"NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!"

YOUTH-LED SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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September 2013

ABSTRACT

For this Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study, the help of six students from an alternate education program were enlisted to collaboratively inquire about the educational experiences of vulnerable youth—students in alternate education and youth who have dropped out of school. Utilizing a qualitative method, the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique, youth researchers asked their peers: *what helped and hindered their retention and success in the education system*? Along with this inquiry, another question that was examined in the study was: *how can youth in alternate education engage in meaningful participation through YPAR and what does this engagement yield*? Youth researchers were involved in the whole research process and took part in the iterative phases of YPAR—critical reflection and social action. Their involvement empowered them to advocate for their peers by disseminating their research results and recommendations to key educational stakeholders within the community. Engagement in the YPAR process provided insight on how to work with marginalized youth in a manner that promotes agency and social change.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by youth researchers with 18 participants. Participants were asked about their experience in mainstream and alternate education. 703 incidents were elicited and from these incidents 55 categories emerged: 30 mainstream categories (5 helping, 14 hindering, 11 wish-list) and 25 categories for alternate education (12 helping, 8 hindering, 5 wish-list). From these categories 9 themes were formed. Overall, the findings show that relationships with staff and peers, flexibility, psychosocial and academic supports, and personal circumstances were vital in helping vulnerable youth find success in school. Moreover, despite the stigma attached to alternate education, participants found the alternate program to be beneficial for their educational careers. Critical reflections and social

actions taken, implications for counselling and education, future research and plans, and recommendations for school district are discussed. Recommendations include: (1) foster caring staff-student relationships; (2) improve response to bullying; (3) facilitate restorative discipline practices; (4) improve psychosocial and academic supports; (5) focus on prevention by gauging and promoting positive engagement; (6) rebrand alternate education as a place for "choosers not losers"; and (7) incorporate youth voice in educational decisions.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research; Youth Participatory Action Research; alternate education; vulnerable youth; high school completion; youth voice; youth engagement

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many that I want to acknowledge—which is only fitting as it is reminder that this project is not just my thesis, but a project that involved the generosity of a community of incredible individuals.

First, I want to acknowledge my co-researchers—Kara Firth, Jordan Florence, Jake Harms, Mya Raber, Taylor Stevens, and Scott Wilson. It has been a privilege to journey together with you; to not only witness your capacity to do research, but to also be impacted by your laughter, stories, and willingness to step forward and advocate for your peers. I believe each of you will do wonderful things and will continue to impact others as you have impacted me.

My supervisors, Dr. Janelle Kwee and Dr. Robert Lees. Dr. Kwee, you have been an important source of encouragement—from those moments of uncertainty to celebrating successes. Thank you for your guidance; your willingness to work with students in such a manner is inspiring. Dr. Lees, somehow you made me believe that this project was possible despite resounding impossibility—thank you for instilling this belief in me and for believing in me. You have paved the way for meaningful community research and this project would be not be possible if it were not for your efforts.

Dr. Marvin MacDonald, thank you for the wealth of information that you provided to me on a consistent basis. Your wisdom and words have been very influential, but more importantly it was your presence and reassurance during our many hallway conversations that I valued the most. Dr. Marla Buchanan, thank you for lending your expertise as an external and for your kind and calming words during the defense. Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc, thank you for sifting through my hefty thesis proposal and providing your insights on how I could improve this thesis.

To Richard Tatomir and Chereca Weaver, thank you for taking on this project as co-facilitators; for volunteering time out of your busy schedules to help me with this large undertaking and somehow making sense of the confusing nature of how I work.

To the participants, for your incredible stories of resilience and hardship. Thank you for allowing my research team and I to be witnesses and for entrusting us with your stories. I hope that this project honors the reality of what you have faced and experienced.

To the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council for seeing the value of this project and lending your support to it. To the Chilliwack School District, for initiating the project and for your willingness to engage in reflective practice. And to the incredible staff at the Education Centre who on a daily basis give their all to the youth they are serving.

To my family who have provided me with so much—for privileging me with values, encouragement, and care. Your sacrifice reminds me of the importance of hard work and the experience of this thesis has helped me further appreciate the gifts and provisions that I was and am endowed with. I do not say it often enough, but I appreciate you all dearly.

Lastly, to Candice Yu, my editor, counsellor, fiancé, and friend. Thank you for the many long hours you have listened to me bicker and doubt my own capacities. You have journeyed with me through the highs and lows, yet constantly you were there with me—present. It is in those moments that your reassurance helped pick me up and push me forward.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Nothing about us without us"
"Love is key"
"One thing I learned about life—it goes on"
"Wherever you go, take yourself with you"
"There are many fish in the sea"
"There is always time to find yourself"
"Fall down seven times, stand up eight"
"Everything is possible, being nothing isn't an option, all you gotta do is believe in yourself"
"Peace isn't a goal to be achieved, it's a means by which to achieve that goal"
"Things have to get worse before they get better"
"Experience is the building blocks that make you who you are"

Raising Hope Research Team, October 31, 2012

Figure 1. Research team (From left to right)—Mya Raber, Taylor Stevens, (trainee, not part of

research team), Jake Harms, Richard Tatomir (co-facilitator), Chereca Weaver (co-facilitator), Fred

Chou (principal investigator), Kara Firth, Jordan Florence, and Scott Wilson (Naylor, 2013,

January 16).

Through the 2012/2013 school year six youth co-researchers, two co-facilitators, and myself journeyed together to address educational concerns in Chilliwack—to provide youth who are often voiceless opportunities to share how they have been impacted by the education system, in order to improve it. The purpose of the study was to explore the educational experiences of students in alternate education and youth who have dropped out. It sought to examine what helped, hindered, and what these youth wished for that would have helped them succeed in school.

We established the name "Raising Hope" for our research team as a reflection of our own experiences; with that, we shared quotes that defined our identity and educational experiences (presented in the beginning of the document). Through reflections, social actions, and hard-work we shaped and implemented this research project; I have the privilege of presenting this journey, the lessons we have learned, and the results of this endeavour, along with recommendations based on the perspectives of our participants. Without this study, vulnerable youth might continue to be silenced while decisions are being made about them. We hope that this project is transformational, for participants, readers, and school administrators, and like our team name, raises hope for possibilities in education and research and results in social change.

General Problem Statement

It has been well established in the literature that education plays a crucial role in the well-being and healthy development of students (Hankivsky, 2008; Peled & Smith, 2010; Thiessen, 2007). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that "not all youth thrive in a mainstream academic setting" (Peled & Smith, 2010, p. 56). For these youth, alternate education programs have been developed to work with those who may not fit in mainstream systems (British Columbia Ministry of Education [BCME], 2012a).

In British Columbia (BC), alternate education programs have generally been successful in enhancing positive academic aspirations of vulnerable youth and their engagement to school (Peled & Smith, 2010). Alternate education programs are shaped according to the needs of the students it serves, thus no two programs are the same (Smith, Peled, Albert, MacKay, Saewyc & the McCreary Centre Society, 2008). Alternate education programs may not be able to reach the needs of all vulnerable youth due to the many barriers these youth face. Hence, it is important to analyse education programs according to its contextualized circumstances.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of youth who have dropped out and students in alternate education regarding their experience of Chilliwack education system—both in the mainstream and alternate program. It was part of a larger program of study supported by the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council (CSRPC) to improve high school completion rates in Chilliwack (R. Lees, personal communication, May 29, 2012). The research program was initiated by Chilliwack School District (District #33) in response to the low six-year completion rates in its district (R. Lees, personal communication, May 29, 2012). The six-year completion rate refers to "the portion of students who graduate, with a Certificate of Graduation, within six years from the time they enrol in Grade 8" (BCME, 2011, p. 56). To give perspective, in British Columbia (BC) the province wide completion rate was 81% in 2010/2011 school year (BCME, 2012a); during 2010/2011 school year the Chilliwack School District had one of the lowest completion rates within the province at 72% (BCME, 2011; BCME, 2012b). Based on these statistics, if the rates were at 81% it may result in an additional 116 graduates (Chilliwack School District, 2011).

To address this concern the Chilliwack school district approached the CSRPC to examine this educational issue (R. Lees, personal communication, August 31, 2012). What resulted from

these discussions were two studies: a quantitative sociological analysis conducted by Dr. Katherine Watson from the University of the Fraser Valley; and a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) study facilitated by my research team. Together the studies will triangulate the completion rate issue in Chilliwack and prompt future action plans (R. Lees, personal communication, August 31, 2012).

The rationale for focusing on youth in alternate education and youth who have stopped attending school was that, upon further analysis, the school district found that the alternate education program was contributing significantly to the lower six year completion rate (R. Lees, personal communication, May 29, 2012). From 2007 to 2011 the alternate program in the Chilliwack school district had six year completion rates that ranged from 9% to 13%, in contrast the rates for alternate programs in BC during that same period was 16% to 23% (BCME, 2012c; BCME, 2012d). This poses a problem within the educational community and merits further exploration. Thus, the premise of this study was to examine the incompletion rate issue from the perspectives of students who have dropped out and students currently attending alternate education; to comprehend and validate the narratives that underlie these statistics.

Part of Chilliwack's achievement contract was to engage all learners (Chilliwack School District, 2011); with the use of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), students in alternate education were engaged in a collaborative inquiry process. With this methodology, I partnered with these students as co-researchers to inquire about education system in Chilliwack. Given that education programs are multifaceted and shaped by contextualized needs (Smith et al., 2007), it was important to explore Chilliwack`s education system ideographically, because youth are experts of their experiences and context. It is assumed that the youth's lived experiences in transitioning out of mainstream education will give a better comprehension of the

factors that underlie the completion rate concern. In partnering with youth who are insiders of alternate education, it ensures that the voices of vulnerable youth are being properly represented in decisions that will be made by the Chilliwack school district. Youth in alternate education are capable of providing valuable feedback that can enhance educational policies (De La Ossa, 2005).

Project Background

    Chilliwack and the Education Centre. Chilliwack is a city in British Columbia that has a population of 77 936 (Statistics Canada, 2012). In the 2011/2012 school year, 6024 students were enrolled in secondary education, while 297 students were enrolled in alternate education (BCME, 2012f). There are three alternate programs in Chilliwack: C.H.A.N.C.E., the Education Centre, and Shxwetetilthet: Stó:lō (Chilliwack School District, 2012). The Education Centre is the largest with 210 students (105 male and 105 female; BCME, 2012f); it is also where the research project was situated. In contrast to the Chilliwack school district, the Education Centre has a large subset of Aboriginal youth, with 78 representing 37% of the school; the Chilliwack school district has 16% (BCME, 2012e; BCME, 2012f). In 2011/2012 the Education Centre reported to having 12% youth with learning disabilities and 16% with behavioral disabilities/mental health issues (BCME, 2012f).

    Personal reflection. As part of the tradition of PAR and its philosophy of critical reflection, it is imperative to present my worldview and biases. The rationale for this is because in qualitative research, my perspectives shape the co-constructed reality of my participants (see Morrow, 2007). With critical approaches such as Participatory Action Research (see Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008), the reflective process is crucial as it ensures that the biases of researchers are not further perpetuating oppression. As a result, to emphasize my own

reflective process, my personal involvement in the project, and the collaborative approach of

YPAR, I interjected my subjective experience and personal reflections in first-person format

throughout the thesis. I was also conscientious in highlighting the collective involvement of

myself with the team by referring to "us", "we", and "our".

I had worked with homeless and at-risk youth prior to entering the Master's program in

Counselling Psychology at Trinity Western University. I remember starting this work with naive

assumptions that it only needed a bit of tough love and grace in order to help these youth

overcome their barriers. I was utterly wrong. As I reflect now I realize my well intentioned

notions were perpetuated by the privilege of living in a secure loving lower-middle class family.

I had experienced struggles in my life with my identity as a Chinese-Canadian and being born

from an immigrant family. Through those experiences I learned early on that to overcome

barriers, one had to persevere and work harder. It was with this bias that I assumed that at-risk

youth can overcome their barriers with just a bit of hard work; little did I understand the traumas

these youth faced and continue to face on a daily basis.

The struggles these youth experienced were only propagated by the biases that were

inherent within our social structures and language—"homeless", "lazy", "delinquents",

"runaways", "punks". Anecdotally it was easy to see how these youth have internalized these

messages, it would almost seem like they were not allowed to succeed because this was how

society saw them—fear of success is what we called it at my workplace. I have seen many

prominent youth fall back to their old habits because they themselves could not believe there was

anything better for them. This experience made me realize how even social structures that were

meant to help often placed additional barriers on at-risk/homeless youth. It further marginalized

the marginalized. Moreover, it made me understand the notion of privilege and oppression, and

how easy it was for me to see the world from my privileged lens; as it is comfortable and easier

to neglect the experiences of the marginalized because it was *their* misfortunes not mine.

It was through these experiences that I came to experientially understand critical theory—

the notion of privilege and oppression that is inherent in the social structures that marginalized

groups experience. These experiences framed the critical theoretical lens by which I adopted

PAR. I recognized that despite the well-intentioned decisions made by social systems, they often

excluded the vulnerable individuals who were most impacted by these decisions. It is important

that change is evoked by those who are marginalized, as they are the experts of their

contextualized experiences.

Research Questions

To improve school systems for marginalized youth, Smith (2000) argued for the

employment of a critical interpretive lens.   Following Smith's recommendation, YPAR was

utilized to explore factors influencing high school incompletion.   YPAR has been chosen as the

methodology as it is inherently aligned to work with youth who have been marginalized; it

values their experience as a form of expertise (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). As alternate education

youth are considered to be at-risk youth (Smith et al., 2007), a methodology that validates the

reality of social power differentials was required. Often when examining disengaged and drop-

out youth, the literature focused on individual characteristics without recognizing the impact of

school systems on student dropout (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Riele, 2006; Smith, 2000). Using

YPAR affirms that marginalized youth are an oppressed group and, because their voices are

oppressed, change may be limited by institutions and systemic forces. It is therefore the system

and institution's role to change their practice, as systemic forces may perpetuate oppression

(Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox, forthcoming). It is crucial that research methodologies give voice to

youth perspectives from a critical lens, doing so will create school systems that are more inclusive and can better serve this population (Smith, 2000). These values are aligned with PAR and YPAR, which validates the lived experiences of the oppressed and provides them with a voice through the participatory process of critical reflection and action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007).

The research questions explored in this study were: (1) *from the perspectives of youth in alternate education and youth who have dropped out, what helped and hindered their retention and success within the Chilliwack education system?* And (2) *how can youth in alternate education engage in meaningful participation through YPAR and what does this engagement yield*? The first research question was examined in a manner that ensured relevancy, youth voice representation, and social action. As PAR is a process rather than a structured approach (Reason, 1994), the research and method of inquiry was shaped by the context. The method of inquiry was the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) which examined factors that helped and hindered participants in their educational journey. The rationale for examining both mainstream and alternate was to apprehend factors that contributed to transitioning students out of mainstream education and to empower youth to critically examine what the school system could have done better for them (D. Manuel, personal communication, June 18, 2012). Knowledge gained from this study will better inform practice for educational institutions in Chilliwack.

The second research question was an examination of the utilization of YPAR with youth in alternate education and what succumbed from meaningful engagement in this process. With this question, the collaborative approach and how youth researchers fully participated through each phase of the project was extrapolated. Reflections and actions taken to promote social change are described to illustrate the results of this form of engagement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides an overview of the research involving alternate education and youth disengagement and dropout. The first section focuses on understanding student dropout from the lens of the engagement and disengagement literature; while the second builds on the engagement literature by highlighting alternate education in BC. Through this investigation, characteristics inherent in successful alternate education programs are presented. The last section describes YPAR and its theoretical backdrop. It integrates the literature on alternate education and youth drop out by advocating for a critically informed methodology to improve education systems for vulnerable and marginalized youth. An overview of the project is provided at the end of the chapter.

Inherent within the philosophy of PAR is the argument that individuals/groups can be constrained by the language and labels placed on them (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007). In an effort to prevent the perpetuation of oppression, terms like delinquent, at-risk, and even dropouts were only used sporadically throughout the thesis. Despite these terms being commonly found in the literature, they are not reflective of my stance; I believe a degree of stigma and restrain is attached to these labels. At the same time, I wanted to ensure that information was being effectively communicated and was accessible to all readers, thus use of these terms were employed only for communicative purposes.

Dropping Out and Disengagement

Dropping out of high school refers to the youth's decision to leave school. As there are varying definitions for the term "dropping out", this thesis was based on the British Columbia Ministry of Education six-year completion rate definition: "the portion of students who graduate, with a Certificate of Graduation, within six years from the time they enrol in Grade 8" (BCME,

2011a, p. 56). In other words, youth who did not complete high school in that given time either

dropped out or were unable to finish high school due to varying circumstances. There are

numerous contributors that can influence the process of dropping out. According to Audas and

Willms (2001), key factors involve individual factors, family circumstances, peer influence,

school structure, and the community.   As dropping out is considered to be detrimental to the

individual's well-being and to society (see Hankivsky, 2008; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry,

2012), it is critical to gain a firm understanding of the construct in order for interventions to be

effectively developed.

The effects of dropping out. The effects of dropping out are considered to be

detrimental to the individual's health and employment opportunities; it has led to additional costs

to the state in the areas of social assistance and crime (Hankivsky, 2008). Individuals who did

not complete high school were more likely to have poorer health, be dependent on social

assistance, commit crime, and earn less in their lifetime (Hankivsky, 2008; Henry et al., 2012).

In a regression analysis examining the Rochester Youth Development Study, Henry et al.'s

(2012) found that dropping out was a significant mediator between disengagement and serious

problematic behaviors like violent crimes, arrests, and problematic drug use, in young adulthood.

These studies showed that dropping out was disadvantageous, while staying in school served as a

protective factor that mediated further risk amongst disengaged youth (Hankivsky, 2008; Henry

et al., 2012).

Reasons for transitioning out of high school. As there are multiple factors that

influence a student's decision to leave high school, it is virtually impossible to ascertain causal

elements for dropping out (Rumberger, 2004). Generally, within the literature there are two

perspectives: (1) dropping out is due to individual characteristics, and (2) dropout results from

institutional factors, which are contextual factors involving families, schools, communities, and peers (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).   It is commonly agreed that dropping out is an interplay of both individual and institutional factors (Audas & Willms, 2001; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

    Individual factors. According to Audas and Willms (2001) one way of characterizing individual effects is with the "life course model". They proposed that early experiences, characteristics, and events have an on-going and cumulative effect on the outcome of dropping out (p. 10). Other risk factors include: the students' attitudes, behaviors, school performance, sociodemographic factors, and prior experiences (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

    Attitudes are comprised of the student's beliefs and values towards their school, behavior, and performance (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) explored the perspectives of youth who dropped out and found that a majority of students felt that they were not feeling motivated, could not catch up, and school was not engaging. Thiessen (2007) noted that those who dropout typically have lower self-confidence than those who complete high school. This resonates with Rumberger and Lim's (2008) postulation that in order for students to find success they need to believe that they are capable of achieving success.

    Youth who are more likely to dropout were engaged in more deviant behaviors (Thiessen, 2007). These behaviors consisted of drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, stealing, selling drugs, damaging property, and teenage parenting (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Thiessen, 2007). Employment to support the family and themselves was also another contributor to dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Sterns & Glennie, 2006), though this may be due to inherent socioeconomic (SES) concerns.

    Youth who were failing school were also more likely to drop-out (Bowers, 2010; Bridgeland et al., 2006). Most youth who dropped out felt they were falling behind prior to

entering high school and were not able to make up for it during high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Similarly, in Bowers (2010) longitudinal analysis found that grades were a significant predictor of dropping out. In Canada, youth who dropped out were likely to perform worse in school and place less effort on school work (Thiessen, 2007). It is possible that doing poorly may be related to an individual's self-esteem and may further perpetuate discourse in an individual's connection to their school (Audas & Willms, 2001; Thiessen, 2007). Despite this predictor, Suh and Suh (2007) and Kaplan, Peck, and Kaplan (1997) argue that doing poorly in academics may be indicative of deeper underlying issues personal and systemic issues.

One of the common elements found in literature was that SES had a direct and indirect influence on school incompletion (Audas & Willms, 2001; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).   In Audas and Willms (2001) research, they argued that SES affects every component of an individual's life, from family to community, and can have a cumulative effect on an individual. Low SES specified that not only are these youth disconnecting from school, but they may be coming from socially vulnerable backgrounds, as indicated by Stearn and Glennie's (2006) who found that some students pulled out of education in order to find employment to support their families.

Gender, culture, and development are all linked with dropping out. In Thiessen's (2007) analysis they found that males were more likely to drop-out than females. As for culture, Thiessen (2007) found that in contrast to non-immigrants, immigrants sparsely dropped-out. In Canada, Aboriginal youth were also less likely to complete high school due to the additional stressors experienced in their lives (Audas & Willms, 2001). As for the impact of development, Rumberger and Lim's (2008) literature review illustrated that students' past experiences can influence whether or not a student drops out. Correspondingly, Audas and Willms (2001)

posited that dropping out can be linked to early school and childhood factors and have a

cumulative effect.

Lastly, mental health may have significant implications for how well students do in

school and whether or not they drop out. The Canadian Council on Learning (2010) reported:

> poor mental health in Canadian school children poses a significant risk to their academic
>
> development and puts them at greater risk of dropping out of school, substance abuse and
>
> suicide. (p. 3)

Meldrum, Venn, and Kutcher (2009) also suggested that mental disorders impacts a student's

emotional well-being, their capacity to learn, and is a contributing factor to student dropout.

Institutional factors. Institutional factors are the contexts and settings (families, schools,

and communities) that affect a student's decision to drop out (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 44).

With families, Thiessen's (2007) analysis of Canadian developmental trajectories found that

family has a significant role in influencing dropout. Specifically youth who were living with

both their biological parents were more likely to complete high school compared to single parent

families (Thiessen, 2007). Family SES also plays a significant role (Audas & Willms, 2001;

Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Stearns & Glennie, 2006); as shown in Bridgeland

et al.'s (2006) study, where 22% cited leaving high school to help their parents financially.

Jimerson et al. (2000) posited that the impact of family on educational trajectories can be

found early in an individual's life; early home environments and the quality of early caregiving

were found to be correlated with dropping out. In addition, Terry (2008) found that the lack of

parental involvement in education, parental divorce, and family turmoil, all play an active role in

influencing drop out. The involvement of family is therefore crucial in helping vulnerable

students graduate, for example Ziomek-Daigle (2010) found that when interventions supported families to be more engaged in their child's education, youth were less likely to drop out.

According to the Manitoba Education and Training (1993) peer relationships are the most influential factor in the lives of youth. Nonetheless, it can have a negative or positive impact on dropping out (Audas & Willms, 2001). Negative consequences may result if an individual's peer network is involved with drugs and alcohol (Thiessen, 2007). On the other hand, peers can have positive implications on healthy youth development as being engaged with school peers can serve as a protective factor to dropping out (McCreary Centre, 2003; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

The results of a comparative analysis of youth at-risk for dropping out and youth who were not, indicated that those who were at risk were more likely to have fewer school friends and more peers who have dropped out and/or in the workforce (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997). Being less engaged in their school social network may lead at-risk youth to seek relationships elsewhere; this process eventually pulls them away from school (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997). Similarly, in Thomson's (1992) thesis, the lack of social connectedness was seen as a significant factor for students who have dropped out.

The school structure may have a role in pushing out students (Lee & Burkam, 2003). In a multilevel analysis, Lee and Burkam (2003) found that when the variables of SES and ethnicity were removed, school characteristics still had a significant relationship with youth dropout. These characteristics were defined by school structure, academic organizations, and social organization. On the other hand, the researchers found that one of the key elements that prevented dropout was due to the social structure of schools. Students that perceived they had positive relationships with staff were less likely to dropout and felt more engaged with school.

Ecological systems theory. The presented studies highlight core factors related to student

drop-out. However, it is important to understand that academic achievement cannot be

constrained into linear models (Johnson, 2008); rather it can be understood within a holistic

framework where each factor interacts with one another (Burgette, King, Lee, & Park, 2011). In

the *Tennessee Dropout Policy Scan*, Burgette et al. (2011) utilized Bronfenbrenner's (1995)

Ecological Systems Theory as a model to understand risk factors involved with dropping out and

how they were interconnected within multiple interacting layers. Bronfenbrenner's (1995)

model was developed to understand human development within the context of relationships and

the environment, it can be mapped onto interactional layers. These layers can be seen as being

nested within one another; the inner most layers are closest to the individual and outer layers are

farther and more abstract, each impact each other. These layers are the: *microsystem*, the

"pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing

person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 39); *mesosystems*, "the linkages and processes taking place

between two or more settings containing the developing person (e.g., the relations between home

and school, school and workplace, etc.)" (p. 40); *exosystems*, "the linkages and processes taking

place between two or more settings" (p. 40); *macrosystems*, "the overarching pattern of micro-,

meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture" (p. 40); and

chronosystems which are the chronological changes that impact each system (p. 40).

Burgette et al. (2011) proposed that by employing Bronfenbrenner's model, the factors

that contribute to dropping out can be framed within interconnected spheres of influence, which

entails individual, home, school, community, and state and national policies. Framing it in this

manner enables better interventions and prevention efforts and validates the complex and

dynamic nature of dropping out of school (Burgette et al., 2011; Johnson, 2008). When

examining reasons for dropping out, it is important to understand that they are part of a larger

framework. Thus actions taken to address this concern needs to affirm these multiple layers and

understand its reciprocating impact on individuals and the community (Burgette et al., 2011).

Engagement and disengagement. Dropping out is considered to be the end of a gradual

cumulative process of disengagement and can start early in an individual's educational career

(Audas & Willms, 2001; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, Marcotte,

Potvin & Royer, 2008; Rumberger, 1987). Disengagement is the weakened connection between

the individual and their educational community (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu & Pagani, 2009;

Smith et al., 2007); while engagement is "the extent to which students participate in academic

and non-academic school activities, and identify with and value schooling outcomes" (Audas &

Willms, 2001, p.12). Both are on a spectrum of engagement (Archambault et al., 2009). Youth

engagement is a crucial construct as it is a significant predictor of success and positive outcomes

(Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004)—it is "crucial determinant of success in school" (Audas

& Willms, 2001, p. iii). Hence, one way of analysing dropout trajectories is to understand the

disengagement process and the role that engagement can have to prevent dropout.   As

engagement is presumed to be malleable, interventions and prevention measures can be shaped

to enhance engagement thus preventing dropout (Archemault et al., 2009; Fredricks et al., 2004).

According to Fredricks et al.'s (2004) review of engagement, there are three dimensions

of school engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. *Behavioral engagement* refers to

the notion of participation, where it is the individual's involvement in school related activities

and tasks that can have an impact on positive academic outcomes. This encompasses doing

school work and following institutional rules. *Cognitive engagement* refers to the intrinsic

psychological investment into learning. It involves motivation, effort and cognitive strategies.

Lastly, *Emotional engagement* alludes to affective identification with teachers, classmates, academics and school (Fredricks et al., 2004). It includes interests, values, perceptions, and attitude towards school (Archambault et al., 2009; Fredricks et al., 2004). These varying dimensions of engagement indicate that there can be a multiplicity of interventions that focus on different ways to engage students, from behavioral to emotion-based approaches.

The relationship between disengagement and dropping out has been validated empirically (Archambault et al., 2009; Henry et al., 2012).   In a study conducted by Archambault et al. (2009) surveying 11 827 students in Quebec, the researchers utilized factor analysis to measure the relationship between dropping out and global engagement and its subcomponents (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral). They found that global engagement was significantly associated with dropping out, even when individual and family risk factors were controlled. However, they reported only behavioral engagement was significant, despite the literature supporting cognitive and emotional engagement being related with dropping out. Correspondingly, in Fredricks et al.'s (2004) review the researchers found that behavioral measures of engagement served as precursors to dropping out, though that may be due to less research available on emotional and cognitive engagement. These articles suggest that the action of engagement in school activities can have significant implications on dropout prevention.

Developmentally, disengagement trajectories can be drawn early in an individual's educational career (Audas & Willms, 2001; Janosz et al., 2008). For example Audas and Willms' (2001) *life course model* proposes that dropping out involves an interplay of engagement, academic achievement, and behavior and health. Based on their multilevel framework, they argue that SES factors, family, school, neighbourhood, and community factors all contribute to this dynamic interplay, which cumulates and is shaped throughout an

individual's development. Another example of disengagement trajectories is highlighted in

Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, and Pagani's (2008) longitudinal analysis of over 13 000 students

in Quebec. The researchers found that students who followed a non-normative engagement

trajectory were more likely to be associated with dropping-out; non-normative trajectories

involved youth who did not have a high level of stable engagement. The value of these studies is

that they provide generalizations for understanding the relationship between disengagement and

dropping out. Still, they do not provide the process between disengagement and dropping out.

To address this discrepancy, Lessard et al. (2008) interviewed 80 students who have

dropped out and integrated their narratives into three thematic stages: *setting the stage*, *teetering,*

and *ending the journey*. With *setting the stage*, a majority of the youth experienced some form

of family turmoil that placed them at-risk for dropping out. In this stage, youth described their

experiences of feeling like they did not belong in school; they were rejected from their peers and

some resorted to acting out in school in order to find a place in the institution. *Teetering* was the

ambivalent stage where it seemed that there were factors that were keeping the individual in

school competing with factors pulling and pushing them away from school. These youth seemed

to float through school without feeling connected to it and wondered whether or not school was

worth staying in. Only a small subset had positive relationships with their teachers, which

participants shared that if these relationships were more positive, they might have stayed in

school. *Ending the journey* can be seen as the last phase of disengagement, it is an accumulation

of events that leads to the eventual decision to drop out. Some participants elaborated that the

process was a gradual course of fading out, while others had a pivotal experience that aided in

their decision.

Dropping out and disengagement can be seen as an intermingling of risk factors. Nonetheless, it is evident that for these students it starts off with stressors in family life and feeling like they do not belong in school, thus beginning the process of disengagement (Audas & Willms, 2001; Lessard et al., 2008). Lessard's (2008) study provides a temporal perspective on disengagement and dropouts, and from that study it is clear that throughout the dropout process youth were marginalized or neglected in their journey. Furthermore, it indicates that dropping out is a process and not just a cultivation of risk factors. These lived experiences highlight the importance of critically understanding how social structures within school and society may perpetuate the harsh realities that these youth face.

Preventing dropout. Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) survey on high school dropouts included a section that allowed youth to share what they thought would have helped them complete high school, these factors included: improving teaching and curricula to be more engaging; creating better access to supports for struggling students; creating a safe school environment that fosters academics; ensuring that students have a strong relationships with at least one adult in the school; and improving parent teacher communication.

Similarly, Lee and Burkam (2003) argued that improving school structures can help with preventing dropping out. Their analysis revolved around school organization, size, and social structure. With school academic organization, the researchers found that curriculum that focused on academically challenging courses over undemanding courses were more likely to retain students. With school size, medium-size schools were more likely to retain students and yet, Lee and Burkam contended that it may be related with other factors such as quality of relationships among school members. Lastly, the most important finding was that students were less likely to drop out when the relationship between teachers and students, as perceived by the students, were

positive (p. 385).   The positive student-teacher relationship was crucial, as even when other

factors were accounted for (students' background, school demographics, and school sectors); the

positive impact of the relationship was still a significant determinant of staying in school. As a

result, one of the key factors in dropout prevention revolves around fostering positive supportive

relationships (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lagana, 2004; Lee & Burkam, 2003).

     Prevention with engagement strategies. Aforementioned, engagement plays a crucial

role in educational success for youth (Audas & Willms, 2001). Even amongst the most

vulnerable youth, those who are engaged in school were more likely to find success within the

school system than those who have disengaged (Saewyc, Wang, Chittenden, Murphy & the

McCreary Centre Society, 2006). When looking at alternate education programs, Smith et al.

(2008) found that youth who felt engaged were more likely to report improved life

circumstances. Similarly, these results reflect the survey conducted by Saewyc et al. (2006) on

protective factors for vulnerable youth, which indicated that school connectedness and family

connectedness were the strongest protective factors for vulnerable youth.

     Despite the expansiveness of the engagement and disengagement literature, Fredricks et

al. (2004) argue that richer characterizations are needed to better shape interventions to enhance

engagement. For interventions to be finely tuned there must be an in-depth understanding of the

lived experiences of disengaged youth. In the case of Chilliwack, though the presented

interventions may be helpful, interventions must still be shaped according to the contextualized

circumstances and needs of the community and its youth.

Youth in Alternate Education

     One of the essential services to prevent dropout is alternate education (Smith et al., 2007;

Aron, 2003). Youth in alternate education "are often the most vulnerable population in the

school system" (BCME, 2009). These youth are frequently referred to as "at-risk youth"—
"youth who are marginalized... as a result of abuse, sexual exploitation, substance use, bullying,
discrimination, mental health problems or street involvement" (Smith et al., 2007, p.7). The
philosophy of alternate education is to serve youth who are struggling in mainstream schools and
to focus on assisting youth to attain education in a "supportive, nurturing and non-judgemental
environment" (Smith et al., 2007, p. 8). It can be seen as the last stop before dropping out, as
many of these youth have already disengaged from mainstream education. Typically, alternate
education programs serve those who have dropped out or have been pushed out of traditional
mainstream schools (Aron, 2003).

       Alternate education structure. According the BCME (2011), alternate education
programs are offered in separate facilities "that meet the special requirements of students who
may be unable to adjust to the requirements of regular schools (timetable, schedules, traditional
classroom environment)" (p. 22). These programs "focus on educational, social and emotional
issues for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional school program" and "provides
its support through differentiated instruction, specialized program delivery and enhanced
counselling services based on students' needs." (BCME, 2009). Their goal is to help youth stay
engaged and connected/reconnect to society (Smith et al., 2007; Zweig, 2003). Despite the
commonality, alternate education programs in BC has found to vary in their approaches, which is
dependent on the needs of the students they serve (Smith et al., 2007). The alternate education
program serves a crucial need, it provides services to a disconnected group of adolescents who
may otherwise experience significant longer term negative effects due to disengagement from
school (Zweig, 2003).

From the perspectives of youth, the differences between alternate and mainstream education is that alternate programs are smaller in size, have smaller class sizes, and have more positive personal relationships with teachers and staff (De La Ossa, 2005). These youth's perceptions parallel with what Raywid (1994) refers to as Type 1 schools, schools that have caring professional staff, small size and class sizes, and a personalized approach (as cited in Aron, 2003, p.11). Its focus is to modify its structural characteristics to meet the needs of youth who need more individualized and innovative approaches to help them succeed. In BC, alternate education programs are designed to connect youth with lower teacher-to-student ratios, additional supports, flexibility, and provide supportive environments (Smith et al., 2007).

Challenges faced by alternate education programs. In Smith et al.'s (2007) review of alternate programs in BC, they noted that these programs faced many challenges to the retention and success of youth, which involved: housing and family stressors, poverty and hunger, mental and emotional health, substance use, abuse and sexual exploitation, and pregnancy and parenting. With housing and family stressors, there were a high proportion of youth who did not have stable housing, only 42% reported living in the same location in the past year and more than half of the youth have reported running away at least once. Family circumstances were unstable and traumatic, with about a third of the youth reported having a family member attempt suicide; Aboriginal youth were twice as likely to experience these issues. Poverty posed a significant concern for alternate education youth. Families may not have had sufficient funds support their child's education. For example, many families were not able to supply enough food for their child, with almost half of the students experiencing hunger once a week or more. Not only does having a lower SES place youth in vulnerable positions in society, it is an additional layer that hinders these youth from finding success.

In the area of mental health, professional stakeholders reported that the most common problems were anger issues, depression, attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, and addictions. Emotional well-being was a significant issue, as more than one-fifth of alternate education youth reported seriously contemplating suicide in the past year. The emotional difficulties may coincide with the experience of abuse as nearly 80% of alternate education youth have experienced either physical (51%) or sexual abuse (28%); of the participants, nearly half of the females experienced sexual abuse. With substance use, roughly 70% reported using marijuana in the past month and 70% reported using alcohol in the past month.   Lastly, a quarter of the students reported having been pregnant or caused a pregnancy, which poses a significant barrier to their education (Peled & Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2007). These are all substantial psychosocial barriers that parallel the issues that disengaged and dropout youth face.

Characteristics of successful alternate education programs. As summarized by Peled and Smith (2010), key elements that enable youth to strive in alternate education programs were: (1) professional and peer supports, (2) school connectedness, and (3) community connections. Youth who are in alternate education programs have experienced histories of trauma and stressful life circumstances and therefore, the provision of professional supports was crucial (Peled & Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2007). Similar to disengaged youth, one of the key indicators of success within alternate education is when the youth feels connected and has developed positive relationships with teachers (Smith et al., 2007). The climate that is fostered by the positive student-teacher relationships challenges the stereotype that alternate education youth are cynical or possessed antisocial behaviors (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, & Gable, 2006). Quinn et al. found that the attitude of alternate education youth were no different than attitudes in mainstream education programs. They argue that students who were identified as troubled in

mainstream school systems flourished in alternate education environments when they feel

respected and valued by teachers and administrators (Quinn et al., 2006). The importance of

positive relationships are strongly echoed in the literature involving the success of alternate

education programs and is noted as one of the key factors of educational success (D'Angelo &

Zemanick, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Quinn et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007).

An example of a successful alternate education program was profiled in D'Angelo &

Zemanick's (2009) case study. The researchers highlight the importance of altering the whole

school program so that it can accommodate to its youth and be conducive to their success. These

accommodations included: school structure, staffing, professional development, curriculum and

disciplinary philosophies. The researchers highlighted the importance of incorporating

counselling services, creating small teacher-student ratios, incorporating work experience

programs, hiring staffs with diverse backgrounds who want to work with this population,

building rapport, ensuring that respect is prioritized, and clearly outlining expectations and

consequences. This case example emphasized the importance of structuring alternate school

programs based on the premise of accommodating youth and encouraging growth.

At-risk youth. Youth that are part of alternate education system are generally considered

to be "at-risk" (Aron, 2003; Smith et al., 2007). At-risk youth can include: pregnant/parenting

youth; suspended/expelled students; recovered drop-outs; delinquent youth; low-achievers; and

youth who generally engage in negative or high-risk activities or have grown up with

developmental and/or contextual disadvantages (Aron, 2003). Within the subset of at-risk are

"high-risk " youth, which entail youth who have severed connections from school, family and

community (Smith et al., 2007, p. 7). Culturally, a majority of the youth in alternate education in

BC are from European descent and a large populace (36%) are Aboriginal (BCME, 2011). At-

risk youth face numerous challenges that prevent their success in mainstream systems; many

have experienced and survived traumatic experiences (Smith et al., 2007).

Aboriginal youth face many additional barriers. Unfortunately, mainstream schools were

not able to adapt to the cultural specific needs, resulting in significantly more Aboriginal youth

represented in alternate education programs (Smith et al., 2007). In addition to the barriers faced

by alternate education youth, Aboriginal youth experience much more risk factors in contrast to

non-Aboriginal peers (Smith et al., 2007). These factors comprise of housing issues, physical

and sexual abuse, and cultural barriers that resulted from the legacy of colonization and

residential schooling (Smith et al., 2007).

