



## *Honoring What They Say*

### *Part III: The Native Education Centre Experience*

#### *Introduction*

The Native Education Centre (NEC) was involved in adapting and testing the UBC research questionnaire and focus group methodologies. This section of the report describes the history, development, and seven goals of the NEC, as established by the charter of the Urban Native Indian Education Society; it then describes the NEC's involvement in the research process.

The process provided an opportunity for the NEC to interact with the UBC research team over six months beginning in February 1993. The interaction consisted of meetings about the details of the UBC graduate survey process, findings, and ongoing implementation.

The decision to participate as a separate First Nations postsecondary institution was made, and the steps that followed the decision are discussed. The steps include adapting and implementing the questionnaire and focus group methodologies and examining and interpreting the substantive findings. The final aspect of this section is a discussion of related issues and reflection on the research process method.

#### *History and Origin*

The Native Education Centre has operated as an adult education program in downtown Vancouver since 1967. The program originated with the late Ray Collins, who began working as an instructor funded by a grant from the Department of Indian Affairs. The objective then was to provide basic academic and preemployment skills that enabled the learners to better cope with the transition to an urban lifestyle. Through life skills and cultural programs, learners could adapt to life in the city without repudiating their past. Education in this setting provided them an opportunity to learn even more about their rich history.

At the time the Centre was the only program in Vancouver that combined life skills and educational upgrading for First Nations adults. Each year the program graduated roughly 35 learners; and in most cases these

learners either found employment or continued their education in other institutions.

### *The Urban Native Indian Education Society*

In 1977 the Department of Indian Affairs decided to discontinue funding for the Centre. Through the involvement of members in the First Nations community, as well as lengthy negotiations with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, an agreement was reached that allowed for the continued operation of the Centre. These people from the community formed the Urban Native Indian Education Society.

In 1979 the Urban Native Indian Education Society was registered under the Societies Act of British Columbia with the following seven goals:

- To help meet the educational needs of people of Native Indian origin who have made or are making a transition to urban living;
- to provide central and suitable facilities where educational meetings can be held;
- to encourage fuller participation of people of Native ancestry in educational and community affairs;
- to assist in, and to undertake if necessary, any educational program or activity designed to promote the welfare of Native people in the community;
- to aim for the creation of better understanding within Indian groups and between Indian and non-Indian groups and citizens for the general benefit of Native education;
- to plan and develop with agencies of governments, churches, businesses, and benevolent organizations the increase and improvement of educational, occupational, and other beneficial services and facilities for Native people in the community;
- to manage and operate the Indian Education Centre.

As a result of this dedication the Board of Directors organized a conference in October 1979 to discuss urban Indian education. URBICON drew over 200 delegates from varied public and private organizations and was a great success.

### *The Period of Growth*

The focus of the Society's activities is the Native Education Centre, and as a result of this focus, the Centre has been able to expand into a valuable resource for First Nations people. An integral part of that resource is a team of three full-time counselors who work with learners experiencing personal struggles.

The scope of this document precludes a detailed description of the accomplishments of the Centre. Following are some highlights of the past 14 years, presented in order to illustrate UNIES commitment to education controlled by First Nations.

- Expansion from one (preemployment) program to 17 programs ranging from basic literacy to first-year college programs in seven areas of study.
- Initiation of a program of studies in Native Adult Basic Education from Level 1 (grade 3) to Level 4 (grade 11).
- Initiation of college preparation programs with two concentrations: general college entry and health/science careers.
- Construction of a Haida longhouse to accommodate the expansion of the NEC.
- Ongoing curriculum development for all programs with the aim of providing a First Nations context that enables learners to better interpret their experiences.
- Development of culture and life skills programs that give the learners hands-on experience with culturally related activities for program credit in all NABE classes.
- Annual Centre/community events—Christmas Party, Elders' Day, Cultural Festival—to develop and strengthen the community relationship.
- Development of outreach education whereby the programs and curricula of the Centre are directly available to First Nations organizations and communities. In 1992-1993 the Centre operated programs in nine communities throughout BC, with a total enrollment of 163 learners.
- Development of the reputation of the Centre as academically, administratively, and fiscally responsible. The Centre is a well respected institution in the educational system of the Province and is regarded as a model to emulate as a First Nations-controlled educational facility.
- Establishment of formal affiliation with Vancouver Community College to provide joint accreditation of academic programs.

#### *Working with the Research Team*

##### *The Proposal*

In January 1993 the University of British Columbia through the First Nations House of Learning submitted a proposal to the Native Education Centre (NEC) inviting them to participate in a research project on its graduates. The proposal outlined the rationale and methodology of the overall research project UBC was undertaking with its graduates and gave information that the project was being funded by the Ministry of Advanced Technology and Training.

The Native Education Centre would participate in adapting a research model that had already been developed by the First Nations House of Learning research team. The proposal also included a report of the First Nations House of Learning/UBC research process for the period July 1992 to October 1992; a revised research timeline; and a copy of the UBC First

Nations Graduate Survey questionnaire. The proposal explained that the NEC would be piloting the UBC research model using either or both the survey and focus group methodologies.

In making the decision to participate in the project, the NEC pondered the following questions:

1. What would the political implications be of participating or not participating in the research project?
2. To whom would the research data belong?
3. How adaptable were the questionnaire and the focus group methods?
4. Would NEC be able to respond within the UBC timeline? and
5. Did NEC have the time and human resources to get the job done?

The NEC had been invited to participate in a meeting with the research team held February 11, 1993.

#### *Meeting the Research Team*

Meeting the UBC research team would prove to be a major contribution to NEC's decision to participate in the research project. It was during that meeting that a member of the NEC management team had the opportunity to present to the research team members a thumbnail sketch of NEC; the historical and present political context of First Nations postsecondary education in British Columbia; and possible implications in the NEC choice to participate. The NEC also had the opportunity to explore with the research team some of the above questions.

The team reviewed details of the research process; provided a summary report and literature review; and discussed issues related to the research methodologies. In addition, part of this one-day meeting was devoted to reviewing some of the returned UBC survey questionnaires while discussing approaches to analysis. Time was also devoted to exploring ways of contacting UBC graduates who had not returned their questionnaires and to planning for the focus group component of the research process.

#### *Making the Decision*

The NEC was given two weeks to explore and discuss related issues and inform UBC of its decision. One of the NEC management level staff reviewed her thesis proposal to do graduate research of NEC students from the skills training (college level) programs. The UBC master's student was interested in investigating the reasons NEC graduates gave for the successful completion of their program. A proposal had already been submitted to the Urban Native Indian Education Society's (UNIES) Board of Directors, so it would be a matter of deciding whether the student would be interested in exploring the adaptability of the survey and focus group methodologies.

Once NEC decided to participate in the research project, the next step was to explore which questions to ask and to decide which graduates to



survey. NEC was interested in two of the three questions presented in the UBC proposal that were to: (a) to determine the relationship between their (NEC) education and employment; and (b) to identify factors leading to successful graduation. However, NEC was interested in adding another dimension to the first question, which was to determine the relationship between their (NEC) education and the graduates' further education.

The third question that interested NEC was why the students chose to attend NEC for their education. The target group that NEC decided to survey was the skills training graduates from 1989 to 1992 inclusive. When NEC made the decision to participate it gave oral confirmation followed by a letter of intent to the First Nations House of Learning at UBC.

#### *Adapting the Questionnaire*

NEC decided that most of the questions were appropriate to meet its overall objectives but added two other aspects. The NEC would investigate previous school experience of NEC graduates and determine the correlation between the NEC education experience and further education. Before completing the revisions of the questionnaire, NEC reviewed the methodology section of the literature review prepared by the research team. NEC decided that the language and format of the questionnaire would be maintained. Minimal changes were made and the whole series of questions was retyped by one of the staff at NEC.

#### *Hiring a NEC Graduate*

The adapted NEC graduate survey questionnaire was ready for mailout during the first week in June 1993. To facilitate this process the NEC, in consultation with the UBC research team chair, decided to hire a NEC graduate. This decision was based on the expectation that the graduate would be able to gain leads from maintained association with classmates and other learners who graduated from NEC.

The NEC graduate was given a list of Skills Training Program graduates of four academic years (1988-1989; 1989-1990; 1990-1991; 1991-1992), and she began making phone calls to the most recent graduates and worked backward to obtain current addresses. One hundred, seventy-one graduates received questionnaires, and at the time of the questionnaire analysis 33 (19%) had been returned. The survey questionnaires were mailed out over a period of three weeks during which follow-up phone calls were made to confirm with the graduates their receipt of the survey. In late July a reminder letter was mailed to learners who had not returned their surveys. As a result, NEC continued to receive questionnaires even as the report was being written.

The 33 surveys were submitted to the UBC research team for data tabulation and interpretation.

*The Questionnaire and its Findings*

The questionnaire was developed to focus on:

1. graduates' educational background before enrolling at NEC; entry into NEC;
2. experiences while at NEC;
3. participants' perceptions of the role of NEC in employment and further education.

It was mailed to 171 graduates of skills training programs identified from NEC records, followed by a letter and a telephone call reminding the graduates to complete the form. There were 33 completed questionnaires returned for a rate of 19.3%. This is comparable to the return rate in the UBC study before the telephone survey was undertaken to promote questionnaire return. Copies of the questionnaire and the invitation to respond are included in the Appendix.

*The Participants' Characteristics and Their Programs*

*Gender.* Four men and 29 women responded to the survey.

*Ages.* The current ages of the participants range from 25 to 54. The median current age is 34.5 years. The age range at entry was from 19 to 51, and median age at entry to NEC was 29 (see Table III.1).

