

Integration and Validation in Hybrid-Online Teacher Preparation:  
A Case Study of Persistence in a  
Native American Special Education Licensure Program

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Donna Rose Patterson

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Geoffrey M. Maruyama, Ph. D.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my spouse, John, who offered never-ending encouragement as I pursued, and finally fulfilled, my dream. My husband and family expressed pride in the work that I was doing. This unwavering support meant a lot to me, especially when I was discouraged and felt as if I would never finish. I also want to dedicate my work to good teachers, who every day make a difference in the lives of students. I had many, whose words stuck with me and led me to believe that I could achieve my dreams, despite challenges and discouragement. Know always that your one word, one smile, one vote of confidence, might be the one to change a life.

I had a quote taped to my desk in the final days of writing my dissertation, most days a lonely task. These words pushed me forward, and reminded me that no one else except myself could finish what I started. When discouragement and procrastination sought to envelope me, these words inspired me to keep going and get 'er done. I wish the same ending for others who have a dream that may seem far away, but can be achieved with your own persistence, faith and hard work.

You can not will this to happen-  
It is a matter of:  
Persistence,  
Faith,  
Hard work-  
So, you might as well just go ahead and get started!

(Author unknown)

## Abstract

This study explored persistence through the experience of professional studies students in a special education licensure program. The context of the study was a graduate level teacher preparation program delivered in a hybrid format of face-to-face and online learning environments. The goal of the program was to prepare teachers from a Native American perspective to work effectively with students with disabilities. The study focus was: the academic and social integration of students; the in- and out-of-class validating agents that fostered academic and interpersonal development; the perceived sense of preparedness to work Native American youth who are identified with a disability, and the bases of these perceptions; and differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in their experience of integration, validation and preparedness. This study used qualitative methodology including program evaluation findings, individual interviews, a written survey, focus group and analysis of online postings. The participants in the study were 13 non-traditional graduate professional studies students.

Results of this study suggested that both the online and the face-to-face learning environments contributed to academic and social integration. These integrating experiences were essential in creating a vibrant and supportive learning environment, and in supporting persistence. Validation was an important factor in developing a sense of belonging in the community, and in fostering self-efficacy as future special education teachers in diverse settings. Validating experiences came from both the face-to-face and online learning environments. Participants felt well-prepared to be a special education

teacher in several skill areas: working with students and families, cultural awareness, ability to be a valued part of an effective team, and instructional strategies. Two areas of skills and knowledge were identified in which students did not feel well prepared: special education assessment and the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandate of special education services. Differences between Native American and non-Native participants included the quality and quantity of giving and seeking support, reaction to challenges, and identified priorities.

Key words: persistence, non-traditional, nontraditional, Native American, American Indian, hybrid, online, hybrid-online, integration, validation, professional studies, teacher preparation, special education, disability, disabilities.

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## Chapter I

Creating engaging and supportive learning environments at the college level is a challenge as demonstrated by the significant numbers of students who do not successfully complete their intended academic program (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2012). The reasons why a student remains in school are individual and varied (Astin, 1992), and the persistence topic has been extensively explored over several decades by many researchers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Braxton, 1999). However, in the decades since a foundational model of the college persistence process was proposed by Vincent Tinto (1975), both the face of the student population and the modes of instructional delivery at college campuses have changed (NCES, 2012). Much of the early research on persistence focused on the traditional college students, the 18-24 year-old undergraduate from a white, middle-class background. Early research gave little consideration to the differing experience of students outside of this demographic, who experience college outside of the conventional institutional environment, or for those pursuing graduate degrees (Astin, 1992). This more diverse student body in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, disability status, and age, as well as the changed educational context for many students, challenges the applicability and highlights the limitations of the early research and calls for an expanded view of the persistence process.

As a result of these demographic changes as well as the exponential technological growth over the past three decades, the online delivery of college coursework, and in many cases full degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level, has

expanded. This type of instruction is now offered at almost every Institute for Higher Education (NCES, 2003), and offers an attractive option for attaining one's academic goals, especially for nontraditional students or those with limited access to a college campus (Pemberton, Cereijo, Tyler-Wood, & Rademacher, 2004). For example, overall, about 20% of all undergraduate students take some online courses, with about 4% completing their entire program online. However, when broken down by age, about 30% of students over the age of 30 take some classes online, with 8.5% completing a full program online. For the graduate students with dependents, about 8.5% complete their degree online, and 33% take at least some of their classes online (NCES, 2007-2008).

There are distinct challenges within an online format in developing meaningful social and academic relationships with both peers and faculty (Frydenberg, 2007). In his exploration of college persistence at the undergraduate level, Tinto (1975) proposes that integration into the academic and social fabric of the college is an essential element into successful completion of college. Academic integration is measured through both grades and intellectual growth over time. Grades are viewed as the meeting of the expectations and standards of the institution, while intellectual development involves a sense of gaining knowledge and appreciating ideas; one offers an extrinsic incentive while the other is an intrinsic sense of personal and academic development (p. 104). Social integration involves informal peer group connections, extra-curricular activities, and interaction with college faculty and administrative personnel. These social experiences result in varying levels of social communication, friendship support, faculty support, and shared affiliation. These social rewards then either enhance or detract from an

individual's commitment to the institution and his or her intended program (p. 107).

Through the experiences that contribute to academic and social integration, a sense of validation develops. Validation is an important element in persistence for all students, but is especially so for students who do not fit the traditional college student demographic (Rendón, 1994).

This new pedagogy of delivery of instruction in an online format compromises or at least seemingly diminishes the potential for both integration and validating student experiences, factors supported as essential to completion of an undergraduate degree (Tinto, 1993; Rendón, 1994). For example, online education is primarily learner centered, altering the dependency on institution-based integration experiences (Miller, 1995). Individual independence, internal motivation and student-centered responsibility are essential characteristics to success in the learning process in an online program (Garrison, 1989), which challenges the Tinto model of the necessity for an assimilation process into the institution as an essential element of student persistence. The concept of belonging to a "learning community" takes on a new meaning when students from diverse geographical areas, backgrounds and motivational purposes may share a cooperative learning experience but not a physical classroom (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). Some say that the important psycho-social factors of the learning process are often ignored in this type of an environment (Spitzer, 1998). Therefore, a challenge for those who teach in an online venue is to create a learning community amongst learners which supports academic and social integration, and validates the individual experience, despite the limited face-to-face contact with faculty and each other in which to do so (Cook, 1995;

Weedon, 1997). For that reason, the question of how students interact with each other and faculty, and the role of both student-to-student and student-to-faculty relationships in the engagement and learning process within this context, becomes an important one.

Combined with the changes of the student demographic over the last several decades, the rise of online education has altered the college experience for many. These changes call for examination of the existing persistence models within these broadened contexts.

Several conceptual models of persistence lay the foundation for this study. The Student Integration Model of Tinto (1975) identifies a successful integration into the college community, in both academic and social realms, as essential for persistence. Building on the Tinto model, John Bean (1990), and later Bean and Shawn Eaton (2000), developed and refined the Student Attrition Model, based on psychological processes, to include environmental factors outside of the college community. Subsequently, and as a response to rapidly changing college demographics and the limitations of the prior models, the Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition by Bean and Metzner (1985) began to conceptualize an expanded model of persistence to more accurately reflect the realities and relevant factors of the undergraduate, such as students of color, older students and commuter students. For example, while academic and social integration are important contributing factors in the persistence for both the traditional and nontraditional student, the nature and dimensions of where and how integration occurs is different for each (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Continuing in this line of research, Laura Rendón and a team of researchers sought to better understand how involvement happens for the nontraditional student, and

how student learning is affected by both involvement and out-of-class interactions (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, Rendón, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jaloma, 1994). This team explored the in- and out-of-class elements that foster academic and interpersonal development, known as validation, in the experience of the students. These foundational theories lay the groundwork for a better understanding of the persistence process. Yet, the underlying mechanisms and reasons for a successful engagement and persistence process may be quite different over time, and across sub-groups of students that fall outside of the traditional student demographic or the conventional college environment. For example, even for the traditional student the relevant factors related to persistence may change as early as their sophomore year in college (Tinto, 1993). To explore the student experience in an alternative learning context, this study examined the nontraditional student in a graduate-level teacher training program delivered in a hybrid-online format.

#### *Context of this study*

This study examines the role that academic integration, social integration, and validation play in the experience of adult nontraditional learners in an online teacher preparation program. The program under study in this project is a state approved special education teacher licensing program with a goal to recruit teachers who are specifically trained to teach Native American students with disabilities. This program was developed from an indigenous focus, utilizes indigenous literature and Native instructors, and incorporates Native cultural traditions, history and perspectives. The recruitment efforts targeted Native American individuals, although students of all backgrounds could enroll.

The licensure program is a collaborative partnership between *Large Public IHE* and *Small Private College* Master of Arts in Education program. The program is a graduate-level, special education licensure program delivered in a hybrid format of face-to-face and online sessions. Students met twice each semester with faculty and classmates; all other coursework was completed online. Each of the eight classes was co-taught by one faculty from each institution, and ideally by one Native American faculty and one non-Native faculty. The program entered its first cohort of 21 students in fall, 2008, with the licensure portion of the program ending in spring, 2010. Upon completion of the special education license, students are fully licensed to teach in k-12 Minnesota schools in both Specific Learning Disabilities and Emotional and Behavioral Disorders<sup>1</sup>. Students then have the option to take four additional online courses at *Small Private College* to complete a Master of Arts in Education degree.

#### *Rationale for this study*

With the passing of the federal law known as PL 94-142 (1975) the “Education for All Handicapped Children Act,” Special Education was designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, provide an equal and appropriate education for all students, and protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. Approximately 5.5 million k-12 students now receive special education support services (Data Accountability Center, 2011). However, since the inception of this law, disproportional

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<sup>1</sup> In fall of 2013, Minnesota will replace the current special education licensing categories to a cross-categorical license of Academic and Behavior Specialist (A.B.S.). This new license will credential teachers to teach in the k-12 setting with students identified with specific learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, developmental and cognitive disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and other health impairments at the mild to moderate level. An individual with the “old” license will be grandfathered into the new system and continue to be fully licensed to teach special education.

representation of minority students in special education has existed both at the national level (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004), and in Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2011). Overrepresentation occurs when there are “more culturally and linguistically diverse children served in special education than would be expected from the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the general population” (National Institute for Urban School Improvement, 2011).

Although disproportionality in special education is an issue in several minority populations, it is especially problematic in the Native American community. Nationally, the population of Native American children who receive special education services is over one and a half times greater than for that of the general population, respectively 16.8% and 11% (NCCRESt, 2010). Nearly 50% of Native American students identified with a disability do not complete high school, higher than for any other minority group (U.S. Commission on Civil, Rights, 2009). It is estimated by some Native American scholars that up to 70% of Native American youth are identified with some type of a learning problem (personal communication, T. Peacock, 2010). As shown in Table 1, Native American students in Minnesota represent the smallest minority population, yet represent the largest percentage per capita of students who receive special education services (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011)



Table 1

*Native American special education in Minnesota during the 2010-2011 academic year*

	Total number in k-12 student population	% of the total k-12 student population	Number that receive special education services	% that receive special education services
Native American	18,486	2	3,982	21
African- American students	83,779	10	15,166	19
Latino students	58,091	6.9	3,805	18
Caucasian students	622,725	74	86,499	14
Asian students	54,559	6.5	4,709	4
Total	837,640		114,161	

There are many roots of disproportionality such as inadequate and inappropriate referral, assessment and evaluation procedures, poverty, discrimination or cultural bias in referral and assessment, school- based factors, and unique factors related directly to ethnicity (Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Utley, Zion, Tate, ... Riley, n.d.). In order to remediate these factors (Klingner, et al., n.d.) recommends that educators need to: be aware of the cultural influences on behavior, trained to develop their knowledge of cultural beliefs, values, behaviors and expectations toward diversity, and know how to effectively use cross-cultural communication skills. Specifically, there is a lack of training of pre-service and practicing teachers in intercultural awareness. A teacher-training program such as the one under study in this research project seeks to increase

this level of cultural awareness, and as a result reduce the disproportionality problems in special education of the Native American students.

Although the population in our public schools at every level is increasingly diverse (Artiles, et al., 2004), there does not appear to be similar change in diversity in the population of k-12 educators in public schools systems. The typical k-12 teacher is a white, 43-year old female (National Education Association, 2003). In Minnesota, out of 9,041 teachers who hold special education licenses there are only 39 who self-identify as Native American, or less than one-half of one percent (personal communication, M. Olson, 2010). Consequently, there is a great need for adequately prepared special education teachers to provide appropriate and culturally specific services to these students.

Clearly, in Minnesota there is a need to both reduce the Native American disproportionality in special education, and to increase the number of special education personnel prepared from a Native American perspective to work with children with disabilities. The MDE has supported a number of innovative teacher-training initiatives that focus on meeting the needs of the Native American community; this program is one of those initiatives. In addition to a program design focused through a Native lens, this program is offered through a hybrid-delivery system of face-to-face and online courses. The instructional delivery mode decision was chosen to increase access to students in distant geographical areas across the state. While there are distinct challenges in conducting effective teacher training in an online format, distance learning has support as a viable option to higher education for students with limited access, and it may be

especially relevant for the Native American community (Sanchez, Stuckey, & Morris, 1998).

There is a large body of research on how to support persistence of traditional aged undergraduate students, but little research has focused on the exploration of the factors that support the engagement and persistence of professional studies students.

Additionally, much of the research in teacher licensure programs has focused on outcome and performance-based measures once the candidates are in the teaching field (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006), with very little examination of the student experience during their teacher preparation program. The current research will use qualitative methodology to explore academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975; Bean and Metzner, 1985), validation (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994) and perception of preparedness to enter the teaching field of the student within the context of a postbaccalaureate, special education teacher training program which is delivered in a hybrid format. A better understanding of how these factors are experienced within this program may inform the development of future programs to adequately ensure the success of this pool of teachers competent in effective teaching strategies and fluent in how specifically to support Native American students identified with a disability, within an increasingly diverse student population.

Research that has been done in the persistence literature across all populations has been largely quantitative in nature, with a significant gap in qualitative explorations of this topic (Harper & Kuh, 2007). Quantitative data provide useful information on the many factors related to persistence, but alone may not reveal the human dimensions,

extenuating factors, and individual characteristics relevant to the issue. Qualitative methods provide an additional way of validating other types of analyses, and anecdotal accounts may uncover additional relevant factors for future explorations. In addition, little qualitative research exists in the study of hybrid or online education; “more in-depth qualitative interviews and case studies could provide richer insights into student e-learning behaviour, and answers to ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions” (Gilbert, Morton & Rowley, 2007, p. 561). This information is critically important in gaining a broader understanding of the day-to-day and first-hand experience of the nontraditional student, the unique challenges they may face and the psycho-social factors that contribute to their success both as students and eventually as teachers.

While it has been supported that both the traditional and nontraditional student have a strong need for integrating and validating experiences in both social and academic realms (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Rendón, 1994), the bases for and depth of these experiences is different amongst the distinct populations. Pavel and Padilla (1993), in reference to the study of the nontraditional student, suggested that researchers choose either to develop new conceptual frameworks or to use existing models to explore persistence. The author of the current research will use the existing models of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975; Bean & Metzner, 1985), and validation theory (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994) to explore the experience of the nontraditional student in a hybrid-online teacher training program. A better understanding of how these factors are experienced in the context of this program will inform the development of future programs to adequately ensure the success of this pool of teachers competent in

effective teaching strategies and fluent in how to support an increasingly diverse student population. The goal of the current research project is to better understand the experience of the first cohort of students in the program, including the factors that have contributed to their success and those that have posed challenges to them, with a focus on academic integration, social integration, and validation.

*The research questions*

This study examined how the factors of academic integration, social integration, and validation are experienced by adult nontraditional learners in a graduate-level, special education teacher preparation program which is delivered in a hybrid format of online and face-to-face instructional delivery.

The research questions that were addressed in this study were:

1. How are academic integration and social integration experienced by students through the face-to-face and online learning environments?
2. What are the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation in the face-to-face and online experiences of students in this program?
3. How well prepared do participants feel to teach Native American students with disabilities, and what are the bases of these perceptions?
4. Are there differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in the areas of academic integration, social integration, validation and sense of preparedness?

*Organization of the dissertation*

Chapter I has provided an overview, introduction, context and rationale of the study, and the research questions. Chapter II provides a conceptual framework and relevant literature, focused on academic integration, social integration and validation amongst nontraditional students in emerging instructional delivery modes. Chapter III presents the research methodology and study design. Chapter IV provides the results of the study. Chapter V includes a discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the literature on academic integration, social integration and validation as it relates to the persistence of nontraditional student in a hybrid model of instructional delivery. This chapter is organized to first present as background a conceptual overview describing several theories of persistence, and how integration and validation impact this process. A review of the research as it relates to the other factors of this study including online delivery, the cohort experience and the nontraditional student will follow.

#### *A brief history of persistence study*

Persistence (Tinto, 1993) can be defined as continuous or intermittent program attendance until learners reach their educational goals (i.e., the completion of a course, certificate program, or degree). Although the terminology is not always the same across research, within this study the following definition of persistence is used: “the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion” (Seidman, 2005).

The majority of the research in the study of college persistence began in the 1960’s; however, foundational work on this topic began as early as the 1900’s. John B. Johnston, a University of Minnesota (UMN) neurologist and Dean of the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts, conducted a series of studies on the prediction of student academic performance, which led to a statewide testing program, improvement of faculty advising and student personnel services. Also at the UMN, E.G. Williamson,

student personnel staff for 43 years (1926 to 1969) and dean of students from 1941 to 1969, saw the importance of supporting the total development of the student as being important to the college experience, and is viewed as a pioneer in the field of college student counseling (Ewing, 1975). He understood the importance of recreational and emotional aspects in the development of the college student, beyond the intellectual needs. He encouraged student support to go beyond the traditional focus at the time and was “trying to get the community context –the social gestalt-in trying to change the institutional climate so that it is conducive to the totality of human development” (p.86). This approach was revolutionary at the time, and this attempt to support students across all areas of development, including but not exclusively limited to academic realms, was exceptional. Other early explorations in the study of college student support include the work at the UMN with Williamson of J. G. Darley and others (Borow, 1990).

A limitation of the early research was that the college student population in the early 1900's was almost exclusively white, male and privileged; cultural, gender or economic diversity was not a consideration (Seidman, 2005). A second limitation of the early perspectives was the limited view of student learning. Students at the time were seen as passive learners, and the pedagogy had yet to evolve to reflect a more actively engaged student (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Despite these limitations, this early work based in counseling psychology began a long stream of inquiry into how college students learn, why they stay in college, and how institutions can better support this process.

Between the early 1900s and the 1960s, a small amount of research examined attrition, but not persistence. One of the first studies on attrition was conducted by



McNeely (1937), and provided analyses of data from 60 IHE's across the country. This methodology of study was unique for the time and created a model for the ensuing studies of the 1960s and 1970s (Seidman, 2005). However, McNeely focused on unsuccessful students' "mortality" process, but not on the factors which support persistence or retention. With the end World War II, the expansion of opportunities and a newly recognized need for a college education led to a surge in college enrollment. However, it was not until predictions of decreases in enrollment and a more competitive college marketplace in the 1970's that IHE's began to consider ways to retain current students (Seidman, 2005). The studies in this next phase, starting in the 1970's, began to look beyond academic failure into the factors that support college success. The next section of this chapter will present an overview of several of the foundational works in this phase of the research.

#### *Conceptual overview of student persistence models*

This section will present an overview of several theories of persistence: Student Integration Model (Tinto, 1975), The Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985), and Validation theory (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994).

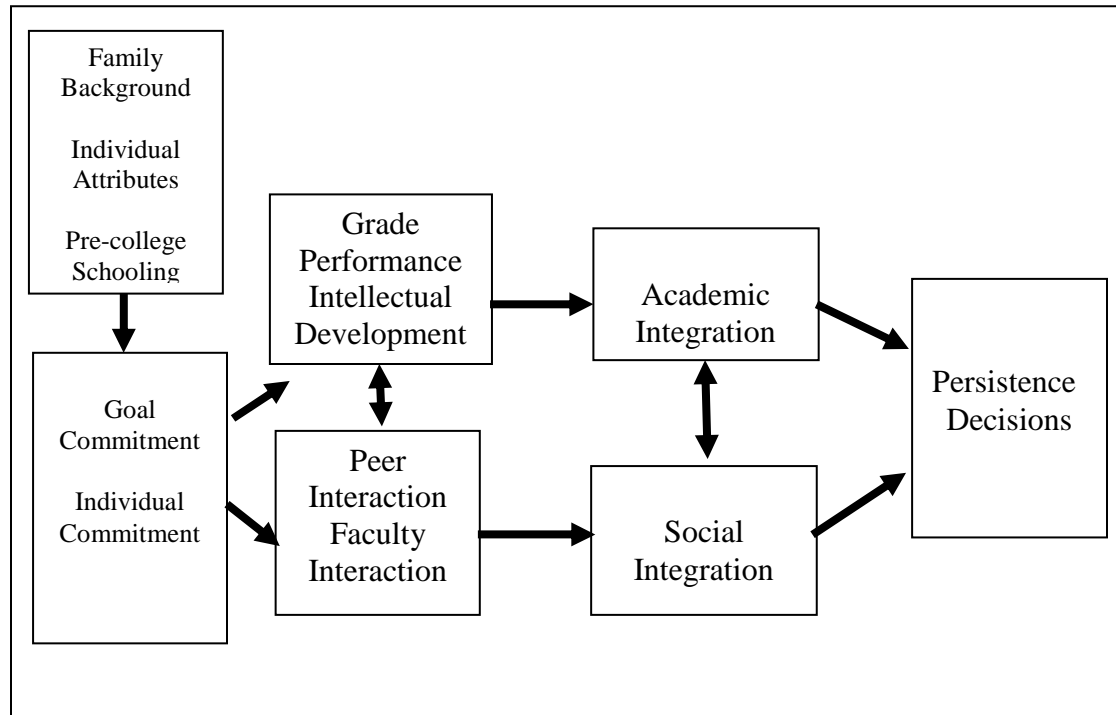
*Student Integration Model.* The Student Integration Model of Tinto (1975) comes from a sociological perspective first considered by Spady (1971) as he called to future researchers to consider the congruency between student and institution (Seidman, 2005). This model focuses on the importance of assimilation into the social system of the college culture as a necessity for success through graduation, and views disengagement from the

environment as a gradual process over time. This model proposes a sequential series of factors and experiences which build on each other to support persistence, or lead to a student dropping out. Initial pre-college individual characteristics and demographics interact with subsequent institutional experiences to impact academic and social integration, further solidify goals, commitments, and intentions, and ultimately contribute to persistence (Tinto, 1975). Tinto proposes that successful academic and social integration in the campus community is the foundation on which a commitment to the institution, ultimately manifested in persistence and degree completion, is built (see figure 1). Establishing a solid membership in the social and intellectual college community takes place primarily through social interactions and experiences with other members of the community (Tinto, 1988). These ongoing relationships with both faculty and peers take place in both formal and informal contexts. Tinto proposes that without a full and satisfactory integration into the college community, a student will begin a disengagement process followed by reduced goal commitment, and will eventually leave the institution.

