Perspectives on capacity strengthening and co-learning in communities: Experiences of an

Aboriginal community-based research steering committee

by

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B. Chst (Applied), Mount Royal University, 2008

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Community-university partnerships have become more prevalent to support community-based research, especially as a collaborative approach to research with Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. One practice is the activation of a community-based research steering committee to initiate, govern, and review research pertaining to their local community. Within literature related to community-based research, perspectives on capacity strengthening and co-learning from the members of a community-based research steering committee are under-represented. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore the research question: *What are the experiences of the Alexander Research Committee (ARC) members in defining and operationalizing capacity strengthening and co-learning across multi-sectoral research projects?* Nine current and past members of the ARC participated in individual semi-structured interviews and five of these ARC members also participated in a subsequent focus-group discussion. Analysis of these qualitative data indicated that foundational relationships and a conducive learning environment are key factors for a community-based research committee to experience co-constructed knowledge and learning. The findings of this study highlight the importance of an operational foundation of trusting relationships in order to establish and sustain a working environment where a community-based research committee can learn together and from each other. This study also yielded insights about how this community-based research committee predicated capacity strengthening from the understanding that 'we are all learners',

with each member bringing forward unique strengths, questions and growth to the research

processes.

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Acknowledgments

My sincere gratitude to the Alexander Research Committee and Alexander First Nation: thank you for welcoming me in as a graduate student and continually supporting me in this research study. The work the ARC has accomplished is inspirational. Your example of CBR principles and unwavering commitment to the children and youth in your Nation has forever shaped my understanding of community-based and strength-based work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Collaborative partnerships in research bring together individuals and groups with the premise that a strong partnership has the ability to produce knowledge and action that is mutually beneficial for all partners. As a result of the dissatisfaction with research that lacks authentic community voices and knowledge systems, there has been an expansion and growth in community-based research (CBR) paradigms and methodological designs that are relevant, respectful and collaborative amongst diverse partners (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Edwards, Lund, Mitchell, & Andersson, 2008; Israel et al., 2010; Minkler, 2005; Wright, Pluscinda, Lieber, Carasco, & Gedjeyan, 2011). The Community-university partnership model is an applied approach that is growing in recognition and operates based on community members, practitioners and researchers coming together to discuss important issues in an environment where multiple worldviews are respected and knowledge can be co-constructed (Israel et al., 2010; Kajner, Fletcher, & Makokis, 2011; Williams, Labonte, Randall, & Muhajarine 2005). The community-university partnership model holds particular significance with groups who have been exploited, decontextualized or completely ignored in research settings; it is seen as a promising approach to avoid continued injustices faced by vulnerable, disenfranchised and/or misrepresented people in the pursuit of knowledge (Bull, 2010; Kajner et al., 2011). In Canada, First Nations have frequently been misrepresented and misused in traditional research and in the production of knowledge (Ball & Janyst, 2008; de Leeuw, Greenwood & Cameron, 2009). There have been advancements in the articulation of promising research practices and ethical principles with Aboriginal Peoples that further promotes a community-based research approach (Bull, 2010; Edwards, Lund & Gibson, 2008; Loppie, 2007).

Across the continuum of CBR there are approaches that range from full-cycle participatory empowerment and action to approaches that are community- situated whereby the community is not typically engaged in all stages of the research project. For that reason there is great variation in the mobilization and application of principles used to produce knowledge within a community-university partnership model (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Israel et al., 2010). Engaging community partners in the research process is one of the overarching principles seen across the continuum of CBR, however, at varying degrees of participation. Further to this, another increasingly common practice found within CBR is the creation and ongoing advisory function of a localized research steering committee, sometimes called a community advisory board (D'Alonzo, 2010; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008). Committees of this nature typically serve as the oversight body for discussing and sustaining research activities and action planning, providing recommendations, sharing resources, and maintaining regular communication among committee members and subsequently to the sectors the members represent. Research steering committees can provide guidance regarding cultural practices, belief systems and community norms, as well as supporting cultural continuity and long-term engagement between community-based partners and partners from outside of the community. Community–based research steering committees can function as anchoring sites for engagement between research co-partners at each stage of a research project and support strong channels of communication with the community at large (Adams & Faulkhead, 2012).

Capacity strengthening and co-learning within multi-sectoral partnerships are interconnected processes and outcomes that are embedded within CBR projects. Given the importance of localized research committees in contributing to and shaping the research within their communities, and the co-learning and capacity strengthening that happens as a result of

participating on the committee, it is important to understand how these two constructs are understood. Through qualitative study the constructs of co-learning and capacity strengthening were explored in this research through a multi-sectoral partnership that formed the basis of a community-based steering committee called the Alexander Research Committee (ARC).

One goal of community-university partnerships is for each partner to have meaningful participation and therefore an opportunity to engage in the research process. As part of the process of engagement the individuals and groups experience capacity strengthening. Here, capacity strengthening conveys that all partners have knowledge, experiences and skills to individually and collectively bring to the research project, and also further develop their own capacity as a result of their participation in the research process (Redman- MacLaren et al., 2012; Smyth, 2012; Verity, 2007). Capacity strengthening can be understood as a bi-directional flow of knowledge, skills and training between research partners. This provides the committee members the opportunity to partner equitably and therefore share responsibility and authority in the research project (Ross et al., 2010). Types of capacity strengthening can include but are not limited to: research, professional and technical, institutional, leadership, relational, personal, and community.

Co-learning is another major construct explored in this study; defined broadly, it is learning with others. In a partnered research context, co-learning is the act of sharing between partners in an open and reciprocal exchange of ideas, experiences, knowledge and power (Curry & Cummingham, 2000). Co-learning takes place within relational connections and relies on an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives among research partners (Bull, 2010; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper & Lewis, 2005). Engaging as a group in the creation and sharing of knowledge aligns with decolonizing methodologies and is closely associated with community empowerment

(Israel et al, 2010; Curry & Cummingham, 2000). In the context of CBR, both capacity strengthening and co-learning are linked respectively to increased voice, influence and "buy-in" amongst community members, resulting in focused action and resource mobilization within partnered research (Chapman & Kirk, 2001; Israel et al., 2010; Traverso-Yepez, Massalena, Bavington, & Donovan, 2012). Still, there are few in-depth examples in the literature of how the concepts are understood and applied within partnered research contexts.

Purpose and research objectives

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore and understand the co-learning and capacity strengthening processes and outcomes in the context of the ARC. The focus of the ARC is on research projects that investigate and encourage healthy and optimal development of children, youth and families within Alexander First Nation (AFN).

This research study seeks to answer the following central research question: What are the experiences of ARC members in defining and operationalizing capacity strengthening and co-learning across multi-sectoral research projects? This study also aims to address the following sub questions:

1. How do ARC members perceive capacity strengthening and related outcomes?

2. What activities do ARC members engage in to create and share knowledge?

3. What is it like to work on a multi-sector research steering committee?

Case Description: The Alexander Research Committee (ARC)

The ARC is a steering committee that approves, monitors and reviews all health, education and social development research projects conducted in partnership with Alexander First Nation (AFN) (ARC Guiding Principles Document, 2013). The overarching focus of the ARC is research projects that investigate and support healthy and optimal development of

children, youth and families within the AFN community. Chief and Council, Elders, and community members endorse the work of the ARC within the community.

Membership in the ARC consists of people who live and work in, or are community members of AFN, and designated researchers from the various partnership projects being conducted in the community (ARC Guiding Principles Document, 2013). At the time of this study the committee was comprised of 15 members. The committee consisted of community members, including cultural liaisons and elders; representation from the band operated health and education departments (e.g., teachers, principal, director of education, community health nurse), and university researchers and designated members (e.g., project coordinators, graduate students, and research assistants) from across the research projects.

The ARC's role includes discussing and sustaining research activities, action planning, providing recommendations, sharing resources, and maintaining regular communication between the members of the committee and the various sectors they represent. The committee takes an active role in ensuring that research processes are conducted in ways that are ethical and grounded in AFN community values and beliefs. The ARC members contribute to a range of research activities and often participate in the dissemination of research related outcomes to ensure the communities voice is represented and traditional knowledge is not shared. For example, numerous knowledge dissemination/translation activities have taken place, such as, oral presentations jointly created by ARC members and presented at academic conferences, academic publications, university and community workshops, guest lectures in university classrooms and at regional Treaty Six gatherings. Knowledge translation activities within the ARC exemplify the community relevance and action focus that guides processes and outcomes. The transferrable learning is helpful for other communities to imagine possibilities for their own

community-based research projects. Working together to create and deliver presentations amongst ARC members embodies the principles of partnered research and collaboration.

During the school year (September- June), the ARC meets in person once a month. On occasion, additional business is conducted over the phone or by email as required. An agenda is set before the meeting and amended at the meeting as required. Each project and/or member has the opportunity to give updates and seek consultation on their work and progress. Annually there are two committee chairs selected and given the responsibility of chairing the meetings and associated administrative work of preparing the minutes and circulating the agenda.

While the name and composition of ARC is relatively new, it dates back to an original community-university partnership in the AFN community. In 2006 a concerned community leader/Elder approached two University of Alberta researchers with concerns about the health and well-being of children in the community. As a result of this initial communication the university researchers and the Elder partnered together to create the aims of the study, *Conceptualizing the Alexander Meyo Pematchihiwin* (Healthy Living Project). This study focused on preventing childhood obesity to reduce instances of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (Pigford et al., 2013). By January 2008, this group grew in membership and formalized itself into the Wisdom Committee (WC). Since the inception of the WC (now known as the ARC) the individual members and types of projects have changed and evolved over time; however, the original underpinnings of community relevance, collaborative partnerships, building research capacity, and transferring knowledge have all still remained at the core of the committee (Pigford et al., 2013).

It was important to all parties involved in the first research project that formed the WC to avoid a helicopter approach when conducting research within their community. Helicopter

research typically refers to outside researchers coming to a community, implementing a research project, collecting data and then disappearing without involving partners or providing any meaningful results back to the participants or wider community (Bull, 2010; Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Castleden, Morgan & Lamb, 2012; Pigford et al., 2013). To avoid this, the WC constructed a set of guiding principles, outlined in a document, that were a means to solidify the purpose, functions, and processes of the WC. A core guiding principle was that all members are to be valued as equals and the document utilizes the language of "…meeting together in a spirit of collaboration, friendship, and shared concern… recognize[ing] that positive relationships are important to the success of the programs of research" (ARC Guiding Principles, 2013, p 4). The creation of these guiding principles and the lengthy time spent organizing the committee was a choice made by the group rather than a purely mandated process set out by funders or an external institutional research ethics board (Pigford et al., 2013). The guiding principles document, frames the protocols for membership, working together, meetings, communication, decision-making, data sharing and storage, knowledge dissemination and publications, community participation and training, and ethical conduct. Woven throughout the document are references to the community-based participatory research approach and the foremost priority of promoting and protecting the well-being of the community – ensuring the community's values and philosophies are respected in any decision and action conducted by the ARC. Drawing from Israel, Schultz, Parker & Becker (2001) the guiding principles describe the research approach "…as one that equitably involves all partners in researcher process and seeks to identify and build on strengths, resources and relationships…" (as cited in ARC Guiding Principles Document, 2013, p. 4). It describes the ways that ARC works together as a group of individuals from across multiple disciplines and sectors. In a brief section, the document outlines the

community participation and training aspects of the ARC. It states that wherever possible, in the research process, community capacity building will be incorporated and research will engage people living in the community in a meaningful way (ARC Guiding Principles Document, 2013). Drafts of proposals, manuscripts and presentations are distributed among members for review and the knowledge and contribution of the ARC must be formally acknowledged in manuscripts and presentations. Co-authorship of publications is the standard approach taken by the ARC, and whenever feasible the community will be named as a co-author or an appointed ARC member will be named for co-authorship purposes. The research design and data collection processes, and stewarding of data and knowledge sharing activities are approached collaboratively.

In the spring of 2013, at the monthly WC meeting, a member shared their concern regarding the name of the committee. Other members agreed, and also commented that at times individuals in the AFN community were confused about the role of the WC and wondered if it was a spiritual committee. Traditional knowledge and wisdom are commonly associated terms with First Nation Elders, culture, and spirituality. The name change to ARC was intended to be a straightforward title for the research steering committee and to avoid any possible misunderstanding of its functional nature. The wisdom of the Elders who have supported and partnered alongside the ARC are still highly esteemed.

Alexander First Nation

The ARC is situated in Alexander First Nation (AFN), which is a Cree tribe of the Treaty Six Territory and located 65 km northwest of a major urban centre. Alexander First Nation by membership is a youthful population; over 70% of the total membership is less than 25 years of age (Alexander First Nation, May 10, 2013). As a Nation there has been a longstanding history of providing members services and programs that match the desire of the people (Alexander First

Nation, 2014). The commitment of the ARC is to guide and implement community-based

research designed to see the younger generations flourish. This desire is in step with the

Nation's mission statement: "The Alexander First Nation is empowered to provide the physical,

spiritual, emotional and mental well-being of every member of the community" (Alexander First

Nation, 2014). Chief and Council, Elders, and community members endorse the work of the

committee in the community.

Community-Based Research Projects

At the time of this study there were three main research projects under the guidance of

the Alexander Research Committee. These projects are briefly described below.

The first project was the Food Security Program: A Positive and Healthful Food

Environment. This multi-faceted project was focused on research to enhance obesity prevention

and food security among children and families from a strengths-based and community-based

participatory research approach. The project was comprised of 5 main components: (a)

conducting a survey of programs and environmental scan; (b) developing community consensus

about food insecurity; (c) creating a food policy council and workshop series; (d) exploring and

documenting children's perspectives on food; and (e) exploring community feasibility and asset

mapping to better understand the external factors on health behaviours (Willows & Farmer,

2013). Food security intervention projects have also resulted from this research, such as the

EarthBox Kids Project, supporting and sustaining the community and school-based gardens, in

partnership with the APPLE Schools project (Triador, Farmer, Maximova, Willows & Kootenay,

2014). Membership on the ARC from this project has included: a research coordinator,

postdoctoral fellow, and University of Alberta professors.

