

THE PHENOMENON OF LOW FIRST NATION HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN
CANADA AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST NATION CHIEFS

BY

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

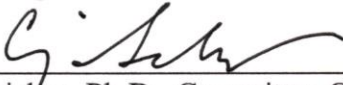
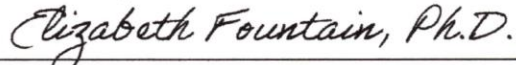
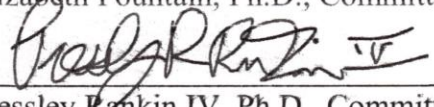

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Where do I start? When I think of the journey I have just taken, I cannot help but think of my grandfather, Thomas Gibot who signed Treaty 8 in 1899. In that treaty, education was promised to the First Nation people, and I made it to the top of the western education system. From the time of 1899 to 2020, I have climbed that education ladder. I have honored my grandfather and all the First Nation leaders who signed the treaties.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of low high school graduation rates of First Nation students in Canada and the perceptions of First Nation chiefs. From the time of contact with First Nation people in Canada to the present, education has been a contention point (Anderson & Richard, 2016; Morris, 1862). Although there have been efforts made to address the education gap, in comparison to the rest of Canada, none of the efforts have been successful (Wilkins, 2017). The solution plans provided through the Canadian education system have not bridged the gap (Omand, 2016). In a report by Anderson and Richards (2016), a recommendation was made to involve First Nation leaders, not chiefs, for student success. With limited research in the area, it was unknown whether this involvement will improve student success. Ten chiefs in two Canadian provinces participated in the study. One-on-one semi-structured interviews completed the data gathering process. As the data analysis unfolded, three themes were identified, which led to four recommendations. One of the themes expressed the value of education. This study revealed First Nation people have always valued education but from the First Nation worldview. This study was significant because, for the first time, it records the voices of the chiefs on the phenomenon of First Nations' low high school graduation rates. Recommendations were made that direct the chiefs to be involved in the educational process and provide guidance for current education systems in Canada, all of which could increase high school graduation rates.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Researchers have found that there was a gap between Canadian mainstream students and First Nation students when it comes to high school graduation rates (Gordon & White, 2014; Richard, 2016). In a report by the Howe Institute Commentary, a periodic analysis of and commentary on current public policy issues, Anderson and Richards (2016) found that First Nation students were less successful than mainstream Canadian students when it comes to high school completion. Overall, high school graduation for the Canadian population of First Nation students was lower than the general Canadian population (O’Gorman & Pandey, 2015; Omand, 2016).

The reasons why this high school graduation gap exists were numerous. Researchers have discovered that some of the causes for this phenomenon were the impacts of poor living conditions of First Nation students, the legacy of Indian Residential School (IRS) programs, and First Nation students being pushed out of high school (Anderson, Fleming & Mussio, 2018; Hanks, 1972; Johnston-Goodstar & Roholt, 2017). As noted, the reasons were numerous and continue to impede graduation rates to the present.

While the reasons for the low high school graduation rates for First Nation youth were varied, another area of note and one explored within this dissertation was how First Nation chiefs understand and address this educational issue. Little has been found about the viewpoints and understandings First Nation chiefs might offer regarding the problem. Chiefs, according to Donovan (2014), did not believe they were properly engaged as they quite often felt ignored by the Federal government. Donovan reported that Perry Bellegarde, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, indicated that he wanted to sit down with the Federal government to discuss education, which could lead to a better understanding of how education can and should work in Canada and that this understanding among First Nation people may lead to action.

Bellegarde further stated that education was the key to reconciliation because it builds bridges of understanding (Chiefs Education of Ontario Portal, 2019). As noted by Donovan (2014), chiefs want to work with the Federal government to address the issues of education and specifically the low high school graduation rates. Communication between chiefs and the Federal government may be one of the tools for increased education attainment at the local school level (Galloway, 2019).

The focus of this research study was to discover what viewpoints and wisdom First Nation chiefs might provide to create a more in-depth understanding of the low graduation rates of First Nation students and what possible strategies offered by the chiefs might be followed for resolving this problem. Strategies thus far involving the chiefs have not been documented. I have explored these strategies, as well as new opportunities, in this dissertation

Study Background/Foundation

The historical and cultural underpinnings of First Nation education were important to making sense of the lived experience data, which will be shared following the results of this study. To provide a study background and foundation concerning Canadian First Nation people, it was imperative to understand the context of the many attempts made to assimilate them into the European culture upon which Canada was built (Fontaine, 2017; Young, 2015). One example of the past practice was the creation of Indian Residential Schools, a method of education delivery that negatively impacted many First Nation people (Barnes & Josefowitz, 2019).

First Nation people in Canada have been a focus of contention since the first contact with European cultures. White and Peters (2009) pointed out, in a short history of First Nation education in Canada, the attempted assimilation through the Indian Residential Schools. This assimilation process negatively impacted the family as a whole when children were forcefully removed from the home. They noted the first known Indian Residential School for First Nation

youth was established near Quebec, Ontario, Canada by the Recollet missionaries in 1620. This French order believed that First Nation youth had to become Frenchmen before being converted to Christianity. This approach failed because parents stopped their children from attending these schools. Although the Recollets had an impact, it was short-lived. Subsequently, in 1629, the English captured the province of Quebec, and the Recollets were forced to leave the colony. Even though the Recollets returned to France, the process of colonization did not stop. The churches and the government continued to recruit First Nation youths into the Indian Residential Schools.

Cohen et al. (2007) stated that in phenomenology, individuals' consciousness shifts from one area to the next within their daily lives. They stated people had to make changes in their lives to fit the norm of their surroundings, in this case, between the First Nation lifestyles and the Europeans. This leap of consciousness was evident when viewing the daily activities of First Nation women. For example, when First Nation women were out in the bush picking berries at four o'clock p.m. and were racing against the amount of daylight left in the day, they had to stop picking berries when the church bells rang. Consequently, the bell ringing interrupted their berry picking time, hence not fulfilling their quota to feed the family. This colonization process would continue to the 1800s (Schiffer, 2016; White & Peters, 2009).

Cultural differences were also an influence on the kinds of laws created by the Europeans that often worked against First Nation culture. The First Nation people had to live and abide under various Acts of the day. For instance, in 1876, the British Crown transferred responsibility of the First Nation people to the Canadian Government (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). This transfer created major changes for the First Nation people and their way of life. The First Nation people were under the Canadian government's administration in matters of

education and election of chiefs. They did not have any recourse with the changes but had to abide by the rules set out towards assimilation.

In addition, authors of studies have documented the impact European education had on First Nation people (Fontaine, 2017; Young, 2015). Morris (1862) noted the chiefs who signed the treaties within these early days accepted that change was inevitable, and the First Nation people believed education could help the youth survive in the western world (Smith, 2016). What was absent in the Morris report was a discussion about the delivery method of western education, and there were no records of what the chiefs understood.

First Nation students did not respond positively to European education. Young (2015), in his research on First Nation children who attended the Indian Residential Schools, provided an example of four boys who ran away from school because they disliked the system where strict rules had to be adhered to. They froze to death on their way back to their village on a cold winter night.

Historically and currently, as noted, First Nation students' education was the responsibility of the federal government of Canada as per the Indian Act, and part of the responsibilities involve building schools, providing teachers, and paying for tuition (Government of Canada, 2020). Statistics, as cited by Anderson and Richards (2016) and Richard (2016), indicate that the First Nation education systems on and off Indian reservations were failing the students, which was evident in the low high school graduation rates. This issue was also evident in the education completion gap between mainstream students and First Nation students.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Although there has been research completed on the First Nation people of Canada in the areas of health, Indian Residential Schools, and education, there was no research on the topic of First Nation chiefs and the low graduation rates of First Nation students in Canada (Honouring

the truth, reconciling for the future, 2015). The chiefs, as leaders, have not been taken into account when discussing the current issue of the low graduation rates. This gap in research on chiefs' perceptions indicates there was a need for their input.

Research needs to include the chiefs' perceptions and experiences, which will add to the body of knowledge within education. Studies have been conducted which suggest First Nation leaders' involvement, but chiefs' experiences have not been researched (Anderson & Richards, 2016). The research community has explored the problem of low high school graduation rates and proposed some solutions which have not increased the graduation rates (Wilkins, 2017). There was great potential for improvement in First Nation education by bringing the chiefs into this conversation.

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed in this study was the low graduation rates of First Nations high school students. Statistics, as noted by Anderson and Richards (2016), revealed that First Nation students were graduating from high school at a lower rate than mainstream Canadian students. Solutions to solve this problem have not been successful, and as such new strategies need to be attempted. Band chiefs have historically not been included in the solution process, so this study has been designed to include them. In a report by Haldane, Lafond, and Kruase (2012), they stated that although the governments and the educational leaders were working on some promising initiatives across Canada, there continues to be no First Nation education system that will support and deliver positive outcomes for First Nation students in Canada. This report by Haldane et al. was completed after the panel met with hundreds of people, including students, parents, elders, First Nation educators, leaders, representatives of provincial education systems, and the private sector. They conducted eight regional roundtable meetings and a national roundtable meeting and made visitations to over 30 First Nation communities and 25 First Nation

schools across Canada. Although this report stated that leaders were consulted, they did not indicate how chiefs were involved during this report or how they could be involved in the future.

The Canadian government, in research on First Nation education, reported that the problem of low graduation rates has not improved despite the attempts made by educators to rectify this problem. Researchers continue to seek out the reason why this problem persists. Whitley (2014), in her qualitative study, noted the issues of imbalance between students' First Nation culture and the curriculum. This study showed students needed counseling more than academics. She posits that this could be one of the issues hindering their education success.

Further, Feir (2015) noted that students of mothers who attended Indian Residential School had worse experiences with education and were more likely to be suspended or expelled. In this scenario, the Indian Residential School system continued to impact the education of intergenerational off-spring. Such studies have been on-going for decades, as noted by the panel, with no clear answers to the problem.

The general problem to be studied was the low high school graduation rates of Canadian First Nations students, and the specific problem was the absence of chiefs' perceptions about the problem and what they might suggest as actions to solve the general problem. As described in this chapter, many possible causes of this problem have been explored. Many of the causes were rooted in the lived experiences of First Nations people. Chiefs were in a position to be knowledgeable about the nature of the problems. What local chiefs perceive about what to do concerning the low high school graduation rates among First Nation students was explored in this study.

Audience

This study will reach many audiences within the First Nation community from the local to the national level. The study will also provide the opportunity for First Nation chiefs to share

their perceptions and beliefs concerning low high school graduation rates. As an outcome of this research study and the results, each spoke about their perceptions of the present challenges, as noted by Anderson and Richards (2016) concerning the low graduation rates in Canadian First Nation communities. The results of the research can assist First Nation parents with new information along with solutions that could help their children to complete high school. When First Nation parents believe their local chiefs supported them, they will have more confidence to help their children graduate from high school. Students will have a better understanding of the value of education and can be guided to continue to move forward with a sense of purpose.

Canadian educational institutions could benefit from this study. When education institutions were aware of what First Nation chiefs perceive and believe about the current educational challenges, they can support initiatives recommended by chiefs.

The problem to be addressed of the low high school graduation rates among First Nation students and the perceptions from the chiefs, will benefit many institutions and First Nation people. The outcome of this qualitative study will give stakeholders, such as chiefs in all Canadian provinces, First Nation band run schools, the federal government, students, and parents the means to make informed decisions on how to achieve improved educational attainment.

Specific Leadership Problem

Historically, there has been a gap between the Canadian First Nation chiefs and local First Nation education, as illustrated in the design of the Indian Act where there was no mention of any clear roles chiefs could have with local and band run schools. The Indian Act, presently and in the past, gave the Minister of Indian Affairs the power to direct Indian Residential Schools administered by the churches to educate the First Nation students (Government of Canada, 2020). This Act does not involve the chiefs. Furthermore, the First Nation parents had no rights. Many of them were threatened with jail time if they did not enroll their children in the

Indian Residential Schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). The studies by Whitley (2014) and Williams (2014) indicated little trust between the administrators of the education system and the First Nation people. The lack of trust was one of the challenges currently faced by chiefs today.

The government also expressed the issue of the lack of trust. With education, people in the government do not trust the First Nation people, as Phillips (2015) noted in his report. Although the federal government of Canada increased funding, which Phillips indicated was nice, he stated that the government of Canada did not trust that the First Nation people could run their education system. Comments such as this reflect the current distrust amongst the First Nation community, the federal government, and the education system.

One of the issues, as posited by Phillips (2015), which added to the problem, was funding for First Nation students. The Canadian government believed that increased funding could help bridge the gap in high school graduation rates. In 2018, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau delivered a remark at the Assembly of First Nations special chiefs' assembly in Ottawa. He stated he would increase funding (PM Trudeau delivers remarks at the Assembly of First Nations special chiefs' assembly in Ottawa, 2018). While the increased funding aimed to improve graduation rates, it was not clear how increased funding will help bridge the gap between chiefs and First Nation high school students, a possible key ingredient of any successful initiative.

It was important to note that there have been some conversations concerning involving chiefs in discussions about educational change for First Nations people. This was reflected in a report by Malone (2017). Malone reported that in Manitoba, Canada, some changes were made to reflect the culture of the First Nation schools, which the chiefs accepted. However, there was no strategy on how this could involve chiefs at the local school level. If the trend continues to involve First Nations' chiefs at the local level and how they can be involved, there may be a

change. However, without chiefs' involvement, the current trend of low high school graduation rates among First Nation students could continue. With this in mind, research on chiefs' perceptions could advance the study of leadership pertaining to First Nation chiefs and its application in the field. Educational leaders and governments will have another resource to rely on when exploring increased education attainment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to generate a new understanding of the role chiefs can have in solving the problem of low high school graduation rates for First Nation students. Thereby, with chiefs' perceptions and new understandings of low graduation rates, new strategies to increase students' high school graduation rates were found. By listening deeply to the chiefs' lived experiences in the First Nation communities, in-depth understandings of the dynamics of the current educational problems were more fully understood. With these deep understandings, more effective and long-lasting solutions to the education problems of the First Nation people were advanced.

Studies and reports such as Anderson and Richard (2016) and Fallon and Paquette (2014) have made recommendations for further participation by community leaders; however, these studies do not state how chiefs could specifically be involved. This study explored how chiefs can be included. Participants in this study, namely the First Nation chiefs from two Canadian provinces, contributed by sharing their perceptions and experiences on low graduation rates and their involvement (or lack of).

As a result of further research, including this study, it was hoped that the chiefs' voices will now be heard and, as such, may empower other chiefs to get involved with their schools at the local level. Without research studies into chiefs' involvement, the trend of low graduation rates may continue. The untapped potential of chiefs' involvement to make a positive difference

in students' lives will be a loss to the First Nation community. This study created space for change, which will enable others to act and lead.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative methodology using a phenomenological design was utilized in this proposed research study. Van Manen (2014) described phenomenology as a self-disciplined expression of the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence. Thomas (2006) also noted phenomenology seeks to reveal the meaning that lives within the experience and to express felt understanding into words. In this case, the lived experiences of 10 First Nation chiefs in Canada was revealed.

Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 First Nation chiefs from two Canadian provinces, Alberta and British Columbia. The goal was to get an equal number of chiefs from each province. These two provinces were chosen due to accessibility. The chiefs in central Alberta and British Columbia often have meetings in common urban settings where I went during the recruitment phase of the study.

A semi-structured interview guide (SSI) was utilized to collect data that reveal First Nation chiefs' perceptions and involvement in the phenomenon of low First Nation high school graduation rates in Canada. Adams (2015) described this type of interview as employing a blend of closed and open-ended questions often accompanying follow-up, why or how questions. Adams also stated SSI was relaxed and in-person, which takes longer than telephone surveys. It was recommended that 60 – 90 minutes per interview would be sufficient. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for all 10 chiefs interviewed. The transcription took place immediately after each interview, and the categorizing phase began.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

The following research questions were designed to address the chiefs' understanding of how they saw the education attainment issues that address the low rate of high school graduation among First Nation students. Further, these questions were created to support the interviewer in exploring what kinds of involvement chiefs might offer to support First Nation students to graduate. The following questions were explored:

1. How do First Nation chiefs experience their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates?
2. What do First Nation chiefs perceive to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates?
3. How do First Nation chiefs understand these factors?
4. How do the First Nation chiefs conceptualize their ability to contribute to finding solutions?

