛɛmsim became clearer to me I understood that it was not possible for change to occur at NWCC without looking deeply and critically at our own preconceived assumptions of how higher education institutions should operate and our own individual and collective contributions to sustaining and protecting a system which held little meaning for the Aboriginal student. This required the organization, and individuals within the organization, to engage in a process of continuous reflection, to consider and question the views that we held about teaching and learning at the College. As President, I bore the responsibility of this change with the Board of Governors, and knew that together we had to model the way forward. Personally, I adopted a regular pattern of reflection alone and in dialogue with others including Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, members of
First Nations Council and various colleagues. Organizationally, I knew that I could not control transformation; I could only invite it, make a place for it, and nurture the conditions that would allow intentional conversation and reflection to occur and change to be fostered. As we progressed in our conversations, the Board, First Nations Council and the leadership of the College drew upon the lessons emerging from the projects described within this thesis, and others, and thus moved the College further towards the goal of a bicultural institution.

The Strategic Planning process served as an appropriate launch pad for the inward reflection required as a continuing process by the organization. This process of continuous reflection became a recurring theme within the College and occurred at the Board table, in conversations with Elders, First Nations Council and throughout the College. As we witnessed the power of these conversations to ignite change in our relationships with First Nations people and our work, strategies were initiated to keep the “fire of these conversations burning”—for example, through initiatives such as the House of Learning and Applied Research, Elders Gatherings, professional development workshops, and the annual Challenging the Paradigm Gathering (a conference open to Canadian First Nations educators and researchers, and to others engaging with the practices of biculturalism in education.) These conversations were consistently informed by five key messages that I, with the support of the Board and the senior leadership of the College, communicated to the College community to nurture reflection and encourage the journey of transformation:

1. Recognition that the College had been fashioned on the colonial paradigm introduced to Canada by the British Empire in the 19th
century; it was not a “made in Canada construct” nor, as we were to later learn, did it represent the people and relationships that had evolved over the previous 250 years since first contact with Aboriginals, a period during which first contacts were a partnership of full equals;

2. Recognition that colonization is not over, and that by accepting, nurturing and continuing the mainstream model of education, we were in fact perpetuating colonization;

3. Recognition that reconciliation should not be deferred to governments and that history has repeatedly demonstrated through the years that the Canadian government has not had the insight or the courage to acknowledge their role in the challenges besetting Aboriginals today. Even though the Prime Minister of Canada had issued an apology to Aboriginal residential school survivors and their families in the spring of 2008, there is little evidence that the apology has shifted the attitudes, beliefs and perspectives of governments in this country, particularly the Government of Canada. Across Canada there remains deep-seated frustration and resentment towards the Government of Canada. This frustration is evident in the innumerable court cases and protests currently in play in Canada. The *Idle No More* Protest movement is but one example of the rising tensions in the country. This Protest is led by Aboriginal people in Canada and is supported by thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, nationally and to some extent abroad. This Protest originated in response to
alleged legislative abuses of Indigenous treaty rights by the current Conservative federal government.

*Idle No More* has quickly become one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history . . . . What began as a series of teach-ins throughout Saskatchewan to protest impending parliamentary bills that will erode Indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections, has now changed the social and political landscape of Canada.

(http://www.idlenomore.ca/story, Par. 1)

4. Recognition that as educators and as a College, there was much for all of us to ‘unlearn’ about the Eurocentric perspective in which we have all been ‘marinated’ (Battiste, 2008) and how it shaped Canada’s college system.

5. That the way forward to redressing the legacy of colonization within the College was through the development of authentic relationships with Aboriginal people.

The importance of “being in relationship” with Aboriginal people and all those with whom we work or live, could not be underestimated. To live in awareness of our relationships with others demands sensitivity, integrity and humility. It calls for close attention to our way of being in the world and our connections to and our impact on others—our interconnectedness with others. Aboriginal people have traditionally lived “in relationship” with one another and the earth; “relationship” is at the heart of the Aboriginal worldview. Being in relationship with our Aboriginal communities and colleagues required us to quit doing things *for* Aboriginals and start doing it in relationship *with* Aboriginals. And importantly, for those with Aboriginal
heritage, the Elders urged us, to be proud of our ancestry and to begin again doing things as Aboriginals.

‘Nawa’ana - ‘the eyes of the people [have been] significantly changed’

In speaking with Elder Mildred Roberts in the days preceding the opening of Waap Galts’ap, she describes the change at the College as Na Gamaaytga ‘Nawa’ana - meaning, ‘the eyes of the people have been significantly changed’. As we spoke, the “people” she referenced included the College Board and First Nations Council as well as many who worked on staff at the College.

Mildred’s insight was instructive as the roles of the Board and First Nations Council were critical to the achievement of the change at NWCC and hold important lessons for others who may embark on this path.

Board Governance and Leadership

A primary role for the Board of Governors at NWCC was the establishment of a Strategic Plan that set the course for the foreseeable future. In 2005, the Plan that emerged foreshadowed a path away from the normal state of being and signalled a movement towards deep change. To the Board or the College leadership, the course of the river we would be running was not clear, and it felt very much as Quinn (2006) describes, that we were “building the bridge as we walked on it.” What we did realize is that it would require us to be purpose centered, committed, open to change and varying perspectives, and to be willing to be outside our own comfort zones.
The commitment and leadership of the Board of Governors was not without its challenges. Many were eager to engage in a process that would chart new territory and open to taking a risk in which the outcome was far from certain. However, as Board members left and new ones came on, the journey needed to be reiterated and it was not always a simple task of explaining the vision. A government distanced from the College’s journey chose our Board members and frequently the Board and I were challenged with the task of helping new members “open their eyes” to the possibility of a different education paradigm.

To assist in this new learning, Board orientation and education took on renewed importance and the role of the Board Chair became critical in modelling and holding accountable the new behaviour expected of members. Board engagement in graduations, celebrations and events which integrated Aboriginal culture and ceremony and marked significant milestones in the journey increased, and through these experiences so too did the learning of Board members.

The steadfastness of the Board to the vision was instrumental in enabling the College to stay the course of transformative change. It is courageous to embark upon a path without a clear outcome in mind other than a College in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives may respectfully co-exist and the learning and success of all students be apparent. Annually the Board reaffirmed this bi-cultural goal and their determination to co-create that future with Aboriginal people.

Board commitment to the bicultural agenda was communicated and evidenced through many actions and motions. Here are some examples of these:
1. Establishing and continuing their support for the College’s First Nations Council;

2. Approving a Strategic Plan that would embark the College on a journey towards healing and reconciliation and annually reconfirming their support for the same;

3. Engaging in Board Education activities which regularly included a review and examination of their role in the bicultural change process and a focus on their own Aboriginal cultural awareness learning;

4. Establishing key Board policies that guided the activity of the College, such as the ‘Naming of Campuses and Buildings’ policy which directed the College to provide bilingual (First Nations) names and signage for all campuses and college buildings and, the development of a ‘Hiring’ policy which took an affirmative action approach to the recruitment and hiring of Aboriginal employees;

5. Ensuring the appropriate resourcing of strategic initiatives designed to further the bicultural agenda such as the funding of the creation of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, the House of Learning and Applied Research, the new School of Exploration and Mining and many cultural initiatives such feasts, ceremonies, indigenous gardens, totem poles and Waap Galts’ap;

6. Assessing their performance as a Board, and mine as President, on the achievements of the Strategic Plan and in particular the progress of the College on the bicultural journey;

7. Demonstrating courage and vision in lobbying the Provincial Government for a change in legislation which would acknowledge
NWCC as a bicultural institution and requesting that the composition of the Board be reflective of the demographic it served, in other words, 40% Aboriginal.