The second project, titled, Apple Schools (The Alberta Project Promoting Active Living and Healthy Eating), was a provincial partnership project of the University of Alberta's School of Public Health and 51 schools across north and central Alberta. The project aimed to help create and support healthy physical and social environments in schools, home, and community from a Comprehensive School Health Framework (APPLE Schools, 2014). Alexander First Nation took part in the Apple Schools First Nations, Metis and Inuit Cohort at the time of this study. A comprehensive school health plan was created and implemented in the school with contribution of staff, students, families and community leadership. The applications resulting from this plan involved updating the school lunch program's menus, and promoting traditional games and physical activity. An APPLE Schools health facilitator, hired from the community, facilitated and supported the implementation of the comprehensive school health plan and currently sustains the program's activities in the school. An additional overview of the entire APPLE Schools project can be found at

http://www.appleschools.ca/files/APPLESchoolsOverview2015-WEB.pdf (June 5, 2015). The ARC membership for this project included the school health facilitator, First Nation, Metis and Inuit cohort school health mentor, and program manager from this project.

The third project was the First Nation Child Development Project (FNCD). This project utilized a community-based research approach to understand what is important in raising healthy First Nation children from the perspective of the community. It was a collaboration between the Yellowhead Tribal College (YT College), the First Nation communities of the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC) and the University of Alberta's Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families. This study created the FNCD questionnaire, which is a supplement to the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (FNCD Community Report, 2015;

Gokiert et al., 2014) the EDI is a population measure to help understand community level trends

in the development of kindergarten children and their experiences prior to starting school (Offord

& Janus, 1999). The FNCD questionnaire was uniquely focused on language, culture and

spiritual aspects of early childhood from a First Nation perspective. For more information please

see: http://www.cup.ualberta.ca/projects-initiatives/ecme/current-projects/first-nation-child-

development (June 5, 2015). Membership on the ARC from this project has included a

University of Alberta professor, research manager, and undergraduate and graduate student

research assistants.

Each of the three projects has had Elders and community members actively involved at

various stages of the research. Invitations to join ARC membership were consistently offered

still some individuals preferred the short-term involvement without official membership.

Similarly, each project had on-going involvement of research assistants from the community and

post-secondary students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature regarding: Aboriginal health and social research, community-based research, multi-sectoral partnerships, capacity strengthening, and co-learning.

Contextualizing Aboriginal health and social research

Aboriginal Peoples of Canada are as diverse in traditional knowledge, beliefs, language, and cultural practices as the regional climates and physical landscapes of their lands. There is no singular Aboriginal paradigm for positioning Aboriginal scholarship or worldviews (Kajner et al., 2011; Loppie, 2007; The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010). Each of the 600 First Nations across the county is a unique Nation. This is an important distinction to avoid assumptions about the homogeneity of First Nations Peoples in Canada. That said, there are shared cultural principles that are widely accepted amongst the diverse Nations.

The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2010) suggests five strong common threads as guiding ideas of an Aboriginal worldview:

1. Holistic perspective,

2. The interconnectedness of all living things,

3. Connection to the land and community,

4. The dynamic nature of the world, and

5. The strength in "power with" depicted by a circle, where all things come together in equal relationship with each other (p. 13).

Aboriginal worldviews are complex and dynamic; they are characterized by holistic, cyclical, relational, and ecologically derived concepts (Absolon, 2010; Brant Castellano, 2004; Loppie, 2007).

Historical contexts. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada desire meaningful participation and control of research and knowledge production affecting their well-being, identity and cultures (Bull, 2010; Brant Castellano, 2004; Edwards et al., 2008). To understand the contemporary context of research we must consider the historical context that it is situated within (Bull, 2010). This history is mired with the destructive reality of colonial impositions and policies, rooted within a practice of research on Aboriginal Peoples tracing back to early European contact (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008). Over 500 years ago, European explorers, missionaries and associated government officials, began, for example, keeping records and journals of their observations and anthropological accounts of Indigenous life to survey and report back to their own governments (Bull, 2010).

Biased information was gathered without seeking clarification or even basic consent from Aboriginal People; this marks the beginning of one-sided, unequal, power relations. European worldviews on governance, social order, trade and resources, and religion were in sharp contrast to the traditional ways of living of Aboriginal Peoples. These fundamental differences and erroneous judgments made by the European colonists led to the bold justification of sweeping, marginalizing, assimilating legislation, actions, and decisions made with the claim of being in the best interests of Aboriginal Peoples. The political power held over Aboriginal Peoples was paternalistic, assimilative and exploitative and was typically deployed in disrespectful and oppressive ways (Bull, 2010; Loppie & Wien, 2009).

Following are a few brief examples of how colonial imposition was forced on Aboriginal Peoples. In 1839, the first Crown Land Protection Act was passed as a legal measure to ensure that the British Crown had ownership and control of Aboriginal lands. This illustrates an early political policy regarding land usage; in turn creating, land dislocation and the eventual

implementation of the reserve system that benefited the Crown and isolated Aboriginal Peoples. Land sanctioned for Crown use is a multifaceted imposition of power as land represents physical and spiritual spaces, natural resources and identity (Castleden, Morgan & Lamb, 2012).

A second example, dating back to 1845, is the Report on the Affairs of Indians in Canada, providing the Legislative Assembly a comprehensive summary of Aboriginal Peoples. This foundational document described what De Leeuw, Greenwood and Cameron (2010) refer to as the start of a discursive construction of Aboriginal Peoples as deviants - deemed as "inferior, childlike, and untrustworthy" and worst of all, requiring state welfare "for their own good" (p.287). Racial superiority and discrimination is passed down through discourses of spoken words and written polices, among other ways, it shapes the social views we hold towards others. The demeaning language used is indicative of the discrimination, lack of respect, and disregard for Aboriginal People as equal.

A third example relates to Aboriginal children and youth, and stems back to 1886. It was decreed that all "Native" children must attend compulsory Crown schooling. Children attended residential and boarding schools jointly overseen by the Catholic and Protestant churches across the country. The pedagogical mandate of the residential schools was centered on teaching the children the moral and religious beliefs of Christianity and European worldviews (de Leeuw et al., 2009). This process systematically removed the children from everything that made them "Indian" including: their parents, extended families, language, culture, ceremony and day-to-day ways of living. Parents who did not comply would be fined or punished. Many children were abused, undernourished and forced to complete hard manual labour while attending residential schools (Nasy & Kaur Sehdeu, 2012). Troubling facts have surfaced, such as, the unethical use of Aboriginal children as test subjects in state appointed nutritional research studies. Children

died as a result of malnutrition and others suffered poor overall development as a result of imposed participation in the studies from 1942 to 1952 (MacDonald, Stanwick & Lynk, 2014). The last residential school was closed in 1986 (Nasy & Kaur Sehdeu, 2012).

Post-colonial legacies and transgenerational trauma exist today after half a millennia of compounded racism and cultural genocide on Aboriginal Peoples (Greenwood, 2005; Nasy & Kaur Sehdeu, 2012; Reading & Wien, 2009). Research has linked social inequalities created by historic, political, social and economic colonization to "disease, disability, violence, and early death experienced by Aboriginal Peoples in Canada" (Reading & Wien, 2009, p. 23). Self-determination has been cited as the most influential of all the social determinants of health due to its direct link to health, safety, education, housing and employment opportunities spanning across family systems and the life course from infancy to old age (Reading & Wien, 2009). One important exercise of self-determination is research, both individually and collectively, as it requires autonomy and authority over scholarly, political, cultural, material, and psychosocial domains (Brant Castellano, 2004; Reading & Wien, 2009). Brant Castellano (2004) defines Aboriginal research as:

> Research that touches the life and wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples. It may involve Aboriginal Peoples and their community directly. It may assemble data that describes or claims to describe Aboriginal Peoples or their heritage. Or, it may affect the human and natural environment in which Aboriginal people live (p.99).

This definition is inclusive of a range of Aboriginal health and social science research. As Ball and Janyst (2008) comment, research goes beyond the generation and sharing of knowledge; "…it is a form of engagement with political significance" (p. 38). Indigenous scholarship and Aboriginal Health research are forms of Aboriginal study, which make up part of a spectrum of

theoretical and applied perspectives. This spectrum could include methodologies that range from incorporating Indigenous principles into CBR through partnership on one end of the spectrum to Indigenous research and methodologies without attempting to modify Western paradigms on the other (Adams & Faulkhead, 2012; Loppie, 2007; Castleden et al., 2012).

Colonial polices and definitions of what truth is, denied Aboriginal Peoples the tools to freely choose their truth and then implement their knowledge into daily living. Whereas, self-determination acknowledges the right to construct knowledge and understand the relationship with it, according to what is real and valuable to Aboriginal Peoples (Brant Castellano, 2004). The ability to consent, assent, control and participate in research matters profoundly.

The appropriation of traditional Aboriginal knowledge, data being used without consent, and Aboriginal People's voices being silenced has caused deep mistrust of research and scholarship (Bull, 2010; Castleden et al., 2012; de Leeuw et al., 2009). Conventional research methods and practices have often misrepresented Indigenous peoples (Ball & Janyst, 2008). 'Parachute style' research, or short-term engagement with community causes harm to the greater community, especially if the research is of a sensitive nature or deficit focused (Brant Castellano, 2004; Flicker et al., 2007). Aboriginal Peoples, in Canada, have at times consented to community-level research out of fear and confusion surrounding the possible negative funding related repercussions from declining to participate as a community (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000, as cited in Castleden et al., 2012). Tensions often emerge between research paradigms and methods, such as, research agendas, protocols, or the dissemination of data particularly for one-sided convenience rather than for negotiated joint processes (Flicker et al., 2007). Researchers, on occasion, project overstated benefits and misleading study outcomes to communities in the process of building proposals and gaining community support and consent (Ball & Janyst, 2008).

Scholars have written extensively on the dissatisfaction articulated by Aboriginal Peoples and their negative experiences of research, insisting, "Only if it's [the research] going to mean something" (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008, p. 53). Along with the declaration of "nothing about us without us" in reference again to ownership, control, access and possession of traditional and contemporary knowledge systems in ways that will not pathologize and do further harm (Ball & Janyst, 2005; Flicker, et al., 2007; First Nation Centre, 2007; Minkler, 2004). A Nakoda Sioux Elder stated, " If we've been researched to death…maybe it's time we started researching ourselves back to life" (Brant Castellano, 2004, p. 98). The resiliency to go forward with decolonizing research approaches has the potential to yield life-giving knowledge and promising practices when it is grounded in ethical and relational partnerships.

Community-based research (CBR)

CBR, as an umbrella term, refers to a range of participatory approaches to research. CBR is historically rooted in social action movements that advocated for community empowerment, equality and social justice (Minkler, 2005; Padgett, 2008). To begin to unpack the concepts of CBR it is important to define community. Community, as a site for research and/or unit of research analysis, is often defined as a group of people that identify with a variety of factors which include but are not limited to: geographical location, a shared belief or worldview, and a common interest or goal (Hills & Mullett, 2000). Understanding community as dynamic and multidimensional can mitigate the belief of community as a homogenous, "subject" group (Ross et al., 2010).

Thinking broadly of community, a major distinction between CBR and other research approaches is the collaborative engagement of a range of co-researchers from diverse backgrounds. Hills and Mullett (2000) define this approach, which is based in a participatory

paradigm, as being collaboration between researchers and community groups in order to create new understanding or knowledge about "practical community issues" with the intention of bringing about change (p.2). Action and applied oriented research is useful when those involved are invested and situated in the research and wish to initiate change and reflect critically on current practices (Israel et al., 2010).

This approach challenges conventional research that often supports the privileging of impartial facts, positions, and scientific objectivity over the promotion of situated knowledge within a reciprocal exchange of ideas (Smyth, 2009; Verity, 2007). Community groups interested in research often have two objectives in mind when partnering in CBR. One objective is a focus on local relevance and the second is the empowerment of their community. These two objectives often form the benchmarks of a successful CBR project (Ross et al., 2010). For these reasons CBR as an applied approach to research is considered a flexible way to create research partnerships (Minkler, 2005).

Israel, Schulz, Parker and Becker (2001) provided a foundational set of nine principles of CBR:

1. Recognizes community as a unit of identity;

2. Builds on strengths and resources within the community;

3. Facilitates collaborative [equitable involvement of all partners] partnerships in all phases of the research;

4. Integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners;

5. Promotes co-learning and empowering processes that attends to social inequalities;

6. Involves a cyclical and iterative process;

7. Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives;

8. Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners and;

9. Involves a long-term commitment by all partners (p. 184).

These principles tend to be embedded in the design and activation of CBR research projects. Each principle is an important foundation to the ever-emerging nature of CBR (Israel et al., 2010). One principle is rarely practiced in isolation from the others and each principle is applied based on the context of the study. Not all of the core CBR principles are necessarily operationalized in every research project or in the same ways. Research partnerships formally bring together individuals and groups to create the opportunity for CBR to unfold.

Community-university partnerships. Community- university partnerships specifically, have emerged from the broad spectrum of community-based approaches that seek to equalize power relationships between academics and community research partners (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Israel et al., 2010). This approach encourages a partnered process whereby multiple worldviews are respected and knowledge can be co-constructed among community members, practitioners and researchers (Kajner et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2005). Community-university partnerships are promoted as a decolonizing approach to avoid continued injustices in the pursuit of knowledge (Edwards et al., 2008: Kajner et al., 2011). Suarez-Balcazar, Harper and Lewis (2005) note that community-university partnerships are built on reciprocal collaboration between the partners.

Multi-sectoral partnerships. No single sector of health, education or social development can effectively provide comprehensive services or knowledge production that would sustain the health and well-being of the children and youth of a community. For this reason, multi-sectoral partnerships can bring together a diverse group of individuals and organizations to develop a community-based research agenda that works towards a common

goal. Multi-sectoral efforts acknowledge the difference and independence between individuals and groups while complementing the varied mandates, practices and roles represented within the partnership (Tamarack- An Institute for Community Engagement [Tamarack Institute], 2013). Multi-sectoral partnerships are a preferred mechanism towards implementing and tailoring community led *initiatives*, coordinating services, reducing duplicated efforts, increasing access to resources and shared responsibility in holistic and culturally safe ways (Ball, 2005; Tamarack Institute, 2013). In research contexts, multi-sectoral work highlights the facilitation of joint undertakings in order to streamline the research processes, encourage trusting relationships and build stronger engagement with local communities (Tamarack Institute, 2013). Research steering committees can facilitate and support the goals of multi-sectoral partnerships in research.

Community-based research steering committees. It is common practice to create a localized research steering committee to help facilitate the engagement, consultation and oversight processes of CBR within a local community (D'Alonzo, 2010; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008). Many scholarly articles, and government and community reports provide a statement that acknowledges the existence of a committee but few offer in-depth examples of the committee member's experiences.