The implication of being "at-risk". There is discussion within the literature that the term

"at-risk" can further marginalize this group of youth (Riele, 2006). The notion "at-risk" refers to

a measurable variable that predicts an outcome of interest, which can be used to divide low and

high-risk groups (Kraemer et al., 1997). In the case of this review, the outcome of at-risk youth

consigns to the negative consequences that result from disengagement and dropping out (Smith

et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the issue with labeling youth as "at-risk" simplifies the personal

attributes of these young people and creates a false distinction between the problematic youth

and "normal" youth (Riele, 2006). It results in policies assuming that it is the students' personal

attributes and risk factors that make them vulnerable to dropping out (Riele, 2006). This false

distinction draws attention to negative attributes of these youth and they are seen as less than

their "normal" peer counterparts (Riele, 2006). This unfortunate misperception is also reflected

in the larger societal view that alternate education programs are seen as dumping grounds for

problematic youth (Aron, 2003; Zweig, 2003). These perspectives negatively impact the lives of

alternate education youth, as they often feel that they face negative perceptions and are viewed as second class citizens by both the public and education systems (De La Ossa, 2005).

The experiences faced by alternate education youth and "at-risk" youth alludes to the notion of *internalized oppression*. Harper (2006) summarizes Baker (1983) and Lipsky (1987) proposition that internalized oppression occurs when socially stigmatized groups accept the negative messages and beliefs that society, or those with social power, places on them. This results in these individuals believing in these false ideologies as they internalize these messages into their individual and group identity (p. 338). Internalized oppression was evident in the famous study conducted by Clark and Clark (1947) which showed that African-American children preferred white dolls over black dolls because of the negative racial messages associated with their African identity. Often minority groups accept the implicit judgements of those with social status even if is negative (Lewin, 1946, p. 44). It is possible that these negative messages can account for negative outcomes in school. The internalization of these stigmas are evident in alternate education youth. In a qualitative study conducted by McNulty and Roseboro (2009), the researchers argue that being in alternate education often reinforce the stigmatization of marginalized youth, it therefore can contribute to further disengagement of youth. The researchers posit that in order to improve school systems, teachers and administrators must critically assess the extent to which their practice continue to perpetuate marginalization.

As the literature on drop-out and disengagement traditionally argued that it is the individual that needs to be changed, it neglected the role that school systems may have in pushing students out and further marginalizing them (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Riele, 2006). Social structures can inhibit the potential of youth (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Though alternate education

programs have many positive aspects, it is imperative to critically examine the implicit assumptions of the education system as a whole and how that may impact its students.

        Improving school systems for vulnerable youth. For improving mainstream systems Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) draws attention to the fact that few research studies have sought the opinions of alternate education students. Through a case study that utilized semi-structured interviews, Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) asked students in alternate education what their experience of the mainstream was in comparison to alternate education. What was evident in their study was that participants felt that *poor teacher relationships* were a key contributor to their lack of success in school. The youth shared that they often felt judged by their teachers and, though the teachers may be well intentioned, they felt the teachers had no time to build relationships with them. Another key factor was that students felt there was a *lack of safety* in mainstream schools, as bullying often left the students feeling unsafe at school. *Overly rigid authority* was another characteristic of traditional schools that was hindering their success, students felt that because schools seemed to focus on enforcing rules they were inflexible and felt punitive. Lastly, *problems with peer relationship* were detrimental. Particularly when students felt they did not belong in the social environment of their school and/or when they were surrounded by negative peer influences.

        The study was important because few studies have been conducted in a qualitative manner that elicited opinions of alternate education youth to critique the education system. It showed that youth are capable of providing insight into the problems that mainstream education have when serving at-risk youth. Still, qualitative approaches may not be sufficient because though the youth's voice is being represented, action may not necessarily be evoked (Rodríguez

& Brown, 2009). In which case, a critical lens with pragmatic solutions must be adopted for

marginalized youth (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009; Smith, 2000).

     Improving school systems in a critically informed manner. In order to effectively

address these issues, there must be a critical stance that challenges both social stratification and

institutional structures (Riele, 2006; Smith, 2000). The insights of marginalized youth are

crucial as these youth are capable of providing insight into policy structures and what needs to be

changed in the school system (De La Ossa, 2005; Smith, 2000). In a qualitative study, De La

Ossa (2005) established that vulnerable youth are capable of providing practical

recommendations for improving schools; this is because of their expertise of being marginalized.

Unfortunately, until schools address underlying beliefs and perceptions, the youth's perspectives

have little merit (De La Ossa, 2005, p. 38). Smith's (2000) supports this notion and purported

that it is important to critically assess social structures within society and educational institutions

as these social structures may be supporting inequality and marginalization. As a result, outcome

based approaches and even qualitative approaches to improve school systems, are not sufficient

unless they explicitly address the social power hierarchies of privilege and oppression (Smith,

2000). Smith (2000) proposes that a critical interpretive approach that values the lived

experiences of marginalized youth is appropriate for addressing these concerns.

     Smyth (2006) contends that to change and improve school systems research needs to

adopt the positional lens of those who are marginalized, from the bottom-up. The issue of

marginalization, disengagement, and dropping out must be viewed from a social perspective that

ensures authentic engagement of youth that allows them to safely voice out their perspectives

(Smyth, 2006**).** Authentic engagement is crucial as oppressed populations often take on the

viewpoint of those who are of higher social position (Levin, 1946); in establishing a relationship, it ensures that the latent meanings of youth lived experiences are being represented.

With Chilliwack, it is important to recognize that because there are varying ideologies when it comes to alternate education (Raywid, 1994; Smith et al., 2007), an idiographic approach can help garner a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by the community. Not only is it important to understand the lived experiences of Chilliwack's alternate education youth (Smith, 2000), as their perspectives can provide insight into policy and school structures (De La Ossa, 2005), but it is also important to evoke social change in the system. The voices of students in alternate education and students who have dropped out must be represented; action must be shaped according to their needs as proposed by them.

Youth Participatory Action Research

Given that alternate education youth are amongst the most vulnerable in the education system (BCME, 2009), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), a variant of Participatory Action Research (PAR), has been chosen as the method because of its recognition of social stratification and its alignment with the marginalized (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Unlike other methodologies, PAR can be seen as a process to develop knowledge and action that is useful for the participants and the community (Kidd & Kral, 2005). Consequently, this characteristic addresses the pragmatic concerns improving the education for alternate education youth in Chilliwack. Through a participatory model, it invites participation from the community to take part in the research process with the goal of constructing knowledge and action to address the community's concerns (Brydon-Miller, 1997; McTaggart, 1991).

The family of action research. PAR can be considered to be an approach within a family of methodologies known as action research (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Reason &

Bradbury, 2008). The origins of action research stem from Kurt Lewin, who was interested in

producing research that led to action and raising the esteem of minority groups (Lewin, 1946;

McTaggart, 1991). Lewin (1946) argued that the application of social science research must be

shaped by the contextualized situations to which it is applied to, it cannot be based just on

general principles. Within action research there are other methods that traditionally come from

different disciplines and philosophical assumptions; however they all share the same common

elements and values.

> ...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in
>
> the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes . . . It seeks to bring together action and
>
> reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical
>
> solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of
>
> individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1)

Reason and Bradbury (2008) proposes that action research can be perceived as containing

three strategies to research and practice: first-, second-, third-person research. First-person

action research fosters self-inquiry, second-level involves interpersonal dialogue regarding

mutual concerns, and third-level refers to creating a wider systemic change. Convincing and

enduring action research involves all three levels of dialogue (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Herr

and Anderson (2005) adds the notion of positionality should also be considered when engaging

in action research. Positionality refers to the relative position of the researcher with respect to

the organization/system, it includes: (1) insider, the researcher studies themselves or their own

practice; (2) insider in collaboration with others; (3) insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s);

(4) reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams); (5) outsider(s) in collaboration with

insider(s); and (6) outsider(s) studies insider(s) (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 31). The approach

that the researcher chooses to adopt, the strategy of research (first, second, third-person) and

positionality (insider/outsider), is dependent on the researchers discipline, community stake

holders, and the phenomenon that is being studied (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Herr &

Anderson, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Participatory action research. PAR differs from other action research methods in that

its philosophical foundations are drawn from emancipatory ideologies of: Paulo Freire, Orlando

Fals Borda, Rajesh Tandon, Anisur Rahman, and Marja-Liisa Swantz; Budd Hall, Myles Horton,

Robert Chamers and John Gaventa (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 272). Specifically, Freire's

(1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the notion of praxis, *conscientization* (critical

consciousness or critical reflexivity) and social action, serve as foundational grounds for PAR

(Freire, 1970; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Kidd & Kral, 2005). With positionality, PAR adheres to

the notion that the researcher is an outsider who collaborates with a marginalized insider group,

to help the group understand oppressed nature of their reality and to evoke change in their

circumstances (Freire, 1970; Herr & Anderson, 2005). PAR is explicit about power differential

between the researchers and participants; therefore challenges traditional research paradigms by

critically assessing each step involved in the research process (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1991; Herr &

Anderson, 2005; Kidd & Kral, 2005).

The key elements of PAR as summarized by Brydon-Miller (1997) involves: (1) research

that originates from the marginalized groups/communities; (2) it addresses the fundamental

causes of oppression within the group/community and possesses the goal for positive social

change; and (3) is a process of research, education, and action that involves all participants in a

participatory and transformational manner (p. 661).

PAR is a self-reflective spiral that includes planning, acting, and reflecting (Kemmis &

McTaggart, 2007). To further elaborate, Kemmis and McTaggart provides seven tenets that are

evident within PAR:

1. PAR is a *social process*: it explores the relationship between the individual and the social

   relations.

2. PAR is *participatory*: it engages people to examine their own knowledge and

   interpretations.

3. PAR is *practical and collaborative*: it engages people to explore practices that can further

   improve their circumstances.

4. PAR is *emancipatory*: it helps individuals to release themselves from unjust and irrational

   social structures that constrain them. It is the process of exploring how they are impacted

   by the social structures that encompass them, i.e. culture, economics and politics.

5. PAR is *critical*: it aims to help individuals recover and release themselves from the

   constraints inherent within social media. For example assessing how labels and

   stereotypes may be unjust and hindering to ones growth and well-being.

6. PAR is *reflexive*: it is a deliberate process which people aims to transform practices

   through critical and self-critical action and reflection.

7. PAR aims to transform both *theory and practice* (p. 283).

   There are no systematic steps to PAR, rather it is a process that is shaped by the

contextualized needs of the inquired upon (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Reason, 1994).

Essentially, PAR creates the tools according to its context to reach the goals of the

community/group, instead of utilizing pre-created tools that are not necessarily adaptable to the

situation of the community (Kidd & Kral, 2005). In other words, methodologically, members

determine the method to use and the methods are adapted to the social context.

Like action research, PAR also consists of different variations based on its stakeholders

and philosophical assumptions that underlie the project. Some of these variations include:

feminist PAR (see McGuire, 1987), youth-based PAR or youth PAR (YPAR) (see Cammarota &

Fine, 2008), critical PAR (see Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), and community-based PAR (see

Israel et al., 2005). According to Brydon-Miller (1997), practitioners of PAR typically draw

form a variety of critical theory sources which include Marxism, feminism, and critical race

theory (p. 659). These theories serve as the basis for the different manifestations of PAR. For

this study, because the key stakeholders in this study are vulnerable youth, the YPAR variation

of PAR was utilized.

Youth participatory action research. YPAR incorporates the same elements that

define PAR, however, it is explicitly pedagogical and has implications for education and youth

development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6). The YPAR framework can be comprised of

several elements, including: positive youth development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma,

2003; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003), critical theory and empowerment principles

(Cammarota & Fine, 2006; Freire, 1970), and community engagement (Checkoway & Richards-

Schuster, 2003). Taken together, YPAR can be seen as a "critical strategy for youth

development, youth-based policy making and organizing, and education" (Cammarota & Fine,

2008, p. 7). YPAR is an educational tool that addresses the social structures that may further

marginalize vulnerable youth (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). It adopts the assumption that youth

voice is not enough, rather action must take place in order to promote agency within youth and to

improve their circumstances (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). According to Rodríguez and Brown

(2009), when doing PAR with youth, there are three guiding principles: (1) *situated and inquiry based*, (2) *participatory*, and (3) *transformative and activist*.

Situated and inquiry based, the focus of inquiry based learning and knowledge generation is built on the real needs and issues that are salient to the youth researchers. The experience and knowledge of young people are therefore legitimate forms of truth as they are experts of their experiences and contexts (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009).

Participatory, youth are fully involved in the process of research. As their expertise is valued, decisions are made in a collaborative manner that enables youth to voice their perspective and opinions on the research process. The power in making decisions is shared between the researcher and youth (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). Authentic participation involves "active participation and real influence in the decisions that affect their lives" (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003, p. 22).

Transformative and activist, involves the active commitment to transform knowledge and practices in ways that can improve the lives of youth involved in the project. This is an important element in utilizing a situated and inquiry based participatory approach (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009).

The rationale for youth participation in research is summarized by Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003)'s evaluation of the literature: (1) it develops knowledge for social action; (2) it enable youth to exercise their rights on influencing factors that affect them, which is in accordance to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); (3) it allows youth to share in the democratization of knowledge, the sharing of knowledge resources; (4) it prepares youth for active participation within a democratic society; and (5) it strengthens the social development of young people. Checkoway and Richards-Schuster (2003) suggests that

youth participation in research enables youth to be active participants in defining the problem, gathering information and utilizing the results. In being involved in the whole process, it raises their consciousness and moves them into action.

       Critical ideology and transformation. YPAR draws its philosophical basis from Freire's notion of praxis, critical consciousness (*conscientization*) and social action (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 6; Freire, 1970). Critical consciousness or critical reflexivity refers to "an awareness of how institutional, historical, and systemic forces limit and promote the life opportunities for particular groups" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 87).   Freire (1970) challenged the notion that for the marginalized and oppressed, their lives do not have to be predetermined by oppressive social forces. He argued that people are able to exercise control over their own existence by engaging in conditions that affect their lives. In interacting with these conditions through social action, one gains an awareness of factors that may be oppressing their self-determination (Freire, 1970, as cited in Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 87). As a result in becoming personally aware, one becomes aware of the social forces that oppress others (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Positive transformation of self and society can occur through the process of praxis (Freire, 1970).

       In practice, YPAR has often been aligned with marginalized youth, individuals whose voices have been traditionally excluded from knowledge development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2008). It engages young people to study their social context and the social issues that are affecting their lives, and through critical reflection and action, youth are able to evoke personal and social transformation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p 2; Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Freire, 1970). Through critical pedagogy, youth learn that their experiences are not predetermined but malleable; they themselves have the agency to change (Cammarota & Fine,

2008, p. 6). Through YPAR, youth learn to validate their knowledge and experiences of

oppression, and in turn, will recognize and address social incongruences within society to

cultivate social justice (Cammarota & Romero, 2011, p. 494). YPAR's transformative learning

process helps youth question previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values,

perspectives on themselves, and the social structural obstacles that hinder their achievement and

wellbeing. This in turn helps them recognize that they have the agency to engage in alternate

futures for themselves and their peers (Berg, Coman & Schensul, 2009, p. 357).   Therefore,

YPAR argues against research perspectives that further oppress marginalized youth. In the case

of this study, it aligns with the perspectives of Lee and Burkam (2003), Smith (2000) and Riele

(2006), which maintain that the traditional lens of the drop-out and disengagement literature

unjustly places blame on the individual rather than critically assessing the system youth are in.

As YPAR is based on a critical ideology, its goal is to promote change to social structures

in a manner that can improve the social circumstances for its youth. An example of YPAR's

impact on social policies and practices at a school setting was illustrated in Ozer and Wright's

(2012) study. In their study, Ozer and Wright utilized semi-structured interviews and

observations to assess the impact of YPAR on the school system and students. YPAR was

implemented through an elective class and with students who were not leaders or high achievers

in school. The analysis involved coding of interviews to see whether or not there were

opportunities for students to voice their opinions, and whether or not it was taken seriously.

Action in this study occurred with students leading professional development workshops at

faculty meetings and presenting findings at a public forum which involved district staff.

Through the critical reflection process, the researchers claim that the activities generated by

YPAR changed the way teachers interacted with these young people, from that of students to that

of colleagues; it altered the social dynamic of the student-teacher relationship. The students

emerged as the experts on issues that impacted their lives. This example illustrates that YPAR

can challenge social dynamics, as indicated by the change in perceptions of the teachers.

Though these results may seem minimal, it shows that the transformational process of YPAR not

only impacts the youth, but can influence social structures.

    Positive youth development. Positive youth development can be seen as one of the goals

for YPAR (Morrell, 2008). Positive youth development adapts a different perspective of youth

development; rather than perceiving youth from a deficit based model, it views youth from a

strength-based approach (Benson et al., 2003). It has an ecological-developmental perspective

where it assumes that relationships and community can nurture positive development; it

perceives youth as enablers in their development, and that all youth are capable of positive

growth (Benson et al., 2003).

    One of the theories for fostering positive youth development is based on the notion of

youth engagement and action, central tenants of YPAR (Benson et al., 2003). In this perspective

through the process of being socially involved and engaged in a democratic process, it enables

youth to be empowered, which in turn has many psychological developmental benefits

(Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Taking part in action within the youth's given context (1)

enhances both the community and the youth, (2) prepares youth for active participation in a

democratic society, (3) and enhances the young persons' social development and capacities

(Benson et al., 2003; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003).

    An example of positive youth development through engagement and action was

demonstrated in Mitra's (2004) study. In employing interviews and observations through a span

of two years, Mitra found that youth who were engaged in school reform projects gained

developmental benefits in the form of *agency*, *competence*, and *belonging*. With *agency*, youth

developed a greater sense of leadership and felt that they were being heard; *belonging*, youth

developed relationships with caring adults and felt more connected to their school settings; and

with *competency*, youth gained skills in problem solving and facilitation, acquired social skills,

and developed public speaking capabilities.

   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Youth participation is protected

by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Checkoway, 2011; United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 1989). In particular, Articles 12 and 13 have

key relevance to participatory research with youth (Checkoway, 2011; Petrie, Fiorelli &

O'Donnell, 2006; UNCRC, 1989). Article 12 states that children and youth have the right to

make decisions on matters that affect their lives. In the case of this study, it would be

educational system that alternate education youth are a part of. Article 13, refers to the notion of

free expression, by which young people have a fundamental right to express themselves. Taken

together, the UNCRC supports the expression of democratic freedom of youth to be involved in

the decisions that impact their well-being. Consequently, the UNCRC principles are aligned

with the YPAR theory and method, as youth are involved in examining their social

circumstances and take part in evoking positive individual and social change.

Summary of Rationale for Focus on Investigation

   The review of the literature offers an overview of the effects of dropping out and

strategies to address it. The disengagement literature can be used as a model for comprehending

the drop out process and, consequentially, engagement can be seen as having a vital role in

preventing school dropout. The review also outlined the literature on alternate education, its

youth, and strategies to improve educational systems for vulnerable youth. YPAR has been

presented as a means to address the dropout issues in Chilliwack; it affirms the experiences of the vulnerable youth while adopting a critical lens. Due to the social circumstances and the marginalization these youth experience, YPAR ensures that knowledge ascertained from these youth are acknowledged while pursuing positive social change. In valuing the unique perspectives of alternate education youth, educational practices in Chilliwack can be enhanced in a manner that is more equitable for vulnerable students.

As informed by the literature review, there is a lack of research that examines and validates alternate education youth perspectives. Fortunately, the literature affirms the need for presenting youth's positions in a critically-informed manner that advocates for systemic change. Moreover, as there are multiple stakeholders involved, it is imperative that research validates the community that the youth are situated in. As a result, the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique was employed as the method of inquiry to ensure that the results were rigorous and beneficial to the community. Given the rationales for conducting this study in a participatory manner and the complexity of working with multiple stakeholders and methodologies, it is best to re-iterate the research question to provide a clear conceptualization of the objectives of the research project.

Research questions and objectives. The encompassing research questions are: (1) *from the perspectives of youth in alternate education and youth who have dropped out, what helped and hindered their retention and success within the Chilliwack education system?* And (2) *how can youth in alternate education engage in meaningful participation through YPAR and what does this engagement yield*? Contained within these research questions are several other objectives and sub-questions. To further iterate, Figure 2 presents a theoretical conceptualization of the project, while the sub-questions and objectives are listed in Table 1. Part one refers to the YPAR component and details the process of collaborative inquiry. It is the critical and

empowering foundation for the implementation of the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique

(ECIT); the second research question is addressed in this section. The second part confers to the

first research question; it is the ECIT section, the qualitative and systematic approach to evaluate

the Chilliwack education system. ECIT was employed to offer the community solutions that can

be implemented to enhance the well-being of its marginalized youth. It was used to explore

helping, hindering, and wish-list factors from both the mainstream and alternate education

systems. The results from both systems were triangulated to find the core themes that impacted
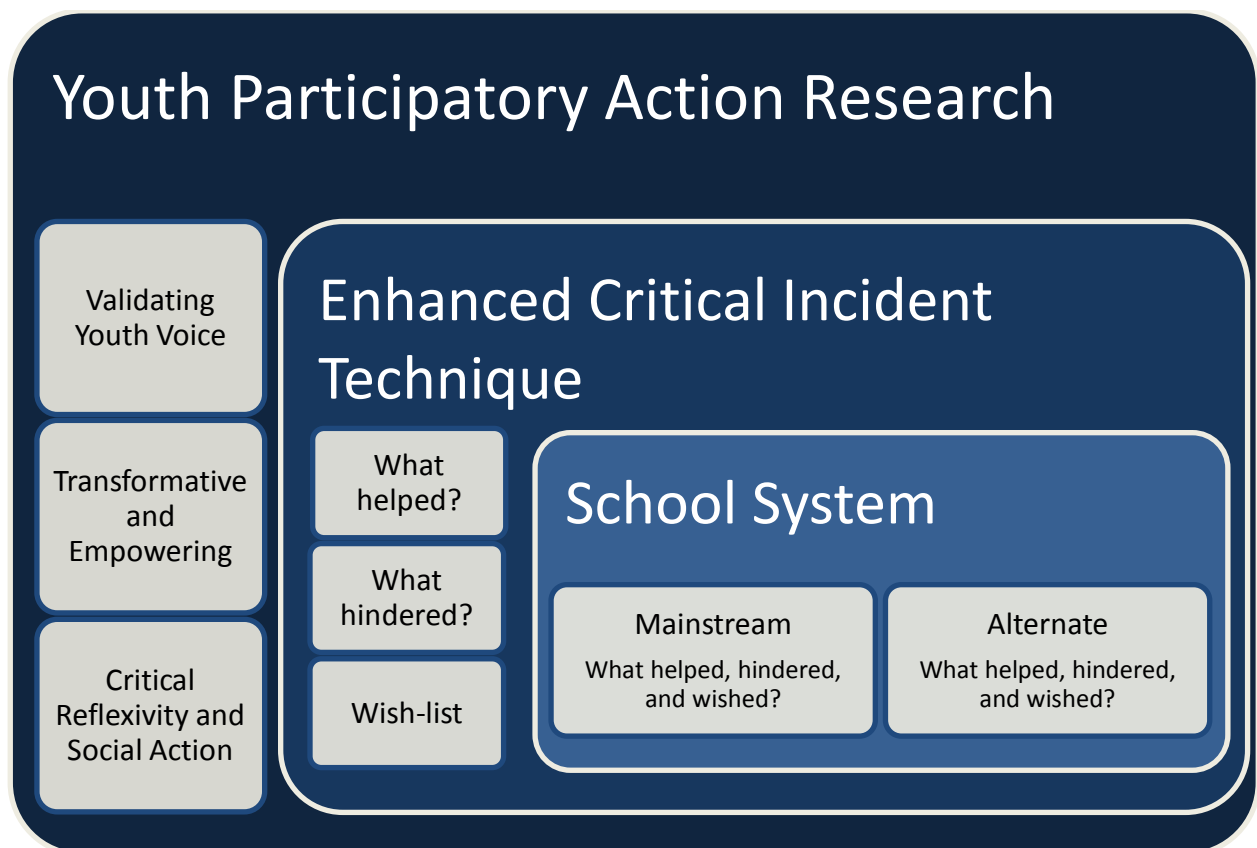
participants.

Figure 2: Overview of the research project

Table 1

Research Objectives and Questions

Part 1: Youth Participatory Action Research
Objective #1: Validating Youth Voice
The examination and validation of the perspectives of youth in alternate education and youth who have dropped out by employing a participatory methodology. It addresses the following:
    (a) Were the voices of youth participants adequately represented?
        a.   How were their perspectives validated?
    (b) For youth co-researchers:
        a.   Did youth co-researchers significantly influence the research process?
        b.   How were the voices of youth co-researchers validated?
Objective #2: Transformative and Empowering
The second objective is used to ensure the principles of transformation and empowerment are upheld, it addresses the following questions:
    (a) How has the project transformed youth researchers who engaged in the project?
    (b) How was the educational community in Chilliwack transformed?
    (c) How were youth empowered?
Objective #3: Critical Reflexivity and Social Action
In critically examining the social environment through the reflective lens of alternate education youth co-researchers, it addresses the following questions:
    (a) What are the underlying factors that contribute and perpetuate youth vulnerability in Chilliwack?
    (b) What were actions taken to promote social change in the education system in Chilliwack?

Part2: Enhanced Critical Incident Technique
Objective #4: Helping and hindering factors
The examination of helping, hindering, and wish list item; a systematic approach to evaluating the Chilliwack education system. It addresses the following:
    (a) Mainstream Education System
        a.   What helped youth stay in the mainstream education system and find success?
        b.   What hindered youth from staying in mainstream education and succeed?
        c.   What did youth wish for that would have helped them succeed in the mainstream system?
    (b) Alternate Education System
        a.   What helps youth stay in the alternate education and find success?
        b.   What hinders youth from finding success in alternate education?
        c.   What do youth wish for that would help them succeed in alternate education?

The questions and objectives presented in Table 1 are addressed in Chapter 4: Results and

Chapter 5: Discussion of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) was utilized as the methodology while the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) employed as the method of inquiry. As established in the literature review, PAR is not a method per se; rather, it is an approach that adapts to the needs of marginalized communities by providing practical solutions to important issues, while addressing underlying reasons for the community's marginalization (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Reason, 1994). Thus the method is not predetermined by PAR, but by the community that it is being tailored to; the method is adapted to meet the needs of the community and to ensure collaboration (Kidd & Kral, 2005). PAR can adopt any method as long as it is supported by the community and adheres to its needs (Creswell, Hanson, Plano & Morales, 2007). Subsequently, this provides a rationale for the employment of ECIT as a method of inquiry within the YPAR study. The presented chapter provides an overview of the core elements of the project's methodology and the process by which it was implemented in a participatory manner, it provides: the paradigmatic assumptions underlying this study; a rationale for adopting YPAR and ECIT; an elaboration of the YPAR and ECIT process and how it was adapted to involve youth participation; a description of the main stakeholders, participants, and co-researchers and how participants and co-researchers were recruited; an explanation of rigour and validity; and an overview of the research process.

The methodology chapter describes the implementation of ECIT framed within YPAR, it does not discuss in detail about the initial stages (training and group formation) of PAR. The context of YPAR situates decisions made throughout the project and the approach utilized to involve youth participation.

As a way to elaborate on the contributions of the youth co-researchers and the collaborative nature of the project, I highlighted key moments pertaining to youth involvement throughout the thesis in the form of personal communications, decisions made during team meetings, and statements shared at public presentations.

Design of the Research Project

Paradigmatic assumptions. A paradigm is comprised of philosophical assumptions which serve as a basis for understanding the world (Mertens, 2010, p. 7). The assumptions that define paradigms include: *axiology*, the role of values in the research process; *ontology*, the nature of reality; *epistemology*, the study and acquisition of knowledge and its relationship to the researcher and research participant; and *methodology*, the process and procedure of research (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). These principles guide the research process, from selection of tools, participants, and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). According to Ponterotto (2005), the different research paradigms include positivism, post-positivism, constuctivism-interpretivism, and critical-ideological (also known as critical theory).

In their review of PAR for counselling psychology, Kidd and Kral (2005) proposed that PAR fits closely with the critical-ideological paradigm. They postulated that though PAR is constructivist in its relativistic values, it has explicit empowerment principles which results in PAR being aligned with the critical-ideological paradigm (p. 187). Inherently, PAR reflects the critical-ideological paradigm values of: emancipation, transformation, and researcher's proactive values being core to the research process (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129).

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1994, 2000) the critical theories that comprise the critical-ideological paradigm are expansive, and there is not a single critical theory that encompasses the paradigm as a whole. Nonetheless, despite the lack of unification, each of the

different critical theories adhere to the same basic assumptions: (1) thought is mediated by power

relations that are constructed within social-historical contexts; (2) facts can never be isolated

from the values placed on it; (3) language is central to the formation of subjectivity; (4)

oppression can come in many different forms and results in the expense of a group/individual;

and (5) mainstream research generally reproduce systems of class, race, and gender oppression

(Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, 2000, as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). Researchers who

adopt critical theories use their work as a form of cultural or social criticism. In this thesis the

critical theoretical underpinnings will be from Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

     Ontology. The critical-ideological paradigm adheres to similar grounds as

constructivists-interpretivists. Both paradigms support the ontological assumption that there are

multiple, constructed realities that are influenced by the individual's experience and social

environment (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). However, critical theorists add that reality is also

shaped by "ethnic, cultural, gender, social and political values" and is constructed within a

social-historical context, but is mediated by power relations (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130).

     Epistemology. The epistemology of critical-ideological paradigms includes the notion

that because reality is socially constructed, it is through the relationship between researcher(s)

and participant(s) that can lead to a deep and accurate understanding of the participant(s)' reality

(Ponterotto, 2005). The dialectical process of the researcher-participant interaction has explicit

transformative aims of empowerment and emancipation of participants from oppression

(Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131). Similarly, this form of understanding is situated within critical

hermeneutics, which presumes that because marginalized groups' realities have been distorted by

oppressive socio-historical forces, the goal of the researcher is to help participants understand

these oppressive forces, with the goal of inciting positive change (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

The researcher as an outsider is able to comprehend oppression and its effects, their goal is to help the oppressed recognize and change this reality (Freire, 1970).

Axiology. Values are central to the research process for critical theorists. Unlike constructivists-interpretivists who acknowledge and bracket their values, critical theorists "hope and expect their value biases to influence research process and outcome" as their goal is to address the social issue of marginalization and liberate oppressed groups from unequal power distributions (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131).

Methodology. The process and procedure of research stems from its critical-ideological ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions; it is shaped by the focus on researcher-participant interaction and invocation of an authentic engagement (Ponterotto, 2005). For that reason, the design of critical theory studies adopts a naturalistic inquiry process where contextualized experiences are validated (Ponterotto, 2005).

Inherently, the assumptions within the critical-ideological paradigm fit the purpose of the study and the nature of the participants. The participants are alternate education youth, one of the most vulnerable groups in the school system (BCME, 2009). Due the nature of this group, a socially critical approach is necessary. The purpose is action-orientated with the explicit goals of invoking change by empowering alternate education youth by helping them find their voice (Haverkamp & Young, 2007); all of which are central goals of YPAR.

Rationale for Youth Participatory Action Research. YPAR has been chosen as the methodology for the study. As iterated earlier, YPAR shares the same principles as PAR, however it is explicitly pedagogical and has implications for youth development (Cammarota & Fine, 2008); an important consideration as both participants and co-researchers are youth in alternate education. YPAR was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, PAR has

been endorsed by the stakeholders who initiated the project, Chilliwack Social Research and

Planning Council (CSRPC) and the Chilliwack School District (District #33).

Second, when working with marginalized youth to improve school systems the literature

advocates for a critical-interpretative approach (Smith, 2000; Smyth, 2006). According to Smith

(2000) it is crucial to adopt research methodologies that respect and validate how youth

experience school, research must take a critical frame of reference that affirms social

stratification. YPAR fits with Smith's (2000) proposition, because it is qualitative research

method that is a critically informed (Creswell et al., 2007). As a qualitative approach, its mode

of inquiry is to understand the latent meanings that people make of their experiences (Morrow,

2007, p. 211); therefore, how youth experience school is respected as a legitimate form of

knowledge.

Third, PAR is idiographic, as it is based on the needs of the community. It focuses on the

contextualized issues that youth face, which is central to the community of Chilliwack. The

study can be seen as a case study of sorts, as it focuses on understanding Chilliwack's youth as a

"unique, complex entity" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Though the case study is not the method of

this study, its properties lend well into understanding the merit of YPAR for Chilliwack. As case

studies consider the unique context-dependent knowledge of its participants (Flyvbjerg, 2004). In

critically examining Chilliwack as a case, it allows us to examine the possible deeper

contextualized issues that alternate education youth are part of (Flyvbjerg, 2004). An

idiographic approach is necessary as generalized principles might not address the contextualized

issues of vulnerable youth in Chilliwack.

Lastly, the variant of YPAR as opposed to other PAR typologies was chosen because

YPAR has been previously employed with vulnerable youth (see Cammarota & Romero, 2011).

The research study does have many parallels to community-based PAR due to the involvement of community stakeholders. However, because the study was situated at an alternate education program and the main stakeholders who are impacted by the study are vulnerable students, YPAR is more appropriate. The community is inherently involved and therefore considered in decisions that are made throughout the project, the extent to which these considerations are made are based on the goals and needs of the main stakeholders, students in alternate education and youth who have dropped out of school in Chilliwack.

Stakeholders. An important feature of PAR is to map out stakeholders and their respective commitments, and to clarify how each stakeholder can influence the research process. The values that each stakeholder holds may either perpetuate or prevent oppression of the studied group (Flicker, 2008). It is possible that conflicts may take place during PAR; therefore intentions should be made transparent and modified for the betterment of marginalized groups (Ozer, Ritterman, & Wannis, 2010). In the case of this study the stakeholders involved were: Dr. Rob Lees, Dr. Janelle Kwee, School District #33, the Stó:lō community, CSRPC, Fraser Health Authority, the Education Centre, vulnerable students in Chilliwack who are in alternate education or have dropped out, youth co-researchers, co-facilitators of the research project, and the principle investigator.

I served as the principal investigator for the project. I am a 26-year-old Chinese-Canadian male student enrolled in the Master's of Arts in Counselling Psychology at Trinity Western University. I have had experience working with homeless youth, which has shaped my view on the importance of needing to provide systemic interventions while ensuring that individual voices are being represented. I have a Christian worldview, which strongly shapes my beliefs of advocacy and social justice, and helps me recognize the value of marginalized voices.

My commitment to this project was due to my interest in wanting to advocate for vulnerable youth, but also to ensure the successful completion of my thesis.

Supervision for the research project was under Dr. Robert Lees and Dr. Janelle Kwee. Dr. Robert Lees is a registered community psychologist with Ministry of Children and Family Development in Chilliwack and serves on the CSRPC. Given his community psychology background, he has a strong adherence to empowerment and advocacy principles. As a staff at MCFD, his role is in quality assurance and therefore ensures that community organizations like the Education Centre are being adequately supported. Moreover, he served on the Chilliwack School Board and has a vested interest in improving the community of Chilliwack. Dr. Janelle Kwee is an associate professor at Trinity Western University. She also has interests in community psychology and has had experience working with marginalized youth populations.

The co-facilitators of the project were Richard Tatomir and Chereca Weaver, both of whom were students from the same program that I was in. Chereca served as a co-facilitator during the training phase of the PAR project, while Richard served as a co-facilitator during the implementation. Their roles were to provide support to myself and the co-researchers throughout the project. They benefitted by gaining experience in conducting participatory research.

The organizational stakeholders included: District #33, CSRPC, Fraser Health Authority and the Stó:lō community. District #33 was interested in this study because they initiated it and they were looking for strategies to improve their system and the six year completion rate. In conducting this study they will gain an understanding of how they can enhance their system according to the perspectives of vulnerable youth, whom, aforementioned, may be contributing significantly to the low completion rates. They are also committed to the strategic goals of engaging all learners and promoting successful transitions (Chilliwack School District, 2011).

The CSRPC, in partnership with the school district, has supported this project because their

mandate is to research social issues that impact Chilliwack in order to contribute to Chilliwack's

social and economic development (Infochilliwack.ca, 2011). Fraser Health Authority, which has

representation on the CSRPC, provided funding for the training portion of the project. The

Stó:lō community has an interest in the PAR study because around 40% of alternate education

youth are aboriginal (BCME, 2012e); the study may have potential implications for its youth.

The Education Centre, the alternate education site where the study is being conducted,

has a vested interest in this study because the study may have implications on the program's

future development. Their students also gained opportunities to learn and develop research

skills. Students involved as co-researchers earned credits for taking part in the research study as

part of their project learning class. With the co-researchers, they had a stake in the study because

they shaped and implemented the project. They also received an honorarium of $8 for each hour

they were involved in during the training phase; there was no honorarium during the project's

implementation.

Lastly, the participants, students who have dropped out or are in alternate education, had

an opportunity to vocalize their experience and provide suggestions on how to improve the

educational programs that are affecting their lives. In voicing their opinions, it prepares them to

take part in a democratic society (Checkoway, 2011).

Positionality. Herr and Anderson (2005) proposed that researchers need to be aware of

their positionality when conducting action research as it has implications on how the researcher

frames epistemological, methodological and ethical issues (p. 30). There are numerous

positional dimensions that a researcher can consider, some of which include hierarchical position

within an organization/community and position with respect to dominant groups in society, for

example class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age (Herr & Anderson, p. 44). It is

a complex notion by which the researcher occupies multiple positions that can be refined and

redefined throughout the dynamic research process.

With this study I am an outsider of the community of Chilliwack as I am a graduate

student at Trinity Western University, born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, and currently

residing in Abbotsford, BC. I have social status because of my role as a researcher and graduate

student; it places me as a social outsider in contrast to youth who have dropped out of school and

students in alternate education. I am an outsider, I have never dropped out of school nor have I

attended alternate education, I have been successful in my educational career. Nonetheless, I

have insider knowledge as I have had experience working with and alongside marginalized youth

during my previous employment working at a youth shelter. I too have experienced

marginalization as a second-generation immigrant and as an individual with a physical disability

being hearing impaired—to this I can say that I have a partial understanding of the frustration of

not being heard and being oppressed due to personal circumstances.

My role and position has changed through the period of implementing the PAR project, I

had adopted multiple roles within the community of Chilliwack. First, I did an internship at

Child and Youth Mental Health at MCFD in Chilliwack. Second, as part of my internship with

MCFD, I helped conduct psychoeducational and mental health awareness groups within the

Education Centre, which was both a role of authority, but also a role of advocacy. Third, as a

principal investigator leading a team of student researchers from the Education Centre, I have

been given the privilege to understand and acknowledge the unique voices and circumstances of

my peer researchers. Due to these positions, I garnered a better understanding of alternate

education youth and contextualized circumstances they face, but at the expense of adopting an

authoritative role. Because of the multiple positions I have adhered to, there was inherently a

disadvantage; my social, economic, and cultural dominance as a middle class, university

educated, and authority-laden role may have hindered my connection with youth participants.

Essentially, I have social power and that power carries intrinsic potential for oppression. On the

other hand, it was also in these numerous facets of my positional roles that enabled me to learn

about PAR and helped me conduct research in a manner that was respectful to youth; for

instance, it provided me with the credibility to advocate on the youth's behalf. As my multiple

positions are connected in dynamic ways, I have engaged in constant reflections and journaling

to ensure that these positions I adhered to could benefit rather than hinder youth voice.