The original work of Tinto (1975) focused on the traditional-aged, undergraduate student from a white, middle-class background, with little consideration of the differing experience of students who fall outside of this demographic. Additionally, this theory predicts persistence as the result of a successful adjustment to the culture of the college, with little attention to the underlying psychological process or external factors that take place during this time that may equally impact persistence outcomes (Bean & Eaton, 2001). The Tinto theory (1975) suggests that integration into both the academic and

social systems of the college campus is necessary for a full engagement into the community, and this assimilation is an essential component in persistence.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model for Dropout from College (Tinto, 1975)*

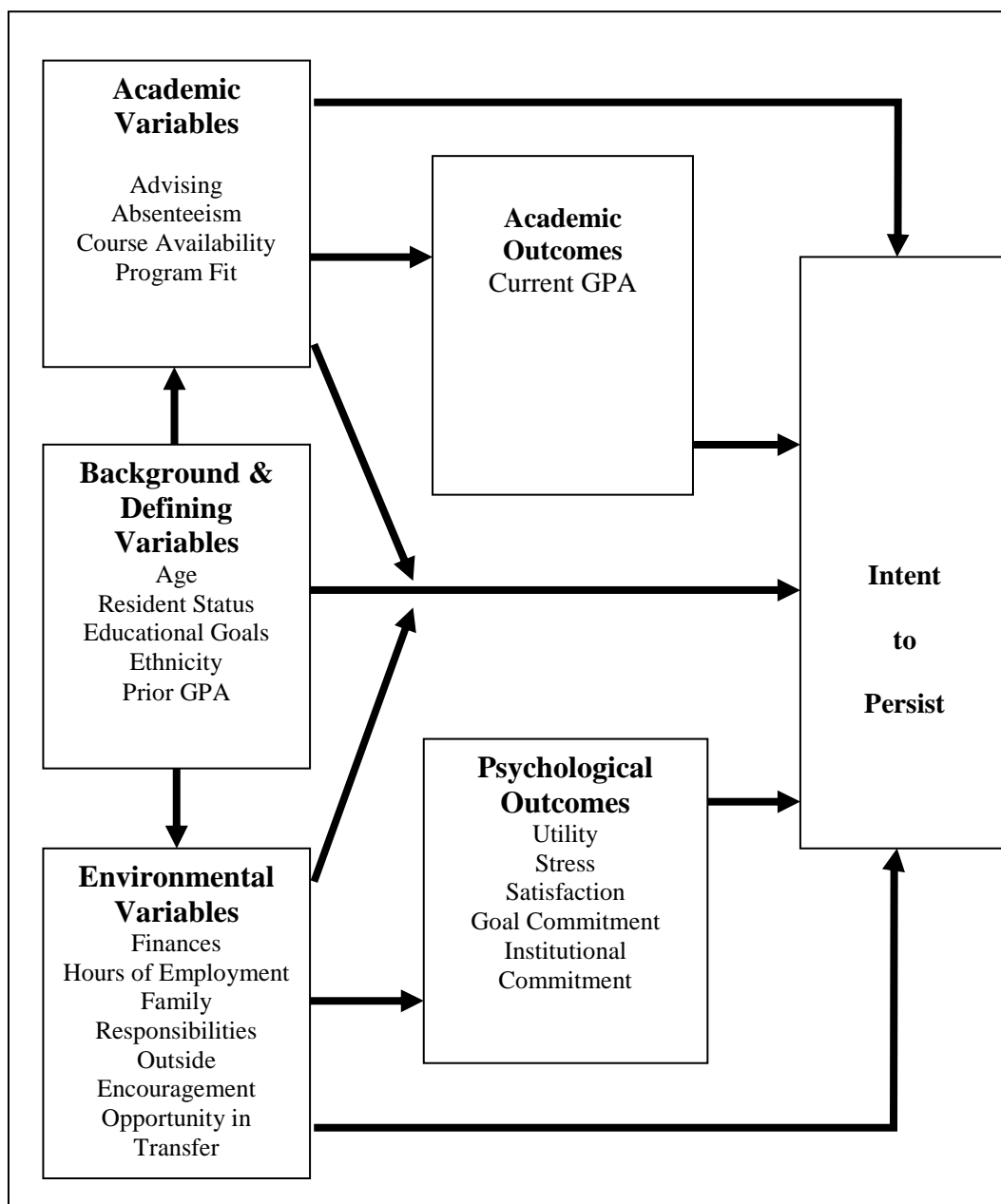


For the student who may bring a more diverse perspective or hold value in the continued membership in other communities outside of the college, this integration model may not be a necessary or sufficient contributor to persistence (Tierney, 1992). The underlying mechanisms and reasons for a successful engagement process may in fact be quite different across these sub-groups of students. For example, Pavel and Padilla (1993) found only a weak fit between the Tinto model and Native American Indian undergraduate students. This gap in support of the applicability of the Tinto model to the

nontraditional student experience calls for further exploration into the bases for these differences.

*The Conceptual Model of Student Attrition.* In the Conceptual Model of Student Attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985), the on-campus social integration factors proposed by Tinto (1975) are deemphasized. This model gives more weight to social and environmental factors outside of the college that are reflective of the many roles and responsibilities that the nontraditional student holds beyond that of “student”. This model aligns with the Tinto model in affirming that academic and social integration are important contributing factors in the persistence of both traditional and nontraditional student. However, it broadens the scope of where and how integration occurs (Bean & Metzner, 1985). While Tinto emphasized academic integration and social involvement within the campus community as critical elements in and contributors to persistence, Bean and Metzner weight these factors differently given the realities of the nontraditional student experience. In most cases, the nontraditional student has significant external influences that are of equal or greater value in the decision-making process to pursue and persist in completion of a college education. These environmental influences are often more central in the lives of the student than are the academic variables. Nontraditional students are not primarily or solely students; they hold many competing roles and responsibilities outside of school which contribute to the overall school experience much differently than for that of the traditional student (see figure 2).

Figure 2. *Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985)*



In this theoretical model, the nontraditional student may include a variety of students such as part-time, commuter, first generation, and those from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Although there are clear differences between the traditional

and nontraditional college student, providing a clear definition of the nontraditional student is challenging. Bean and Metzner (1985) highlight the challenge of defining the nontraditional student:

Nontraditional students can be from any part of the country; from rural or urban settings; rich or poor; black, white or Hispanic; 18 years or older; not employed; working full or part-time, or retired; male or female; with or without dependents; married, single or divorced; and enrolled in vocational or avocational reasons in a single course or in a degree or certificate program. Due to this heterogeneity it is very difficult to develop a profile of a typical nontraditional student. For this reason, the focus of our definition is on the differences between the traditional students and nontraditional students (p. 488).

The inclusion of a wider spectrum of students was a departure from the previous models, which focused on the traditional aged, largely white, and middle-class student. A primary difference between these two groups, as speculated by Bean and Metzner (1985), is that students are not dependent on the college experience as the main source of their social integration. They are typically influenced socially by a continued reliance on the influences of their life external to college: family, friends outside of school, work, and other activities off campus. Additionally, for the nontraditional student, the academic integration aspect espoused by Tinto is filtered through the external social influence in a manner much different than that of the traditional-aged student, whose primary circle of social support is likely to be found on campus.

*Validation.* Laura Rendón and colleagues (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994) continued to explore the college experience of the nontraditional student and the factors that both support success and those that lead to disengagement. The focus of these two studies was how students receive validation through their interactions with the college environment, and how this validation is related to their success in achieving their educational goals. In this context, validation is defined as “an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). These researchers propose that academic and interpersonal validation experiences both in and out of the classroom offers an explanation for lower rates of persistence for nontraditional undergraduate students. Validation arises out of the academic and social integrating experiences discussed in the Tinto model; this model goes deeper to explain the “why” of how these experiences contribute to student engagement and persistence, particularly for the nontraditional student.

According to Rendón (1994), nontraditional students have a need for validation in both social and academic realms. Validating experiences can change an individual’s self-efficacy belief, enhance a sense of belonging, and increase both meaningful involvement and integration, all critical elements in contributing to persistence. Conversely, invalidating experiences can cause nontraditional students to question their place in the college, as well as provoke self-doubts in their ability to succeed. Validation comes from a variety of places including family support, faculty relationships, peer-relationships, and personal motivations. It also may evolve from an intrinsic realization of one’s

capabilities. Rendón (1994) states: “Validation can be something that is done for and in conjunction with the student, but for some students it may also be a self-affirming process as the student discovers new competencies or reaches levels of achievement previously thought unattainable” (p. 67).

Rendón found that the need for and the source of validation to be different between the traditional student and the nontraditional student. Traditional students typically come from a background that has prepared them sufficiently to know what to expect in college and how to navigate resources successfully. For many traditional students, the transition from high school to the socialization of the IHE, access to resources and participation in involvement opportunities presented on campus is smooth. However, Rendón found nontraditional students different in several ways. In a series of small group interviews conducted at four IHE’s, participants in this study expressed levels of concern about their ability to succeed in college, were challenged in their ability to negotiate college life independently, and lacked an ability to academically and socially integrate on their own. This study reports that while traditional students can often function within academic and social systems with ease, many nontraditional students need significant support and active intervention from others to help them navigate the institution. Without this validation, a cycle of disengagement can occur including self-doubts or a perceived lack of “fit” within the institution.

A strength of this study is the use of a qualitative approach to explore the themes identified by individuals as relevant in their lives as college students. This approach allowed for the researchers to report common themes constructed from the students in



their own words. Previous studies primarily used large institutional databases to look at characteristics of students to formulate a model of student engagement. While these approaches have value, the human dimension cannot be captured adequately through quantitative analyses alone. However, this study only focuses on the undergraduate student and does not explore the nontraditional student in a graduate or alternative learning context. The research in the current study will explore validation for the nontraditional student in a graduate program delivered in a hybrid format.

*The cohort model.* Social integration can take many forms, with social connectedness as one of its' primary components (Lee & Robbins, 2000). Various campus experiences, both structured and unstructured, can add to a sense of social connectedness, and subsequently social integration. Participation in a structured learning community (Minor, 1997) is one type of experience that can provide an opportunity for social integration. Minor defines a learning community as a "small subgroup of students characterized by a common sense of purpose that can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness, and uniqueness that encourages continuity and the integration of diverse curricular and co-curricular experiences" (p. 21). A structured learning community meets the psychological needs of students through enhancing an internal locus of control, self-efficacy, motivation and a meaningful connection to the college community (Minor, 1997).

There are several designs for a "structured learning community" that involve co-enrolling a small cohort of students (< 25) in a sequence of courses that they take together. Oftentimes, the learning community may have a theme, and the course content

ideally will be connected across classes (Barefoot, 2004). Participation in a cohort group during an academic program is one way of creating a structured and supportive learning community, increasing academic and social integration, and supporting persistence.

In addition, structured learning communities are particularly successful in “commuter colleges” and distance-learning environments to build relationships (Barefoot, 2004) because they create a sense of belonging into the college community. In online education where persistence rates are significantly lower than in traditional programs (Carr, 2000), Barefoot (2004) reports: “The University of Phoenix, the largest distance-education provider in the United States, enrolling over 125,000 students, credits its seven-year, 65% degree-completion rate to a number of factors including cohort-group instruction” (p. 15).

Although research on the effects of structured learning communities has been primarily with the undergraduate population, positive effects are also found with nontraditional students. The researcher reviewed several studies that explored the cohort experience within teacher preparation programs, a context especially relevant to the current study. Seed (2008) found several benefits for graduate students in a cohort of pre-service teachers including rapport and stronger relationships with each other and faculty, and a decreased sense of isolation. Participants indicated that their experience was an effective way to build a graduate student cohort. Wenzlaff and Wieseman (2004) report, “The teachers sensed that the cohort model assisted in creating a ‘community of learners’ and helped them to become ‘better teachers and learners’” (p. 121). In another study of pre-service teachers in a cohort model, Dinsmore and Wenger (2006) reported an

increase in critical thinking skills, leadership skills, and an increased motivation to learn. The structure of the cohort naturally created an environment to learn with their peers. They report findings that closely mirror research in the undergraduate population, and reflect the foundational models of Tinto (1975), Bean and Metzner (1985), and Rendón (1994). Dinsmore and Wenger report:

These pre-service teachers got to know each other very well; they spent many hours each day together. Whereas many students had felt isolated while taking other coursework prior to and outside of the program, as members of the cohort, they began to learn more through discussions with their other cohort members during and outside of cohort classes. Students of the cohort in this study expressed a strong connection to others within the group. These connections were fostered in informal social situations as well as in class. This sense of trust and reliance within the cohort was described by each of the members as contributing to their success (Data analysis section, para. 7).

*Persistence in online education.* With the broadened diversity in the college population since the 1970s has come an increased competitiveness for recruiting and retaining students (Seidman, 2005). One of the evolving methods of doing so is to broaden the opportunities available for a college education, particularly in the area of online instruction. This type of instruction is now offered at almost every IHE (NCES, 2003), and offers an attractive option at all levels of education, and especially for the nontraditional student or students with limited access to a college campus. Distance learning can offer a means of access to higher education for students who otherwise may

be excluded (Sanchez, et al., 1998). However, despite the continued growth and increased opportunities of online learning in higher education, higher than average attrition rates in online classes and programs continues to be an issue (Carr, 2000; Frydenberg, 2007). Although there is variation between IHE's, Carr (2000) reported that persistence in distance education programs is often 10–20 percentage points lower than in traditional programs.

Bocchi, Eastman and Swift (2004) discuss these concerns regarding the possible reasons for lower retention of online students:

There are a variety of reasons for this higher attrition rate (as compared to traditional brick-and-mortar rates), including students' feelings of isolation, difficulty adjusting to a self-directed approach, and their finding that such courses are more rigorous than anticipated and that faculty members and students lack experience with online learning. (p. 246).

While there are many possible explanation for the lower persistence rates in online education when compared to traditional instructional delivery (Bocchi, et al., 2004), the focus of this paper is on factors related to the topics under study: academic and social integration, and validation. One such factor related to integration is the importance of community in an online learning environment. Rovai (2002) found that the physical separation inherent in an online environment contributes to higher dropout rates. He proposes that feelings of disconnectedness result from this separation, followed by a lowered sense of community, feelings of disconnectedness and isolation. These processes adversely affect student persistence. In an online learning environment, students across a

wide spectrum of backgrounds and motivations may be taking a class together, yet lack a common "classroom," with no physical communal space in which shared learning occurs (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). Some say that the important psycho-social factors of the learning process are often ignored in this type of an environment (Spitzer, 1998). Therefore, a challenge for those who teach in an online venue is to create a learning community amongst learners who may have limited face-to-face contact with each other (Cook, 1995; Weedon, 1997).

Tinto (1975, 1993) stressed the importance of community in relation to persisting in a college program when students feel involved and develop relationships with other members of the learning community. However, the relevancy of these social connections is still under review for the nontraditional student in an online learning environment. In an analysis of several models, Rovai (2003) found that the current models do not adequately reflect the complexities of persistence for the nontraditional student in an online learning environment. A sampling of research reveals mixed findings regarding the relationship of social connections to persistence in the online environment. Kim (2004) found that although social interaction in general in an online learning environment is an important motivational factor, for the nontraditional student a lack of interaction did not decrease motivation to complete. A differing result was found by Asher and Skenes (1993) in a study of 25 adult learners in business classes. In this study, social integration experienced through the social environment with peers had a significant positive relationship with retention and persistence. Bocchi, et al. (2004) found that persistence

for adult learners in online learning programs is enhanced when a supportive group of friends and family is present.

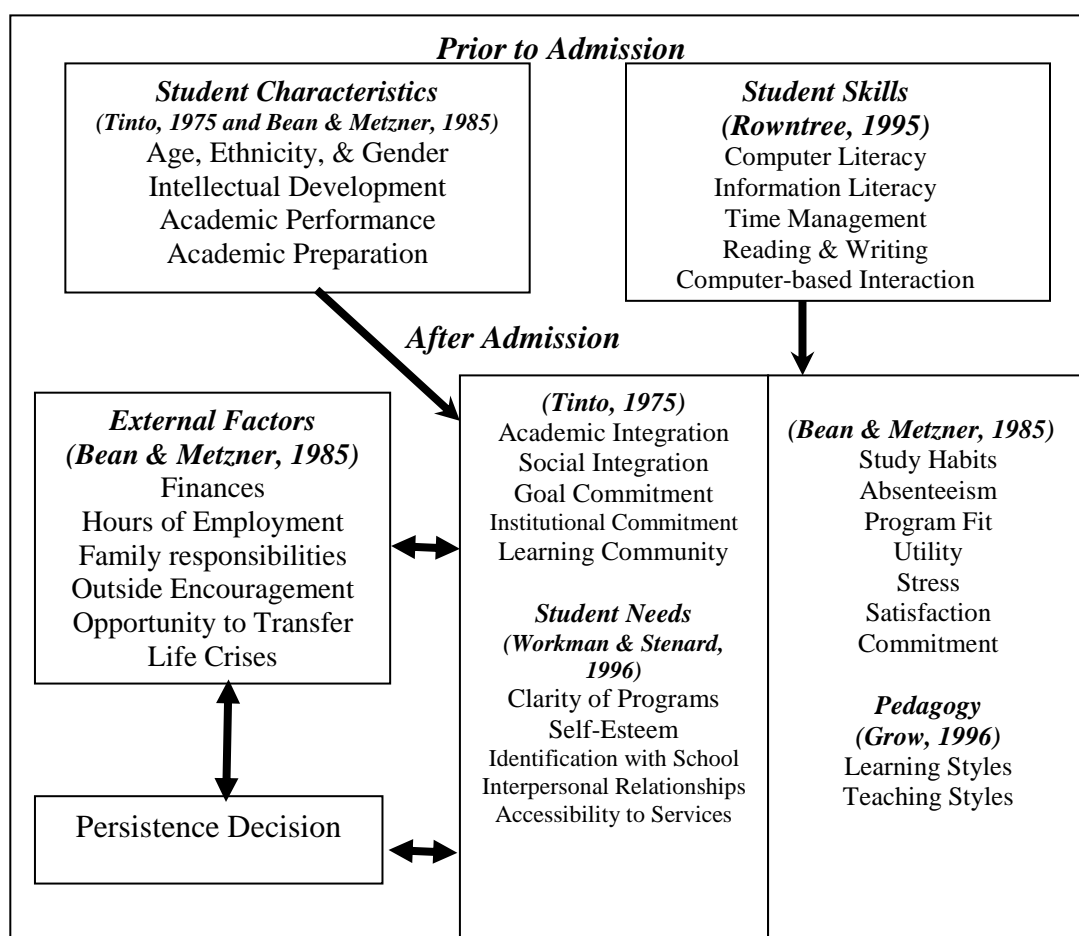
Despite mixed results regarding the value of social integration for the nontraditional students, the needs of distance learners and nontraditional students are similar in many ways. Students in online programs are more likely to be nontraditional students (Rovai, 2003). Diaz (2000) reports that online students are older, with more life and academic experiences; he suggests that these characteristics complement the independent, self-directed learning environment of online education. Early in the boon of online education, Workman and Stenard (1996) identified the needs of distance learners in five areas which may impact persistence: consistency and clarity, self-esteem as a distance learner, a sense of identity with the school, social integration and adequate support services. These five factors are closely aligned with the research of Tinto (1975), Bean and Metzner (1985), and Rendón (1994). Miller (1995) echoes this view that online education is primarily learner-centered, and asserts that the factors related to persistence lie with the individual's motivation and ability to function as an independent learner.

Because of the limitations of the previous models of Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) in relation to nontraditional students and online learning, Rovai (2003) calls for an adapted model that more suitably addresses the unique needs of nontraditional students in online programs. Rovai (2003) has developed an expanded model of persistence for the online learning environment (see figure 3). He states:

Consequently, a synthesis of Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's models may be a better predictor of the persistence of nontraditional adult students than either

model by itself. However, these two models were designed with traditional course delivery in mind, that is, traditional and nontraditional students who attended classes on campus. Although they are relevant for online programs, they should be adapted to the needs of online learners in order to better explain persistence and attrition in distance education programs (p. 8).

Figure 3. *Persistence model for the nontraditional student in online programs (Rovai, 2003)*



In addition to the well-established factors identified by Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985), Rovai considers several other factors that contribute to the persistence of nontraditional students in online learning environments. Prerequisite skills in the area of technology literacy, and reading and writing skills are included (Rowntree, 1995); these skills are not necessarily inconsequential for the traditional undergraduate student persistence, however for the nontraditional student in an online learning environment, he proposes that they are essential for success. The five factors of Workman and Stenard (1996) closely align with aspects of the Tinto model (1975), and with validation principles (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994). For example, as students receive accessible services and clarity in expectations, they are enabled and supported in degree progression and completion. Rovai also includes the factor of pedagogy, and states that for the nontraditional student in an online learning environment a congruency between individual learning style and teaching style must occur (Grow, 1996). The adult student is typically an independent and self-directed learner, and persistence in the online environment often requires the same. Rovai proposes that this model more accurately reflects the complexities of persistence for both the nontraditional student and the online learning environment. He recommends a blended hybrid approach to remediate some of the challenges in a solely online program, an especially relevant conclusion for the current study which explores integration and validation with a hybrid learning environment. Rovai states:

Hybrid programs promise the best of both worlds, offering most of the convenience of all-online programs without the complete loss of face-to-face



contact. The hybrid model assumes that online learning can be enhanced during one or more face-to-face sessions that foster academic and social integration with the school (p. 13).

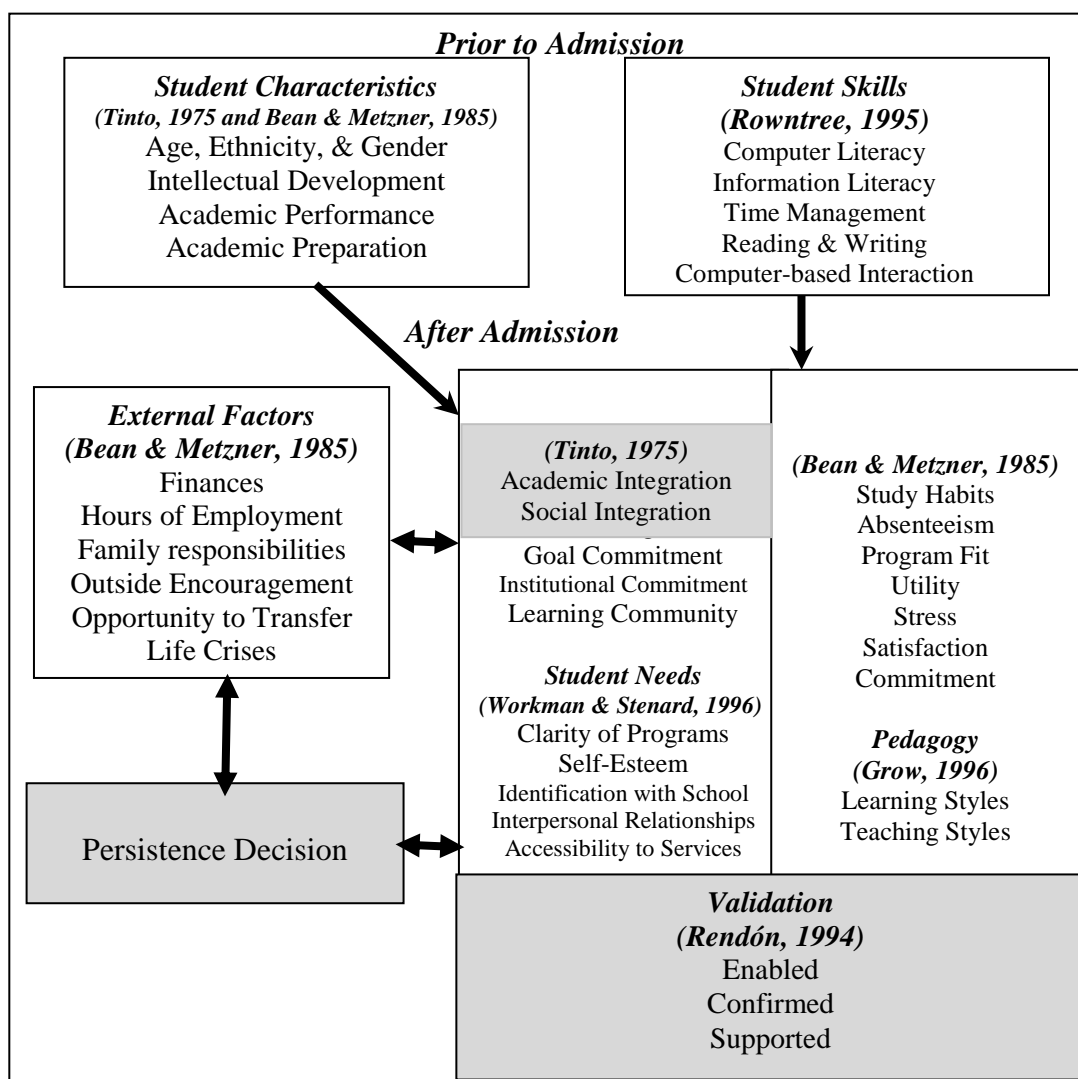
### *Summary*

The current study will explore the experience of the nontraditional student in a hybrid-online learning environment in the areas of academic and social integration, and validation. The models of Tinto (1975), Bean and Metzner (1985), Rendón (1994), and Rovai (2003) each have relevance for the context of this study. Tinto lays the conceptual framework of the need for academic and social integration in order to successfully assimilate and complete one's intended program. Bean and Metzner add external influences as important factors for the nontraditional students. Rendón proposes that the resulting validating experiences take on differing levels of relevancy for the nontraditional student. Finally, Rovai has brought this research into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with applicability in developing a contemporary model of persistence for the nontraditional student in the online learning environment. The researcher will use these models as the basis for the current study, and proposes an expanded model of the Rovai model (see figure 4) to include validation. The author of this study added 'validation' to this model as an essential factor in persistence for the nontraditional student (Rendón, 1994). As is evident in the model, the relevant factors are complex and in some cases overlapping; the author, thereby has limited the current study to a selected few.