Adams and Faulkhead (2012) present findings in their work regarding participatory partnerships and provide a discussion on the relevance of community-based advisory groups (steering committees). The findings presented a strong preference for the inclusivity of all partners helping to avoid the need to have multiple, separate advisory research groups. However, in many large-scale research projects there are still separate technical and community advisory groups which have the potential to create hierarchical decision making systems that

impact how information and decision making is shared in all the stages of research. Verity (2007) reflected that advisory groups created solely at the request of funding bodies with limited function and scope tend to create frustration and patronizing experiences for the community members involved. Healthy and functional committees tend to be focused on solutions and remaining flexible while working towards a common goal (Adams & Faulkhead, 2012, p. 1025).

Guiding ethical principles in CBR. Today, many Canadian public institutions have interwoven the principles of CBR, rooted in a participatory model, into their public documents and promising practices which promote partnership, protection and participation (Kirby et al., 2006; Traverso-Yepez et al., 2012; Sadler et al., 2012). Non-Aboriginal researchers are also seeking new methods to explore and engage with Aboriginal People to gain perspective on their traditional knowledge, expertise and experience (Edwards et al., 2008).

In 1991, Kirkness and Barnhardt, introduced the "4 R's of Indigenous Research: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility" to support research philosophies and methodologies that contribute to decolonizing efforts (as cited in Castleden et al., 2010). In 2004, the National Aboriginal Health Organization formally published the ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) document (2007). This influential document articulates the considerations for self-determination applied to research, and was published by First Nations for First Nations with the hope of providing a broad framework and strategies to use as a pattern for beneficial research going forward (First Nation Centre, 2007). In 2009 the second edition of the federally initiated Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Metis People of Canada (TCPS-2) was established as another ethical bridge to guide in the process of "researching with" and not just "researching on" people. This was another document that represented an intentional shift towards decolonizing approaches in research (Kirby et al., 2006;

Castleden et al., 2012). This document serves as a guide that outlines the ethical protocols for

engagement with an indigenous population. Scholars, such as Jacklin and Kinoshameg (2008),

have also provided a complimentary set of principles for appropriate CBR research within

Indigenous contexts:

1. Partnership;

2. Empowerment;

3. Community control;

4. Mutual benefit;

5. Wholism;

6. Action;

7. Communication; and

8. Respect (p. 60).

The guiding principles for Indigenous research from Jacklin and Kinoshameg (2008) and those

of Israel et al., (2010) are complementary examples of the foundational principles of CBR. Each

set of principles encourages partners to engage in respectful and ethical reciprocity of

relationships and knowledge, while at the same time employing culturally appropriate research

designs and methodology. Conducting research ethically cannot simply be a suggestion or good

intention; at the onset it must be built into the negotiated partnership agreements of a research

project (Edwards et al., 2008; Sadler et al., 2012). Although there are a number of guiding

framework documents, due to the complexity of the partnerships and inherent political nature of

CBR, numerous ethical tensions can surround any one particular research undertaking (Ball &

Janyst, 2008; Edwards et al., 2008). The interpretation and application of the guidelines often

depends on contextual factors. Unfortunately, these guiding documents do not erase the legacy

of harmful research previously conducted, nor do they guarantee any form of current immunity from mismatched or poorly implemented research protocols.

In Canada, university and government partners have established Research Ethics Boards (REB) as a process for vetting research proposals. The REB's ability to universally understand the contextual sensitivity that is required to monitor ethical challenges that exist, often surpass the initial human research ethics vetting process (Boser, 2007; Flicker et al., 2007; Patterson, 2008). The process of how a research inquiry is formed and where the research questions originate from is another aspect of the complexity of partnership. The implications of ownership of data are an example of something that is of particular importance to First Nation communities that seek to exercise autonomy over what type of research inquiries will be undertaken (Ball, 2005; Edwards et al., 2008). Ethical principles as guides to research are a step towards clarity, a ground for discussion and positioning the right direction for the research to be conducted.

Kajner et al. (2012) argue in favour of the relationally driven ethical engagement of community-university partnerships, established on a foundation of grounded trusting and respectful relationships. This way of conceptualizing partnerships while "balancing head and heart" draws importance to the possibilities of *being* engaged versus finding a prescriptive path for *doing* research together, "…as a result of the complex bi-directional relationship that developed… the distinctions between scholar and community member became insignificant… A respectful and dialectical relationship developed, where each partner was both an *expert* and a *learner"* (Fletcher et al., 2008, p. 262).

Capacity strengthening

Increased attention to communities' voice, empowerment, resource mobilization and buy-in as a result of ownership through participation are benefits of capacity strengthening that have

been associated with CBR (Smyth, 2012). Successful capacity strengthening ensures consideration of power imbalances, cultural context, complexity of resources and most importantly, it is predicated on the strengths of the whole group or community involved (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2012). Smith, Littlejohns, and Thompson (2001) suggest that capacity strengthening is a process of partnering with a group or community to determine its needs and strengths while at the same time developing methods that use those identified strengths to meet the established needs while realizing the potential for social change.

Capacity strengthening conveys that each partner has knowledge, experience and skills to offer the research project. It is the diversity of knowledge, experiences and skills that support the richness of multi-partnered and multi-sectoral collaborations. As well, all partners are co-learners and can learn and further develop aspects of their own skills, resources, and knowledge through engagement in the research projects. This iteration of the term avoids the "expert" researcher teaching the "community" partner who is then becoming "skilled." The terminology of capacity building can reflect a colonizing connotation (Verity, 2007), whereas capacity strengthening denotes a multi-directional interaction between partners (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2012). In the past, it was common that a colonial government "bestowed" Euro-Western culture, religion, and education on Aboriginal Peoples "for their own good" as if it was welcomed, equitable, or a consensual process. It was a harmful imposition to Aboriginal Peoples, their culture and their traditional way of life. Despite this distinction, for the purposes of this literature review capacity building/community capacity building are included in the literature search as it represents a wider body of literature.

In Verity's (2007) landmark literature review on 'community-capacity building' (CCB) it is stated that despite the extensive amount of literature, best practices and how-to-guides that

proclaim the benefits of CCB, there is no one clear or common definition on the subject. As a concept, CCB has increased in popularity and, in North America, Australia and the United Kingdom, is now sometimes used strategically to gain a favorable reception by the decision makers of institutional funding applications (Smyth, 2009). Other scholars further describe CCB as an "elusive", "muddled" and "slippery" term especially when it is used as a catch phrase aimed at favorably positioning a project towards potential outcomes (Verity, 2007). From a critical perspective, CCB used for this purpose can be likened to 'camouflage' by which a community is inadvertently involved in the process of CCB all the while the project is advancing an institutionalized or politicized agenda (Chapman & Kirk, 2001; Smyth, 2009). Smyth (2012) adds that proclaiming extravagant CCB promises associated with CBR projects and then being unable to deliver the results due to the constraints of the sociopolitical nature is a recipe for disappointment. Canadian scholar Richard Crilly (2003) contends:

> There are currently no universally accepted definitions, processes or evaluation indicators for community capacity building. Terminology is used inconsistently and often incorrectly; it is quite common for projects to use the term 'community capacity building' but not practice the principles intrinsic to the definition (as cited in Verity, 2007, p.1).

An additional confusion when invoking CCB in the context of CBR is the difference between CCB and *research* capacity building. Research capacity building generally refers to the academic partners of the project sharing research skills and knowledge with their non-academic partners (Traverso -Yepex et al., 2012). Research capacity building is a useful and appropriate contribution from the academic partners; however, it is only one aspect of the CCB process. Capacity strengthening, however, is a more expansive way of viewing research capacity. The process of learning is mutual. Therefore academic researchers also learn beneficial research

skills and knowledge from their non-academic partners (Kajner et al., 2012). These exchanges are the focal point of capacity strengthening by way of sharing experiences, processes, principles, and outcomes.

CBR is typically contextual by nature and does not naturally support a rigid definition or strict standardization of practices to accomplish any prescribed goals. This predicament highlights the significance of this matter. On one side of the debate some covet having a unified meaning, while on the other side they prefer a more flexible and broadly defined set of practices. CBR, as represented by many of the studies highlighted in the academic literature available is presented as an embedded and expected part of the research design. However, very few studies actually discuss in any depth what the common understanding of capacity strengthening actually was among the co-researchers and how it was applied in their research (Fletcher et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2010).

Part of the quandary surrounding CCB is how to proactively identify and document the process and success of CBR projects with CCB outcomes while also upholding a balance between research and action for the mutual benefit of all partners (Israel et al., 2010). Verity's (2007) meta examination of CCB literature provides a synopsis of the common features across the numerous models and perspectives. These common features include: institutional (influence, resources, policies, responsiveness); technical (skills and abilities); knowledge (critical reflection, awareness of power, process of change, knowledge of community needs); linking and resource transfer (resource mobilization, networks between formal and informal systems, collaboration) and community (power, history, conflicts, leadership and participation) (p.23). This list suggests the myriad forms CCB can take within a CBR project and by extension the diversity of CCB within CBR. The possibilities of CCB stretch far beyond simply developing an

increased knowledge base or skill set among individuals who participate in a research project,
including the academic research team members and the community team members. A number of
the features of CCB, such as institutional policies or responsiveness towards community, must
involve high-level system or governmental cooperation and investment. Community members
alone simply cannot accomplish all of a CBR's project goals; nor should they be expected to
accomplish such a feat (Verity, 2007). Again, building capacity at an individual level is
important, yet it is limited to that individual's particular capacity.

        An example of capacity strengthening in an Aboriginal context. The Canadian Public
Health Agency created a Community Capacity Building Tool in 2005. This tool draws from
Labonte and Laverack's (as cited in Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005) nine domains of key
features and elements of CCB. The tool is intended to support a project by assisting in
organizing, monitoring and documenting each project's unique processes in order to help
facilitate discussion among the participants of the project. The tool has been developed so that
each of the nine domains are highlighted as relevant aspects of CCB:

1. Participation (community organizations, target populations, communication methods);

2. Leadership (roles and responsibilities, reporting guidelines, informal leaders);

3. Community structures (pre-existing links, new and/or improved community structures);

4. Role of external support (project related information, technical expertise, financial supports, policies);

5. Asking why (causes, target populations, solutions);

6. Obtaining resources (internal and external);

7. Skills, knowledge and learning (developing skills and knowledge);

8. Linking with others (networking, information transfer, community actions); and

9. Sense of Community (trust and collaboration) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005, p. 5).

One example of a CBR study that utilized the tool was the collaborative project to better understand the increasing prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation (Fletcher et al., 2008). The research partnership included community representatives and academic researchers from the University of Alberta. Over the span of two years the Community Capacity Building Tool was used to study the effectiveness and growth of CCB within the FASD research study. Some CBR projects use the Community Capacity Building Tool as a way to document the project's short-term successes in CCB, however, in this particular example the tool was used to document the collaborative efforts and create knowledge in response to the prevalence of FASD in the community. Drawing from the results of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation study it was noted that the project displayed growth at each domain of CCB, however, it was the domains of "leadership, skills, knowledge, learning" and "sense of community" that were seen as critical to the success of the project (Fletcher et al., 2008, p. 26).

Another example of increased research capacity is found within the feasibility study of asset mapping with children in Alexander First Nation (DyckFehderau, Holt, Ball, Alexander First Nation & Willows, 2013). Although the development of research capacity is not listed in the publication as an objective of the study it is a relevant example of increasing research capacity. The purpose of the study was to explore the community factors that influenced First Nations (FN) children's health choices and served as one component in a larger inquiry into the health factors influencing diabetes in FN children. In the first phase, two local high school

students were hired as research assistants to help produce a visual asset mapping of the community. In the second phase, seven grade 6 students participated in a group interview discussing the asset mapping and healthy living places and spaces in the community. The ARC provided oversight to research protocols implemented in the study and reviewed the manuscripts submitted for publication. The findings were also presented to the community at a community-level workshop that was part of the Healthy Child Project in Alexander First Nation. The children who participated in the study came to an understanding of what giving assent and consent meant in terms of research. Along with this they voiced their opinions on preferred healthy living spaces and places and provided recommendations to leadership in their community. This research project is an illustrative example of how embedded capacity strengthening in the form of research capacity can transpire. Capacity strengthening is a critical component of successful CCB, another critical component is co-learning.

Co-learning

Co-learning is described as the act of sharing between partners in an open and reciprocal exchange of ideas, experiences, knowledge and power (Bull, 2010; Suarez- Balcazar et al., 2005). Co-learning is another established principle of CBR in the literature, yet it remains difficult to gain an in-depth understanding of how it is applied and measured. It is a predominant term used by CBR researchers to explain the principles of CBR and the outcomes of the research project. For example, it is often closely associated with the aspects of community empowerment as a consistent feature of CBR (Israel et al., 2010). Minkler (2000, as cited in Williams et al., 2005) asserts, "research itself is viewed as a co-learning process for researchers and community members" (p. 192). Bull (2010) describes the researcher's role as being framed by authentic relationships that:

Enables the researchers to understand the cultures and values of the peoples they study,

and enable the peoples studied to participate actively in the process. This co-learning

process is important because it enables the researcher to produce knowledge that will be

useful to the peoples studied (p. 17).

Co-learning involves trust, relational connections and a genuine appreciation of the diversity of

perspectives among the research partners (Suarez- Balcazar et al., 2005). Respecting the

community's voice and its collective co-learning's helps to increase the community's sense of

empowerment and partnership in research processes (Israel et al., 2010). As a construct, co-

learning is linked to mutuality in research and decolonizing methods in which community

members and university researchers are equally engaged in the creation and sharing of

knowledge (Castleden et al., 2012). As Curry and Cummingham (2000) state, "co-learning

reminds us of our equality, and provides a frame for developing mutual nonappropriating

learning from and with one another" (pg. 81). Therefore, co-learning teaches us to respect the

other's place and the fact that learning occurs in place and in contested terrains. The authors

draw attention to power relations inherent to the teacher/learner and expert/apprentice

dichotomies found in mainstream learning traditions. This reminds us to be aware of imbalances

of power and position that can hinder the potential for co-learning to take place. Co-learning is

the process of constructing meaning with others and learning through sharing and exchanging

ideas.