Enhanced critical incident technique and participatory action research. Data

collection in PAR is dependent on the needs of the community and can adopt quantitative and/or

qualitative approaches (Creswell et al., 2007). In this study the community of Chilliwack

through the District #33, MCFD, and CSPRC, has determined ECIT as the most appropriate

technique to evaluate and improve their school system (R. Lees, personal communication, May

29, 2012). ECIT is a method that enables researchers to elicit from participants critical incidents

(CI) or factual happenings that helped or hindered a particular phenomenon (Butterfield, Borgen,

Amundson, & Maglio, 2005, 2009; Flanagan, 1954). Initially called the Critical Incident

Technique (CIT), it was later modified by Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009) and called the Enhanced

CIT (ECIT), which included Wish-List (WL) items and nine credibility checks. WL items

enable participants to reflect on what would have been helpful but was not present in their

experience of the studied phenomenon (Butterfield et al., 2005, 2009). CIT was originally

developed by Flanagan (1954) as a means to systematically collect information in a manner that

can solve practical problems or develop broad psychological theories. Originally it was utilized

for the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces during World War II

for selecting and classifying aircrew and improving training and airplane design (Butterfield et

al., 2005, 2009; Flanagan, 1954). Since then CIT has evolved to focus on psychological

constructs and on the lived experiences of participants (Butterfield et al., 2005). Particularly,

Woolsey (1986) advocated for its use in counselling psychology due to its consistency with the

skills, values, and experience of counselling because of its ability to encompass factual

happenings, to explore turning points, and its utility as a foundational/exploratory tool for

research and building theories and/or models (as cited in Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 480).

The value of ECIT for this project is that it focuses on what actually happens within the

context of the students in alternate education and students who have dropped out of the

Chilliwack school system. It adds depth and narratives to generalized approaches like surveys.

ECIT focuses on relevance to the lived experiences of participants and validates this vulnerable

group. It affirms the experiences that was witnessed by these participants.

ECIT was utilized as the method within the PAR methodology. Because it is a flexible

approach by nature (see Flanagan, 1954), it was modified to meet the goal of validating youth

voice and to ensure authentic participation of youth co-researchers. With ECIT, participant's

retrospective self-reports of their experience of the mainstream and alternate education system in

Chilliwack was elicited. ECIT can be broken down into five steps: (1) ascertaining the general

aims of the activity being studied; (2) making plans and setting specifications; (3) collecting the

data; (4) analyzing the data; and (5) interpreting the data and reporting the results. The rest of

the methods section elaborates on how youth participation was integrated into each of these steps

and a summary is provided at the end.

Rationale for Critical Incident Technique. There were several reasons for the adoption of

ECIT within this PAR study. First, PAR does not subscribe a method and instead the method is

determined by the inquired upon community (Creswell et al., 2007). As mentioned, the

community of Chilliwack has chosen ECIT as the method of inquiry to be utilized while

employing youth as co-researchers.

Second, CIT is flexible and action-orientated, it was originally developed to be a flexible

approach and to address practical concerns (Flanagan, 1954). The flexibility of CIT allows it to

be modified according to the needs of the participants. Meanwhile, systemic steps as proposed

by Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009) were followed to ensure rigour. Action is a natural extension

of CIT, as CIT provides a "set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human

behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and

developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan, 1954). Within the CIT approach, the

elicitation of incidents are then formulated to create categories, which according to Flanagan

(1954), are to be formed in a manner that can be "easily applied and maximally useful" (p. 347).

The intrinsic action-orientation of CIT is aligned with PAR principles.

Third, ECIT can be employed as an evaluative approach. For example, in a study

conducted by Westwood, McLean, Cave, Borgen, and Slakov (2010), the researchers employed

CIT as an evaluative tool to assess group-based programs for war veterans. Likewise, past theses

have employed CIT as a means to evaluate and improve services for youth (McLean, 2012;

Mercer, 2009). With this study, alternate education youth were engaged in collaboratively

evaluating the Chilliwack education system.

Fourth, ECIT can be employed to raise critical consciousness for youth co-researchers.

As the purpose of ECIT is to examine helping, hindering, and wished for items, it can be

employed as a means to facilitate critical reflexivity. CIT enables both participants to examine their social context and explore what has limited and promoted their opportunities. Meanwhile the combination of CIT and PAR enables youth co-researchers to gain insight on key helping/hindering incidents that have influenced their lives and their peers through a process of interviews and data analysis; it empowers them to advocate for their peers.

Fifth, CIT has been used with Community-based Participatory Action Research (see Belkora, Stupar, & O'Donnell, 2011). In a case study, Belkora et al. examined the utilization of CIT in a participatory manner, they argued that CIT facilitated community involvement. Though this study is differs in that ECIT was utilized and with YPAR, Belkora et al. showed that CIT can be a useful approach to implement in participatory research.

Lastly, YPAR adds depth to ECIT. As co-researchers are alternate education youth themselves, they too have witnessed and experienced the Chilliwack school system. They are part of the same group of potential participants that have witnessed the strengths and weakness of both the alternate and mainstream education systems. Therefore, rather than myself as an outsider interpreting the meaning of the data elicited, the involvement of youth co-researchers means that I am asking the witnesses themselves to make sense of what their peers witnessed. Which means it is may be more representative of what is actually happening for students who have disengaged from mainstream education in Chilliwack.

Co-researchers and Implementation of Youth Participatory Action Research

The co-researchers involved in the project were: Kara Firth, Jordan Florence, Jake Harms, Mya Raber, Taylor Stevens, and Scott Wilson. From October 2012 to June 2013, these youth researchers engaged in learning about research methodology and contributed meaningfully

to the implementation of the project. Given the extent to which they contributed to this project, they were honored with the provision of authorship agreements (see Appendix N).

Their involvement can be broken down into different phases, training and implementation; each phase consisted of different steps. Figure 3 provides an outline of the research project highlighting the different phases and steps involved. Throughout the entire project the research team engaged in a continuous cycle of planning, critical reflection, and social action. This process is shown in Figure 4 and discussed throughout this chapter and in Chapter 4: Results and Chapter 5: Discussion.
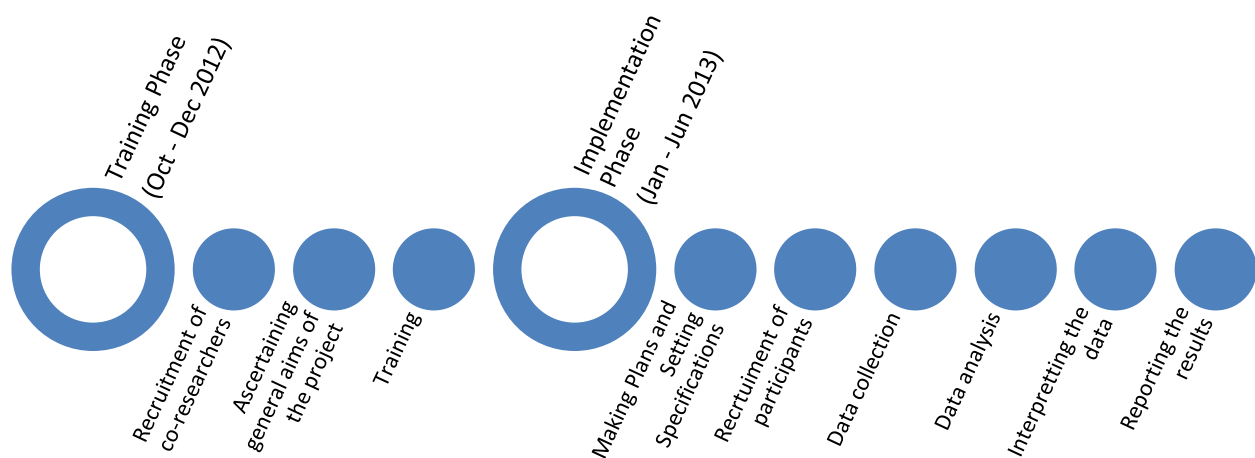
Figure 3. Outline of the thesis project
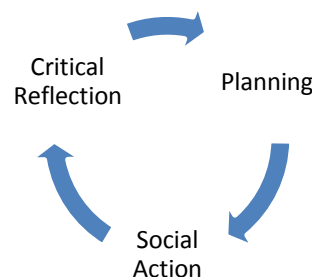
Figure 4. Process of PAR (adapted from Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 278)

Training. Eight students were involved during the training phase; seven completed the training, while six remained to implement the project. The training of co-researchers was implemented by Chereca Weaver and myself. We conducted eight 2-hour workshops to train youth on research methodology while engaging them to critically examine their social circumstances in order to raise critical consciousness.   Training involved learning about research methods, interview techniques, ECIT basics, and ethics. They were provided with a workbook highlighting the material covered in the workshops (see Appendix F). Critical consciousness was raised through the process of relationship building and by validating youth opinions and perspectives. It was also fostered through the process of interviewing each other and providing space for students to share their experiences of marginalization. Training was based on a curriculum that I developed based on literature and material on YPAR. Students were also informed about the reason for the research and were empowered to take ownership of the project by forming their own research team name, vision, and goals for the project (see Table 2).

Table 2

Research Team Name, Vision, and Goals for the Research Project

Research Team Name	Raising Hope
Vision	To promote positive change for youth through research, advocacy, awareness raising, and action.
Goals	1. School system – make changes to mainstream and others 2. School board pay attention the needs of students with challenges (i.e. learning difficulties, bullying, racism, etc...) 3. Raise awareness and make changes 4. Make invisible students seen (give them a voice) 5. Growth and positive environment

Note. Research team name, vision, and goals were formed during the first two meeting with co-researchers on October 24 and October 31, 2013.

Recruitment. These youth were enrolled in the Project Learning class, a class where students can earn credits by taking part in community projects (C. Lawson, personal

communication, May 29, 2012).   The PAR project was coordinated with the Education Centre's

vice-principle and the student's respective teachers to ensure that youth co-researchers can earn

high school credits for their involvement. The criteria for selection required the youth to be

interested in taking part in the project. Further, their involvement was completely voluntary and

they were aware that they had the choice to stay or quit the project whenever they wanted.

      Prior to recruitment, meetings took place to outline the details of the project with

respective community stakeholders and the vice-principal of the Education Centre. I later

presented the project to teachers at the Education Centre during a staff meeting in June 2012. A

final meeting with the vice-principal and the school counsellor, outlined the pragmatics of the

project, space needed, timeline, recruitment strategies, and how the project can integrate with the

school's Project Learning class. Afterwards I coordinated with the teachers to setup an

information session about the research project for students. Teachers discussed with potential

candidates who might be interested in the taking part in the project and invited them to take part

in the information session. At the information session, I presented the rationale for conducting

research, the premise of the project, and what involvement entailed to eleven individuals. Out of

the eleven candidates, eight decided to attend the training.

      Co-researcher involvement was later finalized by their signing of contractual agreements

during the training phase of the project (see Appendix F). These agreements were also provided

to their guardians. Co-researchers were compensated for their time by being provided an

honorarium of $8/hour for taking part in the training sessions. For involvement in the

implementation phase, co-researchers were provided with an orientation and a confidentiality

agreement (see Appendix G). They received high school credits for their involvement in the rest

of the PAR project as part of a Project Learning class.

Implementation. For both the implementation and training phase of the project,

meetings were guided by Freire's (1970) notion of *praxis*, Vygotsky's (1978) principle of

scaffolding and *zones of proximal development*, Hart's (1991) *ladder of participation*, and

Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, and McLoughlin's (2006) model for youth empowerment.

With praxis, the research team continuously engaged in a process of critical reflection

and social action. During each meeting co-researchers were asked to reflect about their

experiences of conducting interviews, recruiting, and presenting, along with other forms of social

action; similarly they were also asked about actions that they wanted to take part in based on

their reflections. This was facilitated in every meeting during the check-in and check-out period.

Vygotsky's (1978) principles fit with Chen, Poland, & Skinner's (2007) proposition that

the level of engagement should not overwhelm co-researchers, rather facilitate their own growth.

It is insufficient to only change the social circumstances of youth, as youth have become

accustomed to one type of environment. Youth need to be equipped with the skills necessary to

adapt to new environments. Scaffolding for youth is required to support transitions from an

oppressive situation to an empowered one. With scaffolding, I was challenged to balance the

dialectic of maintaining high expectations of the research team, while recognizing their

capacities. I did not want to expect any less of the co-researchers, since that would mean that I

did not think they were capable and therefore further perpetuate oppressive beliefs of at-risk

youth; yet, I needed to validate their capacities and to be careful not to overburden them. This

reflection is elaborated in the Discussion Chapter.

Jennings et al.'s (2006) model for youth empowerment dictated the environment that was

fostered during each meeting. Jenning et al.'s model includes: (1) a welcoming, safe

environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between

youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical

processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change, and (6) integrated

individual- and community-level empowerment (p. 32).

Though power is shared in decisions made during the project it is important to note that

full participation may not necessarily benefit youth and may not be possible given the structural

and cultural realities of school settings (Chen et al., 2007; Rodríguez & Brown, 2009). Instead

Rodríguez and Brown (2009) propose that with power, the responsibility of the principal

investigator/adult researchers are "to provide leadership for and maintain the cohesion of our

teams to ensure the quality of the research and scaffold learning… personal decisions are made

about the work of the research team that we believe will benefit the young people and the overall

integrity of the research project" (p. 28).

Rodríguez and Brown's (2009) proposition was operationalized by following Chen et

al.'s (2007) study, where engagement of co-researchers was gauged based on Hart's (1991)

Ladder of Participation (see Appendix O). According to Hart (1991) when implementing

research with youth, there are eight levels of participation; the first three levels are non-

participation where youth do not have any impact, while the last five levels can be considered

authentic participation. With this model there are four characteristics that define true

participation: (1) youth understand the intentions of the project, (2) they know who made the

decisions for their involvement and why, (3) they have a meaningful role, and (4) they

volunteered for the project after the intentions are made clear to them (p. 11). With this project

all four elements were met and overall the level of participation was at level six based on Hart's

model—adult-initiated and decisions were shared with youth.

Following Chen et al.'s (2007) study, I gauged the level of engagement of youth researchers through each component of the research project. Hart's (1991) model also allowed me to have flexibility while still ensuring that participation was authentic, as there were certain parts in the project where full participation may have been overwhelming; in those instances I was more involved. The project ranged from level five to eight through the different phases of the implementation process. A summary is presented at the end of the chapter assessing co-researcher engagement during each step of the project according to Hart's (1991) model; details are provided in Chapter 4: Results and Chapter 5: Discussion.

Research team and outline of weekly meetings. The research team was comprised of myself, the principal investigator, Richard Tatomir, co-facilitator, and the youth co-researchers from the Education Centre; Dr. Robert Lees and Dr. Janelle Kwee served as the team's supervisors. The research team managed the weekly functions of the project and had final decision making powers regarding the research project. The team met weekly for 2 to 3 hours throughout the school year from October 2012 to June 2013. Meetings were held in the "Learning Lounge" a room within the Education Centre, while interviews were conducted in a different room at the school. During this period the co-supervisors were consulted regularly. In training phase of the project (October to December 2012), the weekly meetings followed a training protocol on research methodology, challenged co-researchers to engage in critical reflexivity, and focused on team building. For the implementation phase (January to June 2013), meetings consisted of creating plans, going over plans, shaping the direction of the project, interviewing participants, analyzing data, practicing for presentations, and providing support to one another. Decision making powers were shared amongst the principle investigator and co-researchers. The tasks and content of each meeting evolved as we progressed through each step

of the project. For instance during recruitment we focused on creating recruitment material and

preparing for data collection; during data collection and analysis, meeting times were utilized to

interview participants, co-researchers who were not interviewing analyzed the data.

Research team meetings were also an opportunity to raise consciousness, manage biases,

manage discrimination, and minimize our contributions to marginalization and oppression of

student voice. As the principle investigator and the co-researchers were in positions of power, it

is possible that without sufficient consciousness raising, oppression can be perpetuated.

Therefore it was crucial that each member was engaged in a reflective process in order to

manage ones biases. Kirshner, Pozzoboni, and Jones (2011) provides suggestions for helping to

scaffold youth in the process of managing biases: (1) provide youth with multiple opportunities

to surface bias; (2) guide youth in explaining their thinking to others; (3) frame and re-frame the

purpose of the research; and (4) teach data analysis practices. These recommendations were

incorporated into team meetings.

With consciousness raising, co-researchers were invited to reflect about their experiences

during each action that was implemented during the project. They were also provided feedback

into the project and also received feedback after each interview and presentation. The check-in

period of meetings were utilized to engage youth researchers in these conversations and to

establish the agenda for the day.

Advisory board. As there were numerous community stakeholders involved and

interested in this project, an advisory board was utilized. The reason for having an advisory

board was to ensure stakeholder commitments were respected, to elicit feedback, and to make

sure that the research project was shaped in a manner that was helpful to the community and its

vulnerable youth. Since the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council initiated the

project and also had members who represented various community stakeholders (Ministry of

Children and Family Development, School District #33, Stó:lō community, Fraser Health

Authority, and the city of Chillliwack) it was appropriate to utilize this council to serve in an

advisory role.

There were three meetings that took place with the advisory board: in the beginning prior

to the implementation phase, halfway through the project in March 2013, and at the end with a

presentation of the results and recommendations. During these meetings updates on the progress

of the project was provided and feedback from the stakeholders were elicited. Suggestions from

these meetings were brought back to the research team and decisions were made as to whether or

not the advice was applicable to the project. The role of the advisory was strictly influential, the

decision making power still resided with the research team.

Regarding praxis for co-researchers, being involved with the advisory board can be seen

as an outlet for social action in response to consciousness raising. The advisory board offered an

opportunity for youth co-researchers to take part in the sociopolitical climate of the project; each

co-researcher had at least one opportunity to present and take part in these meetings.

Data collection of YPAR. Data collection was comprised of two layers, one layer

encompassed data collected from ECIT, while the other layer was situated with YPAR and

consisted of assessing praxis, engagement, empowerment, and validating youth voice.

YPAR data was collected from my personal research journals and final interviews with youth co-

researchers on their experience in taking part in the project. The research journals involved

details from each meeting, along with my own reflections and reflections that youth co-

researchers shared during team meetings. Co-researchers are aware that because the project was

participatory research, their reflections were to be incorporated into the thesis (see the authorship

agreement in Appendix N). For the final interview the co-researchers were asked the following questions: (1) what were key moments for you in the project? (2) What did you learn about yourself? The school system? Peers? (3) How were you impacted by your peer's stories? And (4) what do you hope to do with this experience? What do hope for the future of this project?

As YPAR is a dynamic process, reflections and forms of engagement from the co-researchers can be elicited through numerous means either through their actions, statements shared in meetings, and presentation comments. These various forms of data will be utilized to supplement the reflections. To ensure that these are representative of what had actually happened, the supplemented data was sent to Richard to confirm its credibility and approved by the co-researchers. Co-researchers had the opportunity to modify or remove any comments that they were involved in.

The dialectical interaction between the principle investigator and youth co-researchers enabled youth to understand the deeper implications of their participation in the project. This process resulted in more meaningful action and an enhancement of social awareness, which enabled youth co-researchers to gain a greater appreciation of the elicited responses from youth participants. Their reflections were incorporated into the ECIT analysis because the perspective of youth co-researchers shape how data is collected and analysis. The critical awareness fostered through PAR helped co-researchers gain access to the latent meanings or the 'how' of the critical incidents elicited from CIT; thus resulting in meaningful data collection and analysis.

Participants

Participants who took part in the project were youth who have already dropped out of school and students currently attending the Education Centre. As the premise of this study is focused on youth in alternate education, an already marginalized group, all youth within the Education Centre were allowed to take part in the study. There were no restrictions placed on

participants, as these restrictions would only perpetuate oppression and privilege. As the guiding

principal for the study was empowerment and validating youth voice, it was important that

participant agency was respected and that they personally chose to take part. Their involvement

is based on their needs and desires to provide their voice. The only two criteria for involvement

was: (a) that students were attending the Education Centre or (b) the participant had recently

dropped out of school.

Through the process of critical reflection youth co-researchers brought up the idea that

they should take part in the study as well, since they themselves were alternate education

students and because they wanted to add depth to the research study (K. Firth, personal

communication, March 2, 2013). The research team unanimously decided that it was an

appropriate decision and were aware that this meant that they were identified participants, being

that they were both co-researchers and participants (see Appendix M). Co-researchers were the

last interviewees, as we wanted to make sure enough time was allotted for interested participants.

Further, in engaging in the interview process later, youth researchers would have had sufficient

time to reflect about their own experiences, thus providing a more in-depth account. This

contribution was an example of youth empowerment as social action was fostered through the

co-researchers' critical reflection of interviewing their peers.

In total, 18 participants took part in the research study, 6 males and 12 females between

the ages of 15 to 19 years old. The majority of the participant self-identified as Caucasian with

six participants of different ethnicities. There were four participants who self-identified as

Aboriginal (two First Nations and two Metis). Though there was only one participant who had

self-identified themselves as having dropped out of school, it is important to note that a majority

of the participants have dropped out in the past and have returned to education through the

alternate education. Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of the participant characteristics.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Demographics	Participant Information
Gender	Female = 12
	Male = 6
Age	Range = 15 – 19
	Mean = 16.7
	Median = 16
Self-identified Ethnicity	Caucasian = 12
	First Nations = 2
	Metis = 2
	African/Caucasian = 1
	Filipino/Caucasian = 1
Years in school	Range = 9 – 12
Current School Year	Range = 8 – 12
Educational Status	Alternate education and never dropped-out = 4
	Dropped out in the past and currently attending alternate education = 11
	Alternate education and disengagement history unknown = 2
	Currently not attending school = 1

Recruitment Strategies

According to Khanlou and Peter (2005), fair selection of participants in PAR studies are

based on involving participants who are interested in the issue, reduction of barriers for

participation, and clarifying whether or not the participant belongs to the respective community.

To involve interested individuals, co-researchers served as the main proponents of recruitment.

They created and modified recruitment material to ensure that it was youth friendly and appealed

to their peers, this involved creating recruitment posters (Appendix D) and a PowerPoint

presentation slide (Appendix E). Youth researchers also modified the informed consent

(Appendix H) and suggested that compensation should be an option of either $15 gift card to

MacDonald's or Walmart.   After the recruitment materials were made, the research team

presented the project to their peers. Teachers organized to gather their classrooms on two

separate occasions for the research team to present and recruit participants; presentations took

place on February 7 and 14, 2013. Potential participants were informed that they could either

contact myself or the co-researchers to be involved in the study.

In addition to the presentations, co-researchers personally asked their peers to take part in

the study. The co-researchers were informed that participants could not be coerced and they

needed to respect their agency of their peers; the co-researchers could only inform them about

the project and how to get involved. Co-researchers engaged their peers with face-to-face

invitations, text-messages, and they also advertised the project to their friends on Facebook by

updating their status to a message similar to the following: *"Hey! I am part of a research project*

that is looking at ways to improve the Chilliwack school system, if you are from the Ed. Centre

or not attending school at the moment you can be part of the project. If you are interested call

me, text me, or pm me." The rationale for utilizing Facebook and text messaging was to reduce

any barriers to involvement.   For the participants who were interested, the co-researchers

informed me about their interest and I created a schedule for the days that they were to interview

the participant. The co-researchers updated the participants and reminded them of the interviews

the day before. All of the participants who took part in the study were recruited by the youth co-

researchers. None of the participants contacted myself, which shows the merit of participatory

methodology because it reduced the barriers for involvement of these participants.

During the interviews, participants were interviewed by a pair of co-researchers. At the

interview, the co-researchers described the Informed Consent (Appendix H) and gave the

participants an opportunity to read through the form. The Informed Consent provided a

description of the project, its purpose, the nature of their involvement with the study, limits to

confidentiality, why their peers were involved as co-researchers, their rights as participants, how

data will be safe guarded, potential risks and benefits, and debriefing. All the participants signed

the consent forms and were debriefed after the interview and were provided with my contact

information. For compensation, they were provided with either a $15 McDonalds or Walmart

gift card at the beginning or at the end of the interview, depending on their choice. After

interviews were done, co-researchers followed-up by: inviting their peers to the final school

board meeting; providing input for the creation of a poster which disseminated the results and the

actions that the research team committed to, posted in the school for participants to see (see

Appendix P); and a presentation will be made to the school in the following school year.

        With ECIT, recruitment stops when there is enough data for exhaustiveness (Butterfield

et al., 2005, 2009). Unlike other techniques, the sample size for CIT is not dependent on the

number of participants, but on the number of critical incidents reported; hence, sufficiency is

determined by whether or not the domain is captured and described in adherence to the

exhaustiveness criteria (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flangan, 1954). Though exhaustiveness was

reached by the thirteenth interview, recruitment continued until the end of March 2013 to ensure

that interested participants still had opportunities to voice their perspectives. Recruitment ended

at that time to allow sufficient time for the project to be completed within the school year.

Data Collection

        Outline of data collection and analysis. To ensure youth involvement, ECIT was

tailored to scaffold youth throughout data collection and analysis phase of the project. During

each meeting two co-researchers interviewed participants in a separate room at the Education

Centre. Interviews were around 30 to 45 minutes; only one interview was conducted at a time

due to space limitations at the school. Interviews were audio-tapped and were transcribed by an

independent transcriptionist (see Appendix J). With the transcripts, I did the initial analysis

(eliciting incidents) and brought the analysis to the next meeting. At the meeting, co-researchers

who were not interviewing were involved in either finalizing the data analysis for each transcript

(category formation), practicing interview skills, recruiting future participants, preparing material

and practicing for future disseminations, and/or conducting second interviews.

Interview protocol and guiding questions. ECIT utilizes semi-structured open-ended

interviews, to provide directionality in eliciting helping/hindering/wished for items while

ensuring flexibility (Butterfield et al., 2005, 2009). An interview guide (see Appendix I) was

employed for this study, as it provided guidance for youth co-researchers to focus their

interviews and to ensure key questions were asked. Keeping the interviews open-ended allowed

youth researchers to pursue inquiry paths that enabled them to elicit latent meanings. These

interviews were conducted by youth co-researchers who have been trained in basic listening

skills and on how to conduct ECIT interviews. Co-researchers interviewed in pairs, male and

female, and as they interviewed typically one co-researcher served as the main interviewer while

the other helped ask questions and jotted down notes. These pairs remained the same throughout

the data collection phase as a way to build on their collective learning. Co-researchers prepared

by working in their pairs and practiced the interviews on each other during the training phase and

a week prior to conducting interviews.

To build on the youth researchers technical capacities, one of either Richard or I sat in on

the first interviews of each co-researcher with verbal consent from the participants; sitting in on

interviews allowed us to provide immediate feedback to the co-researchers after the interviews.

Furthermore, when co-researchers finished their interviews they debriefed their experiences with

the rest of the research team and elicited feedback. To honor and involve participants in the

research process, for the first several interviews we asked for participant feedback on their

experience of the interviews and how our interviews could be improved. Lastly, I would listen

over each interview and provide feedback to the co-researchers at the next team meeting.

     Interviews were conducted under my supervision to make sure that data was kept safe

and secure, and to provide assistance to co-researchers when help was needed. It ensured that

any ethical issues, such as emotional distress, can be dealt with in a prompt and professional

manner. During the interviews I was with the rest of the research team in the Learning Lounge,

while the interviewers were in a separate room in the school, either in the school counsellor's

office or in an available meeting room; they were aware that they could request for my help at

any time during the interview process. Prior to the interviews, youth co-researchers would

check-in with the principle investigator and discuss any questions to prepare them for the

interviews. At the end of the interviews youth, co-researchers provided the audio recordings and

notes to me for safe storage of data.

     For the interviews itself, Flanagan (1954) recommends three steps to be taken at the

beginning of each interview. The first step is an introductory statement. Though each co-

researcher implemented this part slightly differently than another, they were informed to provide

the following statement: "The purpose of the study is to investigate ways to improve the

Chilliwack school system. It is to get the perspectives of alternate education students and

students who have dropped out what their experience of the education system was, so that we

can find out ways to improve it. This will be done by looking at what helped, hindered, and what

students wished for from mainstream and alternate education system that would have helped

them succeed."

Second, participants were provided with the general aim of the study, co-researchers were trained to inform participants of the following: "The reason for interviewing students who have been through the mainstream education system is because you have a perspective of the school system that others might not have. Your perspective is especially important if you have felt that you have not been taken seriously by the school system in the past. The aim of the project is to ensure that our voices are being considered in the decisions that are made by the school system."

Third, prior to the interview, participants were given information about the potential risks and benefits of taking part in the project and the limits of confidentiality. They were informed that this is an opportunity for them to voice out their opinions and that their opinions will be represented by their peers, the co-researchers. Lastly, they were informed that interviews would be about 30 minutes long and that they could take part in a second interview if they so choose.

Interviews started with questions eliciting basic demographic information and information about their educational history (school year, years in school, drop-out history, and school prior to the Education Centre). To help prime the participants for the ECIT questions, they were asked contextualized information about their general experience of the education system. These questions included: What was your experience of the Chilliwack school system? What was your overall experience of the mainstream system? How does it compare to alternate education? What is your overall experience of alternate education? What happened that made you leave mainstream education?

After these questions were asked, co-researchers transitioned to asking the ECIT questions for, typically in the order of helping for mainstream and alternate, than hindering for mainstream and alternate, and wish-lists. An example of inquiring about helping incidents in mainstream would be: "In what ways did the mainstream education system help you stay in

school and find success?" Co-researchers were informed to gauge the participants and to ask

follow-up questions and examples. They were provided with examples of probes to utilize, for

example: "what were key moments or key experiences?" and "how did that impact you?" As the

co-researchers worked in pairs, the second interviewer typically helped with the probing and

follow-up questions.

Co-researchers were educated to utilize their empathy skills and to focus on open-ended

questions. They were aware that the interview protocol was a guide and that it was important to

engage participants naturally. One of the co-researchers utilized self-disclosure as a way to help

facilitate conversations and help her peers open up, while another co-researcher was cognizant

on making sure that she asked for examples for each experience shared.

In closing the interviews, co-researchers read out the debriefing script for the participants

(see Appendix I). In the debriefing script participants were informed about purposes of the

project and what will happen with the results. They were also reminded that if they felt

emotionally upset after the interview they were encouraged to speak to the school counsellor or

discuss with myself for additional resources.

Recording and storing information. Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder

and stored in my password protected laptop. The recordings were stored separately from any

identifying information of the participants to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Only I had

access to the data so that confidentiality and privacy is kept. A copy of the transcriptions will be

held within the Counselling Psychology department at Trinity Western University and will be

kept in a locked cabinet. Audio recordings will be kept in a password protected portable hard-

drive and also locked inside the department. Upon completion of the thesis, I will appropriately

destroy any other copies of the audio-recordings and transcripts.

Analysis

Data analysis in ECIT is comprised of three steps: (1) determining the frame of reference;
(2) formulating the categories derived from grouping similar incidents; and (3) determining the
level of specificity or generality to be used when reporting the data (Butterfield et al., 2005,
2009; Flanagan, 1954). The frame of reference refers to the intended use of the results. In this
study the results were utilized as a means to empower vulnerable youth by providing them with a
voice. It will also provide input to the Chilliwack school district on how to improve the
education system for these students. The themes that emerge will help identify what factors need
to be enhanced (helping CI's), removed or decreased (hindering CI's), and what could be
implemented (WL items) to improve mainstream and alternate education for students.

Creating categories was done in a collaborative manner with youth co-researchers. This
step can be broken down into: (1) organizing the raw data, (2) identifying the CI's and WL
items, and (3) creating categories. According to Flanagan (1954) category formation requires
insight, experience, and judgement (p. 344). As youth co-researchers have experienced similar
circumstances as their peers, this provided them with the necessary expertise to comprehend the
data they were presented. To familiarize myself with the interviews, I listened to the audio-
recordings and reviewed each transcript thoroughly.

To organize the raw data Butterfield et al. (2009) suggests that interviews should be
chosen randomly three at a time. However, given the time limitations, I started the data analysis
process as soon as there were three interviews. To organize the data I chose highlighters
representing different critical incidents (pink/red for hindering; blue for helping; green/yellow
for wish-list) examples of the respective incidents were underlined with colored pens respective
to the same color coding. Initially I had youth co-researchers involved in eliciting incidents,
however because of the time limitations and because the activity was fairly redundant and

rigorous, the research team decided that it would be best for myself to do the eliciting of the

incidents. Richard helped by eliciting the incidents for one of the transcripts.

To involve the youth co-researchers, the incidents were later written onto sticky note

labels. These labels included the incident, the participant number, whether it was mainstream

(M) or alternate (A), and the line number the incident was found on the transcript. The sticky

notes also corresponded to the respective helping/hindering/wish-list color coding. These

incidents were also recorded into a qualitative research program, Atlas-Ti, where the data was

coded in the following format (HE = helping, HI = hindering, WL = Wish-list, A = alternate

education, M = mainstream education, # = participant number), for example HE-A-18. Incidents

that I was unsure about, I took note of them and incorporated them as inquiries during second

interviews.

In creating categories, the youth co-researchers were presented with the labels during the

weekly meetings. Co-researchers were asked to find the patterns amongst the various incidents

within each respective segment. The segments were alternate/mainstream and within the

different school systems helping/hindering/wish-list items. Co-researchers were asked to reflect

about their own experiences and the experience of the interviews that they have conducted.

With help from myself and Richard, we utilized inductive reasoning and patience to find the

different patterns, themes, and similarities amongst the incidents. Incidents were then placed

onto a foldable presentation board that could be transported to and from the school. Categories

were formed and labeled based on the experiences of the co-researchers. As categories emerged

they were recorded into a working table to keep track of saturation (see Appendix L). These

categories and their respective incidents were later inputted into Atlas. Ti and I reviewed them

during this process. If there was any incidents that did not necessarily fit with a category I would

move it to the appropriate category and confirm with the co-researchers later whether or not it

they approved of the decision. The categories were finalized on April 22, 2013; with the help of

Dr. Robert Lees, three co-researchers and I spent a whole day going through each category and

reviewing each incident (see Figure 5). The changes were later presented to the rest of the team.

Figure 5. Day of data analysis

Unlike eliciting incidents, forming categories involved a higher level of functioning that

incorporated the lived experiences and expertise of the youth co-researchers. To illustrate the

process by which categories were formed collaboratively, Figure 6 shows the creation of the

categories at the first analysis in contrast to the end. Figure 7 shows the training that the co-

researchers were involved in during the training phase to prepare them for data analysis.

Wish-list (beginning) Helping (beginning) Hindering (beginning)

Wish-list (end) Helping (end) Hindering (end)

Figure 7. Category formation process

Figure 6. Data analysis training

The last step, determining the level of specificity-generality, is based on weighing the

advantages of reporting very general behaviors or more specific behaviors (Butterfield et al.,

2009; Flanagan, 1954). This step will be determined by the usefulness of whether or not

presenting more simplified categories will be more helpful or not according to co-researchers experience. To help with this process Flanagan (1954) presents several considerations on selecting level of generality, these include: (1) headings should indicate a clear-cut and logical organization; (2) titles should convey meanings themselves without a detailed definition or explanation; (3) the list of statements should be homogenous, meaning the headings should parallel the content; (4) the headings should be of the same magnitude or importance; (5) headings used for reporting data should be easily applied; and (6) the list of headings should be comprehensive and cover all the incidents of significant frequencies. To address this step, categories were focused on more specificity and had the goal of helping the school system understand what was relevant to vulnerable youth.

A broader generalization of factors that impacted the participations was based on the formation of themes. Themes were created by doing a thematic analysis on all categories, we utilized the same inductive process of creating categories but without considering the segmentations of alternate/mainstream and hindering/helping/wish-list. The purpose of the themes were to highlight the key areas that affect vulnerable students and to provide a simplified set of results for the school district so that social change can be facilitated.

Rigour and Validation

With ECIT, rigour is based on the validity checks as outlined by Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009). However, given that this study adopted a critical theory paradigm, and employed YPAR as its methodological vehicle, the nine validity checks proposed by Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009) will be modified based on the aforementioned foundations. According to Morrow (2005) trustworthiness for critical-ideological paradigms involves the same criteria for constructivist paradigms with the addition of *consequential* and *transgressive validity*.

Consequential validity assesses the degree to which the research achieves its goals of social and political change (Patton, 2002, as cited in Morrow, 2005). With this study it entails raising critical consciousness of co-researchers, authentic participation, and formulation of action based on the results elicited from participants.

Authentic participation speaks to the importance of the principle investigator being critically aware of power differentials and how voices may be silenced due to power dynamics. It pertains to sharing of power in decision-making and the authentic participation of youth throughout the research process. However, as previously indicated, full participation of participants is rare amongst the PAR literature (Smith, Rosenzweig, & Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, Hart's (1991) *Ladder of Participation* was employed as a model to still ensure research was participatory, though the degree of participation varied at each stage of the project.

With raising critical consciousness, the underlying assumption was that through involvement with research, the youth co-researchers became more aware of the social forces that have impacted their lives and well-being. They have gained self-awareness through reflection and through interactions with their peers discussing about matters that impact their lives. Critical reflection is fostered through interactions of co-researchers with myself and Richard through a dialogical process and through meetings and discussion about co-researchers' experiences in conducting the interviews and analysing the data. Moreover, in taking part in data analysis helps promote critical awareness of youth researchers (Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, & Aoun, 2010).

Lastly, social action came in the form of the research team presenting the data to the key stakeholders, the CSRPC, the school district's principals and vice-principals, and the District #33 School Board. Though it cannot be measured whether or not stakeholders will implement the findings from the research at the time of this study, we made sure that our results were rigorous

and conducted in a manner to meet the criterion for a credible ECIT study. In doing so it

presents an opportunity for youth voice to be recognized. Consequential validity is therefore

dependent on how well action addresses the needs of both the participants and the community.

Transgressive validity refers to the ability of the research to incite discourse and

contribute to critical social science (Lather, 1994, as cited in Morrow, 2005, p. 253).   In the case

of this study, transgressive validity occurs through raising critical consciousness of youth co-

researchers and other student participants. Like other YPAR projects, validating the experiences

of marginalized youth as experts in their experiences will contribute to a greater understanding of

oppression and resistance. As Cammorota and Fine (2008) argue, generalization of knowledge is

not based on sample size; rather there is an expansive quality to critically informed work where

its reflections of oppression can connect with other communities that share similar experiences.

Hence, through the process of conducting the YPAR study in a critically informed manner, it

will incite discourse in those who are involved in the study.

Credibility checks. Aforementioned, the nine credibility checks according to Butterfield

et al. (2005, 2009) were followed to ensure validity and rigour. With the first credibility check,

all the interviews were audio-tapped and transcribed by a transcriptionist. The transcriptions and

were than reviewed by the principal investigator to ensure that the experiences of participants

were accurately ascertained.

Second, interview fidelity occurred throughout the data collection phase. Prior to interviews

the interview protocol was reviewed by the thesis co-supervisors, Dr. Robert Lees and Dr.