*First Nations identity and language.* Tabulation of participants' First Nations identities would reveal individual identities, so we report them here by noting the number of First Nations represented at NEC. Some people have ancestry in more than one Nation so more than 33 First Nations are represented. The most commonly cited Nation is Cree: six of the participants. The following other nations are represented, listed in orientation from the Centre.

*East:* Delaware, Ojibwa, Sauteaux, Cree, Metis, Okanagan, Interior Salish, Sto:lo;

*South:* Dakota;

*West:* Halalt, Haida;

*North:* Squamish, Sechelt, Nisga'a, Tshimshian, Gitksan, Tlingit, Chilcotin, Carrier, Northern Tutchone, Lillooet, Stl'atl'imx.

Table III.1

Age	Currently	At 1st Entry to NEC
19-20		2
21-24		5
25-30	10	10
31-35	8	3
36-40	3	3
41-45	5	2
46-50	4	2
51-55	2	1
Missing	1	5

Twenty-three (69.7%) say that they identify with a particular people, lineage (2), band (6), village (1), or group (12). Nine (27.3%) say that they do not. It is interesting to note that eight of the participants (24%) do not identify most closely with the groups they have listed as their own ancestry: the groups they identify most closely with range from noting identification with "all Nations," through telling of their identification with other First Nations cultural groups, to noting identification most closely with the NEC.

Twenty (60.7%) of the participants speak or understand at least one First Nations language, though five qualify their competence to "a bit" or "some," and only 10 claim fluency in both speaking and understanding the language. Six of the 20 say they have some competence in a second First Nations language. The languages represented are named by the participants as Salish, Chehalis, Sechelt, Hulq'umi-num, Okanagan, Interior Salish, Lil'wat, Cree (5 participants), Ojibwa, Haisla, Nisga'a, Gitksan, Tsimshian, and Chilcotin.

*The Programs.* Eight participants have completed one program at the Centre, 14 have completed two; five have completed three; and one has completed four. They give us retrospective reflection from the period 1976 to 1993 from a variety of programs (see Table III.2).

*Variety of programs.* The individual programs completed are shown in Table III.3.

*Admission.* One participant did not specify the basis of admission. Seven fell into more than one category, so the number of bases for admission is 39 (see Table III.4).

Table III.2	
Period	Number of Programs Completed
1976-79	2
1980-82	3
1983-85	2
1986-88	4
1989-91	24
1991-93	20
not noted	5

Table III.3				
Program	Sequence of Multiple Program Participation			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Native Adult Basic Education 2/3	1	1		
GED	6			
Office Skills		11	6	4
Public Administration	5	3	1	
Tourism	4	2		1
Criminal Justice	3			
Family Violence	2			
Early Childhood Education	2	2		

Table III.4

Completed Secondary School	11
Adult Basic Educ/GED	10
Mature student applicant	7
Other basis for admission	11

Some who checked “other” have told specifically what that other basis was: six of the participants note some other postsecondary experience (university, community college, technical school, etc.).

*Educational Experiences Prior to NEC*

It is clear from text responses that several participants misinterpreted *school* in the questionnaire to refer to NEC, not to their prior schooling as was intended by the questionnaire. All text responses were assessed to see whether the participant was referring to school experiences prior to entering NEC or to NEC itself. Only when it could be established that the participant was clearly referring to *school* as opposed to NEC was the judgment made to classify the response accordingly. Of the 33, 16 clearly referred to school. It is the subgroup of those 16 that are referred to below.

*Academic achievement in school.* Participants’ self-assessments of their academic achievements in school are shown in Table III.5 by area. They are arranged in declining level of assessment of achievement (i.e., self-assessments were highest in English, lowest in music).

*Support in school.* The 16 participants who focused on their school experience made assessments, in a restricted-choice questionnaire item, about the sources of their support while they were going to school (Table III.6).

Table III.5

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Not marked</i>
English	11 (68.8%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)	
Humanities	8 (50.1%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)	1 (6.3%)
Math	6 (37.5%)	6 (37.5%)	4 (25.0%)	
Phys. Educ.	5 (31.3%)	7 (43.8%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)
Fine Arts	2 (12.5%)	9 (56.3%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (12.5%)
Science	2 (12.5%)	7 (43.8%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (6.3%)
Music	1 (6.3%)	9 (56.3%)	3 (18.8%)	3 (18.8%)

Table III.6

<i>Indicated As a Source of Support</i>	<i>N and %age</i>
Friends in school	9 (56.3%)
Family	8 (50.0%)
Teachers	8 (50.0%)
Counselors	7 (43.8%)
Out-of-school friends	2 (12.5%)

<i>Table III.7</i>	
<i>Culture gave participant a positive value</i>	8
e.g., instilled strong sense of pride	
<i>Culture gave participant awareness</i>	7
e.g., an awareness of land claims; more consciousness of prejudice	
<i>Culture had a negative effect</i>	3
e.g., "culture was more of a hindrance than an influence"	
<i>Neutral comment</i>	1
e.g., "no acknowledgement of culture as we grew up without it"	
<i>No comment</i>	14

*Effect of First Nations culture before NEC attendance.* This question is a text completion question, reading "My First Nations culture influenced my pre-NEC school experience by ..."

The pre-NEC aspect is so clearly specified that the responses of all 33 participants are considered here. Fourteen people—almost half—chose not to respond to this item. The responses may be classified with the categories shown in Table III.7; short quotes from responses are extracted as examples of the kinds of statements categorized under each heading, and the number of participants who responded in terms of that category is noted to the right. Of the 19 responses, 15 referred to the positive value of culture, or to culture giving the respondent awareness.

*Problems, Responsibilities, and Influence of School*

*Problems.* The 16 who focused on school discussed problems with a completion question: "The major problems and/or obstacles I faced at school were ..." The number of participants who identified a problem in the area is shown in the right-hand column of Table III.8. Of the 16 problems, nine were either racism or institutional.

*Responsibilities.* The question was "Besides my academic work, the major responsibilities I had while attending school were ..." The categories and incidence (from the subgroup of 16) may be found in Table III.9. Of the 12 reported responsibilities, seven are family and home.

*School influence: Help or discouragement.* The text question for this item reads "Would you comment on how the school helped and/or discouraged you (for instance the administration, the faculty, the rules)." One of the 16 did not respond, and one simply said "no problems." Of the remaining 14, seven responses that were felt to indicate the range of participant's answers are presented here.

They seemed of a different world, not in tune with the students. It didn't matter who was sitting in the chairs.

Public school does discriminate, although they try to appear like they don't. Being there I could see little things, e.g., basketball captain was always a white person—I was just a good player.

*Table III.8*

<i>Racism</i>	5
e.g., "always being put down by white people"	
<i>Academic Problems</i>	3
e.g., "my written English," "trying to pass math and sciences," "lack of homework, study skills"	
<i>Institutional</i>	4
e.g., "lack of knowing the teacher"; overcrowded classrooms"; "There were counselors available but there were communications problems due to cultural differences"	
<i>Financial Problems</i>	2
e.g., "no money for extracurricular activities"	
<i>Personal</i>	1
"drugs," "bad influences"	
<i>Logistical</i>	1
"getting to and from public school"	
<i>No comment</i>	2

The students always insinuated that "Indians" were lucky because they always received everything in life "free"; we had many heated discussions about this. The instructors always pretended not to be aware ... around these issues.

I was discouraged because there were no programs in place to help students adjust to mainstream society.

I didn't like being put in a low, low class category (grade 8s didn't talk to grade 9s and so on; grade 11s and grade 12ers ruled). Everyone was put in groups. I was in the outcasts' group.

The rules helped as they were very strict. Because it was a small town the faculty were for the most part generous with their time. Administration was not helpful because no First Nations culture was taught.

Did not allow me to develop personally.

*Entering and Attending NEC*

*Related work experience prior to attendance.* Three people failed to indicate whether they had related work experience prior to initial enrollment at NEC. Fifteen reported that they had such previous experience (e.g., as a teaching assistant in kindergarten, doing office work, bookkeeping, wait-

*Table III.9*

<i>Family and home</i>	7
e.g., looking after siblings, household chores, etc.	
<i>Volunteer and community work</i>	2
e.g., "soccer, basketball practices and games"; "teaching Sunday school; camp counselor"	
<i>Logistic</i>	2
e.g., "getting to and from public school ... 6 km. from reserve"	
<i>Personal</i>	1
e.g., "Just being there to do school work was a major task itself. It took a lot of courage to show up."	



Table III.10

*Private Individuals*

Family members	8
Friends	8
Past or present students	3
Specific individuals	6

*Other sources*

Word of mouth	2
Publicity (brochures, etc.)	3
Other agencies and institutions	7

ing tables, court worker, drug and alcoholism treatment work, etc.). Fifteen people reported no related work experience.

*Initial sources of information.* The first question reads "How did you hear about NEC and its programs?" Three participants cited more than one source, and one said "can't remember," so the numbers in Table III.10 refer to the number of participants who cited a particular source; the total number of sources listed is 37. It is interesting to note that private individuals were the most important source of information, being listed 25 times, whereas agencies and NEC publicity were listed 10 times.

*The decision to attend.* The question is "What made you decide to come to NEC?" and the most basic distinction in the way the question was answered is that responses may be made in terms of either (a) the institution itself, its characteristics, programs, general atmosphere, and staff; or (b) in personal terms, expressing participants' aspirations or motivations.

Only one person failed to respond to this item. Fourteen (42.4%) responded in terms of institutional characteristics of NEC, 10 (30.3%) answered in personal terms, and the responses of eight (24.2%) participants combined both personal motivation and NEC's characteristics. The column to the right shows the number of participants who cited that reason; because a few participants cited more than one reason, the column adds to 35 (Table III.11).

