

Re-imagining Indigenous Parent Involvement in Teacher Education: One Parent's Experience in the Public School System

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My reflective stories, told both from my role as parent and scholar-practitioner, provide insights to re-imagine Indigenous¹ parent involvement in schools, to inform programs of teacher education. The insights and lessons from my lived-experiences within the public school system, first as a student and then as a parent of Indigenous students, propose a paradigm shift so that teacher candidates can understand Indigenous parents and their lives better. Many Indigenous parents are influenced by severe life events that inherently affect their participation or non-participation in public schools. It is imperative that Indigenous parents project their voices in the creation of responses and strategies for parent-directed engagement and that teacher candidates are invited to consider how they will understand parental engagement in their teaching practice. To develop positive strategies, parents, teachers, and administrators must be involved in the educational planning process.

My narrative begins from the time I lived alongside my grandparents on an Indian reservation in central British Columbia. Often, non-Indigenous teachers in public schools have stories and images² of who Aboriginal parents are. I hope that my reflective story sharing helps these teachers to re-imagine Indigenous parents and their participation in education. Through my narratives, I am illuminating my own struggles for liberation, as Freire (1970) describes in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (1970) explains that for the oppressed to wage their struggle for liberation they must see their reality as an insurgence out of oppression, rather than as a limiting condition that serves as "a closed world from which there is no exit" (p. 49). Through this article, I share lived-experiences from an Aboriginal parent's perspective, to offer insights associated with oppressive histories that Aboriginal peoples experience within the public school system. I do so to help shift the paradigm, so public school teachers can understand the context as to why parental involvement is an issue. Programs of teacher education need to consider how teacher candidates will understand their relationships with Indigenous parents in their future teaching practice. Many parents are influenced by severe life events that inherently affect their participation or non-participation in public schools.

My narrative begins with my description of how certain life events affected me in mainstream education, followed by my own experiences as a parent of four children who were students in public schools. My early year experiences in public schools taught me to become a strong advocate for my children. I supported their K-12 transition in various schools in 150 Mile House, 100 Mile House, Kamloops, and Prince George.

Retelling to Restory

Kenny (2015) asserts that "If someone comes along and tries to 'interpret' you, or your community, or your direct experience, and it does not cohere with your own sense of things . . . say no respectfully . . . and invite them for coffee" (p. 191). I am inviting you for coffee so I can tell my stories as an Aboriginal parent to help you understand some of our history and the struggles we faced. By welcoming you to share my lived-experiences, I hope to "dispel the negative beliefs and stereotypes imposed upon us" (Martin, 2014, p. 2). The retelling of the stories is not without pain from the historical trauma, which sometimes keeps me guarded. I will do my best to discern how awareness of the experiences of Aboriginal parents will contribute to teacher education programming, to help teacher candidates prepare to work effectively with Indigenous parents.

My personal story sharing allows me to "express . . . inward knowing" (Kovach, 2009, p. 100) which cannot be achieved through statistics or theory. Archibald (2008) explains that "remembering, retelling, and reconstructing stories are not straightforward"; rather there is "spirit" (p. 147) in the story that requires skill from the storyteller in the retelling. The spirit of my stories is intended to impart understanding and knowledge gained from my parental perspectives.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that a narrative inquiry is "a view of human experience" where "humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 477). Furthermore, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) affirm that:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 477)

Through the methodology of lived-experience I go inward to express my consciousness of being an Aboriginal parent shifting through the contested sites of educational landscapes, to interpret how I proactively participated in my children's development, within my means.

Historical Reflections

Indian Hospital

My life began on the Sugar Cane (Williams Lake Indian Band) reservation, seven miles south of the City of Williams Lake. I was reared in the small community by my grandparents, Ned and Nancy Moiese. I was placed in their care from birth. I was born in the Coqualeetza Indian Hospital in Sardis, British Columbia. Coqualeetza was a sanatorium (also called the Coqualeetza Indian Hospital). It opened in 1941, then was partially destroyed by fire in 1948, and was fully repaired by 1956. The hospital operated until September 1969. The Coqualeetza Sanatorium was established to segregate Indian people diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB) from mainstream society because Indian people were deemed to be contagious. The intent of the segregated system was to ensure that Indian people did not pass the disease on to others. When I was born, my mother was not permitted to hold me because she had TB. I was immediately affected by colonial policy. From birth, my life was disrupted by legislated interference. The experience instigated many quandaries throughout my life. I often wondered how or where I belonged. My 2014 doctoral thesis, "Drumming My Way Home: An Intergenerational Narrative Inquiry About Secwepemc Identities", interrogates this lost sense of belonging that I felt. My life-altering birth experience of being separated from my mother and not benefitting from her closeness troubled me throughout life. The loss suspended my sense of being and this experience affected my perceptions, perspectives, and outlook on life. Retelling the story helps me to heal and I hope that others with similar stories will have the courage to heal, too.