Janelle Kwee. For the first interviews of each co-researcher, either Richard or I sat in on their

interviews. Feedback was provided to co-researchers after each interview, along with feedback

from the participants. For the latter unsupervised interviews, the co-researchers debriefed with

the team after each interview and reflected upon what they did well and what they wanted to

improve on. The team also engaged in continuous discussions on how to enhance interviews,

Figure 8 is an example of ideas the team came up with during one of the meetings. I also

provided feedback to the co-researchers on a weekly basis upon reviewing the audio recordings.

Dr. Janelle Kwee reviewed one of the interviews with me and offered suggestions. From that

discussion, Dr. Janelle Kwee, noted that other than asking for more examples, the interview

capabilities of the co-researchers were sufficient (personal communication, April 1, 2013).
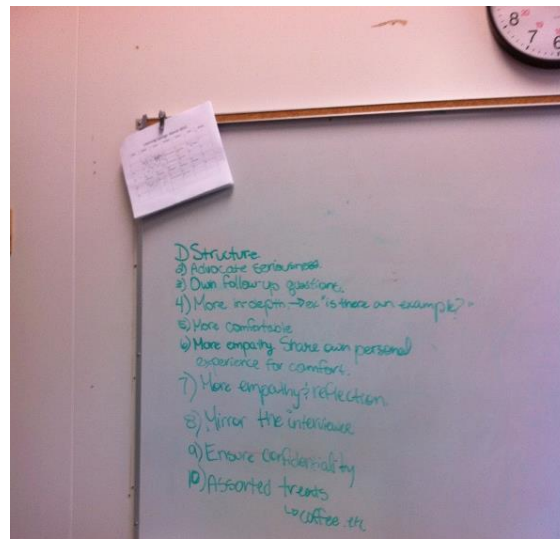
Figure 8. Co-researcher's suggestions on how to enhance interview fidelity: (1) structure, (2)

advocate seriousness, (3) own follow-up questions, (4) more in-depth, (5) more comfortable, (6)

more empathy, share personal experience for comfort, (7) more empathy and reflection, (8) mirror

the interviewee, (9) ensure confidentiality, and (10) assorted treats (i.e., coffee).

Third, is the independent extraction of the CI's. Approximately 25% of the transcripts (5

transcripts) were randomly chosen and provided to an independent person, to extract CI's and

WL items. The individual extracting the incidents was Hilary McBride, a Masters of Arts in

Counselling Psychology student from Trinity Western University. The independent extractions

were compared to the original incidents with 88% concordance rate (percentage of agreement).

Fourth, to ensure that exhaustiveness was met, a log of each interview was tracked as its CI's and WL items were placed into the emerging categories (see Appendix L). Exhaustiveness was reached by the thirteenth interview, latter interviews had incidents all fit into the respective categories. It suggests that the common experience of participants was attained. After all the interviews and second interviews were completed, new, more specific categories were formed. This was not indicative that exhaustiveness was not met, rather the team felt it was appropriate to form more specific categories out of some of the previous broader categories as the latter incidents made it sufficient to form these new more specified categories. We wanted to ensure that participant experiences were accurately depicted, therefore we opted for more specificity by the end of our analysis; these incidents still fit into the original emerging categories.

Fifth credibility check is the participation rate which determines the strength of a category. It is calculated by taking the number of participants that contributed to a category divided by the total number of participants. According to Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009), it is suggested that categories with a participation rate greater than 25% should be included in the data analysis. However, upon discussion with the co-researchers, it was decided that categories with 20% should be included into the analysis. The co-researchers felt that removing a category because it did not reach 25% threshold did not fairly represent participant perspectives. All the categories presented have a participation rate of over 20% with only one category removed because it did not meet the criteria.

Sixth, an independent judge, Hilary McBride, who helped with the independent extraction, was invited to place the incidents into the formed categories. Approximately 25% of the incidents, which entailed 172 incidents, were randomly provided to Hilary along with the categories and their respective operational definitions. Hilary was asked to place the incidents

into the categories that she thinks the respective incidents belonged to. Her placements were compared with the research team's placement of the CI's and WL items. The match rate of 81.4% was achieved, which meets the match rate guideline of 80% as suggested by Andersson and Nilsson (1964) for CIT studies.

The seventh credibility check was cross-checking by participants (second interviews). After the participant's results were analyzed and incidents were elicited and placed into their respective emerging categories, participants were contacted to do a second interview and were provided with a copy of their incidents along with the categories that these incidents were placed. A majority of the participants took part in the credibility checks; four did not do the second interview either because they did not want to or they did not respond back. This credibility check ensures that the elicited incidents and categories accurately captured the lived experiences of participants. Interviews were conducted by youth researchers, participants were asked to review the list of CIs and categories and asked questions regarding its accuracy (Appendix K).

A modification was made to this credibility check, participants were also asked to provide three recommendations to the school board. These recommendations were included into the wish-list items during analysis. The reason for the recommendations was twofold. First, to add more depth to WL items as there was a lack of WL items elicited during the first interviews. This may be because of how the interviews were conducted—WL questions were asked at the end and perhaps participants either felt they already covered the material earlier or they had difficulty attending to the interview. Second, was to empower participants to have an active role in shaping the results and recommendations. We wanted to offer them with the opportunity to provide further input into shaping the recommendations for the school district. All the

participants agreed that the elicited incidents and categories were an accurate representation of

their views, with some minor modifications; each provided at least three recommendations.

      The eighth credibility check draws on the opinions of experts in the field regarding the

agreeability of the categories formed. Three experts were chosen because of their expertise in

working with vulnerable youth and for their awareness of the contextualized circumstances that

these youth face in the Chilliwack school district. The first expert was Chuck Lawson, vice-

principal of the Education Centre. Chuck agreed with the categories and themes and found them

to be helpful. He appreciated that some of the areas such as lack of addiction support reflected

the concerns that the administration also had. He noted that though he can understand why youth

found flexibility to be helpful, on a practical standpoint it would be difficult to administer in

larger schools. The second expert, Brent Pinckney, school counsellor of the Education Centre,

agreed with the results and also found it helpful. Brent provided feedback that despite the results

illustrating that bullying was less prevalent in alternate education, it was still a significant issue

that they faced at the school. The last expert was David Manual, vice-principal of distance

education in Chilliwack, also the individual who initiated the project. He agreed with the

categories and themes, but cautioned that it was important to factor in the developmental

thinking of the participants, for example having flexibility may not necessarily be helpful for

some students in the long run. Overall all of the experts agreed with the categories and themes

and provided additional insight about the results.

      The ninth credibility check was to attain theoretical agreement for the emergent

categories and themes, along with the assumptions of the study, in relation to the existing

literature. Some assumptions of the study were: (a) youth have a right and the capacity to

influence decisions that are being made about them; (b) privilege and oppression is a reality and

youth in vulnerable positions often do not have a voice; and (c) the empowerment of youth can

result in positive change to their own development and to the system that they are a part of.

There was consistency between the literature and the assumptions and categories/themes, it is

elaborated in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Process Summary

The following summary simplifies the procedure and the process by which youth co-

researchers were involved in the study (see Figure 9 and Figure 10). The level of engagement in

each step is gauged based on Hart's (1991) *Ladder of Participation* (see Appendix O).

Naylor (2013, January 16)

Ascertaining the General Aims of the Project: Recruitment and Training for Youth Co-researchers (October - December 2012)

- Orientation and team building
  - Introduction of rationale for the project (Level 5)
  - Create goals and group rules (Level 6)
- Training youth researchers on research methods, ethics, analysis, and how to conduct interviews
- Introduce design of the project
- Training protocol see Appendix F

Making Plans and Setting Specifications (December 2012 - January 2013)

- Develop recruitment material - posters and PowerPoint presentations (level 8)
- Modify research project
  - Informed consent and interview protocol made to be more youth friendly (level 6)
  - Adjust reimbursement idea (level 6)
- Practice interviews on each other
  - Focus on interview skills and ECIT questions (what helped, what hindered, and wished-for from mainstream and alternate education system)
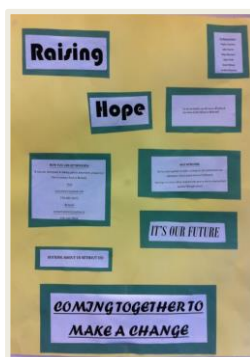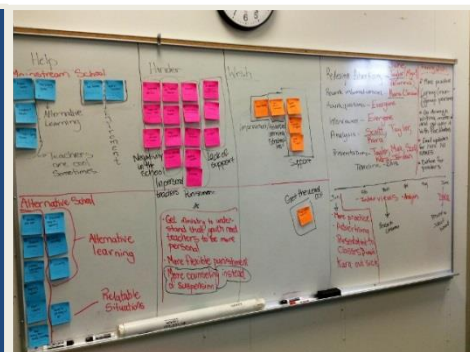
Recruitment of Participants (January 2013 to March 2013)

- Presented project to classmates and shared about how participants can get involved (Level 8)
  - Presentation dates: February 7 and February 14
- Discussed with peers about the project
- Recruited peers on an ongoing basis (Level 8)
  - Participants provided the names of individuals who were interested and principal investigator organized a schedule
- Youth researchers were in charge of reminding their participants

Data Collection (February 2013 to April 2013)

- Co-researchers interviewed participants in pairs (Level 6)
  - First interviews for each pair had principal investigator or co-facilitator sitting in session
  - Feedback was provided on an on-going basis
  - Co-researchers provided each other with feedback
- Two to three participants were interviewed on a weekly basis during the scheduled meeting time
- Second interviews occurred after data analysis, participants interviewed their peers on a weekly basis as well and reminded them of upcoming interviews (Level 6)
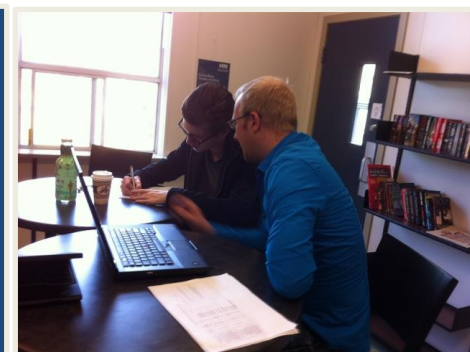

Figure 9. Overview of project process (part 1)

Data Analysis (February 2013 to May 2013)
- Interviews were transcribed by an external transcriptions, interviews were provided on a weekly basis
- Organize raw data (Level 5) - Principal investigator organized data/consulted with team
- Eliciting incidents (Level 5) - Principal Investigator elicited critical incidents and consulted with co-researchers
- Create categories (Level 6) - co-researchers who were not interviewing took part in forming categories. With a posterboard, researchers placed incidents and found common themes amongst the incidents.
- Co-researchers spent a whole day finalizing the data (April 22, 2013)

Advocacy and Consultations
- Discussed with newspaper (Chilliwack Times) advocating for students - January 10, 2013
- Symposium presentation to the Adler School of Psychology Counselling Psychology Conference on March 2, 2013 (Level 5) - advocated for youth voice in research by sharing their perspectives
- Consulting with Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council (Advisory Board) on November 21, 2013 and March 30, 2013 (Level 5) - provided feedback on the progress of the project
- Consultation with Rohan Arul-Pragasam, assistant superintendent of District #33 on January 24, 2013 (Level 8) - discussed about the project

Interpreting the Data (May 2013)
- Analyzed and theorized about the categories on May 2, 2013 (Level 6)
- Created themes through thematic analysis of categories with help from Dr. Kwee on May 2, 2013 (Level 6)
- Created recommendations with help from Dr. Kwee on May 2, 2013 (Level 6)
- Elicited feedback from Advisory board on May 15, 2013 regarding their perspectives on the results and recommendations (Level 6)

Reporting the Results (May 2013 to June 2013)
- Presentation to the Principals and Vice Principals in School District on May 27, 2013 (Level 6) - consulted with administrators, presented results, and answered questions
- Discussed future action plans for the project on June 6, 2013 (Level 6)
- Creation of poster to disseminate the results to the Education Centre, students, and participants (Level 5) - see Appendix P
- Presentation to the Chilliwack Board of Education on June 11, 2013 (Level 6) - provided the results and recommendations for the school district based on the study

Figure 10. Overview of project process (part 2)

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter highlights both the results from the ECIT analysis and outcomes from utilizing a participatory methodology.   Given that the goals of YPAR are evoking social change and engaging youth in critical pedagogy, the outcomes of this YPAR will emphasize engagement, youths' voice, empowerment, and praxis. With ECIT, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the youth co-researchers with 18 participants between the ages of 15 to 19 years old. The six co-researchers were also part of this group of participants. These interviews were conducted from February 2013 to end of April 2013 and occurred in a separate room during weekly meetings with the research team at the Education Centre. Recruitment, data analysis, follow-up interviews, and credibility checks occurred during these weekly meetings; co-researchers who were not conducting interviews assisted in these other components of the research study, which went from February 2013 to May 2013.

The interviews focused on the participant's experiences of the mainstream and alternate education programs, therefore comprising of two ECIT studies.   In examining both the systems, it provides a broader understanding of the participant's transition out of the mainstream education. Participants were asked what was helpful, unhelpful, and what they wish-for that would help them find success and stay in the education system. Demographic information was elicited in the beginning along with questions that helped prime the participants to think about their educational experience and the transition between mainstream to alternate education. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by an external transcriptionist. From these interviews, incidents were elicited by the principal investigator. Through an inductive approach, categories were formed collaboratively with the youth researchers; from these categories themes were created. Themes were developed based on the compilation of both ECIT categorical results

from the two educational systems, it provides an overview of the core factors that affect this

particular group of youth who are considered vulnerable (BCME, 2009).

From these interviews, 703 incidents were elicited. Of these incidents 55 were helping,

242 hindering, and 140 wish list items in the mainstream school system; the alternate program

had 146 helping, 58 hindering, and 62 wish list items.   Incidents were sorted into 55 categories

with 30 categories (5 helping categories, 14 hindering categories, and 11 wish-list categories) for

mainstream and 25 categories (12 helping categories, 8 hindering categories, and 5 wish list

categories) for alternate. Categories from both the mainstream and alternate were then compiled

together to form themes utilizing the same collaborative and inductive approach that was

employed to create categories. Nine themes were formed and recommendations were developed

based on these themes.   Figure 11 provides an overview of the results categorized by

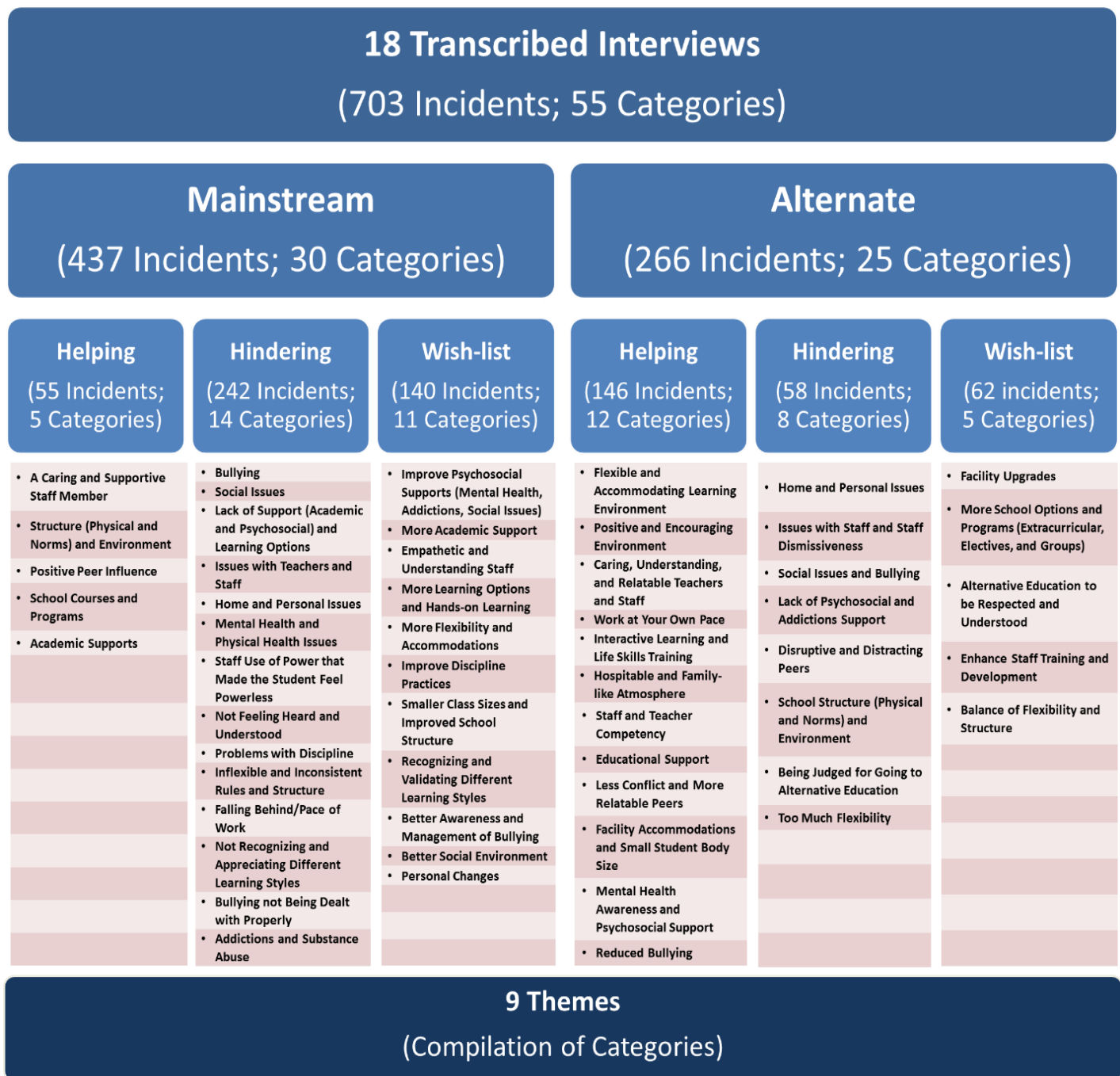mainstream/alternate and helping/hindering/wish-list segments.

18 Transcribed Interviews

(703 Incidents; 55 Categories)

Mainstream

(437 Incidents; 30 Categories)

Alternate

(266 Incidents; 25 Categories)

Helping (55 Incidents; 5 Categories)	**Hindering** (242 Incidents; 14 Categories)	**Wish-list** (140 Incidents; 11 Categories)	**Helping** (146 Incidents; 12 Categories)	**Hindering** (58 Incidents; 8 Categories)	**Wish-list** (62 incidents; 5 Categories)

Helping (Mainstream)
- A Caring and Supportive Staff Member
- Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment
- Positive Peer Influence
- School Courses and Programs
- Academic Supports

Hindering (Mainstream)
- Bullying
- Social Issues
- Lack of Support (Academic and Psychosocial) and Learning Options
- Issues with Teachers and Staff
- Home and Personal Issues
- Mental Health and Physical Health Issues
- Staff Use of Power that Made the Student Feel Powerless
- Not Feeling Heard and Understood
- Problems with Discipline
- Inflexible and Inconsistent Rules and Structure
- Falling Behind/Pace of Work
- Not Recognizing and Appreciating Different Learning Styles
- Bullying not Being Dealt with Properly
- Addictions and Substance Abuse

Wish-list (Mainstream)
- Improve Psychosocial Supports (Mental Health, Addictions, Social Issues)
- More Academic Support
- Empathetic and Understanding Staff
- More Learning Options and Hands-on Learning
- More Flexibility and Accommodations
- Improve Discipline Practices
- Smaller Class Sizes and Improved School Structure
- Recognizing and Validating Different Learning Styles
- Better Awareness and Management of Bullying
- Better Social Environment
- Personal Changes

Helping (Alternate)
- Flexible and Accommodating Learning Environment
- Positive and Encouraging Environment
- Caring, Understanding, and Relatable Teachers and Staff
- Work at Your Own Pace
- Interactive Learning and Life Skills Training
- Hospitable and Family-like Atmosphere
- Staff and Teacher Competency
- Educational Support
- Less Conflict and More Relatable Peers
- Facility Accommodations and Small Student Body Size
- Mental Health Awareness and Psychosocial Support
- Reduced Bullying

Hindering (Alternate)
- Home and Personal Issues
- Issues with Staff and Staff Dismissiveness
- Social Issues and Bullying
- Lack of Psychosocial and Addictions Support
- Disruptive and Distracting Peers
- School Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment
- Being Judged for Going to Alternative Education
- Too Much Flexibility

Wish-list (Alternate)
- Facility Upgrades
- More School Options and Programs (Extracurricular, Electives, and Groups)
- Alternative Education to be Respected and Understood
- Enhance Staff Training and Development
- Balance of Flexibility and Structure

9 Themes

(Compilation of Categories)

Figure 11. Overview of the results

For the categories, a 20% participation rate inclusionary criterion was employed instead of the 25% that Butterfield et al. (2005) suggests for ECIT studies. The rationale for 20% was because co-researchers felt it was important to be more inclusive of participants' experiences. Based on this criterion, only one category was removed from the helping categories in the mainstream.

To highlight the different categories, the data is presented in a table format and emphasizes the frequency of incidents, percentage of incidents within the total incidents in each respective segment (incident rate), participant frequency, percentage of participants contributing to the respective category (participation rate), and an example of an incident that contributes to the category.   The categories within the tables are presented hierarchically based on the frequency of incidents, from most to least. More incidents means that the category is more commonly found experience amongst the participants, it does not necessarily mean that it is more important—after all, each incident/experience is valid in and of itself. Operational definitions and additional examples are provided to offer further information about each respective category. The implications, fit within the literature, and recommendations are conveyed in the Chapter 5 Discussion. It is important to note that the categorization are arbitrary boundaries and are not meant to be rigid; often these categories were inter-related and some even overlap one another.

Overview of Incidents within the Mainstream Education System

Participants were asked what was helpful, hindering, and what they wished-for from mainstream education. From there, they provided 437 incidents which formed 30 categories (5 helping, 14 hindering, and 11 wish-list categories). A majority of incidents shared were hindering experiences with 242 incidents in contrast to 55 helping and 140 wish-list incidents.

Helpful Critical Incident Categories in the Mainstream Education System

Table 4

Helpful Categories in Mainstream Education

Helpful Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
A Caring and Supportive Staff Member	19, 32.2%	8, 44.4%	"I had a really awesome Art teacher in grade 9. This woman, even when I skipped school or whatever, I came to school hung-over or still high or whatever, right? She would sit down with me and she would work on my art with me and she told me like if you ever need anything let me know […] she was there for me cause she knew that I didn't really have anyone."
Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment	12, 20.3%	7, 38.9%	"It gave me a really good work ethic, I guess. Like even now, as much as I don't want to, like the amount of structure for so many years of elementary, middle school, and like there's so much structure and you're expected to do a lot of work […]there's a lot of disciple, I did take that with me"
Positive Peer Influence	10, 16.9%	9, 50%	"I found with a class of your peers all doing something, let's say that they're all working or they're all doing whatever. It helps you by peer pressure, even though that's not [always] a great thing. To do your work, to be pushed forward or whatever, even if you're not exactly the best at it"
School Courses and Programs	9, 15.3%	6, 33.3%	"Yeah, I like volleyball. [...] I think extracurricular activities are like the more funner part of high school […] like having a like shop classes and stuff just like takes a break from your regular class like cause you not sitting at a desk all day"

Helpful Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Academic Supports	5, 8.5%	4, 22.2%	"I had an IEP [Individualized Education Plan], like my whole… just individualized education program. My whole career in school and that really seemed to help. So I've just… more individualized."

Note. Four helping incident did not meet participation requirements and were omitted.

Within the mainstream education system, the participants shared 55 helpful critical incidents. These incidents were placed into five categories: (a) a caring and supportive staff member, (b) structure (physical and norms) and environment, (c) positive peer influence, (d) school courses and programs, and (e) academic supports. Four incidents were excluded as they did not meet the 20% participation rate criteria to form their own category.

A caring and supportive staff member. Amongst the helping categories in the mainstream system, having a caring and supportive staff member was the most significant with 19 incidents and 44% participation rate. The category described how participants were impacted by school staff members who were intentional in their efforts to connect and support these students. Students shared how they appreciated these teachers and administrators and how they felt cared for by these individuals. This category can be seen as a factor that is external to the individual; it is a school characteristic and is regarding how these staff members made additional efforts to connect with these participants, as noted by one participant:

> I'd like get really upset all the time and I'd be like crying and stuff and she would [the teacher] pull me out in the hallway and like ask me if I wanted to talk or we'd drink tea in the lounge and like the library. She'd just be… like she was so nice.

Another participant shared how she felt that she could relate with her teacher in a way that was close and connected, like that of a family member.

> [Teacher's name] was like a Mom to me. When I couldn't go to my mom about certain things. That's the only way I can really put it. […] She was very understanding about me not wanting to go to the [mainstream] high school cause of my social anxiety and stuff.

Structure and environment. Two-fifth of the participants shared that the structure, which includes the physical school structure and the institutional norms, along with the school environment, was beneficial to their educational journey. These participants shared how the routine and structure provided them with a sense of normalcy and recognized that it was helpful for their development. They also shared that facility resources like lockers, gyms, and libraries were helpful. As one of the participants stated:

> Positive things about it [mainstream] is that you can be in a normal social environment and it makes you feel good almost, and I don't know, it's just kind of a nice environment to be in because it makes you feel like you're succeeding and you're doing really well.

Positive peer influence. Though a majority of the participants had negative social experiences in mainstream, half of the participants shared that having friends that they could associate with was helpful in their education. These peers helped these participants feel connected in the school's social environment and were at times one of the main reasons for going to school, as one of the participants shared:

> I don't know like probably the only thing would be like friends in Mainstream School. [They] have the same career ideas as me.

School courses and programs. The programs and courses that were offered in the mainstream school was beneficial for a third of the participants and comprised of nine incidents.

These programs included extracurricular activities, electives, groups, and specific courses that

the participants enjoyed. One of the participants highlighted their appreciation of having an

LGBT-straight alliance group.

> There was an LGBT-straight alliance group in my school. […] I thought that was really
>
> awesome.

Another participant also shared their experience of taking part in sports and why they felt it was

important.

> Yeah, I like volleyball. [...]I think extracurricular activities are like the more funner part
>
> of high school […] like having a like shop classes and stuff just like takes a break from
>
> your regular class like cause you not sitting at a desk all day.

> **Academic supports**. The last helpful category in the mainstream was the academic

supports that were provided to these participants. Twenty-two percent of the participants shared

that the supports that were provided, such as modified classroom setting, individualized learning

plans, and having an additional block to catch up on work was beneficial for their education.

One of the participants shared about their experience of having individualized supports.

> I had an IEP [Individualized Education Plan], like my whole… just individualized
>
> education program. My whole career in school and that really seemed to help.

Hindering Critical Incident Categories in the Mainstream Education System

Table 5

Hindering Categories in Mainstream Education

Hindering Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Bullying	27, 11.2%	16, 88.9%	"Lots of just mean girls, you know mean girls. […] I wasn't the most attractive person per se, and just name calling all the time you know being shoved in the hallways. Just and because of my health issues, you know I was in the, like they say this special needs class and I was just made fun of for that and was looked at funny, cause you know there would be an EA [Educational Assistant] and there would be an autistic boy who, and he was helping both of us, so, looking at me like, yeah. I got bullied like pretty bad for that."
Social Issues	23, 9.5%	12, 66.7%	"What makes it difficult for me to want to be in school for the most part I find is social conflict and a lot of negativity that comes from the students and the student body because there's bullying everywhere you go but in school when you're with people your age specifically and you have to try and fit into a status quo there, it can be hard for a lot of people and that sort of outcasts them in a sense."
Lack of Support (Academic and Psychosocial) and Learning Options	22, 9.1%	12, 66.7%	"One thing that didn't help was how no one ever tried to like set me up with a counsellor there or like a counsellor, never. Like I went there a couple of time and she never really wanted to talk to me."
Issues with Staff	20, 8.3%	12, 66.7%	"Teachers would really tend to do that, they made it very hard to learn and like you know, ignoring most students, helping the other ones. Like, you know teachers would favour others students as well, so... and depending on the teachers, of course."

(Continued)

Helpful Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Home and Personal Issues	19, 7.9%	13, 72.2%	"I was having a lot of family difficulties, umm, I had [been] recently apprehended from my parents and so I lived with my Grandma and I was going through a lot of tough times."
Mental Health and Physical Health Issues	19, 7.9%	10, 55.6%	"Just on a personal level… umm… dealing with a lot of mental health issues myself. Like, there's not very many, like public schools, they don't understand that, and that, like they're just, oh well, you're just a teenager get over it."
Staff Use of Power that Made the Student Feel Powerless	18, 7.4%	6, 33.3%	"My teacher [name of teacher] was uh, picking on my friend for being the kid that never really talked to anyone, being like emo, [the teacher] said he [the friend] was doing emo, and threw a book at him, and told him [the friend] to stop being so emo and go sit out in the hall cause he wouldn't talk to anyone, and it's just like you're just emotionally damaging a kid and you're supposed to be the one teaching us."
Not Feeling Heard and Understood	17, 7.0%	12, 66.7%	"My feelings, my opinions and like my side of everything wasn't really accepted because I was a student and like because... It was kind of like this whole situation where I wanted my voice to be heard because I was being punished, but my voice wouldn't be heard because I was being punished. And, therefore I was a bad kid. So my opinion was invalid."
Problems with Discipline	17, 7.0%	9, 50%	"Well… [Teacher's name] was really big on the list for picking on me. Like one day, like I think I called him [the teacher] a jerk, and that was at like in the hall and I got suspended for like four days for saying jerk and I was like, it's not even a swear word."

(Continued)

Helpful Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Inflexible and Inconsistent Rules and Structure	16, 6.6%	8, 44.4%	[in reference to an incident where the participant was forced to repeat grade 7 three times because he failed one core subject and lost motivation to work hard in school] So like in their eyes I'm like 'oh he failed to pass grade 7 once, to them his grades are worse, to them again oh his grades are even worse, kick him out. Like, it feels like they really didn't try to solve the problem, they just like. […] Like I was a circular hole... a round hole and they just kept like trying to shove the square into the [circle] […]they could have just found the square hole."
Falling Behind/Pace of Work	15, 6.2%	13, 72.2%	"I took so many different subjects and homework... and then I just, I got really behind. […] I just stopped going mostly because I was so behind, and there was no reason to like... I just lost hope in going."
Not Recognizing and Appreciating Different Learning Styles	11, 4.5%	9, 50%	"I felt that the way they teach is more based on memory than your actual skill to learn, and I don't find that quite fair to a lot of students."
Bullying not Being Dealt with Properly	10, 4.1%	7, 38.9%	"It [being bullied for physical disability] was hard like...I like I went to my school councillor at [school name] crying, saying like 'I'm getting bullied, I think I'm threatened here like I'm probably going to get beat up' and [the counsellor] said 'well maybe if you take a beating they'll lay off.' That's what I was told."
Addictions and Substance Abuse	8, 3.3%	4, 22.2%	"I got into addiction and couldn't continue going to school, full time... pretty much."

Aforementioned, hindering incidents in the mainstream system comprised of the majority

of the incidents in the study with 242 incidents, nearly five times as much incidents than the

mainstream helping incidents and three time as much wish-list incidents. All the incidents fit

into 14 categories, which includes: (a) bullying, (b) social issues, (c) lack of support (academic

and psychosocial) and learning options, (d) issues with teachers and staff, (e) home and personal

issues, (f) mental health and physical health issues, (g) staff use of power that made the student

feel powerless, (h) not feeling heard and understood, (i) problems with discipline, (j) inflexible

and inconsistent rules and structure, (k) falling behind/pace of work, (l) not recognizing and

appreciating different learning styles, (m) bullying not being dealt with properly, and (n)

addictions and substance abuse.

Bullying. Bullying was the most significant hindering category with nearly 90% of the

participants sharing that they had experienced bullying either through being physically beat-up,

made fun of, threatened, harassed, and/or ostracized by peers. It was such a prominent category

that it was decided by the research team to split it into another category to emphasize how

participants did not feel protected by the school system, this category was called *bullying not*

being dealt with properly. Bullying also had a residual impact on the participants, as shown in

one of the statements shared by a participant where name calling resulted in her feeling like she

had a panic attack.

> One time I was wearing like this romper, […] and like some girl yelled out *slut* to me,
>
> and like, nearly everybody was yelling it [at me] and stuff, and like… like all of the grade
>
> twelve's and stuff [gathered] in a huge pit, like all the preppy ones [and yelled at me] […]
>
> yeah it was scary, I went home, I couldn't handle it, I was having like an anxiety attack.

Another participant shared about their health issues being exploited by peers.

My friends who I thought were my friends […]. They [would] talk to me like 'ha, ha it's

the seizure kid' and they like take like out their iPhones and they'd start flashing [it] in

my face.

Social issues. Another significant category was the social issues that participants faced,

which comprised of two-thirds of the participants and 23 incidents. Though there may be some

overlap between bullying and social issues, the co-researchers indicated that social issues were

seen as being broader than bullying (K. Firth, M. Raber, T. Stevens, personal communication,

April 22, 2013). It is about the social environment with peers and having social issues in general

which includes having poor relationships, getting into a bad crowd, not being able to get along

with others, and feeling isolated and judged. To illustrate, one of the participants shared how

they connected with a "bad crowd" because they wanted to feel accepted by others.

Grade 8 I got into a really bad crowd. I got into the crowd with all the hooligans. Like all

the cool kids like walk around we would go find some kid to beat up. 'Let's go find that

kid.' […]I want to get noticed and I wanted friends and I only had like my close friend

[friend's name] and stuff like that like we didn't really do much for some reason it felt

like it wasn't enough for me and I wanted to get that sort of centre of attention.

Lack of support (academic and psychosocial) and learning options. Participants felt

that they lacked sufficient academic and psychosocial supports and available learning options.

This category can be seen as a factor that is external to the participants; not about the

participant's personal struggles per say, but how the system has not provided the necessary

supports to help these participants succeed. This category also includes how some of the

participants felt that even when they did receive supports, the supports were either inadequate,

did not provide the quality that they expected, and/or was unhelpful. With learning options, this

eludes to the notion that the participants felt there were no other options available for them other than what the mainstream system offered. Some participants felt that alternate education was not presented as a viable option during their time in mainstream education and they learned about it much later in their educational journey.   A quote that highlights this category is shown below:

> But like other teachers, you know if you're not in their class, you can't really ask them for help, you have to ask your specific teacher and they're not always available especially since they're that one person you can [only] talk to, and everybody else in your class [also] has that one person, so they can easily be taken.

Issues with teachers and staff. Two-thirds of the participants shared about issues that they had with the staff at the schools, which includes teachers, administrators, and counsellors. This category also involved 20 incidents. The category is both internal, where the participants felt that they could not get along with certain teachers, and external, where some of the actions that staff engaged in pushed students away or created a situation where participants felt that they could not get along with a particular staff member. Examples of this would be teachers being frustrated:

> Teachers get really easily frustrated […] I feel like teachers [have] a very certain expectation of you and if you don't reach it, you don't get the help you need.

Or playing favorites:

> Well, some teachers literally play like favourites in Mainstream School, which is not fair at all.

Home and personal issues. Home and personal issues can be seen as an internal factor that impacted the participants' experience of education. The category is characterized by issues that were happening at home or what the participant identified as a personal problem, such as

lack of motivation. With 72% of the participants sharing that this was an issue, this had the

second highest participation rate amongst the hindering-mainstream categories. For instance:

> There was so many things that happened around that time [in reference to participant's
>
> transition out of mainstream high school], I'm not exactly sure which one. I remember
>
> my parents divorced around grade 8 or so, I'm not exactly sure if it's grade eight or the
>
> year before that but somewhere around there.

Mental health and physical health issues. With 19 incidents, more than a half of the

participants shared that mental health and physical health problems were an issue. These can be

seen as more specific personal struggles, whereas the previous category was broader and

contextualized within a family system. Physical health problems entailed being sick and missing

school, or the educators not understanding how to work with medical problems.   Mental health

issues included depression and anxiety. Anxiety was a prevalent issue faced by these

participants and, as one of the participants highlighted, it places them in a position where they

feel they cannot attend school. One of the participants also noted that most of the peers that she

knows have suffered from social anxiety. The impact of social anxiety is shared in the following

quote by one of the participants.

> I have social anxiety and I don't do well in crowds and that was a big thing for me 'cause
>
> I wasn't getting that one-on-one attention. I was getting the ass end of whatever else
>
> everybody else was doing, right? So, I kinda just gave up on that. I had no hope to go to
>
> school. Why go to school if I can't learn it, right?

Staff use of power that made the student feel powerless. A third of the participants

had a negative experience of staff authority, where they felt that these staff members utilized

their authority in a manner that left them feeling helpless. Staff members were perceived to the

participants as being negligent and in some instances, some participants felt that these staff

members bullied students with their authority. With the negligence, a few of the incidents within

the category indicated how participants felt that their confidentiality was breached by certain

staff, as indicated in the quote below:

> [counsellor's name], the counsellor, like she'd be like this is all confidential and I won't
>
> tell anyone, and I'd like talk to her during the day and she'd like call my mom as soon as
>
> I left, and like tell her everything that had happened. […]And like they're only supposed
>
> to tell your parents if you're hurting yourself or someone else.

Another participant shared about their experience of being pushed by a gym teacher, which

resulted in mistrust and a negative impression of the teacher.

> [Teacher's name] would like push me to try to get me running and I'm like 'you don't do
>
> that right' and I just walked out they're like 'go to the office'.

Not feeling heard and understood. Not feeling heard or understood was comprised of

two-thirds of the participants with 17 incidents. This category was about participants feeling like

their perspectives and personal narratives were not being heard and that their circumstances were

not being understood by staff. These participants emphasized how they often felt voiceless in the

decisions that were being made about them, as one of the participants put it:

> Yeah, it's more like what they see. […] If they don't see them [perpetrator] picking on
>
> you but they see you push someone else, it's more like they go on what they saw and not
>
> what actually happened. They don't ask who the victim was, or like what happened to
>
> start the fight. It's just more like 'I saw you push him so you're the one getting in
>
> trouble'.

Problems with discipline. Half of the participants shared that they had problems with discipline. This category is comprised of any issues that involved the discipline process which includes: being disciplined and missing school because of it, perceiving the discipline as ineffective and unfair, feeling that they received an inappropriate discipline for their action, and participants feeling like their perspective was not taken into consideration when discipline was implemented. One of the participants shared how the discipline process was unhelpful for their educational experience.

[With regards to the participant's discipline] they [the staff] didn't really seem to show consideration for the fact that... being forced to sit in the office all day everyday isn't exactly the best school experience, and it doesn't really help me learn.

Another participant shared that they felt the staff's disciplinary actions were unwarranted and inconsistent for the action that they engaged in.

I had this necklace […] and like it had like this little... like little tiny [water pistol] […] and then they like took it away and then like [they said] 'it's a water pistol you can't have that at school' and I'm like 'it's tiny, come on' and then he like took it away and then my dad had to come in and get it. He [the teacher] said it was dangerous at the school. Then I had a fucking stapler on my necklace and [the staff did nothing].