Table III.11

*Institutional Characteristics*

The attractiveness of specific NEC programs	6
NEC's Native orientation and atmosphere (related to the following)	15
The nature and the extent of NEC support; the different approach to learning	4
NEC's physical setting	2

*Personal Characteristics*

Personal aspirations, desire for personal growth, and desire for Native cultural knowledge	6
Family encouragement and support	2

*Application, admission, and registration.* The question is relatively long: “Please comment on how you felt about your application, admission, and registration (for example, information or assistance you received or failed to receive; any difficulties, etc.).”

Four people (12.1%) did not respond to this item, but only one person (3.0%) registered anything negative at all about the processes named in the question. Eight participants (24.2%) were more or less “neutral” (e.g., “no problems; good information [provided] at that time”; “No problems whatsoever”; “It was okay”).

Twenty (60.6%) commented on those processes in very positive terms: three who had had difficulties external to NEC commented on how positively NEC staff members dealt with those difficulties. The key terms are *helpful* and *welcoming*. Other examples of comments are: “The staff makes each person feel like they matter,” and “great reception.” The negative comment focuses on two (unnamed) people who were “rude” at the participant’s initial approach for information.

*Funding.* A picture of the financial situation of NEC students is shown in Table III.12 in responses to the restricted-choice item.

Table III.13 shows the pattern of student support by agency and the participants’ assessments of whether that specific funding was adequate or inadequate.

Fifteen participants reported some kind of negative experience in funding (lateness, problems in eligibility, etc.). Four commented on the formula for funding not taking account of Vancouver’s exceptionally high cost of living. Three had had some difficulty with band funding.

Table III.12

While I attended NEC my funding was usually:

adequate	6 (18.2%)
barely enough	10 (30.3%)
at subsistence level	7 (21.2%)
below starvation level	4 (12.1%)

Table III.13

Source of Funding	N	%	Participant’s Judgment		
			Adequate	Inadequate	Missing
CEIC	16	(48.5%)	3	12	1
MSSH	5	(15.2%)	5		
UIC	6	(18.2%)	1	5	
Health and Welfare Canada	2	(6.1%)	2		
Band	10	(30.3%)	4	5	1
DIA	3	(9.1%)	1	1	1
Student Loan	2	(6.1%)	2		
Bursary	1	(3.0%)	1		
Other Sources	1	(3.0%)	1		

Table III.14

Area	Good	Fair	Poor	Missing
Humanities	20 (60.6%)	10 (30.3%)	3 (9.1%)	3 (9.1%)
English	18 (54.5%)	11 (33.3%)	3 (9.1%)	1 (3.0%)
Reading	21 (63.6%)	9 (27.3%)	3 (9.1%)	
Exam Writing	13 (39.4%)	14 (42.4%)	4 (12.1%)	2 (6.1%)
Study Skills	13 (39.4%)	12 (36.4%)	6 (18.2%)	2 (6.1%)
Essay Writing	11 (33.3%)	14 (42.4%)	6 (18.2%)	2 (6.1%)
Math	8 (24.2%)	15 (45.5%)	8 (24.2%)	2 (6.1%)
Sciences	7 (21.2%)	16 (48.5%)	7 (21.2%)	3 (9.1%)
Second Language	6 (18.2%)	2 (6.1%)	21 (63.6%)	4 (12.1%)

Three participants commented on the high level of stress that is associated with low financial support while attending, and some mentioned that they felt like quitting because of it. One participant wrote:

As a single mom on welfare there was not a lot of financial incentive to take a Manpower-sponsored course. [The motivations were] only my personal desire to better myself and the strength to take risks.

*Academic preparation.* Self-assessments of academic preparation for study at NEC were made in a restricted-choice questionnaire item. The academic areas are presented in Table III.14 in order of decreasing assessment of preparedness.

Some of the comments made by the participants reflected the whole range from a sense of preparedness to a little anxiety:

I had not been in school for a long time. It would be nice to have had a review.

I am the first to admit that I need to brush up on my academics.

I felt that I was ready to continue my education.

*Initial adjustment to NEC.* All but one participant commented on this period of adjustment. The words the participants used to describe their first few months at NEC show a sense of expectation and challenge. The adjectives they used to describe their initial period at the Centre are as shown below: the most common description was *exciting*. Terms marked with an asterisk are descriptors that were used by more than one participant:

*academically good, educative, promising, excellent, \*exciting, interesting, positive, \*enjoyable, fun, \*great, happy, nice, wonderful, calm, \*comfortable, easy, a feeling out process, new, refreshing, \*challenging, difficult, frustrating, hell, overwhelming, scary, \*stressful, trying, cramped for space.*

The adjectives indicate the flavor of their responses, but they can only begin to indicate that most of the graduates remembered their beginning at the Centre in positive terms. Only five (15.2%) recalled the time in remotely negative terms (e.g., a misunderstanding with an instructor, misgivings about ability to do the work). Twelve (36.4%) were neutral (e.g., those who said "hectic") or responded with both positive and nega-

Table III.15		
Family responsibilities (e.g., children, spouses, single parenting, maintaining household)		13
Financial responsibilities (including 3 who held part-time jobs with attending)		6
Personal situations (e.g., coping with illness, disability, learning punctuality, consciously being a role model, learning time management strategies)		6
Community responsibilities, volunteer work		1
None (no noteworthy other responsibilities)		3

tive comments (e.g., that it was academically good, but financial problems made the time frustrating). Fifteen (45.5%) were positive (e.g., “Great! [I] felt comfortable immediately”).

*Problems, Responsibilities, and Sources of Support*

**Responsibilities.** Because adult students often have responsibilities other than their academic work, we asked participants to describe the additional responsibilities they had to meet while attending NEC. Their responses fall into five categories and are shown in Table III.15. The numbers indicate the number of participants who noted responsibilities in the category.

**Problems.** The problems participants noted are shown in Table III.16 in decreasing order of frequency. The number of participants who mentioned a particular problem is shown to the right.

Their notation of things as problems must be compared with the things they mentioned as additional responsibilities. The five participants who listed financial responsibilities as a responsibility did not note finances as problems, so taken together at least 33% of the respondents remember financial issues in terms of either responsibility or problem. Day care

Table III.16		
Financial problems		5
Day care, child care		4
Problems with specific staff members		4
Dealing with a personal characteristic or situation		4
Relationships with other students		3
Institutional characteristics		3
Academic areas (e.g., homework, lack of skills)		3
Commuting to NEC		2

Table III.17		
Friends	29 (87.9%)	
Family	20 (60.6%)	
NEC Student Services	10 (30.3%)	
Other Sources of Support	10 (30.3%)	
Community Support Services outside NEC	3 (9.1%)	
Employment opportunity at NEC	2 (6.1%)	

Table III.18

Specific (named) individuals on NEC staff	17 (51.5%)
Instructors, staff, counselors at NEC in general	11 (33.3%)
Other students	9 (27.3%)
Friends (not necessarily at NEC)	3 (9.1%)
Family	2 (6.1%)
Everyone at NEC, The place itself	2 (6.1%)
Instructors, counselors outside NEC	1 (3.0%)

facilities are predictable as a problem area in light of the responsibilities of students who are parents. The other problem areas are self-explanatory except for institutional characteristics. The issues mentioned include a program lack (e.g., two said cultural learning activities). One mentioned the concentrated nature of a program.

*Sources of support.* A restricted-choice questionnaire item reads: "The things that really helped me get through NEC successfully were ..." The response pattern observed is shown in Table III.17.

On the other hand, the open-ended item that asks for completion of this statement, "The most support I received at NEC came from ..." shows a somewhat different picture of sources of support (Table III.18).

The two items are phrased somewhat differently and imply different contexts of support; the text item might be read to imply support specifically by NEC, yet obviously friends, family, and others outside the Centre were named here as well. When the two items are considered together it is clear that family and friends are important sources of support, but that the NEC staff (instructors, counselors, other staff including support staff) are important sources of help and support as well, because 85% of the participants cite them as sources of "most support" in a context where choice is not necessarily restricted to NEC as agency.

*NEC and First Nations cultural influence.* The connection between NEC and First Nations cultures has a remarkable and important realization at the Centre. Twenty-two (66.6%) people commented on their First Nations culture with respect to their experience at NEC and 11 had no comment. Of the 22 respondents, three (9.1%) spoke of aspects of their culture that gave them a positive approach to learning, to doing one's best, and to sharing. A crucial role of the NEC is demonstrated in the responses of the other 19 participants (57.5%) who wrote that for them NEC's role was one of introduction, reintroduction, or reinforcement of their First Nations culture and identity.

*The Centre as an institution.* We asked for comment on how NEC helped and/or discouraged the participants. The 27 who commented defined these areas as salient:

1. specific institutional characteristics;
2. personal growth;
3. relationships with and characteristics of staff;

4. program and course content; and
5. rules and regulations.

It is noteworthy that only six participants provided comments that were in any way negative, and only four participants' comments were entirely negative: the areas in which those four commented were:

1. the participant's perception of lack of responsibility on the part of some students in connection with rules for attendance;
2. relationships with specific staff members;
3. information and content: a participant thought that more information should have been provided about access to other services; and
4. general evaluation: one participant simply said that NEC had been no help to him or her.