Study Limitations

There were two possible limitations to be noted in this study. First, this study may not be easily replicated in the future as chiefs may not want to give an interview to a series of non-First Nation researchers. Reports indicate that First Nation people have been researched by non-First Nation people countless times in the past, and because of this, they have not allowed researchers into their communities, thereby making collecting data next to impossible (Government of Canada, 2018; Grant, 2016).

The second possible limitation was bias in the study, as I am an integral part of the First Nation community. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed that the researcher needed to be aware of their own bias, have tolerance for ambiguity, be sensitive, and have good communication skills. The bias involved the culture and challenges experienced by myself personally and by my

experience within the education field. Since I am First Nation and shared similar experiences, I had to bracket my beliefs and experiences as I conducted this study. Bracketing, according to Sorsa et al. (2014), was when one deliberately puts aside beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject before and throughout the phenomenological investigation.

Definition of Key Terms

Indian Act. The Indian Act was the principal statute through which the federal government administers Indian status, local First Nations governments, and the management of reserve land and communal monies. It was first introduced in 1876 as a consolidation of previous colonial ordinances that aimed to eradicate First Nations culture in favor of assimilation into Euro-Canadian society (Government of Canada, 2020).

Indigenous People. Indigenous people were defined as a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants (Parrott, 2020).

Chief. Chief was defined under the Indian Act as the head or ruler of a tribe or clan. An Indian chief (Government of Canada, 2020).

First Nation. First Nations was a term used to describe Aboriginal peoples in Canada who were not Metis or Inuit (Gadacz, 2019).

Graduation rates. Graduation rates as defined by Statistics Canada were at the elementary-secondary levels. They were calculated by relating the number of graduates of all ages to the population at the typical age of graduation, where the typical age of graduation was the age at which persons complete high school if they start at the prescribed age and experience no repetition or interruption in their schooling.

Indian Residential Schools (IRS). Indian Residential Schools were defined as residential schools that were government-sponsored religious schools established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture (Miller, 2020).

On-Reservation (On-reserve). On-reserve refers to the First Nation Canadian population who live on Indian Reservations set aside and were governed by the Canadian Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2020).

Off-Reservation (Off-reserve). Off-reserve refers to the First Nation people who do not live on the reservation (Government of Canada, 2020).

Social Promotion. Social promotion was the practice of advancing students to the next grade, even if they have not met the academic requirements of their current year (Zwaagstra & Clifton, 2009).

Summary

In summary, this study allowed for an exploration of the chiefs' involvement in First Nation education and the low high school graduation rates of First Nations youth in Canada. The chiefs' perceptions were explored regarding this phenomenon. Ten chiefs were interviewed from two Canadian provinces. The study provided an in-depth exploration of an Indigenous leader's understanding of education.

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature is presented, which includes data on the education of the First Nation population, an overview of First Nation education in Canada, and First Nation leadership. In Chapter 3, a description of the research method, design, instrument, participants, data analysis methods, and limitations of this study were presented. This phenomenological research study intends to understand the phenomena of the low high school graduation rates of First Nation students from the perceptions and experiences of First Nation chiefs. In Chapters 4, the findings were presented in detail, and in Chapter 5, those findings were discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

First Nation education has been a point of contention in Canada for First Nation people in the past and the present (Anderson & Richards, 2016; White & Peters, 2009). Initiatives have been created by the government that included educating students in Indian Residential Schools and many promises for more funding to local schools. And yet, these initiatives have not created an increase in high school graduation rates (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman 2014; Galloway, 2019). To better understand this phenomenon, it was first important to have a thorough background of the historical and cultural forces impacting education in First Nation communities. As such, the review of the literature will include three topical areas: (a) data on the education of the First Nation population, (b) overview of First Nation education in Canada, and (c) First Nation leadership.

A synthesis of the historical and cultural information and how it might impact leadership and education in the First Nations community completes this chapter. This study will make an additional contribution to this field of study and will bring new evidence to bear on the problem of low school attainment and chief involvement in First Nation communities.

Data on Education of the First Nation Population

The First Nation people have faced many challenges since the first contact with Europeans, from cultural shock to attempts made towards assimilation through the Indian Residential Schools (Morcom, 2014; Neeganagwedgin, 2011; White & Peters, 2009). The First Nation population continues to feel the impact of colonization as indicated in low graduation success and high unemployment rates, as shown in Abele and Delic's (2014) knowledge synthesis report.

Anderson and Richards (2016) found that only four of 10 young adults living on reserves across Canada have finished high school. The statistics for First Nation high school graduation

rates show a slight increase for both Alberta and British Columbia (Alberta Government, 2018; Omand, 2016). According to Anderson and Richards (2016), in Alberta, the three-year completion rate for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students since 2010 had increased by eight percent, to 50.2 percent. In British Columbia, a nine-percentage-point increase in the high school graduation rate the past six years, both on and off reserves. This report by Anderson and Richards (2016) attributed this increase in British Columbia to collaborative work between First Nation groups, the provincial government, federal government, and the presence of a province-wide First Nation education group that acted as a pseudo-school board. Additionally, what was noted by Omand (2016) was the significance of communication. Omand reported that when governments sit down with First Nation people to listen to their concerns and ideas to improve education outcomes, they will be able to determine how to improve education in their communities.

Since this research study collected data from two provinces, Alberta and British Columbia, the following was found to be pertinent data of the First Nation people who reside in these provinces. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2014) reported that Alberta was home to 45 First Nations communities, and British Columbia was home to 198 First Nations communities. The following gives a layout of the current education structures within these areas.

In 2016, there were 1,673,785 Aboriginal people in Canada, accounting for 4.9% of the total population. In the most recent census data taken from Statistics Canada (2016), 258,640 First Nation people lived in Alberta. Nearly half (49%) of First Nation people in Alberta were under the age of 25, compared with 32% of the non-First Nation population. Fourteen percent of the First Nation population in Canada lived in Alberta in 2016. They made up 6% of the total population in that province. According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2019), the most commonly spoken First Nations' languages in the region were Blackfoot, Cree, Chipewyan,

Dene, Sarcee, and Stoney (Nakoda Sioux). In Alberta, there were 55 school buildings located on the reserves throughout the province. Of those, 40 schools offer grades 9 to 12, eight school buildings house 100 students or less, 23 school buildings house 101 to 500 students, 20 school buildings house 501 to 1000 students, and four school buildings house more than 1000 students.

In British Columbia, there were 95 school buildings located on the reserves throughout the province. Of those, 28 schools offer grades 9 to 12, seventy-six school buildings house 100 students or less, and 19 school buildings house 101 to 500 students (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2014). The 2016 Census on Aboriginal People reported that there were 270,585 First Nation people in British Columbia. Just under half (45%) of First Nation people in British Columbia were under the age of 25, compared with 27% of the non-First Nation population. They made up 5.9% of the total population in British Columbia. Seventeen percent of the First Nation population in Canada lived in British Columbia in 2016. There were more than 30 different First Nation languages and close to 60 dialects spoken in the region of British Columbia. British Columbia was home to 60% of First Nations languages in Canada, according to the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (Statistics Canada, 2016).

As noted, there were many differences in terms of the languages spoken and layout of the population within each province, but what was similar was that both Alberta and British Columbia must abide by the Indian Act in terms of school building structures within their territories and must follow the provincial curriculum (Government of Canada, 2019).

Overview of First Nation Education in Canada

In this section of the literature review, education was viewed from two perspectives, a traditional First Nation perspective and a westernized perspective. For example, Wilkins (2017) noted that from a First Nation view, educational training for youth began with every member of the tribe playing a role in educating the child. In this traditional education, children prepared for

whatever way of life he or she was intended to lead, whether it was to be a hunter, fisherman, warrior, chief, medicine man, or parents. First Nation knowledge, skills, and abilities were all applied within the paradigm of experiential learning, observation, and listening (Muir & Bohr, 2014; Olynick et al., 2016). The western perspective of education outlined by Smith (2016) and White and Peters (2009) denotes Indian Residential Schools as a way of educating the First Nation youth. Usually, this education process involved a classroom setting as compared to the natural environment for the First Nation peoples. These two views of education were on the cusp of where First Nation education presently resides.

Having to live between these two worlds has created significant problems for First Nations people (Wood, 2018). One example was shown in the relationship of First Nation parents in supporting their children's education within the community. Here every member of the tribe was involved in the training aspects of the child. Education did not begin in grade one; it began immediately after the child was born (Wilkins, 2017). The westernized perspective was provided through the Indian Residential Schools. The Indian Residential School, according to Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman (2014), created a breakdown of the family due to children's forced removal from the family to those schools. They further argue that parents, due to the loss of their children, did not learn parenting skills. The family unit was disassembled when westernized education was introduced; thus, all members of the family lost their roles.

There have been attempts to change the western Indian Residential Schools approach when parents were not encouraged to be involved in their children's education. Current research studies indicate there was a push for First Nation parent involvement, as indicated in the report by Higgins and Morley (2014). While it was a struggle to get First Nation parents involved, research by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) showed that western education moves forward successfully when there was parent involvement. Consequently, First Nation parents feel the

pressure from both directions. They suffer from past Indian Residential School fallout on the one hand and yet were expected to be involved in their children's formal education within the westernized education system on the other.

The cusp, as noted, was where education went from a time when there was no parent involvement allowed to expected parent involvement. In this study, the point of transition between two different states, for the First Nation parents, was revealed through the voices of the chiefs. For example, in a study by Hanks (1972), the topic of school drop-out was researched among the Alaskan First Nation students, where there was a history of high drop-out rates. What was learned was that students dropped out of school to help support their families who lived traditional lifestyles. They believed they were more useful in supporting their families as opposed to attending western educational schools. Contrarily, what Johnston-Goodstar and Roholt (2017) noted, was that First Nation students were experiencing racism in high school and that students were not dropping out of school but were being pushed out.

Brayboy (2014) expanded on this phenomenon in his discussion on the value of western education among First Nation people. In his research, he found that elders and community members viewed education as a waste of valuable time. He also noted students who returned to the Indian Reservation were of no use as they had lost their culture, language, knowledge of how to live on the land, and how to practice their traditional culture.

First Nation high school students have faced many challenges from supporting their families on the one hand and being pushed out of school on the other. Another challenge to note was the mobility of students. In reports by Anderson et al. (2018) and Turner and Thompson (2015), each study indicated that 50 percent of the high school population of First Nation students experienced school changes in British Columbia. What was interesting to note was students who moved from one school to another each year often struggled to complete high

school. Mobility by students was the central theme in these reports. Although there were numerous explanations for this problem, there has been little change in graduation rates.

Another area that was of significance within the realm of First Nation education was the health and well-being of the First Nation people. Research and inquiries have explored ways to address this area. Stonechild and Castellano (2014) noted the ability of First Nation students to make the most of their educational opportunities depended in part on the health and well-being of their families and communities. Language and culture were also part of the well-being of the First Nation community. As indicated by Preston and Claypool (2013) and McCarty and Lee (2014), it was vital to First Nation education. Clayton and Preston (2014) posit success in education was reliant on language as it was the foundation of the First Nation people.

Another report which speaks to the First Nation peoples' well-being and language was in the research study on the Lenape First Nation people by Hlebowicz (2012). Hlebowicz indicated when there was a language shift within this context, education was disrupted. First Nation people, as cited in his study, lost their language and had to learn their language from a non-First Nation instructor. As this research study indicated, on the one hand, First Nation people struggled to retain their language by any means. On the other, studies indicate they were not allowed to speak their language. Barnes and Josefowitz (2019), in their research study and the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Honouring the Truth Reconciling for the Future, 2015) revealed that First Nation students were forbidden to speak their languages and students who resisted speaking French or English encountered punishments by school staff and thus lost their ability to speak their language. This also cut off communication with their families, who continued to speak the language in the home (Hlebowicz, 2012).

The history of the policy statement Indian Control of Indian Education was important to note. In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood, now Assembly of First Nations, presented a policy statement to address First Nation education. This document entitled “Indian Control of Indian Education” (ICIE) was presented to and accepted by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Assembly of First Nations, 2019). This policy statement made by the National Indian Brotherhood was the result of the concerns parents had on the academic failure experienced by their children in federal and provincial schools. This policy was based on two education principles: parent responsibility and local control (Kirkness, 1984). Since its inception, many First Nation education systems attempted to model their school structure after it (Anderson & Richard, 2016). This Indian Control of Indian Education would be referenced from this day forward. ICIE was brought about by the concerns of parents. Although local control was indicated, there was still no involvement by chiefs.

As First Nation people continued developing ICIE, a research study conducted by Fallon and Paquette (2014) posed a question that addressed a gap in the literature concerning First Nation leadership. They asked, "what were the implications for leadership of reconceptualising First Nations education within an epistemic and ontological field consistent with First Nations' cultures and ways of knowing and being?" (p.194). This question led to the topic of First Nation leadership involvement. The result of their study revealed that the Canadian mainstream society must continue to be involved in open and ongoing deliberations with First Nations. In this way, what can be discovered was ways to prepare leaders who can re-structure, articulate, and lead educational institutions. In their study, they clearly state that leadership must be involved with First Nation education.

Since the 1972 inception of the ICIE policy statement, there were no records which show chiefs' involvement at the local school level except in a study by Aquash (2013), where the

chief's input was sought to support a team approach to education, and a program in which Manitoba chiefs accepted funding for First Nation schools (Malone, 2017). The chief in the Aquash study gave the authorization to move forward with the plan to implement language and culture but was not directly involved. Language and culture were added to the school program at the local school by inviting elders to the school to share their stories. First Nation language was offered to the students. Though this program was well received by students and improved attendance, the gap involving chiefs remained.

Although there was a push to move forward with ICIE in local communities, not all First Nation people were ready for this, as revealed in the research study by Aquash (2013), where some members of the nation voted against local control. The colonization mindset was deeply instilled among some of these members, as attested by Aquash's study.

Further research by Fallon and Paquette (2014) presented an argument that looked at ICIE from a legal perspective. They posited that if there were no constitutional rights to schools in the Indian Act except for the Canadian constitution under s. 35, which gave rights to education for everyone, First Nation people would not be able to design their education system. They stated that there was no legal protection regarding the quality and relevance of education for First Nation people in Canada. Further, subsection 91 (24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, gave the Parliament of Canada legislative authority over the First Nation population, which included lands and education. Because First Nation ways of learning and teaching were not within the education policies of the Federal and Provincial governments, according to ICIE, First Nation people have not been able to move forward with their governance structures, funding, and curriculum, which integrate their own language and cultures.

First Nation people have been going against the grain, as attested by Okakok (1989). She noted that First Nation people had to take a 'foreign' system and try to make it work. She

described that this process had its challenges as the western education system did not take the cultural differences and lifestyles into consideration when educating First Nation students.

Results reported in some of the studies indicate some successful efforts at closing the education gap (Aquash, 2013; Whitley, 2014). According to the research findings, the methods adopted by Aquash (2013) and Mombourquette and Bruised Head (2014) involved a First Nation perspective to education. Although the curriculum did not include First Nation language, history, or culture, each study showed a unique and creative way to incorporate and implement First Nation content, and this set the tone for future success among some First Nation schools.

The Assembly of First Nations suggests putting western education into the First Nation culture as opposed to placing culture into westernized education (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). Although it was a good idea, Ryan (1996) posits that change would not be easy for First Nation people who have integrated into mainstream society. In his study, when the culture was implemented, several teachers and parents resisted the change because they were not ready to accept another way of operating in the school system.