Much later, I learned that my grandmother picked me up from Coqualeetza and brought me back to the community. I was fortunate that my grandparents (my mother's parents) were able to care for me. I have vivid memories of my grandparents. Their words of wisdom guided me through my formative years. I did not return to my mother's care when she was released from Coqualeetza. I remained with my grandparents. Although my grandparents nurtured and took great care of me, I felt puzzled about my identity. My being was inhibited at birth and hindered further by my Dad's exposure to the Indian residential school, followed by my own.

Indian Residential School Experiences

In September 1968, I was placed at the Cariboo Indian Student Residence (formerly St. Joseph's Mission). The school operated for 113 years, from

1868 to 1981. At the time I attended, the residence was instituted as a boarding place and students were bused to 150 Mile House or Williams Lake public schools. I was 12 when I left the comfort of my grandparents' home. My grandpa was a month away from turning 70 and my grandma was 69. They could no longer provide for me with their Old Age pension. At the residential school, I was placed in the senior girls' dorm with a bed amongst a number of other students. The large one-room dorm was separated by age group. I was placed among the younger girls. I made a few friends but I do not recall spending a great amount of time with anyone in particular. I do remember trying to get a glimpse of my brother on the school grounds or during meals so that I could talk with him. I felt lost and I missed my grandparents a great deal. While I was at the residential school, I had no means of communication or travel to visit with them. It was heartbreaking to be separated from my grandparents whom I had lived with since birth.

At the residence, there were mainly *Secwepemc*³, Chilcotin, and Carrier children. Many of the Chilcotin and Carrier students spoke their language frequently. I did not speak my *Secwepemc* language fluently and I never heard it spoken at the residence. The men and women who supervised us were addressed as Mister, Miss, Brother, or Sister if they were part of the monastery or convent. I remember the supervisors being quite strict and they disciplined us with a strap. All students were assigned daily and weekly chores. The chores were inspected for approval and if they did not pass, they were redone. I stayed at the residential school for 10 months out of the year and returned to Sugar Cane or Williams Lake Indian Band for July and August. In my final year at the residence, the senior students were moved to the fourth floor and we were assigned shared bedrooms with another same-gender student. The accommodation was more private and we had walk-in closets to store our belongings. I learned later that my experience at the residential school was not as severe as some of the former students who had the language beaten out of them if they were caught speaking it. In my era, the school provided me with food, shelter, and clothing.

The community Elder⁴ and cultural advisor in my doctoral study described how my Dad was placed at the residential school when he was five. He had lost his mother at a young age. His father (the Elder's grandfather) worked at the nearby Onward Ranch which was run by the oblates. At the residence, the staff, including the Onward Ranch workers, had a separate dining hall from the children and with better food. The workers ate at the same time as the children. The Elder described a time when my Dad saw his father enter the dining hall. My Dad, being five, was naturally

delighted to see his father and immediately ran toward him. Before my Dad could reach his Dad, he was removed from the dining hall and strapped for stepping out of line. When I heard this story, it was difficult to comprehend how a young boy who only wanted to see his father would be treated this way. The retelling of this incident helped me understand how my Dad's exposure to horrific events affected him later on in life. I learned that he was raised by strangers, who had no experience raising children, nor any connection with him; instead, they used their authority to prevent him from having a relationship with his father.

My Elder research participant confirmed that my Dad attended the residential school. I was unaware because I was separated from him most of my life. I did not have a close-knit relationship with him in my primary years. I discovered how deeply my Dad's and my own residential school experiences affected my children. Duran (2006) maintains that Indigenous peoples are stricken with intergenerational post-traumatic stress from residential schools and that the trauma compounds with each generation. Many Aboriginal parents like me live with the trauma and we unintentionally passed on the effects to our children. Knowledge of the intergenerational effects of residential school is essential to understanding the phenomena. As long as these cycles persist, the psychological disparity of my generation, my children's, and potentially their children's to come will continue. The layers of unresolved grief definitively threaten our emotional health and well-being, as I have learned from my past.