The courage of the Board was further demonstrated in 2008 when the Board appointed Irene Seguin to the Chair of the Board of Governors. A Nisga’a Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper and Nisga’a language teacher, Irene was strategically appointed so that the Board and the College might further draw upon her wisdom and guidance. This appointment was endorsed by all of the First Nations in the Northwest through a feast and ceremony in which chiefs or their representatives publicly supported her appointment and reaffirmed their commitment of support for NWCC’s journey of change. Irene served as Chair of the Board from 2008 to 2010.

Over the years, the Board was steadfast and highly engaged in their focus on the journey. While Board motions supported the raising of totems, the hosting of Elders Gatherings, the planting of Indigenous Gardens for the purposes of teaching and storytelling, these motions were also supported in action. Board members were frequently present at the College at the launch of these initiatives, offering their visible support and leadership to these important initiatives.

The Board took risks in the launching of the Freda Diesing School and the School of Exploration and Mining, Schools that weren’t initially supported by the provincial government. They advocated and lobbied for the changes we were making despite opposition.

In May 2008, the Board of Governors approved the proposal for College campuses to serve as venues, if desired, for residential school survivors and their families to congregate in order to hear the Prime Minister deliver Canada’s Apology.
to Indian Residential School survivors and their families. Three campuses were utilized for this purpose. Those gathered at the Terrace Campus were linked electronically to Ottawa. This webcast connection allowed several hundred residential school survivors to gather at the Terrace Campus to hear the Prime Minister and to send a live response to the Apology to Ottawa. The days leading up to the Apology were filled with controversial discussions and stirred deep-seated emotions among many survivors. On the eve of the Apology the College hosted an Elders Gathering at ‘Waap Freda Diesing’ thus providing a venue for them to discuss whether the Apology should be accepted and who among them would respond via webcast to the Prime Ministers words. Joining the Elders and me that evening was the current Board Chair, Penny Denton, the First Nations Council Chair, Barb Henry, and the then Vice-Chair of the Board, Irene Seguin.

The role of the Board during this period of the College’s history was critical in ensuring the College stayed the course of the bicultural journey. Importantly, they demonstrated vision, leadership and courage.

**NWCC First Nations Council**

Not repeating the errors of the past meant recreating the College collectively with First Nations communities and to have First Nations voice along with that of the College leadership such that both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldview would respectfully co-exist within the renewed NWCC. Through this process of renewed approach and relationship, the “eyes” of those on First Nations Council were also significantly changed.
NWCC’s First Nations Council served as the formal venue for these consultations. As the College leadership sought to develop and foster authenticity in our relationships with First Nations, the voice of the First Nations community through the Council served to lead and guide many projects and initiatives at the College.

The College Board of Governors established NWCC’s First Nations Council in 1996 upon the advice of Northwest First Nations leaders. It was not however, until 2001 that Terms of Reference for the Council were discussed. Through the process of developing the terms of reference, the relationship between the Council and the College leadership deepened and greater understanding of the respective roles as well as specified accountabilities, emerged. The results of these conversations were communicated throughout the College and had the intended outcome of moving the Council from a group on the sidelines of the inner workings of the College to a group whose voice was respected, appreciated and valued for their advice and input. This positioning of the voice of the First Nations Council had the intended outcome of integrating the First Nations communities and their leadership, as key stakeholders within the College—and enabled the College community to see the College leadership “walking alongside” the Aboriginal communities they served.

The revised role of First Nations Council provided a forum for direct consultation with Aboriginal communities in the College region. Council members provided direction in the strategic and operational planning of the College formally through a policy framework. First Nations Council policy recommendations focused on student advocacy, program promotion, curriculum design, cultural issues and
content, and program and education service evaluation. Council members guided the College in strengthening its relationships with Aboriginal communities in the Northwest College region by serving as official representatives of their communities.

Formal communication linkages were established through the Chair of First Nations Council to the Board of Governors. Early in our journey, the Chair of First Nations Council was appointed as an ex-officio member of the College Board of Governors and his/her reports were a standing item on College Board meeting agendas.

The President of the College was a member of First Nations Council and I made it a high priority to be in attendance at Council meetings to signal the importance of, and the respect I held for, the voice and input of the Council to College operations and our quest to create a new education paradigm.

Originally, the membership of the First Nations Council consisted of representatives from each of the First Nations villages within the College region; representation from each First Nations Band in the Northwest; Native Friendship Centres; the Northwest region of the Métis Nation B.C., the four Aboriginal post-secondary institutes in the Northwest; NWCC First Nations Access Coordinators; a NWCC administrator and the President. As a result of the terms of reference review, the following members were added: the Vice-President Education and Student Services; the Chair of Education Council or designate and, a member of the College Board of Governors. These changes in membership further served to embed the voice of First Nations and Métis communities within the operations of the College.
The review of the terms of reference provided much needed clarity of role, function and responsibility of the Council within the College as a whole organization. The relationship of the Council to the College had changed. No longer sidelined, Council members now took on the important responsibility of voicing the needs and views of their communities and for providing a conduit to the elected Chief and Council and/or Hereditary chiefs (depending upon the protocols of their community) of their communities. Council members were accountable to their communities or organizations and reciprocally, and the College was accountable to the Council for the directions and input received. These reciprocal roles and responsibilities were affirmed not only through formal letters inviting communities or organizations to participate in the Council, but also through formal and informal communications issued from the Office of the President.

Council members were often sought out to provide feedback or to connect the College with the appropriate community members for specific initiatives or advice. First Nations Council members were, for example, invaluable as the College undertook the development of Aboriginal community-specific protocol guides for use by faculty and staff. These protocol guides served to support the development of respectful relationships between the College and specific First Nations and Métis communities. The protocol guides led to greater awareness and appreciation for the complex and sophisticated social structures of the Northwest First Nations communities.

The Chair of the NWCC First Nations Council, and Council members were not only called upon to provide input and advice to the College, but also to set directions with the College. Throughout my tenure at the College, this collective
direction setting continued to occur and evolve. For example, the Chair of the Council and/or a designate from Council was invited to join the College’s Education Council—a legislated Council representative of College students, staff, and administrators concerned with education programming and student supports at the College.

In 2008, First Nations Council worked collectively with the College to not only co-create, but also report out on, the College’s Aboriginal Service Plan in response to a provincial government funding initiative. The Aboriginal Service Plan is described in further detail later in this chapter.

Through the First Nations Council and the inclusion of representatives in the legislated structures of the College (the Board and Education Council), the relationships between First Nations, Métis and the College were greatly enhanced. These relationships were instrumental in the co-creation, and evolution of many successful projects such as those described within this thesis.