Indian Control of Indian Education has not materialized over the years. When viewing the structures between the Canadian mainstream and First Nation education systems, they differ financially. The provincial government collects taxes and decides each year how much money to allocate to school boards, who then choose how to spend that money locally (Alberta Government, 2018). The Government of Canada funds elementary and secondary education for First Nation students on Indian Reservations. Each year the Federal government allots education funding to the First Nation bands for their students. The current layout of the schools was similar in that both systems must employ qualified teachers and follow the provincial curriculum (Government of Canada, 2019). The school location differs; there were schools on Indian reservations while others were within the provincial jurisdiction. The provincial government

funds First Nation students who live outside the Indian reservation and attend provincial schools. The federal government provides funding for students who live on the Indian reservations and attend provincial schools. The federal government provides funding to First Nations to support approximately 107,000 eligible students who are 4 to 21 years of age, ordinarily live on-reserve, and who are enrolled in and attending an eligible elementary or secondary program (Government of Canada, 2019).

As noted, there were differences between the two educational perspectives of First Nations and western peoples. The challenges faced by the First Nations people as a result of assimilated education have been reviewed in this section of the literature review. ICIE continues to be the carrot First Nation people aspire to reach. However, studies such as Aquash's (2013) and Mombourquette and Bruised Head (2014) show there were no clear-cut answers, and there was very little chief involvement.

First Nation Leadership

This portion of the literature review will examine and identify the roles of chiefs from a historical and current perspective. The roles of Canadian chiefs have been interwoven within the Indian Act. The Indian Act was structured within the Canadian Government. The First Nation people of Canada were required to live and function under the Indian Act (Government of Canada, 2016). Within this Act, the Canadian federal government has fiduciary responsibility for the delivery of education to all First Nation students. The roles and responsibilities of the chiefs were laid out within this act, and the roots of this Act go back many years. However, the roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined.

From a historical perspective, not much has been documented concerning chiefs and their roles. What little has been recorded was from the account of Alexander Morris in 1862 with regard to the treaty negotiations between First Nation peoples and the British Crown during the

years of 1701 – 1923. These Canadian treaties began as an agreement to preserve peace between the First Nation people and the settlers. In 1858, the British officials ceased their funding for First Nation people, and the responsibility was turned over to the Province of Canada. Treaty negotiations continued, which included medication, education, and crown lands set aside for dwellings (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). In regard to chiefs' roles, nowhere in the Indian Act of 1876 and 1985 were chiefs mentioned concerning their involvement with education. The only subject of schooling was in section 11, which gave the Minister of Indian Affairs the power to direct industrial or residential schools. Within this section, school attendance was compulsory, with strict truancy penalties.

Since the British pulled away and the Canadian government took over the responsibilities, decisions continued to be made for the First Nation people. Although the federal government of Canada accepted the responsibility for First Nation education, they were not meeting it (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). They believed the responsibility fell on the churches (Carr, Chartier & Dadgostari, 2017). The Indian Act was not clear about the process of education for First Nation children. Consequently, the chiefs could only stand by as the Indian Act unfolded.

According to the Indian Act of 1985 and into the present time, the First Nation people must operate within a chief and council system where members were elected to run for the position of chief or councilor, but this was not always the case. In the past, there was no electoral system amongst First Nation people (Morris, 1862), but on June 22, 1869, the Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians was passed (Robinson, 2016). This Act involved the better management of Indian affairs and extended the provisions of Act 31 Victoria, Chapter 42. This Act introduced the election regulations, which required the selection and election of chiefs and headmen.

Before this, the First Nation people lived by their traditional selection code. Leaders were selected for a lifetime for their demonstrated talents, experience, wisdom, and integrity. Their recognition as leaders were based on community consensus, and this recognition had to be earned in the eyes and within the context of the cultural values held within their communities (Cajete, 2015). Further, these leaders had to show that they were good thinkers, culturally aware, honest, fair, and ethical, with a readiness to serve the needs of their families and communities, placing the needs of their people above their own. Consequently, the Act of 1869 changed the way of life and the leadership selection process of the First Nation people. The Superintendent General of Indian Affairs directed and ordered the election on the Indian Reservations. Only the males could vote, and the elected member had to be twenty-one years of age. Their term would run for three years unless deposed by the Governor for dishonesty, intemperance, or immorality (Government of Canada, 2020).

Further, according to this act, there was a limit to how many people could be elected, which was set by the number of members in the Indian band; for example, one chief and two headmen for every two hundred people and with members of only thirty. This meant they could only have one chief. The duties of the chiefs in Act 31 were as follows:

1. The maintenance and repairs of roads, bridges, ditches, and fences.
2. The care of public health.
3. The observance of order and decorum.
4. The repression of intemperance and profligacy.
5. The prevention of trespass by cattle.
6. The construction of and maintenance and repair of school houses.
7. The establishment of dog pounds and the appointment of pound keepers.

The Indian Act was amended in 1985, and the rules and regulations for the education of First Nation children reveal nothing new of chiefs' duties. The Federal Governor in Council ordered all stakeholders to proceed with the education process for First Nation students. The governor authorized the minister to enter agreements with the provincial governments, the Commissioner of Yukon, the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, the Commissioner of Nunavut, and the public and separate school boards. These agreements involved the establishment, operation, and maintenance of schools for First Nation children. There were regulations that were implemented concerning the standards for buildings, equipment, teaching, education inspection, and discipline of these schools. School attendance was compulsory for children who reached the age of six, with strict truancy penalties (Government of Canada, 2019).

Current data gives an overview of the roles of chiefs in Canada according to the Indian Act; however, each Nation has its own governance structure. Indigenous Corporate Training (2010) reports on common issues that were faced by chiefs. These were the on-going low socio-economic conditions, housing, health, and education. Again, there was no mention of chiefs' roles or duties connected to First Nation students.

As noted, First Nation leaders have not been directly involved with local schools. They were engaged at a political level as pointed out in ICIE where the role of the Assembly of First Nation National Chief was to ensure there was a collaboration between the Federal and provincial governments and the local chiefs concerning education. Although current leaders were involved politically, there was no mention of a First Nations' education process. There were no formal westernized education processes that First Nation leaders of the past were involved in. The following report from Morris (1862) shows how First Nation leaders conducted themselves.

This record of the leadership styles was recorded by the Honourable Alexander Morris during the signing of the treaties within the years of 1811 to 1876 (Morris, 1862). Morris's

account gives readers a glimpse of First Nation leadership styles of the day. During treaty negotiations between Morris in 1862 and the Blackfoot tribe, Chief Crowfoot was quoted, “while I speak, be kind and patient” (p. 272), and a pause observed. The other thing noted was the sense of urgency Morris displayed, with the time the First Nation leaders took to make decisions:

The following morning the Indians sent word by a representative from each band except Thickfoot’s, that they desired another day to meet in council before having a conference; but, feeling they had sufficient time already, yet not wishing to hurry them too much, we extended the hour of meeting to four o’clock on the same day, which satisfied them and when they promised to be ready (Morris, 1862, p. 154).

Time was of the utmost importance with First Nation leadership, and this cultural difference appeared to annoy Morris (1862), “I am ready now to answer you, but understand well, it was not to be talked backward and forwards” (p. 216). Leadership was taken seriously by the First Nation people as they had their tribe’s best interest at hand for the present and especially for the future. Morris, in his negotiations with the Stone Fort and the Manitoba Post treaties in 1862, noted, “The Indians professed a desire for time to think over what had been said before making any reply” (p. 39).

Furthermore, during the treaty negotiations of 1876 with the Cree Nations at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitts one of the Cree’s’ Mis-tah-wah-sis was quoted in Morris (1862), “When a thing was thought of quietly, probably that was the best way. I ask this much from him this day that we go and think of his words” (p. 208). Another noted observation by Morris was the First Nation leader’s practice of spirituality during negotiations; for example, the observation of the peace pipe was noted, “Four pipe-stems were carried about and presented to be stroked in token of good feeling and amity” (p. 230). As in the past to the present, spirituality was important to the First Nation people. Shirt, Lewis, and Jackson (2012) noted how vital spirituality was as demonstrated in their language style. Kisemanitownîkânninanâskomonânpîkisk-wewin e-sawîmikoyahk, which translated from the Cree language to the English language means, “First,

we would like to give acknowledgment to the Creator for gifting us with a language that has been carried forth from generation to generation from our Cree ancestors” (p. 206). Such accounts note the importance of spirituality and language.

In another example of leadership, Van Kirk (2017) wrote an article that came from the records of the Hudson Bay Company about the life events of a Dene woman leader, Thanadelthur. Thanadelthur negotiated a peace treaty between the Cree and Chipewyan tribes and the British and French, which paved the way for the establishment of a Fort at the mouth of the Churchill River in 1715-16. Although this report did not mention Thanadelthur’s leadership style, it was relevant to note she fit all the requirements as outlined in Felicity’s (1999) research of a leader. In a qualitative study on three First Nation leaders, Felicity outlined leadership qualities as leaders needing to be close to their people, serving, informing them of new developments, and that leaders must have humility. These qualities tie into Thanadelthur’s leadership style. Van Kirk (2017) described Thanadelthur’s journey, of her escape from the Crees to her role as chief negotiator between the Crees, Chipewyan, English, and French. She led this peace treaty by working closely with the four groups. She would not have been successful if she did not fit the leadership traits as outlined by Felicity.

There was very little research on the leadership styles of First Nation leaders and their involvement with First Nation students at the local community level. Cajete (2015) gave an overview on the topic of leadership where spirituality was discussed. He posits that First Nation leadership styles were interwoven within the spiritual aspects of life and that leaders who possess these qualities could help within the education sector. Cajete stated that western leadership theories were based on an entirely different worldview than that of First Nations people and that western-style leadership was a colonial artifact and that those First Nations leaders who practice

these styles alone will do more harm than good within their communities. Ultimately, he stated that it was a question of balancing the two perspectives.

In a research study by Felicity (1999), she noted that leaders need to play an essential role in the western education system and to do what was necessary to understand the operation of the education system. In another report on leadership styles concerning recent First Nations, McLeod (2002) quoted Barbra Wakshul, who stated that leadership was different in the following ways:

- a) Indian leaders need to know both their community (values and history) as well as the Euro-American community because they must function in both societies.
- b) Indian leaders need to be holistic because Indian communities were small, Indians value interconnectedness, and Indians work on a wide variety of issues.
- c) Indian leaders belong to communal societies that must accommodate both tribal values and Euro-American systems in which Indians and non-Indians coexist.

In another report, Morin (2016) argues that for families and communities to be involved and empowered with their children's education, leadership at the community local level needs to engage within a paradigm of leadership approaches. As there were limited studies on First Nation leadership styles, some researchers such as Fallon and Paquette (2014) and Ruwhiu and Elkin (2016) have recognized First Nation leadership styles as being akin to the servant style of leadership. The following aspects were important for the servant leadership style as outlined by Liden, Wayne, Meuser, Junfeng, and Liao (2015), the leader cares for the follower's personal problems and well-being, creates a value for the community, understands the organization's goals, empowers followers, helps them grow and succeed, puts followers first, and behaves ethically.

This section of the literature review has demonstrated leadership styles and approaches in the First Nation communities by looking at the past styles of current practices. Examples go as

far back as Morris (1862), who gave a detailed account of verbal and visual communication of First Nation leadership during the signing of the treaties, and by McLeod (2002) in Wakshuls' account of First Nation leadership in the 21st Century to aspects of the servant leadership style as outlined by Liden et al. (2015).

Summary

In summary, when investigating the phenomenon of low high school graduation rates of First Nation students and the perceptions of First Nation chiefs in Canada, it was important to understand the history of First Nation colonization and the residential schools. This could help to identify the causes of this phenomenon. This research study explored the problem of low graduation rates and was advanced through understanding the experiences of First Nation chiefs and identified the supportive actions to resolve this loss of human potential. Statistics reveal the low school attainment among First Nations, with very little progress within the last 20 years (Aquash, 2013, Omand, 2016). Approaches and studies have been completed with success in some First Nation schools and controversy in others.

Current research showed that First Nation education and leadership among First Nation people had undergone many changes from pre-contact to post-contact. As a result of the Indian Act and the pressure from mainstream education, First Nation students and parents have had to adjust to many changes along the way with no involvement of chiefs at the local level. Although several studies address low education attainment and low graduation rates, there was limited information on how chiefs were involved (Aquash, 2013; Omand, 2016). For example, in a research study by Preston and Claypool (2013), the students in their study noted that education success was rooted in their spirituality and that strong, tenured leadership was needed to support their education. This strong tenured leadership did not include chiefs in this study.

This research study provided the opportunity for chiefs to share their Indigenous worldview on education and leadership with solutions. In Chapter 3, the process for how this was accomplished in this study was identified.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature review in Chapter 2 illustrated that there was a gap in the literature regarding First Nation chiefs' involvement with the education of First Nation students at the local and national level. The literature review also described (a) data on the education of the First Nation population, (b) an overview of First Nation education in Canada, and (c) First Nation leadership. This chapter will describe the methods that will be employed to gather and analyze data from a sample of First Nation chiefs regarding low graduation rates of First Nation students. This research study will give voice to the Canadian First Nation population through the voices of the chiefs on the phenomena of low high school graduation rates among First Nation students. The following questions were explored:

1. How do First Nation chiefs experience their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates?
2. What do First Nation chiefs perceive to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates?
3. How do First Nation chiefs understand these factors?
4. How do the First Nation chiefs conceptualize their ability to contribute to finding solutions?

The following subsections in this research study describe the research method, design, instruments, participants, data analysis procedures, and limitations.

Research Method

First of all, there were three methods to choose from in framing this research study, namely, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. In the literature review, there was no qualitative research on the experiences and perceptions of First Nation chiefs in Canada regarding low high school graduation rates for First Nation students. In addition, the kinds of

information that may provide some insight on how to minimize the achievement gap were best gathered through a qualitative approach.

There were several reasons why a qualitative method was selected as opposed to a quantitative method or a mixed method. A quantitative research method was focused on whether and to what extent variance in x caused variance in y ; a qualitative research approach tends to ask *how* x plays a role in causing y and what the *process* was that connects x and y (Maxwell, 2005). In seeking to illuminate chiefs' experiences of education in their communities and discover their suggestions for what courses of action to address the research problem, qualitative data was necessary. The numerical type of data gathered in a quantitative research would not gather this kind of information. Data collected through surveys on the perceptions and experiences of the chiefs will not fit the quantitative research method (Creswell, 2014). The third research method was a mixed-method approach where qualitative and quantitative methods were combined (McKim, 2017). This method involves gathering quantitative data on the phenomena along with qualitative data. There did not appear to be significant quantitative data at this point that would enhance the information gathered in a qualitative process for interviewing the chiefs.

Since qualitative data was what was necessary for the purpose of this study, it would not be an effective use of time and resources to gather more quantitative data. For the reasons mentioned, quantitative and mixed methods will not suit this study. Therefore, a qualitative method was selected for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited that qualitative researchers were interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, how they make sense of their world, and the experiences they have in the world.

This qualitative research method received approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to conducting the study. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, 10 participants were contacted from two Canadian provinces, Alberta, and British Columbia.

A list of 10 chiefs was invited through person to person contact, telephone calls for an interview, and appointments were arranged with all of them.

I traveled between two provinces to conduct face to face interviews. The participants all presented an Indigenous worldview perspective. Data was gathered through person to person interviews. Interviews were the means of collecting chiefs' personal detailed experiences and perceptions. An interview guide with a set of questions was utilized. Taylor et al. (2015) noted that whether or not a formal interview guide was used, it was always important to prepare a set of open-ended, descriptive questions prior to an interview. They noted this guide was referred to as conversation starters, which will help the interview process. As suggested by Kallio et al. (2016), a field test of the interview guide was conducted by interviewing an objective individual. As a result of the interview, some of the questions were re-worded for clarity. A copy of the interview guide was included in Appendix A. Participants were notified and asked to consent to participate in the study. A copy of the informed consent was attached in Appendix B.

After the participants were selected, the information was disseminated, and the informed consent forms were signed, then the data gathering began. It was expected that this process would take no more than two months. The accumulated time to gather this information was one month. McGrath et al. (2019) noted that qualitative interviews allow researchers opportunities to explore, in an in-depth manner, matters that were distinctive to the experiences of the interviewees, allowing insights into how different phenomena of interest were experienced and perceived. Each participant was asked to engage in an interview of approximately 60 minutes, with the first 30 minutes for the warm-up. Initial questions from the interview guide were asked to warm up the interview. This time-line of 90 minutes was chosen to reflect the time chiefs need as in the reflections in Morris's (1862) report where chiefs requested more time to think.

