Building NITEP: The Native Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of British Columbia, 1969 to 1974

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This paper describes the development of the Native Indian Teacher Education (NITEP) in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC). It begins and ends with a description of the September 16, 1974 meeting at which the students, staff, and Advisory Committee gathered for the first time. The remainder of the paper describes the building of NITEP between 1969 and 1974. It begins with a description of the context of the 1960s and 1970s, including descriptions of First Nations organizations, federal government involvement, and political trends throughout the period. This is followed by an explanation of the formation of the British Columbia Native Indian Teachers Association (BCNITA), involvement of its members in the development of the NITEP concept, the members of the core group who spearheaded the program's development, and the approval process, including the support and opposition within UBC. The final NITEP proposal is summarized. Rationale, guidelines, admission, program content, differences from other faculty of education programs, location of NITEP centres, administration, and government are also explained. The article includes the process of putting the program into operation during 1974, including some special concerns, and concludes with a forward look at the work that lay ahead, once the program had been established. The paper concludes with the observation that NITEP is having an impact far beyond anything the founders had dreamed about in 1974 and offers congratulations to those whose have continued to build NITEP over the past 40 years.

I am picturing it now: 90 people, First Nations[1], and non-First Nations, filling the room with expressions of happiness, exhilaration, pride, satisfaction, anticipation, determination, commitment, nervousness, hope, anxiety, and relief—feelings I also shared. This was the day! Today, the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP), within the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC), became a reality!

It was September 16, 1974, and here we were, assembled all in one room. This was the day that 54 First Nations student teachers, their field coordinators, instructors, faculty members, and members of the British Columbia Native Indian Teachers Association (BCNITA) gathered together for the first time. This was the day we had all been working towards. This was the day that our dreams, our hopes, and our plans became a reality. This was the culmination of more than four years of imagining and hard work building NITEP.

And this is how NITEP came to be.

The Context of the 1960s and 1970s

The late 1960s had been a turbulent time. A number of forces had come into play, forces that would help lay the groundwork on which NITEP would be build. One major force was reaction to the Canadian government's 1969 *White Paper* (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development), which in turn had come about largely in response to the discussions and debates around the 1967 *Hawthorn Report* (Hawthorn, 1967). Hawthorn had concluded that Aboriginal people were the most disadvantaged among the Canadian population and that the disadvantages came from government policies, including the residential school system. He urged for the creation of programs that would develop self-determination among Aboriginal peoples. In 1969, after much study and consultation, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development produced a *White Paper* (1969) which proposed abolishment of the Indian Act and dismantling of the established legal relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the state of Canada.

First Nations people throughout Canada reacted angrily to the proposals of the *White Paper*. In a word, they saw it as assimilationist (see The Indian Chiefs of Alberta's *Citizens Plus* (1970), often referred to as the *Red Paper*; Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* (Cardinal, 1969); and *A Declaration of BC Indian Rights* (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, 1970), often referred to as the *Brown Paper,* for detailed descriptions of responses and counter-proposals). In BC, the Indian Homemakers' Association of British Columbia, especially through its newspaper, *The Indian Voice,* became a strong advocate for First Nations rights, particularly in education. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) had just been formed in 1969, a powerful organization representing status Indians throughout the province, and education was a major part of their concerns. Also in 1969, the British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI) was formed to address the political and social-economic concerns and demands of Aboriginal peoples in urban, rural, and remote off-reserve communities in British Columbia.

Across Canada, the overall effect of the *White Paper* was to galvanize First Nations people and many other Canadians, as well as First Nations and non-First Nations organizations, in their resolve to press for increased recognition and self-determination.

As a result, the federal government, through the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, gradually began to devolve some responsibility to First Nations organizations, to give them a stronger role

in deciding and running their own affairs, and began to give priority to funding proposals which would achieve this goal.

In 1969, the BC First Citizens Fund was created to support cultural, educational, and economic development for First Nations people in the province. It provided support primarily to First Nations people who were living off-reserve or who did not have status. However, the fund was carefully kept away from any project that suggested it recognized Indian title. Although the First Citizens Fund was established and funded by the provincial government, its position as consultant in Indian education and its office were not permitted to be located in the BC legislative buildings. Instead, they were located in downtown Victoria because the government of the day didn't want their actions to be construed as recognizing provincial responsibilities to Aboriginal people (see the *Calder* case that follows).