On the other hand, of the 21 whose comments were clearly positive, 13 participants focused on institutional characteristics that they said had enhanced their educational experience, and eight commented in positive terms about how NEC as an institution had contributed to their own personal growth. The institutional characteristics that they identified were:

1. the atmosphere: "open," "relaxed," "comfortable," "welcoming," "supportive," "encouraging," and "helpful" were terms that were used to describe NEC;
2. the staff (e.g., "encouraging," and "supportive");
3. the First Nations identity of NEC (which was highlighted by six participants);
4. course and program content; and
5. regulations (e.g., "the rules were strict, but helpful").

The comment that seems to capture this area best is that of the participant whose paragraph began "Totally encouraging," and after elaboration, included the summary statement "People cared."

The eight who credited NEC with contribution to their own personal growth spoke in terms such as these:

I became independent and strong.

The institution helped me be responsible toward completing assignments; also helped me to be aware of First Nations people and ... beliefs.

NEC gave me a chance to become something more than just another statistic.

#### *Careers, Work, and Further Education: Retrospective Assessment*

*Continuing education.* A large proportion of the participants have gone on to further education after their NEC experience. Eighteen noted such further participation; 16 had been involved with courses at other institutions; and 14 had taken more than one course at NEC. Ten indicated that they have not taken further courses after their NEC course (though two indicate that they are planning to do so), and five did not respond to this



item. Eleven of those who have gone on to further educational programs also document post-NEC employment.

The high proportion of those who have gone on to other courses after taking NEC courses, or who have been involved in more than one program at NEC, prompt a question about progress and level. It is impossible to do more than infer here but the inference is very strong: only two participants note a change in direction or field in the further education they have sought, whereas in the cases of the other 16 it is clear that the pattern of the programs in which they have been involved is one of progress (e.g., to higher certification levels; to university or college programs in the same field; to specialization; from ABE or GED to skills training programs, etc.).

We asked for participant assessment of how well NEC had prepared them for continuing their education, and the responses were almost uniformly positive. Eight responded with positive comments in general terms (e.g., "Yes—excellent"); six responded with specific reference to academic skills and knowledge areas (e.g., "I improved my educational skills [math, grammar, English, tenfold"]; two others were more or less neutral, though they indicated that they could have used more training in English, math, or communications skills; one was positive in personal terms (i.e., in gaining academic confidence, something that was implied by several others); and the single completely negative assessment focused on a single instructor.

*Employment.* We did not ask for post-NEC employment histories, but rather for comment on the relationship between NEC training and employment. Only the responses of those who explicitly stated employment status after completing NEC programs are included here: 21 (63.6%) document employment after completing their NEC programs, and included in this figure are 11 who document both post-NEC employment and further education after NEC graduation. Only two people indicate neither further education nor a history of post-NEC employment; the responses of another four participants do not indicate employment explicitly, but rather infer it.

If we were to document the specific employment positions of graduates anonymity might be compromised. Instead, by general area we can say that they describe work in sales and service, work as teacher aides, secretarial work (including specialized areas), tourism promotion, administration, and program development.

Two participants noted under discussion about further education that they realized that they needed more training and that this realization motivated further education at either the Centre or another institution. No participant made a negative connection between the educational program in which they had participated and subsequent employment: most noted

a description of their position and let that statement, in connection with the nature of the individual program, speak for itself.

### *General Assessments of NEC and Its Influence*

Three open-ended questions sought general assessments from participants directed at:

1. the NEC experience relative to participants' expectations;
2. the influence of NEC on the participant, both personally and as a community member; and
3. any influence of NEC on the graduates' First Nations identity.

*Expectations.* The generally positive relationship between employment and an NEC experience is reinforced and made explicit in response to a question, "How well did NEC meet your expectations?" Twenty-seven (81.8%) of the responses were very positive. Six of those respondents qualified their generally positive assessment by mentioning some aspect of expectation that had not been met (i.e., two had had difficulty with an instructor—this was a repeated theme by two respondents; one brought up the lack of day care facilities; one said the program went too fast; and two remarked that though the program met expectations, expectations for employment were not realized.

Of the remaining six, two (6.1%) had negative assessments related to what they perceived to be a lack of materials and/or misunderstanding with an instructor. The evaluation of two respondents (6.1%) was more or less neutral, and two others (6.1%) gave no response to this question.

*Influence of NEC.* In another area of retrospection we asked participants to discuss the general influence of NEC "in general (both personally and as a member of your community)."

Three people (9.1%) chose not to respond to this item, though their responses to other related questions indicated generally positive assessments of NEC. There were no negative statements here, so the 30 who made positive assessments of NEC's influence represent 90.9% of the group.

The most common area of influence was building confidence and determination (8), and self-esteem (2). The second most common area for comment was that the NEC experience gave them renewed affiliation with First Nations culture, recognition of belonging, and a sense of community (8). Another three participants were specific about the influence being that they were able to learn more about First Nations culture. Another three focused on the First Nations value of respect, and named it as an important influence from NEC. Awareness of First Nations issues and understanding of present situations was an area named by six participants as having been a product of NEC attendance. Two people said that the process of learning self-evaluation had been an influence, and another two simply said that they had become better people by attending NEC. One

commented that a major influence had been forming positive social ties in the urban environment.

*Identity as a member of a First Nation.* The question was phrased "Did NEC as an institution have any impact on your First Nations identity? If so, what?"

Four people (12.1%) did not comment, and another four (12.1%) said that they had already been well grounded in their culture and identity so could not say that NEC had had an impact in that area. Another four (12.1%) made comments that are difficult to interpret and thus categorize definitively (e.g., "We can be very strong people when we work together," and "There are a lot of us Native people wanting more out of life and going for it. We are not all ... inadequate").

Twenty-one (63.6%) answered in unequivocally positive terms: NEC had had a positive impact on the participant's identity as a First Nations person. Several of the participants described how the NEC experience had given them a sense of identity as a First Nations individual, how it brought them to a recognition of community, and how pride and being comfortable in their identity as a First Nations person had been awakened in them or enhanced at the Centre.

*Additional comments by participants.* In a space provided for additional comments, five people appended general commendation to NEC to their recommendations; the participants appeared to have interpreted the question as a request for recommendations. Among recommendations that were brought up by several of the participants the need for day care (8) and housing (4) were commonly mentioned; as well as physical expansion of the facility itself, due to current space demands and in the expectation of offering a broader range of programs (3). The most commonly mentioned suggestion (by five participants) in terms of policy was that all students have access to cultural studies.

### *The Focus Group Sessions*

The NEC graduate hired to research addresses and mail the surveys would also play a major role in contacting and confirming attendance at two focus group sessions held in late June 1993. Conscious effort was made to have a representative from each of the seven Skills Training Programs and a representative from each of the four years' (1989-1990) graduating classes. The focus groups were led by an NEC management staff with one or two UBC research team members to assist in recording and further questioning.

The NEC graduate transcribed the recordings from both focus group sessions and submitted the transcripts to the UBC research team. A member of the UBC team worked with one NEC management staff person to categorize and interpret the findings.

The graduates who volunteered to attend a focus group session were sent a letter to confirm their attendance; provide the questions; and inform

them that the session would be tape-recorded but that their anonymity would be maintained.

The graduates had the opportunity to think about and answer the following questions, which relate to their experience before, during, and after attending the NEC.

1. What led you to choose the Native Education Centre versus other educational institutions?
2. As a First Nations person, what at the Native Education Centre did you find most/least helpful?
3. In what way is your experience at Native Education Centre relevant to what you are doing now, either educationally, career, or community wise?

The interpretation of the findings are categorized under each of the above questions with a central quote and quotes with some variations. The quotations from both focus group sessions have been merged.

*Question 1: What led you to choose the NEC versus other educational institutions?*

*Desire to learn about FN heritage and be with FN people.* One graduate clearly makes a connection between learning about FN heritage and being with First Nations people: "And I wanted to be around Native people and people I could relate to and find my roots."

Another graduate expresses learning about heritage as a benefit: "I could learn about my heritage ... and I could benefit from that."

The following quote shows responsibility of learning and passing on that learning to others and relates to that heritage in a collective way: "So, I thought I should get myself educated in our Native heritage and be able to pass it on."

Others emphasize the importance of being with Native people: "And I wanted to go to school with Native people"; "And it was all Native people"; "To try and say yes, I belong here, I deserve to be here."

*Milieu at the NEC.* Some express the importance of feeling comfortable and welcome: "When I first came here, even just coming here to apply, I felt immediately welcomed and that was the comfort in it"; "There's one thing Native people find ... there's a lot of comfort with each other"; and the importance of being accepted: "And then I ... you know ... I knew I didn't have to prove myself"; and feeling at home: "When I came here I felt like I was coming home."

Some felt comfortable in a "Friendly atmosphere": "The reason I started here was everybody was friendly ... the first time I thought 'Oh no, I shouldn't go,' but everybody ... was so friendly ... that I thought, 'I'll feel comfortable'; "Everybody was so friendly here, I was happy"; "I was very impressed ... [with] the atmosphere of the school."

It was also important that some were able to anticipate making friends—one especially when older: "You don't know whether you'll be

able to make friends, you know how it is when you get older?" "[My sister] ... had made some friends and then ... we all became fast friends"; and to enjoy oneself: "And they all praised the school ... how much fun it was to be there."

Others express the need to check out NEC before registering: "Coming here ... when I heard about the NEC, I came here and immediately felt comfortable"; "So I came down here one day and checked into everything and took it from there."

And at least one feels ambivalence about attending a non-Native institution: "I felt if I went to a non-Native institution I would be pretty isolated."

*Accessibility of NEC.* One compares the accessibility of NEC with a community college: "I found out it really was quite easy to get into this school ... if I wanted to go to [other community college], I'd have to put my name on a six-month waiting list."