A semi-structured interview was conducted in person, with one chief being interviewed by telephone. The traditional offering of the tobacco and blanket was offered during the person-to-person contact. When the meeting took place on the agreed-upon site, the chief was offered the tobacco and blanket as a sign of a request to be made. Stiegman and Castleden (2015), in their research, noted this necessary protocol. If the participants accepted, it was their way of starting the interview. The justification for the selected questions for the chiefs gave them the opportunity to think and provided the time needed for them to share their lived experiences concerning low high school graduation rates.

The philosophical assumption which guided this study was inductive emerging design logic. Thomas (2006) described inductive reasoning as a process where theory and generalizations were made on the basis of specific observations. Using the inductive approach can aid in looking for something new which emerges from the study. It involves having an open mind without any preconceived ideas. The questions asked to help narrow the scope of the research. Thomas outlined the process and purposes for using an inductive approach, (a) condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format, (b) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data, and (c) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that were evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). What was of significance to note was that the main method of analysis was the development of categories from the raw data into a model. This model encompassed key themes created by myself during the coding process.

The identities and the storage of the data were important to note here. The identities of participants will be kept confidential. Barnhill and Barnhill (2014), writing on data security, made several recommendations when storing gathered data. These recommendations were adhered to. Participants' names as identifiers were kept as pseudonyms. All paper documents and

tape recordings were kept in a secure, locked area. Strong passwords were used to access data in computers. Electronic devices were locked in case a computer was stolen. After the data was reviewed for the writing of the study, it was stored on a separate memory device. The data will be kept for a period of five years.

Research Design

There were five research designs to consider for this research study: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and phenomenology. This section will give a brief outline for each design. First, Yin (2018) described a case study as a study that involves an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases, and the data was gathered through documents, archival records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts. As this study does not involve an in-depth study of a single case, it will not fit into this design. Second, ethnography describes and interprets cultural and social groups by collecting data through observations, interviews with additional artifacts during an extended time in the field, usually six months to a year (Rashid, Hodgson, & Luig, 2019). The anticipated time for this study does not fit the timeline in ethnography. Third, grounded theory conveys a development of a theory grounded in data from the field by collecting data through interviews for 20-30 individuals to “saturate” categories and detail theory; and as this study involves only 10 chiefs, this design will not fit this study (Ivey, 2017). Fourth, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described narrative analysis as the ways humans experience the world through stories where every utterance, even repetitions, and noises were regarded as part of the data to be analyzed. As this study collected the experiences and perceptions of chiefs and not their stories, this narrative analysis will not do. The fifth research design was phenomenology. This phenomenological research design was selected for this study.

The reason why phenomenology was chosen was the intent of the study, which involves gathering the perceptions and experiences of First Nation chiefs through semi-structured

interviews. The method of analyzing phenomena in the phenomenological design was reflective, this reflected experience allows the researcher to gain access to the thing experienced, its modes of appearing in natural attitude, and its meaning (Bevan, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). Klenke, Marten, and Wallace (2016) noted the phenomenological research intends to understand people. In this case, the First Nation chiefs provided a “credible description of human experience as the individual perceives it and allowing the essence of that experience to emerge” (Klenke et al., 2016, p. 209) and reported their experiences and perceptions on the phenomena of low First Nation graduation rates.

Within the literature review, there were many ways of explaining phenomenology. For example, Wertz (2015) stated that phenomenological methods have the aim of gathering knowledge rather than any practical end, and therefore, in that broad sense, phenomenology was theoretical and reflective rather than a practical discipline. The goal and subject matter of this method was to understand what has been called “consciousness” or “lived experience.” Further, Cerbone (2014) noted that the word “phenomenology” means “the study of phenomena,” where the view of a phenomenon coincides, roughly, with the notion of experience. Thus, attending to experience rather than what was experienced was to attend to the phenomena. So, phenomenology can be characterized as the study of intentionality because it was “of” or “about” the low graduation rates of First Nation high school students (Cerbone, 2014). Rossman and Rallis (1998) stated that the researcher seeks to understand the deep meanings of an individual’s experiences and how he or she articulates these experiences. The articulations and reporting on lived experiences were important to note in phenomenology.

In phenomenology, there was a unique way of gathering data; for instance, when the researcher begins the process of interviewing in phenomenology, it was important to note the process involved. Phenomenology, as stated, was about recording and reporting the lived

experience of the chiefs. Bevan (2014) posits that how the data was gathered was of significance. He stated that the interview process was one of the most underemphasized processes in gathering data. An example he used to emphasize the significance of interviewing was by describing the difference between philosophical phenomenology and phenomenology research. The philosopher was the one who reflects on the givenness of a thing, whereas in phenomenological research, initial reflection was by the person who has undergone a particular experience, and this reflection was a primary interpretation, and the researcher looks for the meaning of this experience within the interview process.

This section on research design provided an overview of the five designs, and each was discussed with reasons why these designs were not suited to this study and why phenomenology was selected. The topic of phenomenology was discussed, along with the importance of the interview process.

Instruments

There were two instruments, one was the researcher, and the second one was a semi-structured interview guide. This interview guide was designed based on the research questions. Kallio et al. (2016) discussed that a semi-structured interview combines predefined questions with an open-ended exploration of an unstructured interview. The general goal of the semi-structured interview was to gather systematic information about a set of central topics while also allowing some exploration when new issues or ideas emerge. Semi-structured interviews were used when there was some knowledge about the topics or issues under investigation, but further details were still needed. Pietila et al. also suggested a field test on the semi-structured questions prior to the main interviews. This involved running a practice on the questions with someone not in the study. The practice allowed me to make some minor changes to the questions before the interviews started. In addition, McIntosh and Morse (2015) also indicated that it was important

that these questions were open-ended and framed to stimulate unstructured responses and create discussion. These questions were typically asked of each interviewee in the same way and in a systematic order, but the questions were semi-structured in that the interviewers were allowed the freedom to wander slightly from the script.

Participants

For this research study, purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling was used in qualitative research to focus on selecting information-rich cases, as in the case of low high school graduations and the perceptions of chiefs, which provided knowledge about or experience with a phenomenon (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). The sources within this study were First Nation chiefs who lived on Indian reservations in Alberta and British Columbia and who conformed to the Indian Act of Canada. There were 316 chiefs in British Columbia, and there were 46 chiefs in Alberta (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). Of this group of 362 chiefs, the sample consisted of 10 chiefs from this population.

The majority of First Nations governments in Canada were composed of a chief and councilors who were responsible for making decisions on behalf of the First Nation and its members. For this research study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling was used in qualitative research to focus on selecting information-rich cases that were knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbin, 2015). In order to understand the participants, it was relevant to note the process involved in their selected role as chief. The selection of a chief and councilors can be held in one of four ways (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019):

1. By following the steps outlined in the Indian Act.
2. By following the Indian Band Election Regulations.

3. By using the new and optional First Nations Elections Act according to a community's constitution as part of a self-government agreement.
4. By using a community leadership selection process

Finally, the participants had the ability to communicate their experiences in an articulate way. It was also important to me that they were available and willing to participate in the study, as suggested by Palinkas et al. (2015). As the chiefs were scattered throughout Canada, the two provinces of Alberta and British Columbia were easier to access in the given time for this study.

Data Analysis Methods

There were various methods that can be used to analyze data; for this research study, phenomenology as a methodological framework was used as it has evolved into a process that seeks reality in individual's narratives of their lived experiences of phenomena (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). In order to capture the lived experiences of a phenomenon, data analysis was conducted in a step-by-step method.

A two-month period was given for the data collection. As the study moved forward, each participant was guided through a series of questions with ample time to think about the question and to provide an answer. The interview was audiotaped upon the approval of the chief. Each interview took between 60 – 90 minutes. As each interview was completed, it was transcribed verbatim immediately. Each chief was asked if they could be contacted for clarification of the interview or where additional data was needed pertaining to the questions. Yuksel and Yildirim (2015) posited that it was relevant to have more than one interview for in-depth, rich data. All gathered data were reviewed in preparation for the coding process.

When all data was collected, the process of analysis began. Coding in data analysis involves assigning some shorthand descriptions to aspects of data, which then can be easily retrieved. This coding process can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or a

combination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This coding involves the process of inspecting and unpacking data with the goal of discovering useful information, informing conclusions, and supporting decision-making. During this phase, themes and categories were flushed out from the data gathered and coded.

To create my codes, the text was read several times, and questions were asked, for example, what statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described? These statements were then circled, underlined, and highlighted. The line-by-line analysis was completed once no more new codes were found.

The coding process allowed for the identification of themes through the utilization of highlighting practices as outlined by Sutton and Austin (2015). The text was analyzed for common themes, which led to the interpretation of the findings. This process was done with the interview content of all 10 chiefs.

Limitations

There were two possible limitations to this study to note, replication of the study and bias. In the replication of the study, in the event that a non-First Nation researcher wants to replicate the study, not all chiefs may want to be interviewed by a non-First Nation researcher, thereby making accessing data challenging as indicated earlier (Grant, 2016). All studies were more powerful when they were replicated; however, the process of replication was more challenging when there was a history of mistrust between the two groups, mainly the First Nation people and the non-First Nation researchers. Replication was powerful in that when studies were replicated and achieve the same or similar results, it gives greater validity to the findings (Nosek & Errington, 2020). They stated the purpose of replication was to advance theory by confronting existing understanding with new evidence. They also noted exact replication was not possible because the researcher would have to identify all the conditions and evidence about the claim.

The second limitation was my bias. I am a member of the First Nations community. An attempt to lessen the impact of this limitation was through the bracketing process. As I share a similar background to the chiefs, I needed to remain as concise as possible, making certain that the chiefs' perceptions were recorded accurately. Bracketing was when one deliberately puts aside beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation (Sorsa et al., 2014). Using this process helped me to mitigate bias in the study.

Summary

In summary, this section described the research method, design, instrument, population, data analysis procedures, and limitations, which was used to conduct this qualitative study. As indicated, the protocol was of the utmost importance as in the example of approaching the chiefs in a respectful and traditional way. Further, all the steps were necessary for this research study to move forward.

As stated in this chapter, my phenomenological study was focused on the present phenomenon of the lived experiences of the First Nation chiefs concerning the low high school graduation rates of Canadian First Nation students. It will be through a better understanding of the lived experiences of First Nation chiefs with regard to the high school performance of First Nation students that could lead to new initiatives that could help increase high school graduation rates among First Nation students. This data could also guide education systems along with government officials to make informed decisions when it comes to First Nation education.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings of the data collected from in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with each of the 10 First Nation Chiefs in Canada in regard to their perceptions and experiences on the low graduation rates of First Nation Students in Canada. As there was no research on chiefs' perceptions, this study was vital to the educational field. The study provided additional information on the problem of low graduation rates among students from the perceptions of the chiefs. Findings were discussed according to the themes generated by the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the review of the literature. This section will present findings, results, and theme developments.

Presentation of Findings

The following represents a narrative analysis of each of the 10 participants in this qualitative study. These narratives tell the stories of the overall experiences of 10 chiefs who were interviewed. Participants were identified as eligible for the study based on being elected according to the Indian Act. Once identified, participants volunteered for the study after being contacted by me through a telephone call. Each chief was offered tobacco and a blanket as it was customary to the First Nation culture when making a request. Each chief accepted the gifts.

Through semi-structured interviews using open-ended essay questions, I constructed narratives necessary to analyze their overall experiences. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of all participants involved in the study. Participants included 10 chiefs from two provinces, Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. Three participants were females, and seven participants were males. Table 1 includes the demographics of each participant.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years in office
Arnold	M	50-59	13 years
Cindy	F	30-39	1.5 years
Don	M	50-59	5 years
Frank	M	60-69	8 years
Geraldine	F	60-69	5 years
Justin	M	30-39	2 years
Lester	M	60-69	3 years
Riel	M	70-79	32 years
Shari	F	60-69	11 years
Victor	M	40-49	1.5 years

Chief Arnold

Arnold had been a chief for 12 years. He had a grade seven level education with additional upgrading courses. Chief Arnold was raised in a small community and attended Indian Residential School, where he was sexually abused by the authorities in the school. Due to this experience, he left school during his seventh year. This experience still haunted him as he stated, “I left school because I was being sexually abused inside the school. Did I do it because I wanted to? No, I could never trust a teacher ever since then.” He believed that if he was not abused and had good support systems, he would have excelled in academics. One thing which was prominent was his love and desire to learn more and to challenge himself to improve in whatever he did. His experience was one of the many shared by students who were abused in the Indian Residential Schools.

Due to his keen interest in education and the ability to recognize problems, he decided to run for the position of chief. He wanted to make a difference in his community. He gave credit to the elders who saw potential in him and guided him after he left western education. Everything he learned after that, he was able to use in his role as chief. Although he did not have a university

degree, he pointed out how people would often make comments about his ability to do the work at a high level of education. He recalled what they said, “People say to themselves you must have a university degree from what you guys were doing and how you do stuff. Where did you go and get your education? I went no higher than grade seven, but I spent a lot of time with my elders.” Although this chief was abused within the Indian Residential School, he valued what he learned from the elders. His desire to learn, coupled with the elders’ wisdom, helped him move forward.

Chief Cindy

Cindy served as chief for one and a half years. She had a university certificate and two diplomas, one in financial management and the second one in entrepreneurship. She viewed education as important but stressed that some parents often do not see the value of education. She believed parents needed to understand the value of education, “You need to go so parents were seeing the value of education, seeing that it can open doors.” She attributed this to the fallout of the Indian Residential School system, where parents were not encouraged to be involved in their children’s education. As a result of this, students suffer because they cannot write, “They can’t write, so they’re embarrassed, and they can’t focus because they’re already frustrated that they can’t write.”

One thing Chief Cindy experienced and observed was the difference in education from the time she attended school to her children’s education. She noted there was a lack of structure in the home and in the school system. She noticed the contrast between her generation to that of the students in her community. She observed students did not have homework, nor was homework expected in her view. In her generation homework was expected, “I was your age. I was doing two hours of homework every night, so what’s going on?” She believed there was a disconnect between teachers and parents and in her view, the communication lines had to be

opened for better results. She noticed the impact Indian Residential Schools had on the families and students, and the lack of structure was one of them.

Chief Don

Chief Don led the tribe as chief for five years and was a certified teacher. Prior to being a chief, he taught in an Indian reservation school, which he enjoyed, “that was my place of happiness; if I ever get out of the leadership stuff, that’s where I’d like to be back.”

When Chief Don first got into leadership, he noted that appearance made an impact on community members’ lives. For example, he recognized two things, one, the community arena was in bad condition with a broken-down fence which was next to the school, “it was broken down and was rundown and was this how the kids identified their lives; this was where it was, and it’s not going to be changed or nothing.” He immediately repaired the fence; he believed that things would change, and students would do better knowing that people cared.

The second thing he noticed was that the Indian Residential School System had a negative impact on the lives of the First Nations. He attributed this to his observation of the social problems in his reservation. He talked about how the structure had changed over the years; the example he gave concerned the structure. He stated the First Nation structure was replaced by a strict Indian Residential School structure. When the Indian Residential School was discontinued, the western structure was removed, leaving parents with very little structure. He believed a structure needed to be re-established within the lives of the First Nation families.

Chief Frank

Chief Frank served as chief for eight years. He had a grade 11 education and completed a carpentry program. During his tenure as chief, he witnessed the struggle of his people. Two weeks prior to this interview, a young student had attempted suicide due to bullying in the

western school. He believed there was a lack of communication between the teachers, students, and parents:

We want to meet with the schools and try to find a way to deal with the bullying and harassing, and discrimination. We went to the teacher and she was really surprised to hear what was going on and we were surprised that she didn't know, you know, because it's been going on for a while.