Inflexible and inconsistent rules and structure. With inflexible and inconsistent rules and structure, it emphasized how the students felt that the rules and the school system/institution was too rigid and not flexible enough to accommodate the circumstances that they faced. Further some of the participants felt that the inconsistency in standards left them feeling confused and unsure what standards and rules to abide to. This category comprised of 16 incidents and over

40% of the participants. An example of how inflexibility of staff failed to meet the needs of the

participant is shown in the following quote.

The teachers don't help you if you're behind. It's, oh well, you're failing. […] Well, even

if you offer to come in at lunch or after school, they don't even... they're not flexible.

Falling behind/pace of work. Falling behind and not being able to keep up with the

pace of work had 72% of the participants. The category is focused on scholastic incidents that

involved students feeling overwhelmed by the course work and falling behind to the point where

they felt it was pointless to continue.   One participant felt that the course work kept piling on

them and because they felt overwhelmed they could not keep up even though they wanted to.

I guess the main reason I left was just piling stress. […]I listed a ton of things outside of

the school for my reason for leaving, but the main point of stress was just not being able

to get work finished and um… when I did want to get it finished, um I really couldn't just

because of all the limitations that were present in the school.

Not recognizing and appreciating different learning styles. The next category

involved half of the participants and is regarding how the participants felt that the different

learning styles of the students were not recognized or validated. Participants felt the system was

focused on one type of learning style and favored that style as opposed to others; this made it

difficult for individuals with different learning capacities to succeed, as they felt school was

catered to one form of success. Along with not recognizing the different learning styles, the

category is also about the system not adapting properly to the different learning needs of

students, as one participant shared:

I moved out here and I got put in the [school name] which is a traditional school.

Basically, let's say within three weeks of going to that school, they had me in a special

needs class, and I'm not autistic or anything that would require me to be put into a special

needs class. I only have ADHD but they don't even know how to deal with that and they

couldn't.

Bullying not being dealt with properly. Forty percent of the participants felt that

bullying was not being dealt with properly by the school system. Unlike the previous *bullying*

category which was peer related, this category is about the system and how the participants did

not feel safe and protected by the institution. Further, some of these participants felt that the

perpetrator was not properly dealt with, which resulted in bullying continuing on; this is shown

in the following quote by one of the participants.

> The girl didn't get detention. She didn't get anything. All she got was talked to that if this
>
> [gossip about participant which resulted in bullying] continued, if she continued
>
> spreading this that there would be action, and they would be doing something about it,
>
> right? Like, it [the gossip] had already happened. It continued to go through the school
>
> right. […] Like I had no problem asking my Mom for help...the only problem was is we
>
> got no help [from the school] when my Mom even came with me to get help, you know.

Addictions and substance abuse. The last hindering category within the mainstream

system was addictions and substance abuse.   The co-researchers wanted to create this as a

separate category from mental health and physical health problems because they wanted to

emphasize the impact of addictions on students in the mainstream system. The participants

talked about addictions not being dealt with properly in the schools. Further, some of the

participants also shared about their lives being severely impacted by engaging in the use of

illegal substances.   One of the participants shared about their experience of using drugs.

I got in the bad crowd and that's when I first had ... when I started getting ahh ... partying

and that getting into alcohol and then I had my first hit of weed then I was drunk. Yeah,

first time I ever got high [that] was when I was with a drunk and it was really scary.

Wish List Categories in the Mainstream Education System

Table 6

Wish List Categories in Mainstream Education

Wish List Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Improve Psychosocial Supports (Mental Health, Addictions, Social Issues)	21, 15%	9, 50%	"I think it would be good for you know, more support in schools like awareness about you know like mental health and just things that other students are going through."
More Academic Support	20, 14.3%	11, 61.1%	"[I wish that] the School Board would pay to have like an extra teacher in there, so like kids that like don't understand stuff [will get support]. […] Like even if the teacher like... if you come to the teacher after school... like you should be able to get the help that you want not... not 'oh, just go away...' and if you do get behind, like.... I know they do like Saturday school, but why don't just let them stay in later on a Thursday after school or something like that."
Empathetic and Understanding Staff	16, 12.1%	11, 61.1%	"The teachers themselves, that they would be more understanding of how people work and that, you know, it would be easier to help them and then school kids would be more wanting to stay in the system cause they have actually have teachers who understand them not just, you know, get angry in the middle of class because, you know, they can't get their work done and then the teacher yells at them. […].There's a reason why they act out in class or you know, do silly things or you know... because they're not getting what they need."

(Continued)

Wish List Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
More Learning Options and Hands-on Learning	16, 12.1%	9, 50%	"I wish even more life skill training like yeah. Definitely, it needs to be there, it needs to be there, cause it's not [happening in schools] and that's why we're having such a problem it's just this generation right? 'Cause we all learn this stuff from our parents cause our parents send us to school in the faith that we'll learn it and we don't fuckin' learn it cause they don't teach us, they don't care."
More Flexibility and Accommodations	14, 10%	9, 50%	"[In reference to participant's personal experience of being held back for failing one subject] It would've been really good to have the opportunity to... do work at a higher level while catching up at a lower level... so like, more options I guess. Because like I could've easily just [got] help through grade 7 math while I did grade 8 work and that would've been just fine right? But for some reason, the idea just never even [crossed their minds] like... yeah, it's just like this is crazy. You're either in grade 7 or in grade 8. Take it or leave it. "
Improve Discipline Practices	14, 10%	8, 44.4%	"I don't really believe in suspending kids for doing things wrong because then like you're sending them home to not do school which is why they were being bad in the first place cause they don't wanna be [at school]. So [the school] is basically just giving us a vacation from where we didn't wanna be. I'd rather like let [students] have in-school suspension."
Smaller Class Sizes and Improved School Structure	10, 7.1%	8, 44.4%	"I definitely make the school bigger, but less concentrated, right? So like people would be more spread out. Cause I understand like in a school, […] that's only meant to hold a certain amount of students, when there's more students than the school was originally intended to maintain and like be able to teach at once, everything gets really crowded, right? And, there's like 30 plus students in a class right? And that just is not cool."

(Continued)

Wish List Categories in Mainstream	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Recognizing and Validating Different Learning Styles	8, 5.7%	6, 33.3%	"I just think that they need to give students more of a chance to prove themselves with more than memorization skills"
Better Awareness and Management of Bullying	7, 5%	6, 33.3%	"Um, someone to actually um, do something about bullying. Like bullying is such a big thing, and we have a day about it where you're wearing like a purple shirt […] but I think that every day should be antibullying day cause like it's not stuck to one day. Just one day it's like yeah antibullying, don't bug anyone, it's like why not do that like every single day?"
Better Social Environment	7, 5%	5, 27.8%	"And like people [in mainstream schools] weren't so like judgemental."
Personal Changes	6, 4.3%	4, 22.2%	"I [wish] coulda just like not got into all the drama and just like stuck to my own. That probably woulda helped me. […] Normally I wouldn't ask for help so...I guess ask for help and stuff and all....I'd have succeeded better in Mainstream I guess."

There were 140 incidents wish-list incidents in the mainstream system. Within the wish-list incidents are the recommendations made by the participants during the second interviews. All the incidents fit into 11 categories, which includes: (a) improve psychosocial supports (mental health, addictions, social issues), (b) more academic support, (c) empathetic and understanding staff, (d) more learning options and hands-on learning, (e) more flexibility and accommodations, (f) improve discipline practices, (g) smaller class sizes and improved school structure, (h) recognizing and validating different learning styles, (i) better awareness and management of bullying, (j) better social environment, and (k) personal changes.

Improve psychosocial supports (mental health, addictions, social issues). With the wish to improve psychosocial supports for mental health, addictions, and social issues, half of the participants shared that this was an important wish list item. In addition, during the second interviews, majority of the participants added improving psychosocial supports as a recommendation. This category about participants wanting more and improved psychosocial supports, which meant: better counsellors, more counsellors, addictions support, and staff that could help them with their personal issues and social issues. One of the participants shared how they wanted better counsellors and shared about an incident that motivated them to share this wish-list incident.

> They need better counsellors cause I… like went to the school counsellor and ahh, I was telling them issues I had at home… cause they noticed I was crying in class and they went and called my house and made everything ten times worse. So, the confidentiality, they signed a form and broke it. […] I wasn't harming anyone and I wasn't getting harmed at home, it was just an issue and they called my home and made it worse.

More academic support. With 20 incidents and 61% participation rate, participants shared incidents that formed the category, *more academic supports*. This category is focused on the academic supports that the participants wanted from the education system, which included more one-on-one support, teaching assistants, and school options to receive more help with their schooling. Participants also shared how they wished that there could be a block where they could focus on doing their work. An example of an incident in this category is as follows:

> Even just more support from teachers, like they were just always just really, really busy, and there's a huge classroom full of like 35 something students, and there's one teacher to help everybody, and...if I was away, you know it was hard to catch up, especially on,

things like math and even just like having a go-to teacher. I think that everybody should

have like a case worker if they're behind, like this is who you can go to for help.

Empathetic and understanding staff. Empathetic and understanding staff was the third

most prominent wish-list category. The category had 16 incidents and a participation rate of

61%, it is characterized by how the participants wanted the staff to understand their

circumstances and to have a more empathetic and caring demeanor in their interactions with

students. These participants wanted staff to be open to listening to students and to provide them

with opportunities to be heard. For example, one of the participants recommended that there

should be more workshops for staff to help them better understand student circumstances.

> Well with my health issues, it's not something that's able to be seen, you know, it's
>
> internal. I had a lot of teachers [that thought] I was using it as an excuse, and just, yeah,
>
> unaware, uneducated people who were just... I don't know, I think there should be more
>
> workshops for teachers to understand the individual struggles that the students have to go
>
> through, even though they may not understand them.

More learning options and hands-on learning. Participants wanted more learning

options and hands-on learning within the mainstream school system. With half the participants

contributing to this category, these participants emphasized that they wanted more active

learning that was more hands-on and interactive. They also desired more learning options that

are geared towards their interests and will prepare them for future opportunities like post-

secondary or work. One of the participants shared their frustration in not being able to take

courses that they were interested in.

> One of the biggest things I would wish for in Mainstream is I wish I took courses that
>
> would actually help me fucking learn something that I want to learn instead of having to

pay fifty thousand dollars to go to university to go oh look something I actually want to take.

More flexibility and accommodations. Participants also wanted more flexibility and accommodations from the mainstream system; half the participants provided 14 incidents for this wish-list category. The category is focused on accommodations that the school facility or programming that participants wanted the mainstream system to have done. In addition, the students wanted the learning environment to be more flexible so that it works around the students and not the students around the system. One of the participants suggested the idea of alternate school options within the mainstream school.

> Well now that there's ... it's a big school [in reference to a mainstream school], they should have like ... they should have their own [alternate program] in the high school.

Improve discipline practices. Another wish-list category was that participants wanted improved discipline practices. Eight participants shared 14 wish-list incidents for this category. These participants shared how they wanted discipline practices to be more fair, respectful, understanding, and lenient/tolerant. Some of the participants felt that some of the discipline practices in mainstream schools were ineffective and that problems could have been dealt with in a better way.

> I wish they [the school administration] wouldn't like expel me right away, I wish they would've just let me say what I wanted to say. I wish they would've like made us [a peer that the participant was having a conflict with] talk to each other or like setup a meeting so we could talk to each other. Instead of just making me leave, 'cause I don't feel like I was really...I had a big part in it but she also played a role in it too.

Smaller class sizes and improved school structure. This category is about general improvements to how the school is organized and having smaller class sizes so that students can receive more attention from staff. Within this category included: improving and changing the facilities, classrooms, and how the school as an institution is structured. One of the participants shared that schools should start later as a strategy to help students.

If school started at 10 o'clock, our completion rate would be higher no doubt. […] My old teacher said that and I thought about it for a year or two and I'm 100% all for it. But then you would really... It would change things a lot and they'd... we'd have to work with it. But it would help people. […] It would definitely make people work harder.

Recognizing and validating different learning styles. A third of the participants shared 8 incidents with the wish that mainstream school systems would recognize and validate different learning styles. These participants wanted the school to recognize that different students have different talents and just because they are different does not mean that they were less than other students. Participants also emphasized that it was important to have a strength-based approach that accommodated to the student diversity and how they learn. One of the participants shared:

I just have one thing to say... if the teachers were more understanding of how the kids learn, the kids would be more interactive with their similar learning skills with the other students, and they would learn to build friendships with those kids. […] It's easier when you've got similar qualities that you know the teacher has already put in place that you know that kids start to realize that they're like 'Oh my goodness, I learn the same way as you, this is a whole lot easier, do you need help with this or do you need help with this?'

Better awareness and management of bullying. Bullying was a major hindering category in the mainstream, with the wish-list categories, a third of the participants shared that

they wanted better awareness and management of bullying from the educational institutions.

These participants wanted the schools to be more aware of its prevalence and to better manage it.

They felt that it was often not dealt with or not dealt with properly. An example of one of these

wish-list incidents is as follows:

> I think a lot more bullying goes on in like those kinds of schools [mainstream] and
>
> teachers like… don't act aware of it. Like maybe more now with everything that has
>
> happened [in reference to recent media attention about suicides that resulted from
>
> bullying].

Better social environment. Better social environment, involved 28% participation rate

and 7 incidents. This category is centered on the peer social climate of mainstream schools.

Participants wanted these peer cultures to be improved so that students were more accepting and

less judgemental of each other.   Most of the incidents came from follow-up interviews, however

one quote that came from the first interview was centered on how this participant wished

students were less judgemental, "[I wish] like people [in mainstream schools] weren't so like

judgemental."

Personal changes. Personal changes was the last category with 22% participation rate.

This category was focused on participants wishing that they would have done something

differently so that they could have improved their current circumstances. One of the participants

shared how they wished they had more friends in the mainstream system, as that would have

helped them from their perspective.

> I guess I kind of wish I had like the huge group of friends. Then I would… I would like
>
> never [have] had problems that I would think things have changed [me] over the years.

Overview of Critical Incidents within the Alternate Education System

Participants were asked ECIT questions about their experience of alternate education. These experiences were formed into categories collaboratively and inductively. Aforementioned some of the categories do overlap, however, it is through the joint decision making process that the research team felt that it was important to make these distinctions. For instance, *positive and encouraging environment* and *caring, understanding, and relatable staff* can be considered as part of one larger category, however, the research team decided to make this distinction based on the premise that they wanted to validate the unique experiences of their peers.

Helpful Critical Incident Categories in the Alternate Education System

Table 7

Helpful Categories in Mainstream Education

Helping Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Flexible and Accommodating Learning Environment	21, 14.4%	14, 77.8%	"So it's [in reference to one of the participant's classes] more strict and I kinda need that structure 'cause I have ADHD and I will bunny trail. So umm, that really helped... Her [the teacher]... And her structure and her constantly checking up on me, pulling me up to the desk, asking how I'm doing, saying what do you need to work on today, how can I help you with it. That's been very helpful to me."
Positive and Encouraging Environment	19, 13.0%	13, 72.2%	"Yeah, well definitely the teachers. I find like all the teachers are super nice, and like the people obviously, umm, I never ever really feel judged here. I... I don't know, I feel like everybody kind of like accepts each other here, which I like a lot."
Caring, Understanding, and Relatable Staff	18, 12.3%	13, 72.2%	"[In reference to staff picking her up to go to school] Yeah, it's kinda just like closure [in comparison to previous experiences with staff] knowing that someone cares enough to come and pick you up and make sure you're going to school"

(Continued)

Helping Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Work at Your Own Pace	16, 11.0%	14, 77.8%	"Well, I like the Alternative a lot more because it feels like regardless of what kind of day I'm having, let's just say I'm having a good day I get a lot of work done; bad day I don't. At the end of the day, it feels like I get more work done overall, instead of having a set pace, like every day. I gotta do this, this, this, this. […] having the option to work at my own pace helps a lot."
Interactive Learning and Life Skills Training	12, 8.2%	6, 33.3%	"Yeah, we learn job skills and stuff which is very helpful in this school because a lot of the students here have lots of social problems which [prevented] them from getting jobs and we learn how to deal with them here, which is cool. Whereas in High School, we wouldn't... we'd be told you go hand in a resume, get dressed and you go in there. They don't tell you if you're nervous OK, deep breathing exercises, your hands are clammy, OK go outside take a deep breath, come back in, hand in that resume."
Hospitable and Family-like Atmosphere	11, 7.5%	8, 44.4%	"I honestly love the food at Alternate school. Even if it's an apple or something, I just love to eat, get my belly full and then do some work, and just chill out or sit on the couch or something. Like I just... it feels more... feels like I'm in a more home environment."
Staff Competency	11, 7.5%	7, 38.9%	"It feels like because these teachers are used to [argumentative students], it's very easy to get along with them regardless of their personal views or your personal views. […] Like I've rarely seen a teacher offend a student or them get in to an argument. I've almost never seen that. Like it's surprisingly well, how well this works."

(Continued)

Helping Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Educational Support	10, 6.8%	9, 50.0%	"The amount of support that's like available. So like even if you don't have to call upon that support, you know it's there and you know the option is available, that you can just like go 'hey, I need some help, help me', like that kind of thing"
Less Conflict and More Relatable Peers	10, 6.8%	6, 33.3%	"So being here at the [alternate school] everyone's... they don't care about your age, they don't care about how [you] look. You could pick and choose your friends and but you can still hold your own you know, it's not so heavily influenced like you are in [mainstream school]."
Facility Accommodations and Small Student Body Size	7, 4.8%	5, 27.8%	"The smoke pit does help. The fact that I actually have the option to not have to walk two blocks to have a cigarette at break and they [not] get detention for leaving the school property that helps me."
Mental Health Awareness and Psychosocial Support	6, 4.1%	5, 27.8%	"Cause the teachers like care and there's more one-on-one, and the councillors like don't break their policy thing and […] if they can't help you with that thing, they'll call someone else in for you to make sure... like their number one thing at like alternate is making sure you are okay. It's not… it's obviously your school work but making sure you're okay and then your school work. If you're not okay, you're not going to be able to do your school work."
Reduced Bullying	5, 3.4%	4, 22.2%	"I have witnessed hardly any bullying in this school. I have been... any bullying that has happened with me has [been] dealt with automatically umm, even when I was considered a bit of a bully at times. […] It's actually dealt with at this school [alternate school] and I think that's great even when I was mildly being a bully, it was dealt with and that makes me happy to know that."

The majority of the incidents within the alternate education system were helpful with 146 incidents, more incidents than both the hindering and wish-list incidents combined in the alternate system. All the respective helping incidents fit into 12 categories, which includes: (a) flexible and accommodating learning environment, (b) positive and encouraging environment, (c) caring, understanding, and relatable staff, (d) work at your own pace, (e) interactive learning and life skills training, (f) hospitable and family-like atmosphere, (g) staff competency, (h) educational support, (i) less conflict and more relatable peers, (j) facility accommodations and small student body size, (k) mental health awareness and psychosocial support, (l) mental health awareness and psychosocial support, and (m) reduced bullying.

Flexible and accommodating learning environment. With a flexible and accommodating learning environment 14 of the participants shared incidents that formed this category. The category describes incidents that pertain to strategies in alternate education that accommodates to the student's learning and personal circumstances in order to help them find success. It can be characterized as the system working around the individual rather than the individual adapting to the system; thus flexible in nature. One of the participants shared how modifications on how material was presented motivated them to succeed.

> Yeah, and they have plans and they give you... they tell me how to reach the goal, they
>
> split it into smaller steps and that's like... like that's exactly umm, oh it's just a huge
>
> motivation, it's like... it's made a huge impact on me to finish my education because now
>
> I can actually talk with somebody who know exactly how I can finish it.

Positive and encouraging environment. Nearly three quarter of the participants shared 19 incidents that contributed to the formation of the category positive and encouraging environment. One of the co-researchers described this category as "it is like once you are in the

building, it is the overall atmosphere that is positive and focused on encouragement" (J. Florence, personal communication, April 25, 2013). As described by Jordan, this category is about the positive and encouraging environment that staff, peers, and the school fosters. A participant contrasted the environment of alternate education with mainstream by sharing:

> I have not been pulled aside or made fun at all at this school [alternate school]. Even when I did something very silly, nobody even... like, it's like something that I would've been made fun of [in mainstream]. […] even when I've done something extremely embarrassing... when I've done something extremely embarrassing, other students would just keep to themselves, they'd look over for a second but the just... they'd... it's not their business.

Caring, understanding, and relatable staff. This category is about the attitude of the teachers and how they interact with students in a manner that is caring, understanding, respectful, and relatable. Participants shared incidents how they felt that they could interact with staff as equals and how they appreciated that the staff treated them with respect, dignity, and care.   This category involved 18 incidents and 72% participation rate. One of the participants shared how the personal connection helped them in their own struggles.

> [The Teacher's Assistant] is really like helpful too he's just… like we really just like talk about stuff like, like I tell him about my health problems and stuff and he understands because he has health problems too.

Work at your own pace. Nearly 80% of the participants shared incidents about the value of being able to work at their own pace. The participants discussed how individualized learning plans and working at their own pace removed a degree of stress and was beneficial to how they learned. This was shown in the following quote.

I actually come to school every day here, by choice, and I couldn't do that there

[mainstream] because I feel like even if I miss a day or like even if I'm not in the mood to

come here [alternate school], I can still work on my own gradually, and I just get so much

more done. You know, like...there's a lot more hope coming to this school.

Interactive learning and life skills training. With the category interactive learning and

life skills training, participants shared how they appreciated being able to take part in learning

that was more hands-on and interactive. The participants shared that alternate education had

opportunities to engage them in meaningful work and in learning that was geared towards

preparing them for the real world. Lastly, because of the flexibility of alternate programs,

participants relished in the fact that they were able to take part in projects that they probably

would not have had in mainstream education. The category had 12 incidents and 33%

participant rate. With this category, one of the participants shared:

For the fact that this [regarding taking part in a project] actually goes toward something

like it's helping the schools in Chilliwack in general just like just, gives me credits too

and stuff [and contributes to my] resume experiences.

Hospitable and family-like atmosphere. Eight participants shared incidents that

formed the category of hospitable and family-like atmosphere. Though this category is similar to

the previous category positive and encouraging environment, one of the co-researchers noted that

it was different in that this category was about the tight-knit community formed in alternate

education; it is similar to being invited to a home, where the individual is welcomed and is

greeted with food and warmth (J. Florence, personal communication, April 25, 2013). As

mentioned by Jordan, one of the incidents that was repeated throughout this category was how

the participants appreciated that they were provided with food in the alternate program. The

family environment was emphasized in one of the quotes shared by one of the participants.

> They [the teachers] don't make it like, 'oh I'm your teacher, I'm higher up than you and
>
> stuff'...you automatically, have that somewhat of a respect for the teacher. So, like
>
> calling them by their first names and stuff doesn't make it less respect or anything. It
>
> makes it better, more of a friendship, but not.

Another quote relating to the category was:

> I honestly love the food at Alternate school. Even if it's an apple or something, I just love
>
> to eat, get my belly full, and then do some work, and just chill out or sit on the couch or
>
> something. Like I just... it feels more... like I'm in a more home environment.

Staff competency. Staff competency had 11 incidents and nearly 40% participation rate.

This category was specific to the skillset of staff in alternate education. Particularly, what was

respected was the staff's capacity to engage students and be able to handle student conflict.

Another example would be how participants appreciated the staff's professionalism.

> [The teacher] actually pays attention to each student even though she has lots of students
>
> to care for, she cares for each one individually. And doesn't let her problems interfere
>
> with her work.

Educational support. With educational supports, the category describes the helpfulness

of having supports available and being able to access more one-on-one educational supports

within the alternate education system. With this category half of participants shared that this was

helpful and provided 10 wish-list incidents. Participants shared how they prised that they could

receive help whenever they needed it, as shown in the following:

Like here I've noticed if you have an issue you can ask almost all of the teachers because

they, they do specialize in certain things but they can also work in all other aspects.

Less conflict and more relatable peers. A third of the participants discussed how they

felt that in alternate education, they had less conflict with their peers and that they were able to

relate to them more.   Generally, these students felt that they had better peer relationships and

that there was less drama happening in alternate in contrast to mainstream. For intance, one of

the participants shared:

I mean you come here [the alternate school] and every single person [is in] a completely

different part in their life, and they're all completely different ages, and we're all

completely different people, but we're all the same… we all talk in the hallways... we all

get along like you know.

Facility accommodations and small student body size. This category is about the

physical space of the school and how the school had made specific facility accommodations to fit

the needs of the students they were serving. It is about what the school has done to make it more

conducive and helpful for their learning experience, which includes smaller class sizes and

having a lounge for students.   This involved 28% participation rate and 7 incidents. One of the

participants shared how they appreciate the availability of a quiet room.

I would just go downstairs in one of these rooms that were here and then just the general

room and just stay by myself […] it was helpful 'cause it was you know just a quiet room

all to yourself.

Mental health awareness and psychosocial support. Mental health awareness and

psychosocial support describes how staff were aware of the mental health and social issues that

these youth face. Likewise, the participants discussed how they valued mental health initiatives

such as the peer mental health awareness group that was taking part in the school. In addition to this category are the psychosocial supports, which participants shared has been helpful in alternate education experience. This category involved 28% participation rate and 6 incidents. An example of an incident in this category would be:

> Children with traumatic experiences in their childhood I find learn and grasp things a lot differently than people who haven't, and I've noticed that a lot in my own personal experience and I feel that Alternate Education understands that better than mainstream.

> **Reduced bullying**. With 22% participation rate, the participants shared incidents that formed the category of *reduced bullying*. This category is about participants feeling that there was little to no bullying in alternate education. Further, when there was bullying, it is dealt with by the school in a manner that was professional and collaborative. One of the participants shared that the students self-monitor and stand up for one another.

> There was one incident when I first came here. But ah, it was easily resolved but there was actually one guy in the smoke pit and he called me a name and I ask him like 'how fucking old are we?' And his friend turned to him and told him to shut up. So... Yeah, its [bullying] just not acceptable here at [the alternate school].

Hindering Critical Incident Categories in the Alternate Education System

Table 8

Hindering Categories in Alternate Education

Hindering Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Home and Personal Issues	12, 20.7%	7, 38.9%	"The thing is is that I have to... I take on that workload not only at school but at home. I look after my brothers, I look after suppers, I look after the house."
Issues with Staff and Staff Dismissiveness	10, 17.2%	7, 38.9%	"Whenever I complained no one takes it seriously."
Social Issues and Bullying	8, 13.8%	5, 27.8%	"I'm like not friends with like people [here at the alternate school] like I don't fit [in] and stuff and I like feel weird when I like walk by [the smoke pit]… Like intimidated."
Lack of Psychosocial and Addictions Support	7, 12.1%	6, 33.3%	"No LGBT […]. Umm, there's no support like that for well any of one who's having issues for their sexuality, anything like that."
Disruptive and Distracting Peers	6, 10.3%	5, 27.8%	"I would try to focus on my work, people were talking over here, one person was listening to their music, another person was texting on their cellphone, another person was, you know, doing something else, and, you know, the teacher would, you know, tell all those kids to be quiet in, you know, a loud voice and I would be like so distracted by all of that. That would not prevent me... or prevent me from working"
School Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment	6, 10.3%	4, 22.2%	"And I mean they try to cram so many people into one room. […] Like cooking class, they literally threw thirty cooking people in there. Yeah, so it's like oh everybody want to go in cooking because it's... So they threw thirty people in there. Yeah. And even when there was like ten people in there, I just couldn't handle it. So that's why I stopped going to cooking."

(Continued)

Hindering Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Being Judged for Going to Alternate Education	5, 8.6%	5, 27.8%	"People think bad as like Alternative School, and same with like… I'm worried about going to like university and stuff and them being like 'oh, you came like from an Alternative School, we don't want you' like… we're no different, it shouldn't matter."
Too Much Flexibility	4, 6.9%	4, 22.2%	"The fact that it's like on your own pace. I mean like in a way it's helpful but it's not because it's... I'm not normal now and how I say that is because I can't ... I came to school and I can't pull out my books and I can't [be] like OK [If I still had structure]... I have a check list. […] OK get this done, get this thing, and get this done. [Instead at alternate school] it's OK come to school, I'm going to sit down, I'm going to relax for like half an hour, chill, grab a drink, maybe I'll go down to the store, maybe I'll get some Kit Kats, come back, look at this work for about another 10 minutes, maybe I'll do a bit of it and then I'll stop for a bit, and then I'll go do something else."

With hindering incidents within the alternate education system, there were 58 incidents which fit into 8 categories: (a) home and personal issues, (b) issues with staff and staff dismissiveness, (c) social issues and bullying, (d) lack of psychosocial and addictions support, (e) disruptive and distracting peers, (f) school structure (physical and norms) and environment, (g) being judged for going to alternate education, and (h) too much flexibility.

Home and personal issues. This category was the most prominent hindering category in the alternate system and encompassed 12 incidents and nearly 40% participation rate. The category describes how personal issues like self-motivation, issues at home, and personal struggles disrupts the participants' ability to achieve success in alternate education. These

incidents can be considered as close internal factors that the participant is faced with at home

and/or personally. For example, one of the participants shared the following:

> I can't say that's necessarily a fault or lack of structure [in the school] but it's more that I
>
> have personal problem with motivating myself usually... like until I get motivated to do
>
> something, it's very hard for me to motivate myself to do something.

Issues with staff and staff dismissiveness. Seven students described 10 incidents with

regards to how they had issues with some of the staff for being dismissive and feeling like they

were not taken seriously. The category also involved other characteristics about the staff that the

students found to be unhelpful. One of the participants shared how they felt that some of the

staff's "absent-mindedness" was unhelpful for their learning.

> I also feel like there are a lot of absent-minded teachers here. I mean from the teachers
>
> that I have had and the teachers that I've had are like [participant's teachers]. Honestly,
>
> I'm okay with the whole absent-minded thing but it's a problem when myself who's very
>
> absent- minded. Like it's the kind of thing where we get along but nothing gets done.

Social issues and bullying. Social issues and bullying had 28% participation rate and 8

incidents. This category focuses on some peer social issues like not being able to relate and

connect with other peers. As there were only a few incidents of bullying in alternate education,

the research team felt it was appropriate to incorporate bullying into this category instead of

creating a new category. An example of social issues was described by one of the participants:

> Like everyone standing out at the smoke pit at once, and you're like it's your first year
>
> here and you're like I don't know anyone and I'm going to go stand over there by myself.
>
> […] It's really awkward.

Lack of psychosocial and addictions support. A third of the participants shared that

the lack of psychosocial and addictions support was a hindrance. Though there are psychosocial

supports offered in the alternate systems, these participants felt that there were some support

systems missing, like an LGBTQ support group. Moreover, participants felt that addictions

support was an area that was lacking in the alternate education, which was later confirmed by the

youth co-researchers (K. Firth, M. Raber, & T. Stevens, personal communication, April 22,

2013). An illustration of this category is as follows:

> He [staff member] didn't do anything about it [in reference to a student who the
>
> participant noticed was on narcotics], but if you come to school stoned [off of marijuana]
>
> you'll get put in the drug counselling program.

Disruptive and distracting peers. With six incidents and 28% participation rate,

disruptive and distracting peers was another unhelpful category. The category describes how

some of the students in alternate education were disruptive or distracting to the learning

experiences of participants. One described how for some students who were forced into alternate

education, because there are no other options, they were less motivated to learn which negatively

impacted other students. Another participant had issues with students smoking, as indicated in

the following quote:

> People go out and smoke and stuff and then they go out and smoke weed and stuff and I
>
> mean that bothers me, but what can I do?

School structure and environment. Four participants contributed 6 incidents to create

this category. These participants shared how they felt that alternate education had a lack of

resources. For them, the facilities were not up to par and there was a lack of programs like sports

teams. One of the participants who had experienced the alternate system before changes were made to the school structure, shared:

> At first, [the alternate school], I love this school now, but […] [the alternate school] was like garbage, it was such a bad school. [..] Well I came to school and I sat in class they'd put me to work and I'd have to sit there for a good eight hours and they'd be like 'OK, that's it'. I could get a bit of help and that was it.

Being judged for going to alternate education. Participants felt that they were being judged for going to alternate education. This category involved 28% participation rate and 5 incidents. It is about the participants feeling that the community had a negative public perception of the alternate system. Participants expressed how students in alternate education are looked down upon by the community and are seen as "bad kids". Some expressed how this perception may affect their future. One of the participants discussed how they felt that alternate education was helpful, but unfortunately it was looked down by the community.

> It's hard to really say, because it [the alternate school] feels like overall, it works pretty good, but I'd probably say the composition of the classes and the kids...and I don't want to say this in a negative term, it feel like Alternative School has been kind of, 'oh this is where the bad kids go, these are the kids that can't handle it or whatever.'

Too much flexibility. The last category was, too much flexibility. It contrasted with the helping category where the participants felt the flexibility was accommodating and helpful. In this case, though the four participants appreciated the flexibility, they also realize the hindrance of being too flexible especially when they lack motivation to learn.

I can also see how the lack of structure could hinder my ability to even motivate myself.

Not that I want more structure, but I can objectively see it probably hinders my ability to

motivate myself.

Wish List Categories in the Alternate Education System

Table 9

Wish List Categories in Mainstream Education

Wish List Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Facility Upgrades	22, 35.5%	9, 50%	"It's just like Alternate School are always just put in like old buildings. Like this is an old building...it's gross. Yeah, like they should have an Alternate School built like a real High School. So it feel more like a High School experience and less like a... cause I don't feel like I'm in school right now. […] I would like to have the feel of a regular High School, but with all the benefits of an Alternative System."
More School Options and Programs (Extracurricular, Electives, and Groups)	21, 33.9%	11, 61.1%	"I wish there was… athletics of some sort. Like I wish there was umm...and I guess there is actually a PE class. I'm just not in it right? But, I...I wish there was a more opportunity to go on like a school team or something.... you know. That would be cool."
Alternate Education to be Respected and Understood	8, 12.9%	4, 22.2%	**"**I just like... want... kids to understand that Alternate's not all that bad, like... Alternate has such a bad name, I mean like, 'oh I go to [alternate school], it's like... Ohhooo... like ouuu what a bad school, you're in Alternate School, like you're a loser' and it's like... no, not that at all. And it's like obviously you're embarrassed to say you're going to the [alternate school], […] like on my resume I don't even put that I go to [alternate school], I put [the mainstream school the alternate school is connected to], cause I'm kinda like attached to them."

(Continued)

Wish List Categories in Alternate	Incident Frequency and Incident Rate	Participant Frequency and Participant Rate	Examples
Enhance Staff Training and Development (addictions, social support, learning assessments)	7, 11.3%	4, 22.2%	Yeah, it's whenever I come to school upset… like [the teacher] always asks [another student] if she's upset, even when she's like happy and [the teacher's] like do you want anything? She's like no, I'm just happy today. And I'm like, when I'm low, like sad, like I'm not saying this to get attention or anything, just like I see it in other people too, whenever I'm like just... just... they don't care... like in that sense."
Balance of Flexibility and Structure	4, 6.5%	4, 22.2%	"Yeah more structure but then also I just can't find the happy medium ever. 'Cause I'm ... Cause I like the Mainstream School System right? But then like... It's too much work, too much homework, and it's stressing you out trying to get you to push you right? But when they push me, something falls."

With the wish-list categories for alternate education, there were 62 incidents which formed 5 categories. The categories were: (a) facility upgrades, (b) more school options and programs (extracurricular, electives, and groups), (c) alternate education to be respected and understood, (d) enhance staff training and development (addictions, social support, learning assessments), and (e) balance of flexibility and structure.

Facility upgrades. The most commonly shared category was facility upgrades. Half of the participants shared 22 incidents that they wanted to see facility upgrades in the alternate education school that they were a part of. These participants felt that due to the lack of resources in alternate education, the facility that they were in was often not as appealing as mainstream schools. Some participants even indicated how they wanted alternate education to be in a new facility. An example of this category is in how one of the participants noted that the alternate school needed an elevator so that it could be wheelchair accessible.

It's come up multiple times that we really need an elevator. Because disabled students

can't even get to the upper classrooms.

More school options and programs (extracurricular, electives, and groups). With 21

incidents and 61% participation rate, participants wanted more school options and programs,

which include extracurricular activities, electives, and groups. These participants shared that the

alternate education was lacking these additional programs that the mainstream schools had. One

of them discussed how they wished that there were also other activities that they could engage in

instead of going to the smoke pit.

Just kind of coming up with an idea that all the kids are interested in, which we could

figure out definitely, and just having them at break or lunch, you know, group together

and just do that instead of going out to the smoke pit and standing there and talking, you

know. It's like that's not really beneficial to the kids.

Alternate education to be respected and understood. This category consisted of 8

incidents shared by 4 participants. Alternate education being respected and understood is about

the participants wanting the community, the school system, and other students to recognize that

alternate education and students in it are not bad. They felt that there needed to be more

understanding from these external stakeholders. One offered the suggestion of changing the

name of the school to change the perception of the school.

It's just our school could get a better name, upgrade, and especially [name of another

alternate school], like ohhh my God...[name of the other alternate school]. I mean some

of the kids there need it to be like, but I mean [name of the other alternate school], that's

probably the worst name. People think [name of the other alternate school], oh that's

your last chance, like name it something else.

Enhance staff training and development. Enhance staff training and development included addictions, social supports, and learning assessments. Though in general participants appreciated the competence of the staff in alternate education and their relational approach, they noticed that there were some areas that needed further training and development. In particular, one of these areas was the lack of addiction supports and staff knowing how to work with addictions. One of the participants shared an example about wanting staff to talk to one of their friends about their drug use.

> I just wanted them [the staff] to talk to her and even just like ask her [the friend] [about her drug use], but she's really defiant.

Balance of flexibility and structure. The last category was the wish for a balance of flexibility and structure in the alternate system, it involved four incidents shared by four different participants. These participants appreciated the flexibility, but also realized that too much flexibility was unhelpful for them. They noted that there needed to be balance of structure approaches and room for flexibility.

> Well the fact that it's [the school structure] too flexible. It should be up to a point. It should be like a normal class.

Themes

The 55 categories from mainstream and alternate education were combined together to find the core factors that impacted participants' educational experience. Themes were formed inductively based on patterns found amongst the helping/hindering/wish-list categories in both mainstream and alternate. For instance, *bullying* was a hindering category for mainstream, but on the other hand, it was a helping category in alternate because *bullying was reduced*. In both instances, regardless of whether or not it was helping/hindering or mainstream/alternate, the

main idea that defined both categories was *bullying*. Below in Table 10 are seven themes that

were based on the respective categories. Like the categories, themes with more incidents do not

necessarily mean that they are more important, after all as McCormick (1994) suggested, every

incident is important; rather, it may be indicative of the theme being a more commonly found

experience. The different categories that each theme is comprised of is elaborated in Chapter

Five: Discussion.

Table 10

Core Themes that Impacted Participants

Themes	# of Incidents	% of Participants
Educational Environment and Tone Set by Staff	129	100%
Peer Social Culture and Bullying	113	100%
Pedagogical Approach, Structure, and Rules	109	100%
Academic and Psychosocial Support	91	100%
Discipline and Issues with Staff	69	88.9%
Personal (Includes Mental Health and Addictions) and Family Factors	64	83.3%
Programs, Extracurricular, and Curriculum	58	83.3%
Physical and Institutional Organization	35	72.2%
Perception of and Available Resources for Alternate Education	35	66.7%

Educational environment and tone set by staff. This theme contained the most

incidents with 129 and a participation rate of 100%. The theme here emphasizes how students

were impacted by the educational environment and the social tones that staff established; it is the

relational impact the staff had on participants. The theme describes how the students perceived

the school's educational environment, the degree of connectivity that the students had to the

school, and the quality of the relationships that students had with staff. A significant component

of this theme was the impact of staff on students on whether or not the student felt cared for and

understood by these individuals. Ultimately, it was about the relationships that the students had

with staff members (teacher, administration, counsellors, etc.) that impacted the retention and

success of these youth.