This discovery helped clarify why the display of affection is difficult in our lives. I am the middle child of nine. The separation and emotional void in my formative years subsequently resulted in my own incapacity to express affection to my children. The inability to display affection is a current challenge and it is the most painful loss that besets me. Brown (2004) describes the importance of emotional connection:

... emotions are the root of the sacred tree of life. Emotions provide energy for learning that is activated through perception, creating the possibility of thought and understanding. Without emotions, there is no thought, no learning, no education, no research, no dreams and no conscious life. (p. 4)

I am the victim of historic emotional trauma that is the opposite of "a natural relationship between any two human beings . . . defined by loving affection, communication and cooperation . . . the special human capacity for relational response can be interrupted or suspended by an experience of physical or emotional distress" (Brown, 2004, p. 76). My capacity to express affection verbally and physically remains suspended. The pain is intense when I share my story in public. I choke through the painful loss

of my natural ability to offer affection to my children and, while I share this pain, I heal. While uncovering the life histories of my parents, I understood how my life was shaped and influenced. In similar fashion, I believe teachers and all service providers will learn, too, as more Aboriginal people boldly share their stories.

Reliving My School Experiences

My schooling began in a one-room day school on the reserve. The one teacher taught Grades 1 to 7 for all the children. When I reached Grade 6, I was bused to Marie Sharpe Elementary in Williams Lake and integrated into the public school system. My marginal existence began when I moved into the public school during the latter years of elementary and it continued into high school. The integration was my first exposure to non-Aboriginal students and I noticed that I was treated differently. For example, when teams were chosen, I was usually one of the last to go to a team and it was by default. My school landscape drastically changed from the comfort of my community. I felt like an outsider and I became a loner. Some of my fellow students were pleasant towards me but I was never part of the 'in' group. My grandparents survived on meagre pensions so I went to school with no laces in my shoes and I had one pair of socks I washed daily. I clearly did not have economic status so I did not fit in. I do not remember any teachers in elementary school that stood out for me.

In elementary school, I recall one particular event that really affected me. It happened in Grade 6 during the festive season. All classes planned for and recited performances for the annual Christmas concert for family and friends. On concert day, many students' parents arrived at the school. One of my classmates approached me and asked where my parents were and why they did not come. The remark was unexpected and it was painful because I could not say it was because they were poor. I wished there was a hole I could crawl into and disappear. How could I, as a young child, explain that I did not grow up with my parents and that my grandparents were not financially able to make the trip into the city to be present on my behalf? I could not discern if the comment was meant as a slight or if the question was asked out of curiosity. As I reflect on it, I felt that it was a slight. It seemed that the person wanted me to feel awkward. I managed to simply say that they couldn't make it. After this experience, I promised myself that if I had children I would always be there for them and I kept my promise. I share this incident to show teachers and teacher candidates how lived-experiences can have a lasting effect throughout a person's life. Thankfully, through self-perseverance, I endured Grades 6 and 7 in the mainstream public school system.

In high school, I discovered that I was a fairly strong competitor in team sports and I was not overlooked as much when teams were formed. I was selected to a team quickly and I experienced inclusion. I excelled and plunged into my school work to stave off any negative judgements. I recall two particular teachers in high school who were supportive and showed concern about my studies and well-being. In Grade 8, another female student and I accompanied my physical education teacher on a trip to Victoria, BC, during Christmas break. It was the first time I left Williams Lake for a long trip. It was a lovely experience. She showed us Butchart Gardens in Saanich and the great cedar forests on Vancouver Island. This was a huge treat. My teacher was very kind and considerate. I think she recognized some of the limitations that we had to endure as Aboriginal students or perhaps she was rewarding us for our hard work in school. I never did ask why. My only prior trip was a two and a half hour drive north to Prince George for intercollegiate basketball games. Another significant teacher was my science teacher. He always encouraged me to do my best and he urged me to go on to university. I did not pursue university after high school but I appreciated that he recognized I had the capacity. At the tender age of 17, I was afraid to leave the small town atmosphere and move to the big city of Vancouver. I had no academic role models to aspire to either. These two relationships left me with impressionable memories of my high school years.