**Symbolic Plurality**

College campuses across the country are interesting in the degree to which many have effaced Aboriginal history. Colonization has had the effect of investing the physical environment of colleges with a particular memory, mainstream colonial structures, art forms and gardens. On most B.C. College campuses, the physical structure and landscapes follow a Eurocentric organizational and material model. At the same time, they have excluded structures and materials that relate to other cultures particularly those of Aboriginal people.
Traditionally, the social production of Northwest First Nations cultures was inscribed in the material environment through symbols and motifs such as buildings and monuments, murals and crests. These symbols made a connection to ancient ways of knowing and being passed from generation to generation. As noted previously in this thesis, many of these ancient works were illegally confiscated during the first wave of colonization; today many First Nations communities are working to repatriate their art.

Making place and space for physical expressions of Aboriginal culture on the physical environment of Northwest Community College was a first step in the bicultural journey. The carving and ‘raising’ of the first totem pole at the Terrace campus, according to traditional ways, was a critical first step in not only signalling the commencement of significant change to the College, but also serving to signal a commitment to redressing an era, which previously condemned and outlawed the creation of such cultural expressions.

The first totem pole led to many other expressions of symbolic pluralism across all NWCC’s campuses; for example, the renaming of buildings and the creation of bilingual signs at the Terrace; the carving and raising of two house poles for the Hazelton campus; a mural and house pole for the new Smithers campus; and a totem pole for the Prince Rupert campus. Additionally, artistic creations from the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art were purchased and mounted on various walls and hallways of buildings on College campuses, as were weavings and art from renowned local artists. The College also began to acquire original works of art by Freda Diesing. These works were placed in secure display cases within Waap Galts’ap.
At the feast and installation of the first Aboriginal Board Chair, Irene Seguin, local artists were commissioned to create a traditional button blanket. This blanket was draped over the shoulders and worn, as is customary in Northwest culture, to all significant events, feasts and graduations, for example.

Waap Galts’ap was the largest project that the College undertook to transform the physical environment. This traditional architectural structure became home to student services and supports including a meeting room for First Nations Council and Elders gatherings. Waap Galts’ap also provided a place for students to study, to engage with Elders and to access Aboriginal supports. It was also a highly desirable space for Aboriginal ceremonies and celebrations to take place, events that had by now become an integral part of the College.

Landscapes were also altered at the College’s campuses. An indigenous landscape architect and botanists researched the indigenous plants and shrubs of the region and specific plots of land were reclaimed through the planting of indigenous flora and fauna. The return of the manicured lawns to local vegetation served to further symbolize the College’s efforts to redress colonization.

In these and other projects, First Nations Council involvement and engagement in the decision-making processes of the College figured prominently. Their voice and insights were instrumental in changing the physical environment and guiding the ceremonies that celebrated the same. By inscribing the social and cultural symbolism of Northwest First Nations cultures in the physical environment of the College campuses, NWCC created a new narrative and a new memory. The physical presence of this formerly mainstream institution was transformed and, in so
doing, had the effect of furthering the transformation of the people who interacted there.

**Bicultural Pedagogy**

Matching the College’s approach to pedagogy to the reality within which our Aboriginal students lived was essential to furthering Aboriginal educational advancement. So too was recognizing that if our view of Aboriginal students was one of deficits, then our principles and practices would reflect this, and we would perpetuate the educational crisis for students (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

As we progressed in our understanding of the Aboriginal world we acknowledged that Aboriginal language, knowledge, culture, and values are normal, valid, and legitimate. We also acknowledged that community participation in the learning environment enhances commitment and connectedness and fosters a shared responsibility for support of the learner (students achieved better when there was a close relationship between the College and the home.) Further, we acknowledged that storytelling figures prominently in the Aboriginal reality and, as such, is a powerful vehicle for learning particularly when both instructors and students take turns in the storying and the re-storying of their realities.

This thesis outlined three new significant programming initiatives that served to transform our approach to program development, design and delivery at the College. The Kitlope Field School, the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art and the School of Exploration and Mining were co-created with Aboriginal people, embedded Aboriginal perspectives and began to define biculturalism in the pedagogical and curriculum process. These programs challenged shifts in learners’
accustomed understandings of themselves, their society/culture/knowledge-base and their relationship with others to new ways of understanding. These programs strove to integrate the dimensions of the whole person in their approach to program design—acknowledging the spiritual, physical, intellectual and the psychological aspects of learning, as well as the importance of community. They acknowledged the Ayaawx, the ancestral law of the Northwest First Nations people, expressed in traditional language, song, ceremony, story and daily living, and the impact of the First Nations worldview and the worldviews of mainstream society upon one another.

The approach of these three programmatic initiatives was characterized by the following features:

- Recognition that responsive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with, and connection to, the community is central to Aboriginal education;
- A reconceptualised construct of teacher—instead of instructors being constructed as ‘expert’, the construct became instructors as facilitators/mentors, and;
- Recognition that instructors cannot be experts in another person’s culture if they do not share that cultural background and that non-Aboriginal people cannot speak for Aboriginals. Non-Aboriginals can however, create appropriate learning environments which welcome and respect the voice of the Aboriginal student and encourage dialogue.
In discussions with the educational champions of these programs, these instructors also noted that to be effective in this new paradigm, knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal worldview, the history of colonisation, and the dynamics of racism were critical (Ken Downs, Sherry Ronaasen and Dean of Trades and Industrial Training, Margo van der Touw, Personal communications, 2010).

These programs served as critical transformative projects within the College, championing and leading change throughout all program areas. The Kitlope Field School, designed to recognize and provide a respectful sharing of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal paradigms, took a uniquely Aboriginal approach to learning and introduced the College to “place-based” learning. This approach served to shed new meaning on applied experiential education, immersing students and educators in a world where they were compelled to understand the Aboriginal worldview.

The Kitlope program also forged new ground in mainstream understanding of ‘academic credentials.’ Henaaksiala/Haisla Elders were engaged in the teaching of university level courses alongside western academics; their wisdom and expertise was acknowledged as valid and important.

The success of the Kitlope Field School in formally grounding mainstream curricula in traditional Aboriginal knowledge and values was an important first step in actualizing the bicultural agenda of the College’s Strategic Plan. Many other programs were subsequently built upon its successes and the transformative understandings that were shared.

“The Kitlope Field School program also served to demonstrate the role of education in the “healing of colonial wounds” (Elder Gerald Amos, Personal communication, at the Kitlope Field School, June 2005).
Validation, acknowledgement and celebration of Aboriginal ways of being and knowing were all evidenced in the Kitlope Field School, undoing the previous “silencing and negations” of Aboriginal people.

The power of education to heal and to right colonial legacies continued to emerge even more strongly with the advent of the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. Whereas other art programs privilege western European art as the benchmark of artistic merit, the Freda Diesing School reclaims the role and importance of First Nations art, stories and perspectives in the modern world. This reclamation has had a profound effect on the students, the College community and the art community. Through the honouring of traditional knowledge and relationships in the human, natural and spiritual worlds, the School effectively has redressed the previous assimilative intentions (Arbon, 2008) of mainstream education and inspired those alienated from their culture to celebrate and embrace their traditional roots.