Another set of forces evolved from the *Calder* case (Foster, Raven, & Webber, 2007). This legal action, begun in 1967 in the Supreme Court of BC and later of Canada, sought a declaration that Aboriginal title to Nisga'a lands had at no time been lawfully extinguished. The BC position was that Aboriginal title had never existed and, if it had, it had been extinguished. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada found that there was, indeed, an Aboriginal right to land that existed at the time of the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*. However, the Supreme Court was split 3-3 on whether the claim to the land was valid, and the seventh judge dismissed the claim on a technicality. It was unclear which way the seventh judge would have decided if the technicality was removed. In spite of this, the Nisga'a began treaty negotiations, which eventually resulted in the *Nisga'a Treaty* of 2000. As the *Calder* case progressed through the courts, advocacy for Aboriginal rights, and for improved conditions and opportunity, evolved from First Nations and non-First Nations groups. Fear that the Nisga'a would appeal their case led to significant changes in the direction of federal and provincial government dealings with First Nations people at all levels.

In 1969, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development entered into the *Master Tuition Agreement* with the province of BC (Matthew, 2001, pp. 53-57). This agreement provided for tuition payments from the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to the province of British Columbia for First Nations students attending provincial schools. In addition to tuition costs, the federal government agreed to pay busing costs and to make significant contributions in the form of additions or new public schools to house the increased number of students. As a result, there was a huge increase in the number of First Nations students in public schools. However, there were three serious shortcomings of this agreement, shortcomings that generated a great deal of anger and resent-

ment among BC First Nations. First was the fact that First Nations were not involved in negotiating the agreement; they were not even informed until after it was signed. Second, despite the fact that large sums of money were going to local school districts on behalf of local First Nations students, there was no opportunity for input, advice, or control from local bands or parents. Third, there were accusations of misuse of the funds transferred from the federal government. In one case, a large amount of money was transferred to a local school district so that it could take over the operation of the Indian day schools in the region. However, the local Indian bands were not informed until the money was transferred. Meanwhile the local bands believed they had been negotiating with the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to take over operation of their own schools. Another misuse involved closing the school portion of a residential school, busing the children some 21 kilometres to a public school at the federal government's expense, and the federal government making a significant capital contribution towards construction of a new school to house these children. Then, once the school was built and the capital funds transferred, the First Nations children were moved to another school less than a kilometre from the Indian residence, and the federal government made another large capital contribution to the rebuilding of that school.

Concurrently, pressure for improvement in education was increasing from First Nations parents who shared a growing concern about the shortcomings of the education that their children were receiving, as demonstrated by low attendance, dropout rates, and low achievement. In BC, most First Nations children, including children from the Indian residences, were attending public schools. In some cases, advisory committees and First Nations parent groups were meeting regularly with local school boards or the principal of the Indian day school with mixed results. Some school districts appointed a First Nations member to their board, some with voting privileges and some without. Pressures for changes in education were also coming from First Nations organizations, including bands which felt the desperate need for professionally trained First Nations people in education, leadership, and higher level administrative positions.

The Seeds are Sown

1969 was a pivotal year. Early in the year, a conference on Indian education was held in Kamloops, organized by Phil Moir of the UBC Extension department. Most of the speakers were First Nations people from across BC who were involved in education—teachers, counsellors, chiefs, band councillors with responsibility for the education portfolio, university students, liaison workers, and a few university faculty members. Some were

involved within the public school system, some with the Indian day schools and the Indian residences. The message was clear: very little was being done to provide adequate educational opportunities for First Nations students, and there was a growing resource of frustrated First Nations people who were anxious to get involved in overcoming these problems. It was also clear that many non-First Nations educators shared these concerns and a willingness to work, and that teacher education programs needed to provide far better preparation for working effectively with First Nations students. There was consensus regarding the desperate need for more First Nations teachers to be at the heart of any changes.