The purpose of the present study is to explore how academic integration and social integration are experienced by students in this program through the face-to-face

and online learning environments, the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation in the face-to-face and online experiences of students in the program, the contribution of validation to a sense of preparedness, and differences between Native American students and non-Native students.

Figure 4. *Rovai's persistence model with validation as an essential factor in persistence for the nontraditional student*



## Chapter III

### Methods

This study used qualitative methods to explore the academic integration, social integration (Tinto, 1975; Bean and Metzner, 1985), and validation (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994) of graduate students in a special education teacher training program delivered in a hybrid format of face-to-face and online instruction.

The research questions that were addressed in this study were:

1. How are academic integration and social integration experienced by students through the face-to-face and online learning environments?
2. What are the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation in the face-to-face and online experiences of students in this program?
3. How well prepared do participants feel to teach Native American students with disabilities, and what are the bases of these perceptions?
4. Are there differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in the areas of academic integration, social integration, validation and sense of preparedness?

#### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 13 students from the first cohort of a graduate-level special education licensing program (see appendix A). These participants ranged in age from 25 to 58 years-old, included four male (31%) and nine female (69%) students, and four native (31%) and nine non-native (69%) students (see Table 2). The first cohort began with 21 students enrolled for the first semester in September, 2008. Fifteen

students remained enrolled throughout the two-year licensure program, which ended in spring of 2010. At the final face-to-face session in May, 2010, 15 students were presented with the opportunity to participate in this study; consent forms were collected either at this meeting or at a later date (see appendix B). Out of these 15 students, one student did not consent to participate in the study; another student moved out of state and attempts to contact her were unsuccessful. Unsuccessful attempts were made to interview an additional six students who dropped out of the program during or immediately after the first semester.

Table 2

*Participant Demographics<sup>2</sup>*

Name	Age	Gender	Married	Dependents	Prior License	Tribal member
Eagle	32	F	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Mark	42	M	Yes	Yes	No	No
Desiree	53	F	No	Yes	Yes	No
Shannon	48	F	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Beatrice	32	F	No	No	No	No
Kan Keo	49	F	Yes	Yes	No	No
Will	47	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Katherine	48	F	No	Yes	No	Yes
Jonathan	25	M	No	No	Yes	No
Paul Ray	58	M	Yes	No	No	No
Margaret	46	F	No	Yes	No	Yes
Nadia	35	F	No	Yes	No	Yes
Cindy	31	F	No	Yes	No	No

<sup>2</sup> All names of the participants have been changed and no direct identification has been made to the school districts that employ them or the colleges that they attended. Participant chosen pseudonyms are used throughout this study to protect confidentiality.

### *Methods*

Qualitative research methods were selected because they provided the process for the researcher to most effectively explore the questions of interest. As a program with a main goal to prepare teachers from a Native American perspective to work with students with disabilities, a qualitative methodology allowed for substantive discourse to occur with all students, and for a richness in and depth of conversation focused on the individual experience (Creswell, 2012; Kerlinger, 1973). As a new special education teacher training initiative, it was not known at the start of the study what themes would emerge as the exploration moved forward. The qualitative approach allowed for the data themselves to generate themes and patterns of the student experience. A qualitative approach allows for a “grounded theory” approach. Grounded theory “provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications,” all within the framework of a qualitative process (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). A grounded theory enables you to generate a broad theory about your qualitative central phenomena ‘grounded’ in the data, and is suited for this study because existing theories do not fully address the participant experience (Creswell, 2012).

The exploratory and emergent nature of qualitative research does not include hypothesis testing, but rather an unfolding and evolving process which reveals dimensions of the participant experience. According to Maxwell (1996):

The distinctive characteristic of hypotheses in qualitative research is that they are generally formulated after the researcher has begun the study; they are grounded

in the data and are developed and tested in interaction with it, rather than being prior ideas that are simply tested against data (p. 53).

Although the initial population of 21 students who were enrolled at the start of the cohort was a sufficient number for a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2012), the researcher concluded that a qualitative design was the most appropriate choice for the current study. As noted earlier, 13 students in the special education teacher training program agreed to participate in this study.

#### *Sources of Data*

A case study approach was used to examine what dimensions of the student experience contributed to academic integration, social integration, and validation. Creswell states that the case study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (2007, p. 73). The sources of data in this study were a review of program evaluation information, individual interviews, archival analysis, a focus group and a written survey nine months after completion of the program.

*Program evaluation information.* Program evaluation information included a focus group that was held at the final face-to-face class session in May 2010. The focus group was conducted by faculty from both participating institutions, and used a semi-structured and open-ended format. Topics included: overall impressions of the program, what were the strengths of the program, what was challenging, and suggested improvements for future cohorts. Open-ended questions are “those that supply a frame of reference for respondents’ answers but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and

their expression” (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 483). An open-ended question allows for an open-ended response, with minimal interference by the bias or perspective of the interviewer (Creswell, 2012). Questions in the focus groups were open-ended to learn the “meaning” that students give to their experience. “For the qualitative researcher, the only reality is that constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation” (Creswell, 1994, p. 4). Kerlinger (1973) cites several benefits of using this format:

Open ended questions are flexible, they have possibilities of depth, they enable the interviewer to clear up misunderstanding (through probing); they enable the interviewer to ...detect ambiguity, to encourage cooperation and achieve rapport, and to make better estimates of respondents’ true intentions, beliefs, and attitudes (p. 484).

Discussion with educational colleagues who were familiar with the program and the students followed the focus group. This information guided the development of the more in-depth individual interviews, and identified early themes discussed by the students. The focus group was video recorded and transcribed.

*Individual Interviews.* Fifteen interviews were conducted during the summer and fall of 2010. Eleven participants were interviewed once; two of the participants were interviewed twice. Interviews were held in public locations in the home town of each of the participants such as the local library, a coffee shop or a community center. The interviews lasted approximately two hours each. Six of the interviews were conducted with two interviewers (the author of this study and another faculty member), with post-meetings between the interviewers to compare impressions, share researcher notes and

support interrater reliability (Creswell, 2012). Nine of the interviews were conducted by the author of this study alone.

The decision by the researcher to conduct a second interview with two of the Native American participants was based on observations during the first interviews. During the interviews in a community center meeting room, a camera was set up for videotaping and the researcher took notes. The setting, the camera and the note-taking seemed to make the participants uncomfortable. For example, after reviewing the tapes, the researcher observed several instances of disengagement and discomfort through instances of non-verbal cues such as leaning back, folding arms across chest, looking away, etc. (Creswell, 2012). The researcher conducted a second interview with each participant, this time in their own school, without a camera and without the note-taking. This approach was useful to verify data, ask follow-up questions to clarify meaning and to broaden understanding (Shank, 2006).

The interview protocol was constructed from components from a variety of sources including Rendón (1994), Gohn, Schwartz and Donnely (2000), Clark, Brooks, Lee, Daley, Crawford and Maxis (2006), and broadly from the foundational work on academic and social integration theory first developed by Tinto (1975). Guiding questions were developed and reviewed by a team of special education faculty, supporting the validity of the interview process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, by the nature of this exploratory and emergent research design, other questions developed during the course of the study. As in the focus group, the interviews began with open-ended questions, with subsequent questions attempting to prompt the interviewee to



discuss further something he or she mentioned in an answer (Creswell, 1994; Kerlinger, 1973; Creswell, 2012). A set of nine guiding questions were used (see appendix C), but also allowed the individual conversations to guide and prompt other questions or topics in an emergent manner (Creswell, 2007).

The individual interview protocol was purposefully open-ended and broadly structured to prompt students for information about their decision to join the program, student backgrounds, their expectations for and the reality of the experience, the significant events and people that contributed to academic integration, social integration, and validation, and the general effects this experience has had on them. Questions focused on who and what provided the support that was meaningful to them during the program. Other areas explored were the challenges of the program, what made it possible for students to continue in the program, and what other obligations or life events competed with their attention to their studies and how this affected their interaction patterns.

All interviews were video recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed. The transcribed individual interviews yielded almost 800 pages of data. The researcher used Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software HyperResearch (version 2.8.3) for coding and analysis. Coding is defined by Mills (2007, p. 124) as “the process of trying to find patterns and meaning in data collected through the use of surveys, interviews, and questionnaires.” A recommended process for analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was followed. The steps in this process include: analyze the data according to the research questions; identify and classify exemplars, look for commonalities and

differences between students; sort and catalogue the exemplars into themes; use the themes to construct patterns and additional themes; create categories from related and sorted exemplars; arrange themes according to similarities that are common across students and sub-groups of students, as well as characteristics of the themes that emerged. In coding the data, themes began to emerge as patterns that continually repeat themselves within the data (Mills, 2007). Peer debriefing between the three interviewers supported the validity of the process and conclusions.

*Archival analysis.* The researcher reviewed archival online postings from selected courses of the licensing program. The program course content was delivered primarily online, supplemented by two face-to-face meetings each semester. The cohort students took eight classes over the course of two years as a part of their licensure program. The course content was delivered through the use of the Course Management System (CMS) of Moodle. This CMS was chosen because it was accessible to students at both institutions, and offered a seamless way to deliver the courses collaboratively. Within Moodle there are a variety of features to both deliver content and promote interactions such as discussion forums, wikis and chat rooms. Analyses of these records of online postings focused on describing the quantity of student engagement with the course content, with peers and with faculty, as well as differences between individuals or groups over time. These analyses offered a source of comparison with the anecdotal records gained from the interviews, identified patterns of interaction, and the development of academic integration, social integration and validation.

*Focus Group.* A second focus group with participants took place in February of 2011, approximately nine months after completion of the licensure part of the program. The focus group was conducted by faculty from *Small Private College* and *Large Public IHE*. The site of the focus group was centrally located to participants, and was familiar to them because most face-to-face class sessions had been held there. This discussion focused on how well prepared students felt for their current positions, how the culturally specific model of the program affected their practice with students, and their intentions to stay in the special education field (see appendix D). All 13 participants were invited to attend this session through email, written correspondence and phone; eight students were present.

*Written Survey.* A written survey was completed in February of 2011, approximately nine months after completion of the licensure part of the program. The survey instrument was an adapted version of the "Teacher Recruitment and Retention" survey developed by MDE. Several questions were added to this survey address topics specific to the program (see appendix E). All 13 participants were invited through email, written correspondence, in person and by phone to complete this survey; nine of them did so. The purpose of the written survey was to gain additional insight into the students' general attitudes, perceptions and preparedness beliefs relative to the positions they took after completion of the program.

### *Reliability*

The biggest threat to reliability in qualitative research is personal bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sources of data in this study included interviews, focus groups, a

written survey and archival analysis. This study largely relied on the participants to offer reliable information or data based on their personal accounts, real life experiences and face-to-face interactions. This method of data collection offers rich accounts and information based on the real life situations because of the very personal approach taken. However, with these types of data gathering methods, the interpretation, errors, misinterpretation and personal observations of the researcher may affect perceptions, coding, analyses and conclusions (Creswell, 2012).

Shank (2006) recommends several methods for demonstrating reliability in qualitative research, several of which were followed in this study. To verify the data gathered during the interviews and focus groups, the researcher asked participants to explain a comment when unsure of certain facts. Follow-up and probing questions were used to clarify meaning and broaden understanding. The researcher verified facts and information across participants and between multiple sources of data (Shank, 2006). Two participants were interviewed a second time to verify and gain further understanding of their experience in the program. The written survey was reviewed by colleagues familiar with the program to ensure that the questions were designed to gather the most useful information related to the research questions without creating a cumbersome task. These extra steps supported accuracy, consistency and reliability throughout the course of this study.

### *Validity*

In order to represent the participants' reality of their experience as accurately as possible, issues of validity were addressed through a variety of procedures during the

course of this study. Creswell and Miller (2000) identify nine different types of validity procedures useful in qualitative research, five of which were used in this study. First, triangulation of data “is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). Several sources of data “reduce the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to specific methods and allows for a better assessment” of the explanations that emerge (Maxwell, 1996, p. 94). Triangulation is achieved in this study through the use of multiple sources of data across multiple participants. Next, peer debriefing is “the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomena being explore” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.129). Several colleagues familiar with this licensure program provided support, feedback, challenges to interpretations, flaws in reasoning, and guidance to the researcher. This debriefing was ongoing and took place during the development of the interview questions, initial coding and analysis, identifying emergent themes, and reaching conclusions. Regular consultation with education colleagues took place to summarize the status of the research and to discuss emerging themes, concepts and explanations. Another validity check recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000), is research reflexivity, a process of “identifying and disclosing personal assumptions, biases and beliefs that may color the research process or conclusions” (p. 127). A first step in this process was that the interview questions were developed, reviewed by several colleagues with qualitative expertise, and revised to reduce bias and avoid leading questions. Next, the researcher has attempted to use “thick, rich descriptions” by providing as much detail

as possible about the participants, the setting, and the themes (p. 129). Creswell and Miller (2000) propose that the strength of narrative detail is that it brings a realistic context to the study, and enhances credibility for the reader. Finally, “member-checks” involve systematically getting feedback about one’s data and conclusions from the participants. The purpose of member checks is to provide participants the opportunity to “confirm the credibility of the information” (p. 127). Some say that this process is the “most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what they say and the perspective they have” (Maxwell, 1994, p.94). Member-checking was accomplished through providing participants the raw data (sent transcriptions), the preliminary findings, and a final report. During this process, participants were invited to provide comments or feedback on the accuracy and authenticity of the information.

### *Limitations*

This study is confined to the 13 graduate students in the special education tribal licensure program in a collaborative effort between *Small Private College* and *Large Public University*. The methods used in this study seek to explore the personal experience of these students, and may not apply to other students in future cohorts of the same program, or to graduate students in other special education licensure programs.

Of significance in this study is the role of the researcher as the human instrument, particularly as it relates to the possibility of influencing the outcomes of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this instance, the researcher taught two classes during the two-year program, supervised the student teaching experience of five of the participants, and had significant faculty-student contact with many of the participants during the

program. A valid concern is how this pre-existing relationship between researcher and participant may have impacted the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Additionally, there is concern that the researcher may hold bias, assumptions, and values that may be reflected in her conclusions. The researcher recognizes the weight of these concerns and has made efforts to reduce reactivity and personal bias by including safeguards in the data collection and analysis plan. Although at times a pre-existing relationship with participants could be a limitation, within the context of this study the relationships between researcher and participant provided a foundation for trust and meaningful conversations to take place. For some of the interviews, the lack of a pre-existing relationship would have been a limitation.

In summary, qualitative research methods were used to explore the experiences of students in the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program. The focus of the study was to explore how students have experienced academic integration, social integration and validation, and how these factors have impacted their teaching practice with a diverse student body. Several sources of data were selected to inform and broaden an understanding of these factors within the context of a graduate-level teacher licensure program. Chapter Four will report the findings of this study.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of this study which examined how graduate students in a hybrid-online special education teacher training program experienced academic integration, social integration (Tinto, 1975; Bean & Metzner, 1985), and validation (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini, et al., 1994), as well as perceptions of preparedness to work as a special education teacher. This chapter presents qualitative findings obtained through face-to-face interviews with the participants, analysis of the archives of online postings from select classes, a written survey, and a focus group approximately nine months after completion of the program. All participants were graduate students in a special education teaching licensure program which was offered in a hybrid format of face-to-face and online learning environments. The chapter starts with a profile of each participant; each research question is then addressed by providing information shared and examples from the experiences of the students in their own voice. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How are academic integration and social integration experienced by students through the face-to-face and online learning environments?
2. What are the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation in the face-to-face and online experiences of students in the program?
3. How well prepared do participants feel to teach Native American students with disabilities, and what are the bases of these perceptions?



4. Are there differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in the areas of academic integration, social integration, validation and sense of preparedness?

### *Participants*

Twenty-one students started classes in the first cohort in the fall of 2008, 12 from *Small Private College* and nine from *Large Public University*. Fifteen students (71%) persisted through completion of the coursework, nine from *Small Private College* (75%) and six (67%) from *Large Public University*. Of the original 21 students who started classes in fall of 2008, six (29%) did not continue into the second semester; five of these students (83%) were Native American females, and one (17%) was non-Native and male. Program coordinators at *Small Private College* and *Large Public University* reported that these students left for personal reasons related to family, work and other personal issues which posed challenges in their ability to continue in the program.

The researcher attempted to enroll 15 students from the program for participation in this study; 13 agreed. One student declined to participate, and another student moved out of state during the final semester of the cohort and was unable to be contacted. All participants were enrolled in the program from fall of 2008 through spring of 2010. All 13 students (100%) participated in individual interviews, eight (62%) attended a follow-up focus group, and nine (69%) completed a written survey. Of the 13 participants, four (31%) were male and nine (69%) were female. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 58 years old, with an average age of 42 years, and the median age slightly older at 46 years old. Males had an average age of 43 years old; females had an average age of 41.5 years

old. Four participants (31%) were Native American, eight (62%) were Euro-American, and one (8%) was Southeast Asian. When asked about their marital status during their time in the program, seven participants (54%) reported being single or divorced, and six (46%) reported being married. Eight (62%) said they had dependent children at home while completing their licensure program. Of the 13 students who participated in the study, all (100%) worked full-time jobs in addition to attending school full-time; 11 (85%) worked in public, charter or alternative schools and two (15%) worked in non-school positions. Five (38%) of the participants held a valid Minnesota teacher's license before entering the program and for all others (62%) this was their initial licensure program (see Table 3).

One year after the program ended, eight (62%) of the participants were fully licensed in two areas of special education (Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and Specific Learning Disabilities); seven (88%) of the Euro-American students were fully licensed and one (25%) of the Native-American students was fully licensed; one Southeast Asian student was not yet licensed. Three of the four males (75%), and five of the nine females (56%) were fully licensed in a general education field, and were teaching full-time in a public school setting concurrently while in this program.

Table 3

*Participant Licensure Completion*

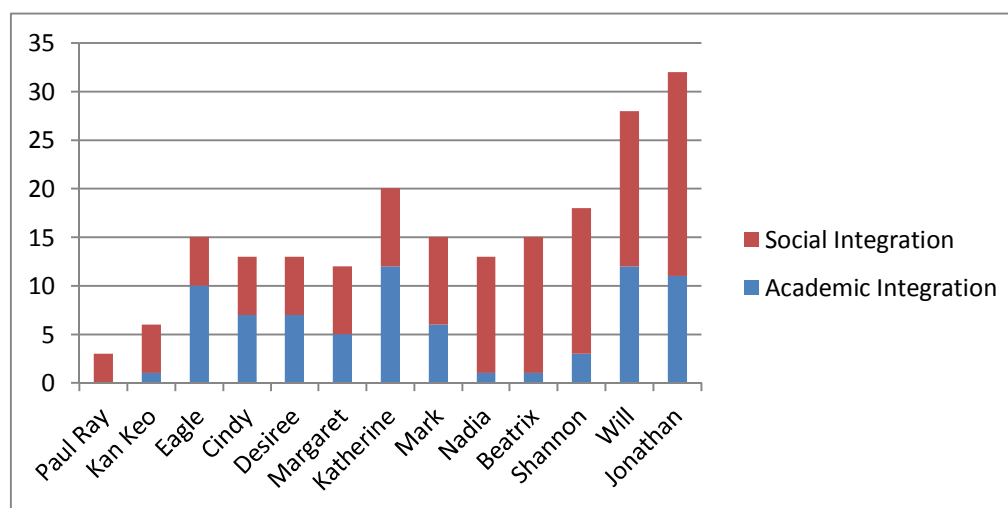
Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Married	Dependents	Prior License	Enrolled Tribal member	SpEd license completed
Eagle	32	F	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mark	42	M	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Desiree	53	F	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Shannon	48	F	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Beatrice	32	F	No	No	No	No	Yes
Kan Keo	49	F	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Will	47	M	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Katherine	48	F	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Jonathan	25	M	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Paul Ray	58	M	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Margaret	46	F	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nadia	35	F	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Cindy	31	F	No	No	No	No	Yes

*Research Question One: How are academic integration and social integration experienced by students through the face-to-face and online learning environments?*

Data coded from the interviews were used to aid in the understanding of how students experienced academic and social integration in the face-to-face and online learning environments. There were 203 statements from the interviews that were coded as “integration”, with 76 coded as academic integration and 127 coded as social integration (see figure 5). The mean number of academic integration statements was 5.8, and median was 6; for social integration the mean was 9.8, and the median 8. Statements were coded as academic integration if participants’ indicated that an experience contributed to their ability to meet the expectations of the institution or to their intellectual growth.

Statements were coded as social integration if participants' indicated that an interpersonal experience contributed to social communication, friendship support, faculty support, or a shared affiliation. The researcher also used data from archival analysis, a follow-up focus group and a written survey to further explore the research question.

Figure 5. Number of academic and social integration statements made by participants during the individual interviews.



#### *Academic integration.*

*Initial goal commitment.* When participants were asked why they wanted to get a special education license, males cited reasons related to enhancing and securing their current jobs. All four of the males (100%) who completed the program stated the reason to receive the special education license was primarily for job security or enhancement of their current positions. Nine months after completing the program, three of the four males (75%) were fully licensed in special education, have remained in their previous jobs, and

intended to stay there for the next five years. Jonathan, a licensed math teacher, explained his reasons for seeking a special education license:

I heard about this program and it works with Native American students, which I already was working with. I thought it made sense to go to a program that would help these kids. And I want the license down the line if I decide to become a Special Ed teacher. It opens a lot of doors, too, you know? It's like a highly employable field, but my main thing was I just wanted to help my classroom teaching.

Paul Ray, director of a charter school in northern Minnesota, felt that the special education training would help him to understand the needs of the students better and also would allow him to assist his small special education staff in meeting the legal requirements of the special education process. He explained:

I knew as a director, I was lacking a lot of practical experience and knowledge in education. So that was part of my understanding of what I would pursue when I took the job as the director, is to find a way to become more engaged and knowledgeable of education as a profession, at some time. So, part is providing more specialized support for the teachers involved in education. The other piece is the special education work load. From that standpoint, my being licensed in Special Education provided additional benefit in terms of the practical running of the school, so it seemed to be a good idea.

Five out of nine females (56%) stated that the special education training and the cultural education would benefit them in their current jobs, although this was not the

primary reason for participation in this licensure program. The Native framework of the licensure program was a primary reason for selecting this program for eight (62%) of the students. Shannon spoke about how the training would help her in her current job as a special education teacher: “The population at D\*\*\* R\*\*\*\* is 30, probably 33% Native American. And so that was really appealing, because that’s the kids I’m going to be teaching and I have a lot of those kids. That was intriguing, I guess.” Similarly, Kan Keo felt that the special education training in the program would assist her in better meeting the needs of her Hmong community, and she also liked the structure of the program. Kan Keo explained her reasons for entering the program:

I have seen so many other students who don’t receive adequate service in education and there a lot of gap, a lot of misinformation between parent and teacher. And I thought I could do that. I could do better than that, because I have the cultural background. I know the people. I speak multiple languages, and I can be a much better teacher for those students. I felt I could do as good or better for those students.

Additionally, females often cited personal goals, finding a greater purpose and a sense of destiny as reasons why they joined the program. Four of the nine females (44%) have moved into new positions since completing the program, and four (44%) have remained in the same positions they held while in the program. The females expressed openness to changing jobs, although results from the written survey showed that most (80%) stated that they would stay in special education for a “long time” or “until they retire.”

The convenience and flexibility of a hybrid program was an important factor in selecting this program for several students, although this instructional design was the primary reason for selecting this program for only two students (15%). Paul Ray simply stated: “The fact that it was online was essential for me.” Will, a full-time social studies teacher and father of two young children, found the hybrid structure appealing: “Just the freedom of being able to log on and log off, and be in your own home. As naive as I was at that time, it just seemed more convenient. So that was nice; that was the big attraction.” Cindy, the youngest member of the cohort, held several jobs and also appreciated the flexibility of a hybrid program: “I was looking for something where I could still work. My job requires me to work every other weekend, and evenings, so I had to find something that was days or weekends or online and then I found this.”

