

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the challenges and the successes of Aboriginal parent engagement in the Calgary Catholic School System. This research gives voice to the educational concerns of rural and urban First Nation/Metis/Inuit [FNMI] parents of the Calgary Catholic School District. The purpose of this study was to examine educational practices relating to parental engagement from three perspectives: Aboriginal parents, district personnel, and district administration. As a Cree woman, I chose to frame the research study and methodology around the Cree Mikowahp teachings. The four Cree laws of nature, wicitowin (sharing), kiskeywatisowen (caring/ kindness/ generosity), kweyaskatesowin (honesty) and sohkisowin (strength/ determination), form the theoretical base for the research. The literature review provides an overview of promising practices in Aboriginal parental engagement and the barriers that obstruct authentic engagement. I chose to rename and reclaim the stories of Cree history using our own terms: the Dog Days, Coming of the Witigo, Following the Path of the Buffalo, and Walking through the Storm. Within each of these sections I uncovered a long history of trauma and oppression that influences parental engagement today.

The research findings clearly indicate that Aboriginal parents want to be involved in their children's education. The participants' responses were respectfully gathered into four bundles for safekeeping, similar to how the sacred medicine bundles are hung in Cree Mikowahps (shelters). The four bundles represent the following themes: Aboriginal Social Context, Relationship Building, Indigenous Culture and Language, and Reciprocal Responsibility. The development of the Mikowahp Tripod Framework was created from participant responses to highlight three key Mikowahp values that support parental engagement practices and programs: obedience, humility and respect. The Mikowahp Tripod Engagement Tool was developed to facilitate relationship building in schools and communities and to overcome some of the barriers identified by participants: lack of trust, stereotypes and assumptions of Aboriginal people, socioeconomic factors, historical trauma, residential school and gender roles. This research represents parental engagement as a process of relationship building that is based on the tripod Indigenous values of humility, respect, and obedience.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Academic Studies: B.A., Athabasca University, 1990  
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1993  
M. Ed., University of Calgary, 1998

Current Position: Doctoral candidate, UBC

## GRADUATE STUDIES

Field of Study: Educational Studies. Leadership & Policy

### Courses

		Instructors
EDST 690	Thesis	J. Archibald
EDST 602A	Doctoral Seminar- year 2	L. Brown
EPSE 565D	Counselling as Colonization Indigenous alternative to modern therapy	J. Gone
EADM 508A	Introduction to Indigenous Methodologies	J. Archibald & L. Rigney
EDST 577	The Social Context of Education Policy	G. Smith & L. Brown
EADM 508B	Indigenous research and epistemology	M. Marker
EDST 601B	Doctoral Seminar - year 1	G. Smith & L. Brown
EDST 596B	Ethics	L. Brown



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

### PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
(Educational Studies)

### **RHONDA ELAINE ELSER**

B.A., Athabasca University, 1990  
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1993  
M. Ed., University of Calgary, 1998

Friday, Sept. 16, 9:00 a.m.  
First Nation Longhouse Board Room  
*Latecomers will not be admitted*

**“Aboriginal Parental Engagement in Calgary Catholic Schooling”**

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair:

Dr. Guofang Li (Language and Literacy Education)

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Research Supervisor (Educational Studies)

Dr. Cynthia Nicol (Curriculum Studies)

Dr. Jacqueline Ottmann (Education, University of Calgary)

University Examiners:

Dr. Cash Ahenakew (Educational Studies)

Dr. Carl Leggo (Language and Literacy Education)

External Examiner:

Dr. Shauneen Pete

Faculty of Education

University of Regina

Regina, Saskatchewan