I talked about the conference with some of the First Nations teachers I knew, including Alvin McKay, a Nisga'a, and principal of the Greenville Indian day school; and George Clutesi, the Tseshaht artist and author from Port Alberni. Others that were contacted included Saul Terry, a Lil'wat liaison worker from Lillooet; Joe Michel, a Secwepemcisn teacher and counsellor from Kamloops; Bert McKay, a Nisga'a principal from New Aiyansh; and Joan Ryan, a Gitxsan teacher from Prince Rupert. It was apparent to us that we needed to gather together all First Nations teachers in the province.

At the same time, we organized a non-credit seminar for teachers of First Nations students to be offered during the summer of 1969, through the UBC Extension department. The seminar was a huge success, and involved a significant number of First Nations people, mostly teachers, together with non-First Nations teachers from throughout the province.

Later in the summer of 1969, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development provided funding to bring together BC First Nations teachers for a conference. The meeting was attended by 21 of the 31 certified and non-certified teachers who were contacted. It was the very first gathering of this sort in BC. Excitement, enthusiasm, professionalism, and personal commitment were at the core of this conference. Plans of action were developed (Indian Education Resources Center, 1970). They included establishment of the BC Native Indian Teachers Association (BCNITA), which would hold a conference every six months and the election of an executive. The BCNITA wanted "forums for us to talk about our own problems, forums to deliberate among ourselves, forums to seek among our own people for the means to solve these problems" (Sterling, 1977, p. 4). Membership criteria were approved, and the first executive was elected. Executive members were:

- Alvin McKay, Nisga'a, principal, Greenville, and chair
- Richard Atleo, Nuu-chah-nulth, principal, Ahousat
- George Clutesi, Nuu-chah-nulth, author and artist from Port

Alberni
- Flora Dawson, Tsawataineuk, principal, Kingcome Inlet, and vice president of the Canadian Association for Indian and Eskimo Education
- Bert McKay, Nisga'a, principal, New Aiyansh
- Joe Michel, Secwepemc, counsellor, Kamloops School District
- Joan Ryan, Gitxsan, teacher, Prince Rupert School District
- Robert Sterling, Nlaka'pamux, teacher, home school coordinator, Merritt
- Angie Todd, Carrier, teacher, Fort St James
- George Wilson, Heilsuk, teacher, Nukko Lake.

Other plans of action included looking into the problems of the boarding program (the Indian Affairs and Northern Development's administered off-reserve program for First Nations high school students); promoting better communication between pupils, parents, teachers, counsellors, and education committees; investigating inappropriate curriculum content; better preparing non-First Nations teachers; increasing the number of First Nations teachers; and promoting improvements in pre-school/kindergarten and adult education programs.

One of the first major accomplishments of BCNITA was the development of the Indian Education Resources Center (IERC), funded by the federal government and with campus space provided by UBC. The IERC newsletter described it this way:

> The aim of the Center is to improve educational opportunities for [N]ative Indian students. We are doing this by:
> - developing and distributing a collection of books and articles containing accurate, up-to-date information for use by students, teachers, Education committees, and many others.
> - sponsoring courses and programs concerned with various facets of Indian culture and history, Indian education and Indian students, particularly for teachers of Indian students.
> - developing communication between the many groups involved in Indian education.
> - vigorously promoting the involvement of Indian people in education decision-making.
> - providing facilities for research and program development related to Indian education.
> - working directly with Education committees, teachers and community groups on such projects as local orientation courses for teachers, development libraries and study centers in Indian communities. (Indian Education Resource Center, 1970, p. 2)

The IERC produced the *Indian Education Newsletter*, loaned books, and provided resource materials by mail to teachers and First Nations

organizations throughout the province. The IERC was guided by the BCNITA executive and I was appointed acting director until a First Nations person, Alvin McKay, became available to fill the position. In the first year, the mailing list grew to over 400 people. Digital copies of the newsletters are available online from the Xwi7xwa Library at UBC.

This was the base from which NITEP grew—a group of skilled, committed, professional First Nations people working together to develop plans for improvements to the education of First Nations students in BC, with an effective support program in place and a physical base in the IERC office at UBC.