Another describes the efficient admissions process: "It was like, I think I want to go to school and here I am, I'm here, I'm in! Ya know, I didn't na, maybe next year"; one recalls the personal interview with a senior staff member: "[I had] an appointment with [staff name] ... so I came to see [name] and talked to him and he accepted me."

### *Relevance*

There are three subcategories here.

*Relevance of NEC.* The topic of relevance is related to aspects of personal, academic, and career life. Some relate the importance of program relevance: "They told me about ... what the courses that were offered to them"; "I came across a book from the NEC that had all the programs and everything and the Criminal Justice one really caught my eye ... it was in the field of what I was doing at the halfway house"; as it relates to First Nations issues: "[Because First Nations were represented here] ... I did a little research and found out what the NEC was all about and it was what I was looking for"; to content: "I came to get all the information I needed so that it would benefit me"; and to how motivating it is when one is able to relate to ideas: "You really start getting the seeds of ideas happening and growing right here, you get really motivated."

Others relate their choices to return to school with making major personal life changes: "I quit school when I was 16 ... and I had been going to various different schools off and on, trying to reestablish myself into a learning mode but it wasn't working"; "I'm a recovering alcoholic and after I'd been sober for a couple of years I didn't like where the alcohol had led me ... I decided I wanted to go back to school."

Another relates choosing NEC to his responsibility of rearing his son: "My son came into my life at that time ... that changed my whole life ... I was thinking I've got to find a job ... I thought about going back to school, get my grade 12 ... I knew about the NEC."

*Relevance to career.* Others chose to attend NEC because programs related directly to careers they were interested in: "I took a work experience and found I liked working in an office atmosphere ... they said the NEC has secretarial training now ... so I ran around ... and they accepted me"; "I sort of looked around at some of the programs ... and tourism seemed kind of fine"; "I came here to get all the information [to] ... benefit me ... careerwise"; "I just got tired of working manual labor, different odd jobs, and I always liked criminal justice system so I came down and I ran across a pamphlet."

One refers to the transferability of the program: "It was a university transfer [program] ... that's what I was looking for."

Another recognizes the employment skills gained: "You've got employable skills ... get out there and get a job!"

*Relevance of non-First Nations institutions.* A couple of individuals emphasize that other schools/institutions were problematic: "When I was going to [residential school], they pushed this English into my face, whether I liked it or not. I remember the first day I started in grade 1, I had problems. They didn't like me"; and "In all other educational institutions, I found that First Nations people or history weren't represented politically or otherwise."

*Goals appropriate to First Nations context/community.* The importance of how education would impact self and others in the wider community is emphasized: "So that it would benefit me and the world out there."

One expresses commitment toward First Nations children: "I hadn't really thought of what I wanted to do then, our children ... who is out there for our children? ... you don't hear of too many day cares on Native [reserves] ... so, I took my ECE [early childhood education]"; another expresses commitment to the future and to the next generation: "I wanted to be prepared for that [future] and also have the educational background of the history of the people that were ahead of us; that brought us to this point in our development and we are the stepping stones for the next generation."

*Experience with prejudice/racism.* Some of the respondents express painful experiences with racism during elementary school: "I really became aware that Native people were being really discriminated against"; "Before, I had a hard time being a minority in grade school in my environment and in my community"; "And a lot of things went on during ... grade school, like a lot of prejudice against me, and I didn't understand it."

Others experience similar concerns in high school and/or college: "And a lot of things went on during high school ... like a lot of prejudice against me"; the shameful feelings and its effect academically: "In high school ... there weren't very many Natives ... we were always picked on, called on, and I became very ashamed of being Native ... the other two learned to fit in with the Caucasians—did certain things that they were



accepted ... they figured, oh well, she can't handle it anyway ... so I gave up"; and the undue stress in proving oneself: "In the high schools and even in college ... was the feeling of wanting or the need to prove myself to be there ... with this constant fight, the stress would overload."

Finally, one respondent feels caught between both worlds: "All the way through my childhood, I was not welcome in either my home reserve or in Vancouver in my school ... I'd hang around with my Native friends and I'd be called derogatory names, you know, chug and squaw and stuff, and then I'd go home for the summer and be called honky, white trash, and whatever."

*Cultural alienation/deprivation.* Many of the respondents relate serious concerns about not having the opportunity to grow up in their culture. Such deprivation causes negative feelings toward oneself: "I didn't grow up with my Native background and I was at a point [in] my life where I really needed to know who I was and where I came from ... because I was changing my life and I wanted a better life ... because I didn't really have a pride in who I was, not just being Native, but just in who I was"; and one relates it to feeling restless with regard to career: "And at this stage, I hadn't really much to do with my culture at all, and I think ... there was probably a great gap in my life ... I wasn't aware of it except that I seemed to be awfully restless ... careerwise."

Another spoke of the importance of learning about oneself: "I started to ask myself a few questions about myself, who I was ... because I didn't ... I wasn't raised in the Native way or Native tradition and I didn't know very much about myself in that aspect."

One talks about growing up away from home: "Because I was raised in a non-Native community and I knew nothing except for mother's hobbies, or part of her culture ... she spoke Native at home and stuff like that, but I never grew up in the environment."

Another discusses the negative effects of residential school: "Because for years when I was in residential school, you know, I mean, we were brainwashed into thinking our history was nothing to be proud of."

*Personal knowledge received from trusted others.* Some of the learners hear positive comments about NEC, which influences their decision to attend: "Then a close personal friend of mine, we had a good chat and she said, 'What about the NEC?'" "I applied ... not with heart in it really ... I guess what it came down to was that I was scared to come back to school ... then a friend just kicked me in the butt and said, 'Do it!'"

Another knows one of the staff and expects to do better: "[In a previous job] ... I contacted the NEC here to see if they could do something better [about outreach] ... I happened to know the coordinator at that time ... so I came to the centre and applied."

Yet another heard positive comments from her family: "I had heard a lot about it from friends and family and I only heard a lot of positive things ... my younger sister came here ... and she really praised this school."

*Referral from agency.* Finally, two respondents relate recommendations from funding agencies: "I went to Manpower because I couldn't get a job ... I noticed this notice on the board that they had a NEC: I came to see the Manpower about it and they told me to come"; and "I went to the DIA and ... they recommended the NEC."

*Question 2: What at the NEC did you find most/least helpful?*

*Most helpful*

*Possibility of multiple programs.* At least three of the graduates were enrolled in NABE (Native Adult Basic Education) before they enrolled in the different skills training programs: "She took her GED, Microcomputer and similar things I took"; "I only made it to grade 8 ... it's time I started. I started in '89 and then I started here in ECE [early childhood education]"; and "I left and I came back again last year and took my ECE ... I've been wanting to do this for years."

One graduate expresses the desire to take another program: "I wanted to stay and get into another program"; one comments on finishing two office skills programs: "I got my Secretarial Office Training and my Microcomputer." (These two programs were designed as Part 1 and Part 2, but have become one program, Office Administration Training.)

*Courses and program quality.* The following extract praises the program organization and instructor commitment: "The course itself was really organized and she [program coordinator] really kept the students [in] with it"; the involvement of qualified instructors in the field: "The course here was really great, we got a lot of instructors from outside the course as well as in"; and the added opportunity of practical, hands-on learning: "And we went on practicum, we went on field trips and we did it all—made drums. It was all beneficial to the course."

One comment praises the benefit of many courses: "My education with the school has taught me a lot. We had a variety of courses"; and the following expresses receiving the opportunity to begin and continue learning: "The day I stepped in, I started learning. I went from my grade [8], got my GED, and I carried on to my ECE, and from that point on I've been just going forward."

The next comment shows the empowerment experienced in learning and the motivation gained from course opportunities: "They basically showed you how to run a video camera, then they took you into the studio where you learned editing ... and what we'd do is have little mock newscast and interviews. Then we started getting kind of political and we started going, 'Let's have a march and videotape it'!"

*Learning about First Nations cultures/issues.* One indicates that learning about heritage is most helpful: "That [learning about heritage] is the most

helpful thing that I've learned at this Centre"; another the strong desire to learn about Native people: "And I thirsted for that. I needed to know more about the Native people, where we stand in today's society and where we might be going in our future."

Others express some negative feelings when confronted with some of the living conditions and habits of some classmates: "I was always used to being very independent ... that wasn't so with a lot of my classmates who sort of expected or looked to others to solve problems for them ... it took me a long time to realize that ... it came from 150 years of living under the Indian Act"; and "I became aware of substance abuse from some of my classmates ... I had a really difficult time relating to ... these insurmountable problems ... I had one really best friend and I would talk to her ... she sort of made me realize that this wasn't unusual in the Aboriginal community ... I left home when I was 13 ... so I did know it existed, it was distant ... whereas I came here, it suddenly became a part of me and it hurt."

Yet others are disappointed that cultural classes are not a part of the Skills Training Programs curricula: "What I would like to see ... when I came here I was really disappointed that I couldn't take any of their cultural courses ... I had this awesome opportunity to come to this school and I couldn't take even one of the cultural courses, I was really heartbroken ... that would have helped with some of the healing, with that attitude"; feel left out: "We are having lecture after lecture downstairs while [other] students are playing, you know, making drums and playing their drums and ... it could have happened in the second semester."

One speaks for self and others wanting cultural classes: "I know for a fact we really wanted to get in on some of the culture"; while another relates taking cultural classes as being a part of NEC: "They'd feel more part of NEC if they did get to do something [a cultural course]."

Being at NEC is supportive to self-expression: "A lot of people, the way I see it, that come here are searching for direction of some kind and being able to express themselves in whichever way they can is good on a positive note."