The School of Exploration and Mining built upon the “place-based” approach to education has adopted a holistic applied, experiential pedagogy, and has woven Aboriginal culture and sustainability perspectives into its curriculum. The School has successfully become a significant provider of bicultural education for an industry sector previously criticized for its exploration and mining practices, and its attitudes towards Aboriginal people and, in the process, its program has emerged as a model of industry training within a bicultural paradigm.

Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Committee

The Kitlope Field School, the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art and the School of Exploration and Mining are just three examples of the College’s
changing view of instructional design, development and delivery. As the bicultural approach to the pedagogical/curriculum development process emerged, Aboriginal student success grew. By 2008, 44% of the student body of the College was of Aboriginal descent and graduation rates had increased. (NWCC Annual Year Two Report, 2009) These numbers encouraged a change to the program and course approval process to support the College’s vision. A new joint committee of Education Council and First Nations Council called the *Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Committee* was established, drawing representatives from First Nations Council, Education Council and the House of Learning and Applied Research. The first appointees were selected based upon their demonstrated understanding of First Nations perspectives and their understanding and leadership of Aboriginal approaches to learning. Not only did this Committee prove to be an important guide and support for faculty departments, the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Committee served to establish important accountability measures within the course/program approval process.

As part of the course/program approval process any new or revised program or course had to be vetted and endorsed by the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Committee for Aboriginal content before it could be submitted to Education Council for final approval. Specifically, this Committee was responsible for the following actions:

Reviewing a course or program proposal for Aboriginal cultural content and making one of the following recommendations:
1. That the proposal does not need Aboriginal cultural content, in which case the proposal is forwarded to the Course/Program Advisory Committee (CPAC);

2. That the proposal should have Aboriginal cultural content, in which case the Committee will report that:
   - The proposal has appropriate Aboriginal cultural content, and the proposal is forwarded to CPAC or;
   - The proposal does not have appropriate Aboriginal cultural content and the Committee makes remedial recommendations that will be addressed before the proposal is forwarded to CPAC.

3. Informing Education Council, First Nations Council and the House of Learning and Applied Research on the advancement of Aboriginal cultural knowledge in curriculum; and,

4. Advising of any challenges or emerging best practices that may be observed so as to enhance efforts to achieve greater incorporation of cultural knowledge and perspective in curriculum and further communication of the same to the institution.

That the legislated Education Council of the College initiated the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Advisory Committee was especially significant in the bicultural transformation of the College. As a result, this Committee had the ability to influence the incorporation of Aboriginal knowledge and values into the College’s curriculum. It is important to note that the Education Council was comprised primarily of faculty and staff from throughout the College, thus the establishment of the Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Advisory Committee was not a top-down
directive, but co-emerged from the conversations and the relationships which developed between members of Education Council and First Nations Council.

As the desire to embed Aboriginal cultural knowledge and values in various programs and courses throughout the College increased, it was critical to ensure that faculty had the appropriate resources at their disposal. Questions such as, “where does one turn for advice and input about cultural knowledge and practice,” and “who are the Aboriginal Knowledge Keepers for the various First Nations communities in the College’s region,” needed to be answered.

Through close consultations with First Nations Council representatives, the House of Learning and Applied Research worked to provide key contacts, resources, and/or knowledge to enable departments to

- Establish curriculum that reflects and respects Aboriginal cultural diversity;
- Ensure curriculum is inclusive of and mutually interactive with Aboriginal culture;
- Develop awareness of Aboriginal cultural knowledge that may be appropriately incorporated into curriculum;
- Access Aboriginal Knowledge Keepers that might be called upon as guest presenters, co-facilitators, guest instructors or ideally new instructors (employees) for the College.

The Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge Advisory Committee served as an effective strategic addition to the mainstream, legislated structure governing program and course approval processes within the College. And while program departments did not always welcome the introduction of this ‘additional’ step, the work of this
Committee served to further imbed Indigenous perspectives into our mainstream curriculum and the acceptance of the same grew.

**Provincial and National Acknowledgement**

As news of the “unlearning” taking place at NWCC, and of the transformative, Aboriginal-inspired, best practices emerged at NWCC, the College began to gain provincial and national acknowledgement. I, and members of the College community were increasingly being called upon to lead workshops and in-service discussions with other post-secondary colleagues about our work and findings at NWCC. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the College community frequently co-presented with a First Nations Council member or Elder. At the 2006 annual conference of the national Association of Canadian Community Colleges, NWCC staff, and First Nations Council members in Montreal, Quebec, presented thirteen discrete workshops on the transformative work occurring at the College.

As we progressed in our determination to create a new vision of post-secondary in the Northwest, the College became successful in receiving Aboriginal funding grants from the Provincial government to enhance Aboriginal student access and success. In 2008, the College received a special Aboriginal Service Plan funding grant of $600,000 per year for a three-year period to develop and help implement specified goals and objectives initiated by the Strategic Plan. This grant provided welcomed dollars to further the bicultural journey.
The Aboriginal Service Plan—Renewal of the College’s Strategic Plan

The Aboriginal Service Plan funding initiative required evidence of Aboriginal engagement as to how the funds would be used. NWCC First Nations Council took a lead role with the College Executive in this process and together they created a Task Force to direct and guide consultations with First Nations Institutes and the British Columbia Métis Nation as well as with First Nations communities and students.

The Aboriginal Service Plan resulted in a number of specific strategic outcomes. These outcomes include the following:

1. Promote/further the partnerships between Northwest Community College and the First Nations Bands, the Métis Northwest Region, and the First Nations Institutes of the Northwest;
2. Develop a model for developing and sharing Indigenized curriculum to further Aboriginal culture and knowledge;
3. Develop a model for the development and facilitated delivery of Aboriginal language conversation programs by our First Nations Institute partners;
4. Create specialized curricula for health and wellness related to critical Aboriginal health and social barriers;
5. Undertake strategies to enhance Aboriginal learner transitions between the Northwest First Nations Institutes and NWCC;
6. Expand and enhance the Elder-in-Residence programs;
7. Establish Aboriginal mentor/tutor program to develop Aboriginal educators and leaders

8. Expand partnerships to address the human resources required for the exploration and mining sector and requisite skilled Trades personnel;

9. Develop partnerships to address the human resources required specifically by the international seaport and marine sector;

10. Develop/expand a network of knowledge-keepers and reputed others who can speak on Aboriginal topics.

Through the collaborative Aboriginal Service Plan development process, specific accountabilities were agreed upon with our Aboriginal partners. These accountabilities were measurable and reported upon quarterly to First Nations Council and the College Board.

The development of the Aboriginal Service Plan project provided three unintended, but important outcomes:

1. It once again engaged the College in in-depth consultations with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders.

2. It initiated a new approach to the process of stakeholder consultations. College Executive members alongside a member(s) of First Nations Council and Elders led consultations such that the new “face” of the College was demonstrable. This process expressed our support for First Nations culture, and our commitment to reconciliation and a College in which both cultures respectfully co-existed.