Knowledge translation. In many published articles and institutional reports, co-learning

is implied by using the terms 'lessons learned' and 'recommendations' as a way of providing

reflections and promising practices gleaned from researchers using a CBR approach. Similarly,

the concept of knowledge translation (KT) highlights the action-focused findings that benefit the

communities. Knowledge translation activities are context-specific and take on many forms, such as peer-reviewed research journals, interactive blogs, outreach informational sessions or information rich calendars.

Numerous scholars have reported on the disillusionment of community members and research partners when research findings and synthesized knowledge were never returned to them as promised (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Bull, 2010; Castleden et al., 2012; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2012; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005). To help ensure the KT activities take place, it is suggested that they are negotiated during the formative stages of a research agreement or memoranda of understanding (Edwards et al., 2008). The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has made the creation of dissemination plans a requirement in the research funding application process. According to the CIHR, KT is defined as "the synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge" (2015). Knowledge translation rests on the basic premise that knowledge exchange takes place between knowledge users and researchers resulting in mutual learning (Bull, 2010). The CIHR presents a conceptualization of integrated KT (iKT) as an on-going collaborative dissemination processes embedded throughout the research project. A range of commonly used terms to describe KT can be found in CBR, including: knowledge mobilization, knowledge transfer and exchange. Despite the varying terms used, the goal of KT is to share the key findings of a study with a variety of applicable audiences, also known as knowledge users, found in community, academia, policy and decision-makers and practice based settings (CIHR, 2015; Wilson, Lavis, Travers & Rourke, 2010). The term co-learning appears in many scholarly articles, however a search of the published literature for examples from the perspectives of community members (or a steering committee) did not yield any examples.

Contributions of the Present Study

There is a need for research that illuminates the operationalization of community-based research principles within a community setting. Working together in partnered research supports ethical research processes and provides an opportunity for rich learning, sharing new perspectives, and co-creating beneficial outcomes. This research contributes to the literature by examining how members of one Aboriginal community research steering committee understand, operationalize and experience capacity strengthening in their own research and committee work, including how they have experienced co-learning within a multi-sectoral partnership.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

Qualitative case study was used as the method in this research. Case study is a qualitative approach to research that is used to explore a phenomenon within its naturalistic context using a variety of data sources (Stalk, 1995; Creswell, 2012; Padgett, 2008). Qualitative case study refers to the in-depth analysis of a single (or multi) unit that presents descriptive knowledge and provides concrete examples and context. Merriam (1998) also describes, "a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process… in context… in discovery. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research" (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.19). Specifically, an instrumental case study design was used. Instrumental case study consists of a single case used to provide insight and understanding based on a description of the processes of a particular phenomenon (Zucker, 2009).

The researcher acknowledges that her worldview is deeply shaped by a social constructivist perspective. Charmaz (2003) advocated approaching research as a mutual relationship between the participants and the researcher in the creation of a shared and interpretive reality.

The goal of this case study was not to flush out all of the fine details of the constructs of co-learning and capacity strengthening but instead to provide an enriched understanding through the ARC's experiences as understood by the researcher. The findings of this study are interpretative renderings of constructed ideas and concepts presented in the form of themes (Charmaz, 2003). The researcher approached this study from the following assumptions:

1. Participants are first and foremost the experts of their own experiences.

2. Participant's experiences are representative of their truth and often reflection of the context in which they were shared.

3. Knowledge is socially constructed and largely impacted by cultural, political and social constructs.

4. Participants each have their own subjective reality; therefore this research is not seeking to test for falsity.

5. Research conducted ethically involves a high level of engagement with participants and the associated community to create a shared reality.

Data sources

Multiple sources of data were incorporated and useful in shaping the researcher's understanding throughout this study including: (a) individual interviews with committee members about their experiences participating on the ARC; (b) a focus group discussion and; (c) an archival review of ARC documents and records (e.g., governance documents, meeting minutes); and (d) observation and researcher field notes. Combining these four data sources helped to yield an understanding of capacity strengthening and co-learning outcomes and provide a description of the case.

Individual interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were the primary method used for data collection. Interviewing is a form of communication between individuals with the specific purpose of gathering information (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). Individual interviews allow for in-depth conversations using open-ended questions as a guide. Individual interviews were offered, as a way to accommodate the constraints of scheduling a group discussion, and allowed for individual participants to share their unique perspectives with the interviewer.

Focus group discussion. Focus groups provide the opportunity to gather information

from a cross section of individual participants during an intentionally planned discussion. The

purpose of the focus group discussion was two-fold. First to receive critical feedback on the

organization and initial interpretation of the interview data from ARC members, and second to

generate additional data through exploring the themes presented as a group. This was important

given the engaged and participatory nature of the committee.

Archival review. Document reviews are a useful method to obtain a broader context of

the work, history and scope of the ARC. A range of ARC and research project specific records,

memos and reports were reviewed and used in this study. These documents included research

agreements, meeting minutes, and community reports from past research projects. This data

supplemented and situated the findings from the interview data and were used as additional

contextual information. The ARC documents were also used to build the background

information of the case study description. The data gathered was primarily retrieved through

records that are maintained and available for all committee members on a secure shared Google

drive. Some documents were retrieved from the AFN website and members of the ARC with the

permission of the ARC. The members of the ARC also made themselves available to provide

additional contextual information as required.

Observation and researcher field notes. Field notes were gathered to record

impressions and curiosities throughout the research process. With the permission of the ARC, I

was a participant observer at several meetings from May 2013-June 2015. Observations took

place at the time of the interviews and during ARC meetings. Permission was obtained from the

ARC to note the interactions and processes within the committee setting. Descriptive

information was collected including factual data such as the date, time, settings, actions and

conversations observed. Additionally, reflective information was collected to guide my own

research process as a record of my thoughts, questions, ideas and concerns as observations were made. Personal records, notes, and memos were used to support continuity and clarity in the process and content of data collection.

All of the tangible recorded data and observation notes were stored and filed in a locked filing cabinet, and will be kept for five years in accordance with the University of Victoria's Human Ethics Research Board. The audio-recordings from the interviews are also kept secure with password protected digital transcription files.

Participants

ARC members were involved as participants and/or in the process of suggesting key informants within the current and past membership to contact to participate in the semi-structured interview and focus group. Through purposive sampling, participants had to be a current or former ARC member, and willing to voluntarily participate. Recruitment took place by a face-to-face, telephone, and email invitation (Appendix A). An information letter was given to each prospective participant at the time of recruitment to provide information concerning the purpose of the study, procedures, and participant rights (See Appendix B).

Participants were given 'the Participant Consent Form' approved by the Human Ethics Research Board of the University of Victoria as reference for all of the pertinent aspects of the research (See Appendix C). Time was provided for the participant to review the documents, ask questions, and/or take additional time to make their decision on participation. This document provided important information regarding confidentiality, free and informed consent, and the right to withdraw without negative recourse. Nine participants with the aforementioned criteria consented and took part in the semi-structured interviews. The participants experienced ranged from 1 – 9 years of service (inclusive of the formative work and pre-formalization of the official

WC, now ARC). The participants represented the following: parents/grandparents of a child or youth in the Nation, directors of education, program managers, teaching assistants, school health facilitators, principals, project coordinators, and university professors.

Similarly, focus group recruitment took place from within the nine individual participants from the previous stage of individual interviews. Each participant was invited to take part in this second stage of data collection. Five of the nine participants consented to participant in the focus group interview discussion.

For the focus groups, additional attention was drawn to the limits of confidentiality due to participation in a group discussion. Participants were presented with a full disclosure of these limits. All of the information discussed above was given in written email form to the participants that previously suggested email communication as the best form of contact.

Ethical Considerations

From the onset of the study, priority was given to adherence to the ethical protocols of the community, the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB), and the ARC's guiding principles and research agreements. The community protocols are grounded in a commitment to mutual benefit and respect. The ARC committee gave their approval for this study through a consensus letter signed by the Director of Education (see Appendix D). In addition, ethical approval was granted from HREB of the University of Victoria. As a student associated with Dr. Rebecca Gokiert and the FNCD project team at the Community-University Partnership (CUP) for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families, University of Alberta (UAlberta), this project also fell within existing ethics approval through the UAlberta's HREB.

As previously discussed informed and voluntary consent was a condition to any individual's participation in the study. Confidentiality could not be fully guaranteed and was limited due to the nature of group data activities, the participant selection and context of the study.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of participants in all documents and reporting done in the context of this study. There was some loss of confidentiality for those involved in the focus group, as they interacted as part of a group. Another possible loss of anonymity was based on the fact that the ARC is situated within a relatively small community. Even with the use of pseudonyms it is possible that a reader could infer the probable ARC members involved in this study. To mitigate this possible risk, consultation took place to negotiate the naming preferences of the ARC before in regards to this thesis or subsequent dissemination transpired.

Throughout this study, the researcher gave updates and sought feedback from the ARC at each key phase of the research process. Discussions took place at the time of research design, participant recruitment, initial and on-going analysis, and a final presentation of the study and associated findings. For example, the researcher also gave an overview presentation with the findings at the December 2015 ARC meeting. It was agreed that the researcher would bring a draft executive summary back to the ARC in January of 2016 for review and shared authorship with the Nation. The ARC and Alexander First Nation will have full access and use of the document for the knowledge dissemination activities of their choice.

Procedures

Individual interviews. Each interview commenced with a brief set of demographic questions (e.g., occupation, roles, and length on the committee). The semi–structured interview questions were used to gather information on the perspectives of the participants (See Appendix

E). The questions explored the understating and experiences of capacity strengthening and co-learning from participants' own research and committee work. Nine individual interviews ranged from 33 to 60 minutes; additional time was spent discussing the consent form and other processes before recording the interview. The face-to-face interviews were recorded with the application of VoiceMemo+ and a backup recording was made at the time of the interview with the same application on another device. Four individual interviews took place face-to-face in AFN, at Kipohtakaw Education Centre (KEC). Three other face-to–face individual interviews took place at alternative locations within the city of Edmonton. Two participants used the option of a telephone interview to accommodate scheduling. Phone based individual interviews were recorded with the application CallATape.

The author created a verbatim transcription of each interview. Participants were informed that approximately two weeks after their interview a copy of their transcribed interview would be available for review. Each participant received a copy of their transcript either in hard copy delivered in person or distributed via email in word document format. Four of the nine participants accepted the invitation to review their own transcript prior to the de-identification/pseudonym process as a means of checking the accuracy of the transcription work. Participants were instructed to review their transcript to look for any accidental misunderstanding in the transcription of what was literally said versus the intended meaning.

Focus group discussion. The focus group consisted of five participants, and one graduate student who took notes. Five initial themes were presented and distributed to participants of the focus group. The author discussed each theme and provided time for participants to read and comment on the document distributed. From that point in a round table discussion, the group discussed each theme in a two-fold process. Firstly the discussion

generated critical feedback on the initial interpretation of the themes. Secondly, incorporating the critical feedback each theme was explored to generate additional data as a group. The focus group discussion was approximately 90 minutes and took place in person in AFN, at KEC. The focus group discussion was recorded in duplicate with the VoiceMemo+ application on a smartphone and a laptop. General discussion notes where taken during the session by the note taker. A second set of detailed notes was completed from listening to the recording in its entirety twice. This set of notes was completed with time markers, key words and highlighting sections and phrases from specific participants in the discussion.

Archival review. Descriptive information including factual data such as date, time, settings, and action steps found in minutes of meetings, community reports, letters of support and published articles we collected and reviewed. The purpose of the review was to find additional information on ARC's background, key decisions, and procedural records. These data were recorded and organized in my field notes. The information gathered was primarily used to build an understanding of the context and history of the ARC.

Approaches to analysis

Merriam (2009) describes the process of analysis as making sense of data in order to answer the research questions. In the context of this case study this relates to finding the answers to the research questions by exploring the understanding and experiences of participants. Research conducted using a qualitative case study approach holds the challenge of sorting through a high volume of data collected. Thematic analysis is described on a basic level as "…identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). A theme is a concept that represents a pattern of meaning within a data set; in this study

the primary researcher constructed themes and therefore it was the researcher who determined and defined the themes from their interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2012).

The systematic process of analysis was drawn from Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of six phases of thematic analysis, which includes: "familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and developing the report" (p.87). The procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) served as a procedural guide for the analysis process, however, it was important to remain flexible and nuanced through the process in order to give the opportunity for non-linear aspects of thematic analysis to unfold. Below is a description of the cyclical data analysis process, which involved reviewing the data multiple times to compare, identify and generate a coding framework, and build groupings that ultimately became themes.

Stage one, familiarizing myself with the data, took place through repeatedly reading the interviews. Each recording was listened to and read multiple times to complete the transcription work and the process of de-identifying the information.

Stage two commenced with the initial systematic process of coding the data. Each interview was printed in hard copy and read through to pay close attention to each interviewee's comments, and to also notice the commonalities and differences between the interviews. At this stage, data was analyzed using a basic constant comparative process (Creswell, 2013). Segments of the individual interviews were compared for commonalties and differences with the overall goal of identifying patterns in the data (Merriam, 2009). When utilizing this process, similarities and differences became apparent by looking across the data set at various descriptive words used, and accounts of both personal or organizational learning and change. Broad categorical patterns began to emerge and included: positive relationships, working and engaging together,

sequences of events, values of ARC, open communication, and learning experiences. A

summary cover sheet was created for each individual interview as a quick reference and a

framework notation of the codes and prevalent ideas specific to that interview (for an example of

the coding framework please refer to Table 1).

Table 1. An Example of an Initial Coding Framework

Interview Transcript	Initial Coding Framework
Interviewer: "One thing that I'm very curious about is... what is it like, from your perspective, to work on this multi-sectoral advisory committee?" (3, 118-119)	
Participant: "I think some of the benefits have been that, having been familiar with research and finishing my Masters, I was able to bring that perspective to the table but also to bring a First Nations perspective because I know in research First Nations views are so seldom and there's very little research from First Nations perspective on First Nations issues. So to me it's always been important and critical to give that point of view and to assist in the research generally in any way that Alexander can or that I can. So, I just had an interest in it initially, and I still do but I think more-so being an advocate and a voice for First Nations community who has had, not just Alexander but general First Nations research has been research done *to* them and not *with* them. So it was really critical to have good working relationships with the people that we were doing research with to ensure that First Nations voice; First Nations culture; First Nations history; our worldview is represented in that research. Our opinions matter and we're involved in every step of the process..." (3, 121- 133)	Familiarity with research FN perspective Value of doing research together Stronger voice Positive working relationships Research together

At this stage, over one hundred codes across the interview set were identified. Codes

were then organized while considering the commonalities, differences, and patterns between the

different interviews. During this exercise groupings of codes were placed together in terms of

the concept they represented and within the context of passages they were retrieved from. These

synthesized codes became the basis for the construction of the research themes.