Another speaks honestly about struggles associated with classroom learning and the effort required to learn: "I had to learn to take my ego and set it aside and be quiet ... I had to learn to be quiet ... I guess I was a detriment sometimes to the learning process in that group ... and it still is difficult"; and one relates the difficulty she has with a course because of the healing process she is in: "I just barely passed [course] because I had so much healing to deal with, but the other subjects I had taken, I had not problems with."

*Personal empowerment, self-esteem, and development of First Nations identity.* One relates how confidence increases with learning about self: "I benefited by learning about myself and who I am ... I can stand up and I know what I am talking about"; and others are empowered by the learn-

ing process: "You realize your potential and you go, 'Oh my God, I can do anything'"; the opportunity to discover new skills: "I really liked the opportunity to start new things ... it was really good for the self-esteem and to be able to practice skills I wasn't aware that I had ... I could help others enjoy things in a very positive way"; and to strive for academic excellence: "Whenever I got frustrated or tired or didn't think I could write another page ... I thought of that plaque [achievement award] and I thought how badly I wanted it ... And I got it! ... it is the incentive to actually go out and do it and be proud of working for it and getting it."

One recognizes the pride in accomplishment: "[Cultural courses] would increase your confidence in your abilities too ... it's known to give a person pride in creating something"; in resisting low standards: "Sometimes the attitude in the class ... I felt it myself a few times, that because we're Native don't make it too tough for us"; and desiring to be a part of the Native community: "I really needed to find out where I fit and I know where I wanted to be, I wanted to be part of the Native community."

*Helpfulness of instructors and staff.* Several comments are about instructors who encourage and give positive reinforcement: "It was the instructors ... the instructor told me I had good potential ... she said if you really want to pass, you got to come in and do work on your own ... so she gave me a chance and I took the option to do it ... they understand ... I had emotional support as well as the understanding"; show caring and advise learners to be challenging: "Some of the teachers were helpful ... they were so caring and took a key interest in our lives and in our thoughts ... encouraged us to challenge them, not in a confrontational way but to challenge their theories and beliefs"; instill pride and promote self-acceptance: "They talk to you to be proud of who you are and not to hide the fact or try to be somebody else ... it just more or less helped me"; insist on high standards: "Some of our teachers were brutal ... everyone would be complaining and really upset ... he said, 'You've got to show improvement in that area, you're going nowhere with that type of writing skill.'" "After a while I learned to appreciate that"; and encourage learners to ask questions: "Our teachers were very helpful ... we were told that no question is a stupid question ... we were openly encouraged to ask anything ... that was very helpful"; "I found all my teachers here extremely encouraging and helpful ... even if you asked the same question three times ... they would keep answering as long as you needed help."

Some commented on the approachability of the instructors: "And the instructors as well. And we could approach them at any time no matter how trivial the question may seem, they were always there to help and usually these were the pieces of the jigsaw that gave you the whole picture in the final analysis"; and their helpfulness: "I got that little push and you get that urge to go on"; "If you had any problem at all, myself I had a bit of a language problem [and] they provided help for you here. They got

somebody in special. [And] there's no other place that you can get that"; "Yeah, they pushed me, 'cause I was about ready to drop out, especially the first time—and we talked and talked and talked. Then I said, 'Okay, I'll give it a try.' So I gave it a try and I had to talk to them again"; "And the teachers, everyone pats you on the back saying, 'You can do anything you want to do'"; "The most helpful for me was ... there were two teachers who I really appreciate"; "How great the teachers were."

Others praise counselor support: "If you need counselors they were a lot of help to me for solving my difficulties ... and they were so helpful when I needed help. They were there and when you needed them, they said, 'Come on in, talk to us'"; and "[A staff member] had a whole bunch of doors for me to try and ... ended up helping me get funding from UIC for the year"; others note staff helpfulness: "Everybody was just so helpful"; approachability: "Other staff in the school were good, used to be able to go talk to them, anybody"; and dedication: "The staff and everybody was just great. They were there"; "The staff were pretty good, the instructors especially that [program coordinator], she was really good. I heard the others were just as good too."

Others comment on the positive and helpful environment: "I'm not too sure whether I would have kept on if I wasn't in this environment"; "The most helpful, just being at the Native school, really helped a lot"; "Just the atmosphere I think for me was good for kind of a move from a small town into the city, it was kind of a culture shock. Meeting everybody here, it's like a family. So that's the best part"; "I found most helpful, is everything that's located right here in the building. Everything is so available: the library, the counselors"; and "Another thing I found helpful was the environment, just being in the building ... it's always a good feeling"; "It's like a big family."

Others comment on student unity: "And the unity of the students ... I really enjoyed that experience of the students coming together and being really close"; "The most helpful thing I found here I guess is the unity of all the students and the instructors as well."

Two contrast being at NEC with other learning (college) institutions: "[In contrast to the NEC] ... I found it hard ... going to [community college], 'cause of the unity of the students here ... you don't know anybody, they're not the same. You don't get the same unity"; "In other institutions ... I mostly did find it sort of cold, sort of a sterile environment ... I didn't realize that there was anything different until I came here ... it was like coming home."

*Influence of friends and family.* Many commented on the support they received from friends: "It was the teachers and my friends ... we gave each other support and it was encouraging that we all give each other that kind of support"; and how they formed study groups: "[We] kinda reached out to others right from the start ... once we got to know each other, we usually

formed our own study groups"; "We had to help each other ... we did form study groups and we supported one another and if someone didn't show up, we called"; and helped one another: "I found my classmates extremely helpful ... you don't wait until you fall into a certain way, we were automatically in that circle just by being here"; "Because you get all this support from the students."

Another felt fitting in was quite natural: "You just blend naturally, it's not like a group apart where you have to be a certain way ... everyone accepts everyone the way they are."

One learner felt disappointed when others weren't ready to be helped: "There were a couple of people in our class that were going into the field of helping people and ... were not ready themselves ... that was really distracting and really hard sometimes ... some of their problems ... were sort of dragging everybody down ... you'd want to reach out and help ... but they still had to learn how to deal with it themselves."

Others met relatives or friends from other times: "[I found that I] ... knew people that [I] hadn't seen for awhile ... when [I started talking] to somebody in terms you are related to them? I came across a few students that, 'my God, you're my mother's cousin' and, you know, stuff like that"; and "Coming here and seeing that you have friends from different place and I ran across a lot of people whom I met over the years. Just kind of never kept in touch ... it was nice."

#### *Least helpful*

*Problems with funding.* Some commented on the inadequacy of funding: "We struggled because everyone was so poor ... the last week of every month I was always out of money and I borrowed it from a friend ... it was an endless cycle of borrowing, paying it back and having to borrow it again"; others have difficulty gaining funding: "When I got accepted ... my band wasn't willing to fund me for the first year ... they didn't know who I was"; "The door was closed to me when I went to Manpower although I was entitled with my UI ... it was like they said to me even before I sat down ... by chance I happened to talk to Sue and within that day she told me that I was signed up to come"; and: "I had a horrible time at CEIC even though I had worked for years and put into UI ... by getting the help of Donna at the school, she was able to get me alternate funding ... I really truly felt that the woman at CEIC had made up her mind ... before I went through the door."

Other comments show funding was not available for further studies: "Unfortunately, finances weren't there so I went out and got a job"; "But funding would be stopped right in its tracks and that's it"; and "Unfortunately, that door was closed for me. [I] can't go nowhere else. [I've] got to stay where [I am]."

*Need for day care.* Two graduates express concern about the lack of day care: "For lack of day care, I notice that a lot of the students were having



problems getting to school and because they were encountering problems with day care. Their babysitters wouldn't show up."

*Workload or program details.* Several of the graduates expressed difficulties with workload: "The workload got a little heavy ... it's really jammed into a short period of time and that was really hard ... I almost didn't make it. I think everyone considered quitting at one time in that class"; "When I was in Secretarial, it was quite a heavy workload ... and I got discouraged"; "We had an incredible workload"; "The workload ... if somehow the secretarial course could be broke up or else extended ... the only person in our class that actually really got a full understanding of the accounting ... had taken it before, so she came in with some knowledge ... that was really the hardest for me"; and "The first term ... was so difficult ... we were doing something like 25 hours a week of home studies on top of 30 hours of classroom stuff."

One wanted to do more cultural classes: "I wanted to do more cultural, but I wasn't able to make the drum, make the sweaters or do the beadwork ... if you're going to teach the children, you'd like to know some of the things yourself ... I don't think it necessarily has to be my culture, it could be other [FN] cultures"; one wants a second year at NEC: "I'd like the second year of ECE, if possible, to be offered here, 'cause there's not too many places that have full-time ECE."

Other comments are about teachers: "Some of the other teachers were biding their time ... were very indifferent ... I didn't find that very helpful or encouraging"; and "Some of the teachers were burnt out and some of them were just there to collect a paycheck."

One graduate expresses concern about confidentiality: "If we had problems ... every time I seemed to go to this one person ... and it almost seemed like everyone knew ... so I guess confidentiality for counselors, they really got to take that seriously ... my instructors had confidentiality ... it really hurts when other people know"; and another about course transferability: "I realize the course [practicum] was for job skills training and other than that not all the other courses were transferable to university, so that's the only thing negative about it."

*Racism and discrimination.* One student comments on misunderstandings between teachers and students: "Some of our teachers were non-Native. We expected them to be understanding and sensitive about Native people ... and if they weren't some students weren't too polite to them ... I admired those non-Native teachers that would come in here"; and "About the racism ... the white man ... I never heard that before ... I heard that a little bit here or felt it more like ... I started to learn about more people and where people's pain and the attitude was coming from ... in that attitude ... it's their form of healing."