*Grades.* Grades are an extrinsic reward received by students from the institution (Tinto, 1975). For the participants of this study, the range of grade point averages (on a 4.0 scale) was 2.73 to 4.00, with the average being 3.55. Males had an average GPA of 3.64, while females had an average GPA of 3.52. Native American students had an average GPA of 3.20, while non-Native students had an average GPA of 3.70. Those who held a prior teaching license had an average GPA of 3.50; those for whom this was their initial teaching license had an average GPA of 3.56 (see table 4).

Table 4

*Participant Grades and Overall GPA on a 4.0 Scale*

Pseudonym	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	Overall GPA
Nadia	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	4.0	1.5	2.5	0.0	2.73
Margaret	3.5	3.0	4.0	2.5	3.5	2.5	2.5	4.0	3.13
Katherine	4.0	3.0	4.0	2.5	3.5	2.5	2.5	4.0	3.20
Cindy	4.0	3.5	3.5	2.5	3.0	2.5	4.0	3.5	3.30
Will	3.5	3.5	3.0	2.5	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.40
Mark	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	3.60
Eagle	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	2.5	4.0	4.0	3.67
Jonathan	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	2.5	4.0	4.0	3.67
Kan Keo	4.0	3.5	4.0	3.5	4.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.73
Paul Ray	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.88
Desiree	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.90
Shannon	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00
Beatrix	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00
Mean	3.92	3.67	3.83	3.17	3.83	3.00	3.46	3.63	3.55

*Institutional expectations.* Meeting the expectations of the institution is an aspect of academic integration which is closely related to grade performance (Tinto, 1975). The primary form of faculty-student interaction was through the online format which created challenges for many students in understanding expectations. For example, as a hybrid program, some students depended on and expected full access to the tools available through the online course management system as a way to receive feedback on their course progress. When instructors did not fully utilize these online tools, it led to confusion on the part of some students in knowing whether or not they were fully meeting expectations. Jonathan explained:

I know this is a little thing but I don't know if the grading program on Moodle works well or if professors weren't using it or using it effectively, because I would check my grades and I would be failing because grades we hadn't turned in yet, because they hadn't been assigned yet, would turn into zeros. I know that's kind



of a ridiculous thing but it kind of hurt my ambition in some ways. And I looked through and be like, “Oh, I’m failing; Oh, I’m not actually failing.” So I didn’t like that at all.

Both students and teachers experienced challenges in communicating and maintaining consistent and clear expectations through the online format. Students felt that at times grading standards were not consistent across classes or instructors. Mathew talked about this frustration:

I think consistency from professor to professor was kind of hard. I think the internet amplifies things. Most of the students are learning how to be students on the internet and a lot of the professors were learning how to be professors on the internet. Even though most of the professors had taught for years and years and years, they were like first year professors for the internet. There were times expectations that would have come across very clearly in a traditional setting became more confusing with the internet setting. I didn’t really understand what was going on there. I felt like sometimes expectations from class to class weren’t the same. Sometimes it was hard with two professors to see which professor is the one that is setting the guidelines, which professor is the one that I’m writing for. So, I found that to be kind of difficult, too.

Instructional design factors were at times a hindrance for students to meet the expectations of the instructors. For example, in a traditional face-to-face learning environment, group work is a valuable activity which often creates a mutually beneficial and cooperative learning experience. Instructors in the program under study attempted to

replicate this group process in the online learning environment, but students often reported that the group work was more of a challenge than the positive learning experience it was intended to be. Shannon discussed the challenges she faced in completing the online group projects: “The really difficult thing about the online time was the group work, only because of people’s schedules. Not all students were online at the same time. That was the hard thing about group work.” In an online format, there is not an opportunity to consider non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions or intonation. This lack of the social cues normally found in face-to-face interactions can lead to misunderstandings and skewed perceptions when relying on the written form of communication alone. Jonathan discussed an example of an instructor whom he felt did not communicate expectations clearly:

I felt that she had really specific expectations that she didn't communicate for assignments. I'm ok with people that have specific and difficult expectations for assignments, and I'm ok with people not communicating about what they want for an assignment much, but I think maybe it was a combination of the two. I felt that I don't know that she was, I got the impression that she was looking down on us, and I don't know if that is accurate or not.

All students in the program were graduate students, and had varying levels of experience with the online format. Yet, many students were unprepared for the amount of work that was involved in a hybrid program. All students in the program worked full-time, and nine (69%) had dependent children at home. They were not solely students, but as adult nontraditional learners also had other roles and responsibilities that competed

with their role as student. Katherine, a widowed mother of seven children, simply said: “Oh geez, how come I have to think so hard?” Will discussed the challenges he felt in completing the work and in meeting the expectations of the institution:

I knew it was a lot of work and it took me by surprise at first. Because for the first year and a half, the classes were, you learn the pace of each class. You knew what to expect, you knew how it was rolling, the ball was already in motion, so you’re going at this speed and then, the one class just boom, woke you up. And you just went whoa, this is getting hard. For anyone interested in taking an online course, it’s a lot harder, I think, than going to campus because there is no turn-off.

*Intellectual growth.* For many participants, academic integration was facilitated through the relationships that developed with their peers in the cohort. A sense of belonging, identification with the norms of the group, and a shared affiliation developed over time. Participants found that this supportive learning climate fostered intellectual growth. Kan Keo attributed her own learning and meeting the expectations of the institution to both direct contact with and indirect observation of her peers. She reflected on this process:

The thing that is good about a cohort is that I could talk to some of my classmates. When we have small groups, we already establish some of the relationships. I call them and find out, what the question meant. Sometime when they post, and I try to see, what was the question the instructor asked and how did he answer. When I understand that, then I know how to go back and formulate my own thinking on this. Because when I don’t understand the question, I can’t get that done.

The relationships that developed fostered intellectual growth and an appreciation for the work and lives of their peers. Peers learned from each other, and valued this process. Beatrix shared how these relationships fostered openness in communication and intellectual growth:

I loved it that a lot of the people in our cohort were Native. I was so comfortable asking them questions. I don't know if I would feel as comfortable asking someone I didn't know. I could go to them and be like, "What do you think about this?" And they were just so open about it and responsive.

Students were brought together two times each semester for face-to-face classes, which ran from Friday night through Sunday afternoon. All students (100%) stated that they enjoyed the face-to-face classes, and that the time spent together contributed to their overall academic integration. In addition, several students commented on specific aspects of the face-to-face meetings. For example, Desiree mentioned how a specific presentation style appealed to her personal learning style during these classes: "Academically, the actual...I loved the...this may seem real traditional classroom...but PowerPoints. Get to the material and having that to review again was really good. I really liked that because you could do a lot with that visual." Kan Keo, a student from Southeast Asia, struggled with the reading and writing requirements in the online portions of the class. Although she enjoyed this extended face-to-face time together with her peers, she also expressed a need to spend more time during the face-to-face meeting in discussion. She was overwhelmed with the amount of information presented on the weekends coupled with an inadequate time for processing and reflection. Kan Keo explained:

And I think more discussion time should be allowed, not just with the peers but with the instructors. I think we need more time between the instructors and the group members to discuss more. We are so crunch in time, so you get right to the point very narrowly and specifically, you do not elaborate anything else. That was all you were worried about; time for lunch, time to go, and the next day somebody else. You just present us some information and the next day different information; there are a lot of questions in my mind, I'm not clear yet. I don't have the opportunity to discuss with the class; I don't have time to share with my peers. What do you think? Do I understand the same as you do? I want to be able to have more time with this because if we discuss, we talk, I will be able to remember things better

The students who were a part of the cohort were diverse across many areas including culture, socio-economic class, values and beliefs. This diversity brought both enrichment of and challenges to other's ideas. Katherine expressed an appreciation of the varying ideas and perspectives that she gained from interacting with her cohort peers, "Yup. Because you learn from, there was all walks of life there, all cultures, all beliefs, different; they got to understand the Native point and you also got to understand where they were coming from." Mark commented on how this diversity affected him:

Learning from the American Indian students in our class was an invaluable experience. Knowing their view on things, even if it was sometimes..... I know Margaret would speak her mind. That was good though; there can be such a

divide between people from different cultures and stuff, and when you get to know people it all goes away, not all goes away, but it's different.

The Circle of Courage (COC) framework (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1992) is the foundational model that guided the development of the program, was a recurrent theme throughout each course during the two-years of coursework, and a model to guide the future work of the graduating teachers in the schools (see appendix F). The COC model was meaningful to 12 participants (92%) as a guiding structure that they will use in future work, and found it meaningful to them professionally and personally. Students commented on the COC as an essential component in their academic integration through intellectual growth. Participants stated that this philosophical foundation of COC is a model that will continue to guide their personal lives and influence their professional practice. Mark explained how the continuity of the COC theme throughout all classes of the licensure program affirmed what he already knew and also helped him to be aware of its implications in the classroom and beyond:

....and just the Circle of Courage, because I apply it in my life and I apply it when I student taught or when I'm a para, whatever I do. I keep those things in mind. It's just a big issue of respect and respecting the kids. I always had that and knew it, but just the Circle of Courage really brought it up more, because we worked on it so much. Because when you're writing your papers and you gotta look at those, putting those pieces all together, it just makes you more cognizant of it, it's like, oh yeah, I really have to keep those things in mind.

All students in the program were given the opportunity to attend an in-depth workshop on the Circle of Courage in the Black Hills, South Dakota. All expenses were paid for this four day trip and five students (38%) went, along with one faculty. For those who were able to attend, the Circle of Courage training in South Dakota complemented the intellectual growth and personal development they experienced through the program. Cindy reflected on the impact that the conference had on her, and found it to be a meaningful and transformative learning and growth experience:

It was very, I don't know how to put it in words; it was a spiritual experience. I mean some of the discussions we've had, the material, the movies, and then when I went on the trip to South Dakota; that was a true spiritual experience. I feel like it's made me a better person... more informed. I'm just so interested in everything now; I want to learn about everything.

While students had varying expectations upon entering the program, all participants (100%) stated that the cultural aspect of the program was meaningful to them. For the Native-American participants, the inclusion of the cultural focus in the program was significant because of the recognition, respect and value accorded to it throughout the program. Non-Native, participants expressed that the cultural learning of the Native American perspective changed them both personally and professionally. Will, whose primary motivation for choosing the program was because of the hybrid-online format, found that the cultural learning was an unexpected, but meaningful, aspect in his own professional development and intellectual growth:

I didn't have any expectations. I really didn't know, and that's why it was kind of refreshing to actually acquire the knowledge. I knew I was going to get the special ed. skills that I needed and that was going to be new, and I knew that. That's why I liked that Native American part; that was the added twist and that's the part I walk away with, and I'm glad I did that part.

The hybrid-online design of the program both benefitted and challenged the exchange and appreciation of ideas. Eagle illustrated the benefits she felt in the online exchanges, and how this format enriched her own processing and sharing of ideas:

It's different because you don't talk to people in between classes and you don't really process the information within the class. But, I think it gives you a chance to kind of think about things and come back with the things that you've thought about and kind of process things more. Then, it's kind of you get a more chronicled conversation than just one time. I thought that was nice. Then, I think you got a little better understanding of where we're coming from. Just having that time and being able to write things out. That was nice.

Katherine, who initially hesitated to speak honestly in the online discussions, gained confidence as well as an appreciation of the dialogue that occurred. She came to value the conversations and differing opinions of her peers, and considered this process as a valuable contributor in her intellectual growth. She recalled the reciprocal learning that she experienced:

You answered the ones you thought didn't get it or didn't get it the way you got it. Then you wrote your answer and they'd go, "Oh, I'd never thought about it that



way.” I thought it was really, really cool, because you can give your point versus their point then, and come out with an equal answer. And sometimes you just never did agree, but most of the time you got your view and his view and we came out with an understanding. Because you learn from... there was all walks of life there, all cultures, all beliefs, different, and they got to understand the Native point and you also got to understand where they were coming from. I found it very interesting. There was stuff that I didn’t know or stuff that I didn’t agree with also, and I just kinda’ went, “Are you telling me?” And they would go, “Yeah.” And I go, “I never thought about it this way but did you ever think about it this way?” Like some had to do with the spiritual Indian something. I go, “In my beliefs I think you got that a little bit backwards, and you know because different tribes learn different ways.” And I go, “Well, we do it this way.” It gave me a chance to tell them, “You know I believe that, but I believe it this way. I’m not knocking the way you said it, but I just think of it this way.” And he said, “That’s basically the same.” I said, “That’s what I thought.” But they took your opinion pretty fairly and the more you took part in it the more you got out of it.

### *Social Integration*

There were 127 statements from the interviews that were coded as social integration. Statements were coded as social integration if participants indicated that an interpersonal experience contributed to social communication, friendship support, faculty support, or a shared affiliation.

*Relationships with peers.* When the cohort began, students were brought together early in the first semester for their first face-to-face class. They were a group of 21 strangers from a large geographic area, differing life and career circumstances, and several distinctive cultural backgrounds. This diversity did not escape the notice of several participants, and elicited a self-evaluation of whether or not this was the right program for them. Will described his feelings when he first met his cohort peers:

I remember the very first time we had the meeting, everyone's nervous, they don't know each other and they're casing each other out, and several people, I think, showed up and never came back, I think from that first time, which I thought was interesting. But I'm an observer, so I went, didn't say much, and just saw. It was pretty overwhelming, to say the least. You're sitting there, you don't know anybody, you have people coming up, and you don't know if they're guest speakers or if they're part of the program. It was just a lot of stuff.

Students quickly formed connections with each other and the group developed into a supportive network of self-directed and motivated learners. Students moved quickly from being individual students to a cohesive group which depended on each other for support, belonging and success. Following a predictable group formation process, the cohort went through the expected stages of development of forming, norming, storming, and performing<sup>3</sup> (Tuckman, 1965). Beatrix explained her process of evolution as a learner and as a member of the cohort that occurred over time:

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<sup>3</sup> Tuckman's (1965) model highlights the four sequential stages group formation process as forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming refers to a period in which members try to determine their positions in the group, procedures to follow, and the rules of the group. The second stage, storming, starts

Those evolved really quickly into..... The first one, you kind of don't know what to expect. You're more of a passive listener, observer. Then, as we went, it was more like, well let's do this at the face-to-face. We all had more of an idea of what we wanted to see happen, or what we needed out of it or bringing up ideas, talking about things that we wanted to talk about. So, that was cool. It was amazing how even after only meeting people face-to-face a couple times you show up and you're excited to see them and how's it going. It's a really strange feeling to let go and realize even though we've only seen each other a couple times we really know each other now at this point. So, by the end, it was really cool that way. Once you can realize hey, these are people who are really a part of my life in a way.

All participants (100%) stated that they enjoyed the face-to-face weekends, which were held twice-per-semester. These times together were useful in getting to know each other, giving and receiving social support, and experiencing a sense of belonging. The face-to-face classes solidified personal and professional bonds, and allowed them to get to know each other in a deeper way. The face-to-face weekends provided an opportunity

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when conflict arises as team members resist the influence of the group and rebel against accomplishment of the task. The norming stage begins when the group establishes cohesiveness and commitment to its tasks, finds new ways to work together to accomplish the tasks, and sets norms for appropriate behaviors. The final stage, performing, occurs when the group shows proficiency in working together to achieve its goals and becomes more flexible in following their procedures for working together forming, storming, norming, and performing. Forming refers to a period in which members try to determine their positions in the group, procedures to follow, and the rules of the group. The second stage, storming, starts when conflict arises as team members resist the influence of the group and rebel against accomplishment of the task. The norming stage begins when the group establishes cohesiveness and commitment to its tasks, finds new ways to work together to accomplish the tasks, and sets norms for appropriate behaviors. The final stage, performing, occurs when the group shows proficiency in working together to achieve its goals and becomes more flexible in following their procedures for working together.

for informal and extended contact with faculty and with peers. It also provided a chance for informal social activities, which added to the sense of community. Students often brought their families with them, which allowed for friendships to develop through informal peer group connections. Students who had children developed friendships between the children, as well as cohort peers. Kan Keo talked about these friendships:

At first we didn't bring, I brought mine, but she didn't bring hers. After we were ok to do that; we had the room for our family, then they got to know each other. And we have not just the moms but the daughters too getting a relationship. That's good. Nadia's daughters and my daughter get along really good; they get together and play.

Nadia also enjoyed the opportunity to spend time getting to know the other families, and socializing together. She spoke about these gatherings:

Will had stayed over that next night with his family and my family stayed over so we got together and the kids played. That was nice because my kids and his kids had played before when they had been up. My girls played with Kan Keo's little girl. She was in our room at like midnight, came knocking, the kids got up. It was fun. I hope that they continue.

Social interactions between cohort students were largely limited to the face-to-face weekends, with minimal social exchanges outside of class. However, the time together on the weekends was an important aspect of the program. Nadia commented on the value of these meetings: "The face-to-face piece to it was important. Getting to know

people, because then you were able to better relate or better bounce ideas around, and communicate more effectively.” Cindy elaborated:

It was nice to get away and see everybody in real life. I think that’s really important. There was some of the face-to-face days where I felt like, ok, maybe were not so much learning or getting stuff done, but it as team building or just getting to know your cohort, getting to know your peers. And that’s important. The program wouldn’t have been as impactful or the relationships wouldn’t have been built between everyone involved. I learned a lot just from hearing other people talking about their experiences, the experienced teachers, principals, the mothers, everything that I don’t have experience in. It’s easier to talk with someone face-to-face than, you wouldn’t just bring up personal experiences on Moodle and have a conversation that way.

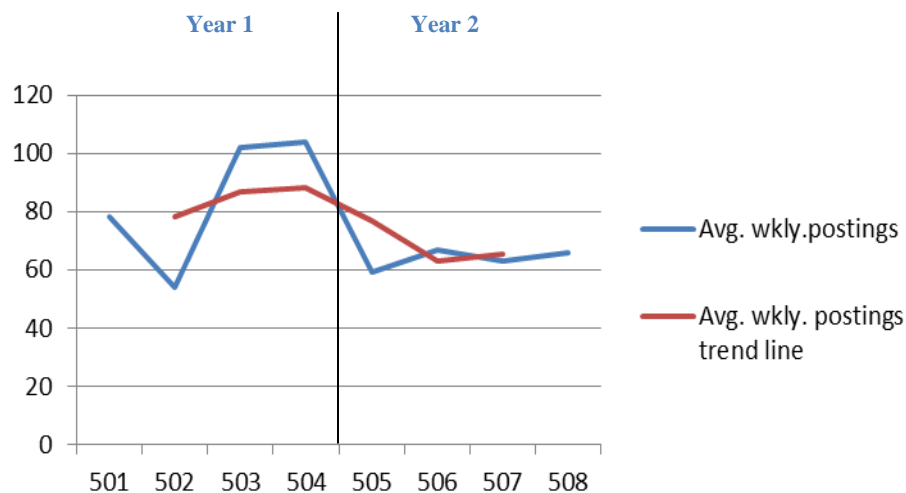
As mentioned earlier (see page 59), several students and faculty attended a conference in South Dakota. In addition to the academic integration benefits discussed, social integration was also supported through the informal interactions that occurred. Students attended workshops, participated in Native American ceremonial traditions and bonded with each other and faculty. Social integration in the cohort was strengthened through the informal contact with each other during this extended time together, and resulted in increased levels of affiliation, friendship and community. Cindy went to South Dakota, and reflected on her experience with her peers:

....and then going to the Circle of Courage, or the South Dakota Reclaiming Youth conference. Patty, Katherine, Shannon, Kan Keo, we all, we hung out, and we’d

all go out to dinner. When we'd go on tours, I think we bonded and became closer through that. That was fun and just the meetings in Hinckley. I would always sit with a different group of people during lunch and just chat.

Students came to depend more on each other for support than the faculty or institution. Oftentimes, peers went to each other first for clarification about assignments, and to faculty next only if they needed additional support. The online community discussion areas were useful for these informal conversations as the cohort progressed. Although participants perceived a higher level of level of support from peers as the cohort progressed, students did not post more frequently as time went on and actually decreased in semester three and four (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Participants average weekly postings



*Figure 6:* All participants' average weekly postings and average weekly postings trend line show an increase in the second semester followed by a decrease in year two.

Several students used social media outside of the designated course management system to collaborate and share information. Shannon explained how this informal connection was an important aspect of her learning process:

We did messenger. Because it was really, having Patty on messenger, we would turn on messenger, we would be working on homework but if we didn't quite understand something, we would be doing on the side, texting back and forth to each other. So, instead of being on the phone, and I would say, "I don't really get this," and we had these huge discussions. I think now, that was a really important part for me. We set it up and then later on, we got Paul Ray on, and we might be doing our homework.

*Social integration and administrative staff.* Several instructors taught more than one class throughout the two-year cohort, and this arrangement contributed to social integration. A familiarity developed, not only with the instructor's expectations for the course, but also with them as an individual. Will explained his view of these relationships:

But just like you would meet, or just like you would get to know the students, some of the teachers that you had more than once, you got to know them pretty well all along, same with the postings and stuff. So that was kind of cool. It did make it a little more intimate. It wasn't just sitting in class getting lectured to. It was kind of, you kind knew them. I think that also comes from being away for the weekend, because you have the class time, then you also have the meal time and the social time at night.

There were limited informal social interactions with faculty outside of the face-to-face weekends. However, during the trip to South Dakota students enjoyed getting to know the one faculty that accompanied them. Cindy shared: “It was cool to work, hang out, and get to know Melinda in South Dakota. That was fun. I felt like she had a true passion to be there and to be doing what she was doing. That was cool.”

*Strengthened goal commitment.* Unity, responsibility, and accountability to other members of the cohort developed as early as the first semester. These relationships with peers kept them going after the first semester; the friendship and support led to a sense of accountability to each other, and a strengthened commitment to completion. At the initial face-to-face meeting, there were 21 students in attendance. During the first semester, six students (29%) dropped out of the program. After the first semester, all of the remaining 15 students continued through completion. As individual students, or the group as a whole, encountered and overcame difficulties, their bond and determination was strengthened.

Eight participants (62%) said that they felt a responsibility to others in the cohort and also had a sense that “we’re in this together,” to support each other, and were determined to not let themselves or others fail. This sense of community supported persistence; they posted when they did not want to, and continued on with the program despite challenges. These supportive connections carried over to the online environment where students took it upon themselves to support the work and answer questions. Students took on the role of clarifying assignments for each other, going to peers for



explanation and interpreting assignments, as well as providing emotional support to each other. Nadia described how cohort members watched out for each other:

Well, we kind of recognize when somebody wasn't there in the postings. We all started to count, somebody's missing, oh, Desiree's out, and shoot her an email. I noticed that Paul Ray was gone for a while; I think his father-in-law died. I contacted him and he was like, "Oh, I'm ok, thanks for checking." It was nice, things like that.

*Research Question Two: What are the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation in the face-to-face and online experiences of students in the program?*

There were 274 statements from the interviews that were coded as "validation" (see figure 7). The range of validation statements was from three to 41; mean was 19.6, and median was 20. Statements were coded as validation if participants indicated that an experience or interaction contributed to a feeling of being enabled, confirmed or supported in their academic and interpersonal development. Three primary themes emerged as sources of validation: faculty and staff, peers, and family.

Figure 7. Validation Statements

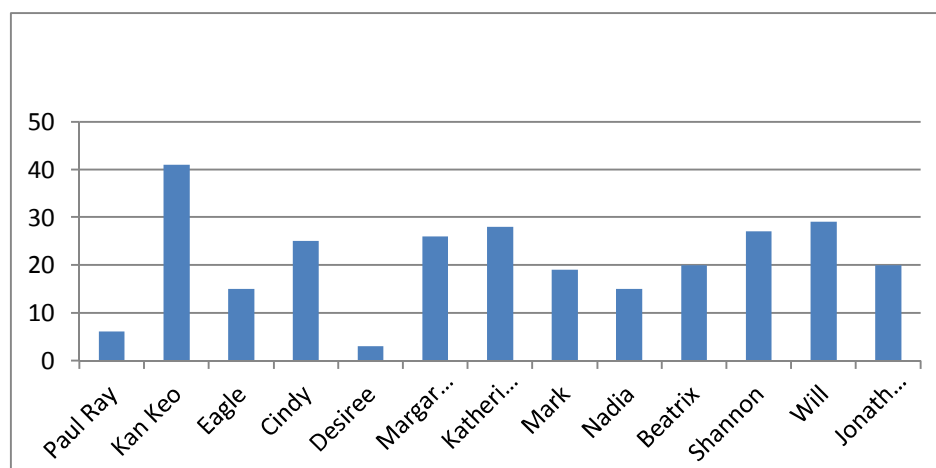


Figure 7. Statements by individual participants coded as validating.