Growing the Idea

Over the next few years, the concept of a teacher training program for First Nations students began to crystallize within BCNITA and at UBC. Many hours were spent at BCNITA conferences and executive meetings discussing the development of the program. There were also meetings with First Nations organizations, the provincial Ministry of Education, UBC, and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. A great deal of the discussion of ideas was done informally at conferences, in airports, and in restaurants.

In 1972, George Wilson took a draft proposal to the Deputy Minister of Education for reaction and advice. According to George, the Deputy Minister refused to even read the draft because "it was based on racial discrimination" (G. Wilson, personal communication, 1972).

A few months later, the New Democratic Party came to power in BC with very different perspectives on education. In an interview between Dave Barrett, the new premier, and Jack Webster, a well-known broadcaster, Barrett confirmed the comment that there were more totem poles than Indians at UBC ("Conversations with Jack Webster, 1974, p. 2)—so George, Alvin McKay, and I went out and counted. As far as we could determine, Barrett was right—by one totem pole! George quickly took this information to the new Minister of Education and immediately received her support for the concept.

The BCNITA executive decided early on that the new program would be called the *Native Indian Teacher Education Program*. The name remains 40 years later, even though the term Native Indian has fallen out of favour.

A list of criteria for a new First Nations teacher education program gradually evolved. Since these criteria were never really recorded, I have done my best to reconstruct them from my notes, my memory, and a few records.

- The goal of the program was to increase the number of professionally qualified First Nations teachers in BC.
- It must be First Nations controlled; it must have the active involvement of First Nations people in planning, development, and operation.
- It must reflect a First Nations philosophy.
- It must lead to full certification as teachers.
- It must have flexible entry criteria, such as mature student entry with consideration for other work and educational experience.
- It must not be watered down; graduation requirements must be at the same level as regular teacher education programs.
- It must allow the students to remain in or near their home community at the beginning of the program to enable continuing contact with their families and peers, and make the transition to the university environment more gradual.
- It must introduce the students to actual classrooms early in the program.
- It must allow for students to leave the program before completion if necessary for personal or other reasons, with eligibility for other education-related positions, such as teacher aide and home school coordinator.
- It must minimize financial hardships wherever possible.

Concurrent with these criteria being developed, we continued to meet informally with First Nations organizations and various faculty members, seeking feedback and advice on the proposed program.

Within UBC, there was a patchwork of strong support, contrasted with doubt about the efficacy of the idea. Some faculty members felt that such a program was very worthwhile. They had no difficulty with the fact that it discriminated in favour of First Nations people, as long as the quality of teacher preparation was equally as strong as with the regular program. At that time, the term *equity* was not common but the current (2015) meaning of the concept was evident in their thinking. They agreed with the program rationale concerning the desperate need for more First Nations teachers and the problems that many First Nations people faced in becoming teachers under the then-current programs. They understood the huge need for such a program. Resistance from some Senate members and from some faculty members within the University appeared to emanate from general resistance to change; resistance to what was then called *reverse discrimination;* resistance to flexible entry requirements; resistance to the off-campus focus of the first two years, including lack of exposure to the University community and limited access to the University library; and the assump-

tion that being a First Nations program would result in it being of inferior quality. This last concern was never spoken of or written about, but most of us involved in the planning sensed it regularly.

The Core Group

Many people worked on development of the program, but there was a core group who were right at the centre of the efforts. We worked well together. We did not always come from the same perspective or have the same opinions. However, there was a high level of trust and a strong feeling that we were working on something that was bigger than any one of us. The people within that core group are described below (in alphabetical order).

Alvin McKay, principal, Greenville. Alvin had grown up in a prominent Nisga'a family from Greenville, trained in leadership skills from boyhood. He was an excellent speaker and an effective decision maker. He attended St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay, worked as a fisherman, and then become a teacher. He became the first First Nations director of the Indian Education Resources Center in 1971. Alvin was passionate about improving educational opportunities for First Nations students. He would speak about it frankly to Nisga'a leadership, inspirationally to First Nations students, forcefully to government officials, and cooperatively with colleagues. Alvin later became the first superintendent of the Nisga'a School District. Alvin died in 1999.