The Realities of Lived-experiences

Mine is one story among a sea of many that reveals how lived-experiences influence the behaviours and standpoints of Indigenous parents. Sharing these experiences is necessary for educators to understand these realities. It will help teachers and teacher candidates realize why Indigenous parents may be reluctant to get involved in the system. A recent occurrence reminded me of how parents can undergo cognitive, emotional, and psychological barriers that initiate various levels of trauma. I was reminded of how certain structures can trigger stressful memories as I approached an older building at the University of British Columbia. On my path to lecture in a social work class, I came upon a building that reminded me of the residential school I attended. The simulation hit me like a ton of bricks and stirred up heavy emotions. I was completely taken off guard by this unexpected feeling. This instance is an example of how buildings can produce horrific memories of residential schools for Aboriginal parents, which could incapacitate their entry into buildings. It is highly possible that a person cannot walk into a building that represents an institution. Steinhauer (2012) affirms how these "past experiences were negative and personally

debilitating. Social and familial issues and needs can inhibit or determine [parental] involvement” (p. 77). I believe it would make a difference if educators became acquainted with the child’s parent(s) to discern their potential limitations and strengths—for example, understanding how negative memories could impede their physical presence. My first point of contact as a parent visiting the school was normally being greeted by the principal or having a direct check-in with the administrative office. I rarely saw teachers until parent-teacher interviews, for 15 minute appointments per child, or when there was a concern about them at school. My interaction was normally to react to a situation. I am grateful that I was able to support my children because I could have stopped attending to situations that focused on deficits rather than my children’s strengths and qualities. I did not feel a sense of community.

To re-imagine parent involvement is to distill the notion that Aboriginal parents have no interest in their child’s education, as Steinhauer (2012) experienced at a public presentation when someone shouted:

If First Nations parents do in fact care about their children, then why aren’t they involved in the schools? Why do their children miss so much school? I have yet to see a Native parent attend parent-teacher nights! I am having a hard time believing that they do care. (p. 66)

Although the incident occurred in another province, the blanket statement is unjust, unfair, painful, and derogatory. I found the statement troubling; therefore, I am exposing my parental involvement in the educational journeys of my four children, from K-12 in public schools, to refute this statement. I demonstrate how I cared and showed concern for my children. The statement adds to the question of what parental involvement means and who determines involvement. Speaking from experience, it seems that Aboriginal parents are excluded from meaningful involvement and so I consider the expectations of parental involvement.

Who Defines Parental Involvement: The School, the Parent, or Others?

Aboriginal parents are often excluded from the course of action; therefore, the school authorities and teachers decide what parental involvement means without parents’ input. According to Friedel (1999), educational researchers validate the association between parental involvement and student achievement, yet the issues are not investigated from the Native parents’ perspectives. Friedel (1999) believes it is up to Native parents to restore balance and harmony for their children’s education, and she suggests that Native parents rediscover their purpose and what they want the education system to be. I wholeheartedly agree with Friedel that Aboriginal parents have a stake in the education of their children and that many

more parents would be involved if the terms are appropriate. I share how I participated in various schools within my capacity, as part of that rediscovery process.

Narratives of School Landscapes

Understanding the narratives of school landscapes, or justifying the reasons why the narratives are important, stem from "three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social" (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, p. 24). I situate myself as Clandinin, Pushor, and Murray Orr (2007) explain:

[I] speak to [my] relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry . . . [I] justify . . . how it will be insightful to changing or [helping others think] differently. (p. 25)

My storied landscapes cover the transition from primary school through to high school with my four children. My two groups of children were separated by 13 years. My first landscape is as a single parent and sole caregiver of my eldest children. My main priority was to ensure that their basic needs were met. I kept abreast of their schooling through parent-teacher interviews or in-person if there were any issues. They never really complained and they remained on schedule throughout their elementary years. I credit their participation in seasonal sports and the change in their environment that kept them grounded in their studies. We lived in the Williams Lake area, 100 Mile House, Kamloops, and, finally, Prince George. They attended public schools in four different school districts and a private Catholic school in Kamloops.

I relocated to Prince George in 1982 for economic reasons. My son was 10 and my daughter was 8 at the time. Due to financial limitations, we lived in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city. They attended and completed elementary school at Carney Hill, where there was a significant population of Aboriginal students. We lived within safe walking distance of the school. This was important for access since I worked fulltime. They both remained active in several sports. My daughter had a very close friend and my son had sports friends. They moved through elementary school without any setbacks. I was fortunate that my children did well because work commitments limited my time at their school. I was the sole income earner. For many single parents, this is the reality. From my experience raising two sets of children in different eras, I noticed that the stimuli for the eldest two were not as aggressive as for the younger two. The older children were satisfied with sports and spending time with family; they were not distracted by the influx of technology. The gaming industry had not consumed the lives of youth at that time.