*Validation from faculty and staff.* Students felt enabled through administrative interaction and support. These relationships between students and staff were important to students feeling connected to the institution and program. Consistency and availability of faculty and administrative staff were important factors in the communication process. Students reported that faculty were prompt in returning emails and phone calls, and felt that they were there when needed. Nadia discussed the importance of this availability:

I appreciated how everybody was so quick to get back to me on things. That was important because maybe I only had a certain time to do an assignment and that was the weekend and now it's due on Sunday, and I hope they respond to me. I checked on this sooner, but I didn't realize sooner. You guys were available all the time, which was more than I expected, which I'm sure was a challenge for you guys.

Expenses were paid for the face-to-face weekends, and this support enabled participants to attend without incurring additional financial burden. Mark appreciated the support: “Having your mileage paid and being able to stay in that room free, that makes a big difference too. It really says you’re cared about.”

Ongoing administrative support throughout the program was important. At the face-to-face weekends, there were many logistical arrangements that were handled by administrative staff. Students appreciated the availability of staff during these times, and felt well supported in these details. Shannon shared her experience during one late-night interaction:

I was supposed to room with Marilyn one night, and that didn’t happen because she called in and she got lost in Wisconsin somewhere and she was going to be in at like two or three in the morning. She got ahold of Cindy in the middle of the night, and I think Cindy just got her another room.

The administrative support at the face-to face weekends also went beyond the logistics; the design of the program created a space for relationships to develop. The staff created an environment on the weekends that was conducive to social support and comfort. Will talked about the small details of the weekends that enhanced and enabled the students to connect with each other and faculty:

Helen was just amazing. She always had refreshments and stuff for families and right behind the pool area, inside the hotel, there was that lifted area. People brought down their computers and talked and visited and kids swam. So, it was really a social fun thing, and yeah, professors were there and it was nice.

A faculty academic advisor was assigned to each student, however many students never met with their advisor. Consistently, they went to each other or administrative staff for support. Consistent availability of one administrative contact enabled students to focus on completing the program successfully and not spend additional time on administrative issues that would arise when there was a need or a question. Desiree was pleased with the program outcomes, and felt supported administratively: “Considering this was a first round, it was really well done. Helen..... she’s a great coordinator; any question I could start with her. She’s excellent. I never felt like hanging in the wind. There’s always a place to go.” Paul Ray echoed this sentiment: “I think that’s an important piece, someone consistent, who is responsive to those kinds of things and again, getting rid of those stones in our shoes so we can focus on the learning piece of it.”

Interactions with faculty provided acknowledgement, recognition of the value of their previous work and life experiences, and built confidence in students. Katherine shared how one faculty accomplished this: “She listened to what we had to say about Native culture, and she knew about special ed., that I was special ed. And she goes, “Well, you know this.” I go, “I do know it, the rez, some of it.”

Students, some due to personal style and others due to a growing bond and shared affiliation with peers, looked to their peers for support more than to faculty. Participants rarely met with or requested assistance from faculty. Students demonstrated perseverance with limited support from faculty or advisors. Faculty support was accessed on an “as needed basis”; students knew faculty and advisors were there if needed and felt comfortable asking for help, but most did not frequently seek out support from faculty or

advisors. Students typically turned to their peers first for support, questions, and advice. Jonathan explained: “I have good rapport with Colleen (*his academic advisor*). If I needed to talk to a professor outside of the course, I would have gone to her, but I didn't. Those supports were there, but I didn't take advantage of them.” Shannon offered an explanation of why students went to their peers in the cohort, rather than faculty:

In some ways, I guess, I think that the cohort in itself lends itself to be in some ways more student-centered than faculty. When you go to traditional college, you see that teacher all the time and maybe you do seek out more support from them. I know we could have emailed to get more support from faculty, but being that it was online that was probably more difficult. I think we sought out each other more. That's part of the strong bond that we had. We're not all 20 year old kids, we have all had a lot of life experiences and they're all so very different. That added a lot.

*Validation from cohort peers.* When students struggled and questioned whether they should remain in the program, the “community” got behind them, and affirmed how important each person was to the cohort. The cohort model was an integral contributor in validation for students. For some students, the relationships that developed were an essential factor in their success. Kan Keo, who struggled with many aspects of the program, attributed her ability to complete the program successfully to her cohort peers:

The very first session, the first face-to-face meeting, everyone seemed so cold and I said, “I don't know if this is for me, I don't think I want it.” Then, I hang on through the second semester and things got better. This cohort seemed to be very

good and if other cohorts are like this, I don't mind to be in a cohort again. At least you have each other, just to talk to, just ask general questions, and when you see each other, you say hi, don't just ignore them, smile and welcoming and accepting. That's what kept me in the cohort.

Students received validation through a confirmation that they were not alone in their journey. They experienced self-affirmation and developed confidence in their developing competency when struggling with challenging times. Cindy received reassurance and confirming signals from her peers that she would achieve success. She explained the type of validation she received from peers: "Just talk about their experience, and be supportive, it will be ok, positive words, kind words. Yeah, that was helpful. You know don't worry about it, it will get taken care of, just know next time do this differently." Will talked about the meaning of support during challenging times:

You know what's funny, is that, that's what I liked about going online, even though it was hard. Someone would say something, reading somebody's post, and it would just make you laugh, it'd make you appreciate it. Even through the hard times, when you're reading somebody's post, we're all in this together. Yeah, it's hard but we're all gonna get through it. I don't think I specifically seeked (*sic*) anybody out and talking to them but I remember checking in with people, "How you doing?" They'd go, "It's rough, it's hard." We'd always say, "There is an end, so just hang in there."

Through a reciprocal cycle of interactions, students received confirming signals of the worth that their individual contributions made to the learning community. Students

felt their previous life and work experiences were recognized as legitimate knowledge (Terenzini, et al., 1994). Katherine spoke about the acceptance she received from her cohort peers, her impact on them, and in return how over time gained a new confidence and resulted in getting over her own embarrassment about her disability:

I think I impacted them a lot... I think a lot, because I am a Native with Dyslexia and had to live it. And I think a lot of them will remember me because I stuck in there and kept going, and if I didn't understand in our group work, they kind of said, "Well, think of it like this." And I go, "Ok, alright," because I think we all impacted each other. I think there's not one of us that wasn't impacted by each other. Before, I would get all choked up if I had to tell I was dyslexic, oh poor me. Now it's like, whatever, you gotta admit to what you got wrong and then you gotta move forward. And so like when I have kids come to my room and go, "Oh I can't read very good." I say, "Um excuse me, but I have a four year degree and I'm Dyslexic." "You're what?" I said, "I'm Dyslexic."

Paul Ray also talked about the reciprocity of the relationships that developed:

When you seek out somebody and confide in them and seek help, you're also opening yourself up to a relationship with them that makes them reciprocate, and it helps them to feel comfortable reciprocating. So that even if they weren't initially thinking about that, or wanting to confide in someone, the fact that you called them, or them having an issue, they're more communication to vent. Then it expands, so that, if I'm talking with you, and you're talking to her, and pretty soon the three of us are talking, or at least more comfortable in talking.

The support that students gave and received grew out of both online and the face-to-face interactions; one complemented the other. Nadia talked about the importance of the face-to-face weekends in offering a tangible opportunity to facilitate subsequent online communication with peers:

We got to bond a little bit more with them, which made to easier to ask questions when we were communicating online. I also thought it was important because I'm way up here so I felt isolated. I was kind of jealous of everybody else because it seemed like they got together. For me that was really important. I was able to ask questions in person, which is sometimes easier. I don't know, I just liked being able to go over some additional stuff. It was nice, things like that. It was also nice to be able to go, "Hey, what did you think about this reading," and just bounce things off of them. I think that first year I was completely uncomfortable doing that. By the end, I was comfortable with everybody. It was just a matter of how much we communicated outside the course.

Peers supported each other in a variety of ways: formally structured through the online classes, face-to-face weekends, and informal and student initiated interactions.

Cindy shared how she felt supported by her peers in a variety of ways:

I would call Beatrix or Kan Keo. I even drove up to Macgregor to work with Katherine and Margaret. Everybody was just helpful. If I had a question, you could post it on the Moodle and someone would answer right away. Everybody, we all knew we were the new people in this, so it was nice support and willing to help. And not just, "Oh I'm doing mine and sorry if you don't know yours but..."



The online learning environment provided both benefits and challenges in receiving and giving validation through support. Paul Ray discussed the limitations of the online format:

I do think the online creates a situation where people feel more isolated. Whether they might be or not, they feel more isolated; people aren't quite as accessible.

You can't look around the room, and see people doing the same thing or sharing the same kinds of feelings.

This support and validation was most important during challenging times. The feeling that students were not alone was comforting, and gave support to each other.

Mark reflected on how this support system developed over time:

Well, I think it helped when it was getting overwhelming and somebody would finally speak up and we'd all go, "Oh yeah, I'm experiencing that, too." That definitely helped. Yeah. If there wouldn't have been that it would have been really frustrating. And it took a while for that to happen, because nobody really wants to stir things up you know.

The support that was given and received during the program was an essential factor in completion for some students. When asked during the interview what impacted her most during the program, Beatrix did not hesitate to respond:

Impacted me the most? Oh my goodness. I would say the people in the program, including the professors. I would say it was the group that we had; there was a lot of support; a lot of flexibility. When things weren't going right or you hit those bumps in the road, the fact that we all had each other and we got to share the

experience. There were times when I was stressed or I was like, “Oh my gosh, I’m going crazy. I don’t know what’s going on.” And then there were fifteen other people going, “No, I’m feeling the same way, it’s ok.” Yeah, I think that was the most important part of the program was just having that great group.

Each participant became an important contributor to the learning community, and each member's contributions were recognized as valuable to the overall learning environment. Shannon talks about the significance of this shared and cooperative learning: “It’s being in this together. When things are working like that, and when you have that buy in, you’re learning more. Learning with a group of people, you’re learning more than doing it individually, because you’re always talking and networking.” Nadia, who at the start of the cohort was hesitant to voice her opinions or disagree with others, came to value that exchange: “I valued everybody’s opinion or what they had to say. It’s ok to ask questions, it’s ok to say, ‘Hey I’m struggling.’ When questions come up or things arise, you have somebody else to bounce that idea off. Or, ‘Hey, where you’d get that information.’ ”

As the comfort level with each other and the online environment increased, inhibitions decreased. During one particularly challenging semester, a student took the lead to make it known that she was struggling. As a result, others felt safe and confirmed that they were not alone and admitted publicly that they too were struggling. Paul Ray commented on this aspect of support: “Damn right; to find out that you weren’t the only one is huge.” This shared struggle brought unity amongst peers, and also garnered support when needed. Nadia talks about her observations during this period:

I admire Beatrix being the one to stand up and say what everyone was feeling. But nobody was going to be the first one to say it. But, leave it to Beatrix, she'll do it. I think that nobody wanted to say that they didn't get it. Then, after she'd be the first one to say it, we'd all chime in, "Oh, me too," or "Yeah, I didn't understand it either." I think we felt heard after she would initiate that. Obviously, we can't be heard if nobody says anything.

Beatrix gave her perspective on how it felt to be the one speaking out, and receiving confirmation from peers that they too were struggling:

I thought I was going crazy, because I can't even keep up with up this. I can't even physically do the amount of work that we need to do. There were weeks of feeling like this. I finally Moodled, "Is it just me or is anybody else experiencing this?" That was when the flood gates opened. People were like, "I don't even have time for my family." That was one point that I'm glad I said something because I really did feel like there's something wrong with me if I feel this stressed out. I think once everybody came out and was like, "I'm really stressed out, too." That was like, "Ok, I'll get through this. As long as I'm not alone in this, I can stick it out; we'll get through it." That's how we ended up getting through it.

While some students felt validated in banding together during challenging times, not all students had the same need for a shared experience. Will offered another perspective on the challenges he faced, and his decision to not engage in the online venting that many found helpful:

I didn't. I know people did, because that was part of the water cooler. But I personally didn't. It wasn't enough to....for me, it was just you had to do this to get to this. I still had the goal of graduating from the program, so yeah some classes were tougher than others, some required more stuff than others; you just.... if it gets tough you just grit and do it. There is an end, so just buckle down and do it. That was my approach, that's always been my approach and some things are harder than others, and you will get through it; just don't give up. That was the time where I knew that, yes, there is an end, and you just have to knuckle down and get 'er done. It's not something that you sit there and complain about it, you just do it. So, that was the challenging class and I guess everybody would say that, but I think the different personalities dealt with it differently. For me it was kind of, I can't say fun, but I liked that challenge. It was an eye opener, it was like a shake-up, and it was probably good that it woke people up. It brought other things out of us that probably were just in motion. We could have coasted through the next year and maybe not grown as much. So if you look at it as, it stirred you up and you probably changed because of that. And you may not have liked it going through it but because you did it, probably brought you to a spot where you probably wouldn't have gotten there had you not had that course. That old saying, "If it doesn't kill ya (*sic*), it makes you stronger."

*Validation from family.* Validation from family came through both direct and indirect support. For those who lived with immediate family, the support received was primarily non-academic in nature, such as general understanding, encouragement to

continue, allowing time for study, and taking on more roles and duties during high-stress times. Six students (46%) were married during the cohort. All of these students (100%) agreed that their partners and children made sacrifices, and supported them through the process. Mark explained the support he received from his family:

I don't even know if I'd be where I am without my wife particularly. She went to college and dropped out after a couple semesters, and she's doing really well in the business world right now. So, she's holding off on finishing her degree until I'm completely done with all this. I have one more thing to do, the Math test, but without her support I don't think I could do it at all. And my family, they made tons of sacrifices, my kids, sacrifices too. There have been times instead of helping with their homework; I'm doing mine and things like that. I don't know, just the support in general.

Some of the students had family members who worked in education, so there was a shared understanding of the stresses in working with children with special needs. For example, Beatrix had several family members in education, and commented on how they supported her:

I have a cousin, who I really go to a lot for this stuff. She's been so helpful. She's been doing it for years. Doing ELL, she has experience working with diverse groups of kids. She's been a really good sounding board, or even just to vent, like, "Oh my gosh, today was crazy. Have you ever seen anything like this?" She'd be like, "Oh yeah." My aunt's been teaching for years. She just got her administrative license. She did Adaptive PE. So, she has also done a lot of work

with kids who are in special ed. It was really nice to be able to go to her on other more related to Special Ed issues. So, yeah it was helpful.

Validation through family support sometimes came through indirect channels.

Jonathan shared how his family supported him indirectly in establishing unspoken expectations:

Well, socio-economically and culturally I was supported because both my mother and my father and my sister have master's degrees, and my brothers working on his. So, you know that was in some ways a family expectation. Not a direct expectation, but it was assumed that I would get my undergrad degree and going on for more school was like kind of the obvious thing to do socio-economically and in the family culture. So they didn't directly help me a lot by saying, "Oh you should do this program," or talk about the program a lot, but by setting up those expectations.

Katherine also felt indirect support from her recently deceased mother. This support kept her motivated towards goal commitment to complete what she had started:

I stayed with it because my mom died while we were going through this and she was so happy that we were going to help people out. So then, I would of stayed with it and I knew Margaret was gonna stay with it if I stayed with it, because we're kind of best friend-sister kind of thing. When my mom first passed away, I thought I don't need to think about this and my mom. And I thought as I would go to sleep and I woke up, I could see my mom standing there going, "You girls get

to school.” That’s what really got me going. Whenever I thought it was too hard I thought, “Ok mom, now what do we do?” And she kinda got us through it, I think.

*Validation from other sources.* Participants also received validation from sources outside of the cohort. Several students were supported through administrative support in the workplace. Student felt valued through interactions with administrators, which motivated them to succeed in gaining licensure. Administrators at times offered financial support, which confirmed to them that the licensure that they were working towards was valued. Katherine appreciated the support from her district:

I wanted to go to South Dakota, and decided I’m going to make time to go to South Dakota. And I thought, “Uh, I don’t know if I have the extra money.” I went to my supervisor and I said, “This is about learning, teaching Natives. My college is paying for my airfare and room, but could you fork me over some food money?” Then they forked me over three hundred dollars, and I thought, “Yes, I got it!”

Participants also shared how they were validated through their relationships with children at school. Nadia received validation in her work with Native American youth as a high school guidance counselor. She recognized that she was already practicing many of the Circle of Courage principles in her work. Nadia felt assured and validated in her work: “I came home, and when I’d counsel with the kids, I realized that do that every day, that’s embedded in me. If you have a good balance in what you’re doing, it’s good. So I felt like, ok I’m good.” Mark talked about the validation he got from being able to make a connection with children where others had failed:

Boy, I don't know what it is. It's some sort of, especially with kids who are nonverbal, it's some sort of.... I can get in sync, in with their heads. I don't know what it is. I can't really pinpoint it. I can kind of get my head to work that same way, understand. Like when I started E\*\*\*\*\* high school, they had a nonverbal young man, a kindergartener. They couldn't handle him. Nobody knew what to do, because they hadn't seen anything like him. He would eat everything, and run around. He couldn't sit in the classroom without reaching out and I just understood the need for that visual schedule and the need for the simplified language, and just step- by-step and the patience and everything like that. I worked with that boy and he ended up participating in a lot a lot of kindergarten. That's what I love to do. I love just dealing with kids in crisis and helping them find a better place.

Katherine felt validated during her work with children, when she observed that she was truly making a difference not only in academic growth, but in supporting the development of positive self-esteem in children who were struggling:

By the time I left there, what, 12 weeks, that kid looked at me and said, "You know I'm a good reader." I said, "You are." He said, "I'm not dumb, I'm very smart." I said, "You are very smart." I said, "Some people just need a little more help." He's the one that made the most; he stuck in my head the most there. There were some other ones, but he was the one I really liked.



*Research Question Three: How well prepared do participants feel to teach Native American students with disabilities, and what are the bases of these perceptions?*

*Perceptions of preparedness.* The researcher used data from individual interviews and results from the written survey (see appendix F) to explore the participants' sense of preparedness as a special education teacher. From the interviews, 78 statements coded as "preparedness." Statements were coded as preparedness if participants indicated that an experience contributed to their belief for success as special education teachers, or that they have the skills and knowledge to do this job effectively (see figure 8). The range of statements coded as preparedness was from one to 16; the mean was six; the mode and median were both five.

Figure 8. Preparedness Statements

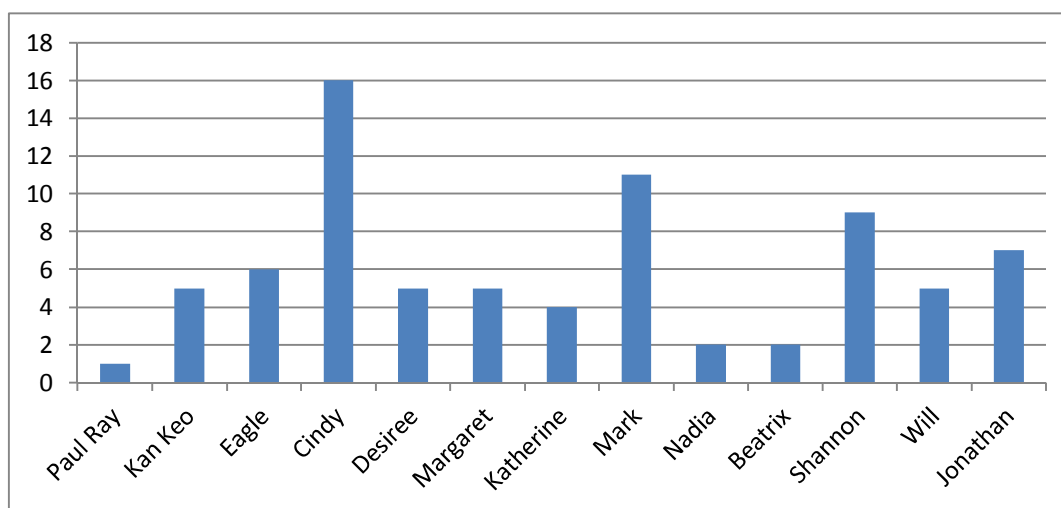


Figure 8. Statements by individual participants coded as preparedness beliefs.

Students felt well prepared to work with Native students with disabilities, as well as with students from other diverse backgrounds, with a perceived generalized sense of competency and confidence in cultural understanding. All participants (100%) stated that they felt prepared to teach special education. Students felt well prepared to work effectively with students and families of all diverse backgrounds. Eight (62%) of the participants were working in urban settings, and five (38%) in rural areas. All participants (100%) stated that This program has trained them adequately for the work they are doing and to meet the needs of diverse students and families. Twelve participants (92%) intended to stay in special education either “a very long time” or “until I retire”; one (8%) planned to stay in education but was unsure what she will do over the long term.

Four areas of skills and knowledge came out of the data that students felt well prepared for: working with students and families, cultural awareness, ability to be a valued part of an effective team, and instructional strategies. Two areas of skills and knowledge emerged that students felt they were not prepared for: special education assessment and the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandate of special education services. Two themes emerged as the bases for feeling prepared: an individual’s’ background and experience and an increased sense of self-efficacy.

*Working with students and families.* The first area that students felt well prepared for was their ability to work with students with special needs and their families. Nine students (69%) felt well prepared to teach Native American students with special needs, and as a special education teacher. Cindy shared how she felt about her future work: “I feel super prepared to deal with families in that way. I’m not so excited.” Mark was

another student who shared that he felt well prepared as a special education teacher. He believed he had a special ability to connect with challenging students where others had failed, and felt that he could be a leader in sharing his knowledge with others. Mark described his skills and obligation to share his knowledge:

I can kind of get my head to work that same way. I understand. I think I can slow myself down to a point to understand the step-by-step, the simplified language and the patience. One of the best things for me was just to be able to say, "This is what I know, these are things to try." I know that this and hands on, just every little thing that I learned I was able to tell her and it helped. And I know my goal is...I'll just have a better insight, not only if they're my students or whatever.....just being able to help share the knowledge with other people. I want to do all the right things, you know, especially that parental involvement that I haven't seen a lot of teachers do. If you ever mention a home visit to some teachers, and they look at you like you're out of your mind. I could see that happening someday, where that, if need be, you gotta do what you gotta do. I want to be that teacher that goes out and does everything I can.

Students had specific ideas about how they would fulfill the role of special education teacher, and what priorities they would establish in their future classrooms. Cindy focused on the relational aspect of the educational environment and how she would facilitate that experience: "I love working with students; that will be great. Having students that can trust me, feel safe, come to me, and that I can learn from. I can help them in their educational experience, and emotional things, be that support." Katherine

believed that the knowledge and skills gained in the program would add to the relationships she already had established with students and their families in her community: “What I want to do is just work with the Native students.....it gives me more insight to what they’re going through. I know most of the families around here; it just makes me understand more.” Margaret, who herself went through the special education system in her k-12 schooling, felt well prepared to work with Native American students with special needs and could provide a voice for her future students. She stated simply: “I want to be an advocate.” She continued and shared how she worked to build self-confidence in students and reduce the stigma of a special education label:

I think what helps the kids the most is not doing all them IEP tests, is just to get the help they need. Because putting them through that IEP testing sometimes they get mad, and go, “I’m not Special Ed. I don’t want to be labeled Special Ed.” And I go, “You’re not labeled Special Ed, they don’t label Special Ed anymore. They’re finding out what you need to learn.” That’s all it really is: different people need different learning tools.

*Cultural awareness.* The second area that students felt well prepared for is an awareness of different cultures, and an ability to be a culturally responsive educator. Nine students (69%) cited this area as one for which they felt prepared. While the focus of this program was the Native American culture, students stated that their cultural awareness went beyond a specific culture and generalized to other cultures and diversity more broadly. The foundational knowledge of Native American culture served a distinct purpose for those who work with Native American students, yet it also transcended into a

more global sensitivity to diversity issues. Shannon commented on the value of the cultural knowledge she gained through the program:

I would say the strength of getting that cultural piece was worth anything we might have missed. That's a huge thing that most programs overlook. That's probably the most impact, that cultural piece is the biggest impact in my work. The Native culture piece would be valuable for somebody who's not teaching Natives, too, because we all come in contact with different cultures. Because of what I learned about Native culture I probably asked more intelligent questions, instead of totally making those cultural assumptions like we do. That's the largest piece of this program.