Bert McKay, principal, New Aiyansh. Like his brother, Bert had grown up in a prominent Nisga'a, Greenville family, trained in leadership skills from boyhood. He also attended St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay, worked as a fisherman, and then became a teacher. He taught at St. Michael's before returning to the Nass River. As well as being an accomplished, passionate speaker, he was particularly passionate about preserving and building on the Nisga'a language and way of life. He worked tirelessly, developing a written form for the language and courses for its instruction. His work also helped form the basis for what later became the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government. Bert later became co-chair of the NITEP advisory committee in the Faculty of Education. Bert died in 2003.

Joe Michel, counsellor, Kamloops. Joe Michel was Secwepemc, from the Adams Lake Band near Kamloops. He taught for a number of years at the Indian Residential School in Kamloops. Joe was reputed to be the first residential school graduate in western Canada. Later, he was seconded to Kamloops School District and became a counsellor with First Nations students. Joe was a very quiet, mild-mannered person. When he spoke, he usually clarified the issue that was being discussed. He always had realistic

and effective ideas. Others often looked to him for advice. Joe went on to help found the Chief Atahm School, in which Secwepmectsín was the language of instruction, and received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 2007. Joe died in 2009.

Joan Ryan, teacher, Prince Rupert. Joan was one of the most conscientious contributors to development of NITEP, always prepared for meetings, aware of the finest of details, and always prepared to ask the difficult questions about the development of the program. Joan was Gitksan, originally from Gitwangak. She attended the Indian day school in her village and went on to graduate from high school in Prince Rupert, at a time when it was very unusual for a First Nations student to attend a public high school. She later completed her teacher training at Vancouver Normal School. Over the years, she taught in many coastal Indian day schools: Bella Bella, Port Simpson, Haida Gwaii, and eventually settled in Prince Rupert, teaching at Conrad Elementary for many years. She assumed the traditional title *Hanamuuxw* in 1966. She helped develop the Gitxsanimx dictionary. Joan later became Native education principal in School District 82—Coast Mountain. She was also co-chair of the NITEP advisory committee in the Faculty of Education. Joan died in 2005.

Robert Sterling, Nlakapamux, home school coordinator and teacher, Merritt. Robert was the solid, reliable, consistent, thoughtful member of the group. He would drive to Vancouver (over six hours each way in those days) whenever he felt he could contribute. Robert was the primary developer of the home school coordinator programs in BC schools. He helped to create a better understanding of the lingering consequences of residential schools. He authored several articles that mapped the social and linguistic constructive differences between English and First Nations speakers, particularly in instruction and teaching, to highlight the ways in which education could be more effective. Robert died in 1983.

George Wilson, teacher, Heilsuk. George attended St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay, where one of his teachers was Bert McKay. He completed his teacher training at the University of Victoria, and taught in Prince Rupert and Nukko Lake. In 1972, he became director of Indian Education for the provincial government and travelled throughout the province, helping to develop local programs and problem-solve difficult situations. George was a very effective speaker, who was inspiring, challenging, and humorous. He was chair of the BCNITA executive and led the drive for NITEP from 1972 until his untimely death in 1974, just two months before NITEP was finally approved.

My involvement as part of this core group began with arranging to bring together the BC First Nations teachers in 1969, and then as acting

director of the IERC in its first year. I regularly attended meetings, formal and informal, as we built the program. As an assistant professor, I was the main link with the University. I was very aware that I was the only non-First Nations in this group (I was sometimes humorously referred to as the "token whiteman"). I was in a position of trust and saw my role as facilitator: contributing some ideas; being careful not to push my own ideas; helping others clarify their ideas; and bringing information from the University as well as from my contacts with First Nations and non-First Nations people throughout the province. Later, I was asked to be the first supervisor of NITEP until a First Nations person became available.

Of course, there were many other First Nations teachers who supported the development of the program. Among others, they include Flora Baker, Alvin Dixon, Shirley Joseph, Brenda Taylor, Saul Terry, and Margaret Vickers.