This chief had a desire to be involved with the schools and invited other chiefs to be a part of this relationship-building process. When asked about the strengths of the school, he struggled to find any strengths, "It's really hard to find strength of the education program to help our students, like I don't know how to help our students to move forward in a better way." This response was an indication of how most of the chiefs felt about western education.

Chief Geraldine

Geraldine was in her fifth year as chief during this interview. She earned a high school diploma and a diploma in band administration. Chief Geraldine was raised on the Indian reservation and attended a one-room school on the reservation with what she called "white" teachers. She remembered waking up very early every morning to catch a bus at 6:30 am. When she first attended school, her English language was very limited, and because she could only speak her Cree language, others laughed at her. She recalled her experience in the western school. "That first year, when I started school at six years old, and I barely knew English. I still get laughed at."

Racism and prejudice were issues she had to deal with as a child, and she believed students continued to face this in their schools often feeling powerless to do anything about it, "Keyam, that's our attitude of fighting back because, like for racism, we ignore it, right? Keyam, you know, and we just carry on, right?" Keyam in the Cree language means, "never mind." This

remark, “Keyam” was also made by another chief. They believed when confronted with racism, it was best not to react.

In her experience, one Metis teacher believed in her and helped her in school, and due to this support, she was able to graduate from high school. She recalled the number of times the teacher kept her in during recess to do her work and she believed this helped her move forward. Although she had to give up her recess time to study, she was determined to do the work. However, she noted, not all students received this type of support and without supports many students struggled in school.

She noticed very little parent involvement up until graduation day, where she became aware of the high number of parents who attended the graduation ceremony. She noted parents took great pride in their children’s accomplishment. Although students were not at their grade level, the schools moved them forward, to the next grade up until grade 12. By the time they graduated which was 12 years later, many of them believed they were finished and many of the parents viewed this as an accomplishment, “They graduated, so let’s just say it’s an achievement for them and for their families, I guess.” This chief was articulating what she believed was viewed as a success in the minds of the parents and students. Success was attributed to the number of years students committed to attending school, and in this case, 12 years.

Chief Justin

Justin governed as chief for two years. He had a Degree in Business Administration, a Certificate in Capital Works, and Infrastructure Management. When asked where he was raised, he stated, “Everywhere.” He began to work for the circus at a very young age and traveled to all the fairs. He was raised by a single mother and viewed her as his role model. He was proud of his mothers’ academic accomplishments. She had earned a university degree.

When asked what a successful education was, he stated there was a difference between knowledge and education, “I think the ability and comfort to demonstrate what they learned in a practical sense like there was education and there’s knowledge, knowledge was like being who we were and just learning our ways I guess, and education was the tools that we need to excel in life.” He gave an example of an elder who had passed away. Although this elder was an alcoholic he faithfully burnt grass and shrubs every spring to keep the land clean. People in the community began to wonder why the grass and shrubs had grown so long and the land was neglected, they later learned it was this elder who took care of the land, and no one had replaced him after he died. This chief gave this example to illustrate how important the land was to the people, no matter what state they were in. In his view, this elder was knowledgeable.

Chief Lester

Chief Lester had two degrees, an undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Science and Physical Education with a focus on Exercise Physiology and Biomechanics, and a Diploma in Education. He had been chief for three years. A comment was made recognizing his education, and his response was, “It doesn't get you much job, but it sounds nice.” This response gave an indication of the value of education and the jobs available or not to First Nation people.

Although First Nation people have reached the level of earning university degrees in western education, it does not necessarily mean their education will provide the jobs they seek nor meet the needs of the First Nation community.

Chief Lester was raised by his grandparents in a structured environment. They gave him the freedom to roam the bush when he wanted, but he had to do his homework and chores before he was free to do what he wanted. When he was a youth, he believed everyone was raised by their grandparents, and he was grateful that he had healthy grandparents. It was not until later he learned that not all children were raised by their grandparents.

When asked about controls, he shared his thoughts on “free-will.” He defined “free-will” as opposed to controls where students must conform:

I got my degrees by free choice because I traveled around the world for a whole year and a half; that was my education in itself. Yes, I had to write the papers, I had to get those grades, but I did it on my own free-will, not because there was a control there.

“Free-will” meant freedom to choose, freedom to explore, and freedom to be responsible. His view on controls was not something that could help the students. He viewed control more of a hindrance to students. He valued his concept on freedom.

When asked what a successful education was, he stated it was subjective and questioned how success was measured. He believed a successful education was about one being well-grounded in the land, water, and air. However, due to the negative impact of the Indian Residential School, many of the people lost their way. What he meant by “lost their way” was due to the western education system; students had to conform to a western way of learning and, as a result, lost connection with their language, culture, and land. He stated, “Every generation was one step further away from the natural world.” He also stated that the elders had an important role in preparing students by guiding them along. He believed the connection to the elders was also severed and needed to be reconnected.

Chief Riel

Riel served as chief for 32 years. He had a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology. Chief Riel described himself as a “Residential school dropout and an escapee.” He was in the residential school up until grade eight, and then he escaped. At the age of 21, he decided to change his lifestyle. The department of Indian Affairs was recruiting students and was offering \$50.00 a month allowance, tuition, and room and board to every student who wanted to upgrade their education. Chief Riel applied and was accepted and thus started his upgrading education journey. He shared his experience as to the steps he took, “So, I went and did grade eight, nine, and ten in

three and one-half months, and 11 and 12 in eight months, and I went and got my Master of Arts from the university.” Although he had an incentive to return to school, which was the \$50.00 a month, he became interested in the school work and challenged himself to excel. He was able to demonstrate to himself and others that with determination, education success can be attained. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology. The elders recognized his accomplishments and asked him to return to the reservation to work with the people.

When asked what a successful education meant to him, he responded, “Education should be providing you with the skill sets to be successful in what you choose to take on in life.” He emphasized that students needed to look to their communities for what was needed, “Take that on and succeed in working with the people.” What he meant by looking to their community for what was needed aligns with First Nation education, when students were taught according to what was needed in the community. For example, to be hunters, medicine doctors, or warriors. Each student was trained in that direction. He emphasized that students in the present could look to their community to see what was needed and train in that area.

Due to his experience in the western education system, he believed the current education system needed to be reevaluated; he stated, “We need to rethink education.” He understood the goal of the Indian Residential School was to “take the Indian out of the child.” He mentioned ICIE was created in 1972, where the goal was to “put the Indian back in the child.” However, this approach, according to Chief Riel, was contradictory because “Indians controlling European style education,” would not work. Although he recognized the goal of ICIE, his experience revealed the western curriculum could not be enforced by First Nation people. Since ICIE began in 1972, there has been little change in the graduation rates of First Nation students. He believed students “trained in his history in the past people’s values and his people to worldview” would work better.

Chief Shari

Shari was in her 11th year in her role as chief. She had a grade 12 diploma with two years of college. Chief Shari spent 12 years in the Indian Residential School, where it was very strict and structured. Even though she spent 12 years in school, she remained grounded in her language and culture. She recalled her childhood experiences in regard to what she learned about the language and the land:

I grew up a language speaker. I grew up going hunting with my parents, doing berry picking and going fishing, and each time we went, say we're down there fishing, we spoke the language down there, and we spoke the name of the places.

All the locations in nature had a name and a purpose, but when children attended Indian Residential School, they lost connection to their land and language; as Chief Shari described it, "Language was tied to the land."

Chief Shari shared her experience with the structure of the school. The Indian Residential School had a strict structure in place where students were expected to say a Christian prayer three to four times a day and were conditioned to listen to the bell. When she hears a bell ringing, she experiences the same feelings she had as a child. She stated when the bells rang; the students had to confirm:

Yeah, where everything was bells and whistles and punishment if you don't conform to whatever it was that they want, after a while, you just accept that you conform, but after being in there for all those years and you're all of a sudden tossed, what you got? You still waiting for somebody to give you a little shove and say I could do that, you know it's ok, go do it, right? Yeah.

She also stated that parents today were not in touch with their children. As she recounted her experience as a parent, she felt sad. She felt she had lost the opportunity to be the parent she could have been. She gave an example of when she had to learn how to express love to her children. However, she did not feel alone with this as many other parents also struggled with the affection part of parenting. She, further, posited due to this type of experience, parents lost their

traditional parenting structure. In her view, they were caught between two structures, the First Nation and the Indian Residential School. She suggested the structure caused confusion and was a problem which needed to be addressed.

Chief Victor

During the time of this interview, Chief Victor had been chief for one and a half years. He had a Bachelor's Degree of Arts in Native Studies, a Minor in Political Science, and a certificate in Best Practices in Aboriginal Business and Governance. Chief Victor was raised by his parents. Both his parents were educated, and he had a close relationship with his grandparents. He was raised with his language and culture intact.

During high school, he encountered a guidance counselor who did not want to give him his career goal options after graduation, because he was told he would not succeed. He believed this counselor had no confidence in his abilities:

I went to the guidance counselor, and I said I want to go here with the University, and then he just looked at me and said, that's not for you; based on your grades, it's not for you. So, don't even consider looking at that; you're more of a trades.

This was not a positive experience for him nor did it encourage him to go on with his education. To think about this experience, Chief Victor chose not to immediately pursue his education. In the meantime, he worked as a teacher's assistant for a period of time and later decided to pursue a degree. To prepare for university, he attended a university preparation program and moved on to a university where he successfully earned his degree. He learned it was not necessary to accept the beliefs western educators had about him. What was important was the belief had in himself.

The Indian Act topic was raised during this interview, and he stated that the Crown, which represents the treaties between the First Nations and the Queen of England, promised education to instill language and culture; he stated, "The reason why I bring that up was that in there it was said that the school would be provided on reserve, it was one of the stipulations that

the crown promised to the First Indigenous Peoples First Nations.” He believed the Crown did not live up to their promises.

Furthermore, Chief Victor shared his views on the written text of the treaties by Sir. Alexander Morris (Morris, 1862). Although, Morris had a written text, he wanted to emphasize that the treaties were also passed down through oral records from the elders. When he had a discussion with his father, he was told that the elders believed this school was “Intended to have support for the retention of our language, culture, and our history, but somewhere down the line, this became a provincial curriculum run school.” He also stated that the provincial curriculum had done its job as students were not presently speaking their own language, “They all speak English, and it’s time for a treaty-based education system where language and culture were intertwined in the curriculum.” As noted, the Indian Residential School played a huge role in the loss of language.

Presentation of Results

Through the analysis of the in-depth individual interviews and sub-questions answered by all 10 of the participants, the results and themes of this study emerged. The participants in this study linked themselves through many of the same observations and experiences with the low high school graduation rates in Canada throughout the semi-structured interviews.

I had to be aware of my values, interests, perceptions, and thoughts to be able to set aside the things that influenced the research process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). It was further noted that I had to be open-minded during the interview while using the semi-structured interview process and that bracketing was a source that validated the research study. Although I had some knowledge in the information shared, it was not verbalized and allowed the interview to evolve naturally according to the participants’ perceptions. An audio recorder was utilized to

record the interview, which was then transcribed verbatim and kept in a confidential file in preparation for qualitative coding.

Once the data analysis began, themes and sub-themes started to take shape. The steps involved in the creation of the themes were described by Sutton and Austin (2015) in chapter 3 of the data analysis method in this study. Each interview was read line-by-line whilst highlighting phrases and words. This was repeated until the themes began to emerge. The following were the themes and related codes.

Table 2

Identified Themes and Related

THEMES	RELATED CODES
Theme 1: First Nation and Western Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Residential Schools • First Nation Education • Elders • Community • Spirituality • Indian Affairs • Language • Culture • Curriculum • Funding • Colonialism
Theme 2: Parent-Student-Teacher Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting • Supports • Structure • Life Skills • Racism • Bullying
Theme 3: Value of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Promotion • Communication • Leadership Roles • Graduation • The measure of Success • Role Models

Theme Development

Theme 1: First Nation and Western Education

The first identified theme was First Nation and western education. All participants stated that western education and the provincial curriculum was not geared toward First Nation Education. In fact, all the participants believed that the Indian Residential School had negative impacts on the First Nations' way of life. Arnold believed and stated that the "whole education system was failing, and it's collapsing." He attributed this to the Indian Residential School closures and the impact this closure had on the First Nation people. Shari and Riel held the belief the First Nation structure was dismantled with the Indian Residential Schools when the First Nations' structure was replaced with a foreign structure of "bells and whistles."

When the Indian Residential School was discontinued, it left many First Nations people bewildered as to what they would do with their lives. Arnold described it as, "When the kids came out, it just exploded, everything exploded here in this community. Social problems everything, drinking, everything just flared up right away." Shari shared that students were lost when they left the Indian Residential Schools, "You're all of a sudden tossed out. What have you got? You still waiting for somebody to give you a little shove." All the participants believed that the Indian Residential Schools had done its job-destroying families and communities.

Language and Culture was a reoccurring theme. Participants believed that, due to the negative impact of the Indian Residential Schools, students lost touch with their culture and their language. Language was an integral part of the First Nation culture, and as Riel stated:

Our language was tied to the plant; our language was tied to our philosophies; that's our worldviews; for example, in our Nation, in our language, there's laws that govern how you speak. The language, so language such gives you your mindset, how you look at the world, how you look at other people, how you relate to other people, its values the values in there, that you lose when you don't have that.

Shari shared her experience prior to Indian Residential School, stating her parents would take her out to the bush to hunt, fish, pick berries, and gather plants. She was raised to learn about all the important aspects of living in harmony with nature, and everything was done in the language. She believed, due to students being pulled away from this lifestyle, they lost touch with their culture. She stated when students lose touch with their culture and ability to identify that lifestyle in their language; they lose touch with a huge part of themselves:

The language came from the land, and so this you know kids learned to speak the language as they were doing everything and that was such a huge part of being able to retain it. It's not so easy learning it in school and trying to associate those words with the action. It's not as easy associating with action like what you're doing on the land, your berry picking or as you're hunting or skinning a hide all the language was there. So, if you're no longer able to go fishing down here you know if the fish were wiped out or they blocked off our area and we couldn't fish, that part of our language was gone forever. So, that lessens our ability to teach our kids and the ability for them to retain that.

When viewing academics, Don believed students were caught between their culture and what they learn in school. Don expressed students often lose connection to their culture, "You walk that line of your culture and academic, that cultural thing was very, very delicate." Don believed it would take seven generations to relearn their language and culture to where they once were:

We just got to keep pushing on it, and it was going to keep pushing forward with it. We have to keep going because we want to get back to what we were before, and it's going to take us seven generations to get there, but if we stop now, we're not going to get there, so we just gotta keep practicing and practicing.

In summary, this section looked at the different perspectives of education, mainly how western education negatively impacted First Nation students. Western education was delivered through the Indian Residential School system, where families were dismantled with loss of language and culture.

Theme 2: Parent-Student-Teacher Relationships

The second theme identified was the parent-student-teacher relationship. Prevalent throughout the interviews was the common ideology that a strong parent-student-teacher relationship was critical to a successful education for students who wanted to complete high school. Individual time with students, listening to parents and students, and supporting their culture and language were beliefs discussed by all 10 of the participants.

The following were the perceptions of the chiefs in regard to the parent-student-teacher relationships. Frank shared his experience concerning some of the challenges his members faced in regard to transportation. Students in his community need to travel a fair distance every day to get to a provincially operated school located outside the Indian reservation. When students missed their bus at the end of the school day, parents called him with requests to find transportation for their children or if students missed the bus in the morning, they would not attend school that day. Many parents did not have transportation and this was concerning for Frank.

Another problem he faced was the relationship between the students and the teachers. Prior to the interview, he was notified about a student who attempted suicide due to bullying in school. When he went to the school and met with the teacher, he found the teacher was not aware of what was going on with this student. This surprised Frank:

We had one student just two weeks ago, she tried to commit suicide because of the bullying and harassing in the school, we went to the teacher, and she was really surprised to hear what was going on and we were surprised that she didn't know because it's been going on for a while from my understanding, so how come they're not dealing with it?

Frank became aware of the disconnection between the parent, student, and teacher.

He questioned why they did not have a program that addressed bullying and harassment. Due to this incident, six chiefs decided to meet with the school to address the disconnection between

parents, students, and teachers. His belief was that when chiefs worked together to address such problems, this will create the change, which supports students in western schools.