Peer social culture and bullying. This theme is centered on the social atmosphere and

culture that was established by their peers. A core component of this theme was bullying,

whether or not it was happening, and the degree of safety that the students felt within the school

system. As mentioned before, bullying was the most prevalent category amongst the categories

and had the highest participation rate. This theme contained 113 incidents and 100%

participation rate.

Pedagogical approach, structure, and rules. The theme involved 109 incidents

contributed by all the participants. It is an institutional effect that is focused on how the students

are taught and how rules were implemented. The theme here focuses on pedagogy the degree of

flexibility that was inherent within the pedagogical process. This includes how structured/rigid

the teaching was and how accommodating it was to the student's unique learning styles and

circumstances that they faced.

Academic and psychosocial support. With 84 incidents and full participation, this

theme indicates that having support or not having support had a significant impact on the

participants. The supports included: academic supports (learning supports and modifications to

the participants program) and psychosocial supports (mental health support, counselling,

addictions, and dealing with social issues). The degree of support that the students received was

dependent on the institution that they were part of. Typically, participants experienced more support in the alternate system than the mainstream.

Discipline and issues with staff. The theme involved 69 incidents and nearly 90% participation rate. Social hierarchy and power differentials between students and staff defines this theme. The social hierarchy can also result in the implementation of discipline that was either helpful or unhelpful to the participant. Furthermore, the degree to which social hierarchy was enforced had either a negative or positive impact of participants.

Personal (includes mental health and addictions) and family factors. The presented theme can be seen as a factor that is inherent within the individual and their social microcosm (family and intimate relationships). It contained 64 incidents with an 83% participation rate. Within this theme, the participants acknowledged how personal issues can impact their educational careers. This theme includes: mental health, physical health, addictions, substance use/abuse, personal relationships (i.e., boyfriend/girlfriend), family relationships, personal characteristics (i.e., motivation) and factors affecting them at home (i.e., having to take care of family, divorce, and family circumstances).

Programs, extracurricular, and curriculum. This theme involved 58 incidents and 83.3% participation rate. The theme can be seen as part of a larger concept of flexibility within the institution and the institution's academic organization and is related to the themes: *pedagogical approach, structure, and rules* and *physical and institutional organization*. It is about having various learning options and programs in school that have an impact on students. Whether or not these programs were available was dependent on the schools flexibility and/or resources. Within this theme are school courses, extracurricular, having groups, and learning options that are flexible, engaging, and interactive.

Physical and institutional organization. This theme had 35 incidents and a 72%
participation rate. It is focused more on the facility accommodations and how the institution is
organized. With facilities, it is how the building itself had components that either facilitated or
hindered learning such as class sizes, student body size, and availability of learning resources.
Whereas institutional organization entails how the school was organized and how it operated
(i.e., school start times).

Perception of and available resources for alternate education. The last theme is
strictly a theme that encompassed categories that affected students in alternate education. It had
35 incidents with 67% participation rate. The theme is centered on how the participants felt
judged externally for being in alternate education and how alternate education was generally
seen as a school for "bad kids", resulting in lack of resources and funding for the alternate
education program. This theme indicates that participants, as part of the alternate system, felt
that they were not treated fairly by the education system.

The implications of the themes and interpretation of the themes to the research question
will be discussed further within the Discussion chapter. Collaboratively, with the help of Dr.
Janelle Kwee, recommendations were formed based on the themes, and shaped by the
suggestions and narratives of the participants. Feedback on the recommendations was elicited
from Dr. Robert Lees and the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council. The
recommendations, categories, themes, and their fit within the literature will be discussed further
in Chapter Five: Discussion.

Youth Participatory Action Research Outcomes

One of the core reasons for utilizing action research is to influence change within the
participant's system (Dick, 2006). Though the measurement of systemic change is outside the

scope of this study, specific actions taken to address change can be expounded. For instance, the

results from the ECIT study can be beneficial for the school system. Additionally, youth were

empowered to voice their perspectives by sharing about their experiences and providing

recommendations on how to improve the education system using the ECIT method. As noted in

the project's conceptual model (see Figure 2), the objectives of the underlying YPAR

methodology was to validate youths' voices through the engagement of youth researchers,

honoring participant perspectives, engaging in critical reflexivity and social action, and ensuring

that the values of empowerment and transformation were upheld. The process and outcomes by

which these objectives were addressed is presented in this section.

Co-researchers engagement. Hart's (1991) ladder of participation (see Appendix O)

can be utilized to gauge the level of youth engagement in research (Chen et al., 2007). With

Hart's (1991) ladder, the higher degree of engagement and empowerment, the higher the rung on

the ladder. Overall, the project reflected participation at level six, as it was initiated by adults

(school district was interested in determining factors that contributed to the low six year

completion rate) and decisions were meaningfully shared with youth co-researchers. The level

of involvement fluctuates depending on the phase of the project, for details on the level

involvement of co-researchers during each phase of the project, please refer back to Chapter

Three: Methodology. This section, instead, provides specific examples of social action and

critical reflexivity as a way to understand engagement. These examples are based off of what I

have witnessed and have written down in my research journal.

Engagement in critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity or critical consciousness refers to

the awareness of factors and circumstances that impact the lives of individuals (Freire, 1970).

Throughout the research project, the co-researchers were engaged in examining these factors

within the education system. As the co-researchers engaged in the narratives of their peers, it

resounded with them and impacted them. Co-researchers shared how learning about these stories

resonated with their own stories and helped them become more patient and empathetic to their

peer's circumstances (Firth, Florence, Stevens, & Wilson, 2013). One of the co-researchers

realized why one of the participants engaged in bullying in the past after interviewing them (M.

Raber, personal communication, February 13, 2013).

Throughout the process, the co-researchers linked personal experiences of oppression

with other forms of critical theory. They discussed about feminism, critical race theory, and

queer theory. Likewise, these discussions were fostered throughout the research project in group

discussions during training and implementation.

Social action also resulted in the youth engaging in critical reflexivity. To illustrate, the

co-researchers engaged in reflections on how to improve their own capacities as researchers.

Throughout the research project, they received continuous feedback on their interviews from

Richard and myself and provided each other with feedback. One of the co-researchers noted that

he felt that the youth researchers were pushing their own biases onto the participants and wanted

to make sure that this was changed (J. Florence, personal communication, March 14, 2013).

These discussions were focused on ensuring that the voices of their peers were heard and

validated. Similarly, this challenge for personal growth was evident after each presentation that

the youth took part in. For instance, youth engaged in a reflective process on how to improve

presentations and how to get their message across better to their respective audience members

(K. Firth, J. Florence, M. Raber, & T. Stevens, personal communication, May 16, 2013, May 30,

2013, & June 6, 2013).

Through the reflective processes, social action emerged. For example, as the youth

researchers engaged in the project, one of them suggested that they too should take part in the

interviews as participants to add depth to the study (K. Firth, personal communication, March 1,

2013). This suggestion was discussed amongst the youth and concluded that this would be a

good option. Likewise, instances of this came through the project as the youth desired to create

material to spread their message, such as wanting to create a video and a poster. The youth also

discussed about actions that they hope will take place after the project is complete and engaged

in future action planning. Direct reflections regarding the co-researchers' engagement

experience in the research project is presented in Chapter Five: Discussion.

Social action and contributions of youth co-researchers. Social action informs critical

reflexivity, and sub-sequentially is also informed by the reflective process—it is a circular

process. The youth co-researchers engaged in numerous forms of social actions. Table 11

presents a list of some of the actions and contributions of the youth co-researchers.

Table 11

Examples of Social Action

Social Action	Description	Date(s)
Forming goals and plans for the research project	At the beginning of the research project, co-researchers created a vision statement, goals, and ground rules for the project.	October 24 and 31, 2012
Creation of recruitment material	PowerPoint slides, pamphlets, and poster advertisements were created to recruit participants. All the recruitment material was created by co-researchers outside of the meeting time.	January 10 – January 31, 2013

(Continued)

Social Action	Description	Date(s)
Recruitment of participants	Youth co-researchers presented the project to recruit participants (February 7 and 14). They also contributed to the idea of utilizing other youth friendly approaches to recruit, i.e., Facebook and text messaging.	February 7 to mid-March 2013
Consulting and updating Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council	The Chilliwack Social Research Planning Council served as an advisory committee. The youth researchers engaged in discussing about the project with the council and elicited feedback.	November 21, 2013; March 20, 2013
Consulting with Vice-Superintendent	Youth researchers met with the Vice-superintendent of the school district. They shared about the project and answered questions about how the project will be conducted.	January 24, 2013
Modifying research material and practicing interviews	Youth researchers modified the informed consent and interview protocol to ensure that it was more youth friendly. They also practiced their interview skills on each other during their own time.	December 7 – January 31, 2013
Provision of suggestions for the research study to be more compatible to the needs of youth participants	Suggestions were provided throughout the project during scheduled meeting times. For example, initially the reimbursement was a gift card to McDonalds; youth researchers proposed that it would be better to offer an option of McDonalds or Walmart, given the needs of some of the potential participants. Another critical suggestion was the idea of involving themselves as participants at the end to add depth to the results.	Continuous
Work through social conflicts for "greater good" of the project	There were multiple conflicts that happened amongst co-researchers. However, the researchers noted that the project had precedence and they worked through their differences in order to ensure the project's success.	Continuous

(Continued)

Social Action	Description	Date(s)
Utilize media attention to advocate for students	Youth were interviewed by the Chilliwack Times about the project. They shared about their motivations and utilized the media as a medium to advocate for youth voice in the school system.	January 10, 2013
Advocate for youth voice in research	Four co-researchers took part in preparing and presenting at a Counselling Psychology Conference at Adler School of Psychology. They took part in a symposium presentation advocating for youth voice in research.	March 2, 2013
Advocate for needs within the alternate system	Throughout the project co-researchers discussed about the lack of resources and areas that needed improvement in the alternate system. For example they discussed about the need for an elevator for a student with disabilities and how the school needed to move the garbage bins away from the front entrance. Some of the co-researchers talked to teachers and administration about these concerns.	Continuous
Interviewing participants and conduction of second interviews	In pairs, youth co-researchers interviewed two to three participants on a week to week basis during the scheduled meeting time. After the participants' data were analyzed, they were invited to do second interviews which were facilitated by co-researchers.	February 13 - April 25, 2013
Data Analysis	Youth researchers who were not interviewing participants helped the principal investigator do data analysis. This involved inductively creating categories based on patterns found amongst the incidents. The categories were labelled and modified by co-researchers. Three co-researchers took part in a whole day of data analysis to finalize the categories (April 22, 2013).	February 27, 2013 – May 2, 2013
Formed themes and recommendations	With the help of Dr. Janelle Kwee, the research team utilized inductive thematic analysis to create themes based off of the categories. Based off of the themes, personal reflections, and participant wish-lists, recommendations were formed.	May 2, 2013

(Continued)

Social Action	Description	Date(s)
Presentation and consultation with the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council	A 45 minute presentation was provided to the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council. Youth researchers practiced for the presentation, presented, and answered questions about the research project. Feedback was elicited from the council.	May 15, 2013
Presentation to the Principals and Vice-Principals meeting	A 45 minute presentation was provided to the school district's principals and vice-principals during their meeting. Youth researchers interacted with the audience professionally and provided consultative feedback to the questions asked about the project and how to engage at-risk students.	May 27, 2013
Brainstorm future action plans	During the last meeting youth reflected about their experience in being part of the project and discussed about future plans for social action both personally and through this project.	June 6, 2013
Presentation to the school board	A 30 minute presentation was provided to the district's school board. Preparation was involved for the presentation so that the message was delivered succinctly. Results (categories and themes) along were recommendations were delivered to the school board. Youth co-researchers also shared reflections about their experience in taking part in the research project.	June 11, 2013

The table shows the different ways that the youth engaged in the research project. Details on some of the core social actions in comparison to the YPAR literature is presented in Chapter Five: Discussion.

Validating youth voice. Youth voice involves validating the perspectives of the participants and sharing decision making powers with youth co-researchers. With the co-researchers, each decision made about the project was brought up during weekly meetings and opinions were elicited. Decisions that the co-researchers wanted to implement were also brought up to the research team during this time. Important decisions about the project always involved

discussions with the co-researchers; while for minor decisions, co-researchers were informed.

With minor and major decisions, the youth researchers were aware that they had the opportunity

to voice their opinion whenever they felt a decision was inappropriate or if they disagreed with a

decision.

To ensure that participants' voices were validated, the research team offered the

participants with the opportunities to provide feedback about the project and to verify their own

results during second interviews. Feedback was elicited during the first several interviews. We

asked about the participant's experience of the interviews—what were we doing well? What

could be done better? And what would they like us to incorporate in future interviews? In

addition to eliciting feedback, participants were asked to take part in second interviews after their

results were analyzed. During second interviews, the participants were shown the process by

which we conducted our analysis, updated on the status of the project, and provided with a copy

of their incidents that were elicited from their first interviews, along with the corresponding

categories by which these incidents were placed (see Appendix K for template). To empower the

participants, they were asked to provide three recommendations to the school board, these

recommendations were incorporated into analysis.

To disseminate the project to the participants a poster (see Appendix P) was created to

highlight the results of the project and specific actions that were done to advocate for youth

voice. This poster was presented to the Education Centre, and posted in an open area for other

students, participants, and staff to see.   Youth co-researchers were also informed to invite the

participants to the final school board presentation, in which a few participants attended.

Transformation and empowerment. Reflections on the transformational and

empowerment process of the project on the youth co-researchers is discussed in Chapter Five:

Discussion. Though measuring the impact of the research project on the education system was beyond the breadth of the study, the actions that were committed to impact the education system can be presented.

During the interviews it was emphasized to the participants that their voices would be taken seriously. This process of sharing their own narratives, in and of itself, was an empowering process. Moreover, with ECIT's wish-list component, participants were asked about ways to improve the education system; this allowed participants to voice their opinions on how to make the system more equitable for their own circumstances and for the circumstances of other students like themselves.

There were three main actions that the research team did in an attempt to impact the education system in Chilliwack. First, the team presented the results to the principals and vice-principals. They were able to provide their opinions to administration along with suggestions on how to engage vulnerable students. Second, the research team presented to the Chilliwack school board. They provided recommendations and highlighted areas that needed to be addressed. During this presentation, the board members acknowledged the importance of having the voices of vulnerable students inform their policies and practice (Chilliwack Board of Education, personal communication, June 11, 2013). Third, they advocated for alternate education programs. The co-researchers themselves were an exemplary illustration of the importance of alternate education; they accomplished the feat of doing graduate level research, advocated for their peers, and challenged negative public perceptions of students in alternate education. These co-researchers presented a different image of alternate education to the school board and to the media—an image of competence and integrity.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Youth-Participatory Action Research (YPAR) was employed as the methodology to examine factors that may contribute to the lower six year completion rates within the Chilliwack school district. To address this concern, the method the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT), was used to validate the different narratives of the participants and to explore what helped and hindered youth who have dropped-out and/or attending alternate education; it was suspected that this group of youth may contribute significantly to the completion rate concern. This chapter will discuss about the results and its fit within the literature, which will also serve as form of cross validation, one of the ECIT credibility checks. Butterfield et al.'s (2005, 2009) purports that categories need to be examined in relation to the literature, however since ECIT in this study fits within PAR; the connection of each category to the literature is not necessary as it may not facilitate social action. Instead the core themes will be examined in relation to the literature, while highlighting some categories within each respective theme.

As one of the purposes of YPAR is to promote social change, recommendations to the Chilliwack school district formed by the research team is presented in this chapter. Social action and change that resulted from the study, will be compared and contrasted with other YPAR studies to gauge the consequential validity. Implications on practice, limitations of the study, reflections of the co-researchers and the principal investigator, and future studies and action plans will comprise the rest of the chapter.

Summary of Results and Fit within Literature

The perspectives of 18 participants on factors that helped and hindered their retention and success within the education system in Chilliwack were ascertained in the study—this involved asking about their experience in mainstream and alternate education. These participants were

recruited and interviewed by their peers, the youth researchers. Interviews were transcribed by

an external transcriptionist and then extracted for critical incidents and wish-list items by the

principal investigator. The co-researchers collaboratively formed categories, themes, and

recommendations. A total of 703 incidents (437 incidents related to mainstream education; 266

incidents related to alternate education) were elicited which were categorized into 55 categories

(30 categories for mainstream; 25 categories for alternate). For the mainstream education

system, there were 5 helping categories, 14 hindering categories, and 11 wish-list categories; for

alternate education, there were 12 helping categories, 8 hindering categories, and 5 wish-list

categories. From these categories 9 themes were formed using thematic analysis.

Through the process of engaging in research and learning about factors that impacted

their peers and their own educational experience, youth co-researchers formed seven

recommendations based on the categories and themes elicited from the study. With YPAR,

youth researchers engaged in social action, which cumulated to a final presentation of the results

and recommendations to the Chilliwack Board of Education.

Overview of ECIT results. The research study highlights a stark contrast between

alternate and the mainstream education; mainstream having significantly more hindering

incidents (242 incidents in mainstream versus 58 in alternate), while the alternate was seen more

favorably with more helping incidents (146 incidents in alternate versus 55 in mainstream).

There may be several reasons for this contrast, one of which may be due to the biases of the co-

researchers and participants, as a most of the participants were currently situated in the alternate

system. That said, this favorable view of youth in alternate education is reflected literature. For

example in De La Ossa's (2005) study found that participants had experienced advantages in

being in alternate education in the areas of school size, class size, and personal attention and

relationships; while Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) study found that youth in alternate education

generally had poor experiences in traditional schools, which were improved upon in alternate

education. In BC, Smith et al.'s (2007) analysis of alternate education programs found that

students attending these programs reported experiencing more positive factors in contrast to their

previous educational experience. Though these studies provide a rationale for the contrasting

differences in the experiences of mainstream versus alternate, the results may also be indicative

of the Education Centre being successful in implementing their alternate program.

Overview of themes. These themes, along with the categories, were formed to

understand the core factors that contribute to the retention and success of vulnerable youth in

Chilliwack. Incorporated within these themes are helping, hindering, and wish-list categories in

both mainstream and alternate education. Based on Audas and Willms (2001), Rumberger and

Lim (2008), and Lee and Burkam (2003) differentiation of factors that contribute to high school

dropout, these themes can be seen as part of larger constructs of institutional, social/relational,

individual, and community factors (see Figure 12). As factors that contribute to dropping out

and disengagement are often complicated and interactional, direct linear models are insufficient

for understanding this phenomenon (Johnson, 2008).   Instead, Johnson argues that student

achievement can be best understood as a developmental outcome of layers interacting with layers

within Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological system model. Similarly, the results of the thesis can

be best understood as interacting elements within a larger ecological frame of reference and

should not be seen as being mutually exclusive.
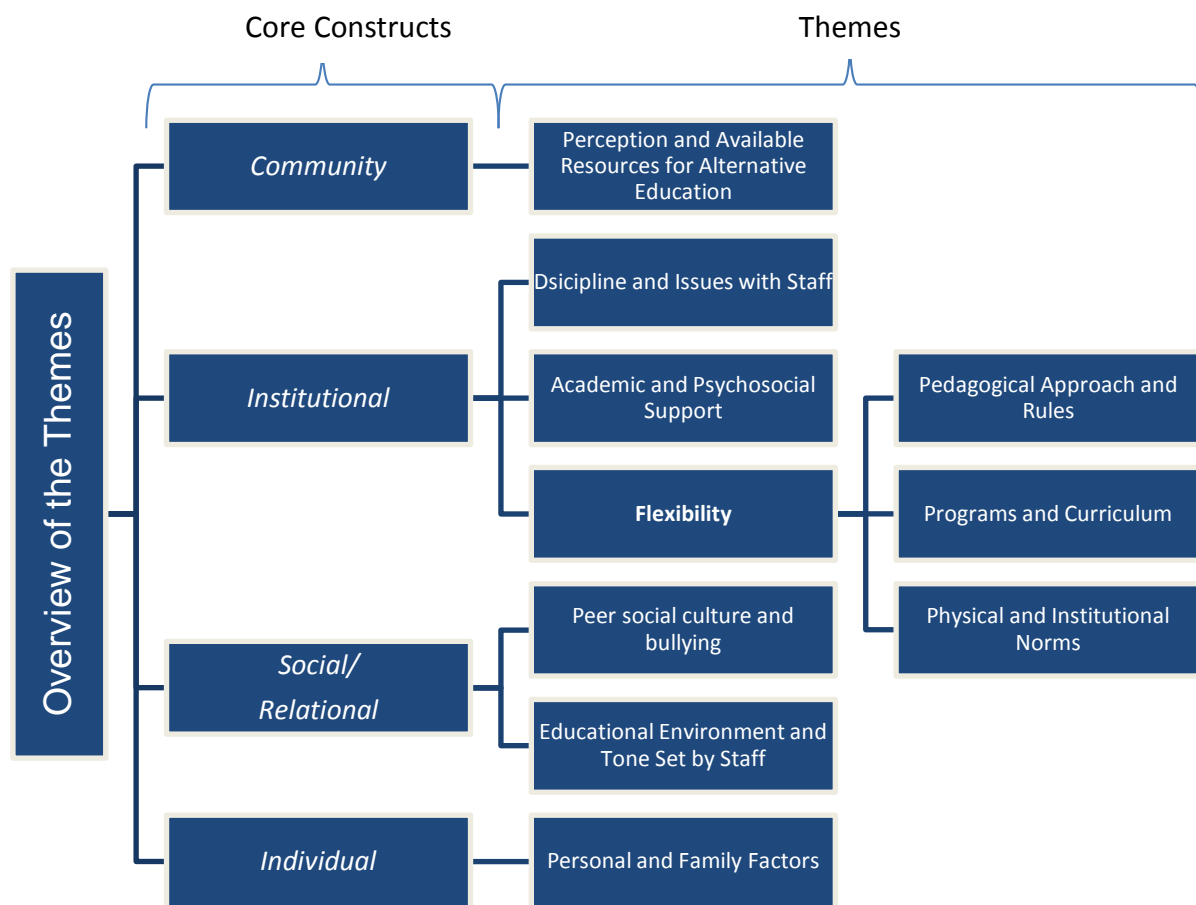
Figure 12. Overview of themes split up into community, institutional, social/relational, and individual constructs

Educational environment and tone set by staff. This theme was comprised of 129 incidents and 100% participation rate. At the core of this theme are relationships that participants had with staff members. Table 12 presents the categories that pertains to this theme and splits it up among common constructs. For example *caring, accepting, and relatable staff* is the same construct as wishing for *empathetic and understanding staff* and *not feeling heard and understood*. These constructs help us understand the core components of a theme.

Table 12

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Educational Environment and Tone Set by Staff

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Relationship with staff and feeling understood	**HE-M**: Caring and Supportive Staff Member **HE-A**: Caring, Accepting, and Relatable Staff	**HI-M**: Not feeling heard and understood **HI-A**: Issues with Staff and Staff Dismissiveness	**WL-M**: Empathetic and Understanding Staff
Staff competency	**HE-A**: Staff and Teacher Competence		**WL-A**: Enhance Staff Training and Development
Learning atmosphere fostered by staff	**HE-A**: Hospitable and Family-like Atmosphere **HE-A**: Positive and Encouraging Environment		

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

The presented theme was the most common experience amongst participants. One can break the theme up into three main constructs, *relationship with staff and feeling understood*, *staff competency*, and the *learning atmosphere fostered by staff*. It is clear that the relationships with staff played a critical role for these participants. One of the core categories of *feeling cared for and accepted* was both a helping category in the mainstream and in alternate, but also experiencing the opposite was true in both systems as hindering events. Participants noted that having a positive relationship with a staff member had a beneficial impact on them; they often cited feeling cared for and supported by these individuals. Yet, the opposite was also true, where the feeling of invalidation was common amongst the participants. The value of a student-staff relationships on vulnerable students is echoed throughout the literature (see Abrami et al., 2008; De La Ossa, 2005; Lagana-Riordan, 2011; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Kaplan et al., 1997; Kennedy,

2011; Knesting, 2008; Saewyc, et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Thomson, 1992). As suggested

in the study, student relationships with staff play an important role in helping them stay

connected to school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003). These relationships are

important because positive and connected relationships are the most critical protective factors for

vulnerable youth (Saewyc et al., 2006); furthermore, strong relationships with caring adults

enable youth to build on strengths and capacities that develop self-esteem and skills to overcome

obstacles and thrive (McCreary Centre Society, 2003).

The skill of the teachers to handle situations had an impact on participants. Though

participants appreciated that staff were able to calmly work with students acting out, they wanted

more training for staff in alternate education to deal with situations like addictions. Students

who are considered "at-risk" face numerous barriers which often leave teachers feeling ill-

equipped to work with (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989). Therefore in order for educators to be

successful in working with this population, it will be important for additional support to be

provided to develop staff (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

Participants shared that the positivity and hospitality that they received in alternate

education made them feeling welcomed and accepted. These social dynamics were fostered by

staff in alternate education. An often cited incident was that participants appreciated having food

available in their program; meeting this need addresses the issue of hunger as a barrier to

education for students in alternate education (Smith et al., 2007). With the positive environment,

Conchas (2006) found that small, personal school environments focused on cooperation

contributed to the success of students with barriers.

Staff play a vital role in the lives of these students, in their relationships, their approach,

and the environments they foster. Working with these students must involve staff who are

willing to engage with students in a manner that is respectful and caring; it is these factors that

are currently being promoted in the alternate program in Chilliwack.

      Peer social culture and bullying. Peer social culture and bullying had full participation

along with 113 incidents. This theme involved 10 categories which were split into two

constructs: *influence of peers and peer social environment* and *bullying* (See Table 13).

Table 13

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Peer Social Culture and Bullying

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Influence of peers and peer social environment	**HE-M**: Positive Peer Influence	**HI-A**: Disruptive and Distracting Peers	**WL-M**: Better Social Environment
	HE-A: Less Conflict and More Relatable Peers	**HI-M**: Social Issues	
		HI-A: Social Issues and Bullying	
Bullying	**HE-A**: Reduced Bullying	**HI-M**: Bullying	**WL-M**: Better Awareness and Management of Bullying
		HI-A: Bullying not being dealt with	

  Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

      Peers play an important role in keeping students connected with education; on the other

hand, students who felt less connected socially to their peers were likely to pull away from

school (Ellenbogen & Chamberland, 1997; Smith et al., 2007). Most participants had social

issues with their peers in mainstream, either because they had conflicts with these peers or felt

socially isolated. Yet, in contrast, a commonly shared experience was that participants felt

connected to their peers in alternate education; they felt they were more relatable and that there

was less conflict. The diverging experiences between mainstream and alternate is echoed in

Lagana-Riordan et al.'s (2011) study which found that alternate students had positive peer

relationships, but had problems with peers when they were in mainstream. Likewise, Thomson's

(1992) thesis found that it was a common experience of students who have dropped out to have had frustration connecting interpersonally with peers.

The experience of bullying in the mainstream system was the most commonly shared category amidst the participants. Participants frequently shared how they did not feel protected by the education system and that not enough was being done about bullying. In Lagana-Riordan et al.'s (2011) study, lack of safety in mainstream education was a core hindering experience of vulnerable students. While in Suh and Suh's (2007) examination of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the researchers found that bullying (i.e., engaging in fights and being threatened with harm at school) was a significant risk factor for dropping out. Given the vulnerability of these youth, safety must be fostered in schools (Saewyc et al., 2006).

Being able to connect with peers diminishes the risk of dropping out and keeps students engaged in school (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Smith et al., 2007). In nurturing peer connectivity in schools and remediating the negative experiences of bullying, it will help vulnerable students find success in education.

Pedagogical approach, structure, and rules. The degree of flexibility found within pedagogy, structure, and rules, was another important theme that impacted the participant's retention and success. All the participants shared 109 incidents that contributed to the formation of this theme. At the core of this theme is adaptability to the students, whether that is through the pace of work, institutional structure or adapting to the different styles of learning (see Table 14).

Table 14

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Pedagogical Approach, Structure, and Rules

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Pacing of Work	**HE-A**: Work at Your Own Pace	**HI-M**: Falling Behind/Pace of Work	
Degree of flexibility in the institutional structure	**HE-A**: Flexible and Accomodating Learning Environment	**HI-M**: Inflexible and Inconsistent Rules and Structure	**WL-A**: Balance of Flexibility and Structure
		HI-A: Too Much Flexibility	**WL-M**: More Flexiblity and Accommodations
Recognition of different learning styles	**HI-M**: Not Recognizing and Appreciating Different Learning Styles		**WL-M**: Recognizing and Validating Different Learning Styles

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

Participants discussed how they appreciated being able to work at their own pace in

alternate education. Most of these participants also shared how they felt overwhelmed by school

work in mainstream; they conversed about when they fell behind, the work kept on piling on

them to the point where they gave up on school. In Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) survey of students

who have dropped out, failing school and feeling that they could not catch up was one of the top

five reasons why respondents left school. While in Bowers (2010) study, student grades were an

important predictor for dropping out and disengaging from school. However, despite academics

playing an important role, Suh and Suh (2007) along with Kaplan et al. (1997) argue that

academic failure is mediated by other factors like low SES and behavioral problems, therefore

falling behind may instead be a predictor of other core underlying issues.

Degree of flexibility in the institutional structure is about the rules established by the

institution and teachers and how accommodating the system was to the participants. Typically

participants felt that alternate was more flexible and accommodating than mainstream; they felt

that they had to fit into the mainstream structure. Moreover, in Lagana-Riordan et al.'s (2011) study, flexible rules was noted as a recommendation when working with at-risk students; inherent within flexibility is an understanding of the unique circumstances that these students face which requires flexibility to be an essential part of practice.

Lastly, participants advocated for the importance and recognition of different learning styles. The appreciation of different learning styles corresponds with Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences which proposes that intelligence can be broken into seven different types of intelligences all of which are valuable. In Dunn, Beuadry and Klavas' (1989) literature review, the researchers found that adapting teaching methods to different learning styles increases student achievement.

Academic and psychosocial support. The degree of academic and psychosocial support received by participants played an important role in their educational experience. All the participants also contributed to this theme with 91 incidents. The categories that encompassed this theme is found in Table 15.

Participants noted that there was a lack of academic supports in mainstream systems, they felt that they were regularly overlooked or, because there were too many other students, they were not able to get the help that they needed. While in alternate education, these participants shared about the benefits of having the individualized support. As for psychosocial supports, participants shared how they had numerous struggles with interpersonal issues, addictions, and mental health concerns. During the second interviews, a majority of the participants wished for more and improved psychosocial supports.

Table 15

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Academic and Psychosocial Support

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Academic Support	**HE-A**: Educational Support **HE-M**: Academic Supports	**HI-M**: Lack of Support (Academic and Psychosocial) and Learning Options	**WL-M**: More Academic Support
Psychosocial Support	**HE-A**: Mental Health Awareness and Psychosocial Support	**HI-A**: Lack of Psychosocial and Addictions Support	**WL-M**: Improve Psychosocial Supports (Mental health, Addictions, Social Issues)

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

The argument for more psychosocial and academic supports is supported in the literature (see Bridgeland et al., 2006; De La Ossa, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003; Kaplan et al., 1997; Lagana, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Suh and Suh, 2007). The provision of supports is found to reduce substance abuse, violence and antisocial behavior, mental health, and facilitate positive youth development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, & Lonczak, 2002; Gottfredson & Wilson, 2003; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001). Greenberg et al. (2003) purports that despite growing evidence that advocates for preventative approaches, often these are not being developed within education systems. Given the strong evidence for preventative approaches by enhancing supports, it is essential for it to be implemented to improve the well-being of vulnerable students.

Discipline and issues with staff. The theme of discipline and issues with staff is centered on the nature and impact of the hierarchical structure of school systems on participants. A majority of the participants contributed incidents to this theme which had 69 incidents. Students shared some significantly negative experiences with staff where they felt that staff used their position in a manner that left them feeling powerless. This includes incidents where staff

did not responsibly meet the standard that was expected of them, such as maintaining

confidentiality and disrespecting students. One of the participants even shared how they were

pushed by one of the teachers during a physical education class. Specific categories that are

included in this theme is shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Discipline and Issues with Staff

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Issues with Staff		**HI-M:** Issues with Staff	
		HI-M: Staff use of power that made the student feel powerless	
Discipline		**HI-A**: Problems with Discipline	**WL-A**: Improve Discipline Practices.

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

Negative experiences with staff result in students feeling invalidated and rejected which

often results in them being pushed out from school. In Thomson's (1992) thesis the author

indicates how invalidating and rejecting experiences with staff plays a decisive role in the

student's decision to drop out. Also, cumulative educational experiences of rejection seem to

play into whether or not a student will feel rejection amongst staff in their current circumstance

(Kaplan et al., 1997; Thomson, 1992); it is important to address these concerns early in a

student's educational journey.

With disciplinary issues, participants discussed how they felt that the punishment they

received did not properly reflect the behavior they engaged in. They shared how they felt their

stories were not considered when decisions were made about them. In Lagana-Riordan et al.'s

(2011) study, participants proposed that staff needed to understand why they violated school

policies, rather than strictly enforcing rules. Like the current study, Lagana-Riordan et al.'s

participants also felt that staff in mainstream schools utilized authority rigidly and punitively.

Personal and family factors. With an 83% participation rate and 64 incidents (see

Table 17), personal and family factors was another core theme found in the study. This theme

can be seen as individualized factors that are related to the self, intimate relationships, and

family. Participants noted numerous individual barriers that they faced, from having to take care

of their family to struggles with mental health and addictions. It reflects the degree of

vulnerability that these youth are facing.

Table 17

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Personal and Family Factors

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Family and Personal Factors	**HI-M**: Home and Personal Issues	**HI-A**: Home and Personal Issues	**WL-M**: Personal Changes
Mental Health, Physical Health, and Addictions	**HI-M:** Addictions and Substance Abuse		
	HI-M: Mental Health and Physical Health Issues		

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

With students who have disengaged from mainstream school, it is evident in the literature

that family circumstances play a critical role in impacting these students. This comes in the form

of financial issues and coming from low SES situations (Audas & Willms, 2001; Bridgeland et

al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007; Terry, 2008), coming from single parent

households (Thiessen, 2007), having to take care of family (Sterns & Glennie, 2006), and

experiencing challenging family situations (Smith et al., 2007). Due to the importance that

family plays in the lives of vulnerable students, researchers propose that in order help these

students, their families should be supported and involved (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

Participants noted that mental and physical health has been an issue in their educational careers. Often they would cite anxiety and depression as being one of their core health concerns as it places them in positions where they feel overwhelmed and do not want to attend school. Mental health challenges are significant barriers for vulnerable students (Saewyc et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007). In Smith's (2007) study, amongst students in alternate education, one in four participants shared that they had a health issue. Lastly, addictions was another key factor that impacted these participants. Some participants shared how they felt that it was a significant detriment not only to their education but to their lives. Correspondingly, there is a connection between dropping out and the involvement with drugs and alcohol (Thiessen, 2007).

These factors show that there are strong personal issues that affect these youth. They face numerous challenges and therefore it is essential that these concerns are addressed in educational systems. It is difficult for at-risk youth to do well academically given the numerous associated factors involved in their lives that prevent them from succeeding (Kaplan et al., 1997).

Programs, extracurricular, and curriculum. The availability of programs, curriculum, and extracurricular activities had 58 incidents and a participation rate of 83% (see Table 18). This theme can be split up into the school programming and the interactive learning.

Table 18

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Programs, Extracurricular, and Curriculum

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Learning Courses, Programs, and Extra-curricular	**HE-M**: School Courses and Programs		**WL-A**: More School Options and Programs (Extracurricular, Electives, and Groups
Interactive Learning	**HE-A**: Interactive Learning and Life Skills Training		**WL-M**: More Learning Options and Hands-on learning

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

Participants shared how they appreciated that the mainstream system had resources available along with different course options and extracurricular activities, such as team sports. They lamented in the fact that alternate education did not have these options available. The literature proposes that having these different forms of learning is helpful in the educational experiences of students (Lee & Burkam, 2003). These programs contribute to helping the students stay engaged, which is a predictor of success and positive outcomes for students (Audas & Willms, 2001; Fredrick et al., 2004).

Participants shared how they valued that in alternate education they were able to engage in learning that was interactive and built on life skills. One of the participants contrasted mainstream and alternate, by sharing that alternate teaches them skills that are relevant to their circumstances, such as basic job skills. These participants also appreciated that because alternate was flexible, they were able to engage in projects and groups, like a mental health awareness group that was being run at the school. These experiences reflect what is considered desirable about alternate programs (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Wilson, Stemp, & Mcginty, 2011). Additionally, in Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) survey on high school dropouts, one of the core recommendations was to improve teaching and curricula to be more engaging.

The different learning options and engaging and interactive teaching helps students stay engaged in school. As shown in the literature, the more connected youth feel to school the more likely they are to report having a positive outlook in life (Smith et al., 2007).

Physical and institutional organization. This theme represents the impact of the facilities and institutional organization on participants. It presented with 35 incidents and 72% participation rate.

Table 19

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Physical and Institutional Organization

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Institutional Organization and Physical Structure	**HE-M**: Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment **HE-A**: Facility Accommodations and Small Student Body Size	**HI-A**: School Structure (Physical and Norms) and Environment	**WL-M**: Smaller Class Sizes and Improved School Structure

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

Participants discussed how they valued the norms and stability that was offered in mainstream schools. While in alternate they felt that the system lacked structural resources in comparison to mainstream. The relationship between institutional organization and structure with dropping out was explored in Lee and Burkam's (2003) and Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson's (2007) studies. Lee and Burkam (2003) argued that the institution can either push students away or help them stay in school. Though the most important factor was positive relationships with teachers, it was contingent on the organizational and structural characteristics of high schools. Christle et al.'s (2007) study compared the characteristics of schools with high dropout rates to schools with the low dropout rates; the researchers found that schools with lower dropout rates were in better physical condition (cleanliness, condition, and orderliness) and had larger staff-teacher ratio (i.e., smaller class sizes) than schools with high dropout rates. From these studies one can infer that facilities can either facilitate or hinder other core elements that impact student success such as staff-teacher relationships.

Perception of and available resources for alternate education. Lastly, two-thirds of the participants shared 35 incidents related to the negative perceptions of going to alternate

education. They also felt that because of this perception, alternate education received less

resources, which contributed to the wish-list category of wanting improved facility upgrades.