It would take many pages to describe the commitment of these people and the sacrifices they made. They shared a deep passion for developing a quality program in response to a desperate need. Their contributions and sacrifices included enormous amounts of intellectual and emotional energy; constant travel and meetings; time away from their families, friends, and classrooms; as well as the frustrations of dealing with prejudiced attitudes and slow-moving bureaucracies—but they shared the inspiration that comes from building something that would make a significant difference in the lives of First Nations people.

The Approval Process

Dean John Andrews of UBC's Faculty of Education, who succeeded Dean Neville Scarfe, gave strong support for development of the program. In late 1973, he established a Dean's committee on a teacher training program for Native Indians as well as encouraging a range of other alternative teacher education programs for the Faculty. The committee members were: Art More, UBC, Chair; Lonnie Hindle, BC Association of Non-Status Indians; Ian Housego, Faculty of Education; Bert McKay, BCNITA; Joan Ryan, BCNITA; Robert Sterling, BCNITA; and Jack Wallis, Faculty of Education (UBC, 1974c).

At the same time, the BC Joint Board on Teacher Education established a subcommittee to investigate ways of increasing the number of First Nations teachers throughout the province.

BCNITA continued to develop the program and met concurrently with the Dean's advisory committee. Drafts of the proposal were also forwarded to each department in the Faculty of Education for their consideration.

By April 1974, both BCNITA and the Dean's advisory committee approved a final draft of the proposal, and it was ready for formal submission to the Faculty of Education and the Senate of the University.

Summary of the NITEP Proposal (Faculty of Education, 1974)

The goal of the program was "to increase the number of [N]ative Indian teachers certified to teach in BC schools (both federal and provincial) by developing an alternative program which is more appropriate to the educational background, heritage, needs and desires of people of First Nations ancestry in this province" (UBC, 1974c).

The rationale was based on the severe shortage of First Nations teachers in the province; the desire by First Nations people to attain greater control and influence over the education of their children; the positive outcomes of increasing the number of First Nations teachers; recognition that the program discriminated based on ethnic and racial background (but this was a result of inadequate educational opportunities that were, themselves, ethnically and racially based); and the large number of First Nations people who wished to become teachers and either could not or did not.

Part of the rationale was a description of the problems faced by First Nations people who wanted to become teachers. Briefly, these problems included: ineligibility for university entrance; economics of paying one's way through university; length of teacher training programs; "dead-end" high school programs that closed doors to further education; feelings that existing teacher education programs were irrelevant and inappropriate; other personal responsibilities at an age when they would be attending university; the demand for First Nations people with advanced education (demands which drew them away from their university education before completion); feelings of alienation from the university community; the legacy of discrimination; lack of models; and cultural/geographic isolation from the home community.

The guidelines for the program were based on the guidelines developed by BCNITA. These included: the need for a First Nations environment throughout the program; the need for flexibility in academic entrance requirements; the need for a large component of field and community-centred experiences; the need to maintain high standards in the program; the need for the program to lead to regular teacher certification (in other words, introduce flexible entrance standards while maintaining completion standards); the need for flexible entry points; location of significant portions of the program to be near the student's home; the need to maintain and develop the student's cultural heritage; the need for strong support services; and adequate financial support.

Admission to the program would be based on regular university entrance requirements or the mature student entry program of the University, provided the student could show strong academic, professional, and personal potential for teaching.

The program consisted of four steps, each equivalent to one year of university study. At the end of three years, students would be eligible for an Interim Standard Teaching Certificate. After the four years, students would be eligible for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree and full teacher certification.

The content of the program was divided into three categories or steps: (1) teaching competencies (TC)—skills and techniques of teaching, such as guided practice teaching; (2) educational background (EB)—knowledge of the educational process, such as educational psychology and how to teach specific subject matter; and (3) general background (GB)—general background knowledge that all teachers must have, such as educational philosophy and content of specific subject matter, including math and social studies. These categories are described in much more detail in the actual proposal.

The first two steps would take place in field centres throughout the province, as close as possible to the students' home communities. During these first two steps, the emphasis would be on developing teaching competencies and, to a lesser extent, educational background. Field centres would be guided by coordinators, who were themselves teachers and had a strong working relationship with the local First Nations communities. Some students would require more than two years to complete the first two steps, especially if they needed to upgrade their academic background. After the initial orientation, activities would include periods of observation and practice to develop teaching competencies and, to a lesser extent, educational background. The idea was to provide an actual classroom base on which to build educational background knowledge. As part of the first two steps, students would study the First Nations heritage of the local area through locally developed Indian studies courses. The Indian studies courses were the only courses which differed significantly from the existing Faculty of Education courses.