In stage three, searching for themes, was a continuation of looking for relationships

between themes and at ways to combine related themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke,

2006). A more refined listing of codes and gathered data for each tentative theme was created,

and resulted in a list of approximately twenty themes. At that time the following are examples of

themes generated:

- Ask and also listen,

- Confidence and growth in ARC members,

- CBR in action,

- How we start working together,

- Be present and be real,

- Relationships and trust, and

- KT activities.

In stage four tentative themes were reviewed by reconsidering the passages selected in the

context of the original interviews and also the broader perspective across the entire data set. The

themes generated and further refined where also influenced by considering the following criteria

for theme selection: "Be responsive to the research question… be sensitive to the data set…, be

exhaustive…, be mutually exclusive…, and be conceptually congruent…" (Merriam, 2009,

p.185-186). On the advice of Merriam, I created a simple visual chart in order to conceptually

see, if the themes fit together and were at the same level of conceptualization. This process was

helpful to keep the focus of my inquiry at the forefront and attend to themes from the same level

of categorization. For example, at this point in the analysis a separate code for "open communication" did not appear to be a standalone concept. Nonetheless the code for "open communication" was a solid aspect of "the learning space" theme.

The initial five tentative key themes that were presented at the focus group included: (1) the learning space, (2) foundations for working together, (3) time, (4) community champions, and (5) strengthened research capacity. At the beginning of the focus group all five key themes were introduced and then each key theme was presented individually, followed by a roundtable discussion.

Overall the themes resonated with participants, however, they provided suggestions and revisions to the five themes. Participants spoke freely about their impressions, concerns and questions after the presentation of each theme. Participants provided clarification on the language I had used in my initial analysis. For example, in the theme *foundations of working together* I had connected the idea of foundation to the guiding principles and the associated values of CBR; however, participants suggested that *relational principles* were the actual *foundation* of the ARC. The importance of relationships as being the foundation was reiterated throughout the discussion. This confirmed the reconstruction of the theme of relationships to an elevated and overarching placement and subsequently placing the guiding principles theme as a subtheme.

A second example of feedback was the use of the term capacity strengthening as it related to growth, exchanging information and development experiences. A number of participants reported that they felt uncomfortable with using the language of capacity strengthening and preferred simply using learning to refer to strengthened learning, co-learning, learning continuity etc. in its place. Finally, a third example of feedback was in relation to my interpretation of *time*

as a theme. Participants voiced that *time,* as a concept should be written up in a way that is read without an unnecessary negative tone.

In stage four, I repeated aspects of stages one through three with the focus group data. Using detailed notes and listening to the recording of the focus group discussion I reorganized the themes to align closer to the feedback I received. The underlying message from the focus group discussion was an emphasized importance on relational practices, learning and learning environments.

From the interviews and focus group discussion, three interrelated and overarching themes were constructed: foundational relationships with the subtheme of champions; the learning space, and subthemes of time and ask and listen; and strengthened learning, and the subtheme of living processes and documents. The review with the ARC provided another opportunity for member checking and to ensure a higher level of accuracy in the representation of the data. Next came stage five, which is based on defining and naming themes to produce a more refined and articulated understanding of each theme and was woven into the recursive processes of stage four.

The sixth and final stage yielded discussion of findings and its relation to the literature and research inquiry of the study (Braun & Clark, 2006). Stake (1995) suggests that case study analysis results in naturalistic generalizations. The primary goal is to present an understanding of the experiences voiced by the participants as closely as possible, and also maintain a transparent and methodical processes to diminish errors of my interpretations. The naturalistic interpretations conveyed the findings in a simple, flexible, and action orientated language (Creswell, 2013).

Establishing Quality

One goal of this study was to conduct trustworthy research that demonstrates accountability and adequacy (Padgett, 2008). Lincoln and Guba describe trustworthiness, within qualitative research, as a study that is undertaken ethically and represents an understanding of the participant's experiences as closely as possible (as cited in Kirby et al., 2010).

A number of strategies to strengthen rigor and credibility were employed throughout the entire project (Padgett, 2008). One technique used was data triangulation. Data from the interviews, researcher observations and the available documents were used to support data triangulation that draws on the multiple sources of information. I used the technique of critical member checking in the format of a focus group to verify, define and interpret data. Another technique for insuring quality was prolonged engagement with the community throughout the project and action/dissemination phases. This aspect is grounded in my association with the FNCD project, which had already developed a healthy and purposeful working relationship to better understand the nuances specific to the ARC and AFN.

Furthermore the utilization of what is called 'expert consultation' was used with the ARC members as another way to strengthen the study. Expert consultation typically includes consultation on pertinent aspects of the study, such as research methods, participant recruitment, interview questions and protocols. Amongst the ARC it is also common practice to engage in peer debriefing such as debriefing as a group or with colleagues after a meeting to clarify the understanding of discussions or decisions. At times this debriefing occurs during a committee meeting, at other times it happens after the meeting once a member has had a chance to reflect. This form of peer debriefing is used as needed to maintain the CBR values of team work, the

creation of an environment for discussion, and the emergence of unforeseen information through collaboration.

Documentation was maintained as the research processes were employed. These included: pivotal decision-making and notes on data collection methods and analysis. This documentation is purposed to create an audit trail to foster transparency throughout the research process. Documenting the research process will help to contribute to the transferability of the research and my growth as a novice graduate student researcher (Kirby et al., 2010).

Chapter 4: Findings

The following findings are presented as themes that have been generated from the individual interviews and focus group discussion conducted as part of this study. As previously discussed, this study set out to explore capacity strengthening and co-learning within a multi-sectoral community research committee, and the broad themes and subthemes below were constructed from the accounts shared by the ARC committee members. As a result of the analysis there were three overarching themes presented:

1. Foundational relationships,

2. The learning space, and

3. Strengthened learning.

In addition to these three overarching themes there were four prominent subthemes that were constructed and included (a) champions, (b) time, (c) ask and listen, and (d) living processes and documents. A brief explanation and supporting quotes for each theme and subtheme is provided in the following section.

Foundational relationships

Across the data set the ARC was described as a relational working group. Without exception, participants described working jointly with others as the bedrock of their experiences. Foundational relationships is a theme that is constructed from the lens participants used to unpack the underpinnings of capacity strengthening and co-learning in the member's own research and committee work. Throughout the interviews the relational ethos was characterized as "welcoming", "respectful", and "caring". One participant articulated their engagement in the ARC by noting, "We come together as equal partners, with different strengths and this work is predicated on trust. We've worked from the bottom up, our foundation is together and our base

is on that trusting relationship." To cite another example, one participant spoke of a fellow committee member's relational style of engaging community and their role in supporting the process of developing the ARC by saying:

> There has to be trust; there has to be openness. There has to be a lot of communication; there has to be that willingness to go over and above just the research. I'll give the example of Eric again, because he had a genuine interest in the community and a genuine interest in the people… He was at community events; all outside of work hours and I think that really impressed the people that there was willingness and a genuine interest. That's so critical in building relationships and wanting to start committees within a community.

This is a good example of a member actively modeling the ARC's core values of trust and respect. Participants expressed satisfaction because of the genuine relationships they have formed. This element of respectful relationship sets the operationalized experience of the ARC apart from other committee work the members have been involved in. One participant acknowledged, "Of all the committees I sit on there is more respect expected and received on that committee than any other committee I sit on. And its not that other people are disrespectful it's just that the guiding principle of respect is extremely strong in ARC." Another participant attributed their longevity on the committee to this relational ethos by adding, "One of the most beneficial things of this committee and has kept me on this committee is because we've had excellent working relationships." This indicates an outcome of prolonged member engagement due to positive interpersonal relationships. The inclination to continue partnering and developing new co-constructed research projects is also evidenced by the substantiated functionality of the ARC that stems back to the foundation of relationships.

Participants recalled times when they had to negotiate differences amongst members. One example provided occurred during a manuscript review period where there was a pivotal decision to be made around the authorship of the research and the appropriateness of community-specific content. This instance resulted in challenging discussions but despite the challenge it was concluded that, "We may not always agree on what is said. But we had that respect with one another so strongly that if we were uncomfortable with anything that was written [in a manuscript], that was respected and taken out." ARC members also consistently presented the examples of being able to negotiate and collaborate across different project goals and to experience the normative roles and expectations of the committee framed through the lens of relationships. Additionally, this illustrated for some that committee membership resulted in an unexpected shift of how they viewed applied research, "…sometimes it doesn't even look like research, but it is, showing people that you care, that you're interested."

At the core of the participants' experiences was a relational connection to other ARC members. For many participants, there was a specific individual with whom they attributed the success of ARC to their influence and efforts and these individuals were called champions.

Champions. Champions are characterized as influencers who promote the start up phase of a community-based research committee and remain key players throughout the duration of the project(s). Their influence is rooted in advocating within their interpersonal networks and having clear understanding of the community's dynamics and needs. Additionally, the community champion, in the sense of a community member, sees the potential for their own community, "And just like any project you need to have a champion who's driven by the need to have respectful research done in their community that ties in with helping them measuring what the goals of their community are." These community-orientated priorities are evidenced in the

ARC by community champions that find practical ways to mobilize knowledge, develop transferable research capacity, and hire community-based research assistants in the community.

Research steering committees are mobilized effectively when connected champions help navigate the logistical, financial and formal agreements that already exist within the community. These champions are essential for the successful start up of new initiatives within the community, "I think the key is getting those unsaid leaders at the table, or champions, but also some true leadership because they can also make stuff happen financially in a community or through the system." Champions are credited for the successful operationalization of the ARC throughout the lifecycle of the various research projects. These champions hold a valuable role:

> With the ARC there are some real champions, people who in the community who have been at every single meeting and valuing those people not just so that I can somehow label my research as community-based participatory research but valuing them, just the amount of time they put into something because they perceive that it's good for their community.

It is these champions that have made the work of the ARC functional and sustainable within the community. Built on a strong relational foundation, the learning space facilitates the co-constructed learning and growth for the ARC and the research projects it oversees.

The learning space

The learning space characterizes how ARC members understand, operationalize and experience co-learning. The working environment of the ARC is the space where co-learning and growth takes place. Participants referred to this concept in relation to the actual physical location of the face-to-face meetings; it was referred to as a site where a meal is shared and discussions happen. The ARC embodies a safe, trusting, and respectful space where you can ask

questions, seek guidance on cultural protocols, and share project related successes and challenges without the fear of negative repercussion. The activities ARC member's engage in to create and share knowledge include group discussions, progress or formative design presentations, simulated/piloted data collection experiences, guest presentations, reviews of written draft documents/manuscripts, and sharing relevant resources in person or sometimes via email. Similarly, working multi-sectorally across a variety of different projects allows the ARC to engage in a broader range of discussions and brings a different point of view and set of resources to each specific project. Each member offers, and is respected for, the unique perspective they bring to the conversation:

> Talking multi-sectoral committees in general, in my experience they are just a terribly rich way to work because they offer a space where people can, from those different sectors, can share their own individual viewpoints but it also provides a new space for people to then create a new sort of perspective on this issue that everybody has come to the table for…. They challenge people's viewpoints and provide a space that's not normally there for people to dialogue about their own individual perspectives, the collective perspective and kind of pushing the boundaries sometimes.

Sharing a meal at the ARC meetings was highlighted as a simple yet effective aspect of the learning space. Participants articulated the value they place on eating together in order to maintain an open and welcoming environment. One said, "I think one of the things is, well I'm going to be a bit of a humorist, if you offer food they come." Another commented, "Being together that's essential. I think without food being there people would be not quite as inclined to come. You know? We break bread together, we share a meal."

The ability to attend the meetings in-person and be 'face-to-face' with the other members is important in continuing the review and discussion processes in which members engage in and create knowledge. Participating in live meetings is a critical part of the ARC. According to one participant:

Making an effort to attend the monthly meetings also reflects on the strong principles of relational principles. I miss meetings all the time, but when I have to miss an ARC meeting I don't view it as just "Oh well, they'll be fine without me" I understand that it demonstrates a lack of respect when I do not feel like I have time and I de-prioritize them. And its not what I'm doing but it could be perceived as that perception and it would break my heart because I just have so much respect for that little [ARC] community.

Insight into the ARC member's perspectives of co-learning hinged on having a presence in the community:

And more stuff gets done when you're in the community actually. There were times that I would go to the community to do a specific thing but I would bump into this person and we'd chat. By then end of the day, I had done what I wanted to do but I had done a whole lot more and accomplished a whole lot more than just emailing or phone calling.

Open communication is a prominent feature of the learning space for all members that include the academic researchers, community members, community departmental staff, and project staff. Strong communication is the first line of working through challenges and negotiating resolutions.

I think keep[ing] the lines of communication open so that you're community partners have enough trust in you to be able to say either, "this isn't working for me" or "we need

to make a change" or "here's what I need from you to be able to help me do my piece of this puzzle better."

Open communication is also linked to feeling included and comfortable with participating, "So we felt comfortable. So everything that they said, like at the beginning of meetings, everything that they said was clearly defined and then we went on to the next project. We were never in the dark about anything."

When reflecting on the learning space the participants described the environment the ARC has created that is conducive for co-learning to occur. A large component of this environment is the willingness of ARC members to ask questions and take the time to listen to others.

Ask and listen. A strong emphasis was placed on the ability to listen and ask questions as a real time process in co-learning between members. Ask and listen is a subtheme within the overarching theme of the learning space. The findings lead to the understanding that trust underpins the relational connections that are closely linked to speaking up, feeling heard, exchanging information as understood by the ARC as co-learning. One participant summarized:

> You need to establish trust and trust comes from listening. I think listening and understanding, so not just tokenistic but really trying to hear what people are telling you about what's happening in the community, what their needs and wants are, how they want to work together, the apprehensions that they have because if you can really hear those things from people then you can address them.

Additionally, it was shared that being interested in the work of others further creates the learning space and opportunity to co-create new understandings and knowledge. For many ARC members who are new to CBR, growth is evidenced as they begin to try out new critical research

reasoning skills. The fact that the ARC not only encourages the questions to be asked, but that it fosters and promotes them, results in the growth of confidence within the participants and also develops the ability to skillfully pose questions.