3. The Aboriginal Service Plan consultations caused the College to re-examine its current Strategic Plan, precipitating an early renewal of
the College Strategic Plan and leading to revised strategic objectives and actions of the same. These revisions made clearer the path to the bicultural goal envisioned for the College.

Key revisions to the College Strategic Plan connected to the College’s bicultural goal included the following four strategic objectives and actions in the NWCC Aboriginal Service Plan, November 2008:

1. **Strategic Objective: Enhance Service and Support to Aboriginal Learners**
   
   **Strategic Actions:**
   
   a) Enhance student services within the College through increased engagement of Elders and Aboriginal Student Access Coordinators
   
   b) Expand student outreach to the community to express the Aboriginal value that knowledge is gained for the improvement of the community not just the individual
   
   c) Develop streamlined transition processes with First Nations Education Institutes in the Northwest to enhance access and continued learning

2. **Strategic Objective: Indigenize Curriculum Development & Delivery**
   
   **Strategic Actions:**
   
   a) Develop a framework for appropriate development of Indigenized curriculum
   
   b) Develop additional Aboriginal programs and curriculum
c) Develop processes which formally recognize the knowledge of Elders and Aboriginal knowledge keepers in the learning setting

3. Strategic Objective: Enhance Employee Understanding and Awareness of Aboriginal History, Culture and Knowledge

Strategic Actions:

a) Initiate professional development opportunities which promote the decolonization of teaching and enhance understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and knowledge

b) Promote applied research endeavours which are rooted in First Nations principles and philosophies

c) Host dialogues and teaching on the appropriate incorporation of First Nations culture, knowledge and practice


Strategic Actions:

a) Develop policies, practices and structures to expand the Aboriginal workforce at the college

b) Develop policies, programming practices and structures to accommodate Aboriginal learners

C) Develop policies and processes to ensure the appropriate inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge, culture and practice

Local needs, interests and goals informed the Aboriginal Service Plan (and consequently the renewal of the Strategic Plan) and both Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal people were involved in its research and design. The implementation of the Plan served to support the empowerment of Aboriginal communities by fulfilling practical and concrete needs to improve the daily well being of Aboriginal Peoples. The Plan adopted a holistic approach to student support and service, incorporating plans for student assessment, outreach, assessment and inclusion. The Plan emphasized the importance of community-based engagement and programming, authentic partnerships, transparent decision-making, accountability and culturally appropriate training and education. Importantly, the Plan acknowledged the necessity and importance of making time and place for reflection and relationship.

The development of the Aboriginal Service Plan by NWCC and the processes that ensued was further evidence of the secure place the voice of First Nations communities had acquired in the decision-making of the College by this time in the bicultural journey. The development of the Aboriginal Service Plan provided further impetus and opportunity for First Nations Council to work with the College to articulate and implement a consultation framework based on respect, recognition, and reconciliation. In turn, Council representatives liaised with their Aboriginal communities or Aboriginal Institutes with their Boards to ensure the Aboriginal leadership views were voiced in the consultations that took place and, where needed, in the decisions being made. The process of developing the Aboriginal Service Plan enhanced the climate of collaboration and power sharing.

The Bicultural Paradigm

The early relationships between the Europeans explorers and the First Nations warrant addressing in this thesis. These early years of contact were heavily influenced and shaped by Aboriginal ideas: egalitarianism, a proper balance between
individual and group, and a penchant for negotiation over violence—all Aboriginal values that Canada absorbed. (Saul, 2008) The journey to a bicultural NWCC may be framed as the question John Ralston Saul (2008, p. 12) put to Canadians: “What would our education system look like if we had, as a Canadian society, continued to honor the civilization that was prevalent in the first 250 years of our civilization which were shaped and guided by the First Nations people of these lands?” In A Fair Country, Saul argues that a way of living and being in these lands was completely hijacked by the British Empire, after Confederation, in the late 1880s and 90s. He claims that the British Empire rewrote the history of Canada and as Canadians we are all still struggling with this reality (Saul, 2008).

For decades Northwest Community College struggled with the legacy of colonization that has left definitive marks on the survivors of residential schools and the generations that followed. As the attitudes and beliefs of this colonial period took root, many Canadians, having been marinated through our education system and the attitudes and practices of the dominant culture, now have an understanding of Canada’s Aboriginal people that belies the richness and sophistication of the traditional Aboriginal worldview and knowledge. These false and limiting views of Canada’s Aboriginal people continue to permeate mainstream organizations. This reality was evident at many points in the journey of the College. Despite the Government of British Columbia call for “transformative change involving the re-creating of existing institutions” through an MOU with First Nations leaders and the post-secondary system (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2005), it was clear that the Province had no idea what do to with an institution like NWCC who took to heart this message. Calls by the Board of Governors and myself for new legislation which would recognize the transformation of this College as a bicultural institution and
requests that the composition of the Board be supportive of this change and reflective of the Aboriginal demographic it served, went unheeded and were ignored; the importance of this progressive agenda was ironically lost on those responsible for enacting the words of the MOU.

While the emergence of a bicultural institution in the shell of the formerly mainstream NWCC might be lost on those in government, it is not lost on the people of the Northwest and those who study and work there. The eyes of these people have been significantly changed and they are now the stewards of this transformation.

Transformative change requires change at a very deep and personal level; the change at NWCC has permeated the thinking and attitudes of the many who worked and, in turn, caused the structures and processes to change to those that support the new bicultural paradigm. Northwest Community College became the vision to which we had aspired: a College that incorporates and celebrates the Aboriginal paradigm of knowledge systems and a College in which the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews respectfully co-exist.

This chapter describes the changes to the College’s governance and authority arrangements that accompanied the bicultural educational programs that were at the vanguard of pedagogical and curriculum transformation within NWCC. The bicultural paradigm that came into existence was forged through both the programmatic developments described in the previous chapters and the organizational innovations that gave authority and authenticity to the First Nations voice in the governance of the College. Both developments, occurring in parallel, provided the necessary conditions for the lessons of Txeemsim to bear the fruit of a
bicultural paradigm within a post-secondary education institution in Northwest British Columbia.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

What Lessons for Higher Education?

“Every journey toward transformation begins with a reflection on those things for which one cares deeply about, and the relationships that exist in one’s inner and outer worlds” (Cajete, 1994, p. 190).

The Journey

This dissertation follows the journey of NWCC in its quest to shift its established education paradigm and explores whether it was possible for the College to be non-hegemonic and bicultural. It examines the differences between the Aboriginal and the Eurocentric paradigms for systematic education and identifies the conditions required for achieving meaningful change. It notes that transformation of individuals within the institution is important to bringing about deep systemic change.

The journey has had a significant impact on my own view of post-secondary education and the role of educational leaders. My work at NWCC transformed my understanding of the education paradigm that I had been conditioned to believe in and to accept uncritically. This was a deeply personal journey as I acknowledged that I had, like so many others, internalized many of the fundamental assumptions underlying post-secondary education in Canada.