Cindy believed that the relationship between the teacher and student was critical for students to move forward successfully; the relationship needed to be intact. Oftentimes, when there was a disconnection between the two, the student was the one who suffers a loss of educational potential. This example was given on what the students experienced:

They can't write they're embarrassed and they can't focus because they're already frustrated that they can't write. The teachers were pushing, "Ok, get this done and get it out" and they don't have the skills because there was no push for that stability in learning, there's no structure.

Among the lack of structure issues, Cindy understood the supports were not readily available for the students who needed it. For example, she noted, "The classes were too large within a small school, students were cramped together, 40 students to a classroom". She postulated issues were complex with students who were dealing with identity, such as being First Nation or not. She noted some students were not interested in learning about their cultural backgrounds. Another issue she felt was important to underline was autism. Cindy suggested the number of students with autism was increasing along with family breakdowns, which, she felt, all contribute to the lack of structure. She stated that although these were some of the challenges her students were facing, one of the positive outcomes she noticed was that teachers had more interactions with families.

Students need support was what Justin believed. He gave an example of his own life experience. He described the hardships he endured in his life when he had no one to turn to. He stated the family was not only by blood it could be with others who understood and provided support. He said students with no supports often found it difficult to cope:

All these kids they need the strong backing to help them if they stumble and fall, there's gonna be people to help them get back up because uh yeah everybody stumbles and falls,

and it's up to them to whether they get back up or not; and some of these kids don't want to get back up.

Justin was concerned about the students who felt like giving up and who needed supports and encouragement to move forward in life, he believed some these students without supports, would not succeed in their education.

When viewing education from the First Nation perspective, Don, who was a teacher prior to being a chief, understood firsthand what it was like to work with students who have low self-confidence. He would instill messages in the minds of students who felt discouraged and believed they could not complete their school, "I can't do that, I said sure you can, but I'm not as good as them. You don't have to be; you just be, do this, just do this, and be able to say, I can do it, I can do it, I can do it." Don understood the value of education and had the desire to raise the confidence level of the students. He stated when he was no longer chief, he would teach again.

One of the other aspects on the subject of support within this area, Don pointed out, was the importance of diet to student success. This encompassed a healthy diet. He believed when students were not fed with a healthy diet, they will not be able to focus in school, which was an important factor to education:

It starts on the day that we enter school; we were low-income family. We cannot afford the food, the extra food that we need, and so from that day on, we decline in brain development, and that goes through all First Nations. We all have, and we looked at it as ahhh not appointing the best teachers and not that, not the case, it was to do with food.

Due to this lack of a healthy diet, Don believed students would not reach their goal to graduate from high school, and if they did graduate, they would not be at their grade level and must take upgrading if they chose to go further academically. Therefore, when viewing the relationships within the parent, student, and teacher scenario, a healthy diet was one of the significant factors.

In many instances, parents do not have the means to provide a healthy diet for their children, and consequently, students go to school hungry, and when students were hungry, they would not be able to focus on their studies. Thereby, the relationship between parents, students, and teachers was impacted. When students lack a healthy diet, they have an added stressor in the classroom and as a result the teachers struggle to carry out their lesson plans.

Participants also shared some the challenges students faced, and the impact to their education. This was due to some of the social problems in the community, for example, alcohol and drug abuse in the home. An example was given by one of the participants. When parents abused alcohol throughout the evening, as a consequence, students lose the ability to rest properly. Therefore, with lack of nutrition and rest they face the consequences in their studies.

A common theme among all the participants was the value of the support that students needed, support within the parent, teacher, and student relationship.

Theme 3: The Value of Education

The third theme concerned the value of education. The value of education was viewed within the two perspectives of the western and the First Nation. For example, First Nation students value their cultural traditions and beliefs, whilst western education was more focused on the western process of education on the western process of education through the Indian Residential schools. The two differ in the practice of education. For the purpose of this study, it was indicative to define the word “value.” A definition was chosen from the nationally recognized, award-winning organization, Winning Features (2016). This organization helped and empowered high school students to succeed. They defined value in three areas.

In their view, value was about preparing the students to be self-confident and successful, which means helping them find an area where they “fit in” (Winning Features, para. 1). The process of finding this aspect includes helping them discover what was important to them and

what their values were. When students understand their values, they were driven, focused, and able to live authentic and happy lives. Winning Features (2016) indicated three areas in which to focus value: (a) character values, include the qualities of commitment, loyalty, positive attitude, and respect; (b) work values, when students discover the values that help them, they will find what they want in a job, this includes experiential learning, public contact, prestige, and stability, and (c) personal values were values that help students determine what they want out of life and will help them in being happy and fulfilled. Winning Features (2016) also pointed out that students needed to be given the opportunity to explore their values and determine what drives them. Inevitably, only when students understand their values will they determine what motivates them. Therefore, when value was viewed from this perspective within the paradigm of the First Nation culture, only then will First Nation students be aligned with their ways of learning. This will help them gain clarity in regard to what they really want to achieve in life. This definition of value was not practiced within the Indian Residential Schools as attested by the chiefs' perceptions.

Each participant viewed education from their perception and understanding of education. They explored why students attended school and why the graduation rates were low. Don's views on the definition of education were one of passion and confidence; he believed the first part of having confidence was to "actually dream it." He further believed students attended western school to be involved in the social aspect of it, "It's ingrained in us to do the schooling, I think, to be heard, to be seen." Through his experience as an educator, he understood the value of education but also understood the struggles students faced.

The definition of successful education and the value of education from the perspective of Riel was that education should be providing students with the skill sets to be successful in what they choose to take on in life. Although he stated, there were more graduates out of high school,

he questioned if that was the way to view success, “We may have many more graduates, but was that what, was that what we should be gauging success by as opposed to a person that’s trained in his history of the past peoples’ values and his people to world view?” Prior to European contact, the people in his Nation traded and were multilingual because it was necessary in order to communicate with the other Nations. Education was valued and involved in the learning of various languages within the education process of his tribe. He stated that when viewing graduation as a measuring stick, the curtain had to be pulled back, “Pull the curtain back, was that success, not according to elders.” The value of education in his view was about learning to live with nature to be able to do the things which support life, “First Nation lifestyle was not trained in school, for example, fishing, hunting, and making medicines” were not taught in schools. He questioned what students were actually graduating from.

All the participants’ perspectives on the value of education resulted from their lived experiences with the western education system when the First Nation education was not valued, nor were the cultural differences taken into account. They surmised this was due to colonialism and assimilation, when students were pressured to attend school. For example, in the western education system, the participants’ believed students were pressured and forced to go to school. Riel and Shari stated they had “No choice but to go to school, they have to.” Frank stated, “Students were pushed to go to school.” Cindy believed, “Students were pressured to go to school,” and Lester shared similar beliefs, “Students attend school because they were forced to.” Don’s views were a bit different; he stated it was “Ingrained to go to school,” and Justin and Victor stated students went for the social aspect of education and Cindy believed it was the student’s right to be educated, “Education was a right for the students.”

According to the chiefs, the First Nation people do understand and value education from the perspective of First Nation learning. When viewing the value of education from the

participants' perspective, Don believed relationships were vital, especially to one's own identity as a First Nations individual, "If a student doesn't have a connection to who they were as an Indigenous person then they would find no value in education which was run by the western education system." Riel was curious as to what type of education students were retaining, "What's the values? What type of education were they attaining? Were they retaining?" He believed that students need to be motivated to learn. Don does not believe in forcing students to go to school; he stated, "There's no internalized value to going to school because the values, they're not there and we cannot force somebody to." In Don's views, parents did not value western education and believed he needed to help them understand the differences between the value of First Nation and western education.

The differences on the value of education were shared from the perspective of Riel, who gave an example of his son, who was taught to provide for the family. He was taught at a very young age to fish and hunt. This learning process was exciting for the youth as he was eager to learn everything he needed to know. Riel's daughter was taught to make medicines and harvest food. This learning process also began at a young age. Both were trained within the context of the cultural community and all worked together as a family. This education process was valued. The learning process was complex and not an easy one because it was a step-by-step process where every little thing counts. When out in the bush, safety precautions needed to be learned and observed. The weather conditions and the landscape also played a huge part to surviving and living off the land.

All participants agreed that social promotion was not in the best interest of the student. Zwaagstra and Clifton (2009) described the social promotion as students being passed to the next grade level even when they have not completed their last grade level. This practice began in the 1930s'. Don observed students who participated the graduation ceremonies, even when they had

not completed high school at their grade level. He believed these students would struggle with their education in the future. He commented, “You know you're behind, and you never catch up.” He also stated that some students would stop there, while some who want to pursue further education would have to upgrade. Geraldine, too, was aware that students were socially promoted. She stated that students believed they had completed their education when they completed 12 years in school, however, not necessarily at their grade level, “They’re not at their grade level, so I guess, but for them, it’s a big thing for them to graduate right?” This gave a perspective of the chiefs’ experiences and observation on social promotion. Chiefs have observed that students appeared not to value western education but valued the graduation ceremonies.

Geraldine did not believe that students valued western education. This belief stemmed from her observations in the community. Although students had not earned all their credits to complete high school, the students and their parents valued the graduation ceremony. She surmised, part of the graduation they valued was the process and preparation for the ceremony which involved getting dressed in formal clothing with the cap and gown. This ceremony was attended by many parents and chiefs and was an exciting moment. The parents viewed this as an opportunity to acknowledge and express their love for their children, even when they had not earned all the credits for the high school diploma. One thing to note was that this unconditional acceptance has long been instilled within the First Nation peoples’ education process when everyone in the community was involved with the teaching and celebration of the child.

In summary, three themes emerged. The first was First Nation and Western education. In this theme, participants noted the western education system was not working for the First Nation student. The participants shared their experiences of the negative impact of the Indian Residential School system on the First Nation people. The second theme was Parent, Student,

and, Teacher relationships. In this theme, participants noted that the relationships between the parent, student, and teacher were of importance, which they felt needed to be worked on. They believed there was a disconnection within this relationship, and if not addressed negative consequences could continue. The third theme was the Value of Education. Here, the participants believed there was a perception that First Nation people did not value education, but that was far from the truth. They believed that First Nation people did not value western education because of the Indian Residential School experience and the fact that western education did not take First Nation culture, language, and cultural differences into account. In essence, education was valued within the context of the First Nation learning style.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The implications and recommendations of this study were presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to generate a new understanding of the role chiefs can have in solving the problem of low high school graduation rates for First Nation students. Thereby, with chiefs' perceptions and new understandings of the problem of low graduation rates, perhaps new strategies to increase students' high school graduation rates may arise. The following research questions were answered:

1. How do First Nation chiefs experience their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates?
2. What do First Nation chiefs perceive to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates?
3. How do First Nation chiefs understand these factors?
4. How do the First Nation chiefs conceptualize their ability to contribute to finding solutions?

Discussion Findings and Conclusions

Through providing a rich narrative analysis in response to the phenomenon of the low graduation rates among First Nation students, the research questions provided a structure for themes to emerge and strategies for action to be forwarded.

Research Question 1 Response

How do First Nation chiefs experience their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates?

When describing their experiences to the low high school graduation rates among First Nation students, participants focused on their own self-efficacy and experiences as chiefs. They felt, on the one hand, they could make a positive impact with students yet were frustrated

because they believed that the western education system was not a fit for the First Nations student's education process.

Riel's observations were representative of the general sense of frustration and hope voiced by all the chiefs. He discussed his perception of how he could make a contribution to education. He believed he could make a positive difference by telling his own stories and by sharing the knowledge of the elders' concerning their perspective on education. He completed a research study on language from the elders' perspective and published a book, which he stated was currently being utilized, "That's being used as a textbook in colleges and high schools, so we've got to rewrite our history according to our... on our own terms." Riel stated he did not want to see the students suffer. He believed he had to support them to get some level of education, and while as a chief, he could do his part to make changes within that system:

While we have problems with the educational system, we don't want to see our children suffer. You know and not be unemployed, and so we strive to try to get them some level of education so they could function within the system, while at the same time, we, as chiefs, have to try to change that system.

In Riel's views, he believed chiefs could contribute to change by being involved in education.

When more chiefs understand the plight of students, they will know how to help the student from their position.

Don was a teacher prior to his role as chief and believed his experience provided him with the insight into what was needed when working with students. He shared his views on the impact Indian Residential School had on the family structure. He believed that the structure was lost, "They've all been taken away by you know the impacts of all those structures have been removed. We have to put them back." Don also believed that spirituality and culture was an important aspect of the student's education, "Yes, grade levels were up there, well, what about

the other stuff, social, the spirituality, and culture?” Many of the participants spoke on students’ identity and how it was tied into their spirituality.

Furthermore, within the area for the search for solutions, all the participants stated they were invited to the graduation ceremonies, where they made speeches and met with the students to acknowledge them, and offer words of encouragement:

I always tell them I love being part of positive things. I love to see the growth. I love to be here. I love to be part of their lives, not just as their chief, but just a person they can talk to, and I see them in their community. Some of them work at the front desk (The front desk was the position of the band secretary where calls were taken).

Shari expressed how pleased she was for being invited to attend the graduation ceremony. She believed students were proud of their accomplishments. In her nation, there were two graduation ceremonies; one for the First Nations students hosted by the First Nation parents and the other with the provincial school system. Leaders were invited to attend both ceremonies, and when students saw their leaders in the provincial graduation ceremonies, they were reassured that someone they know was speaking on their behalf; Shari stated:

Just in the last few years, they’ve invited one of the leaders to go there and speak for on behalf of the other leaders at the high school. So, for the grad and I felt that that was good because I think it was important for the students to feel that you know somebody from their community was there or speaking on behalf of the First Nations because that didn’t happen before.

This was an example of how the provincial school system and the First Nation leaders could work together in support of high school graduates.

Frank indicated that the chiefs had not been involved with the education system because they were not invited; however, that has changed over the past few years; they were now invited to speak in the schools. Frank hoped that this would make a positive difference for the students:

The town and the council were trying to figure out ways that we’re all going to work together, but that’s not in the schools, that’s in the town right, but with the schools and there’s really been nothing for me other than going in once in a while to say a speech at a school with one or two classes at a time, but hopefully it’s going to change now because

we went and met with the school two weeks ago and we're going to start changing that because now we want to start addressing these issues that were happening and how were we going to work together to address them. If we can get something moved on that I think it's going to be a, it's going to really benefit the students that we have. Hopefully, that's going to work.

Cindy was open to accepting support from outside resources for her students. A school located in an urban city offered tutoring for her students, who reside in the reservation. This offer was accepted. She shared her excitement about the tutoring program when she stated, "The other thing that they're willing to do was to develop a tutoring program, to come and tutor our children, to come and do it into the community and tutor our children." Cindy believed the students would benefit from this support. This was one of the ways Cindy contributed to finding solutions to the low high school graduation rates in her community. Because of her knowledge and awareness of students' education challenges, she was able to contribute by working with others.

One of the interesting points Cindy made, concerned an invitation she received by the urban school to board her students, this meant students had to move into the city and live in a residential setting. Cindy was not comfortable with this idea. She stated she could not repeat what the Indian Residential School did to First Nation children and could not bring herself to agree with the idea.

Prior to his position as chief, Justin was a positive role model with the school district. He often met with students to encourage them in their education. Due to this background, he had invested a fair amount of time and effort into working closely with students even though he felt pulled in many different directions as a chief:

You're a chief, like no, I'm actually not a chief. I'm Justin; first, chief second, and I'm here to do my job to the best of my abilities because that's why I'm here. I'm not here for a long time. I'm here to do what I can with what I have. And it's I think it's imperative for leadership to be at these discussions and to have it because they're the leader of the people. They were the voice of the people. So, it's in their best interest to be having these

discussions with the schools and with the school districts with whomever they have to talk to. They have to talk to. It's a difficult job being a chief because you're automatically stretched and pulled in 10,000 different directions, education being one of them and health being another.