As a result of what he learned in This program, Mark advocated for more expanded awareness of Native American history in the public schools: "The American Indian history and everything behind it should be a more important a part of all kids' education. It shouldn't be second and brushed aside, because we can learn a lot from it, and we should have more respect." Jonathan, a licensed teacher at a primarily Native American school explained how his training would impact his teaching with all students: "It will help me work with my Native American students, and for the students who aren't, it will help. It puts this idea in people that different cultures do things differently and the vastness of cultural experiences across the spectrum." Similarly, Beatrix spoke about her cultural preparedness:

I think the program, the tribal cohort, even though it's focused on Native American families and kids, it really did have strategies that work..... awesome

diversity component..... that can be applied in working in any situation. I don't feel like if I don't end up working with Native populations that it was a waste of time. I think it was so helpful in so many aspects.

*Effective team member.* The third area that students felt well prepared for was an ability to be a valued part of an effective team. Seven students (54%) cited this area as one for which they felt well prepared. Through a variety of experiences during their licensure program such as coursework, field hours, student teaching and continuing in their current worksite, students had opportunities to participate, demonstrate competency and be recognized as a valued and contributing member of an educational team. Mark spoke about his experience:

When I was student teaching, I was like, "Wow, I get to go to the meetings now!" We have a lot of different house meetings, behavior meetings, and I find I have very valuable input and people listen and you learn from others. I feel very prepared actually. As far as working with paraprofessionals, I feel confident; working with the kids, I feel confident. I went to the meetings at the end of the year, and I said, "This might be going on a limb, but I want to change the name on the Resource Room." The special ed. directors are like, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Let's call it the Learning Center." "Done." I'm like, "What?"

Although Will completed his student teaching at the same school where he was a social studies teacher, he moved into the special education team during the required 12-weeks of practicum. He knew the special education staff, but described the student teaching experience as one filled with new learning, gained confidence in his preparation

to do the job, and reconsideration for his future teaching specialty. He reflected on his next steps after being a social studies teacher for over 20 years:

I think the neatest thing about the student teaching was working in the school and being a part of the team. You know the people and you know that they have their job, but you really don't know what their job is until you actually walk in their shoes. And that was what was cool about it. Being in their department and actually doing their job with them. It really opens your eyes, like, "Oh wow, this is what you guys do." That was the best part about it. I knew she had these classes and she did this and this and this, but actually being in the classroom, doing the stuff, really gave you an appreciation of what they actually do on a given day. And that again, changed me to thinking that, "I would like that more, I think now, than being a Social Studies teacher." So, I think my next move will be following my license in the special ed. program somewhere.

*Instructional strategies.* The fourth area that students felt well prepared for is in their ability to provide instructional strategies that meet the needs of individual students. Eight students (62%) cited this area as one for which they were well prepared. Mark commented on this area: "I think a lot of the expanded knowledge on disabilities really helped and different instructional techniques. I used a lot of the stuff I've learned when I was student teaching; I've used it." Mathew attributed his learning of instructional strategies to the sharing that occurred through his cohort peers. He valued the opportunity to learn from others: "I learned a lot about different strategies people had, the different kind of environments. I learned what they would do, and how their school

does something differently as opposed to my school. I think that was really important.”

Although Shannon felt well prepared in instructional strategies, she suggested that additional time on reading strategies would have been useful: “A lot of my job is reading, because that’s what they’re behind in. I spend so much time teaching reading. It’s the main focus of everything I do. I would have preferred to spend the science time on reading.”

*Skills and knowledge that students do not feel well prepared.* Two areas of skills and knowledge emerged that students did not feel well prepared for: assessment and the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandates of special education services. Three students (23%) did not feel well prepared in special education assessment. Nine students (69%) did not feel well prepared for the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandates of special education services.

*Assessment.* Although 11 out of 13 students (85%) did not cite a lack of preparation in assessment, eight (62%) did desire more application practice and site-specific assessment information. Paul Ray expressed a need for more time in practicing assessment with “real” students: “So, some practicing diagnosing, recommending issues and interventions. That might be fun, because you could have real kids, real scenarios. This is the kid. Well, what’s he doing? Tell me more.... to ask those questions..... to practice that skill.” Paul Ray suggested that a better use of the face-to-face time could be spent on the area of assessment. He continued: “I think, that to me, is a real good use of some of that face-to-face; having the practical things..... what are you going to be doing



on the job and how do you get to practice them.” Nadia also discussed her need for additional understanding of the broad range of assessment:

There are so many types of tests out there or assessments; the thing that I would need additional time on is knowing what tests our district uses. I think that it was neat that we all brought in tests and talked about the tests that we had done and looked over and how you do it and why you do it. I thought that was important.

*Special education paperwork.* Special education services are a strictly regulated process to provide special educational support to students with special needs. As a result, special education teachers are responsible for compliance with many legal requirements. These requirements include understanding the laws associated with special education, documenting various aspects of the educational environment, and writing the Individualized Education Plan. Nine students (69%) did not feel well prepared for these responsibilities.

Although Shannon was confident in her knowledge of the law because she was already working as a special education teacher, she did not think that this topic was covered adequately in the program. She explained: “I think maybe the law part of it. For me that wasn’t a problem, because I had been to hearings and I knew all the regulations; so, that didn’t affect me at all.” When asked about her understanding of the law, Margaret acknowledged a lack of preparation, but also had resources available for reference, if needed: “I think we went through that part a little bit too fast. I’m glad I have that little paper, one of the papers that I saved, I did look at.”

Desiree agreed with several other participants of the overwhelming nature of meeting the many responsibilities of a special education teacher. She talked about her concerns:

Because it's such a specialized teaching area, there is so much. I thought about this a little bit because I was trying to think of what, if there could be an element and we just touched on it, it was like the SPED forms and the day-to-day pieces and how you even have to organize a year to get it all done. We covered it, but it might have been nice to spend more time from beginning to end, "Here's how you do it." My biggest concern is making sure I lay out my year well so that I'm with my students and not worrying about the next meeting and paperwork.

Nine students (62%) did not feel well prepared to write an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the written document which outlines how the specialized needs of the individual student will be supported in the educational environment. Margaret did not feel well prepared for writing an IEP. She commented: "We could have gone over the FBA's (*Functional Behavior Assessment*) a little bit more and writing the IEP's. Writing the IEPs, we didn't spend very much time." Although students did not feel well prepared for the task of writing an IEP, they also did not express concern in this area. For example, Jonathan acknowledged that he would not be working as a special education in the next academic year, so although he did not feel well prepared for this aspect of special education, he was not concerned with this gap of knowledge and skills: "There are some things with writing IEPs where I don't feel very strongly about yet. IEPs and other documentations, although given that I'm not planning on working directly as a special

education teacher right away, it doesn't really bother me.” Katherine did not feel well prepared in this area, but had confidence that she could work collaboratively with others to fulfill this responsibility: “I liked the classes but I feel that writing the IEPs myself, to this day I still don't know how to do that. But I could get it down but then someone would have to doctor it up.” Similarly, Mark did not feel well prepared in this area, however expressed confidence that he would be able to meet this responsibility because of strong skills in other areas:

I am a little nervous about the technical aspects of the job, such as the IEPs and things like that; I wish I could've had more work on that. I'm a little nervous about the paperwork, but not really because I have strong writing abilities, and I can just present myself better that way than speaking, and I know I'll just learn that stuff.

*Bases for perceptions of preparedness.* Two themes emerged as the bases for feeling prepared: an individual's' background and experience and increased self-efficacy.

*Background and experience.* Five of the participants in this study (38%) held Minnesota teaching licenses prior to entering the program. All five (100%) of these students stated that their prior license and teaching experience added to their sense of preparedness to work as a special education teacher. Shannon credited her background to feeling prepared: “I have an elementary education license coming in, so I had an advantage. I'm more familiar with everything that we talked about. My college degree is twenty years old, so I've seen a lot of different programs come and go.” Nadia similarly felt that her background was a good foundation for future work as a special education

teacher: “I also have classroom management skills and I have an elementary ed. license, so I feel comfortable. I worked closely with special education when we have IEP meetings, manifestations, due process. I know our policies, so yeah, I feel comfortable.” While Desiree personally felt prepared, she wasn’t so sure that others in the program without the experience and background she possessed would be well prepared: “I think that because I was already a teacher I feel very prepared, but I wonder if I wasn’t already a teacher if I would feel prepared. I’m not sure. There’s so much to cover to get us ready.”

Other background and experiences also contributed to a participant’s confidence in their preparedness. For example, Cindy disclosed that at first she was nervous about interviewing for special education positions. Upon reflection, she realized that she did have many experiences that had prepared her for work as a special education teacher. She elaborated: “I have a ton of experience and I just don’t realize it. I have tons of in the classroom experience, substitute taught, working in mental health for so long, my student teaching, my practicum experience, I’ve ran youth groups before, I did a summer internship at Guadalupe School in St Paul. I ran two classes, planned the whole thing. I’ve done so much in the past ten years or so, that I am very experienced. I feel prepared.”

*Increased self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations (Bandura, 1997). Despite particular areas of a perceived lack of preparedness for individual students, all participants in this study (100%) stated a belief in their own ability to succeed as a special education teacher. The basis for this

self-confidence came from several sources including validating experiences, personal empowerment gained through acquired knowledge and skills, fulfilling a purpose, and the freedom in having career options.

*Validating experiences.* As discussed in the previous section, “Research Question Two,” validation was an essential aspect of the experiences of participants in the face-to-face and online learning environments. Validation contributed to participant’s success in the program, as well as to their self-efficacy as a special education teacher. They overcame challenges to achieve a goal, completed student teaching, and gained confidence over time. As participants felt enabled, confirmed and supported through a variety of experiences, self-efficacy increased. The author refers the reader to that section for a full discussion of the role validation held for participants.

Mentoring was an area mentioned by several participants. For example, Shannon explained the role of the mentors she had in her worksite: “She taught special ed. for twenty years, and reviewed all my IEPs. Then, my principal was a special ed. director. So, I really had two or three sources of information and I was on their door a lot.” Eagle learned from others that they, too, are still learning. Although Eagle felt unprepared in some specific areas of special education, the awareness of other teacher’s challenges assured her that it was okay to be a new teacher, yet still not “have all the answers.” She discussed this awareness:

Not being a teacher when I went in, but hearing the other the teachers that were already teaching talk about some of the things they saw. You can hear people talk about stuff but until you’re actually doing it. Those kinds of things, trying to

apply things or kind of recognize people coming from the same kinds of situations. Being able to hear about other people's experiences was nice. To hear that nobody has the answer and everybody struggles at least a little bit. There definitely isn't one way of doing things. That's was helpful. I feel like I definitely have more confidence.

*Personal empowerment gained through acquired knowledge and skills.* A variety of experiences supported the development of empowerment in students. They developed confidence in areas where they previously lacked self-assurance, and a competency in knowing how to ask for what they needed. Desiree asserted herself to request assistance in an area that she felt unprepared for: "In student teaching, they laid out a map for me. It was really lovely. They said, 'Here's the ten things you need at the beginning of the year, here's what to expect.' I asked, and I got what I needed." Similarly, Jonathan acquired knowledge and skills that would be useful in his teaching: "Especially student teaching has helped my day-to-day classroom teaching, which for me was in the same setting, but it was with D\*\*\* there. That helped my classroom teaching. The things I learned from that will continue to inform my teaching."

For each of the eight classes in the program, students were required to complete field hours in a variety of school settings for a total of 180 hours over two years. The settings were across all k-12 age levels, and at least two disability categories. All of the participants worked, and held varying responsibilities in addition to being full-time student. Although fulfilling the requirements of field hours was challenging, students

reported a gain in confidence and self-efficacy in working with students across the spectrum through these experiences.

Student teaching for 12 weeks provided an opportunity for participants to apply in a classroom setting what they had learned throughout the program. This experience was both challenging and rewarding as students developed and recognized competencies and skills as a special education teacher. This experience built confidence and self-efficacy in their ability to be a special education teacher. Kan Keo described her growth during this period:

I didn't think I could work with them because they don't even recognize I was there. They just ignored me for the first several weeks. But then it was my turn to step in, and I initiate it and work with them, and it turned around. Just like anyone else, they only think of you when they want to see you. So, they really nice, the ones that ignored me and don't even look at me, they just opposite behavior. I have a video and I really enjoy looking at it.

Several students had a negative personal experience with special education in their own families. Margaret spoke about the empowerment she felt to be a strong advocate for her son through the acquired knowledge and skills gained in the program:

I figured out they can't do this to me, like some of the things the schools are doing, like making me agree with them. When they finally caught on at the school that I was doing Special Ed, then they finally started easing up and doing things. Towards the end, those IEP's with Charles, they were all very professional. Before they would.....they thought I would just go along and do this or that. I

think they think if you don't know what's out there they will just push you toward it. I think that's how it all started changing. The more I knew, the more all of their nonsense stopped.

*Fulfilling a greater purpose.* For some students, self-efficacy came through a belief that they were destined to be in this program at this time, and that their subsequent journey would follow the correct path meant to be. This belief is illustrated by Margaret: "I just stumbled onto this, and I thought, well I was supposed to take it or else I wouldn't have bumped into it anyway." Therefore, they were not worried about the future because they had a self-assurance that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing at this point in their life, and the rest would unfold as it was intended to be. Will was one of seven students (54%) that expressed a similar sentiment:

For me it worked. I think that I, without sounding very cosmic, I think I was drawn towards it. I think I did it for a reason that I may not even know yet. I don't think I took it by accident. So how it plays out, I think will be interesting. For me that's what I like about life anyway, is that for whatever reason decisions you make now and you realize ten years down the road why you did it, and where it led you. I believe anyway, that I took it for a reason, and whether or not that comings out now, in the future it will make more sense and that's for me why I took the program.

*Freedom in having career options.* Seven participants (54%) expressed confidence in having a choice in their future employment, and control over ensuing career decisions. A belief that their skills and license would be in demand in the market



place provided a sense of security and self-efficacy as a soon-to-be special education teacher. As Cindy neared completion of the program, she realized that new choices would soon be opening up for her. She shared:

I'm not going to take a part time, because I don't want a part time. I mean there's a ton of positions out there. You know I was really nervous for this interview I just had, and I was talking with one of my friends and she was like, Tracy, "You're interviewing them. You don't know if they're the right fit for you."

As Eagle gained new knowledge and skills through the program, she became more confident in speaking out at her school site, but also expressed concerns about causing trouble. However, completion of the program eased her anxiety. Eagle talked about her new-found confidence: "I know with my license I can get a job right away. It's giving me a cushion. Maybe I wouldn't take this chance normally but I'm going to anyway because I know I can fall back on something else." Although Jonathan was licensed in elementary education and middle-school mathematics, he was not fully licensed to teach the high-school students in his current position. Each year the district would need to apply to the state department of education for a waiver in order for him to continue in his position, which caused him some anxiety as he waited for approval. He expressed some relief with his pending special education license:

I'm in a pretty good place. I have a job that I'm content with, and by the end of summer, I'll have my license. If I lose my job I'll be able to get another job. I don't have too many concerns. I'm excited to feel more secure with my license. Last year, I got a scary letter, like chastising me for working a job I wasn't

licensed for. So, at least now I'm licensed for something K-12; I think that will help that process.

*Research Question Four: Are there differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in this program in the areas of academic and social integration, validation and perceptions of preparedness?*

Several differences between the Native-American students and the non-Native participants emerged through the data analyses. Whether these differences were due to individual differences, personal style, cultural custom, or a combination, is uncertain, and the effects of differential attrition also contribute to difficulty in interpreting the differences.

*Academic and social integration.* A component of academic integration is intellectual growth, comprised of gaining knowledge and appreciation ideas (Tinto, 1975). All Native-American participants expressed an appreciation for learning from their peers, and the non-Native participants valued the opportunity to learn from their Native-American peers. Desiree shared her view of the shared learning:

I did feel a little disadvantaged being the light kid. A lot of the Native students, they knew their history. I learned to ask what may seem like silly questions, to try to learn what it is I need to know. I loved learning people's personal stories about family history and how they've been impacted by the boarding schools. Some of our students have found positive experiences in boarding schools and some not. So, it's important to ask the dumb questions.

However, the Native-American participants also stated that some of the ideas that were presented through the coursework were inaccurate according to their own family history. Katherine at times withheld her true opinions in online discussion because she did not want to “start a fight.” She explained this incongruence with her own belief system:

I thought that when it came to learning about the boarding schools, they didn't really bring that out as bad as it was. That's another part that me and Margaret disagreed on. When we answered people, we'd go, “Not according to my aunties, because my aunties went through it, so they really know how it was. And we knew how it was because they told us.”

Another area of dissatisfaction with the content was the focus on societal issues within the Native-American community. Several of the Native-American participants were glad that there was a licensure program specifically geared for their community. However, this focus then also brought with it the possible misconception that the issues were solely in the Native-American community, perhaps overshadowing the cultural and historical contexts. Katherine explained her concerns:

I thought, because I am a Native, some of it, I thought, was just there for saying the Native part of it. Because unless you really understand how Natives grow up, and their backgrounds. Because even in the white people they have the same problems, the drug problems, the alcohol problems but it mostly stands out more in the Natives. You hear people, “Well, if they weren't drunks...” and I go, “There's just as many white drunks as there is Indians.” Instead of looking at

them as Native drunks, they just should say, “They have a drinking problem.” If they just don’t point to the Natives for the drinking problems, then, they made it look like only Natives had the learning disabilities. I felt that it made it look like only Natives had this disability. But sometimes they didn’t have a disability; it was the way they were understood.

Despite this concern, several of the non-Native participants expressed that this experience deepened their learning and understanding of the Native American culture, serving to break down negative stereotypes that they previously held and that were deeply ingrained in them from when they were young. The sentiment was particularly poignant as expressed by Kan Keo, a recent immigrant from Vietnam. She admitted how her perceptions were altered through this experience:

I heard so many negatives about Native Americans I was never going to step foot in this state, in Minnesota. They’re just lazy and not doing anything, and killing people. I see the movie, and the movie never portrayed the Indian good. I thought I want to find out. I want to learn about their culture. I want to know how different is their culture to mine and in the way of life. They have ceremony but it’s very different from mine. At the beginning, I didn’t know how to relate to the Native students. I was uncomfortable. I think their facial, they look at you, they’re not as friendly looking, but they are good inside. Eagle, she seldom smile, but when they talk she talk nicely and she freely offer suggestions. So, I said, “Don’t judge people just by what they look.” But, because you guys forced us to

work as a group and then, that opens up an opportunity to work with each other and to talk.

All four of the Native-American participants (100%) stated that they, at times, felt the need to explain themselves or hold back on what they really wanted to say. While all students stated that they enjoyed learning from their peers, there was a consciousness for the Native-American participants about the possibility of miscommunication. Nadia commented:

I think it was good on one hand to see what people were thinking. It was kind of also like you kind of had to explain yourself. It's hard to say some things when you don't have the context and they don't understand. That's what I was saying about you kind of have to explain yourself. But, it's not really easy to say, you have to talk and talk and it goes off in tangents.

Although Margaret felt more comfortable in this program than in previous experiences, she still did not feel completely safe in expressing her full opinions honestly. She disclosed:

I've noticed a lot if a non-Native would say the same things as I would say; they don't get in as much trouble as I do. There was a few times, once in a while, but not as much as before, I was going to say something, and my sister would say, "Margaret don't say it, you'll get yourself in trouble." It's true, it would be something about Natives or something and she goes, "Rose don't say it, you can't shut up once you start." It is true, I would have never shut up. I would have gotten everybody all riled up.

All students expressed that they experienced intellectual growth through the cultural focus of the program. However for the Native-American students, the story of their culture is not just a long-ago history; they are still affected by it. Eagle spoke about this experience:

I think there was an effort to try to get the non-Natives to understand where we're coming from as far as education and history. But, I think everybody that was Native could probably tell you this. They had some lady that worked at the B\*\*\*\* school and somebody else come in and talk about their boarding school experiences. I think we all probably could have talked about that and how that influences. Because I think even people say, "Well, that stuff happened hundreds of years ago and why is it still bothering you today? Just get over it." But I think it directly affects every one of us every day. Just like my dad growing up in foster care and how is he supposed to learn how to be a dad if he didn't have one. And even culturally, how is he supposed to learn those things when he doesn't have that information. His parenting skills are going to transfer to me and going to transfer to my kids. How do you deal with certain situations? Just all that stuff. I think that's directly influenced by what's happened to our people. How is that being transferred generation to generation? I don't know if they can understand that. It's in there. The hurt and the anger and the sadness...it's in there. When people go to school, you see still all these white people doing things. I don't know, maybe it just brings something up. Like you're being made to feel ashamed

or that you're not smart or something. I don't know what it is. It's just really complicated.

*Validation.* Although parts of the cultural piece of the program may have felt distorted or inaccurate, Native-American students also expressed that the design and content of the program validated what they have known and experienced throughout their lives. Nadia stated: "Yes, I know this stuff already, I live it every day, and now it is being taught to others. My truth is validated. I think I live the Circle of Courage every day; it's embedded in who I am." Although much of the content was information already known to the Native-American participants, its' inclusion in the program provided a sense of validation. This focus provided validation through knowing that their culture was being taught to others who were unfamiliar with or had misconceptions about Native-American history. Nadia continued:

But going back to what made an impact on me that was really a powerful piece for some of the students. One of the girls had mentioned, this was before she saw the movie, she said, "I think that's such a good thing that they had boarding schools, to take them in and teach them." Don't you know about boarding schools? Later talking with that lady, she said, "I had no idea." As we talked some more, other people didn't know. I didn't know that so many people didn't know about boarding schools, because they saw it as a good thing, a positive thing. So, I think that's interesting to me. To realize, "Oh you don't know?" It's not that people are ignorant about it, they just don't know, and that's not really taught a lot. I guess from my perspective, I just assumed that you should know. So, I

thought that was really neat and that it affected the people in our class. That was powerful for me, for it to affect other people.

Validation also comes through having one's work, life and knowledge recognized by their peers (Terenzini, et al., 1994). The Native-American focus of the program provided an opportunity for students from this cultural background to contribute to the learning community through sharing their personal experience and knowledge. For example, although Katherine struggled with some of the reading and writing requirements due to her disability, when it came to Native-American topics, her strength and leadership emerged. Several opportunities arose that allowed her to experience success, demonstrate capability and discover new competencies. She completed with ease assignments which many of the non-Native students struggled. She described one of those experiences:

We did it on the seven teachings and I go, "This is a piece of cake. I teach this every culture class," and Margaret goes, "You do?" I said, "Yeah, I'll print it right off the internet right now." Then we printed it off. I said, "It's right here." Tracy goes, "What do I get to do?" I said, "We're Native; this comes really easy to us." I said, "We live this." It was a no brainer because we lived it. That's the way it is. That's how we grow up, so it's easy.

*Support.* Validation also comes from giving and receiving meaningful support (Terenzini, et al., 1994). Some students found the online format to get in the way of getting the support that they needed from their peers. While this challenge was not unique to the Native-American participants, the response to the challenges was dissimilar



from that of the non-Native students. When challenged, non-Native students would actively seek support from either faculty or more often, peers. For example, in one particularly challenging class, a non-Native student voiced her frustration in the public discussion forum. Many students joined in this heated discussion with faculty, yet all four Native American students were notably absent. Three of the Native-American participants (75%) expressed a feeling a shame for not being able to navigate the system or perform successfully. Nadia explained how she would handle these types of challenges:

I probably didn't go to anybody because I would just shut down. If it was a face-to-face class, I would go there every day, and I wouldn't feel overwhelmed and lost. I would have that better bond or feel more a part of something. I felt shameful that I don't even have a disability and I couldn't complete it. And that's embarrassing to me. I'm like, "What is wrong?" I just couldn't cope, but I couldn't say, "I'm struggling." I just kind of shut down. Finally, I was able to say, "I'm shameful, here's what's going on."