The Eurocentric knowledge base upon which our post-secondary system was founded continues to support colonization by maintaining one frame of reference,
and one dominant mode of thought, whilst disclaiming other cultural knowledge bases and values. It perpetuates damaging myths about Aboriginal cultures, languages, beliefs, and ways of life, and legitimizes the continued denial and confiscation of Aboriginal language, lands and wealth. Rather than liberating the human potential among Aboriginal peoples, it has had (and continues to have) quite the reverse affect; it has created a legacy among First Nations of personal self-doubt and feelings of inferiority and oppression.

During my ten years at NWCC as the College President, I lived amongst the First Nations of the Northwest, and learned from many Elders, Chiefs and Aboriginal Knowledge Keepers. I became immersed in the culture and cyclical lifestyle of the Ts’msyen in particular and was introduced to the songs, stories and ceremonies of a culturally rich knowledge system. I was adopted by Chief T’xaayye, and became a member of a large extended family who took me on as their own. I was given the name of Biyaalsim Jiiyuus or Morning Star – the star visible in the very early dawn.

The name is an old Killer Whale clan name. Each region in the Northwest has one person in the clan with a reference to the sacred name of morning star. At one time in our clan history the star people captured a clan-member. They came from the sky one day and took the young one away. Eventually, the young one returned with a great deal of mystical knowledge. The ancient killer whale clan matriarchs proclaimed the essence of the star as their emblem. The name is a symbolic reminder within the killer whale clan history of the thirst for knowledge and the spiritual growth that accompanies it. (P. MacKay, personal communication, February 2014)

My name, as Chief T’xaayye explained to me, is representative of the role I was called to perform and the responsibility that I carry for the people of the Killer Whale clan.
Upon the death of my father and some years prior to coming to Northwest Community College, I learned that I had Blackfoot Indian ancestry from my father’s side of the family, something that was never acknowledged when I was growing up. As I immersed myself in the Indigenous cultural knowledge paradigm of the Northwest First Nations, I understood the draw of my first journey to Haida Gwaii and the compulsion I felt to join the College. Here, in these remote villages and landscapes, I was given the opportunity to discover my heritage and gain an insight into a way of knowing, learning and being in the world that resonated with me. Aboriginal knowledge is based on personal experience and the experiences of others observed and considered over hundreds of years; it is based on social values such as respect, authenticity and stewardship. As a knowledge system it is not static, it is constantly adapting to the dynamically changing experiences life presents us with as well as to changing social values. What I intuitively felt about organizations as webs of interconnected relationships and the leader as steward and guide became clearer for me as I came to view my role through the lens of the Aboriginal paradigm.

Now, after living in tune with the Aboriginal paradigm for over fourteen years, the perspectives of the Northwest Coast First Peoples, the ceremonies and the experiences have become an integral part of my life and my view of the world.

The Indigenous worldview influenced and affirmed my approach to the presidency role and my own leadership. It provided a new framework in which to approach the challenges of the bicultural journey and encouraged “learning from reflecting on the past, and learning from sensing and acknowledging emerging future possibilities” (Scharmer, 2014).
This new framework was demonstrated in the many transformative projects that emerged at NWCC, catalyzing and motivating deep cultural shifts within the previously established education paradigm of the College.

The acceptance and cultivation of skills informed by First Nations pedagogical values, skills associated with observation and doing, with learning through authentic experience, retreat, reflection, consultation, listening with an open mind and acknowledging an inner sense of knowing, and the acceptance of experiences emerging from this cultivation, became central in my leadership journey. These experiences encouraged deeper capacities of knowing for me and for others involved in the transformative process set underway at the College.

The axiom of one heart served as the foundation to the “relationship-centered” leadership approach that emerged for me, and for the leadership team at the College. This axiom reminds us “. . . that all life is sacred and all life forms are connected; humans are neither above nor below others in the circle of life; everything that exists in the circle is one unity, of one heart” (Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 259).

Grounded in the Indigenous paradigm, my leadership practice grew as I placed more emphasis on the importance of being “in relationship” with those whom we sought to serve and support, to be mindful, to show compassion and to strive to awaken the creativity of others. I understood more fully that my role was to model and encourage others to build trust through the co-creation of authentic, reciprocal relationships, and to “place more value on the processes and interrelationships than the ‘things’ that grew out of them” (Alford, 2001, Para 21).
Focused on the web of relationships at play within the College, I shed linear patterns of thinking and planning, and dispensed with the notion that leaders ‘manage change.’ I became more confident in my role as guide and facilitator, seeking out and supporting people with ideas for change and fostering critical conversations of the bicultural journey within the College and the vision for the future. As networks of people embraced the vision and explored its meaning for the College and our students, I knew my role was to celebrate and support that learning and to nurture greater engagement and further change.

The “relationship-centered” leadership approach meshed well with the College’s transformative journey and served as a new leadership framework for an education system challenged to overcome the relationships of colonization.

The journey of Northwest Community College demonstrates that it is possible to shift the Eurocentric paradigm to make authentic space for a bicultural environment within a mainstream institution, and offers many messages for post-secondary institutions in Canada. I summarize in the following sections the significant messages that now inform my understanding of what is necessary for transformative institutional change leading towards the establishment of a bi-cultural educational environment in a post-secondary college. I begin with the importance of acknowledging the colonial practices of mainstream education—a crucial first step on a complex journey.
Emerging Messages

Acknowledgement of the Colonial Practices of Mainstream Education

The central purpose of integrating Northwest Coast First Nations knowledge and perspectives into the College was to balance the post-secondary system to make it a transforming and capacity-building place for First Nations students. The message of Txeemsim, and that of my own experience, is that educational institutions will only change if we are, as individuals and institutions, willing to first do the inner work and engage directly with Aboriginal knowledge and consciousness.

As we seek to construct a bicultural education paradigm we cannot skip the step of self-reflection and personal examination. We also cannot omit exposing the injustices of our colonial history or deconstructing the past through a critical examination of the reasons leading to the devastation of Aboriginal knowledge and the subsequent oppression felt by Aboriginal peoples. We have to engage in dialogues that explore and uncover the flawed assumptions of the Eurocentric education paradigm, and we must be willing to safely communicate the unsettling emotions that that exploration will create within us. For mainstream institutions, the absence of undertaking this work has frequently resulted in a lack of institutional understanding of the enormity or the criticality of the work at hand. It has led to initiatives intended to support and serve Aboriginal students becoming ‘side-lined’ or segregated within isolated departments and falling short of their goals. Various
examples of this work of reflection and dialogue may be found in Canada’s institutions, such as the School of Indigenous Education, an Aboriginal instruction and Student Support Centre within Red River College in Manitoba and Negahneewin, a separate college within Confederation College in Ontario—both extraordinary undertakings that have struggled to have more than a limited impact on these institutions as a whole.

Moving towards the righting of the education paradigm requires nothing less than a complete exploration of the failings of why the Eurocentric education system has continued to oppress First Nations peoples, resulting in a full understanding of the reasons why this paradigm has failed and continues to fail in its attempts to integrate Aboriginal Canadians, together with an understanding of the importance and the urgency of the need for more fundamental change. It also requires that educators make a conscious decision to be agents of change, to learn about Aboriginal knowledge and culture and to determine to make change in their approach to pedagogy and learning.

This is the message of Txeemsim—it is critical that the requisite inner transformation occur in order to restore balance in the world.