When my eldest children advanced to high school, I paid particular attention to how they were received. I was sensitive to the possibility of racism since I had experienced it in my school days. According to Archibald, Rayner, and Big Head (2011), Aboriginal parents and students in public schools are “targeted.” One participant said, “In school you have to address really overt racism, and experience what is different about you” (Archibald et al., 2011, p. 15). I endeavour to illuminate the experiences of difference that I felt as a student and, later on, how my children felt, to offer awareness of expressed racism in the schools. Racism continues to be an extremely relevant entity, as St. Denis (2007, pp. 1084-1085) expressed, and there is a need to “offer both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal teachers and administrators opportunities to learn more about racism . . . especially the ideology of and belief in the superiority of whiteness” and how it shapes us. An added consideration is the residual effects of racism. Even as a mature person, I am consistently perceptive of how I am received in all facets of life.

My eldest daughter heard the racial slurs. She had a few close friends she hung out with so she did not feel targeted. My eldest son did not seem to feel direct racism. It was likely because he was a member of the hockey team that represented the City of Prince George, referred to as the Rep team. His Rep hockey jacket signified his talent as a hockey player. He earned his place to represent the city in the elite hockey league. I am sure he was respected for his hockey prowess.

My involvement with my eldest children’s schooling increased in high school. At the outset, I monitored their core course placement because there was a tendency to programme Aboriginal students into the non-academic stream. I felt that Aboriginal students were considered to lack the aptitude to perform at the academic level. I consulted with the Aboriginal counsellors to ensure that my children were programmed into the academic stream rather than being automatically placed into the technical stream. I followed up by consistently participating in parent-teacher visits throughout the school year. Parents met their child’s teachers in the gymnasium and then visited their classrooms. A few times, I discovered failing grades and low performance during the teacher interviews. My children seemed to be more attuned to socializing than being interested in their studies, and yet they both almost completed high school. My daughter was one course short for graduation and my son sadly dropped out in Grade 11/12. Although I was heartbroken that they didn’t complete their high school education, I knew that I did the best I could to support them.

My experience with public schools was much more eventful with my two younger children. Their entire schooling experience from K-12 was in

Prince George, from 1992 to 2008. I reminisce about an experience in my son's early years. His kindergarten teacher was one of his favourite teachers. At the beginning, he enjoyed school and was excited about going to school every day. I was curious to learn more about his kindergarten experience. When I visited his class and met his teacher, I learned that my son liked to play rather than do school work. To help him transition as a five-year-old, she gave him extra time to adjust to a learning environment. In the play area, she kept a Batman costume for the children. My son was permitted to wear the costume right away while she eased him into his class routine. The experience was magical. The teacher's gesture set the tone for his kindergarten experience. I appreciated her approach and we maintained a good rapport during both my children's involvement at Pinewood Elementary School. To this day, I remember her as being one of my son's favourite teachers.

Unfortunately, not all of our experiences were magical. Both of our children moved through their elementary years at a steady pace. Our daughter maintained honour roll status throughout. Both our children felt indifferent with two teachers in particular, however. As responsible and caring parents, we responded to these teachers' concerns through in-person meetings with the teachers and the principal to work through conflicts. We tried to resolve each situation and yet, many times, we felt that the school administrator sided with the teacher. Although we attempted to address situations based on our children's perspective, it did not seem to improve much, but it was manageable. Both our children remember these teachers negatively. Our son completed his elementary years at the same school and moved on to high school. Our daughter finished her final year at Southridge Elementary because we moved to a different neighbourhood. We would have driven her to her former school but she decided to try a new school. She thought it would be nice to meet new people but it was a difficult transition. She had all new teachers and she had left her friends behind. Although she was unhappy in Grade 7, she participated in school events and maintained her honour roll standing. She was resilient.