*Transportation.* At least two graduates find commuting to school a challenge: "Having to come all the way from Surrey, I was fortunate in

that I knew the city ... if someone didn't show up, we'd call, we'd arrange rides"; and "It was hard, I had to travel from Surrey."

*Accessibility.* At least one graduate would like more access for communities: "At least a third or a quarter ... come here to the city for the first time ... and some of them don't make it ... so I'd rather that we took the NEC to the community."

*Question 3: In what way is your experience at the NEC relevant to what you are doing now (career, education, community)?*

*General FN culture, pride, values.* One graduate relates learning about her culture to pride and belonging: "And coming to this school made me feel proud of my culture and also let me enjoy and be part of the community ... like open the door for me to be accepted in the Native community"; "And I learned my heritage."

*Learning about First Nations cultures, issues, community.* Some emphasis is put on learning about Native rights, especially pertaining to the concept of community development: "The program ... gave me overall view of what's available out there in the community, or what I could do for the community. So my experience here covers all three areas, strongest in career and community, but, educationally it gave me a broader view of what I could learn and what I can pass on to others. My main focus right now, is to encourage all First Nations people to get themselves educated, because we're going into self-government and so we need educated people that can deal with the community at large, as well as within the First Nations community"; and one increases that community sense and bonds more closely with family: "Coming here ... has brought in my community sense ... I've asked questions, you know, it's strengthened my bond with my family ... it will grow stronger and stronger as I fulfill my needs in the spiritual sense."

Another becomes aware of discriminating policies: "It was like a whole new world opening to me ... I became aware of the Indian Act, I became aware of some of the suspicions I'd had in my head for some time ... that, yes, Native people were severely discriminated against"; "I learned a lot about politics and Native rights and this school's taught me a lot in regards to rights—a lot of Native issues."

Another observes: "I think a lot of the students here ... want to give something back to the community, to the people ... what sets Indian people apart is if you ask most of them what they want to do it is something in some way serving their own people."

One becomes sensitive to community needs: "Being at NEC made me aware of all the needs there are in the aboriginal community ... to achieve self-government"; and others become sensitive to community needs: "Being at NEC made me aware of all the needs there are in the aboriginal community ... to achieve self-government"; to involvement in community change: "I wanted to encourage other people to become involved, because

now we have to do for ourselves what was previously done for us. That's where I stand on the educational part of it for now"; "I don't feel too alone. And, because of this program, I try to talk to younger people, be a role model; just do my best and hopefully they'll help other people"; "So it's really brought me into the community and then I'm sharing with the community things that I am learning from the Centre itself"; and actually become involved: "Oh basically, because of coming here, it kinda got me into the Native community. I got to know a lot of Native people in the city, like a family. It's good that way"; in volunteer work: "I wanted to mention something about community as well ... I've been a volunteer with the radio program and I've had a couple of radio shows. All of this is coming out of what I've gotten out of the NEC. I had a radio program on Native education"; "I want it to be a continuing series. I want to do a program on the residential school. I've also had a show on affordable housing and I have another show scheduled for [date] and I'm going to be interviewing some of the instructors of and facilitators of the [NEC program] and [NEC program]."

*Personal meaning and growth.* The following explain some significant life changes: "I realized after I started in the program that I must have hated school ... even in reform school ... but at least it helped pass the time"; and "I think I've benefited tremendously from walking in and being a scared person with a grade 8 education and coming up with all these ideas and ambitions. I think I'm the number one PR person for the Native Ed! But I think all students are. I would encourage anybody to come here."

The following expresses improved commitment to education: "Then [I] realized, 'Yeah, that's what I want to do, is continue my education'; and one has children attending NEC: "I have three children coming here ... and they are doing very well right now for themselves."

Another relates personal to career development: "It put my goals straight ... the position I'm in today I do ... all the things I like to do ... I've had to learn to become more assertive."

*Directly relevant to employment.* Of the 11 focus group participants seven are employed; two are continuing their education; one is actively seeking employment; and one is developing her own business. Some cite their employment experience: "Work has really worked out well because [of] what I gained from different courses ... the [program], first aid [course]. Those things worked for me really well because I've been working ever since; two steady jobs, basically, and other part-time jobs. I've always been working since I've been in school"; "I'm working now, but all the courses that I took got me to this point of employment. And I'm using everything I got out of my job training, so that's really helpful, and the job that I'm in, I'm learning a lot about community services"; "With the practicum placements, the majority of the class, I myself, they were really good. They gave the students the experience they were interested in—whatever their inter-

ests were. It was a really good part of the program. A lot of students did get jobs from them. I've had a job since then and I'm still working"; and "Now I see people from [my home town] and I tell them [I finished school at] the NEC ... they're like, 'Wow are you ever lucky' ... they asked me what I'm doing now and I'm like, 'Oh, I'm working for them now' ... they just can't believe it."

Others relate their NEC experience to future career goals: "Just the experience of being here has given me a clearer vision of exactly what I want to do—it's narrowed down to where I have a target in my mind which is always my dream ... it's given me the direction of where I'm going"; "And now I want to run my own day care on my reserve ... [now I have my ECE] ... I'm working together with my Chief and a social worker to get everything together for me"; and "As far as my career, my ultimate career is to be in the media, either in news broadcasting or journalism. And those things came to me from being part of the NEC [in their] ... noncultural courses ... The newsletter got me interested in journalism and being part of the video course really got me into the producing, directing and new issues, into the broadcasting areas"; and the person who is actively seeking employment: "I have two positions that I am waiting for, [field] at [place] and the Band, whichever comes first, I'm going to take it"; and the other who is developing her own business: "But because I took the Native course I really enjoyed what was offered, I would like to position myself in Native Tourism industry. It has taught me quite a bit in regards to all my interests, careerwise and my creativity."

*Academic achievement.* Two continue education in the field started at NEC: "I'm continuing my education ... into my third year at [college] ... I could have gotten a job but I knew if I had taken on a job with good paying money I wouldn't go back to school ... so they're still in the back of my mind"; and "All I needed was my first year [received at NEC] and then with the second [at other college] I just carried on"; "Coming here was really good for going on to college and most of the courses were transferable to [local college]"; and "I'm still going to school today, and I'll be finished next summer."

The graduates who are employed have future academic goals: "[It] gave me a wonderful foundation to go further ... I'm going to take more schooling and using the knowledge I have with the computers and the beginning accounting I would have enough to start my own business"; "I've got my [field] diploma and right now I'm at a crossroads where I might go for my BA in my [field] at [local university] or [other local university]"; "I'm going to continue on toward getting a degree so I can be a part of the solutions toward educating First Nations people."

Another comments: "It wasn't boring, so educationally it's taught me quite a lot about the industry that I'm in right now that I'm striving for. I'm going into a retail outlet that I'm opening in about two months"; and

others pass on academic support to students or community: "I deal with students pretty well most of the day ... some of them know that I was once a student ... they see that if they stick with their studies ... they do get somewhere"; and "[Where I did a practicum] ... the NEC helped me get my ties there ... and ... they're starting a scholarship ... for students who have gone through the NEC ... so it's helped me in that sense as well."

The following express academic confidence: "And academically, it helped me out tremendously ... I had a grade 8 education, I came here and acquired all my basic education"; "Now I consider myself to be somewhat academically sound"; "I'm really proud of how far I've come—from a grade 8 education"; and another passes on pride in being Native: "There are quite a few Native women there ... and being that I found out a little bit more about the Native part of myself I'm more about to help them ... in dealing with their Nateness or telling them that they can be proud of who they are."

Finally, one individual finds the program so interesting that he or she doesn't want to leave: "And I found that it [program] was so interesting that when I did graduate, I didn't want to leave here."

*General ability and self-esteem.* The following show the self-confidence that relates to the NEC experience: "It's given me the confidence to know that I can, you know, that I can learn ... when I was here I was amazed that I could do so well ... there must have been needed healing from past experiences in school ... I have the ability to attain knowledge"; "It's hard to explain, the change that happened to me over the year that I was ... came here ... I gained the confidence and I found, I'm clear in what I am and where I am going"; "When I first started the school here ... I was very doubtful I could do it ... now sometimes I think [the teachers] wish I'd shut up! ... I've gained a lot of experience and confidence here."

Others express personal pride: "I did graduate ... and now I'm working for the NEC and I'm really proud of that"; in graduating: "I didn't graduate high school and I thought, 'oh yeah, just another school, probably won't' ... but then I learned to be proud of myself"; "I graduated from the [program] here last year in '92."

*General evaluative comments.* The following relates success to feeling comfortable at NEC: "They can't believe it ... you're one of the ones who was always picked on and you still made it. I said, 'Yeah, that's 'cause of NEC ... you feel comfortable there'"; and others make the following statements: "[I learned] through my program ... and support from other staff that it was OK to make mistakes ... I'm still a little hard on myself"; "Good education experience, everything's worked out perfectly"; "It's been a great experience, attending the school"; "I really enjoyed my experience at the NEC ... I'm glad I came"; "So, other than that, everything about the Centre, I find really positive"; "So, those things came from being right here in this environment, in the NEC."

Finally, "If anybody wanted to ask me about this school, I think I'd recommend them here ... it's very friendly ... the people and the teachers"; "It was beneficial to me and that is what I was working for when I first started the program here ... it would be a stepping stone for me."

### *A Summary of the Findings*

Like the summary of the UBC findings in Part II, the summary of the NEC experience discusses first the process model, then the substantive areas. Here they are those of interest to the Native Education Centre (i.e., what brought the respondents to the NEC; success factors and barriers—what graduates liked most and least; and education-employment relationships).