**Affirmation of the Aboriginal Worldview**

A critical theme in the decolonization story of Northwest Community College central to this thesis is the journey of discovery and acknowledgement of the worldview held by the First Nations of the Northwest. Throughout the transformative projects outlined within this thesis. Indigenous knowledge, perspectives and cultural expressions were acknowledged and respected as holding significance for a way of
knowing and being that held important lessons for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. As a result, the projects explored in the chapters of this thesis describe the lengths to which Indigenous knowledge was appropriately researched, considered and integrated throughout the College. Those involved were sincere in their belief that Aboriginal knowledge held important lessons for all learners and for the College community. This belief was a critical first step. Post-secondary institutions need to acknowledge the validity of Aboriginal knowledge and encourage the dissemination, development and survival of that knowledge in an effort to create culturally rich and dynamic educational contexts that combine both Aboriginal and Eurocentric knowledge systems within an emergent bicultural paradigm.

**Development and Adoption of Local Protocols**

The First Nations of the Northwest are not homogenous in their cultural expressions, practices and processes. While many similarities exist, it is critical that consultations with individual Nations and their communities take place for the uptake and support of Aboriginal knowledge and practice. At NWCC, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations’ *Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Indigenous Heritage* (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2013) served as the foundation for the development of local protocols. Great effort was undertaken to host Elders Gatherings, and to engage in consultations with local communities, their hereditary chiefs and their recognized “keepers of Aboriginal knowledge.” This work, overseen by the House of Learning and Applied Research, led not only to the emergence of local protocols, practices and procedures for accessing First Nations knowledge for the College, but also ensured that the traditional ownership of that knowledge was respected and not usurped.
Recognition of First Nations Knowledge Keepers

The recognition of First Nations Elders and Knowledge Keepers as masters of Indigenous knowledge and arts became a prevailing theme in the NWCC journey. Their expertise was an important resource in all of the projects described within this thesis. Validating the relevance and importance of these individuals to the teaching and support of First Nations culture, practice and traditional ecological knowledge challenged mainstream academic norms that equates expertise with the holding of a publicly recognized credential such as a Higher Education degree awarded by a Eurocentric university. But as was described in the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art and in the Kitlope Field School chapters, Elders and Knowledge Keepers were the primary sources for the teachings offered. Their leadership and engagement in the learning process resulted in profound and transformational learning experiences for all those participating. Canadian institutions need to appropriately acknowledge the important resource we have in Aboriginal Elders and Knowledge Keepers, legitimize their voices and experiences and embrace the teachings they can offer our post-secondary institutions and the learning of both our students and faculty staff.

Capacity Development and Support

The House of Learning and Applied Research at NWCC served the important role of building capacity within the College. Focusing on the obstacles that inhibited staff from realizing the bicultural goal, Chapter 7 described the many strategies developed and adopted for disseminating decolonizing theory and emerging bicultural practice as well as including and supporting the learning and discovery of First Nations knowledge, traditions and pedagogy. Through the hosting of
dialogues, Celebrating the Wisdom of the Elders, brown bag lunches, Learning from Place camps, and more, the House of Learning and Applied Research consistently nurtured critical dialogues and learning throughout the College. This focus on capacity building and support within the institution was significant in maintaining the momentum of the transformative journey and served to inspire and motivate the College community.

A common error in post-secondary institutions in Canada is the assumption that Aboriginal teachers are inherently knowledgeable about Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy. The reality is that Aboriginal teachers feel as unprepared as the non-Aboriginal instructors who strive to integrate Aboriginal content into their lessons. For NWCC, the House of Learning and Applied Research served as an important learning and networking forum and resource for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal faculty and administrators.

The House of Learning and Applied Research serves as an important, if not essential, model for other post-secondary institutions beginning this transformative journey.

Communities of Practice

The House of Learning and Applied Research also supported the annual Challenging the Paradigm Gathering hosted by the College. This Gathering drew Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators to the Northwest to dialogue with Elders and leaders in Indigenous education, to share emerging practices, to learn from Aboriginal knowledge keepers and to expand the dialogue of decolonizing post-secondary education. The annual Challenging the Paradigm Gathering spawned a
A provincial community of educators dedicated to transformative change, many of whom became active in the national Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC)’s Serving Aboriginal Peoples network and annual Symposium. (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2014)

The *Challenging the Paradigm Gathering* points to the value of forming regional ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) within the Canadian post-secondary system for the purpose of gaining knowledge related to the decolonization of education. Through the process of sharing information and experiences, community members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves both personally and professionally in an integrated holistic way.

A significant challenge in redressing the legacy of colonization is finding the courage to go against the mainstream norm. The vast majority of educators in Canada are the products of an educational system built on colonial and racist assumptions about Aboriginal people. There is little scholarship, research or practice outlining the way forward to bring about the transformative change described in this thesis. Communities of practice offer a supportive learning network in which educators might share their experiences, dialogue with Elders and Knowledge Keepers and collectively explore the journey towards a new education paradigm, an emergent bicultural paradigm.

**Representative Board Governance**

It is not uncommon for Colleges and Institutes to seek Board members representative of the communities they serve. What is uncommon is the legislative...
requirement to do so. Having the voice of those an institution seeks to serve and support has long been acknowledged as a practice of good governance (Agere, 2000) yet the British Columbia Colleges and Institute Act remains silent on this topic. (College and Institute Act, 1996) The Act gives the power of appointment to the British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor in Council with no acknowledgement of the skills or knowledge the appointees might be required to possess. As a result, achieving Aboriginal representation on the Board of Governors of community colleges was left to the Board Chair and to the President’s ability to influence the British Columbia Corporate Board and Resourcing Office—the body responsible for making board appointment recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Legislation which supports the appointment of Aboriginal members to the Boards of post-secondary institutions in Canada would serve to bring the Aboriginal voice to our boardrooms and would emphasize the government’s commitment to change in the area of post-secondary education.

**Aboriginal Advisory Councils**

In many jurisdictions in Canada, the Boards of Colleges and Institutes have the ability to establish committees. In British Columbia law, College Boards have the authority to create advisory committees (College and Institute Act, 1996, section 22). At NWCC, the Board created an advisory committee, which became known as “First Nations Council.” This Council served to assist the College Board and Administration in the College’s transformative journey by providing input, leadership and oversight. The success of this Council required a shared vision, clear terms of reference and the positive engagement of the President and other senior staff. Reporting to the Board and engaging regularly with the senior leadership and
staff through Council meetings, the First Nations Council served to emphasize the mutual commitment of the Northwest First Nations and the College leadership to travel the bicultural journey together.

The First Nations model successfully operated within NWCC given the context of the Northwest Aboriginal communities and the relationships that evolved between the College and these communities. I believe post-secondary institutions would find value in discovering appropriate and respectful means by which to formally engage the voice of the Aboriginal community.