Step three would consist of more formalized coursework at UBC. In Step four, students would complete the academic and professional concentrations required for the degree.

The operation of the program would be the responsibility of the NITEP program director (later referred to as the supervisor), who would be responsible to the NITEP advisory committee and the Faculty of Education. The advisory committee would be the continuation of the Dean's

Committee on a Native Teacher Training Program, made up of First Nations and University representatives and First Nations members who would be in the majority. The field coordinators, who were teachers selected to head up each field centre, would come under the responsibility of the NITEP supervisor. The field coordinators were crucial to the successful operation of the program. They would be responsible for the day-to-day operation of each centre, student support services, coordinating and supervising student teaching, and scheduling of courses at each centre. The NITEP students would be the direct responsibility of the coordinator, with help from local resource people.

The main differences of this program compared to regular teacher education programs were:

- a large degree of First Nations input into decision making at both the University and local level
- flexible admission requirements while maintaining existing completion standards
- high levels of support: academically, personally, and financially
- the field centres, which provided the opportunity to maintain closer contact with home communities and actual classrooms in the first two years
- the Indian Studies courses
- reversing the order of theoretical background and classroom experience
- being part of a First Nations community while taking part in the teacher education program.

The Final Approvals

Attaining approval of the proposal by the University did encounter some difficulties. Normally, such a proposal would go to the University Senate Agenda Committee, which would, in turn, submit it to the Curriculum Committee which, in turn, would submit it to the New Programs Committee, and then it would work its way back to the Senate as an arduous, drawn-out process. Dean Andrews wanted to hasten the approval process so that the program could begin in September (it was already April); otherwise, it would have to be delayed for a year. He was able to convince the Agenda Committee to forward the proposal directly to the Senate, bypassing the other committees on the grounds that it was not a new program but a rearrangement of existing elements of already approved programs. The proposal was brought before the UBC Senate meeting of May 22, 1974 (UBC, 1974b). There was some strong resistance to this procedural process, as well as some opposition to the program itself. "I have grave doubts

about the academic content of this Program as it's outlined here and I think that there is a very grave question arising of academic standards," said one member of the Senate. However, others, especially Dean Andrews, spoke in favour of the program and, eventually, the motion to approve was carried. Still, that was not the end of it. The Senate Curriculum Committee met later (UBC, 1974c) at the Senate Chair's suggestion, to discuss the program and the way it was approved. Eventually, the Senate Curriculum Committee acceded and commented that it was "unfortunate" that they were bypassed. There were some oral reports that Dean Andrews was officially censured over the issue, but I can find no written confirmation of this. Certainly, I felt that congratulations and thanks to the Dean were more appropriate.

We all breathed a sigh of relief, and then took a deep breath because we knew how much work lay ahead.

Another necessary approval was for funding of the additional costs of the program. A funding request had been made to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the ministry came through with a significant grant of $250,000.

Putting the Program into Operation

Even before the final approvals were made, we began the process of putting the program into operation, subject to final approvals. I was appointed as the first supervisor, with the agreement that as soon as a qualified First Nations person became available I would stand aside. It would be six more years before Verna J. Kirkness, Cree teacher, was appointed as supervisor and who provided such strong leadership to the program.

The first steps included selecting the locations for the field centres, selecting coordinators for each centre, and advertising the program to potential students. After some discussion and debate, it was decided to locate the first centres in:

- Terrace, where Northwest Community College provided classroom and office space
- Williams Lake, where the local bands provided classroom and office space at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School, which by then was operating as a residence only (it finally closed in 1981)
- Kamloops, at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, which was then operating as a residence only (it finally closed in 1978)
- North Vancouver, in temporary classrooms at Norgate Elementary School, provided by North Vancouver School District.