Table 20

Overview of Categories for the Theme: Perception and Available Resources for Alternate
Education

Construct	Help	Hinder	Wish
Negative Public Perception		**HI-A**: Being Judged for Going to Alternate Education	**WL-A**: Alternate Education to be respected and understood
Available Resources			**WL-A**: Facility Upgrades

Note. HE = Helping; HI = Hinder; WL = Wish-List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

The negative perception of alternate education resonates in the literature. In De La

Ossa's (2005) study of alternate education student experiences, participants felt that they were

viewed negatively by the public and were seen as second class citizens. Similarly, Espinosa

(2011) conducted YPAR study in a rural community and found that alternate schools were

generally seen as a place for "good for nothing" students. These judgements not only extend to

alternate education, but also the notion of being an "at-risk youth". As Riele (2006) contends,

being labeled as at-risk only further marginalizes these youth, as it simplifies social issues as

being inherent within the individual; it places the blame on these young people.

Negative perceptions of students in alternate education can be detrimental, as negative

messages can be internalized by marginalized minority groups (Baker, 1983; Lewin, 1946;

Lipsky, 1946). This negative public view of alternate education is unfortunate, as this study

indicates that participants generally found alternate education to be helpful for their education.

Rationale for theme hierarchies. According to two of the experts who served as

credibility checks in the study (C. Lawson, personal communication, May 2, 2013; D. Manual,

personal communication, May 30, 2013), many of the presented themes would impact students in

mainstream education, however they believed that the hierarchical placement or commonality of

each theme would be different (i.e., curriculum and programs would be a more prominent theme

for mainstream students). The ordering of the themes exemplifies the importance of

relationships for vulnerable students given that the top two themes were centered on

relationships with staff and peers. The results of this study parallels another local thesis

conducted by Thomson (1992) who examined why students dropout using a qualitative

methodology. Thomson also found that the most prominent impacting factors were caring

relationships, emotional security, and having a sense of belonging; the content covered in school

was important, but not as important as the aforementioned factors.

Students who are marginalized may come from circumstances where they do not

necessarily receive the proper relational nurturance, therefore the sense of invalidation

contributes to pushing them out. These students who were identified as troubled in mainstream

school systems often flourished in alternate programs because they feel respected and valued by

staff (Quinn et al., 2006, p. 16); it is these positive relationships that fosters academic success for

vulnerable youth. Though it may be important to improve teaching, curriculum, and instructions,

as suggested by Bridgeland et al. (2006), the results found in our study suggests that the focus of

teachers and administrators should be on nurturing positive and caring relationships with

students who are considered vulnerable or "at-risk" for dropping out of school.

Recommendations

Based on the themes and categories, co-researchers collaboratively formed

recommendations for the Chilliwack School District. These were formed with the assistance of

Dr. Janelle Kwee and incorporates feedback from the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning

Council and Dr. Robert Lees. Final decisions for the recommendations were determined by the research team. For specific recommendations tailored to mainstream or alternate, the wish-list categories of each respective system may be helpful for administrators to implement. Table 21 presents the recommendations along with some corresponding actions.

Table 21

Recommendations for the Chilliwack School District

Recommendations	Suggested Actions...
Foster caring staff-student relationships	- Students want to feel heard, understood, and connected to staff - Staff-student relationships that are centered on respect, support, and understanding - Emphasize relational skill development for staff; empathy and listening skills training - More training for staff to better understand current issues that students face - Staff training on how to developing positive/strength-based learning environments
Improve response to bullying	- Improve peer social environments that fosters positive relationships, peer culture, and cohesion - Create school culture where bullying is seen as unacceptable by students and staff - Students standing up for one another - Better management and training of staff to deal with bullying
Restorative discipline practices: Address the reason for the behavior, not just the behavior	- Incorporate peer mediation and focus on understanding and prevention, not punishment - Re-examine whether or not current discipline practices are effective - Understand that behaviors are forms of communication - Disciplinary practices that are fair and are based off of reasonable rules, expectations, and consequences

(Continued)

Recommendations	Suggested Actions...
Improve psychosocial and academic supports	• Improve counsellor and staff professionalism: Incorporate continuous quality control measures and more training on ethics and confidentiality • Provide more psychosocial supports; more counsellors and more addiction services • Training for staff to deal with mental health and social issues; better informed about available resources
Focus on prevention: Gauge and promote positive engagement	• Focus on prevention to address academic issues, problematic behaviours, and social issues • Prevention should be centered on understanding, identifying problems earlier, and the promotion of a positive and welcoming school climates • Facilitate welcoming and positive peer environments and cohesion; have activities that allow peers to connect with one another • Address problems earlier rather than later; attendance issues indicate problems
Rebrand alternate education: "A place for choosers not losers"	• Re-brand the alternate education system • Develop a school that is centered on adapting to the different learning styles and can be seen as an option, not as a place go to if you are a "bad student" • More resources available for alternate education programs so that these programs can take part in some of the same benefits that mainstream system have; improve facilities • Utilize a balance of flexibility and structure
Incorporate youth voice: Nothing about us without us	• Feedback informed practice • Serious consideration of recommendations made by youth, not tokenistic considerations • Utilize youth-led research projects to address educational concerns (i.e., bullying), improve school practice, and to ensure inclusivity of youth voice in the education system

Foster caring staff-student relationships. As noted in the results, student relationships with teachers and administrators play a vital role in helping students find success in their education. To work effectively with vulnerable students it is crucial that staff focus on building

rapport and positive connections. This recommendation is strongly supported in the literature

(see Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lagana-Riorda et al., 2011; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Knesting, 2008;

Terry, 2008; Thomson, 1992). As noted in Saewyc et al.'s (2006) study, positive relationships in

schools serve as a critical protective factor for vulnerable youth.

Improve response to bullying. The co-researchers noted that not enough was being

done to address the issue of bullying. Majority of the participants shared that bullying was an

issue in the mainstream system; it constituted being the most common hindering category in the

research. The impact can be severely detrimental, as one of the participants shared how because

she was bullied she did not feel safe at school. It is imperative that students who are

marginalized to feel safe and welcome in school; without these elements these students "are less

likely to develop supportive relationships to help them thrive" (Saewyc et al., 2006, p. 6).

Restorative discipline practices: Address the reasons for the behavior, not just the

behavior. Participants discussed that often they felt their stories were not taken into

consideration when they were disciplined. They felt that the discipline practices were rigidly

applied and were unhelpful. This recommendation is highlighted by one of the statements shared

by a participant:

> I don't really believe in suspending kids for doing things wrong because then like you're
>
> sending them home to not do school which is why they were being bad in the first place
>
> cause they don't wanna be [at school], so you're basically just giving us a vacation.

Though it is important to enforce school rules, vulnerable youth often face circumstances that

make it more likely for them to violate policies. As suggested by Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011),

at-risk students would benefit from having a chance to explain their circumstance and work out

agreements regarding consequences (p. 112). In focusing on understanding and restoration, it

helps empower the youth and provides them with a sense of agency.

　　　Improve psychosocial and academic supports. During the second interviews with

participants, a majority of them emphasized the need to improve psychosocial and academic

supports. They noted how they wanted more counsellors, along with counsellors who were

better trained in working with their specific needs. This recommendation for preventative

supports is strongly reinforced by research that notes its effectiveness in helping students and

advocates for more supports in schools (see Bridgeland et al., 2006; Catalano et al., 2002; De La

Ossa, 2005; Domitrovich & Bumbarger, 2001; Gottfredson & Wilson, 2003; Greenberg et al.,

2003; Kaplan et al., 1997; Lagana, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Suh & Suh, 2007; Wilson

et al., 2001).

　　　Focus on prevention: Gauge and promote positive engagement. Participants shared

about significant moments in their scholarly journey which pushed them away from feeling

connected to school. They discussed how they felt issues could have been resolved earlier if

staff would have listened to them or asked them about what was going on in their lives. The

accumulation of events parallels the literature on disengagement, where disengagement is

considered a gradual accumulating process that leads to dropping out (Audas & Willms, 2001;

Herny et al., 2012; Lessard et al., 2008). There are markers that staff should be aware of as it

may be indicative of a larger problem. For example in Bowers' (2010) longitudinal analysis, the

researcher notes that grades are a significant predictor of drop out; while Bridgeland et al. (2006)

notes that attendance patterns are a sign of dropping out. Lastly, to address disengagement, it is

important to create an academic environment that engages students. Bridgeland et al. (2006)

suggests to improve teaching and curricula to make school more engaging and relevant.

Rebrand alternate education: "A place for choosers not losers". Generally, participants felt that alternate education has helped them find success in education. A majority of the participants have dropped out and returned to school through the alternate program. In Smith et al. (2007) examination of alternate programs in BC, the researchers purport that these programs are predominately successful; not only do these programs help marginalized and disenfranchised youth succeed in educational outcomes, they also provide an environment for youth to feel valued and supported (p. 59). Alternate programs provide a valuable resource for students who would otherwise not be in school, it benefits the community as it helps their vulnerable youth find success. Alternate education should be seen as a choice for students, not as a last resort option for students who are failing. Nonetheless, despite the success of the alternate program, participants often felt that there was a negative perception of alternate education, which was evident in the lack of resources and funding. It is important to improve the perception of alternate education and to provide it with the necessary resources to be successful; doing so will benefit current students and for future prospective students where mainstream education is unhelpful for their learning.

Incorporate youth voice: Nothing about us without us. This recommendation resonates with one of the goals of the School District 33's achievement contract—engaging all learners (Chilliwack School District, 2011). The project is an example of youth engagement and how in the process of taking part in YPAR, positive youth development can be fostered amongst students and result in students in alternate education contributing to improve school policies. The literature supports the notion that vulnerable students are able to provide helpful evaluative feedback to improve educational programs (Bridgeland et al., 2006; De La Ossa, 2005; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). There are many issues that the education system is faced with, thus it is

important to incorporate youth perspectives and to engage in inclusive practice; not only does it

facilitate a sense of agency amongst youth, but it respects youth voice and can improve

educational policies.

Praxis: Critical Reflexivity and Social Action

The cycle of critical reflexivity and social action are the core components that make up

PAR. Throughout the project, youth co-researchers were engaged in this process. Figure 13

highlights key moments where co-researchers were involved in praxis; a more extensive list is in

Chapter 4: Results.

- My reflections as a principal investigator
- Reflections from co-researchers
- Resonating with perspectives of participants with their own stories
- Connecting personal narratives with critical theory
- Recognizing that they have capacity for social change
- Reflecting on experiences after engaging in social actions

Critical Reflexivity   **Social Action**

- Consultation presentations with Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council
- Advocating for youth voice in research at a symposium presentation at a Counselling Psychology Conference
- Presentation to the Chilliwack Principals and Vice-Principals meeting
- Presentation to the Chilliwack School Board
- Co-creation of recommendations
- Advocating for needs in alternate education

Figure 13. Highlights of critical reflexivity and social action

Social action: Consequential validity. During the research project co-researchers

engaged in various forms of social actions. Social action has a broad definition and can

encompass numerous forms of actions, which includes and not limited to: presentations,

interviews, providing recommendations, and preparing for meetings. The focus of this section

will be to highlight some of the actions that the youth engaged in and contrast that with the

literature on Youth Participatory Action Research in education systems.

In a large scale PAR project conducted in the Chicago Public school system, several

schools and community organizations joined together to conduct survey research on factors that

contributed to dropping out and solutions to remediate the issue (Voices of Youth in Chicago

Education [VOYCE], 2008). The report noted that through this project, youth were engaged in

data collection, data analysis, and dissemination. Their project resulted in meeting with the

Chicago Public School officials and school stakeholders and introducing them to the findings,

recommendations, and a proposal for partnership. The project produced a report on the results

and created a website to keep stakeholders up to date. Like the thesis, the VOYCE study focused

on making recommendations to key stakeholders, though at a much larger scale.

With studies where YPAR was localized within schools, the literature purports findings

where youth researchers were able to voice their perspectives to respective stakeholders. In Ozer

and Wright (2010) analysis of YPAR on two high schools, they found that YPAR resulted in

novel student-adult "collegial" interactions and provided students with opportunities to influence

educational practices. Cammarota and Romero (2011) highlights the efforts of several different

student-led PAR projects in a social justice education curriculum. These projects resulted in a

presentation to the school principal, advocating for the rights of other students, and a student

promoting equal rights for Spanish-speaking students to the school board. The studies illustrate

the relevance of PAR and the efforts that students made to impact core educational stakeholders.

It parallels this thesis in that students were advocating for vulnerable groups of students.

Espinosa (2011) conducted a dissertation that was similar to the presented study.

Espinosa worked with a youth researcher in alternate education to challenge the negative stigmas

associated with the alternate system within a rural community. Espinosa also focused on

engaging with students as researchers. She started with five co-researchers, though most

disengaged or graduated during the implementation of her project leaving her with one youth; the

present study had six while two disengaged towards the end of project after the data analysis

phase. In both studies youth were empowered to promote change in the education system, while

enhancing their academic skills.

To my knowledge, there has been no other YPAR study conducted as an educational

course within school systems in Canada. Moreover, it is uncommon amongst the literature to

have co-researchers engaged in full collective action throughout the whole project, while

employing a rigorous research method such as ECIT (Smith et al., 2010).   According to Foster-

Fishman et al. (2010) "few PAR projects tend to involve youth in all of these phases—

particularly the data analysis phase" (p. 67). In Canada, Loiselle (2007) conducted a similar

study to the extent that it was a PAR project with youth evaluating their alternate education

program. However, it differs in that the focus on Loiselle's thesis foci was mainly on the

enhancement of feminist voice amongst her youth researchers and they explored the topic

through creative means such as generating a participatory video. This project was centred on

positive youth development and had a strong pragmatic function of providing evaluative

recommendations to promote change within the school system. Though both research studies

differed in approach, both had the goal of empowering and engaging youth researchers in a

critically reflective manner while advocating for youth voice.

With our study, the core social action was centered on utilizing youth voice to promote

positive equitable change for youth who have disengaged from mainstream school system.

These were the goals that the youth set out to do from the very first meeting (see Figure 14).

Whether or not these goals were met is outside of the scope of the study, however actions were

taken to influence change and address these important goals.
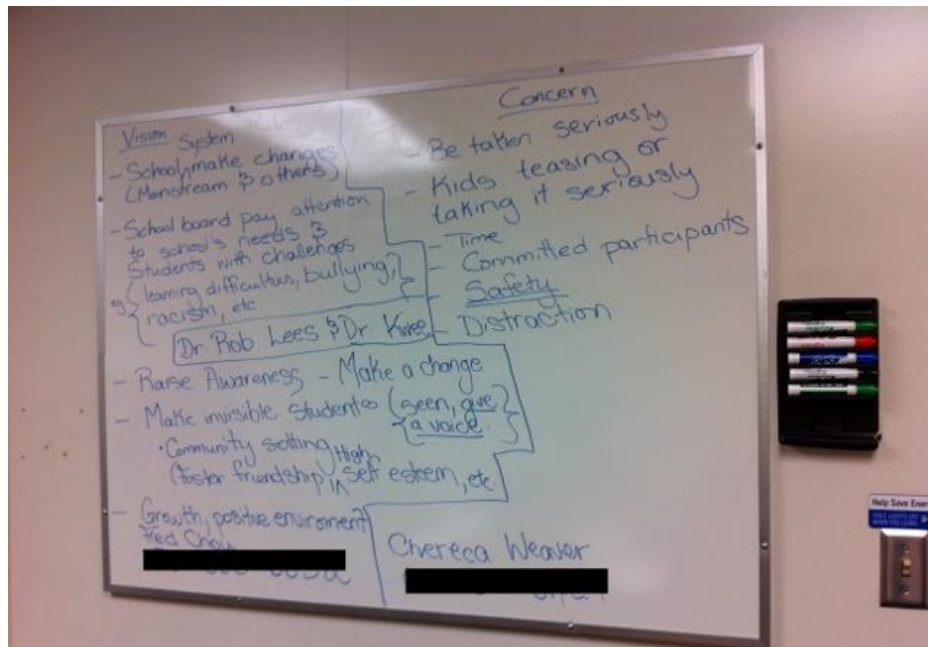
Figure 14. Goals/vision was created on October 24, 2013. These goals were: (1) School system

make changes (mainstream and others); (2) school board pay attention to school's needs and

students with challenges; (3) raise awareness – make change; (4) make invisible students seen and

give them a voice; (5) growth, positive environment.

Like other YPAR studies, this project engaged in sharing the perspectives of youth to key

stakeholders. Three significant forms of social actions resulted from this project, these were

presentations to: the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council, the Principals and Vice-

principals of the school district, and the Chilliwack Board of Education. With the presentation to

the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council, this was an opportunity for youth to share

their perspectives and recommendations to core community stakeholders, as the council is

comprised of members who represented various community organizations (i.e., the University of

the Fraser Valley, Chilliwack Community Services, Ministry Children and Family Development,

School District #33). We were then invited by the assistant superintendent to present at a

principals and vice-principals meeting. This presentation provided youth researchers with a

chance to impact and make suggestions to administrative leaders, some of which were staff at the

same mainstream schools that had impacted participants both negatively and positively. It

challenged administrators to reflect upon their practice as they asked the team for their opinions

on how to address the needs of vulnerable students. During this meeting the participants were

treated with respect at a collegial level. Lastly, we presented to the Chilliwack Board of

Education, which was an opportunity to advocate for the needs of vulnerable students and to

share their narratives. With this presentation, we provided recommendations for the school

board to consider. A picture of the group after the presentation is shown in Figure 15. In the

realm of YPAR projects, the social action that manifested from the project was significant and

the efforts that the youth engaged in produced rigorous results that can inform policy.   The chair

of the board thanked the team for our efforts and for ascertaining the perspectives of a hard to

reach population group, he later shared that the board will incorporate these viewpoints into

future decisions (W. Krahn, personal communication, June 11, 2013).

Figure 15. Picture of co-researchers after presentation to the Chilliwack Board of Education.

From left to right (Mya, Taylor, Kara, myself, Jordan, Scott, and Richard)

Youth reflections. Though co-researchers engaged continuously in the critical reflexivity, explicit reflection questions were asked towards the end of the project. They were asked the following:

1. What were key moments for you in the project?

2. What did you learn about yourself? The school system? Peers?

3. How were you impacted by your peer's stories?

4. What do you hope to do with this experience? What do hope for the future of this project?

Four co-researchers engaged in these interviews. Direct quotes are supplemented with my own notes from meetings, which includes moments of reflexivity that I noticed from the youth researchers. These quotes will also include my interpretations of it based on past actions and my relational understanding of the youth. These reflections and interpretations were sent to Richard Tatomir, who witnessed the same events, and to the co-researchers, to modify and verify. Kara, Jordan, Mya, and Taylor provided their reflections.

Kara. When asked about key moments from the project Kara shared, "hearing other people's stories, learning how to do interviews, and learning from other people's stories." She later elaborated on what she meant about hearing her peers stories. "It was kinda cool cause they can relate. And most people have similar situations that's more in-depth and serious." Kara had the opportunity to engage in the narratives of her peers; it helped expand her understanding of the social situations that impacted the participants which resonated with her own circumstances. During the research conference, she shared that it made her feel more empathetic to her peers and helped her become more patient with them (K. Firth, 2013).

"When I first joined this group, you know that I didn't talk that much and now I won't shut up [laughter]… it helped me open up a lot more." Anecdotally it was clear that as Kara became much more comfortable with the group, she began to share more and openly discussed her ideas. She shared that through the project, she was able to discuss some negative educational experiences that were never talked about before (K. Firth, 2013). In her involvement in the project, it was clear that she took part in a process of recognizing the value of her own voice. She stated, "I learned how to be more open and not care what people think."

Kara showed incredible growth, as revealed in her suggestion to have co-researchers involved as participants (Firth, personal communication, March 2, 2013). For her, she was frustrated that the initial interviews did not provide the amount of depth that she was hoping for: "My first interview I realized how some people trail off and don't really want to open up as much about themselves and when you [referring to the principal investigator] were sitting in the interviews, they didn't open up as much." Kara appreciated that she was able to help others share their stories "I'm glad that I could help some people… not necessarily make them, but help them like get more detailed with their school experience and things like that." These experiences have shaped her and provided her with a sense of hope for the future. It is reflected in what she wants to do for the future and what she hopes for the project. "I hope this project goes somewhere and actually makes change and I hope for myself that I pursue a great career like a psychologist."

Jordan. For Jordan being involved with the project provided him with an example and further clarification on what he wanted to do in the future. "I have learned from this group and like the people I've talked to and the kind of things I've talk to people about, I feel like it will help me in general for the kind of thing that I want to do, right? Cause I want to be a teacher and this subject is literally right down my alley." For Jordan it reflected his own values and beliefs

on how to be a teacher and how to engage students in an empowering manner, "It sorta like reinforced the way I already looked at the world. It helped reinforce the kind of things that I wasn't really sure about and like my viewpoints."

Jordan was committed throughout the whole project and for him it was a transformative experience that has helped his educational experience, it helped developed his character and skills (J. Florence, personal communication, June 11, 2013). Jordan reflected the concept of positive youth development, he shared, "well it's improved my skills in several ways… it's made me a better speaker, it's like made me procrastinate less. Sorta kept me on task that kind of thing and it helped bring out my leaderships skills."

To the team, Jordan was known for his metaphors, it illustrated his thoughtfulness and his awareness of the circumstances that affected his peers. He modeled leadership in his consistency and feedback that he provided to other members. To him it seemed like the project meant much more than simply a project; it was an opportunity to advocate and provide a voice to the voiceless. "I hope that it can really change things and help other people in my position voice their opinions, right? Like they don't get a chance to voice their perspectives because of the way school is… it's horrible."

Mya. The research group was one of the reasons why Mya continued to feel engaged with school, she shared "this group really gave me a reason to continue to come to school this year." Mya contributed significantly to the project, during presentations she interacted with the audience in an open and genuine manner and utilized her past experiences to help inform others on how to improve practice. In connecting with own her experience of marginalization, it manifested into advocating for the needs of others. For instance, during team meetings she brought to attention that the school needed an elevator for a student with a mobile disability; she

wanted to make key stakeholders aware of this. Her passion and enthusiasm for helping others

was contagious, it impacted those who listened to her talk and shaped the direction of the group.

Mya illustrated Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy, where the oppressed in

becoming aware of their circumstances liberate those in power. Like Kara, Mya connected with

the stories of her peers, "it was really moving to hear that other people shared similar

experiences as me." She also shared about her experience of being bullied and how through the

process of interviewing her peers, she understood why some of them bullied in the past—often it

was related to their own experiences of being bullied or personal issues (M. Raber, personal

communication, February, 28, 2013). For Mya in understanding the cycle of oppression, it

helped disempower narratives and beliefs about her past oppressors.

"I definitely matured a lot from this process. I've got a lot of work experience

throughout it. It definitely helped me deal with some of my social anxiety issues and how to

present and stuff." Like Kara and Jordan, Mya experienced growth from taking part as a co-

researcher, which shapes her future outlook. She shared "I'm going to take my training and use

it in future arrangements and also be able to better my future with the experience I have... it

really helped me with my social anxiety. Hopefully I'll be able to better that myself."

> *Taylor*. When asked about her experience of the project, she provided the following:
>
> Well it was really in-depth and it took a lot of dedication to actually have the motivation
>
> to do it seeing as I never really had the motivation to go to school and take part in
>
> something that is even like extracurricular… it taught me a lot, it taught me to be more
>
> comfortable with myself and comfortable with the people around me and with my
>
> situation in of itself.

For Taylor, it was a transformative process that helped her become more aware of her strengths and appreciate her own educational narrative. It also helped her address other areas in her life, like Mya, it connected her with school.

> I used to be really hard on myself and I would just discourage myself because it was easier than having to face the problems of going to school and dealing with people on an everyday basis. Yea so it kind of got me out of my shell and made me realize that hey school doesn't necessarily have to be my worst enemy.

The project helped her engage in something that meant more to her. It was something that was significant and challenged her to transcend beyond difficulties because what we were doing as a group was important.

> The beginning it was odd to see us all come together like that because when this group started I was still a newbie in this school, I didn't know very many people and I wasn't really comfortable in the environment I was in yet. I dunno, it was really fascinating to see all these kids come together as one and like we had our bickering and arguments and catfights and what not, but in the end we still just like worked together and form a group.

Like the others, the project made her more aware of her personal circumstances and through engaging in these experiences, it shaped what she intends to do with the project. "I know that it could help me advise my brothers through high school who are just starting it…. It helps me kind of understand a little more where I came from and understand why I did what I did… I can tell them, I can help them." In reflecting about the significance of the project she created a logo for the research team (see Appendix R). It illustrated a sense of empowerment and belongingness, united for greater cause.

I hope that the project could not only affect the Chilliwack school system, but it could

take on even further throughout Canada… if they actually took the time to talk to these

kids and to the teachers and actually get down to the problem, then I think we would have

like a more successful graduation rate and more successful people in the workforce.

Principal investigator reflections.   "Cutting-edge…" that was a comment that one of

my friends shared with me about what they thought of my thesis. I had just come back from one

of the team meetings with the co-researchers—it wasn't the most productive meeting. As I half-

listened to my friend continue to talk about what they thought of the project, all I could think of

was that meeting where I was sitting around a table with my youth researchers making 'fart

jokes', I chuckled in response while confusing my friend at the same time. That moment

illustrated on why I think we were able to successfully implement this project. It was not

because I was a brilliant researcher, nor was I charismatic. Rather, I think it had everything to do

with the relationships that we developed as a team and the incredible altruistic capacities of these

youth researchers. Sitting around and making 'fart jokes' was about the relationship that we

fostered. I chose to trust these youth, to let go of my control of the project, and respect them as

competent and capable individuals; in doing so, they did the same for me. Though it was

important to get the work and research done, everything that I did was filtered through the lens of

honoring youth, helping them find their voice, and building the relationship that I had with them.

Was it cutting-edge? It certainly does not feel like it. Maybe I do not ascribe this project as

being cutting edge because, in my mind, I am doing what I think naturally makes sense, to offer

youth opportunities to vocalize their opinions. In my mind cutting-edge is reserved for complex

algorithms and shiny machines—I think this study was a reflection of how fostering trusting

relationships can uncover the inherent gifts and capabilities of youth and the incredible feats that

can succumb through the process of empowerment.

It was not easy to conduct the project. After all it went against all that I knew about

research. When I was in undergraduate, research to me was about finding significant statistical

results, disseminating it, and publishing it in a journal, preferably one that is well-known. This

study challenged my patience as often times, I was not able to get what I wanted done during a

meeting. There were moments where I was not sure whether or not to push or pull back. It was

difficult because there were moments where these youth did things that were way beyond their

developmental level; they were doing graduate level data analysis. Yet, on other days I would

forget that they were youth and had other circumstances affecting their lives, and I would

accidently place too high of expectations on them. It was tough to be able to scaffold in those

moments. I wanted to respect where the co-researchers were at, but did not want to belittle them

by thinking that they were not capable of doing the work.

It was also difficult balancing my role as both a principal investigator and a peer. On one

hand in order to build relationships, I felt it was important to interact at their level without

hierarchy, as an insider. On the other hand, it was important to maintain authority to ensure

proper boundaries and to facilitate research. There was also the struggle of wanting to embrace

my counselling identity and to help facilitate growth and healing whenever I witnessed

oppressive narratives, yet I also knew I needed to maintain my boundary as a researcher. In

many ways it felt like walking on a tight rope, where in order to move forward I needed to

properly balance both sides—peer and mentor, servant and leader, outsider and insider, biased

and unbiased, abiding to the needs of the community and abiding to the needs of youth, advocate

and researcher.

I would like to say that I empowered these youth and that it was my brilliance that made these youth shine—of course all false. Rather, I think it was a dialectical and iterative process, where I was empowered and impacted by the youth researchers, which in turn affected them. I think I gained just as much from these peers as they did from me. They affirmed my presence and accepted me as an insider, despite the fact that I was clearly an outsider. For those two to three hours a week I was part of their group as much as they were part of mine. It felt like these arbitrary boundaries of social hierarchy no longer existed, rather we were in this together. I felt empowered because despite feeling like I did not know what I was doing half the time, these youth placed their trust in me as we journeyed together. When we approached new discoveries, we celebrated, and when we came across challenges, we lamented, but continued push one another further. These youth believed in me and validated me and, as much as I strived to find their value, they naturally found it in me. There were several times in the project where I wanted to give up or just do a "good enough" job. Yet, in those moments, I saw progress and insight from my co-researchers that continued to inspire me. One instance occurred in the beginning of project's implementation where one of the researchers, despite being sick, sent me an email at 5 am sharing that she could not make it to the meeting that day; attached to her email was work that I had asked her to do. That was just one of many incidents that left me feeling astounded— the project was just as significant to them as it was for me.

I have gained so much from this project and I hope my peers have as well. Not only have I had the privilege of knowing these individuals, I have grown as a researcher, clinician, and individual. Yet, when I reflect about what are the next steps of this project, I am torn ethically. Was it just me that benefited from this? Did the co-researchers really gain as much as I witnessed? Did the participants in the project really feel heard? After all, I am the one that that

gets a Master's degree out of this. How do I still continue to honor and acknowledge these incredible narratives that I have been gifted with? Will this project, just be a pilot project and nothing will come out of it? At the moment I do not have an answer to these questions and maybe I never will. However, I think these are appropriate questions for any critically-informed researcher to ask themselves. I can say though, that I have been transformed through engaging in this process, through interactions with co-researchers, and through hearing the various narratives of participants; this experience has shaped me and will continue to inform how I do practice and research with other vulnerable groups in the future.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

The research study contributes to the literature in counseling psychology and has implications for the involvement of youth in research, the participatory employment of ECIT, and the elicited results can inform practice for school counsellors.

Involvement of youth in participatory research. Inherent within the Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) definition of counselling psychology are social justice implications—"counselling psychologists bring a collaborative, developmental, multicultural, and wellness perspective to their research and practice…In addition to remediation, counselling psychologists engage in prevention, psychoeducation and advocacy (CPA, 2009, p. 1). Kidd and Kral (2005) further elaborates that because counselling psychology has an explicit social justice orientation, practitioners are "called to examine the larger sociocultural contexts that underlie individual problems and to use interventions that facilitate social action and empowerment with participator strategies" (p. 192). The research study, in and of itself, can be seen as an intervention that reflects Kidd and Kral's proposition.

Youth co-researchers were empowered to collectively take part in a project that transcended their own personal desires in order to advocate for their peers. For example, one of the co-researchers shared how they set aside personal conflicts with other researchers because they knew that the project was more important (Stevens, 2013). This form of engagement also helped these youth connect with school; two of co-researchers elaborated that the reason why they continued to attend school was so that they could complete this project (Raber, 2013; Stevens, personal communication, May 27, 2013). With social action, the project enabled vulnerable youth to voice their experience of the education system and provide suggestions for improvements. It challenged negative perceptions of alternate education youth as the team advocated for their needs by presenting recommendations to key stakeholders.

The study was an example of a successful implementation of YPAR within an alternate education program. Despite the growing popularity of YPAR, in Canada there were only a few accounts of PAR being employed within an educational institute (see Loiselle, 2007). Not only can YPAR be applied within schools in Canada, but it can produce relevant and rigorous results, facilitate positive youth development, and impact the larger community.

The implementation of YPAR reflects the literature on advocacy competencies in counselling (see Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). The American Counseling Association advocacy competencies promote the notion that some of the psychosocial issues that youth face may be due to systemic problems (Lewis et al., 2002). In this case, doing research with explicit youth involvement, not only yields rich data, but can also facilitate psychosocial change in the micro- (participant empowerment and advocacy) to the macro-level (social advocacy, systemic advocacy, and community collaboration) according to Lewis et al.'s model. Therefore, in many ways YPAR can be used as a social justice informed counselling

intervention, especially for vulnerable groups (Smith, Davis, & Bhowmik, 2010; Smith & Romero, 2010). It addresses the inherent systemic issues which may be perpetuating the psychosocial concerns that vulnerable youth face. Moreover, many of the factors that one would want from counselling is found in PAR, such as: healing and growthful experiences, providing pathways to success, raising consciousness and awareness of circumstances affecting their lives, empowerment and transformative change to the self and to the system (Ho, 2002; Smith et al., 2010).

     Benefits to youth co-researchers and school system. The engagement of youth in research was not only empowering, but fostered positive youth development. Like Mitra's (2004) and Flicker's (2008) studies, engaging youth in research resulted in youth gaining skills through presentations, interviews, time management, team work, and advocacy. Co-researchers also learned how to reframe messages according to the different audiences and connected with community members which may lead to future opportunities. They also engaged in a democratic process of voicing their perspectives and were mentored by Richard, Chereca, and I.

     The research project aligns with the literature that supports the idea that youth are able to contribute in shaping school policies (De La Ossa, 2005; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). In this case, youth provided recommendations to key stakeholders in the educational community in Chilliwack. It resonates with Smyth's (2006) argument that in order to promote change in educational policy and to address the concern of dropping out, it is critical to promote and encourage students to authentically share their voice in the matter.

     Benefits to research. The involvement of youth co-researchers enhanced the study as it became more accessible to vulnerable youth, enhanced rigour, and resulted in a deeper and more contextualized understanding of the incidents elicited. Similar to Flicker's (2008) study, having

youth as co-researchers resulted in better questions, recruitment, data collection, analysis, dissemination, and action. The youth researchers made the study more accessible to their peers by improving the informed consent and creating recruitment material to be more youth friendly. With recruitment, not a single potential participant contacted me to take part in the study despite being offered the option to; instead, all the participants took part in the study because the co-researchers invited them. Another example of making recruitment more youth friendly was the youth researcher's utilization of text message and Facebook, an idea that I had not originally planned; little did I know that these communicative mediums were the main forms of communication amongst participants. The co-researchers also noted that their peers opened up more when they started to interview the participants alone (Richard or I sat in each of the co-researcher's first interviews). It is likely that if co-researchers were not involved, there may be less depth in the results, let alone any participants taking part in the study. Lastly, the formation of categories, themes, and recommendations were informed by the idiographic experiences of the co-researchers. Therefore it provided a more representative illustration of what actually happens to vulnerable students in Chilliwack making it was more relevant. Essentially, the co-researchers were expert witnesses asking their peers what they witnessed in the studied phenomenon; they are therefore able to understand the nuances that only insiders can appreciate. There is much more depth in their understanding than if I, being an outsider, were to conduct the interviews.

There are implications from this study on how to involve youth, specifically vulnerable youth, in research. This is valuable, since there is a wealth of information that these youth can provide, which can enhance educational policies. Given the lack of social power that youth have, it is possible that this wealth of information may be neglected if conscious efforts are not made to include these voices. The study also challenges the rigid application of research

principles. It is not to say that these principles are not important, after all there is a reason for

their development. However, it is possible that rigidly applying research principles may

indirectly make it inaccessible for vulnerable youth to take part in research (Kwee et al., 2013).

For instance, initially I did not consider utilizing Facebook or text messaging as a way to

communicate with participants because I was fearful that it may breach confidentiality; yet

without these mediums, most of the participants might forget about interview dates and/or it

would be difficult to reconnect with participants to do second interviews given some of the

barriers that these youth faced. It was still important to ensure that utilizing these

communicative devices was still ethical, therefore youth co-researchers were reminded about the

importance of confidentiality. The study indicates that YPAR can be implemented as a way to

bridge the gap between institutional research and youth.

     Enhanced critical incident technique. The Critical Incident Technique has been a

widely used qualitative research method within the field of counselling psychology (Butterfield

et al., 2005). Despite its longevity, amongst published literature it has only been employed once

within a participatory framework (see Belkora et al., 2011) and has not been applied within an

YPAR model. The research study contributes to Belkora et al.'s (2011) postulation that due to

the personable and flexible nature of CIT, it is able to accommodate and involve participant

researchers to engage meaningfully in the research process while meeting the aims of the

community/group.

     The integration of ECIT with participatory research provides researchers with a vehicle to

engage in rigorous research, while ensuring that the principles of collaboration and

empowerment are met. From an ECIT standpoint, this research study can be considered

trustworthy, as it meets the nine credibility checks proposed by Butterfield et al. (2005, 2009).

This is important to note, because one of the arguments against youth participatory research is that it is often seen as being deficient in areas of validity and reliability—there is less research competence and consistency when working with youth researchers (Smith, Monaghan, & Broad, 2002). This study shows that ECIT, with its systematic steps and credibility checks, can help produce meaningful results that can be helpful for the studied community. Furthermore, with the inclusion of ECIT's wish-list component, it adds an empowering element to the study. Not only are participants noting factors that impacted them, but they are able to contribute to the change that they want to see in the school system; thus congruent with the empowerment principle of PAR. Lastly, since the co-researchers in ECIT are informants themselves who have also witnessed the studied phenomenon, PAR adds depth to ECIT's qualitative approach. Therefore, ECIT can be seen as an option for researchers to engage in qualitative and evaluative youth participatory research. It is possible to have rigorous, meaningful, and empowering research that facilitates growth, while producing practical results and recommendations for the community.

School counsellors. The results of the study has direct implications for counsellors within school settings. As suggested by the ECIT analysis and the recommendations, vulnerable students desire caring and empathetic relationships with staff. Counsellors are in positions where they are able to provide this relationship for these students, which can be a protective factor against disengagement. Furthermore, as counsellors are trained in developing rapport and therapeutic relationships, they are in positions where they can inform and train other administrators and teachers through workshops and consultations.

It is also clear that there needs to be improvements in psychosocial supports—both increasing the number of available supports and improving current practice. Several participants noted that they felt their confidentiality was breached by their school counsellor in unwarranted

situations; warranted situations being, harm to self, harm to others, and being subpoenaed. These

participants shared how they felt that they could not trust the counsellors or staff members

because of these incidents severed their trust. As these youth are in vulnerable positions, trust is

of upmost importance as they may not otherwise have adults in their lives that they can trust. It

is vital for counsellors to honor the privilege of engaging with these students' narratives by

properly maintaining their confidence. Despite working in a school setting and having to be

accountable to the system that they work in, counsellors must uphold their commitment to the

code of ethics that they are bound to.

Lastly, as suggested by both Ho (2002) and Smith, Davis, and Bhowmick (2010) the

implementation of research groups can be a way to engage vulnerable students. Not only can

there be meaningful research that results from it, but it can also be an empowering process that

facilitates positive youth development and enhances self-efficacy and agency. As these youth

typically face circumstances that are constraining, conventional therapeutic approaches may not

be as effective. Hence, YPAR offers a different approach for connecting with youth in a

validating and empowering manner within schools; it is an approach that is both educational and

therapeutic.

Implications for School District and the Six Year Completion Rate

The study was initiated to explore factors that contributed to the six year completion rate

amongst students who have disengaged from mainstream education. It was suggested that

alternate education may be contributing to the lower completion rates in Chilliwack. This

research engaged in the stories that underlie these statistics. It proposes that the completion rate,

as a measure of success, is insufficient in validating what is actually happening with these youth.

One could easily oversimplify and misinterpret the statistics; they may suggest that alternate

education was unhelpful as it seems that its youth are not completing high school within the six

year timeframe. However, majority of the participants involved in the study have actually

dropped out and returned to school through the alternate program.