Justin reported his role was an important one, he believed connection to the school was vital to First Nation Student success and one of the aspects in his role as chief meant he could be involved in a meaningful way. Arnold and Victor stated communication between the leadership and the school district was imperative. Victor believed if change was going to materialize it had to be initiated by the leadership:

So, we need to listen to our elders. We need to bring that identity back. We need to bring the language, culture, and elders, and land-based teachings and immersion creating our own curriculum. We started to do out of the box thinking. Let's create our own curriculum. We don't need to comply because it's already done its job. It's up to us. We can't depend on government to reverse what has happened. It's up to us to reverse what was happening, and it also gives us that sense of sovereignty, self-determination coming from a treaty perspective.

This can-do attitude was expressed by Victor and he believed First Nation people were quite capable to work together to create changes for the benefit of the students.

Geraldine indicated that her council needed to work together for the benefit of the students. She believed when councils worked together, it would create a greater impact for the students. She believed in her role as chief she could make this possible:

My solution what I would like to do was have a manager meeting, you know, maybe have a councilor involved. Let's talk about it. Let's give support to our young people here that you know that are struggling to stay in school and go to school like you know make them worthy, you know like they were worthy too like they have worth you know no matter what's going on in their life you know that's you know growing up I had structure you know like in the way we weren't free you know just go anywhere not like children nowadays they can just go oh I'm going here or sometimes they would even tell the parents they're going here or there wherever.

Lester attended graduation ceremonies for high school students, and stated the connection between the leadership and the student was important. He believed when students saw their

chiefs at the graduation ceremonies; it would boost their morale to keep moving forward with their education.

This section discussed how First Nation chiefs experienced their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates. Though there was constant a level of frustration with the current system, the chiefs maintained a can-do attitude about what they can do. All of the chiefs were increasing their involvement with the schools at the local level. Apart from attending graduation ceremonies and making speeches in classrooms, chiefs believed culture and spirituality was vital to the students' education and elders needed to be involved. A few of the chiefs specified role modeling was important and that students needed to look to their leaders for guidance and support. The chiefs also believed if change was to occur it had to be initiated by them.

Research Question 2 Response

What do First Nation chiefs perceive to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates?

Some of the primary factors all participants agreed upon were the gap between the parents and the western schools, and the lack of supports. Most participants believed that parents were not involved due to the historical issues of the Indian Residential School system when parents were not allowed to be involved in their children's westernized education. Riel stated, "We didn't have a choice, our parents and grandparents didn't have a choice. They would be thrown in jail if they didn't go." Parents were afraid to challenge the education system of the day. They felt they had no recourse. If parents refused to allow their children to attend school, they were threatened with jail time; consequently, the children were admitted into the Indian Residential School.

Riel further elaborated on his perception of the First Nation family. He believed a broken family system was due to the impact of the Indian Residential Schools. Students were forcefully removed from their homes and not allowed to speak their language, he stated, "Because we're told that's a devil's language." He said this was partly due to colonialism, where they suffered under that system. "It's our struggle was this and lack of mistrust of that whole history of colonialism that we've suffered under." He believed the parents and their communities continue to operate under that system when parents were not allowed to be involved with their children's education. He understood students continue to struggle with their language, and he stated, "When people try to learn their language, we have a mental block because we're told that's the devil's language, right?" He emphasized this was not a process one could easily overcome.

Don believed First Nation education had been negatively impacted by the Indian Residential Schools, and as a result, the family system has deteriorated. He said the men had lost their roles in the family. He gave an example of when social assistance was provided to single mothers on the reserve, many believed in order to receive this money the males had to leave the family, "The family system has changed, and the males do not have a role in the family structure, there were many single parents." This belief stemmed from the western policy of social assistance, where families with abled men, such as in adult sons, brothers or spouses who lived in the home were expected to prove they were seeking employment. And because employment was scarce on the reservation, these males could not attain employment, and thereby the family was not given assistance. This policy forced the males out of the homes, because they believed the only way to help their families was to leave the home and only then were the woman given social assistance. Thus, in this new world men lost their roles according the Don.

He viewed the family as broken and dysfunctional due to this, "It's all broken and dysfunctional, so how do we teach something we don't even know of to be parents, to me the

cultural parts were missing.” Don stated the people needed to understand the Indian Act and take responsibility for their own lives, because the Indian Act made changes in the lives of the First Nations people holistically, “The Indian Act damaged the First Nation system. People became dependent.” He wanted his people to empower themselves.

The value of western education was non-existent or low from the parents’ perspective, according to Shari, “I think as well that the schools itself need to better understand First Nations students and their needs.” She said students were not graduating at their level and they were being socially promoted and not ready for life outside the school. She gave an example of a time when she went into the school to deliver an Indigenous program for a group of teachers. She had not completed her presentation when the school bell rang and the teachers walked out immediately. In her mind, this was an example of the lack of respect some of the educators had for Indigenous culture. In her First Nation culture, there was always an opening and closing to any presentations and this did not take place on that day. Clearly, this was an example of the cultural differences between western and First Nation education.

Another factor within this area, participants discussed involved parents who turned to alcohol and drugs to cope. According to Frank, the home was not the best or healthy environment for some of the students. This was what he observed in his community. He recalled childhood memories when the community was whole and homes were open to all and many people visited house to house. This practice was destroyed by the Indian Residential School system, when many of the children were forcefully removed from the home. In order to help bring the community spirit back, he held healing circles for the men and women in his community, he stated, “Slowly the people began to come around.” Frank never gave up on the hope his people would heal from the trauma caused by the Indian Residential School. These

healing circles provided support for many of the parents who struggled with alcohol and drug abuse.

As noted, chiefs viewed the various primary factors according to their experiences and perceptions. In Cindy's view, the students did not value education, "My perception is the kids just don't see the value in the education." She also found education support as another problem:

They don't have the sense of support. They don't feel the support that was meant to support them. I guess twisting it, there's a lot of pressure, and the support mechanisms that were provided to them aren't seen as the support; it's more pressure and demand on them, so they get overwhelmed.

This was an example of how students perceived support from the school. Rather than view it as support, it was more of an added stressor.

Justin proposed that student education should start at a young age; this way, the student would be better prepared for elementary school. He believed when students were prepared in the home to meet the western world, they would have a better chance to succeed when they entered that world. However, he was concerned with some of the homes. He expressed the home of the parents needed to be taken into account and was important to mention. In his view, for students to excel, they needed a stable home and not all homes provided the stability needed for success. What he felt was necessary was that student's basic needs were met and that students also needed emotional support. He posited the Indian Residential Schools caused traumas for many parents, which they continued to recover from.

Arnold, from his perspective, believed students were pressured by their parents to attend school:

But amm some of them were just sent to go to school because their parents just don't want them around the house anymore. Sad to say, but it was the truth. I don't lie, and I don't hide from nobody, and that's what I feel, and that's what I see. And they think that the school was ahh a daycare for their students or their kids. And amm when you send them to school, and everything and stuff like that and you know you discipline them, and

then the parents come back to you and say what were you doing with my kids why treating them like this for.

As noted, in one aspect, children were pressured to attend school by the parents, which was an expectation by the school system; which they complied with, but when the school enforced disciplinary methods the parents drew the line. Consequently, according to Arnold, this caused conflict between the parents and the school which often led to involvement by local leaders.

Parents often called local chiefs with these types of concerns.

The topic of language and culture was raised in the interviews. Victor believed there was lack of supports, in regard to language instructors in the mainstream schools. He gave an example of five First Nation students, who attended the school only to find there were no language teachers there to teach them. Arnold stated the curriculum needed to be reviewed so that it met the needs of the students.

To add to this example, Geraldine believed the education system lacked the involvement of elders. Extending further on this perspective, she suggested due to the Indian Residential School trauma, many elders were not healthy enough to be involved in the student's education. Many elders were traumatized and had not yet healed. Geraldine wanted to help the family but was afraid to overstep her boundaries. In her view, "it's a delicate matter working with families." Geraldine also stated the culture was deeply impacted by the Indian Residential Schools, "We just didn't practice our ways, we didn't respect our ways, we've forgotten." Lester explained the problems students experienced was due to the cultural differences, "That's why we don't succeed because we're trying to place something that's not ours, we didn't create it, now we have to live by it." This comment underlined the frustration that was filtered throughout the chiefs' perceptions.

Adding to the comment made by Lester and Arnold, another factor raised by all the participants was the curriculum and cultural differences. They believed the provincial curriculum was not in the best interest of the First Nation student. They emphasized language and culture needed to be incorporated into a curriculum which supported the students' cultural historical background.

Question 2 explored what First Nation chiefs perceived to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates among First Nation Canadian students. One of the primary factors concerned the relationship between the parents, students, and the schools. Cultural differences also played a huge role in this relationship as attested by the participants. This relationship gap was identified by the participants, they perceived this gap played a role in the students' education to their detriment. They believed the parents who attended Indian Residential Schools were traumatized and therefore did not know how to parent or work with the schools. The understanding and value of western education which included the curriculum was neither present nor understood by many families.

Research Question 3 Response

How do First Nation chiefs understand these factors?

All the participants had a perception of what contributed to the low high school graduation rates among First Nation students. What they believed contributed to the low graduation rates was the trauma many experienced due to the Indian Residential School assimilation process which resulted to the problems parents and students had within the education system. Arnold had a clear understanding of the factors due to the research he conducted. As a result, he wrote a book on his tribes' First Nation history. He interviewed many elders who told their stories of the difficulties they encountered and experienced with the loss of their language and culture. He attributed this to the cultural differences between western and

First Nation people and the distrust which developed due to the assimilation process. He perceived this as an historical issue.

Due to the colonization and assimilation process within the First Nation language and culture. Lester stated students were many generations away from the natural world. In essence, students have been removed many generations away from their cultural and traditional roots due to the western education system.

The Indian Residential Schools impacted the First Nation people on many levels, and education was one of them. Don stated that the students lacked drive, “I think the biggest one was drive. No, there’s no change in things, there’s no hope, I think it’s very low. If you’re here, you know in your community what do I have to look forward to skill-wise?” Don indicated the motivation level was low amongst students.

Shari indicated students were socially promoted, a common theme that emerged from all participants. She believed when students were socially promoted, they were not “ready for life outside school,” and therefore, they lack the life skills to cope. Participants believed students who were socially promoted would lack the academic skills or confidence to move forward with their education.

Support was a factor raised. All participants lived on Indian reservations, and in some communities’, students had to travel by bus to attend provincial high schools. Frank was one of the chiefs whose students traveled by bus every day to attend school. He observed when students completed high school, they had nothing to return to on the Indian reservation. Many of them had no supports during their time in high school and as a result remained in the community, where they abused alcohol and drugs. They either dropped out of school or graduated with incomplete credits. Frank stated, “They don’t have the supports at home, healthy supports, where parents can get involved with their education and then, they don’t have the community support

with the community, which allows or enables their student's alcohol and drug use." Justin shared similar views when he stated, "Without support in the home and lack of basic needs students will not do well in school."

Victor pointed out the current state of the lack of parental involvement stemmed from the Indian Residential School era when parents were not allowed to be involved in their children's education, yet Arnold believed the culture and language continued to be practiced by the elders, "The saving grace was the elders, in the knowledge, who were educated in that Indigenous way of doing things." Although Arnold went to the Indian Residential School, he spent considerable time with his parents and elders to learn the culture and language. He stated, due to the negative consequences of the Indian Residential Schools, parents did not get involved with education, "Historically, why parents weren't so much involved in school, really the negative connotation of what school meant for them was not a very good experience." He believed parents were traumatized and did not know how to support their children with western education. When students entered the door into their homes, they would leave behind the western world and re-enter the First Nation world. Most often, western education was left at the door and depending on the amount of time they remained in their First Nation world the western education was not retained.

This section addressed how First Nation chiefs understood these factors. Chiefs had a clear understanding of what contributed to the low high school graduation rates. The Indian Residential Schools played a big part in the destruction of the traditional First Nation lifestyle, which contributed to the struggles families experienced in the western education system. Based on what the participants stated, there was a lack of trust when it concerned western education. They stated elders do not trust the education system due to the past negative experiences with Indian Residential Schools. Participants stated the students lacked the drive to attend school. The

students were being socially promoted, and when they left school, they did not have the skills which prepared them to function in the western world.

When students find themselves on the cusp of the two education systems and have not learned from either, they often do not have anything to look forward to on the Indian reservations. Mainstream educators did not know how to help them and many parents did not know how to support them with western education, because it was as foreign to them as it was for their children. Despite that, participants stated elders were the saving grace as they retained their language, culture, and knowledge. All participants viewed elders as an integral part of the learning process however, due to the Indian Residential School system, this connection was severed. The question now, which remains in the minds of the participants, was, how can this connection be made where elders can regain their status at the community, which allows them to guide students in their learning?

Research Question 4 Response

How do the First Nation chiefs conceptualize their ability to contribute to finding solutions?

There were many views on this question, such as making physical changes, voicing concerns at the chiefs' table, and by encouraging the people to regain their traditional ways of living. The participants viewed their voices as one way of making changes, and all believed in building relationships between parents, students, and the schools. The curriculum was one issue that the participants believed had to be changed. Victor stated he wanted his people to have their own First Nation run school with a culturally based curriculum. All participants' views varied from one-on-one contact to attending national meetings with other leaders.

Riel's experience within the process of research provided valuable information from the elder's perspective. As a result of this research, he published a book, which schools were using

as one of the resources within the school system. He also worked closely with his Nation by practicing traditional ways of living, such as fishing, hunting, gathering medicines, and teaching these skills to the students in his community. Don concluded he needed more funding from the federal government in order to help his people. The funding was not enough to do the work he wanted to do, but one of the solutions he believed was important was to help build communication links with the parents, students, and the schools. Don added spirituality had to be incorporated within the learning dimension, "If a student doesn't have a connection to who they are as an Indigenous person then they would find no value in education which is run by mainstream." Other than this perspective, Don believed he could not do much due to the fallout of Indian Residential Schools, "There's no parenting skills there's no life skills, there's no nothing passed on, it's been and that's what I see is that it's been in place and there's where we're at." The frustration by chiefs as noted was a re-occurring theme.

Shari wanted students to get excited about education on the land, "Kids need to learn more about the land by being out there where they can feel it and get excited." She also emphasized how important spirituality was, "For me spirituality was, it's not separated from our culture, it's not separated from the language, it's all there, it's part of everything that you do." She contributed by attending many meetings where she voiced her concerns in regard to the education system.

Frank stated he worked closely with his tribe's social worker on the reservation and believed workers in this role were key contacts to families. He described the number of families, who struggled to provide the basic needs for their children and part of the social worker's role was to "be able to go to these homes and say you know we can't allow these students to be living in an unhealthy home and you're going to have to do something to address it." Frank stressed, "It's our responsibility to make sure they're going to be safe to make sure they're going to be

well nourished and getting good rest for their school.” One of Frank’s dreams was to have a school in his community so that it would be easier for the parents and students. He noted, when students missed their school bus to get home, parents had to find transportation to pick them up and return them to the community and this was often a struggle for both.

One of the important aspects of the child’s education was the ability of leaders to listen to the community and watch. According to Cindy, she stated, “I’ve got to listen to the community, and we watch. It’s not just listening, but you watch, you observe and see where the struggles were. You see what the interests of the kids were.” Justin shared his experiences growing up in a broken home and stated he knew what it was like, “Well, as a chief and having those conversations as well as being from a broken home, like, I know what it’s like.” He also stated there was hope, “I’ll keep, I’ll keep fighting to find those solutions, and I think as long as we keep fighting other people see it that we’re fighting and they’ll come and join the fray.” Justin was committed to building relationships with other chiefs and with the school districts. As noted, there continues to be hope on the part of chiefs.

Although, it had been a challenge for Arnold, he acknowledged he had to keep the communication lines open between leadership and the schools. He stated he liked challenges and would never walk away from them. His can-do attitude kept him moving forward. He planned to provide the funds to hire a liaison worker in the schools to work with families. He stated, “I just put five hundred thousand dollars into the education system, out of that \$500,000 there was supposed to be a liaison worker position coming out of it, and I want to see that happen.” Amidst all the obstacles, Victor contended humor needed to be practiced, “Find the humor in everything.” He believed the First Nation people always used humor to lighten their burdens. He added he attended graduation ceremonies, speaking engagements, and often offered incentives to students. He believed all this would support the student in their education journey.