Moving into high school presented many trials for them both. It was a challenging time; I understood the power of peer pressure. I attended the school a few times for meetings with my son, the Aboriginal education worker, and the principal or vice-principal, usually regarding suspensions for fighting. We would review the incident and the school policy so my son would understand the degree of the infraction. There were tolerance limits; if the child got into too many fights the child could be expelled. On one particular occasion, my son reacted to racial taunts. He was called a "dirty Indian". He could not put up with the nasty name-calling so he got into a

scrap with the perpetrator off the school grounds. I was quite upset about the way the school handled the incident because it seemed that my son was considered to be equally at fault. I questioned why he was handed the same penalty when he had not instigated the fight and he was the recipient of a racial slur. The authorities maintained their position and he was given the same suspension time. I felt that my son was not treated fairly. The situation was difficult because I do not condone physical fights, but I clearly related to my son's reaction. I told the authorities that, in all honesty, I do not know how I would have reacted if I was the brunt of a racial slur. This was the one incident where my child was directly targeted for his ethnicity. I was hands-on when incidents occurred.

The most difficult challenges were keeping them both interested in their school work. Their priority was to spend time with friends. They had very little interest in school and it showed in their grades. The teachers were very good at reporting our children's absences or incomplete homework. I did not really know how they were progressing until parent-teacher interviews. High school was not a happy time; it required a lot of effort to keep them engaged in their schooling. It was difficult relating to their personalities and characteristics in terms of their commitment to learn. At one point, I was at a loss when my son's biology teacher called frequently to report that he was close to failing. We tried to understand his lack of interest but he wasn't responding. We received regular calls about his tardiness or absence from this class. I warned him that if the teacher's phone calls continued I would go into the school and sit with him through his class. I am sure he thought I was joking or just trying to trick him. His pattern continued so I showed up to his class one day. I arranged my visit with the teacher beforehand; we thought it might work. It was like magic again. My son came into class late and he was very surprised to find me sitting in a chair next to his, waiting for him. He approached his seat and asked why I was there. I simply reminded him that if the phone calls didn't stop I would join him in class. He said "no, mom" and he wanted me to leave but I made good on my promise. I could tell that he was embarrassed. I gave him a break and I left the class early. Consequently, he was always on time and the phone calls stopped.

There was a time in Grade 11/12 when our son was on the borderline to achieve his credits for graduation. To finish on schedule, he completed courses through correspondence over the summer months. He repeated a few failed courses. Although his interest declined, his actions showed that he wanted to finish high school. We found supports in the school to get extra help for the difficult subjects. In the end, he worked very hard to complete his required courses to graduate on schedule. We were impressed

because, in his last year, he needed to take courses during extra blocks—before regular school hours and over lunch—to catch up. Somehow, he realized that he had to put in the effort to complete and he graduated on the honour roll.

My youngest daughter did not keep up her honour roll status in high school. In fact, in her final year she told me how much she hated school and she said that she would say it every day until the end of the year—and she did exactly that. I felt that if she needed to say that she hated school, but agreed to go, I could handle it. She attended regularly and graduated on schedule, too. The aim of sharing my experiences in schools is to describe many of the challenges I confronted as an involved parent of four children. I maximized my participation at the highest level possible, given the circumstances throughout. I believe stories such as mine are important to tell, to disrupt the perception that First Nations parents do not care or are not involved in the schools. Possibly, Aboriginal parents are not as visible or their availability is dictated by circumstances; every family is different. Even my involvement between the two sets of children varied.

To recap, I was in survival mode as a single parent of my eldest two children. My goal was to ensure they had shelter, food, clothing, and sports activities. Hockey for a single parent was a major expense and sacrifices were made as a family unit for my eldest son to have access to an elite league. The nature of the representative hockey league required extensive travel to tournaments and appropriate dress attire. It was challenging for a sole parent, so I could not accompany him to most games or tournaments. On one occasion, my daughter and I did go to a Christmas hockey tournament in Red Deer, Alberta. For the three of us, it was a mini family vacation on a very tight budget. My daughter played hockey, too, in the minor hockey league at the recreational level. Her competitive sport was fastball. By that time, I had worked my way up to a higher paying job so we could travel with her to out-of-town tournaments. She was on a fastball team that represented the city, known as the Rep team as well. Both of them were strong athletes. My joy was watching them in their sports. My experiences with the younger two were quite different. I was no longer a single parent. Because I was not the sole supporter, I was more hands-on in their schooling, more proactive rather than reactive. They had more opportunities because survival was not my main emphasis. It was financially improved with two contributing parents. They participated in more sporting activities and travel.