#### *The Process Model*

With regard to the applicability of the process model, it appears that the model itself is sufficiently adaptable to be of use to a postsecondary institution as different in its goals and student population as the NEC. Further, it appears that the relationship with the UBC research team served a number of purposes: to influence the decision to cooperate with UBC's request; to witness and model a number of research processes; to complete the collection of participants' responses using both questionnaire and focus group; and to analyze and interpret the resulting information.

During this collaborative venture, however, some limitations of the process model became evident. The return rate on the questionnaires, while above average for a First Nations population asked to fill in a form of this length and complexity, is similar to that of UBC's and is equally unacceptable. Adding a telephone interview to a sample of nonrespondents would in part remove this limitation from the process model. It is unfortunate that one question in the written form was not clearly worded in one third of the respondents' eyes. However, it raises one limitation of the process model and its adaptation by other postsecondary institutions—it is not always easy to anticipate what participants in a survey will read into written questions, and some experience in constructing questionnaires is desirable if ambiguity is to be avoided. However, care in wording, followed by limited pilot testing, will prevent many such problems.

With regard to the focus group methodology, it would have been desirable to have had some "contextual" analysis (like that done with the UBC data). However, it is more difficult to teach; future projects undertaken with the process model will undoubtedly address this limitation.

Analysis of the information, and its reporting, in the absence of a trained research team on which to model and with which to work or witness may be a further limitation. Further testing of the process model will both reveal the extent of this possible difficulty and provide solutions if necessary.



### *The Participants*

Most of the 33 graduates who responded to the questionnaire were women. The respondents' median age at time of entry to the NEC was 29 years; they were from many First Nations, enrolled in a number of different skills training programs. They had been admitted on any of several bases of admission in approximately equal numbers (e.g., completed secondary school, adult basic education). Their school experiences before attending NEC were mixed, but 9/16 school problems were seen as having been either "racial" or "institutional," while 7/12 had "family" responsibilities in addition to academic ones. Of 19 respondents, 15 stated that their First Nations cultures had either a positive value or had given the respondent awareness of First Nations issues (e.g., land claims, racism).

The focus group participants were all graduates of at least one program; more than half were presently employed by the Centre; and several were continuing their postsecondary education. Two off the 11 participants were male. They represented a variety of ages and programs.

### *Getting in: The Decision to Attend*

Before attending NEC just under half the questionnaire respondents had had work experience related to their skills training program. Most heard about the NEC from private individuals; 25/37 listed sources fell in this category. NEC brochures were cited 3/37 times. However, it was primarily the institutional characteristics of the NEC that respondents listed as influencing their decision to attend—of 35 factors listed, 27 refer to characteristics of the NEC (15 of which are specific references to the NEC's First Nations orientation and atmosphere). In general, the respondents found the application and registration processes to be a very positive experience. Like the UBC respondents, the NEC people felt best academically prepared in English and reading, moderately so in exam, essay and study skills, and poorly prepared in math, science and second languages.

The comments by participants in the focus groups enhanced the knowledge gained from the questionnaires. Generally, the decision to attend the Centre revolved around two broad factors: relevance or accessibility and First Nations milieu or identity (each of which operates, of course, in the context of the other). A major aspect of accessibility is the comfort level students felt, even on first entering the Centre; this has in part to do with the First Nations atmosphere and personnel. Focus group participants commented on three aspects of relevance: personal goals, academic goals, and career goals. A number of graduates commented on the fit between program descriptions and their own interests and vocational goals, and on the ease of access. With more specific regard to First Nations milieu or identity, an important aspect was the desire to learn about First Nations heritage and to be with other First Nations people, to experience the



"comfort" felt when with other First Nations people. In part this may have been a response to prejudice felt in the majority culture society.

Other factors involved in the decision to attend the Centre included: the wish to learn and pass it on to others (in keeping with the First Nations value of sharing and generosity); a commitment to First Nations children (for a person studying early childhood education) and a wish to benefit the community at large (again, in keeping with First Nations values of being explicitly concerned about future generations and of giving back). Personal knowledge, or knowledge received from trusted others, also seems to have been a factor in the decision to attend.

#### *Success Factors (Most Liked)*

The first few months at the NEC were not a barrier for the majority of questionnaire respondents, because only 5/32 had any negative comments at all. The experiences of this period are likely to have been a success factor for at least the 15/32 who reported positive experiences (e.g., "I felt comfortable immediately"), because the effects of first impressions have been found to be lasting. Sources of support are likely to have been an important success factor: friends and family were cited 49/74 times as sources of support, while in NEC staff were cited 28/46 times, and other students a further nine times. People who encourage and support clearly matter, whether outside or inside the institution. Other success factors included the atmosphere of the Centre, the First Nations identity of the NEC, relevance of course and program content, and the regulations ("strict, but helpful").

The comments of the focus group participants concentrated on four aspects: the possibility of taking successive programs, course or program quality, the personal qualities of instructors and staff, and the First Nations culture learning or milieu. Again, these factors would operate together, interacting with each other to create a context for learning and success for First Nations students; this context is reflected in the comments on the positive and helpful environment. Comments on the teaching skills and positive personal qualities of the staff and instructors are particularly frequent, while comments on the First Nations classes and atmosphere focus on a strong desire to be involved with the cultural aspects of the NEC and the personal empowerment and growth associated with both the discovery of new skills and the increasing sense of oneself as a First Nations person.

#### *Barriers (Least Liked)*

Problems experienced by the questionnaire respondents included limited finances; 21/27 respondents felt that their funding was barely adequate or less. The inadequate source was an agency or Band for 29/37 instances of funding, as compared with 1/4 for other sources. For some respondents, responsibilities or perceived problems were like to have been barriers:

these included family responsibilities (13/29), financial responsibilities or problems (11/33), and personal situations (6/29). Negative perceptions of the Centre, likely to have been barriers for the individuals making them, included specific problems with staff, perceived lack of information, and "lack of responsibility" of fellow students (a measure of academic climate in one particular class perhaps).

A major barrier for the focus group participants was funding, particularly the problems encountered when attempting to qualify for CEIC (Manpower) funding. Inadequacy was also a problem, as was lack of availability, particularly for further education. Other barriers included the lack of day care, a lack or difficulty in getting transportation, and discomfort resulting from racism toward non-First Nations instructors and others. Several people commented on specific factors that may well have been barriers for them (e.g., course transferability, lack of confidentiality in one staff member).

### *Education and Employment*

The connection between education at the NEC and employment is clear in the case of the questionnaire respondents: of 27 respondents, 21 explicitly spoke of employment status, four implied it, and only two did not indicate employment. Most were employed in an area related to their skills training. Of the 21, 11 were also taking further courses or programs (of the 18 respondents discussed in the next paragraph). The Centre met or exceeded people's expectations in 27/31 responses. With regard to the focus group participants, 7/11 were employed, two were continuing their education, one was developing a business, and the 11th was seeking employment (negotiating with two employers simultaneously). All found the NEC programs or courses relevant and useful.

Eighteen of the 33 questionnaire respondents had gone on to take further postsecondary education after completing one program at the NEC, all but two in the same area (e.g., child care, academic areas). Programs or courses were taken both at the Centre (14/18) and at other institutions (16/18). The Centre prepared its students well (14/17 respondents), academically. The two focus group participants who were continuing their education agreed with them.

An important aspect of the NEC is revealed by the 22 questionnaire respondents who commented on their First Nations culture, 19 of whom wrote about the Centre's role as one of introduction, reintroduction, or strengthening of First Nations culture and identity. In response to another question, a number stated that the NEC gave them renewed affiliation with First Nations, a sense of community, and a renewed appreciation for the First Nations value of respect; awareness of First Nations issues and of present situations were also mentioned. This increasing awareness and affiliation with First Nations is an intended outcome as far as the Centre is concerned. In addition, because of the interaction between a sense of

personal power, feelings of personal comfort and a sense of belonging, and employability, this outcome is far from irrelevant to the relationship between employment and education. An additional factor is the need in the First Nations world for skilled people in most areas. These factors were also mentioned by the focus group participants, who in addition noted a desire to be actively involved at every level with First Nations issues and concerns.

Another unintended outcome, strictly speaking, was personal growth. Eight of the questionnaire respondents reported this, using words and expressions such as *independent, strong, responsible, and more than just another statistic*. In response to another question about the influence of the Centre, a number spoke of increased confidence, self-esteem, determination, and increased forming of positive social ties. Once again, the relationship between this outcome and employment is probably indirect. Confident people find it easier to make the effort required to get jobs and to survive the application and interview processes. People who are positively socially situated in a community are more likely to be stable, productive members of that community, First Nations or otherwise. In addition, focus group participants commented on an increased commitment to learning, pride in academic achievement, and the discovery of a broad ability to function in life.

#### *General Comments*

It is clear from the above summary that in the respondents' view, the NEC is fulfilling its mandate to train First Nations people in a variety of postsecondary programs and to create a milieu in which First Nations culture and identity is primary. Other outcomes, equally desirable, include personal empowerment and growth, an increased involvement in First Nations issues, and an increasing sense of oneself as a member of a valuable culture. Success factors include the matching of program to needs of students, but equally important is the careful creation of an environment conducive to learning and comfort for First Nations people, including the skills of a caring staff. Barriers appear to be primarily financial, but also include a number of other factors reported as isolated, personal incidents. Reputation and milieu, in addition to ease of access and fit between programs and career and personal goals, appear to be major factors in the decision to attend NEC programs.