This is evidenced by the personal growth and operationalized co-learning amongst the ARC members:

> I feel like it is a table of learners sort of and that everybody is committed and curious…I am curious what the other project is doing and how they're going to do that and I've learned methods of engagement right that I'm able to apply even within that committee and also to my other work… Or getting advice from people and having that relationship where I could ask them very openly, "you know I don't actually know what to do in this situation."

To cite another example, one participant explored their experience:

> First, when I started I wanted to get a feel for this, how it works; I read last years notes and kind of educated myself in that sense, but as the year progressed, you know, I was more vocal and, you know, I would like to think I provided some good feedback. I like being an active participant.

Growth in the area of cultural humility was expressed upon reflection on the times participants asked questions in relation to cultural and spiritual protocols within the community:

> All communities are different. That's what you learn over and over and over again is you can't bring your experiences from a previous community into a new community because there are different cultural practices, there are different ways of doing things. Every time you have to start over so your experience in every community will be different in what is appropriate and what is sacred.

Time. Time is another subtheme of the learning space. It was described in many ways including the importance of time, the use of time, the allotment of time, and seeing time as an investment. Participants shared that time is required to co-create knowledge and sustain research activities. Participants noted that in order to embody the CBR principles and do research well it requires a commitment of time. One participant clarified that, "Doing community-based research is a labour of love and not a drudgery, burden or onerous task as we commit the time needed. It is currency we use and give to others." Others voiced the nature of a give-and–take working environment:

> Giving of yourself and making time is part of the give and take nature of working relationally. We'll call each other, like, you know, 'cause it's that mutual benefit, it's like "Hey, I need someone to come and do a guest lecture on this particular thing are you available?" The same is true in things like, "We need you to do something related to our school or community, can you make time for that?" right so there is a lot of that give-and-take.

Because of the importance of time to the ARC, time also presented its own set of challenges. For example, ARC members identified that engaging with community and other department leaders within the Nation was challenging because of the time required. Another challenge for the ARC has been maintaining sustained representation from all departments in the community. Other participants identified the challenge of bringing in additional leaders at the committee table in saying:

> There might be people who you really, really, really want at the table and they are very difficult to get there. And that could be for a number of different reasons. It could be

because they have a full plate already, or they're a high level individual and getting them

at any table is very difficult just because their schedule is very full.

The concept of time was constructed as a key component of the learning space drawn from the

participant's reflections. Many participants noted that the elements of the theme of the learning

space directly influenced their strengthened learning and capacities.

Strengthened learning

Capacity strengthening is perceived as continuous learning; or as one focus group

participant suggested, "strengthened learning." For the purpose of this discussion, strengthened

learning is defined as the lessons learned and the knowledge generated by the ARC and its

associated research projects. The ARC members reflected on their own experiences of learning

that were both co-created and individual in nature. It was said that, "we are all learners" and

throughout the interviews and focus groups significance was placed on learning as the unifying

goal of the ARC. The outcomes of strengthened learning, discussed as examples in this section,

are strengthened research capacity, First Nation/Cree worldview and personal learning.

Framed in the understanding that " we are all learners," the ARC members themselves

are continuously engaged in receiving and sharing knowledge. Each member has the equal role

of learning and sharing with others in order to co-create knowledge. The construct of

continuously learning has shaped the way the ARC operates along with the corresponding

internal processes of overseeing research in the community:

And it is the deciding of the group how we're going to work with one another to learn

from one another. And because there is no step-by-step process that does that that's the

process you go through to get where you're going to get. So every week I co-learn

something. Some of it is totally unintended learning you know, totally unintentional

learning that I've learned. But hearing the power of what other researchers find influences our program, so to me that's transference of knowledge, both directly as we sit in those presentations and as everybody is given that data. But the second transference is what does that mean for my organization.

Additionally, another participant echoed the experience of the ARC co-creating itself and the research it produces:

I mean the ARC really has been co-created both by the community members and the researchers. It wouldn't exist in its form today without that co-creation. And it has evolved over time, you know, who chairs it, who takes responsibility of different aspects of the outcomes of those meetings. The research members from the community have made it very clear that they would like built into grants enough money so that they can present at conferences; the community has been included in almost all of my written work where the community will be named as an author, and I've had to write editors to say why, explain to them being that I do community-based participatory research. I have to honour the fact that our steering committee would like the community to be named as being responsible for the knowledge that comes out of the community. So, it's that we've really co-created how that committee functions together we're sharing the responsibility now of talking to other people about how we work as a team.

Strengthened learning is expressed in the reflection of co-created knowledge described here as personal understanding, partnered research and sharing the learning's of ARC with others.

A Cree worldview is embodied within the core values of the ARC. There were a number of members who live, work and/or volunteer in the Nation who find a great deal of pride in their

culture, language and traditional ways. Participants affirmed that strengthened learning is nurtured and celebrated within the Cree/First Nation worldview:

> From a First Nation perspective there's always an opportunity to learn, any given day from any given person and we see learning as lifelong learning so, it's not just out of a textbook or it's not just out of a test that you've done or anything like that. Every time we have a meeting there's definitely opportunity to learn. Whether, you know as we've talked about different research processes right through this interview and through the overseeing of the research committee, there has been ample opportunity both from a researcher perspective and from a community member, on a daily basis. And not just in the research but in getting to know one another. I don't see learning just as textbook learning. Any given day of the year, any moment in a day, there's an opportunity for learning.

Conversely, a non-Cree ARC member reflected on their own significant involvement in cultural transmission specifically linked to handling and holding cultural information. The participant shared this account:

> I think culturally I had a huge training/learning in terms of the Cree culture from central Alberta, and I was very honoured to learn how do you show respect for information. What you do with information that is being given to you about the culture, and being mindful of that… Being mindful of the best responses to indicate that you recognize that the information you've just received is for you and that it is unique information. It's not just a conversation that just happened. There are gold nuggets in there for better understanding of their worldview.

Again, another participant reflected on cultural learning and how it changed their own thinking:

> I've become much more humble as a researcher, not just as a part of the ARC but just over the course of my career, that I'm not an expert. I come with a certain level of expertise, but I'm not an expert on anyone else's lives and no matter how often I have worked in aboriginal communities, I will never be able to understand from a First Nations perspective what it's like to be First Nations, so really respectful of the fact that I have a lot to learn from other individuals and just the value of community-based research.

On an individual level, participants described the change in their own understanding of community-based research as a result of the ARC. One participant asserted that her own standard for doing and understanding CBR has changed as a result of the work of the ARC:

> And just knowing it's a very rich experience and it's very rare to encounter that. I have intentionally chosen to not pursue some of the research that I was doing prior to working in this community because distance, or some logistics, I've really realized that I wasn't able to do community based participatory research in those communities in the way that I'm able to do it in here. So ARC has really set the standard. But then, if other communities fall short, does that mean you shouldn't do it? I'm not one-hundred percent clear, but I've become very dissatisfied with, what before, I would have said was community based research and now I see that in actual fact working with community is not community based research. What we have with the ARC really honors those principles.

Research capacity has been strengthened in the community and on the ARC. Experiences like vetting research questions, administering surveys or reporting back to community or funders are examples of experiences that helped develop the member's research capacity. Workshops, training and mentorship have been provided throughout the various research projects in order to

support the learning strengthening process. For example, as findings and knowledge are produced by research projects the follow up step is often sharing that information with the community, other researchers and communities interested in similar types of research. The ARC members and community members have presented at conferences and had articles published in academic journals. This has elevated the voice of the ARC into the broader context of community-based research and academia. This is an example of how the ARC members are equal and full contributors to the research. Research tasks are not held exclusively in one or two ARC member's portfolios:

> I think, just generally knowing that, every one of the community members has a voice and say and can contribute to that process. I think that has been a benefit to research in Alexander. And throughout the process we've always encouraged our own community members, not just our staff.

One participant further mentioned that through the experience of publishing and reviewing documents she has a deeper understanding of authorship and knowledge translation for her Nation. This is evidence of capacity strengthening as a result of committee work:

> I've learned a lot and my capacity in that area has really improved and I really am interested in that side of the whole application part and publishing of course, and naming a First Nation instead of an individual in publication. So, that was another give-and-take, another way that we had to try and work together because one person doesn't speak on behalf of the whole Nation aside from the chief, and so it's been an interesting process. Just in terms of staffing as well, I think it's been really critical for department staff. I only speak on behalf of their department, to be familiar with research; to understand focus groups; to understand review of manuscripts; review of developing questions;

developing the right types of questions; testing questions, that's even been really

interesting to me as well.

Personal learning was evidenced by one participant who planted her own garden after

participation in the some of the school-based earth box intervention project. She gained interest

and knowledge that was used practically to feed her family and recall her family of origin's

gardening practices.

I grew my own food and it was organic. That was my first hand at gardening. And I

think back to how my mother and my father did it, and there's a certain way you got to

plant them. So I was thinking, gee, all these years my father did it this way. So I did it

that way, the same way, but I was a rookie but it grew.

Strengthened learning captures the growth and development ARC members experienced as the

result of their work on the ARC. One important element of the working functions of the ARC is

the co-constructed processes and documents it has developed.

Living processes and documents. This subtheme further explores the overarching

theme of strengthened learning and pertains to the working aspects of the ARC. In this context

living processes and documents refers to the dynamic and contextual nature of operating as a

research steering committee. There are flexible systems in place to operationalize and 'do' the

work of research and intervention projects. As previously discussed, these working aspects are

sites for the capacity strengthening by way of skills development and include things like

conducting interviews, collecting informed consent, and processing data. The types of research

activities vary depending on the phases and nature of each project. In the history of the ARC

there have been numerous formal and informal opportunities that have been created to develop

applied research skills. An example of these skills developed through the provision of training

workshops and mentoring. Since it's inception the ARC has developed guiding documents, one

document that has been developed is the ARC's guiding principles. This document gives ARC

members' clarity and direction regarding committee processes which in-turn helps to stabilize

and support the work the committee accomplishes. It serves as a reference document that was

originally intended to ensure the ARC remained participatory and its decisions were grounded in

the contextual needs of the community. One participant commented, "The document is not a

contract for the relationships; it just outlines and writes out how we work and helps to guide the

meetings so they can truly be a learning space." It serves the purpose of documenting the

committee's values and agreement to partner together. Furthermore, participants noted the give

and take nature of having a common goal and mutually beneficial partnerships:

> So it's a bit of a give-and-take. I think that openness and honesty in that process, being
>
> clear what are the requirements, as a researcher what does the University require of you,
>
> and asking are you okay with this, 'can we work with this?' and just working it together
>
> in terms of the two requirements, so there's flexibility in there as well.

Another participant likened the ARC to a well-oiled machine and recognized that tasks such as

administration and communications are key to maintaining the momentum in overseeing

research well:

> So in order to make just our space and time together efficient and useful, we need to be
>
> working very diligently in the challenges in the background of communication,
>
> organization, administration; things that most people don't think about but when they're
>
> done well, things flow well and it makes it easier for everybody to work as a group. Then
>
> you can have that opportunity for richness and innovation and those things that come

with having a well-oiled machine. And that's what the ARC has become really, is a well-

oiled machine.

The 'opportunity for richness and innovation' as this participant shared, alludes to aspects of new

partnerships or grant development, creative knowledge mobilization, and implementation/

intervention programs that can transpire most efficiently when the ARC operates smoothly from

an administrative perspective.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This thesis has introduced the concepts of capacity strengthening and co-learning found in a community-based research steering committee designed to oversee multi-sectoral partnerships. In chapter 2, a review of the literature on Aboriginal health and social research, community-based research, multi-sectoral partnerships, capacity strengthening, and co-learning were presented. Chapter 3 examined the methods of qualitative case study applied in this study. The ARC is the case presented as the contextual unit of analysis. Data was collected primarily through interviewing past and present ARC members in order for the researcher to gain and explore an understanding of their experiences. Chapter 4 presented the thematic findings that have been constructed from the data collected.

This chapter seeks to: (a) discuss the research findings presented in chapter 4 in relation to the literature reviewed in chapter 2; (b) present the limitations and researcher reflections of this study; and (c) present recommendations for future research and provide concluding remarks. Creswell (2009) suggested that the discussion section in a qualitative research paper serves to "confirm past information, or diverge from it… and suggest new questions that need to be asked" (p. 198-190). This chapter brings together the themes constructed by the researcher and refined by the focus group participants, derives meaning from the themes to answer the research questions and proposes direction for further study.

Findings in relation to the literature review

The thematic findings from chapter 4 will be used to structure this section and include:

1. Foundational relationships;

2. The learning space; and

3. Strengthened learning.

In addition the following four subthemes will be discussed: (a) champions, (b) time, (c) listen and share, (d) living processes and documents.

Foundational relationships

ARC members made clear that working relationally was the baseline of their work. This finding is consistent with CBR literature that emphasizes the core principle of CBR as a participatory paradigm and flexible approach to collaborative research resulting in a new understanding about community issues and mobilizing change (Hills & Mullett, 2000; Minkler, 2005; Israel et al., 2010). In addition to authentic relational connections, ARC members highlighted the importance of working as equals in authority and responsibility in their roles. Participants appreciated coming together for meetings, trusting other members to accomplish their own projects, tasks and activities, and then report back to the ARC in a transparent fashion. Participants did not suggest that equal partnerships required equal (or constant) participation in the research processes. The ARC presents an example of a participatory approach to CBR conducted in a flexible way. Ross et al. (2010), suggest that equality in partnership is not the same as the expectation of equal participation at each stage in the research process.

Commonalties were found between the theme of foundational relationships and the underpinnings of the worldviews commonly shared among Aboriginal Peoples. As discussed in the literature review, the National Collaboration Centre for Aboriginal Health presents five common threads within this worldview: "holistic perspective, the interconnectedness of all living things, connection to the land and community, the dynamic nature, and the strength in "power" with all things come together in equal relationship with each other" (2010, p.13). The ARC situates itself as a local and integrated group that focuses on the strengths of its children, youth and families to engage in useful and relevant research. The power of relationships here is

an effective means of ethical and fruitful research activities. Kajner et al. (2011) discuss

Aboriginal Peoples' worldview on relationships as an intricate web of family, community, as

well as all living things, implying that there is an inherent personal respect and responsibility to

others and self. The authors suggest that the importance of interconnectedness is at times missed

or misunderstood in western paradigms, which places a stronger emphasis on individualism. It is

for this reason that CBR and the applied approach of participatory research is considered a

preferred and congruent approach to research with Aboriginal Peoples (Castleden et al., 2012;

Kajner et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2005).