Shari wanted to see more counselors working with the students who abused alcohol and drugs, she stated, “The parent was aware and allowed it. Where were we as parents?” Her plan was to work closely with council to address problems. Lester understood the job of the front-line workers was not easy and provided support for them. He said, “I look at my community, and I look at those that were on the front-lines and say, I think you’re doing a really good job, how can I help you better? or what do you want me to do? can I advocate for something that’s important to you?” This clearly showed the can-do attitude of the chiefs.

It was clear in response to question 4 that the chiefs were not passively watching as this problem in the education of their youth continues. When the question of how chiefs experienced their engagement in the search for solutions to low high school graduation rates was asked, chiefs stated they experienced some frustration with the western curriculum because it was not a fit to First Nation students learning process. Furthermore, chiefs were all involved in the graduation ceremonies and had meetings with local schools. They believed part of the solution was to remain engaged with parents, students, and schools. They were actively working within their means to help the youth in their communities and would clearly go further given additional opportunities afforded them.

Overall, in looking at the responses to the research questions, the three themes identified in chapter 4 filter through all the conversations. The themes of First Nation and Western Education, Parent, Student, Teacher Relationships, and the Value of Education color every aspect of the lived experience of the chiefs and the problem of low graduation rates. What the First Nation chiefs perceived to be the primary factors in the low high school graduation rates was attributed to the impact of the Indian Residential School system. As a result of this, families were dismantled. The chiefs indicated there was a disconnection between students, parents, and the school systems. The curriculum was another area of concern that needed to be re-assessed.

First Nation chiefs understood the factors to the low high school graduation rates. They understood that the Indian Residential Schools negatively impacted the language, culture, and the family system. They live in the results of these factors within their Indian Reservations.

The First Nation chiefs conceptualized their ability to contribute to finding solutions. Many of the chiefs stated they had to use their voices to initiate changes. They believed they needed to keep communication lines open to their communities and with the schools. The curriculum and the cultural differences was a point of focus and they noted the importance of creating a curriculum that met the needs of the First Nation students. More funding was also indicated. The chiefs also believed that the First Nation traditional lifestyle and spirituality must be preserved in order for students to value their identity and their First Nation history.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

The general and specific problem concerning the low high school graduation rates among First Nation students was that, although there has been research completed on the topic of education, there was no research that explores the perceptions and lived experiences of the First Nation chiefs in Canada. Their perceptions have not been explored, thereby creating a gap in research. This study explored the perceptions of the First Nation chiefs on the low high school graduation rates. As a result of the study, three themes emerged from the interviews, which provided views of different aspects of the response to the problem statements.

The three themes apply directly to the problem statement. The first theme that emerged was First Nation Education and Western Education. The participants all agreed the Indian Residential School had a negative impact on the First Nation ways of learning. The leadership style practiced within these schools was autocratic, where the absolute power was in the hands of the church officials, whereas in the First Nation learning style, the child was empowered to learn from the elders and adults of the tribe. The second theme that surfaced was the Parent, Student,

Teacher Relationships, where all members of the family were involved with the teaching of the child. Each member of the tribe had a role to play in the education of the child, whereas in the Indian Residential School, there was one teacher for 50 – 100 students. The third theme was the Value of Education. In the First Nation world, the education of the child was geared towards preparing them for their future and was aligned with their lifestyle. The western education model was not geared towards the First Nation lifestyle as it did not take into account the cultural differences. It was a foreign system that was not in harmony with the First Nations way of learning. What was revealed was that First Nation people did, in fact, value education, but not in the way it was delivered by western society.

All these themes combined created a path for change to the low high school graduation rates. By including the Canadian chiefs' perceptions and beliefs in this research study, the gap was partly addressed. There was now additional historical background provided by the chiefs with solutions where change can be made by the leaders who have the influencing power.

Application to Leadership

Each of these themes also applies directly to the servant leadership style, where each member of the community was valued and supported. Servant leadership was intertwined within the First Nation culture; for example, the First Nation education process empowers and teaches students to prepare for their future. Relationships were of importance to this learning process, and every member of the tribe valued education.

The following aspects were important to the servant leadership style as outlined by Liden et al. (2015), the leader cares for the follower's personal problems and well-being, creates a value for the community, understands the organization's goals, empowers followers, helps them grow and succeed and puts followers first, and behaves ethically. For example, the chief who repaired the fence was concerned about the appearance of the community and how it would

reflect on the students' self-esteem. This act in itself was a demonstration of the servant leadership quality of caring for the well-being of followers. As students walked by the fence every day to go to school, they would notice the difference the chief made; thus, students will be aware that their chief cared for them and his community. Creating a value for the community and empowering members were also the traits of the servant leadership styles, as pointed out by Liden et al. (2015). In this case, the chief who agreed to accept tutoring from an outside source empowered the parents to support their children in their education and created value for the community.

Servant leadership applies, as the chiefs could utilize this style when working with government officials. For example, Schwantes (2015) listed 10 qualities that a servant leader possesses. The leader has good listening skills, along with empathy, has the ability to help people heal by helping them solve their problems and conflict in relationships. The leader was also self-aware and had a strong sense of what's going on around them. Further, the leader has the power of persuasion by using influence to create positive outcomes. Conceptualization was also a skill that the leader has, which was the ability to look at a problem by thinking beyond the day-to-day realities. The leadership has the foresight to be able to see the outcome of a situation and stewardship, which involves having the commitment to serving the needs of others. The commitment to the growth of people was the ninth quality that the leader possesses, and the tenth quality was the ability to build communities by encouraging peoples' positive qualities and praising them for their efforts.

These 10 servant leadership qualities mentioned by Schwantes (2015) and the six Liden et al. (2015) listed apply to the leadership style of the chiefs from the community level to the national level. By utilizing these leadership qualities, chiefs will be able to support and influence change within the area of education.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the data resulting from this explanatory phenomenological study, four recommendations were suggested. Each of these recommendations has implications for current chiefs, aspiring First Nation high school students, parents, educators, education institutions, and governments.

The four recommendations for action were: (a) The relationship with the Federal Government regarding financial support; (b) the curriculum and how it needs to be created to meet the educational needs of the First Nation students; (c) the relationship with the school divisions, and (d) the ongoing support for the First Nation parents and students.

Relationship with the Federal Government

What was of significance was the funding chiefs have highlighted. This increased funding will support changes that need to be made to meet the educational needs of the students. First Nation based education can become a reality, and access to more funding for First Nation education will help this process. With the continued relationship between the government and First Nation chiefs, this may become a reality.

By utilizing the servant leadership skills as outline by Schwantes (2015) the leader has the power of persuasion by using influence to create positive outcomes. These skills will help them when negotiating with the federal government in regard to funding. An example, towards these negotiations involves the curriculum. The chiefs have discussed the importance of creating a First Nation curriculum and by conducting research on First Nation curriculum, they could design one that reflects their tribe. This curriculum proposal could be taken to the federal government for financial support. With a well thought out plan and actionable goals the federal government could help to support their initiatives.

First Nation Curriculum

The focus of this recommendation was on the curriculum. This involves relationships with other First Nations, First Nation education systems, community members and education departments. The chiefs could work with their education departments to explore and research what First Nation curriculum models were currently available in Canada. By investigating these models, they will be able to assess how they can design their own First Nation curriculum for their tribe. As each tribe differs in culture and language they will be able to tailor such a model to meet their needs. As suggested by a number of the chiefs the curriculum process could be funded by the federal government whose fiduciary responsibility according to the treaties was to provide funding for education. However, as noted in the literature review, education was tied into the Indian Act and chiefs, federal government, and educators will need to be creative when addressing this artifact, the Indian Act.

Relationship with School Systems

As the First Nation curriculum will take some time to create and develop, the chiefs need to continue to build relationships with the provincial school divisions by attending meetings and going into the schools to meet with teachers and students. For the chiefs who have schools on their Indian reservations this approach will also apply. When educators understand the First Nation chiefs' perspective on education, they will better understand the First Nation student. In addition, school boards with First Nation trustees could be created to support the First Nation education system, and First Nation counselors could work with the families and students in the school to help with the Indian Residential School trauma.

Relationship with Parents and Students

The relationships with the community on the Indian reservations were important, and the chiefs could support parents by explaining the value of education and how First Nation education

can help their children in their future. By communicating and defining the value of education with the community, the parents will understand and support their children in their educational endeavors. The relationship with the students was of the utmost importance because when students feel valued by their chiefs in their education endeavors, they will be more apt to succeed. It was also vital that the chiefs share the value of education with the students on the topic of education.

It was also vital chiefs share the value of First Nation education and acknowledge the challenges students faced within the western education system. When students understand the differences in education delivery, it will lessen the strain of “going against the grain” and free them to acknowledge their own culture and ways of learning. As Okakok (1989) noted First Nation people had to take a ‘foreign’ system and try to make it work

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of the analysis and study outcome, there were three areas that require further research: (a) research with other First Nation chiefs, (b) elder’s input in First Nation education, and (c) trauma by the Indian Residential Schools on First Nation education.

Further research needs to be conducted to involve other groups of chiefs in regard to their perceptions and beliefs on the topic of First Nation Education. Further research with other chiefs could involve the chiefs from eastern Canada, and new findings may emerge. It would be instructive to compare their beliefs with the chiefs involved in this study who believed that there was a problem with low high school graduation rates among First Nation students.

Another area to be researched was the elders’ beliefs and perceptions of what First Nation education could look like in light of the low high school graduation rates in Canada. Although elders have been interviewed in regard to their experience in Indian Residential Schools, they have not been interviewed on the low high school graduation rates. The benefit of these

interviews will help educators understand their experiences and what solutions they may offer. It will also validate the First Nation Peoples ways of learning. The chiefs stated elders played an important role in the family's education. By doing the research within this area, perhaps elders could suggest solutions to bridge the gap between the student and elders. With elders' input, additional information can be used in the creation of a First Nation curriculum.

Research into the impact of trauma on the First Nation families and how it affected their learning should be explored. Through the research, solutions may be identified to help the families heal from the trauma. All the chiefs stated that the impact of the Indian Residential Schools affected families across Canada. Families were traumatized, and as such, there was little research about what to do to deal with this trauma at the school level. Although there were some First Nation counselors in the schools, the parents were left out of the equation, and when looking at the First Nation education of the past, parents were involved at every level, but currently, parents' trauma were not being addressed at the community school level. When looking at the counseling methods for First Nation people, it would be interesting to see what methods work well for the traumatized family. For example, some First Nation counselors may use traditional methods such as sweat lodges, fasting, or smudging within their sessions as opposed to mainstream counselors who may use such strategies as reality therapy or cognitive behavior therapies.

Concluding Statement

In conclusion, when viewing education for the First Nation student, there was an opportunity for historic change for First Nation education. As the literature review revealed the chiefs confirmed the findings of the researchers on the problems cited. This study not only confirmed the findings, but adds to the solutions by the chiefs. As confirmed the First Nation people endured hardships due to the negative impact of the Indian Residential Schools.

According to the chiefs' perceptions, what was experienced by First Nation people was not productive nor positive. Western education was viewed in a foreign way by the First Nations, which was delivered out of harmony with their beliefs and culture.

For the first time in history, this study captures the voices of Canadian chiefs on the phenomenon of low high school graduation rates among First Nation students. As noted in the literature review, First Nations people have been over researched in the past and would normally shy away from non-First Nation researchers. This was why this research study was significant. It records the chiefs' perceptions in a way that offers solutions to the problem of low graduation rates among First Nation students. This study will add to the academic field where others can build from.

When Morris (1862) negotiated with the chiefs on the topic of education, the chiefs may have believed that education could help the youth learn how to live in the western world. However, the western education process may not have been fully explained to the chiefs. The chiefs may have believed that education was a process to learn more about the western world. They could have thought that the youth would learn how to speak English and how to function in this society. The chiefs did not understand, first of all, that the Europeans had a class system in place and that there were many roles in western society, which the chiefs could not have understood; thereby, how could they understand the process education played towards these roles? Thus, the painful process began with educating youths for these roles without understanding the roles they were being educated for. The chiefs understood the value of education, but did not understand the process of western education. Hence, if the chiefs and Morris discussed the process involved, the chiefs could have had more input in the process and delivery of education.

A deeper understanding of the First Nation regard for the general concept of education was revealed in a very interesting observation made about the parent and chiefs' experience attending student graduation ceremonies. Students were graduating in spite of not having enough credits to meet the high school diploma requirements. But the parents and chiefs attended because they were proud of the student and wanted to express their unconditional love and acceptance for the student. In the eyes of western education supporters, incomplete high school requirements may be viewed as a failure, but in the eyes of the First Nation parents and chiefs, it was not viewed in the same light. This act alone aligns with the servant leadership quality as outlined by Schwantes (2015) when he stated that praising others for their efforts was one of the leadership qualities. By choosing to lead with servant leadership, chiefs will have another style that can help influence and implement changes.

Finally, what was important to note was the understanding of the value of education and how vital this awareness was to the low high school graduation rates. The chiefs in this study identified the problems and had a clear understanding of what needed to materialize to move forward. This phenomenological study revealed that First Nation education was essential and was valued by the First Nation people. This study underpinned why western education had not been valued. Through awareness of these differences in the value of education, First Nation chiefs, students, and parents will be able to reaffirm their identity and culture with pride and worth. Educators and governments will have additional information to help this process where they can “come and join the fray,” as one chief put it.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE – First Nation Chiefs in British Columbia and Alberta, Canada

1. What tribe/band were you from?
2. How long have you been a Chief?
3. What was your age?
4. What education level do you have?
5. What was your definition of a successful education?
 Probes: Do you think this reflects First Nation communities' expectations?
6. Why do you think students attend school?
7. Were the students academically prepared for entering the high school program?
8. What were the strengths of the education program in helping students achieve a
 “successful education? Probe: factors that influence success
9. What challenges were students facing in acquiring their high school education?
10. What controls were in place for students attending school? How effective were the
 controls? What was the impact of the controls?
11. Was there resistance to the controls?
12. What do you think was the community that the students belong to? What was important
 to them about that community?
 Probes: What symbols were they attaching meaning to - other students from north, from
 their community, language, culture, clothing, etc.
13. Do you think that students were acquiring coping skills? How and what were they?

14. If academic and community identity outcomes were indicators of a successful education, how were the students doing in achieving these outcomes?
15. What additional supports do students need to influence success?
16. Additional comments:

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to participate in the following research project to be conducted by faculty member or student, in the _____ Program. I understand this research study has been approved by the City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form, signed by all persons involved. I further acknowledge that I have been provided an overview of the research protocol and a detailed explanation of the informed consent process.

Title of Project: THE PHENOMENON OF LOW FIRST NATION HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES IN CANADA AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST NATION CHIEFS

Name and Title of Researcher(s): Rubi Sakeskanip-Shirley, Doctoral Candidate

For Faculty Researcher(s):

Department:

Telephone:

Email:

Immediate Supervisor:

For Student Researcher(s):

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Craig Schieber Associate Faculty

Department: Education

Telephone: 206-226-2544

E-mail: schieber@cityu.edu

Program Coordinator (or Program Director):

Sponsor, if any:

Purpose of Study: To study the phenomenon of low first nation high school graduation rates in Canada and the perceptions of First Nation chiefs.

Research Participation:

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (the checked options below apply):

Respond to in-person and/or telephone Interview questions;

Answer written questionnaire(s);

Participate in other data gathering activities, specifically, _____; Other, specifically,

_____.

I further understand that my involvement was voluntary and I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation at any time without negative consequences. I have been advised that I

may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand I may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation was confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means. If the student researcher's cooperating First Nation chief will also have access to raw data, the following box will be checked. All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) were kept locked and password protected. The research data will be stored for years (5 years or more if required by local regulations). At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers,

sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

Participants Name: Please Print Participants Signature:

_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Rubi Sakeskanip-Shirley

Please Print Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or their supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s): Program Coordinator (and/or Program Director), City University of Seattle, at (address, direct phone line and CityU email address).