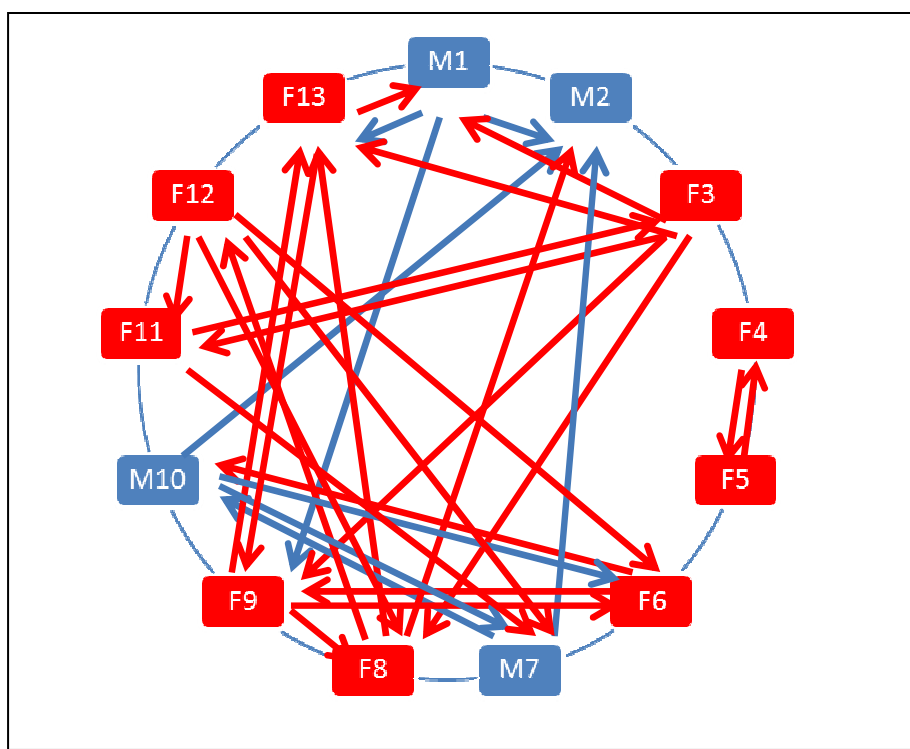
The data revealed several differences in how Native-American participants dealt with challenges compared to their non-Native peers. For example, when a grade dispute occurred, the Native-American students accepted the lower grade, even though they felt they deserved a higher grade. The non-Native students discussed the disagreement with the instructor and advocated for and received a higher grade. When faced with challenges, the non-Native students voiced frustrations publicly in the online discussion forum, and others would rally to support and echo the concern. This shared unity created

meaningful support, but the Native-American students were mostly absent from this public “venting.” Beatrix recalled this approach:

There were times when I was stressed or I was like, “Oh my gosh, I’m going crazy. I don’t know what’s going on.” And then there were fifteen other people going, “No, I’m feeling the same way, it’s ok.” Yeah, I think that was the most important part of the program was just having that great group.

During the interviews, each participant was asked, “During challenging times, who do you go to for support?” A sociogram was created with the names of the cohort peers whom they named as a key support person (see figure 9). Data analysis revealed that each participant in this study had at least one other cohort peer with whom they connected beyond the requirements of the program. Eleven participants (85%) named more than one person; two participants (15%) named only one other person. The two who named only one person were both Native American, the two sisters Margaret (F4) and Katherine (F5). While Margaret and Katherine expressed appreciation for the other members of the cohort, when it came to support they relied solely on each other (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Cohort peers identified as key support



*Perceptions of preparedness.* All participants (100%) stated that they felt well prepared to work as a special education teacher. All nine non-Native participants cited an increase in cultural awareness as an essential element in their sense of preparedness, and in their self-efficacy to work with a diverse student population. However, none of the Native-American students cited an increase in cultural awareness as a key learning outcome, or as a factor in their self-efficacy to work as a special education teacher. During the interview, the researcher asked Eagle if she felt that non-Native students would now be able to work with Native students and families. She responded with mixed feelings. She explained her doubts:

I think so, I guess to a certain degree. I know a lot of them said they did work with Native kids. But, it was also still kind of like that, “Oh, I work with an Indian kid so I’m going to get them some books to read about being Indian.” I think you really kind of need to be careful. They’re really talking about this stuff and in a real direct way. In fact one student said, “I hope it’s not too direct that we’re putting off some of the white students.” You do have to explain yourself. I did a lot of work with Beatrix and Jonathan. It was funny because he’s coming from C\*\*\*\*\* School and he knows how Native people are and Beatrix is like never been with a kid before and not really been in the Native community. So, it’s kind of funny, I would talk with Jonathan and they’d be like, “People call each other ‘savs’ and stuff.” And Beatrix was like, “Oh, my gosh, they call each other ‘savs’.” Then, Jonathan would be like, “They’ll talk about white people,” and Beatrix would be like, “Oh, yeah, that’s the worst thing you can be is white.” It was just funny because there are differences and things that go on that somebody that’s not around that is not really going to be able to understand.

*Priorities.* Although all participants were nontraditional students with multiple roles and responsibilities, there was a difference in how participants prioritized these duties. For the non-Native students, many stated that school was the main priority during the two-year program, and that many areas of their lives took second place to completion of the program. However, all of the Native-American participants (100%) stated that their responsibility to their community would take precedence over their school work, if a choice had to be made between the two. Eagle talked about the multiple commitments to

family, school and community as a Native person, the community comes first. Eagle spoke about the conflict of obligations to community and school:

There's lots of stuff going on that you kind of have an obligation to. It's hard. Obviously the value is to the community and not to the school. It's hard. It's a different value system. That's the struggle being an Indian person. Ok, I'm scheduled to do this thing but this other thing is here. But, you can't get back the face-to-face time either. It's hard. They have spiritual stuff that if they call you, you have to drop everything and go. That is the expectation, and if you're going to join and that's what you have to do.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings from the exploration of the experience of the students in the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program. The results chapters discussed the academic and social integration of students in this program, the in- and out-of-class elements that foster validation, the perceived sense of preparedness of the participants in their ability to work with Native American youth with disabilities, and the differences between the Native American students and the non-Native students in their experience of these factors. This study was completed using qualitative methodology including program evaluation findings, individual interviews, a written survey, focus group and analysis of online postings.

Results of this study suggest that both the online and the face-to-face learning environments contributed to academic and social integration. These integrating experiences were essential in creating a vibrant and supportive learning environment.

Validation was an important factor in developing a sense of belonging in the community, and in fostering self-efficacy as future special education teachers in diverse settings. Participants felt well-prepared in several essential skills related to the field of special education including: working with students and families, cultural awareness, ability to be a valued part of an effective team, and instructional strategies. Two areas of skills and knowledge emerged that students did not feel well prepared for: special education assessment and the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandate of special education services. Differences between Native American and non-Native participants include the quality and quantity of giving and seeking support, reaction to challenges, and identified priorities. Chapter V will discuss these findings, implications of the results and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the student experience in a graduate-level special education teacher training program delivered in a hybrid-online format. This study used qualitative methodology to explore academic and social integration, validation, and perceptions of preparedness. The program under study was designed with a Native American focus, therefore the researcher also explored differences in the experience between Native American students and non-Native students in these three areas. The methodology included a review of program evaluation findings, individual interviews, analysis of the postings in the online classes, a written survey and a focus group.

This study began with the initial hypotheses that the factors of integration and validation would play a role in the experience of the nontraditional student in a hybrid-online teacher training program. The depth and breadth of this role was explored throughout the course of the study, and through a grounded theory approach the data resulted in a hypotheses-generating process. The initial hypotheses provided the basis for understanding of the factors within the context of the program, and led the researcher in the direction of expanding the hypotheses to a deeper level of understanding.

This chapter will discuss the findings of this research study in relation to the existing and emerging literature on academic and social integration, validation and perceptions of preparedness for the non-traditional adult learner in the hybrid learning

environment. It will outline the limitations of the study, offer a few final thoughts and possibilities for future research.

### *Participants*

Twenty-one students started classes in the program in the fall of 2008, 12 from *Small Private College* and nine from *Large Public University*. Fifteen students (71%) persisted through completion of the coursework, nine from *Small Private College* (75%) and six (67%) from *Large Public University*. Of the original 21 students who started classes in fall of 2008, six (29%) did not continue into the second semester; five of these students (83%) were Native American females, and one (17%) was non-Native and male. Program coordinators at *Small Private College* and *Large Public University* reported that these students left for personal reasons related to family, work and other personal issues which posed challenges in their ability to continue in the program. Another possible explanation for this discriminate attrition amongst the Native American students could be a perceived sense of non-responsiveness to individual needs, resulting in retention for those Native American students who identified less with cultural issues, or are more assimilated into the culture of higher education. However, three of the four Native American women who remained in the program self-identified as having a strong cultural identity and maintained close ties with their Native communities. Given that five of the six who dropped out early were also women may lead to some speculation regarding the role that gender may play in their decisions to not continue on through completion, and certainly a need for inclusion of this group of students in further research.



*Academic integration*

The hybrid-online format initially caused challenges for students in understanding the expectations of the institutions, and in academic integration. However, the cohort model was instrumental in overcoming these challenges through the strong group formation process that occurred. Intrinsic motivational factors emerged as a strong contributor to student completion, whereas the extrinsic reward of grade performance did not seem to be an important aspect in participant's academic integration. Intellectual growth was facilitated through the relationships and shared affiliation that developed amongst the cohort peers. These peer-to-peer relationships exerted a stronger influence on intellectual growth than did the faculty-student relationships.

There was significant variability in the faculty training and experience in teaching in an online learning environment. This study revealed that the faculty level of competency in managing the online learning environment was noticed and was important to students. This factor is supported in the research on non-traditional student persistence in the online learning environment (Rovai, 2003). However, exactly what the necessary skills required of faculty to achieve a level of proficiency in online teaching is still open for discussion and further research (Alvarez, Guasch & Espasa, 2009). Likewise, students also had variability in the level of skill and degree of comfort with online learning tools. All students eventually learned how to navigate the course management system effectively, but for those students who entered the program with a higher level of skill this transition was smoother. This factor has been supported as an important factor in

student success in the online or hybrid online learning environment (Holder, 2007; Rovai, 2003).

Participants in general did not seek grades as a confirming validation nor did they seem to need extrinsic rewards while in the program. However, intellectual growth was rewarding and also served as a confirming signal that their investment of time and resources was worth the expenditure. The cultural knowledge that was gained was most important to those students who had strong preconceived stereotypes about the Native-American community, and served as a meaningful area of growth for them.

Male participants were more motivated to enter and complete the program by the functional reward of benefit to their careers. Female participants were motivated by personal fulfillment or altruistic purposes. In some ways the population of this study is similar to the foundational work of Tinto (1975), yet in other ways it is distinctively different. For example, in his exploration of the undergraduate student population, Tinto found vocational development to be more important for males than females, with one's educational plans and expectations for future occupational status being, after ability, the single most important independent predictor of attainment (Tinto, 1975). This difference between males and females was also supported in the results of this study. However, for the participants in this study, goal commitments, whether personal, altruistic or professional, were of primary importance in their integration experience. For the undergraduate, traditional aged student, family background and prior educational experiences were more important (Tinto, 1975). The results of this study align well with

the results of latter models of Bean and Metzner (1985) and Rovai (2003), which are more reflective of the adult learner experience.

### *Social Integration*

The participants in this study went through a “typical” group formation process over time (Tuckman, 1965) and developed strong relational bonds with each other. These bonds were an important contributor to their success in the program. Informal social interactions were infrequent; however, the ones that occurred over the course of the two-year program were a valuable aspect of the unity and shared affiliation that develops between peers. The twice-per-semester face-to-face meetings were important times to develop informal relationships that added to educational success and group affiliation. Students felt that faculty was available if needed, but did not often seek their support, instead seeking out peers during challenging times, especially after the first semester and beyond.

Social integration as demonstrated through mutual support and feelings of connectedness were a surprisingly important aspect of student engagement in the program. Much of the existing literature in online learning confirms that a social connectedness with peers is an important aspect in persistence (for example, Rovai, 2002), and is confirmed in this study with the strong feelings expressed in statements such as: “I would not have made it if it were not for my peers.” The expectation of the author of this paper was that non-traditional adult learners would not necessarily need or seek out this level of support or that it would be as meaningful to them as they expressed.

The findings of this studied are echoed in other studies of online learning environments and in online teacher preparation programs (Anderson, 2004).

The online learning environment initially seems to have been a barrier to social connection and support, especially in the first semester. However, in the second semester and beyond, the online interactions became a bridge to others and emerged as an essential component in peer-to-peer support. For example, students began to notice when a peer would not post and would seek them out to offer support. In a face-to-face environment, this disengagement process might not be as noticeable, thereby limiting the social support available. Students also developed a deep sense of accountability to each other in their shared learning experience manifested in their meeting the responsibility to post online and interact with others.

### *Validation*

Validation came primarily through peer relationships and family support. The intellectual growth that they gained also served to confirm that they had made the correct choice in this program, and that their growth would positively influence their work as a special education teacher and personally. The finding of this study aligns with the foundational literature on validation for the non-traditional student, and its role in the college experience (Rendón, 1994).

The online learning environment served as a source of validation through the supportive community that developed. Participants initially were hesitant to post true opinions, or to engage in a controversial discussion. As time went on and a feeling of safety developed, students took more risks in voicing opinions, worked through intense

debates and received confirming signals of their value as a community member. The online learning environment offered a venue for all to be heard equally, whereas oftentimes in a face-to-face environment a vocal few may dominate class discussions. This egalitarian model offers a greater opportunity for a shared and cooperative learning experience.

The financial support that students received to attend the face-to-face meetings and a related educational conference added to the validation. Without this financial support, several students would not have been able to participate in the licensure program. It also created a feeling of being a valued member of the program. The twice-per-semester face-to-face meetings created a “space” to both give and receive support, and to cement the sense of purpose and place in the program, contributors to an overall sense of validation. Validation came primarily from peers, and participants often commented that without this support and validation they would have likely withdrawn from the program. Family provided logistical support and encouragement, which enabled students to focus on their school work.

#### *Perceptions of preparedness*

Both integration experiences and validation contributed to perceptions of preparedness and a developing sense of self-efficacy to do the work of a special education teacher and with diverse student populations. Specifically, four areas of skills and knowledge came out of the data that students felt well prepared for: working with students and families, cultural awareness, ability to be a valued part of an effective team, and instructional strategies. Two areas of skills and knowledge emerged that students did

not feel well prepared for: special education assessment and the paperwork associated with meeting the legal mandate of special education services. These results align with research that shows that the reason why special education teachers leave the field is not because of the challenging work with children, but rather with the administrative parts of the job (Kaff, 2004). Part of this burnout process may be the result of gaps in the teacher preparation programs as demonstrated in the current study.

Two themes emerged as the bases for feeling prepared: an individual's background and experience and an increased sense of self-efficacy. Low levels of self-efficacy are associated with teacher burnout (Chreniss, 1993). Because special education teacher retention is a major problem (Billingsley, 2008), the development of self-efficacy in pre-service special education teachers is important. Several participants reported that they were challenged to "think outside the box", and take the theory into practice during field work and student teaching. In their experiences, the "real-life" of teaching did not always align with textbook theory. This seeming incongruity between textbook and teaching practice seem to enhance personal and intellectual growth because it challenged the pre-service teachers to reflect on their choices in the classroom and consider alternative ways of doing things. This process formulated a stronger sense of personal philosophy and self-confidence in their ability to be a successful special education teacher and an independent practitioner.

#### *Differences between Native American and non-Native students*

There were several differences that emerged between the Native American and non-Native students. While all students expressed appreciation and value for the Native

American focus of the program, Native American students felt validated personally in this emphasis. All students expressed that they were challenged at times, however while non-Native students would reach out and get what they needed during these times, all four Native American students used the word “shame’ when discussing their challenges; they also did not often seek out support from peers or faculty. There were also differences noted in the process of giving and receiving support. Non-Native students typically had several peers with whom they felt comfortable in seeking and giving support, while Native students had few (if any) peers from whom they would seek support.

Some students found the online format to get in the way of getting the support that they needed from their peers. Whether these differences were due to individual differences, personal style, cultural custom, or a combination of both, is uncertain. In other research, students were found to be selective in whose posts they read and responded to (Anderson, 2004). Similarly, the Native American students seem to be drawn to those who they felt comfortable with and interacted accordingly. Additional archival analysis of a larger sample pool could offer additional insight into these selective online interactions.

Finally, all students were adult non-traditional students and held multiple commitments outside of the program. However, the non-Native students frequently discussed how they would put family and community responsibilities on hold with precedence going to completion of the program. Native students, in contrast, stated openly that their community responsibilities would come first and before school, and in fact at times did trump program deadlines or responsibilities. The context for this study is

a Native American special education licensure program. The need for culturally specific special educators has been well documented since the 1970's (Baca & Miramontes, 1985). Since that time, many institutions have attempted to create programs which address both the disproportionate rate of minorities in special education as well as the shortage of special education teachers from minority cultures; this program is one such initiative. Yet, even with these efforts there continues to be a shortage of adequately trained and culturally specific special educators. Additionally, when students of color are recruited into higher education, retention at all levels continues to be problematic.

In the current study, the majority (83%) of the first semester dropouts were Native American. Although the numbers in this study are small, the results are supported in other studies with much larger sample populations. Students of color, in general, have higher dropouts than white students at every level of education (NCES, 2012). However, there are several other factors that may have contributed to these students not continuing in the program. Adult and non-traditional learners in general have lower retention rates (Kerka, 1995), students at all levels in online programs have lower retention rates (Rovai, 2002), and when you combine adult learners in online programs, the problems of retention are further exacerbated (Park & Choi, 2009). Although, the Native American students who dropped out in the first semester are not included as participants in this study, the program evaluation findings seem to suggest that the reasons for leaving the program were primarily because of conflicts between outside commitments and the program responsibilities. The results of this study indicate that additional face-to-face classes, especially early in the first semester, may be needed to remediate and reduce



early disengagement. However, this discriminate attrition rate in the Native American students could also signify that the program may have been non-responsive to the needs of the Native American students, and only those individuals who identify less with Native American issues stayed in the program. Therefore, although this study showed some differences in both the retention and the experience of the Native American students and the non-Native students, the reasons for these differences are complex and unresolved, and most certainly warrant further exploration.

Of the four Native American students who participated in this study, only one (25%) has become fully licensed to teach special education, as compared to 88% of the Euro-American participants. Follow-up conversations with two of the Native American participants who have not yet finished their licenses indicated that the reason was due to the inability to pass the required state mandated licensing tests. These poor licensing outcomes for Native American students based on an inability to pass what some may consider a discriminatory test bias is concerning to many faculty in higher education teacher preparation programs (personal communication, C. Smith, 2013).

### *Conclusions*

The study used an existing framework that has been extensively studied, and applied it to a novel population. Academic and social integration are well supported as relevant factors in the undergraduate student experience (Tinto, 1975; Bean & Metzner, 1985), but not widely explored in graduate programs or in online learning environments. Validation has been proposed as an additional factor of relevance to persistence in the non-traditional student experience, and in some ways a result of the integration process

(Rendón, 1994, 2006). Yet, to date, how validation might be experienced in an online environment has also been sparsely studied. The literature supports the position that the development of this level of peer-to-peer support is not unusual in a cohort model (Anderson, 2004), and the strength and meaningfulness of these connections is closely related to success.

The current study has shed some light on the relative importance of these factors in the non-traditional student in a hybrid-online learning environment. Yet, there are several limitations in the current work. First of all, the results of this study are limited to the population of the program. This program is unique in its design, therefore no overarching themes or generalization to other programs or other students can be assumed. Next, the participants in this study were mostly female (69%). The results of this exploration favored social support as an essential element in the student experience; it is not clear with the small sample whether this reliance on social support was a result of the cohort experience, the dominant female presence, or perhaps a combination of the two. Another limitation of the current study is that there were no Native American males included in this group; hence the voice of that demographic is absent. Also absent is the “autopsy” voice, the experience of those students who left the program early; what was lacking in their experience cannot be assumed. That valuable source of data would benefit from being culled and holds implications for the results of this study as well as further research.

Areas of challenge and weakness expressed by the participants have provided guidance for modifications in the second cohort in areas such as methods of instruction,

level of support, course sequence, and consistency across courses and instructors. The results of this study have informed the revision of the program in several specific ways:

- Support the development of stronger faculty-student relationships initially and ongoing. Develop additional training and guidelines for instructors to be more consistent in online teaching across courses; ongoing training of all faculty in online pedagogy. All instructors who are able should attend the first face-to-face weekend so that these peer-faculty relationships are started early in the program.
- Provide early and ongoing support to students. Be alert to early signs of disengagement through closer monitoring of online presence. Lay out a clear foundation and online orientation at the onset of the program; build in peer-to-peer support activities from the first semester forward. Establish ongoing communication with students through direct phone calls and emails as soon as they get behind in their work. Native students especially may benefit from the personal connections, communication and early intervention. Observation and monitoring for patterns of disengagement early on may signal a need for more intensive support, check-ins, and different ways of advising or reaching out earlier and in a more personal way.
- Provide for more independence of how work is completed within the expectations of the program. Re-align the coursework to fill in gaps in the intellectual growth and preparation of students.
- Incorporate more traditional ceremonial activities to establish and maintain group connection, social support, validation and enhance cultural knowledge. Connect the

Circle of Courage foundational philosophy more directly and meaningfully with activities in courses.

- Future research:
  - Conduct a replication study with the second cohort to broaden the base of understanding around integration, validation and preparedness (completed in 2013).
  - Explore more fully Native-American pedagogy for adult learners with the goal to improve retention rates in this and similar teacher training programs (currently in progress).
  - Conduct a follow-up study as former students enter the profession as special education teachers to evaluate preparation and intent to stay in the field.

This information from this study will be used to develop and improve future programs and policies to prepare teachers from a Native American perspective to work with students with disabilities. The ultimate goal of improved teacher education preparation programs is to adequately prepare an increasingly diverse workforce to meet the authentic needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The hybrid online learning environment provides an effective means to recruit a more diverse pool of potential special education teachers, especially those with limited access to a college campus. Through continued exploration of the factors that support success in these types of alternative preparation programs this goal can be achieved.

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## Appendix A

## Participant Profiles

Name	Participant Profile
Eagle	32 years old, Native-American Ojibwe, married with three young children at home. She and her husband also are foster care parents for Native-American families. Her father is Native-American and her mother is from a Mexican migrant farm-worker family. Her undergraduate degree is in Native American Studies. She currently works as an academic assistant and cultural liaison in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Her father earned his G.E.D; her mother's educational level is unknown. She has basic computer literacy skills, but little experience with social media and none with online instruction.
Mark	42 years old, married with three young children, Euro-American and owns a home in northern Minnesota. He grew up in rural southeast Minnesota, and currently lives in Duluth. Mark dropped out of high school, but later returned to earn a G.E.D. and an undergraduate degree in Management Psychology. Both his mother and father dropped out of high school, although his father later earned a G.E.D... He has worked for seven years in a charter school as a special education paraprofessional with students identified with an emotional or behavioral disorder. He has taken several online classes as a part of his undergraduate degree.
Desiree	53 yrs. old, Euro-American, and divorced with two children at home (ages 17 and 15 years old). She lives in an urban area. Her father has an AA degree, and her mother a master's. She worked with special needs youth in an institutional setting as a high school student, and currently works as a special education teacher. Her undergraduate degree is in Health Education, and she holds a teaching license in that area. Prior to entering the program, she worked for 12 years as a restaurant manager in the Twin Cities, as a Director of Religious Education in her faith community, in a crisis nursery, and as a homebound teacher. She had limited technology experience prior to entering The program.



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Shannon 48 years old, Euro-American, married with two children (one still living at home; an adult son has autism and lives in a group home). She lives in rural northern Minnesota. Her undergraduate degree is in elementary education, and she holds a teaching license in that area. She currently works as a special education teacher in learning disabilities on a waiver. Her father has a master's degree, and her mother has some college, but no degree. She has basic computer literacy skills, but little experience with social media or online classes.

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Beatrice 32 years old, Euro-American, single and rents an apartment in an urban area. She grew up in a rural area, and has lived in the city for the last 13 years. She has worked with youth in varying capacities since high school, and began college as a social work major. Although she knew she would eventually work with kids, her undergraduate degree is in Classics: Greek and Romans Studies. She currently works as a server in a comedy club. Her mother has some college, but no degree; her father has a high school diploma.