 Negotiating differences was constructed as part of this theme. In a great deal of CBR

literature consensus-building principles are presented as promising practices used to negotiate

decision-making and points of contention on a research team (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008;

Ross et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2005). Neither the term consensus nor its connotation was

used in the data gathered for the current study. Discussing and sharing differing points of view

was part of the ARC member's reflections, this suggests that as a committee the emphasis is not

on finding absolute consensus, as much as the group negotiating an action-focused solution that

is best suited for the community. By contrast, Williams et al. (2005) comment that many

partnerships are unsuccessful and it is largely attributed to bringing "unequal players to an

uneven table to participate in difficult, predetermined decision making" (as cited in Roe et al.,

1997, p.310). Declaring that research partners are respected and equitable, while often the stated

goal, is not always the reality.

 For the purpose of protecting anonymity the case description did not describe individual

participants or discuss their vocational backgrounds. It is noteworthy, however, that

approximately one-third of participants expressed that they had no previous CBR research

experience prior to their membership in the ARC. Within a wide range of CBR research experience (from none to considerable experience) amongst participants the importance of relationships was a repeatedly and passionately shared common understanding. This foundation made co-learning and capacity strengthening possible and situates the rest of the findings. The implications of a relational foundation were woven into each of the other themes discussed.

Champions. Within the theme of 'foundational relationships' was an honouring of the key people who advocate, influence and bring understanding to the committee work. Participants especially used the term champion as a positive descriptor of an ARC member who used their relational networks and connections within the community to support a specific aspect of the research partnership. This person is often an individual, who is a community member, and avails himself/herself as an advisor. This characterization is in step with the goal of CBR to maintain community relevance and in the context of the ARC it is seen through the lens of relationships (Minkler, 2005; Israel et al., 2010; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). Championing, in this context, is similar to the suggestion of Israel et al. (2010) that CBR needs to have community partners who enhance research with their "understanding of a given phenomenon and the social and cultural dynamics of the community, and integrate the knowledge gained with action to improve the health and well-being of the community members" (p. 177). Champions are an example of relationships in action, which in turn advance a research team's understating of the community's strengths, needs, and research possibility as a whole. Fletcher et al. (2008) conducted a study looking at the effectiveness of community–capacity building within a CBR project and linked the active collaboration between First Nation community members and other research partners to successfully maintaining a community-centred focus and relevant community-level outcomes, as many researchers have suggested as a promising practice

(Edwards et al., 2008; Kajner et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2005). These findings compliment the perspectives of ARC members ensuring community-level outcomes are at the core of projects the ARC oversees.

Another Canadian study conducted by Castleden et al. (2012) explored the perspectives of university researcher's on CBR involving Indigenous Peoples. It was suggested in the study's findings that the core theoretical principles of CBR are not easily mobilized and vary greatly in practice. The respondents in that study stated that involving key leaders and community members into aspects of the research presented a challenge to partnerships and is further pressed by the formation of new relationships, and limitations on time and funding to support in-depth engagement of community members. In this current study, the case of the ARC's collaborative partnering has gone significantly beyond a consultation process to self-determination process, as members act equitably in a cycle of discussion and action research activities. ARC members are not shielded from the constraints of time or funding but by contrast as a group they have created a culture of CBR and a consistency of practice, oversight, and relational accountability within their structure and across different projects. The reflections of participants honoured the formative and influential members, champions, as a way of remembering the work of cultivating relationships and building the foundation into a functional committee. The study by Castleden et al (2012) described did not discuss the role of a community-based steering committee in relation to the university researcher's perspectives of CBR. By contrast, the ARC members' perspective of operationalized research projects are largely attributed to champions having created opportunities, awareness and continued partnership for longer-term health, education and social benefits to both the local community and partnering researchers.

The Learning space

The learning space is the second overarching theme presented in the findings. The learning space is the environment where learning happens. Participants highlighted that face-to-face meetings and the respectful norms of the group were centering and stabilizing factors to the operation of the committee. The reflections of participants did not paint the image of the ARC as an adversarial force or overseers of CBR but rather the ARC was likened to a host of an honest conversation over a shared meal. The ARC members described the ARC as an environment that is safe, trusting and respectful. Consequently, the outcome of this safe environment was evidenced in the member's willingness to seek guidance, ask questions and share both successes and challenges. This theme presents a connection between the physical spaces and the working environment. The richness of co-learning thrives where action, an applied orientation to research, and critical refection on practices are welcomed. Applying the principles of CBR, such as the seminal principles for CBR from Israel et al. (2010), are not as easy to put into practice, as they are to understand theoretically. A lack of trust and mutual respect is reported by Israel at al. (2010) as the most frequently mentioned challenge that community members encountered in conducting effective CBR. The authors noted a lack of feedback of research findings and beneficial outcomes for the community as the main contributors to that lack of trust. Cargo and Mercer (2008) suggest making continual efforts to foster mutual respect and trust among partners and caution taking this trust for granted. ARC members reported the commitment to their monthly meeting and their presence in the community as key factors to fostering this mutual respect.

A Canadian study conducted by Bull (2010) investigated the importance of ethical research relationships in the context of CBR with Aboriginal Peoples. The study interviewed a number of researchers and community leaders who had a personal or professional mandate to

advocate for ethical research. The two main concerns of Aboriginal Peoples being studied were false generalizations about assimilating cultures and research without a meaningful benefit to the community being studied. The study attributed co-learning to the relational processes employed to better understand and include community as active participants, which in turn produces valid knowledge for them to use in that community. Although Bull's (2010) study did not specifically include the perspective of community members it does confirm the baseline of trusting and reciprocal relationships that is found within the ARC. It is the strength of experience suggested by ARC members that becomes a protective factor in mitigating potential research related harm to the community. Active participation and engagement are an underlying concept in this discussion of the learning space.

Within the ARC the range of professional designations, academic disciplines and the variety of research projects represented, influences the learning space. The literature on multi-sectoral partnerships supports the learning space by its increased ability to streamline research process, support in achieving common goals, and the use of resources and shared responsibilities (Ball, 2005; Tamarack Institute, 2013). The research findings as they relate to the strengths of collaborative partnerships form a key to understanding how to accomplish effective CBR within a community. The link between how to develop collaborative partnerships based on trusting working relationships and the cautionary suggestions to avoid tokenistic involvement were both themes readily found in the literature available (Bull, 2010; Castleden et al., 2010; Duran & Wallenstein, 2010). The literature discusses the barriers and challenges to forming and maintaining strong working relationships and that these relationships can often be hindered by the logistical distance between the university researcher and the partnered community. One contextual factor for the success of the ARC may be that it is not located in a remote community.

University researchers can travel to meetings in a day trip and, therefore, relative proximity is one supporting factor in accommodating the participant's high value placed on meeting in person. The seemingly simple concept of meeting and sharing a meal in person was paramount to creating and experiencing this learning space.

History influenced the learning space. Accounts of nutritional research conducted on Aboriginal children in residential schools without any ethical or fiduciary safety, responsibility or informed consent have left individuals being studied, silenced, and communities deeply mistrusting of research as a whole (Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008; Nasy & Kaur Sehdeu, 2012). Despite the existing literature showing a history of troubling and unethical research on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada numerous scholars have observed that there is a desire for Aboriginal Peoples to be research partners and leaders in research pertaining to their community (Ball & Janyst, 2005; Flicker et al., 2007; Minkler, 2004). It is research that empowers and strengthens the capacities of individuals and communities that were the key distinction. The ARC, through self-determination, ensures that research involving them and their children and youth, promotes building community strengths and health. This is an example of the mandate of "nothing about us without us" (Ball & Janyst, 2005; Flicker, et al., 2007; First Nation Centre, 2007) that is found within all aspects of the ARC's work; which includes, approving, monitoring, and reviewing the research-taking place within the community. The learning space described by ARC members is the place where the functional acts of self-determination relating to the research processes of ownership, control, access and participation from design to dissemination take place (First Nation Centre, 2007). In this study, an example of a community-level outcome is the implementation of health intervention project that aimed to holistically increase the health

of children in the community and knowledge translation efforts that promoted the community's expressed importance on culture and language in the early years of a child's life.

Ask and Listen. To participants, co-learning involved asking questions and truly listening to eachother. The subtheme of the learning space explores the interplay between asking questions and listening. The elements of a respectful and safe environment found in the learning space are linked back to the foundation of relationships that created the willingness for members to ask a question or share an idea. A number of the ARC members observed the growth in confidence to ask questions that was evidenced among the community-members who were also ARC members. Having a voice within the ARC is central to understanding the co-learning processes experienced. This growth of confidence is exemplified by the empowerment of the community's voice and is linked to the literature review as one of the indicators of a participatory and collaborative approach to CBR (Minkler, 2005; Israel et al., 2010). Increased community voice is also aligned with the concepts of empowerment, communication and respect, which are examples of the principles for appropriate CBR research with Indigenous Peoples presented by Jacklin and Kinoshameg (2008).

The asking and listening processes of the ARC are echoed in writing by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) who describe co-learning as relational connections from a genuine appreciation of the diversity among the research partners. A number of studies have noted that asking 'why' questions supports the development and engagement of critical reflection. This in turn helps to refine the research process and better understand the causes of community health and social issues (Castleden, et al., 2012; Fletcher et al., 2008; Israel et al., 2010). The confidence to ask a question is also linked to another principal of research with Indigenous Peoples, community control, described by Jacklin and Kinoshameg (2008). It is applied here in being able to say

"no" or "not yet" to a proposed research design, method or engagement process in the community. Similarly, the ability to ask critical and informed questions is highlighted in the work of Israel et al. (2010) and Fletcher et al. (2008) as a transferable skillset that community-members and research partners bring into other areas of their vocational and personal lives. The learning space was rich with opportunities for ARC members to show interest in the work of others and encourage questions as a key dimension in co-learning.

Time. Time is the second subtheme within the learning space theme, and was described in numerous ways by participants. Time was framed as a currency, a necessity, and as an investment into the ARC and was critical to the process of co-learning. For some ARC member's time was expressed as both a challenge and a source of satisfaction. The time required to build partnerships, solidify formal research agreements and discuss areas of research inquiry can be lengthy processes for university-researchers and community partners and each are required before the actual research questions or methods are ever drafted into a research design (Adams & Faulkhead, 2012; Jacklin & Kinoshameg, 2008; Ross et el., 2010; Williams et al., 2005).

The seminal work of Israel et al. (2010) reviewed approaches to CBR partnerships and presented the concept of time demands as a key methodological issue. It also described the tension of the time required to negotiate and construct research design balanced with the time required to accomplish and sustain the research activities. The tension surrounding time usage is common in CBR approaches (Israel et al., 2010; Ross et el., 2010; Williams et al., 2005). The difference in the current study is that this theme of time is not simply discussed for an individual research project but within the additional commitment of a multi-project community-based advisory group. Although, for some, the time they spent as an ARC member provided them with

a richer experience because of the wide range of research projects and individuals they were connected with that would not been exposed to otherwise.

There is a cautionary message found in CBR literature to avoid over burdening community members with the associated time commitments of research projects. This aspect of time is related to the theme of champions previously discussed. It is the champions of the community who may become overstretched due to their prior commitments and community-leadership roles either found in their professional or personal interests. The literature has shown that, in particular, First Nations experience this overburdening. One study explored a situation where Elders were called upon to participate in multiple roles within their community. This study by Fletcher et al. (2008), on research capacity building, reported Elders themselves overwhelmed by the demands of research project and their everyday commitments. This draws attention to the tensions between theoretical and applied participatory research where the practicality of time constrains conflicts with the ideals and interpretations of participation. Participants in this current study noted the link to time and the importance of seeking out and including Elders into the research process balanced with the understanding that many Elders contribute to a number of non-research activities within the community. In the face of practical time constraints, Williams et al. (2005) suggested that priority be placed on engaging community-members and/or volunteer research partners to develop research questions and interpret findings. In accordance, one strategy employed by the FNCD project was to host an Elders forum during a key point in data analysis to invoke co-learning discussions.

Having sufficient time allotted to collaborate was linked to the success of the ARC. Time allocation and usage among ARC members was another point of negotiation and nuanced understanding integrated into the feasibility of the learning space.

Strengthened learning

Strengthened learning was a term used by a participant to capture their understanding of capacity strengthening. When asked about capacity strengthening, "we are all learners" was a phrase that resonated with the ARC members' description of capacity strengthening. This phrase reiterates that all ARC members have knowledge, experience and skills to contribute. The literature reviewed on capacity strengthening shared this view of capacity strengthening as a multi-directional interaction between partners and predicated the understanding of strengths on the group as a whole (Redman-MacLaren et al., 2012). Building on the strengths and resources of the community is another foundational principle of CBR from the work of Israel et al. (2010). A primary "strength" and "resource" identified by the ARC are the children, youth and adults in their Nation. Again, people and relationships are at the core of the ARC's understanding of strengthened learning.

Meta research conducted by Verity (2007) reviewed the literature on community-capacity building to provide a list of the five most common features of "institutional, technical, knowledge, linking and resource transfer and community domains" (p.23). Although this current study did not present the participants with examples of Verity's suggested domains to help situate their own strengthened learning the participants did give examples of capacities strengthened in each area. For the 'institutional' domain the influence on health and wellness polices in the school began to mobilize students, school staff, and administration to make changes to the school lunch menus and the types of snacks and beverages sold in the school canteen. An example of the 'technical' domain was the increased skills in regards to preparing manuscripts for publication and navigating co-authorship as a committee. In the area of 'knowledge' there was an understanding of the community's needs followed by a critical

reflection on current practices which lead to an inquiry on the healthy living places and spaces for children and youth within the community. 'Linking and resources transfer' was exemplified in collaborative multi-sectoral networks created within the ARC's partnerships. Finally, the domain of 'community' was reflected as strengthened learning in the sense of connection with others felt by some ARC members as they participated in various research activities. The strengthened capacities listed here are examples of strengthened learning that occurred within the ARC.

The most predominant strengthened learning among ARC members took place in the area of research capacity. It occurred with their involvement in activities such as the reviewing of proposals and manuscripts, and co-presenting at workshops and conferences. The dissemination of findings and mobilization of knowledge (Israel et al., 2010) is key to strengthened learning in making the new knowledge available to the research partners and their broader community. This includes the ever-important feedback loop around data and methodological processes common to the ARC that in turn inform community-level action, as the local leadership and community decided to implement.