**Bicultural Pedagogy**

The post-secondary system continues to largely ignore Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy, perpetuating the educational crisis that has been endlessly quantified and analyzed, and exposing the failure for Aboriginal Peoples of the mainstream Eurocentric perspective that has structured educational theory and practice. This thesis narrates three transformative programs in which the College strove to respectffully blend Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy with Eurocentric epistemology and pedagogy to create a new bicultural paradigm. These programs reduced the distance between Eurocentric thinking and Aboriginal ways of knowing through the engagement of decolonized hearts and minds. (Visano & Jakubowski, 2002)

If we are not to repeat the failures of the post-secondary institutions’ efforts to mould the Aboriginal student to suit mainstream structures, then the message of individual and organizational transformation (the decolonized heart and mind that Visano and Jakubowski speak of) must be embraced.
The programs described within this thesis provide important messages for institutions seeking to transform mainstream pedagogy. All of these programs shared the characteristics of respect and acknowledgement of local Aboriginal pedagogy and ways of knowing. They validated the wisdom and experiences of Elders and Knowledge Keepers by drawing upon their expertise in both the design and delivery of curriculum. First Nations Knowledge Keepers were introduced and viewed as experts in the learning setting and were appropriately compensated for the teachings and expertise they provided to the College.21

Eurocentric curriculum and teaching styles are indifferent to the processes of Aboriginal knowledge acquisition and serve to continue the legacy of oppression and repression of Aboriginal students. Stiffarm (1998) cites that Aboriginal pedagogy is found in sharing circles and dialogues, participant observations, experiential learning, modelling, reflection, ceremonies, or story telling as ways of knowing and learning. Applied, experiential learning, learning from place, observing and doing, individualized instruction: these are the characteristics of Aboriginal pedagogy integrated in the key projects explored in this thesis.

A further observation evident in the narrative research of this thesis is the importance of making place and space for the Aboriginal worldview across the curriculum. Aboriginal knowledge is not something that may be ‘added onto’ existing curricula. The programs describe curriculum design approaches that are significantly different than the mainstream approaches and, in so doing, sought to integrate Aboriginal knowledge and the expertise of Aboriginal people in ways that affected core learning. Integrating Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy in the

21 Compensation for Indigenous Knowledge Keepers might take a variety of forms depending upon the instructional period – from an honorarium to an ongoing faculty contract. In all cases the compensation was commensurate to faculty salaries.
academy require us to engage with Aboriginal partners to legitimize the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education.

**Plural Symbolism and Education Learning Environments**

Throughout this thesis the impact of infusing the educational learning settings at NWCC with the language, symbolism and expressions of Aboriginal culture and ways of being was emphasized. The art of the Freda Diesing School and the symbolic plurality of totems, the longhouse, Indigenous gardens and bi-cultural signage were powerful vehicles for furthering transformative change at the College by providing an opportunity for Aboriginal learners to “see their reflection” (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000, p. 88) in the physical “place” of the College.

The art studio and the work of the students in the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art proved to be an especially compelling method of reclaiming and presenting Northwest First Nations knowledge, engendering respect, building pride and encouraging healing amongst the students.

The use of symbolic plurality is an especially powerful message for post-secondary institutions to consider in their quest for bicultural transformation.

**Honour Through Celebration**

Celebration is a common theme throughout the narrative of the bicultural journey of Northwest Community College. Northwest Coast First Nations culture is rich with song, music, dance, stories and ceremony, which frequently mark significant events and occurrences in life’s journey. As the College transformed, we made a point of honouring milestones, documenting significant change through story, art, and ceremony. This practice was a public display of institutional respect
and affirmation of Aboriginal knowledge “texts” marking for all to see the significant progress the College had made in its journey towards biculturalism.

**Indigenous Languages—Fundamental to the Bicultural Journey**

As Northwest Community College progressed in its journey, an understanding of the importance of Aboriginal language evolved. In the latter years of the journey, the College committed to offering for-credit courses in the languages of the First Nations and Métis people of the Northwest. Utilizing Language Keepers and Elders, these courses were often based within First Nations communities to encourage and authenticate participation.

Indigenous knowledge is most frequently transmitted through Aboriginal languages. The ability to speak an Aboriginal language is an indispensable part of Aboriginal identity, as these languages convey a sense of self, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of spiritual relationship to the universe.

Language is at the heart of First Nations culture and knowledge retention. Many Aboriginal people, especially Elders, believe that without language their culture and the essence of which they are, is lost. Language is the most fundamental way that cultural information is communicated and preserved. The important relationship of language to knowledge and the survival of a culture requires that any discussion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems must include language retention (Settee, 2008, p. 2).

There was little government support for the delivery of First Nations languages at the College, and courses were offered on non-sustainable funds, often cost-shared with a First Nations community. Going forward, communities, governments, and colleges must work together to preserve the cultural diversity of
Aboriginal communities by valuing and supporting the delivery of for-credit courses at colleges and institutes.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the key learning’s of this thesis in terms of a transformative journey towards biculturalism in a post-secondary education are as follows:

1. Acknowledgement of the Colonial Practices of Mainstream Education
2. Affirmation of the Aboriginal Worldview
3. Development and Adoption of Local Protocols
4. Recognition of First Nations Knowledge Keepers
5. Capacity Development and Support
6. Communities of Practice
7. Representative Board Governance
8. Aboriginal Advisory Council
9. Bicultural Pedagogy
10. Plural Symbolism and Education Learning Environments
11. Honour through Celebration
12. Indigenous Languages—Fundamental to the Biculturalism Journey

The above are not intended to be a technical ‘tick the box’ list for other institutions to follow, but rather as signposts or messages for educators to consider, contemplate and reflect upon.

Certainly, from my own journey as an educational leader at NWCC, the most important message for other institutions, other presidents, board members and First
Nations people involved in the decision-making within post-secondary institutions is the necessity of personal change. Redressing the legacy of colonization within Canada’s post-secondary institutions fundamentally challenges us to internalize the messages of T’xeesim.

Transformation of self is a significant obstacle and stumbling block. What we witnessed at NWCC is that some people resisted change completely; others only came part way and others yet felt threatened. But as a critical mass of people experienced or witnessed the criticality of the vision, and the empowering effect it was having on, not only our First Nations communities but on all of us, more and more people joined the journey.

A significant challenge for people contemplating the journey is the absence of a clear end point because the concept of a bicultural journey is not well understood and beyond many people’s imagination. Certainly as a College, we were challenged to find successful examples from which we could learn. Having lived this journey for over seven years, the fragility of it stands out for me. It is fragile because it is counter hegemonic and required constant and sustained transformative energy and positive leadership. The default position is always the Eurocentric paradigm, a paradigm to which I knew I would never return.

Fundamentally, as this thesis illustrates, bicultural education is only a concept, a vision easily spoken but always still to be realized, a concept that signals a pathway to be taken. Achieving such a vision demands not technical transformation, as many change management theorists would have us believe, it requires an internal personal and organizational change that is both seen and unseen, both discernable by milestones achieved and the unfolding of next steps. This brings a whole new level
of complexity to the task as it requires us to reimagine our views of education and the leadership styles that these may be compatible with such change while engaging in the problematic process of change towards fulfilling one’s bicultural vision.

Txeemsim serves as a strong and powerful First Nations metaphor for the emergence of a bicultural institution and supports the deep-seated identity shift that is required of all of us who seek to engage in the transformative process.
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