We had some concerns in Williams Lake and Kamloops about the students attending classes in buildings where they had once been Indian Residential

School students. In both cases, the residences (children had begun to attend the public schools nearby) were, by 1974, administered by First Nations advisory boards. Both boards strongly supported the idea of hosting NITEP, seeing it as a very positive development. In Kamloops, the NITEP classroom had once been the Grade 5 classroom of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. It turned out that two NITEP students had been in Grade 5 in that classroom and their then-teacher was also a NITEP student along with them (he had formerly taught in the Kamloops Indian Residential School on a letter of permission). We were concerned that this amazing set of coincidences would weigh heavily on the two NITEP student teachers, bringing back memories which might interfere with their learning. On the other hand, the residence administration had just changed to a First Nations Advisory Committee and the administrator was a highly-regarded First Nations teacher from the area. The result was that the students soon decided it was "cleansing" to be back and involved in a positive First Nations program in which they really believed. This was one of the first demonstrations of the amazing resilience that NITEP students have shown over the years.

In each community we were able to identify a local teacher who had an effective working relationship with the local First Nations people, except in North Vancouver where we asked Joan Ryan to be the coordinator. The coordinators were seconded from their respective school districts and the district was reimbursed by NITEP for salary and other costs.

We also met with school districts surrounding the centres, to arrange for the early student teaching experiences in their schools.

The local coordinators then took over in their areas, establishing closer contacts with the schools, the bands, the local First Nations organizations, and, most importantly, with potential First Nations students for the program.

I continued to meet with the various departments within the Faculty of Education, to arrange some of the courses that they would be providing to the off-campus centres. The *English 100* course was mandated to be part of the first year, so we arranged with the English department at UBC and the local colleges to provide the course locally.

After days of recruiting in the centres by coordinators, followed by presentation of their applications to the UBC registrar and the Mature Student Entry Committee, 54 students had been accepted into the program: Kamloops—14, North Vancouver—12, Terrace—16, and Williams Lake—12. Of these, 42 were admitted under mature student entry and 12 were admitted under regular university admission criteria.

In early September of 1974, the excitement began to build with an orientation week in each field centre. Students got to know their coordinator and met with teachers who were to be part of the initial classroom experience. Shortly afterwards, all of the students and staff members travelled to Vancouver for the beginning of the second week. Students were accommodated with friends and relatives in the Vancouver area and at the Jericho youth hostel.

On Monday morning, September 16, 1974, we all gathered at UBC for two more days of orientation. That brings us back to the beginning of this article: the first meeting of NITEP students, staff, and faculty. That day, more than any other, remains in my memory as the day that NITEP officially began. Our dream was being realized!

We had so much more work ahead of us. Nevertheless, we had accomplished something that we were all proud of, something that would make a positive contribution to educational opportunities for First Nations children across the province. As Robert Sterling said ten years later:

> What could be the secret in offering a better service to Indian children? The development of a learning environment that means something to the child and the child can believe in him/herself. . . . The Native Indian Teacher Education Program, NITEP, stands in the forefront of our successes. The Program is an Indian idea, is Indian controlled and its philosophy is Indian, although the Program falls under the jurisdiction and approval of the University of British Columbia. (1984)

And here we are, 40 years later. NITEP has grown into a superb, far-reaching program that has positively affected the lives of hundreds of First Nations student teachers and thousands of First Nations and non-First Nations students. As of early 2014, 919 students have entered NITEP, 371 have graduated, 13 have earned the three-year Standard Teaching Certificate, and 61 are currently enrolled (personal communication, NITEP Office, January 2015). NITEP graduates are now teaching in schools across the province; some have gone on to graduate degrees, including doctorates; some are principals and administrators; some are in leadership positions in the provincial and federal governments; some have moved into other professions; and many are working for First Nations organizations throughout Canada.

NITEP is having an impact far beyond anything we dreamed about in 1974.

I say, "Congratulations and well done" to all those who have participated in bringing NITEP to where it is today.

Note

[1]During the 1960s and 1970s, the respectful term was *Indian* or *Native Indian*, or sometimes *Aboriginal* in legal settings. At the time of writing this paper, the respectful term has become

First Nations. I have used *First Nations* or *Aboriginal* throughout the paper, except for quotations or names of organizations.

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