Living processes and documents. Living processes and documents was a subtheme found within the theme of strengthened learning. ARC members noted the dynamic and contextual nature of operating as a committee and referenced the creation of guiding principles. In the Adams and Faulkhead (2012) article titled *This is not a guide to Indigenous partnerships: But it could help*, conveys the message that a step-by-step guidebook to CBR cannot be made since each partnership is unique. The point here is that we need to pay close attention to the community-situated contexts as opposed to institutional prescriptive guidebooks. This is not to dismiss the relevant contribution of promising practices and lessons learned from other

researchers, but to strengthen its influence by understanding the limitations it may have. With this understanding, the interpretation and applications of promising practices and ethical guides to research with Aboriginal Peoples are relevant and supportive factors in implementing organizational processes and documents.

Creating jointly developed norms was suggested by Israel et al. (2010) and then cited by others (Bull, 2010; Castleden, et al., 2012; Edwards et al., 2008) as a good way to create flexible systems and administrative processes that match the needs of the project or committee. The ARC took this course of action during the early stages of its inception. Participants noted that the guiding documents and processes were stabilizing measures found within the ARC. Knowing your role and the roles of others was considered by ARC members to be a critical factor in carrying out committee work successfully and it was also supported in the literature reviewed (Edwards et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2005). Additionally, the use of research agreements and memorandums of understanding supports outlining the terms of engagement and ethical considerations at the onset of the research process (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Edwards et al., 2008; First Nation Centre, 2007).

Limitations and researcher reflection

First, due to the small sample size this study's findings cannot offer generalizable information that can be applied to all CBR projects. Furthermore, the participant's perspectives and unique experiences in this localized setting cannot necessarily be replicated in another study. Specifically, this study intentionally acknowledges the heterogeneity of First Nations cultures and does not attempt to make generalizations, but rather places a focus on transferable learning. A comparative study that examines and includes other similar community research committees would be useful to expand the sample size and scope. For example, within the FNCD project

there were three other CBR committees created within the other partnering Nations. Each committee was in a different stage of development and the ARC was the only one previously operating. Ultimately due to limitations of time, scope, and my lack of connection to other communities it was not feasible.

Secondly, I was unsuccessful in recruiting an Elder as an individual interview participant. Acknowledging the wisdom of Elders is of the upmost importance to Indigenous epistemology (Loppie, 2007). It was not a formally required aspect of the research design, however, in the spirit of CBR with a First Nation, it was important. A research update on this study was presented at an ARC meeting with a prominent Elder in attendance. The Elder asked thoughtful questions and commented on the importance of the study. Two Elders in the community expressed their positive regard for this study but were unable to participate. A shortsighted decision on my part was limiting the invitation to participate in the focus group to only the 9 individual interview participants. The focus group was held months after the individual interviews concluded; perhaps at that time an Elder might have been able to attend.

Recommendations for future study

Further study is required in order to engage participants in a similar community-based inquiry that is inclusive of a larger cross-section of communities with research steering committees. There are promising opportunities to explore capacity strengthening and co-leaning as separate constructs found in CBR, as well as constructs contextualized by CBR steering committees. One area of further exploration could be to examine situations where community-based research steering committees deal with tensions and or challenges (e.g., interpersonal or methodological). This situation was not present in the expressed experiences of ARC members

and in hindsight, I could have created an additional individual interview research question in my study to invite open-ended discussion.

Additional areas of inquiry specific to the ARC could include:

1. An exploration of how the ARC approached the ethical complexities and processes of including children and youth in their research projects; and

2. To employ an evaluation framework to evaluate ARC processes and associated project outcomes from a mixed methods or quantitative design.

Concluding Remarks

Over the past decades, community-university partnerships, as part of the CBR umbrella of research, have become more prevalent. This is evident in the abundance of scholarly literature describing theories and practices of community-university partnerships. These partnerships are developed from CBR principles and venture into the cycles of knowledge creation, mobilization and action planning. This thesis used qualitative case study methodology to explore the concepts of co-learning and capacity strengthening from the experiences of a CBR research steering committee.

Specifically, the community-university partnership and associated research took place in Alexander First Nation. The ethical engagement guidelines, such as the guidelines provided by the CHIR for research with Aboriginal Peoples support research processes that provide the community with meaningful, respectful and active engagement that ensures ownership; control, access and participation in the research being conducted (First Nation Centre, 2007). An unflagging commitment from ARC members to maintain a focus on community-needs and priorities for children, youth and families was found in this case study. Strong and respectful

working relationships were the foundation of the ARC members' experiences. The implications of a relational practice orientation in CBR are many.

Another finding was the emphasis on the physical space where the ARC conducted its work. It is clear that for this committee the working norms of face-to-face meetings and sharing a meal were paramount to creating an environment where co-constructed knowledge and learning could take place. For other CBR steering committees this pre-condition may not carry the same weight; what is important is that every member of a research steering committee understand the factors in their context that foster the creation of the learning space.

The third major finding in this study was the general consensus that each committee member contributes in his or her own way and that everyone, no matter their position, is a learner. Participants shared examples of how, as outcomes of participating in the research steering committee, they think differently about research, have learned how to ask important questions, and have come away with a sense of accomplishment.

From the findings of this study it can be said that the ARC would not have functioned successfully without the intentionality and opportunity of its members to create and maintain strong working interpersonal relationships. Here the voice of members from a CBR research steering committee can be added to the call for increased time parameters and funding opportunities to accommodate the time and resources required to successfully build and sustain CBR partnerships, as many researchers and community-leaders have and continue to advocate.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Telephone or in-person Participant Recruitment Script:

Hello my name is Heather Stringer. I am calling today to invite you to participate in a research study. Do you have ten minutes to talk with me now or is there a better time for me to call you?

(Potential participant: Yes, now is fine)

I am a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The research that I am going to explain to you is part of the requirements of a Masters in Arts degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball and Dr. Rebecca Gokiert.

At anytime, please feel free to ask questions as I go through some important information to introduce you to the study.

The study is called "Perspectives on capacity strengthening and co-learning: Experiences from members of a community-based research steering committee." The aim of the study is to investigate the experiences of members of a community-based research steering committee and the way they understand and enact capacity strengthening and co-learning in multi-sectoral projects.

I have contacted you because of your knowledge and experiences as a result of your current or past involvement on a community-based research steering committee, specifically the Alexander Research Committee (formerly known as the Wisdom Committee).

Your participation will contribute to the valuable knowledge regarding community-based research, and add insights and concrete examples from the perspective of a localized research steering committee.

Participation will involve participating in an individual interview. The interview will be either in-person or over the phone and will last for approximately 1 hour. You also have the option of participating in a secondary focus group that will last approximately 1.5 hours. This process gives me the opportunity to inquire about the accuracy of the preliminary findings and to ask further questions of participants.

All participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without consequences.

Can I answer any immediate questions you may have at this time?

Are you interested in seeing a more detailed document describing the pertinent details of the research study?

If yes, Can I email it to you? Please take some time to read the document so that we can further discuss your involvement in the study.

My contact information is 780-xxx-xxxx or by email at hsdawn@uvic.ca

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Date

Dear: First Name (if possible) or Potential Participant:

RE: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

This letter is an invitation for you to participate in a research study that is focused on the experiences of members of a community-based research steering committee and the way they understand and enact capacity strengthening and co-learning in their research within a multi-sectoral committee context.

You have been selected as a potential participant because of your knowledge and experiences as a result of your current or past membership on a community-based research steering committee, specifically, the Alexander Research Committee.

Participation will involve participating in an individual interview. The interview will be either in-person or over the phone and will last for approximately 1 hour. You also have the option of participating in a secondary focus group that will last approximately 1.5 hours. This process will allow me a chance to inquire about the accuracy of the preliminary findings and to ask any further questions of participants.

All participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without consequences.

Your participation will contribute to the valuable knowledge regarding community-based research and will provide insights into the process of an actual localized research steering committee.

If you are interested please see the attached Participant Consent From for more detailed information please contact Heather Stringer at 780-xxx-xxxx or hsdawn@ucvic.ca

Sincerely,

Heather Stringer

Graduate Student, MA in CYC, University of Victoria

Appendix C: Free and Informed Consent Form

Date

Dear: First Name (if possible) or Potential Participant:

Re: Participant Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled, "Perspectives on capacity strengthening and co-learning: Experiences of members of a community-based research steering committee" that is being conducted by Heather Stringer. I am a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The research is part of the requirements of a Masters of Arts degree in Child and Youth Care. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball and Dr. Rebecca Gokiert.

My contact information is: Heather Stringer at 780-xxx-xxxx or hsdawn@uvic.ca. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. You may also contact Dr. Ball at 250-472-4128 (Victoria) or Dr. Gokiert at 780-492-6297 (Edmonton).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand, using a qualitative case study approach, the co-learning and capacity strengthening processes and outcomes of multi-sectoral research across various research projects and initiatives. The study is concerned with the experiences of members of a community-based research steering committee and the way they understand and enact capacity strengthening and co-learning in their own research and committee work. Specifically, this study aims to investigate how the Alexander Research Committee (ARC) members understand, operationalize and experience capacity strengthening and co-learning in their own research and committee work within a multi-sectoral context.

This research is important because it will enhance our understanding of capacity strengthening and co-learning within multi-sectoral community-based research contexts.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are, or have been, a member of ARC (formerly known as the Wisdom Committee). Your participation will contribute valuable knowledge regarding your committee and project based work.

Your Involvement

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include partaking in an individual interview. The interview will be either in-person or over the phone and will last for approximately 1 hour. You also have the option of participating in a secondary focus group that will last approximately 1.5 hours. The interviews will be audiotaped, to maintain the accuracy of the data and will later be transcribed and analyzed. Written notes may also be taken during the interview.

Your permission will also be requested to contact you after the interview, by a method of your choice, for a secondary follow-up interview for clarification of the initial data analysis and any further questions. This additional contact will take approximately one-two hours of your time.

Inconvenience

Participation may cause some inconvenience to you. The inconvenience will primarily be in terms of the commitment of your time as a participant.

Risks

The only foreseeable risks to you by participating are risks to your confidentially and anonymity. Please see bellow for further information in these matters.

Benefits

By participating in this research you will be contributing to knowledge in the field of Community-Based Research and Community-University Partnerships.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may also withdraw at anytime without consequence or any explanation. If a participant chooses to withdrawn for any reason, their individual interview data will not be used for analysis and will be erased and/or shredded. In addition, you can decline to answer any question during the interview with no consequence.

If you are willing to participate in a focus group you will be informed that, should you withdraw from the focus group, it will be impossible to remove your individual information due to the interdependent nature of focus groups. Your anonymity will continue to be protected in the analysis and final report of the study.

The informed consent process will be required at every group or individual interview session throughout the research process. Participants will be required to consent by initialing their own original form at each step to proceed.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. I will keep the audio recorder; consent forms and the password protected external disk drive in a locked filing cabinet. Any electronic information will be kept on a password protected computer file.

Your identity and any individual that you refer to during interviews will remain anonymous by use of pseudonyms. All identifying data will be destroyed five years after the research is complete.

Dissemination of Results

Any written work or presentations based on the research will not contain any identifying information of the individual participants and/or any of the individuals that participants referred to. The decision to name Alexander First Nation and/or ARC and/ or any organizations/projects that participants work for or with will follow the directive of ARC in any of dissemination activities to be listed by name or not.

Disposal of Data

Once the study is complete data that identifies participants will be disposed of. Paper copies containing data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased.

This study has been approved by The Human Ethics Offices at the University of Victoria. If you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval of this study contact Human Ethics Offices at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca. If you have any questions about the study please contact: Heather, the supervising professors using the information listed on the top of page 1, or Jody Kootenay, Director of Education, Alexander First Nation at 780-939-3551.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in tis study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Are you willing to be contacted after the initial interview as outlined above? Yes   No

If yes, how would you like to be contacted? Phone   Email   Other

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Signature   Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Sincerely,

Heather Stringer

Graduate Student, MA in CYC, University of Victoria

Appendix D: Letter of Approval and Support

Food Security Program:
A Positive & Healthful
Food Environment

apple SCHOOLS
Alberta Project Promoting active Living & Healthy Eating

First Nation Child Development

CUP

Alexander Research Committee
A Collaboration between the Alexander First Nation and researchers from the University of Alberta

June 15, 2013

Human Research Ethics
B202 Administrative Services Building
Office of Research Services
University of Victoria,
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria, BC, Canada
V8W 2Y2

Attention: Human Research Ethics Chair

RE: Heather Stringer's HREB Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research

Please accept this letter from the Alexander Research Committee (ARC) to support Heather Stringer's ethics application to conduct her thesis related qualitative research on the capacity strengthening and co-learning of the ARC. We understand that her research will commence in June 2013 (or as soon as she receives ethics approval).

The ARC is a steering committee that reviews, approves and monitors all research projects being conducted in partnership with Alexander First Nation, which focus on health, education or social development. Membership in ARC consists of people who live and work in, or are community members of Alexander First Nation, and designated researchers from the various projects being delivered in the community.

We understand that Mrs. Stringer will contact and recruit current and former ARC members to participate in individual or group interviews. Authorization is granted for Mrs. Stringer to collect data from committee members in Alexander First Nation in person, by email or by telephone following ethical requirements. Mrs. Stringer has permission to access ARC documents at the discretion of the ARC as long as there is no sensitive material or sensitive material is removed.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jody Kootenay (Director of Education) at 780-939-3551.

Sincerely,

_____   June 12/13.

Jody Kootenay   Date
Director of Education

Appendix E: Sample Interview Questions

Demographic Questions:

- How long have you been an ARC member?

- Briefly describe your role and involvement in ARC?

- What projects have you been involved in?

- In what ways have your experiences with ARC supported growth in your role as (community member, Elder, grad student etc.)?

Interview:

- What strengths do you bring to the ARC?

- How have you shared your learning across multiple projects of the ARC?

- What does co-learning mean to you?

- Tell me about a time that you wanted to share something you knew or discovered with another member of the ARC?

- What has been the biggest challenge in sharing your leanings?

- Can you describe a time when you were influenced by another research project's practice or outcome?

- What types of opportunities have you had to build your knowledge or skills as a member of the ARC?

- If time and resources were limitless, how would you envision sharing the challenges and successes of your research project (or role in ARC) with others interested in similar work?

- How important is the transfer of knowledge in the work of the ARC? Describe

- What do you believe makes the ARC a strong influence in the community?