If my children and I were subjects of research, I think it would be inconclusive to determine that it was a result of my single parent status that two of my children did not finish high school, whereas two completed

when there were two parents in the home. From personal experience, I place emphasis on the reality that there are many variables that contribute to outcomes. My stories show how my lived-experiences dictated the extent of my involvement, particularly as a single parent. I was the best parent advocate I could be for all my children in school; whether or not they completed depended on their personal performance. As I considered my parental obligations in schools, I reflected on Chabot (2005) who made an interesting statement "that school practices play a more significant role in cultivating parental involvement than does the educational background, family size or socio-economic status of the parents" (p. 8). Therefore, establishing and determining parent involvement is not the sole responsibility of the parent: it is a partnership. I wonder how parents can be deemed unresponsive if they do not feel welcome at the school. Aboriginal parents must be involved in determining what parental involvement means to them.

I hope that by retelling my stories, teachers and teacher candidates will understand from my experiences how Aboriginal parents' and students' lives are affected by historic and ongoing colonial relations. I could simply have shared facts and statistics rather than stories, but according to Archibald (2008) "the power of storywork to make meaning derives from a synergy between the story, the context in which the story is used, the way that story is told, and how one listens to the story" (p. 84). My hope is to assist educators in finding ways to engage with Aboriginal students and parents by deeply listening and learning from our experiences. By sharing experiences, Aboriginal parents play a significant role in "teaching, learning, and healing" (Archibald, 2008, p. 85). I realize that students, including me, do not walk through the doors of any school and leave who we are behind. Children are deeply affected by their life histories and experiences as well. I recall facing racial taunts in school as my children did. Ultimately, my experiences in public school helped prepare me for my role as a parent. Acknowledging how Aboriginal people have been exposed to horrific events, particularly through educational institutions and policies, will heighten awareness and encourage schools to be welcoming places. I hope that by sharing moments from our histories I will encourage non-Aboriginal educators to harness the "blaming-the-victim logic" (Schick & St. Denis, 2003) which suggests that Aboriginal peoples' disadvantage is their own creation. From birth, my disadvantages resulted from colonial policy, which neither I nor my family could control. My stories and thoughts coincide with Agbo (2003), who suggests that the most important thing is for the school to cease being a fenced-in enclave. Agbo (2003) purports that it would be reasonable for education authorities and community people to

have substantial interest in how students perform, and in how teachers' and parents' roles are engaged in student learning, to the satisfaction of parents. It is critical for parents to occupy their children's development, including their learning, within a school context.

Discussion

During the retelling and reliving of personal stories, I was reminded about how Aboriginal parents' involvement in schools is influenced by misguided history, racism, and the effects of colonial policy. These factors must be deliberated in the development of responses and strategies for parents, universities, and teacher education programs to work together effectively. When parents become involved in schools, it is important for them to understand their expectations and to have the means to fulfill them. According to Chabot (2005):

... parental involvement is flexible and can involve a wide range of activities. It is as circumscribed or as far-reaching as a community allows and, frequently, reflects the needs and expectations of the community in question ... the term 'parental involvement' shall be understood to include not only the direct involvement of parents, but also participation of Elders and community members. (p. 2)

This description captures a strong link between parents, Elders, and community members, and the defining characteristic is open-ended. In my experience with public schools, parental involvement is normally restricted to a parent (or parents) who does (or do) not reflect the community-mindedness of Aboriginal people. Chabot (2005) further suggests that an overall strategy should be developed and implemented to support parent-directed engagement. A parent-directed strategy would include parents so that they can determine how they can be involved. A positive approach outlining the benefits for Aboriginal parents and their children, and how the scheme fits in with the community dynamic, is equally important.

Strategies cannot be produced in isolation from Aboriginal parents; it is equally important that histories and cultural backgrounds are considered. I believe that if educators understand the histories, cultural norms, and current realities of colonial impositions, they will be more equipped to understand and respond to major obstacles, such as the intergenerational effects of residential schools. My wish as a parent is that effective and compassionate partnerships can be created to aid Aboriginal children, parents, and communities in their learning and healing journeys.

Notes

¹ The term *Indigenous* expresses my affinity with peoples globally who have similar backgrounds. I use labels such as *Aboriginal*, *Indian*, *Native*, and *First Nations* when citing authors or referring to legislative policy.

² Thomas King describes how images of Indians exist in peoples' imaginations in "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind". Similarly, teachers have images of Aboriginal parents. I intend to re-image who these Aboriginal parents are.

³ *Secwepemc* is italicized to emphasize my preferred identity marker.

⁴ Capitalization of Elder signifies respect and esteem extended to Elders.

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