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Kan Keo 49 years old, native Hmong immigrant, is married with five children (four adult, one still at home, age 11 years old). She lives on a small farm in rural Wisconsin. She labels herself as "white Hmong", and her husband as "green Hmong," a "mixed" marriage as she describe it, once forbidden. She speaks four languages fluently: Laotian, Thai, English and Hmong. She moved with her family to Minnesota in 2005; before that, her family immigrated to Hawaii when she was 13 years old. She currently works as a special education liaison and interpreter; previously she has worked on her family's poultry farm in Arkansas, as a financial aid case manager, and as a mortgage banker. Her undergraduate degree is in Human Services. Her motivation to obtain a teaching license was to better advocate for the Southeast-Asian students that she currently works with to obtain more services. She also would like to have the same work schedule as her husband. She had no experience with online social media, and very little experience with technology beyond basic email.

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Will 47 years old, Euro-American, and married with two dependents (ages 14 And 11 years old) at home. He owns a home in a suburban area of the Twin Cities. He is a licensed social studies teacher, and has worked in a high school

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setting for five years. His current school is part of an integrated school district, with 50% of the students from the urban area, and 50% from suburban. Although a Minnesota native, he was a school counselor in rural upstate New York a residential setting with at-risk youth for three years. He was also a social studies teacher in a large New York City high school for over 20 years; this school had 45 social studies teachers and Will reports that it was ranked the most culturally diverse school in the five boroughs of New York City. He holds a master's degree in education. He returned to Minnesota in 2001, after the attack on New York. He learned about the licensure program through an online search for special education licensure programs. He had taken one online class previously, and had basic technology literacy skills such as sending email and using the internet. His motivation for earning a special education license is for job security in his current school.

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**Katherine** 48 years old, Native American, and widowed with seven children (ages 19 through 2 years old); six of her children are adopted and all have special needs. She lives in rural Minnesota. She is Ojibwa and is enrolled in the Mille Lacs Band. Her father has a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education, and her mother completed 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She grew up in a rural area, and her sister Margaret is also in the program. She lived on the reservation in her early years, but due to her fair skin, freckles and red hair was the victim of bullying and a negative climate. Subsequently, she moved with relatives to the local "white" community to continue her education. She received special education services when she was younger, graduated from high school on the 'B' honor roll, yet, like her sister, did not know how to read or write fluently upon graduation from high school. Her undergraduate degree is in Organizational Behavior Management. She currently works as a cultural liaison and special education advocate in the k-12 public school system. Her motivation for earning a special education license is to help her own children, all whom receive special education services, and to be a role model for her children. She had taken one online class previously, and used the computer only to play games.

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- Jonathan 25 years old, Euro-American, and unmarried with no dependents. He lives in an urban environment in an apartment with several friends. He is licensed teacher who works in an alternative high school in Minneapolis; his license and undergraduate degree is in elementary education with a middle-school math concentration. The school where he has worked for three years has a high percentage of Native American students and about half of the staff is Native American. After graduating from college, he wanted to work in an alternative school, but not necessarily in a Native American school. He is also a musician, and has significant experience with technology and social media such as FaceBook and MySpace. His father has a bachelor's degree, and his mother a Master's degree. He learned about the licensure program through an acquaintance. His motivation for earning a special education license is for job security in his current school.
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- Paul Ray 50 years old, Euro-American, and married with four adult children no longer at home. He lives in a rural area of northern Minnesota, moving here after taking an early retirement buyout as an executive in a large national retail chain. For five years he has been the director of a small (less than 100 students) elementary charter school, and also own and runs with his wife a small resort hotel. His undergraduate degree is in accounting and business management. His motivation for getting a special education license is to better understand the students in his school, the educational system is general, and to support his special education staff with due process responsibilities. He had significant experience with technology, and had also taken one online class prior to starting The program.
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- Margaret 46 years old, Native American, and widowed with three children (ages 16, 8 and 2 years old). She lives in rural Minnesota. She is Ojibwe and is enrolled in the Mille Lacs Band. Her father has a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education, and her mother completed 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She grew up on a reservation, and her sister Katherine is also in the program. She was a "behavior problem" in school, and received special education services. She graduated from high school, but did not learn to read or write fluently until she entered college. Her undergraduate degree is in Organizational Behavior Management. She currently works as a maintenance
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supervisor in the public school system. Her motivation for earning a special education license is to help her own children, all whom receive special education services. She has also attended many special education meetings for other family and community members, and feels the knowledge will help her to help them. She had taken three online classes previously, was comfortable with social media and email.

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Nadia 35 years old, Native-American, divorced, with two children at home. She owns her own home in northern Minnesota. She is Ojibwa and is enrolled in White Earth. Her father is Native-American and her mother is Euro-American. She was not raised on the reservation, but maintained connections with her band during wild rice harvesting, other traditions and ceremonies. Her undergraduate degree is in elementary education with a mathematics emphasis, and she holds a teaching license in that area. She currently works as a guidance counselor at the local public high school with a high Native-American student population. She has basic computer literacy skills, but no experience with social media or online instruction.

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Cindy 31 years old, Euro-American, and unmarried with no dependents. She owns a home in an urban environment. She grew up in an urban area and had many friends who were Native-American when she was younger. She has worked with adolescents for seven years as a psychiatrist associate in the mental health ward of a hospital. Prior to this work, she had experience as a youth worker, camp counselor, and a substitute teacher. Her undergraduate degree is an integrated major of sociology classes, Educational and Youth Studies. She had taken one online class previously, and prior to enrolling in the program she had very little experience with technology or online sources other than email.

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## Appendix B

## Consent Form

*A Case Study of the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program*

You are invited to be in a research study of your experience in the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current or former student in the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by faculty members from *Small Private College* (Sxxx Oxxxx and Donna Patterson) and *Large Public University* (Txxxx Hxxxx).

**Background Information:** The Tribal Special Education Licensure Program is an innovative teacher training model. As the first group for students to graduate from the program, the purpose of this study is to understand more fully your experience, to identify what has worked well for you and what has been challenging, and to assess a perceived level of preparedness to work with both Native American children and in special education.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in a 1½-2 hours interview with project staff during the summer of 2010, participate in a follow-up focus group and a written survey approximately nine months after completion of the program. The interview will take place in your home town in a public space (library, coffeeshop, etc. ). The follow-up focus group and written survey will take place as a group in a mutually convenient location (ie: Hinckley). Access to the follow-up survey will be provided electronically or in alternative format if requested. We will also be conducting an analysis of select online postings from classes to identify patterns over time in both breadth and depth of interaction. The duration of this study is estimated to be nine months, and will conclude approximately March of 2011.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** Although not the focus of our conversations, there is a risk that personal or sensitive information may evolve during interviews or focus-groups conversations.

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study.

Indirect benefits to participation are the ability to be a contributor in the increase of the body of knowledge pertaining to the retention and persistence of college students in future programs, the training and retention of culturally competent special educators, and the improvement of programs and policies.

**Compensation for participation in this study:** Travel expenses, meals and overnight accommodations for the follow-up focus group will be provided.

**Confidentiality:** A final written report will be disseminated to stakeholders: MN Department of Education, *Small Private College* and the *Large Public University*. The records of this study will be kept confidential. Findings of this research may be presented at state and national conferences and in educational research publications; however pseudonyms will be used in all written or verbal reports. If we publish any type of report, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file or secured digital storage; only faculty members involved directly in the project will have access to the data and video recordings. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While we will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number of students in the cohort. Videotapes will be destroyed by May of 2014.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with *Small Private College*, the *Large Public University*, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contact and Questions:** The researcher coordinating this project is Donna Patterson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or by email at pattersd@xxxxxxx.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

*I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*I consent to be videotaped. Note: You may refuse to be videotaped and still participate in this study.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in published documents and final written report (pseudonyms will be used in all written and verbal reports).*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

## Interview Protocol

*Project: A Case Study of the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program*

Date of interview:

Time of interview:

Interviewer: Donna Patterson

Place of interview:

Interviewee

1. Tell me about yourself and how you got to where you are today.
  - Undergraduate major? Another teaching license?
  - Why did you choose special education?
  - How did you hear about the program?
  - Did you explore or apply to other programs?
  - Why did you select this program?
  - Past experience with online delivery?
  - Past experience with native cultures?
2. What were your expectations when you enrolled in the program? How did these expectations align with your actual experience?
3. What or who has helped you in completing this program?
  - Can you comment on the role that your family or friends played in your experience?
  - Can you comment on the role that your peers in the cohort played in your experience?
  - Can you comment on the role that the college faculty or advisors played in your experience?
  - Can you comment on the role that any others played in your experience?
  - What did you do specifically to be successful in this program?
4. What aspects of the program have had the most impact on you? In what way(s)?
  - Can you comment on the structure of the program?
  - Can you comment on the online delivery of the instruction?
  - Can you comment on the face-to-face sessions?
  - Can you comment on the COC:
  - Can you give an example of belonging, mastery, independence, mastery
  - Can you comment on your relationship with faculty?
  - How did you like your classes? Tell me about one of your more interesting instructors? One of your more challenging instructors? One of your least liked instructors?
  - Can you comment on academic advising support? Did you seek out advising...face-to-face or in person/ under what circumstances?
  - Did you meet socially with faculty outside of the face-to-face sessions?
  - Can you comment on your relationships with peers?
  - What types of interactions did you have with your peers in the cohort?

- Did you meet socially outside of class assignments with peers?
  - What type of future relationships do you anticipate with your cohort peers?
  - Can you tell me about your student teaching experience?
5. What aspects of the program have been most challenging to you?
- How did you overcome these challenges?
  - Who did you talk to during these challenging times? What specifically did he/she say or do to support you during these challenging times?
  - If you needed a pep talk, who do you talk to first? Who else?
  - Did you ever think about quitting the program? What were the reasons?
  - Why did you continue?
  - Can you comment on the structure of the program?
  - Can you comment on the online delivery of the instruction?
  - Can you comment on the face-to-face sessions?
  - Can you comment on your relationship with faculty?
  - Can you comment on your relationships with peers?
6. How prepared do you feel to enter the teaching field?
- How does it feel to have the licensure program behind you? What is your biggest concern? What are you most excited about?
  - How prepared do you feel for special education?
  - How prepared do you feel to work with culturally diverse students?
  - Can you comment on how the native perspective of the program will impact your teaching?
  - Where do you see yourself one year from now? How about in four to five years?
7. Think about the next cohort...what advice would you give to the new group of students?
8. Would you recommend this program to your friends? Why or why not?
9. Is there anything else about your experience in the program that we haven't covered and you would like to share with me?

### *Wrap Up*

After this interview is transcribed, a pseudonym will be assigned. What pseudonym would you like to be identified with?

Interviewee's email:

Interviewee's gender: M F

Interviewee's age:

Interviewee's marital status:

Tribal affiliation:

Do you speak a native language: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Did you have any children at home during the program?

In what format would you like to review your transcript and preview comments?

*Thank you for your involvement!*



## Appendix D

## Focus Group Questions

Winter/Spring 2011

*Project: A Case Study of the Tribal Special Education Licensure Program*

1. Where are you working? What are your duties?
2. How is it going?
3. What has been the most surprising aspect of your work?
4. What areas of your work do you feel well prepared for?
5. What has been most challenging to you?
6. Do you plan to return to this job next year? Why or why not?
7. What are your plans for completing the Master's degree at *Small Private College*?

## Appendix E

## Written Survey

Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Background and Demographic Information
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1. Are you Male or Female?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female
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2. What is your age?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> 25 and under	<input type="checkbox"/> 46 – 55
<input type="checkbox"/> 26 – 35	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 55
<input type="checkbox"/> 36 – 45	
  
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors	<input type="checkbox"/> Masters
<input type="checkbox"/> Some Graduate Coursework	<input type="checkbox"/> Education Specialist
	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral
  
4. What is your ethnicity?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Euro-American	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American
<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian
<input type="checkbox"/> African	<input type="checkbox"/> Other race: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	_____
  
5. What is the total number of years you have been working in education?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 -3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 – 6 years
<input type="checkbox"/> Over 6 years
  
6. What is the total number of years you have been working in special education?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 -3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 4 – 6 years
<input type="checkbox"/> Over 6 years
  
7. How many years have you worked in special education in your district?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Not currently working as a special education professional	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 -3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 – 6 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 – 10 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 10 years

8. What best describes the environment in which your school is located? (May choose more than one)
- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rural    | <input type="checkbox"/> Reservation or tribal school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Urban    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban |   |
9. What best describes the student population at your current school?
- Low Socioeconomic Status
  - Middle Socioeconomic Status
  - High Socioeconomic Status
  - Multiple Levels of Socioeconomic Status
10. What best describes the student ethnicity at your current school?
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Euro-American    | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other race: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian            | _____                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic         | _____                                      |
11. What is the type of setting where you work? (May choose more than one)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home and/or community-based early intervention | <input type="checkbox"/> Separate site building (FS 4)                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early childhood preschool setting              | <input type="checkbox"/> Other-agency-based service (day treatment, residential, hospital) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Charter   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle School                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal school   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Magnet School                                  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative School                             |  |
12. What best describes the services you provide? (May choose more than one)
- Provide services within the general ed. classroom
  - Pull-out special education services/resource
  - Self-contained special education program
  - Itinerant (travel to more than one school to provide services)
  - Related services, describe: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Only answer the following if you are a **special education teacher** and support a specific content area(s): What content area(s) are you responsible for supporting students? (May choose more than one)
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Literacy       | <input type="checkbox"/> Art                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts  | <input type="checkbox"/> Music              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics    | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science        | <input type="checkbox"/> None               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____       |

14. Have you ever left the teaching or related service field?

Yes

No

If yes, what were the reasons? \_\_\_\_\_

How long were you gone? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you return? \_\_\_\_\_

Recruitment
-------------

15. How did you hear about your current position –

District Web site

Minnesota Teacher Recruitment  
Center

Minnesota State Workforce  
Center

MASA/MASE

Council for Exceptional Children  
job site

Other job sites, please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_

Local newspapers

Job Fairs

Conferences

Internal job posting

College placement offices

Word of mouth/Informal  
networks

Other, please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. How were you hired?

Applied and offered the position

Transferred from another position by choice

Transferred from another position by district

Other

17. If you applied for this position, in how many different districts did you submit applications

1

2-5

5-10

10+

18. When you accepted this position, did you have other offers available?

Yes

No

If so, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

19. If you applied to more than one position, what choice was this position

- 1<sup>st</sup> choice
- 2<sup>nd</sup> choice
- 3<sup>rd</sup> choice
- 4<sup>th</sup> + choice

20. Why did you choose this position?

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21. When you interviewed and were offered this position, **indicate the 2 most important** incentives that the *administrator provided* to make the position more attractive to you.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District salary and benefits package                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide mentor   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiring/sign-on bonus   | <input type="checkbox"/> Induction program  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salary incentives such as starting at higher step on the salary schedule | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide release time for team meetings, assessments, or other due process requirements |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relocation and/or housing assistance                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Payment of cost associated with licensure  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job share options  | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget for classroom materials, equipment and student incentives                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loan forgiveness   | <input type="checkbox"/> Provision of or access to staff technology equipment (e.g. laptop)                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tuition reimbursement  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Payment of professional association membership fees                      | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional development opportunities                                   |   |

22. Please rate the following items in terms of how important they were in your decision to accept your current position. If the item represents something that was not discussed or available, circle NA

	NA	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
Overall treatment received during the interview and hiring process					
Interaction with potential colleagues					
Salary & benefits					
Access to formal mentor program					
Case load (size, diversity)					
Access to instructional resources					
Access to technology					
Program philosophy/services					
SPED staff relationships					
Administrative support					
Support for professional development					
Relationship with general educators					
Support with due process					
Culturally specific training or support					
Diverse staff population					
Diverse student population					
High Native American student population					
Other:					

Teacher Credentials
---------------------

23. Indicate your area(s) of licensure (Check all that apply *only if you are fully licensed*):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional/Behavioral Disorders   | <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental Adaptive Physical Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disabilities            | <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Special Education         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developmental Disabilities       | <input type="checkbox"/> School Social Worker                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical and Health Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> General Education:<br>specify_____        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deaf/Hard of Hearing             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blind/Visually Impaired          |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech Language Pathologist      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Psychologist              |  |

24. Based on your current position, are you fully licensed for this position?

- Yes  
 No

25. If you are not a fully licensed special education teacher, what is the reason (ie: need to take state exams, chose not to license at this time, cannot afford licensing fees, etc.)?

26. Please rate the following statements:.

	Disagree strongly 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree strongly 4
My preparation program adequately equipped me for my current position.				
I have enough training and experience to deal with student academic needs.				
I have enough training and experience to deal with student behavioral problems.				
I have enough training and experience to work with an ethnically diverse student population.				
I have enough training and experience to work with Native American youth.				
I have enough training and experience to work with parents and families.				
I have enough training and experience to fulfill my administrative responsibilities (paperwork, due process, assessment, etc.)				



Support
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27. Based on your experience in your current position, how important is administrative support?

Building level administrative support (such as principal, assistant principal)	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
<p><b><u>Select the three most important areas related to what you receive from your administration</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Positive constructive feedback</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Responsiveness</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support with difficult issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides resources</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fair and equitable treatment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participates in special education student meetings (e.g: I.E.P.'s)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Culturally aware and responsive</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>				
Special education administrative support (such as sped director, sped coordinator)	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
<p><b><u>Select the three most important areas related to what you receive from your special education administration</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Positive constructive feedback</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Responsiveness</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support with difficult issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides resources</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fair and equitable treatment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participates at special education student meetings (e.g: I.E.P.'s)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Culturally aware and responsive</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>				

28. Based on your experience in your current position, how important is collegial support?

Collegial support	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
<p><b><u>Select the three most important areas related to what you receive from your colleagues</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to collaborate regularly with colleagues in general education</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to collaborate regularly with colleagues in special education</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to collaborate regularly with paraprofessionals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I consider my colleagues as friends</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Observe and learn from colleagues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Formal mentoring</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Informal mentoring</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School morale</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sense of belonging</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>				

29. Based on your experience in your current position, how important is professional development?

Professional Development	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
<p><b><u>Select the three most important areas related to what you receive in your workplace</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Induction or mentoring program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Financial support for professional development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Due process support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunity for growth and advancement</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technology training</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Instructional strategies and academic support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Culturally specific training and support</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Specialized training in my area</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Used online resources for academic strategies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Used online resources for behavioral strategies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Used an online social network for support</li> </ul>				

30. Please list areas in which you feel you need more support in your workplace.

Affective Factors

31. Please answer the following three questions about stress related to the current position

	Almost never 1	Monthly 2	Weekly 3	Daily 4
How often do you feel a great deal of stress?				
	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
Based on your experience in your current position, to what extent does work related stress level influence your decision to stay?				
<p>Which of the following contributes most to the work-related stress in your current position?  <b><u>Select the three most important areas</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Range in the needs and abilities of students</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bureaucratic regulations and rules</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paperwork</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting expectations, goals, directives</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Severity of student needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student behavior and discipline problems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Workload that is not manageable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Caseload that is not manageable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discriminatory practices</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cultural differences or intolerance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</li> </ul>				
<p>When you are stressed, who do you turn to for support?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Colleagues at your school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Colleagues outside of your school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Formal mentor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Informal mentor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Friends</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Family</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</li> </ul>				

32. Please answer the following questions about job satisfaction.

	Not Important 1	Minimally Important 2	Moderately Important 3	Very Important 4
Based on your experience in your current position, how important is your overall job satisfaction in your decision to stay?				
Which of these factors contributes to your decision to stay in your current position? <u>Select the top three areas</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recognition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Feeling appreciated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Respected</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I am making a significant difference in the lives of my students</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative relationships with teachers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative relationships with parents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative relationships with administrative personnel</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative relationships with other service providers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cultural diversity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance of cultural diversity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other</li> </ul>				

33. Please circle True or False to the following statements.

T	F	I believe and accept my district goals and values.
T	F	I believe and accept my school goals and values.
T	F	I believe and accept my specific program goals and values.
T	F	I spend extra non-compensated time outside of my duty day to complete work related tasks (e.g.: lesson planning, paperwork, etc.).
T	F	I spend extra non-compensated time outside of my job to work on behalf of special education professional organizations and /or initiatives.
T	F	I spend extra non-compensated time outside of my job to work on behalf of district, school or program support activities (committees, volunteering, etc.).
T	F	I maintain a current membership in at least one special education professional organization (i.e.: CEC; exclude union membership as it is mandatory).
T	F	I can effectively get through to the most difficult students.
T	F	I can effectively control disruptive behavior in the classroom.
T	F	I can effectively adjust my lessons to the proper level for individual students.
T	F	I can effectively use a variety of assessment strategies.
T	F	I can effectively collaborate with the families of my students.
T	F	I can effectively work with a diverse student population.

34. State your intention for each of the following:

	I plan to leave as soon as possible	I plan to stay for at least a few years	I plan to stay for a long time	I plan to stay until I retire	Unsure
My current position					
My district					
Remaining in special education					
Remaining in education (but not special education)					

35. Where are you working this year and what are your duties?

36. Is this a different job than you had last year?      Yes      No

37. What area(s) of your current work do you feel well prepared for?

38. What has been most challenging to you this year?

39. Who/what have you used for support this year during these challenging times?

40. What type of support do you wish you had that you do not currently have?

41. How well has this program prepared you for the work that you are doing?

42. Do you plan to return to this same job next year?      Yes      No

Why or why not?

43. If you are leaving your current position as soon as possible, what are your plans?

44. What are your plans to complete the Master's degree at *Small Private College*?

45. Use this space (or the other side of this sheet) to share any other comments that you would like.

***Thank you for completing this survey!***

## Appendix F

## Circle of Courage

**The Circle of Courage® Philosophy**

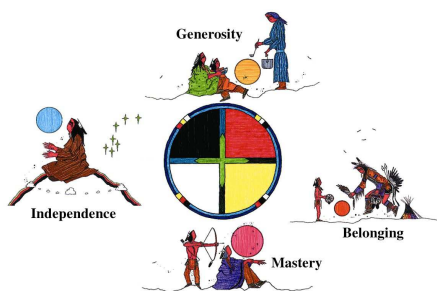
(<http://www.reclaiming.com/content/about-circle-of-courage> )

The Circle of Courage® is a model of youth empowerment supported by contemporary research, the heritage of early youth work pioneers and Native philosophies of child care. The model is encompassed in four core values: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The central theme of this model is that a set of shared values must exist in any community to create environments that ultimately benefit all.



In 1990, Dr. Larry Brendtro, Dr. Martin Brokenleg, and Dr. Steve Van Bockern, Augustana College faculty, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, published *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*. The authors suggested that children who are often referred to as "alienated", "troubled" or "difficult" are at risk because they live in an environment that is hazardous - one that breeds discouragement. By contrast, an environment that promotes courage is one that fosters changes to meet the needs of the young person and society and subsequently reclaims youth at risk.

The model is represented by a circle - the medicine wheel - that is divided into quadrants. The circle is sacred and suggests the interconnectedness of life. Likewise, it expresses the sacredness of the number four - the four directions, the four elements of the universe, and the four races. Each quadrant of the CIRCLE OF COURAGE stands for a central value - belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity - of an environment that can claim and reclaim all youth. It represents the "cultural birthright for all the world's children."



The Circle of Courage is a philosophy that integrates the best of Western educational thought with the wisdom of indigenous cultures and emerging research on positive youth development. The circle suggests the importance of the shared values of belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery. While

the four dimensions of the Circle of Courage can be described individually, they must be viewed as one. Ideas from the book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* offer insight on understanding the four values:

**Belonging:**

In Native American and First Nations cultures, significance was nurtured in communities of belonging. Lakota anthropologist Ella Deloria described the core value of belonging in these simple words: "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know." Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds that draw all into relationships of respect. Theologian Martin Marty observed that throughout history the tribe, not the nuclear family, always ensured the survival of the culture. Even if parents died or were not responsible, the tribe was always there to nourish the next generation.

**Mastery:**

Competence in traditional cultures is ensured by guaranteed opportunity for mastery. Children were taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience. A person with greater ability was seen as a model for learning, not as a rival. Each person strives for mastery for personal growth, but not to be superior to someone else. Humans have an innate drive to become competent and solve problems. With success in surmounting challenges, the desire to achieve is strengthened.

**Independence:**

Power in Western culture was based on dominance, but in tribal traditions it meant respecting the right for independence. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, Native teaching was designed to build respect and teach inner discipline. From earliest childhood, children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults modeled, nurtured, taught values, and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion.

**Generosity:**

Finally, virtue was reflected in the preeminent value of generosity. The central goal in Native American child-rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In the words of a Lakota Elder, "You should be able to give away your most cherished possession without your heart beating faster." In helping others, youth create their own proof of worthiness: they make a positive contribution to another human life.