From this standpoint there are two implications. First, though the sample size is not large

enough to generalize these findings, our participant demographics suggest that possibly the

majority of students in alternate education have dropped out in the past; nonetheless, because of

the alternate program, they were able to reconnect with school. Now this can be seen as a

marker of success, as connection with school serves as a protective factor for vulnerable youth

(Saewyc et al., 2006). In addition, the six year completion rate does not take into account the

number of years that students were away from school if they dropped out in the past. Meaning,

if a student dropped out for two years and returned to school through alternate education, than

those two years are counted against them—it may appear that they are not completing high

school when they are in the alternate system, thus making it seem like the alternate system was

unsuccessful in helping the student complete school in six years. Second, most of these

participants shared significantly more helping incidents in alternate than in mainstream. This

implies that these participants experienced alternate education in Chilliwack to be helpful. From

these two points, one can argue that the six year completion rate statistic is an insufficient

measure of success for vulnerable students, it does not take into account the contextualized

circumstances that these youth face. Instead, the fact that students returned to school through

alternate education and have found it to be helpful maybe a better representation of success.

With teaching practices the YPAR project can be seen as a microcosm of engaging

vulnerable students differently—in a manner that focuses on empowerment, critical reflection,

relationships, and positive youth development. Jennings et al. (2006) model of youth

empowerment was used for the study, this model includes: "(1) [providing] a welcoming and safe environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical process to affect change, and (6) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment" (p. 32).   It demonstrates that engaging vulnerable students in this manner can be highly beneficial.

Lastly, the research incorporated Aboriginal voice. There were two participants who self-identified as Aboriginal, two as Metis, while one of the co-researchers as Aboriginal. The information shared by these participants contributed to the final results; there were no notable differences between their educational experiences from the overall results.

Limitations

Though there is merit in critical qualitative research, one could argue that there are limitations in its generalizability—thus a lack of value in the recommendations. Though the study does not produce general theoretical knowledge, it does not mean that it did not produce rigorous context-dependent results which is just as, if not more, important than general theoretical knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2004). The merit of the study is based on relevance, not generalizability. It reflects the phenomenon of what is actually happening with a marginalized group of students, which may otherwise be overlooked because these students do not have social power or may not even take part in research. This study's goal was to formulate knowledge that is close to the real-life situations. These participants' experiences are assumed to be valid as it reflects what they report as actual happenings. Meanwhile, ECIT takes viewpoints of participants and reflects the common themes found amongst their differing perspectives. Further, with PAR, it takes into account the context and tailors the study so that knowledge

elicited from the study can be applied and facilitate action. Limitations should therefore reflect whether or not the study was relevant to its original cause of: empowering youth and promoting social action within the context of School District #33.

Despite making the study available to everyone at the Education Centre, there was a biased selection process, as participants were friends with different members within the research team. It is possible that, while still being part of a disenfranchised group, those who took part in the study had social hierarchy within the alternate system. As a result, the perspectives of other participants who may be even more marginalized in the alternate system were not accounted for. Though the study was exhaustive, in that no new categories were formed, it is probable that by recruiting other members who have different vantage points, it may have resulted in more categories and/or a modification of the of the present categories—likely most of the categories should remain the same because exhaustiveness was reached by the 13th participant out of 18 (see Appendix L).

Most of the participants were attending alternate education, only one of them had dropped out from school at the time of the interview. Given that they were part of this system, it may have provided a biased outlook that was favorable to alternate education. In addition, the negative experiences shared about mainstream education can be seen as a form of revolt or rejection because participants did not fit into that system. This renunciation of the mainstream is positive in the sense that marginalized youth were empowered to voice their opinions about systems that may have been oppressive; however, it may also result in the provision of an unfair and negative skew of mainstream education.

The co-researchers had difficulty managing their biases during their interviews. Though this has been addressed throughout the training and after each interview, it was clear that co-

researchers sometimes slipped into pushing a position and/or provided too much self-disclosure. For instance, during the interviews, the youth researchers wanted to improve their school by advocating for an elevator in order to make it wheelchair accessible because there was a student with a mobile disability. Despite this being a success from an YPAR perspective (it showed critical reflexivity and social action by advocating for another disenfranchised youth), some youth researchers ended up pushing this view onto other participants. In doing so it did not respect their agency and could have been an oppressive act. Though these incidents were addressed and discussed as a team, we acknowledge that this was a bias in the study. However, given the critical lens that we adopt, we also willingly embrace the social justice element of this bias, but not the part where it may have breached the agency of participants. That said, a bias towards verification of preconceived notions is inherent within all research, not just qualitative approaches (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

YPAR limitations. With the YPAR process there were limitations in the selection of co-researchers. The opportunity to take part in the project was not presented to everyone at the Education Centre, instead co-researchers were introduced to the study by invitations from teachers. Though the invitation criteria was never made known to me, it is possible that the selection process may have been biased towards more affluent individuals. Although it is important to have co-researchers who can sustain involvement, in not making it an open process for recruitment, it may have further perpetuated oppressive tendencies. However, due to pragmatic considerations and working with the school's gatekeepers, I felt it was still an appropriate decision to respect their recruitment process. Pragmatically, it would have taken longer to start the project if it was an open process; the project would not have been completed within a school year. In addition, I felt it was important to work in partnership with the

Education Centre as the study was a pilot project. Nonetheless, youth agency was still respected,

interested candidates were provided with an information session and were given a choice to take

part in the project or not.

   Sustaining involvement of co-researchers was difficult as it was quite rigorous towards

the last month of the project. After data analysis was complete, three co-researchers became less

engaged. One left because of personal conflicts and was already disengaging from school,

another felt that they had to focus on other classes in order to graduate and was less involved,

and the third had personal circumstances that affected them. It is also possible that the amount of

work was overwhelming for some of the youth researchers. While there were still three co-

researchers involved, it was evident that they were less motivated towards the end of the project.

The lessened motivation may be due to the amount of work they had to withstand, that it was

year-end and students in general were less engaged with school, and/or the disconnection of their

other peers had an impact on the rest of the team. That said, these three co-researchers sustained

involvement until the end of the project, while the rest of the co-researchers were engaged for a

majority of the study.

   Lastly, given the scope of the project and that essentially two ECIT studies were

conducted and analyzed, the project was a fairly large undertaking. Coupled with that, the

project needed to be completed within the school year to in order to ensure youth received

credits, that they were available to contribute through each stage of the study, and to sustain their

involvement. A longer study may have resulted in more disengagement (see Espinosa, 2011).

Additionally, there were deadlines that had to be met for presentations which resulted in added

pressure for youth and myself. With these cumulating circumstances, there was insufficient time

to allow the natural process of PAR to unfold and to engage youth in further critical reflection.

Lessons for Future Implementation

There were several anecdotal lessons learned from the implementation of YPAR with youth in alternate education. Some of these lessons were ideas that I wanted to employ, but due to the time and resource limitations, I was not able to do so. This information may be helpful for researchers who are looking to conduct YPAR in the future.

1. *Scaffolding—ensure that level of involvement is not overwhelming*. The research process was rigorous and it involved youth co-researchers in nearly all the decisions that were made about the project. Further, for the last two months of the project the project moved from meeting two hours to three hours each week. The level of work was demanding on youth researchers and at times it may have been overwhelming. As noted in Chen et al. (2007) higher level of participation does not necessarily mean that project is better, it is gauging authentic participation without overwhelming the youth.

2. *Have sufficient time and resources*. The project was limited to one school year which resulted in additional pressure and less time for youth to process and reflect about their experiences. Ideally projects like this should have had the training phase during the summer months or right at the beginning of the school year (this YPAR project started in late-October). It may also be more helpful to have two to three facilitators who have shared responsibilities and are all equally involved.

3. *Partnerships with the school*. Due to time limitations it was difficult to communicate with teachers on the progress of the project and their students. Future applications should involve teachers and administration more. It may also be helpful to have a teacher as the other co-facilitator so that they have an opportunity to learn about the participatory inquiry process which can help with the continuity of the project in the respective school.

4. *When implementing ECIT within YPAR, change the ordering of questions.* As shown in the results, there were significantly less wish-list items. A possible reason for this is because wish-lists were asked at the end of the semi-structured interviews. Often participants covered many of the topics already and may have found it redundant, thus less wish-list items. Another possibility is that towards the end of the interview youth participants might not have been as attentive. To prevent this, the ordering of questions can be shifted around randomly on an interview to interview basis.

5. *Moderate the level of work.* It seemed that every week had loads of work for the youth researchers to take part in. It would be helpful to moderate the work load by having some weeks focus on fun and interactive team building exercises—this may help with sustaining co-researchers.

6. *Utilize different mediums to facilitate critical reflexivity.* Youth were provided with journals as a way to reflect about their experiences. Though none of the youth ended up journaling, they engaged in critical reflexivity through conversations. It may be helpful to utilize different mediums to foster critical reflexivity, such as video journaling (vlogging) and/or creating a Facebook group for members to post their thoughts.

7. *Provide leadership opportunities within group meetings.* I ended up planning for most of the research team meetings. It would have been more helpful if I left some of these tasks for youth researchers to take on and plan—it nurtures their development and decreases my workload.

8. *Emphasize confidentiality.* Some of the co-researchers who were familiar with the participant's educational history shared that some of the participants did not share their complete stories. It is possible that confidentiality was not emphasized enough to create

the level of safety that was necessary for participants to share fully about their

experiences. It may also be indicative of the level of marginalization that some of the

participants experienced in their educational journey.

9. *Make use of social media*. Most youth participants and co-researchers connected through

social media. Communication was at times difficult with co-researchers as some did not

have cell phones and some only used text messaging. Future implementations should

look into utilizing social media such as creating a Facebook group to make

announcements to the research team and/or creating a website to update respective

stakeholders.

Future Studies and Actions

The project shows that youth in alternate education are able to collaborate and participate

authentically in research, while producing rigorous results. Nevertheless, the study was initiated

by the community, the research problem was not defined by the youth researchers. Future

studies can look into implementing a full YPAR study according to Hart's (1991) model, where

youth initiate the project and determine the research question, and through partnership with

researchers, inquire about the questions that are relevant and important to their own well-being.

Even if a full YPAR study is not implemented in the near future, as CIT is an exploratory

method (Woolsey, 1986), there were many questions that came out of this study that will require

further analysis incorporated with youth perspectives. For example, bullying was a significant

category and it will be vital to include youth voice to address this matter—youth-led solutions to

bullying and cyberbullying. Another potential youth-led study is to have students inform

teachers and administrators on how to build rapport and positive relationships with them. The

value of these studies is that it engages youth in collaborative learning and inquiry, and it can promote inclusive practice in the school system.

Lastly, as the six-year completion rate is still a key concern for the community of Chilliwack, it may be appropriate to do a large scale PAR project much like the VOYCE (2008) study. It can involve youth in multiple schools and community organizations to collectively inquire about the matter of dropping out and disengagement. Due to the success of our project in gathering data from vulnerable youth, doing a large scale study may result in attaining input from students who may not otherwise take part in research. It ensures that those who typically do not have a voice are provided with an opportunity to vocalize their perspectives. These viewpoints can inform decisions made by the school system. Doing a large scale study can involve youth representation in collectively addressing a community concern.

During the meeting on May 30, 2013 the research team gathered together to discuss future actions. This meeting resulted in the decision to create a poster to disseminate the data to their peers (see Appendix P). The team also felt it was important for youth research to continue in the Education Centre and to be incorporated into other schools in Chilliwack. From this discussion came the idea of building partnerships with other universities like, Trinity Western University and the University of the Fraser Valley, so that researchers and graduate students can help facilitate youth-led research projects. Another idea to bridge this collaboration is to develop a youth-led research committee or advisory board to coordinate youth research in Chilliwack—similar to the CSRPC.

Conclusion

We urge that the recommendations presented in this thesis are taken into account by the school district. These are the voices of individuals who have been marginalized in school

systems. Their views account for experiences that are often overlooked, yet equally as important as other stakeholders. The research discussed in-depth about our journey as a research team and how we ascertained these results in a manner that was respectful to youth; it was meant to be transparent, to show rigour and process and how we honored youth voice. The recommendations that we have for the school district are: (1) place emphasis on fostering caring staff-student relationships; (2) improve response to bullying; (3) facilitate restorative discipline practices; (4) improve psychosocial and academic supports; (5) focus on prevention by gauging and promoting positive engagement; (6) rebrand alternate education as a place for "choosers not losers"; and (7) incorporate youth voice in educational decisions. Nothing about us without us is the mantra of the study, it is therefore imperative that decisions by the school district incorporate the views of students who have disengaged from mainstream education.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

TRINITY WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Research Ethics Board (REB)
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

Principal Investigator: Fred Chou

Department: Counselling Psychology

Supervisor (if student research): Dr. Janelle Kwee, TWU; Dr. Robert Lees, Chilliwack
Ministry of Children and Family Development

Co-Investigators:

Title: "Nothing About Us Without Us": Youth-Led Solutions to Increase High
School Completion Rates

REB File No.: 12G15

Start Date: December 7, 2012

End Date: November 1, 2013

Approval Date: December 7, 2012

Certification

This is to certify that Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board (REB) has

examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research

meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the "Tri-Council Policy Statement:

Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans".

Sue Funk, B.A.   for   Phillip Wiebe, Ph.D.
REB Coordinator   REB Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for one year and may be renewed.
The REB must be notified of _all_ changes in protocol, procedures or consent forms.
A final project form must be submitted upon completion.

7600 Glover Rd., Langley, BC, Canada, V2Y 1Y1 Telephone (604) 888-7511, Fax (604) 513-2047

Appendix B: Letter of Approval from School District #33

Chilliwack
School District   Partners in Learning!

September 14, 2012

Dr. Rob Lees
Associate Clinical Team Leaders
Child and Youth Mental Health Service
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Chilliwack BC

Dear Dr. Lees

This is to approve your request to continue the planning of the Youth Participatory Action Research Project. I understand that this project is a partnership initiative between the Chilliwack School District, the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council and Trinity Western University. The principal researcher with be Fred Chou.

I understand that Fred will be implementing a Participatory Action Research design which involves training youth in research skills and then working alongside them in implementing the research plan. Fred will be working the Education Centre and Vice Principal Chuck Lawson and his staff to identify students appropriate to the project. When interviews are conducted the researcher will be accompanied by co-researchers. Appropriate psychological supports are in place for any issues that might arise as a result of the research. The focus of the research is to discover what factors alternative education students, past and present, believe are critical to their graduation.

Our school representative to the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council, Principal David Manuel has had several meetings about this project and contributed to its formation. Our outgoing Superintendent, Michael Audet also attended meetings about the project and was supportive.

We look forward to working with you. Final approval will be granted once we have received the approval from the University's ethics committee and implementation details.

Yours truly,

Rohan Arulpragasam
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

cc   Chuck Lawson, Vice Principal
        Rick Jones, Principal
        Evelyn Novak, Superintendent
        Janet Hall, Director of Instruction

Appendix C: Letter to Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent,

I am a second year student in the Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University. I am conducting a research study at the Education Centre in conjunction with the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council, Chilliwack Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the Chilliwack School District. This study has been approved by the vice-superintendent, Rohan Arulpragasam, and by the Education Centre's vice principle, Chuck Lawson. The purpose of the study is to examine ways to improve the education system for youth in alternative education or at risk of transitioning to alternative education.

The premise of this study is to explore ways to improve the six-year completion rates for the Chilliwack school district, with a particular focus on youth in alternative education. To do so, a Participatory Action Research study is being conducted where trained youth co-researchers from the Education Centre will be working with me to construct and implement this research study. With youth co-researchers, it ensures that the perspectives of youth in alternative education are being properly represented.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that all youth at the Education Centre are invited to take part in this study as participants. Whether or not they want to take part is dependent on their decision to do so. There will be no detriment in not taking part in the study and they will not be pressured to be involved; it is entirely voluntary.

The research will consist of a 30 minute to an hour interview at school in which your child will have the opportunity to share about their experiences about what helped and what hindered their educational journey. These interviews will be conducted by the youth co-researcher with assistance from me. The interview will include a time for debriefing, which will allow your child to ask questions or gain additional support.

The risk for taking part in the study is that some of the questions may be uncomfortable to discuss, such as exploring events that hindered ones education. In these circumstances the co-researchers are trained to properly conduct interviews in an empathetic manner and additional supports will be provided.

This study may benefit your child in that they will have an opportunity to voice their opinion in a validating manner. They will also be taking part in the democratic process of shaping decisions that impact their well-being. The results of the study will be presented to the Chilliwack school district with recommendations formulated based on your child's perspectives.

Confidentiality is highly valued and your child's identity will not be revealed at any time in the study. Transcripts will be anonymized and audio recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed when the study is completed. As a small token of appreciation, participating students will receive a $15 gift card to McDonalds.

All youth are invited to take part in this study, however if you do not want your child to take part in the study or have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (778) 883-6632 or Fred.Chou@mytwu.ca. We will wait two weeks from the date of this letter before we start recruiting participants. This time period will allow you to ask any questions and to assess whether or not you want your child to participate in this study.

Thank you, I look forward to hearing from you!

Fred Chou

Graduate Student, M. A. Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University

Appendix D: Poster Recruitment
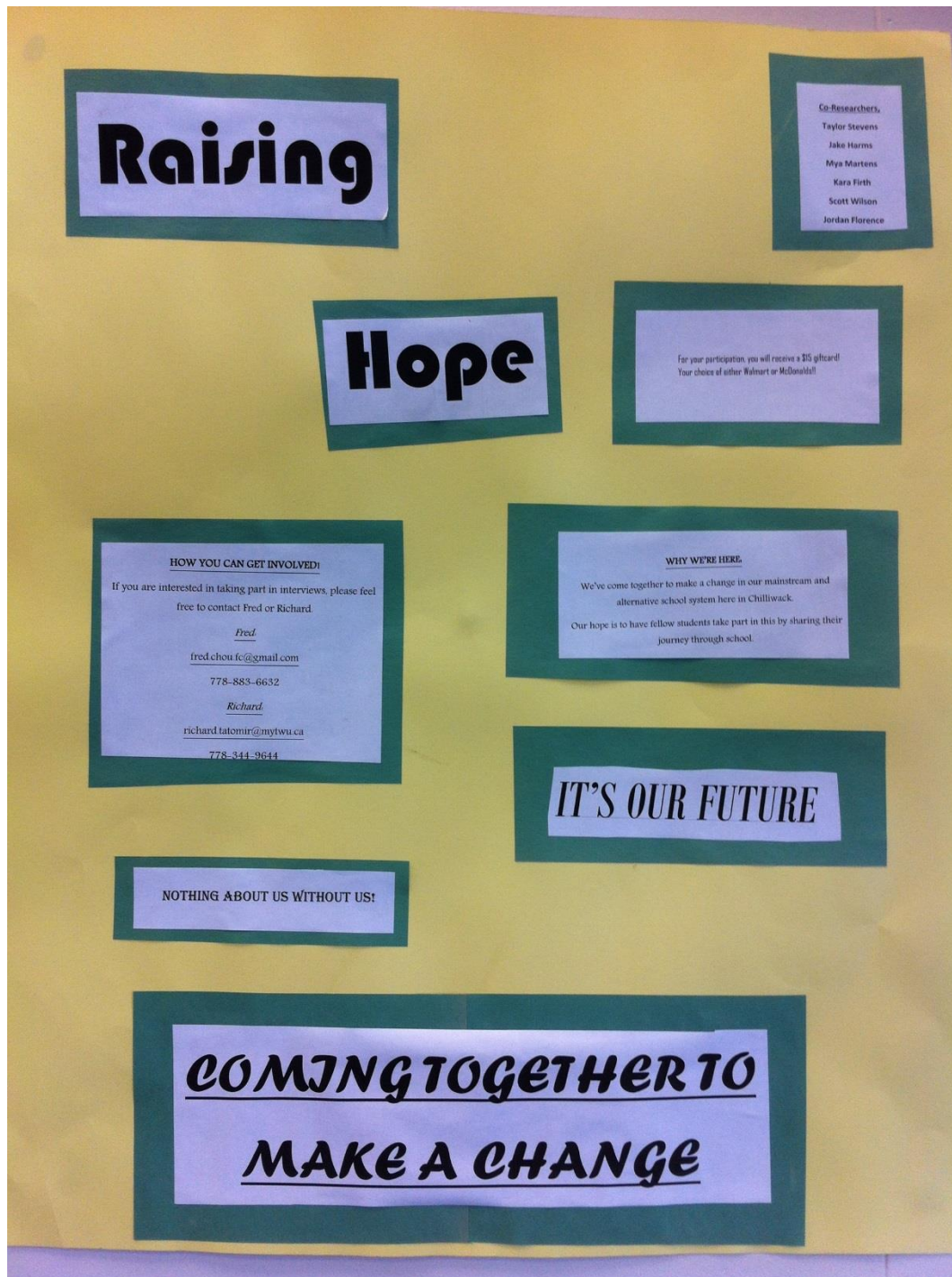
Appendix E: PowerPoint Recruitment Presentation Outline
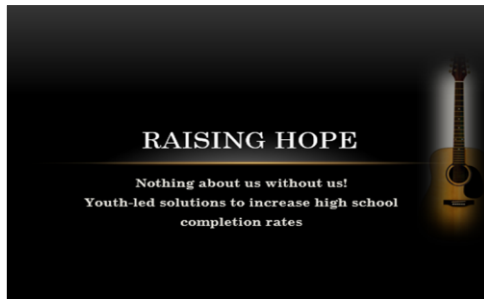
1 -Title Page
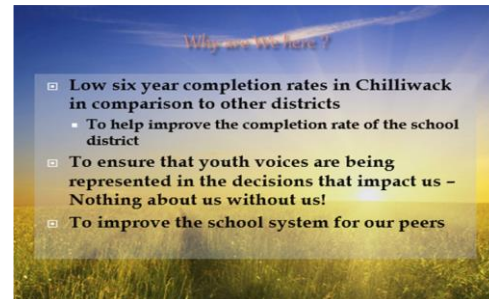
2 - Why are we here?

3 - Why would you want to help?
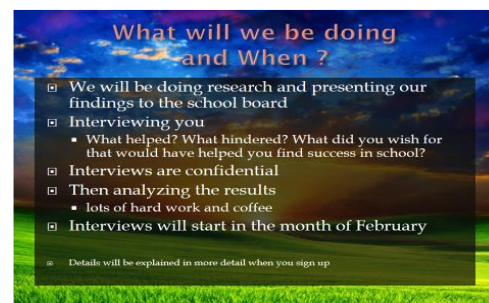
4 - What will we be doing and when?

5 - Will they take us seriously?

6 - How do I take part in the study?

7 - Questions

1 – Title Page
- Raising Hope
- Nothing about us without us! Youth-led solutions to increase high school completion rates

2 – Why are we here?
- Low six year completion rates in Chilliwack in comparison to other districts
- To help improve the completion rate of the school district
- To ensure that youth voices are being represented in the decisions that impact us – Nothing about us without us!
- To improve the school system for our peers

3 – Why would you want to help?
- So you can get your input, get your voice heard and put into action
- We want your perspective
- We need you to help - without your voice decisions will be made by adults who may not understand our situations
- For participation you will be compensated with a $15 gift card

4 – What will we be doing and when?
- We will be doing research and presenting our findings to the school board
- Interviewing you
- What helped? What hindered? What did you wish for that would have helped you find success in school?
- Interviews are confidential
- Then analyzing the results
- lots of hard work and coffee
- Interviews will start in the month of February
- Details will be explained in more detail when you sign up

5 – Will they take us seriously?
- YES!!
- We will be presenting to the school board in June
- Media is on board
- Met with assistant-superintendent, Rohan
- Supported by the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council

6 – How do I take part in the study?
- Pamphlets for more information
- Contact anyone of the following and we can setup a meeting.
- Recruiting ends in March
- Fred Chou
- Jake
- Jordan
- Kara
- Mya
- Richard
- Scott
- Taylor

7 - Questions

Appendix F: Training Workshop Outlines, Contracts, and References

Workshop #1 – Introduction and team building (Group formation) / Kicking things off
Goals: To create foundations for team to develop and trust each other. To introduce purpose of research group. To establish a purpose for the project.
Training goal: To understand the purpose of the project.
Praxis goal: Emphasizing that youth are the experts of their experiences and reflect on moments youth were not taken seriously.
WHY WE'RE HERE: MY STORY; OUR STORY; WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER … WHAT YOU CAN DO

2 hr	Activity	Checklist
15m	**Welcome:** ▪ Introduce each other by sharing an adjective that starts with the first letter of their name. Take time to get to know each other.	☐ Arrange chairs in a circle ☐ Visioning ☐ Sign consent forms ☐ Sign contracts (Appendix 1) ☐ Bring handbooks!
15m	**Ice-breaker:** • *Skittles Game (see p. 34)* Provide handbooks	
30m	**Explain purpose of the project (My story, your story, our story):** **Map out brainstorm in quadrants** ▪ Why the youth are in this project and that they have been selected because they have shown interest in wanting to make a change. Explain that the purpose of the project is to find out how to improve completion rates. Explain that the community of Chilliwack is looking for ways to improve school systems, but they want to make sure that youth perspectives are considered. ○ Elaborate on purpose of using youth as co-researchers- They are the experts. ▪ Ask question about how youth are feeling about this proposal. **When were times you felt like you were not included in the decisions someone else made?** • Elaborate my role is to ensure that they are being heard and taken seriously	
15m	**Why did you want to get involved? (What we can do together... what you can do)** ▪ What made you want to get involved in this project? ▪ What are your hopes and fears? ▪ What do you expect to get out of the project?	Materials
		☐ Consent forms ☐ Youth researcher contract (p. 30) ☐ Facilitator contract (p. 31) ☐ Skittles game (p. 34) ☐ Why research? (p. 36) ☐ Visioning (p. 37) ☐ Training timeline (p.38) ☐ Journals ☐ Markers ☐ Flipchart/Board ☐ Snacks
30m	**Visioning activity** • In response to finding out that they have been chosen to be part of the project have team brainstorm what they hope for • What do you want to change? (Curriculum, School)	
15m	**Logistics:** • *Sign consent forms* • *Contract signing – youth research and facilitator's* • Meeting time • Payment • Journals – explain purpose of it, it is meant for them to reflect on experiences and can be handed in. Or it can be reflection of anything that they have experienced	

Question(s) for journal:
1. What are three guiding principles that you want everyone to follow by?
Adapted from Y.E.L.L. (2007) Session #1 and Sydlo et al. (2004) Unit 1.

Workshop #2 – Group Identity (Group formation)	
Goal: Defining ground rules and introducing research and Participatory Action Research	
Training goal: Forming a group identity and cohesion and understanding importance of research. Praxis goal: Help youth recognize that they are not alone in their experiences, these experiences of marginalization are shared.	
YOUTH-BASED THEME: WHO ARE WE? SLOGAN … WE HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY; some students, here are being "put down"	

2hr	Activity	Checklist
5 m	<u>Check-in</u> • Use a ball to check-in with everyone. Check-in ball. • Question: How did people feel about last week?	☐ Create group identity ☐ Learn about importance of research ☐ Have youth sign rules form
5 m	<u>Ice breaker</u>: *As the wild wind blows*	
40 m	<u>Establishing Team Norms</u> **A. Team name activity** ▪ Write everyone's name at top of flip chart ▪ Invite everyone to come up one-by-one to draw symbol that expresses something about them and then sign their name. Explain what it means. ▪ When finished draw a circle around the symbols and names. ▪ Make comment about the team ▪ Invite group to come up with team name **B. Creating a team slogan** (Brainstorming) **C. Group rules/guiding principles** (Brainstorming): Bring out rules from last week homework and define the rules together. Write it down on a board for everyone to see. Write down and sign together	
40 m	<u>Importance of Research</u>: Why do we do research? WHO CARES? *Town council activity* • *Purpose*: To raise consciousness and to • What have you learned from this activity? • What do you think research has to play into this? (Everyone has an opinion but we need research to support it). Research (brainstorm): • How do you find out something? • Provide *research cycle* and explain Explain PAR: creating effective tools to address an issue • Show scene from Hotel Rawanda (2004): (scene: "I think if people see this footage, they'll say 'Oh, my God, that's horrible.' And then they'll go on eating their dinners") → emphasize importance of action Checkout: ▪ What have you learned? ▪ What did you wish you could have learned?	**Materials** ☐ Research cycle ☐ Photocopy of last sessions visioning ☐ Guiding principles (p. 39-40) ☐ Research cycle (p. 41-42) ☐ Town council activity (p. 43-45) ☐ Wild wind blows (p. 46) ☐ Hotel Rawanda (2004) scene ☐ Labtop (optional) ☐ Snacks
5 m		

Reflection Question(s) for journal: How has your school journey shaped your life? What would you change?
Adapted from: Y.E.L.L. (2007) Session #1/2

Workshop #3: Research 101 (Research competency)		
Goal: To gain a general understanding of research		
Training goal: To understand the different types of research for different types of questions. Introduce Critical Incident Technique. Praxis goal: help youth understand that through involvement in research, change can happen.		
WAYS TO GET NOTICED, TO HELP PEOPLE LISTEN TO WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY [THEIR SLOGAN HERE]		
2hr	Activity	Checklist

30 m	Check-in:
	 • Check-in ball.
	 • Play song: Changes (Tupac)
	  ○ What is this song about?
	  ○ Why did Tupac write this song?
	  ○ How does that relate to PAR? → Purpose of PAR is to invoke changes but while addressing the underlying social problem.
	  ○ Can you relate to this? → **invitation to share music for next 5 workshops**
	
	 Teaching methodologies:
	 ▪ Link with last session about having to find out information
	 ▪ Revisit question: "How do we make school better for youth?" Talk about the different ways to address the problem? Write up all the ideas.
	 ▪ Ask them how would find out what other people thought?
		☐ Prepare room for three difference work stations (interviews, surveys, focus groups)
		 ☐ Ethics

15 m
 	
 5 m
 	
 1h (20 m each)
 	
 15 m
	A. Break down research
	  1. What are sources of information (Resources? Who to talk to?)
	  2. Quantitative or qualitative?
	 B. Critical Incident Technique (CIT)
	  • *CIT handout*
	  • Introduce CIT – that it is a method to look at what helped/hindered/wished for?
	 D. Introduce youth to CIT with different methods, have youth practice on each other:
	  ▪ *Provide research methods handouts*
	   ○ Interviews
	   ○ Surveys
	   ○ Focus groups
	 E. Discussion
	  ▪ What did you like the best?
	  ▪ What did you like the least?
	  ▪ What kind of information did you get from different methods/ QUESTIONS?
	  ▪ What is the value of different methods?
	  ▪ Pros? Cons? What is the information good for?
	 Changing the question:
	  • How would they ask the same question in a way that would make sense to youth?
	  • How to improve it?
	
	 Checkout:
	  ▪ What have you learned?
	  ▪ Invite a youth to plan the check-in activity for next week.
		Materials
		 ☐ Snacks
		 ☐ [songs] Tupac (Changes)
		 ☐ CIT handout (p. 47)
		 ☐ Research stations (p. 48-54)
		 ☐ Research methods overview (p. 55-56)
		
		 Resources
		 Salkind, N. J. (2009). *Exploring research* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Question(s) for journal: What are some songs/poems/artwork/personal art work that inspire you or makes a comment about society and how to improve society? Bring for next class		
Adapted from: Y.E.L.L. (2007) Session 4 and Sydlo et al. (2004) Unit 4		

2hr	Activity	Checklist
	Workshop #4: Ethics (Research competency)	
	Goal: Gain a general understanding about research ethics	
	Training goal: Gain a clear understanding of the importance of research ethics.	
	Praxis goal: Explore ethics and how it has affected youth; photovoice to raise critical consciousness.	
	THEIR VOICE COUNTS – WE LISTEN, TOO!	

2hr	Activity	Checklist
15 m	Check-in: • General check-in with ball • Have a group member share a song → invite other members to reflect	☐ Inform school about picture taking activity ☐ Ensure enough time to process and to do photovoice activity
10 m	Ice breaker • *Visioning/empowerment exercise*	
15 m	Ethics Explain that when they are doing research it is important to maintain ethics. • Explore moments that they have been lied and cheated to? Or when a promise was broken. Have youth reflect on these experiences and explain those feelings. Explain that ethics are needed to protect. • Process reflection	
45 m	Cover the following topics ▸ Know their own rights ▸ Protection from Harm ▸ Maintenance of Privacy ▸ Coercion ▸ Informed Consent ▸ Confidentiality ▸ Debriefing ▸ Sharing Benefits Explain each topic and have youth share stories or share personal stories. Elicit feelings about each. Adapt process orientated reflection for each topic and relate to how youth felt marginalized or oppressed when their rights were violated.	**Materials** ☐ Visioning exercise (p. 57) ☐ Confidentiality (p. 58) ☐ Research ethics 101 (p. 59) ☐ Participant rights (p. 60) ☐ Disposable camera ☐ Know your rights sheet
1 h	Photovoice activity • Invite youth to take pictures of what helped/hindered/ wished for from school? • Can take multiple pictures • Camera etiquette o If take picture of people, ask beforehand • Return camera at end of activity to print off Debrief and checkout	

Reflection Question(s) for journal: If you can change anything about the school system, what would you change?	
Adapted from: Wilson et al. (2007)	

2hr	Activity	Checklist
	Workshop #5: Interview skills (Research competency)	
	Goal: Develop basic interview competencies	
	Training goal: Develop interview competencies.	
	Praxis goal: Raise awareness of how others in the group have been affected by their social structures.	

2hr	Activity	Checklist
15 m	Check-in • General check-in with ball • Journal question check-in • Have a group member share a song → invite other members to reflect • Youth will not share their pictures yet; they will use interviews to elicit experiences.	☐ Prepare room for youth to conduct interviews ☐ Photo voice debrief
15 m	How to do interviews **Activity (Defining the question)**: Youth will interview each other about their experience of taking the pictures • Define questions that should be asked (What helped/hindered/wished for/What is their experience)	
10 m	**Proper interview techniques 101**: • What are good interview technique? • Active listening? Why is it important?	
15 m	**Teach active listening** • *Active listening work sheet* • *Markers 101*	

10 m	**Fishbowl demonstration**
	 • Interview one of the youth and use active listening and ask questions as defined by youth
	     o ?: discomfort is ok
	     o ?: discomfort may mark "boundaries" → "respect" of participant's "back off" requests
		Materials
		 ☐ Snacks
		 ☐ Bring pictures from last session
		 ☐ Active listening (p. 61)

40 m	**Triads** • Have group members interview each other (15 min each with feedback) • Interview about experiences of taking picture and experience of school	☐ Markers 1010 (p. 62) ☐ How to do interviews (p. 63-65)

20 m	Group discussion (consciousness raising):
	 • Share pictures
	     o Was there anything you learned about yourself that you did not expect to learn?
	     o Anything new about your school experiences?
	     o What did you find out about other people's experiences?
	     o How does that make you feel? Do you want to make a change?
	 • Explain that pictures will be kept for a later activity
	
	 Explain how to do interviews for next week
	
	 "summarizing" – "ending" …
	 • What do we need to remember from today?
	 • Items from the "team"	

		Resources UNICEF p.41 Session 3 of YELL

Reflection Question: If you can think of a metaphor of your school journey, what would that be? Create a poem/picture in response to your journey thus far.

Adapted from: Checkoway; Y.E.L.L. (2007); Sydlo (2004)

Workshop #6: Conducting Mock Interviews (Research competency)		
Goal: Interview using CIT method and recording		
Training goal: To gain semi-independent skills in conducting interviews Praxis goal: gain social awareness of how others are affected by their social structures.		
2hr	**Activity**	**Checklist**
5 m	<u>Check-in</u> • General check-in with ball • Journal question check-in (Picture from last week) • Have a group member share a song → invite other members to reflect	☐ Run through interview process ☐ Ask school to see if different rooms can be used ☐ Make sure all forms and recordings are returned

15 m	<u>Interview preparation</u>
	• Go through *interview sheet* handed out last week
	• Explain the process of doing interviews – review material from last week
	    o Invite individual
	    o Informed consent
	    o Face sheet forms
	    o Record
	    o Conduct interview
	    o Debrief and set next contact date
	• Do quick walkthrough
	    o Explain about taking notes and general tips
	• RE-ITERATE ETHICS → *confidentiality sheet*	

60 m	<u>Conducting interviews</u> • Each youth practice conducting interviews on each other (25 minutes each) • Go through the whole research process	**Materials** ☐ Mock Informed consent forms (p. 74-75) ☐ Mock interview protocol (p. 70-73) ☐ Interview steps (p. 69) ☐ Interview checklist (p. 68) ☐ Interview reminder sheet (p. 67) ☐ General interview tips (p. 66) ☐ How to conduct interview (p. 63-65) ☐ Recording cameras or microphones ☐ Interview protocol
20 m	<u>Debrief</u> • What were your experiences of conducting the interviews? • What would you change in the questions? • What would you change in the process? • **What would you change about the consent form?** • Invite one of the youth to share their recording for next week <u>For next week</u> • Inform youth next week will be focused on data-analysis <u>Checkout</u>	
Reflection Question(s) for journal: What was the experience of doing the interview like? What was going on in your head? Emotionally? Physically? And what would you change about the interview questions.		
Adapted from: Y.E.L.L. (2007)		

2hr	Activity	Checklist
	Workshop #7: Data analysis (Critical consciousness raising)	
	Goal: Gain basic data analysis skills	
	Training goal: Data analysis for CIT. Deciding what to do with results.	
	Praxis goal: Gain an understanding of how others are impacted through the formation of categoreis	
15 m	<u>Check-in</u> • General check-in with ball • Journal question check-in (Picture from last week) • Have a group member share a song → invite other members to reflect	☐ Prepare a highlighted copy of an interview session ☐ Prepare already elicited incidents on post it notes ☐ Prepare a transcribed interview
30 m	<u>Re-defining CIT and Finalizing Interview Protocol</u> • Ask about experience of asking those questions from last session • What would they want to change? Different methodology? • What would they change about CIT? • **Finalize interview protocol**	
20 m	<u>Data analysis:</u> **Eliciting critical incidents** • Draw from one of the interviews • Provide an example transcript • Ask youth if those are the correct elicited incidents	**Materials**
50 m	**Creating categories** • Jot down incidents into small post-it notes (before session) – different colors for help/hinder/wished for • On a white board create three categories and start having youth post up the post it notes • Start looking for patterns with youth • Create categories • Create names for these categories <u>Debrief</u> • Were there any categories that were surprising? • Did this fit with what you expected? • What can we do with this information (think about for next session) <u>Checkout:</u>	☐ Pre-prepare elicited events from last session ☐ Post-it notes with incidents ☐ Post-it notes ☐ Highlighers (many colors) ☐ Whiteboard ☐ Snacks ☐ Data analysis 1010 (p. 76)
	Reflection Question(s) for journal: Jot down the main categories, now with this information what are some things that you want to do with this information?	
	Adapted from: Butterfield et al. (2009)	

Workshop #8: Action planning and planning next steps... and CELEBRATIONS		
Goal: Create action plans for next phase		
Training goal: Present results and action planning for next phase. Praxis goal: Invitation to take action by conducting interviews on peers for next phase		
2hr	Activity	Checklist
30 m	Check-in • General check-in with ball • Journal question check-in (Picture from last week) • Have a group member share a song → invite other members to reflect	☐ Ensure that it ends well ☐ Invitation for next phase ☐ Celebrate ending and beginning
45 m	Problem tree • Pair pictures that best suits the categories from photovoice activity • Start mapping out from the hindering category what are underlying factors • Invite participants to picture what action may look like based on these categories	
15 m	Create research timeline • Create a research timeline • Invite youth to be part of the process • Iterate that change occurs from them, this was only training real change is when your peers provide their input	
30 m	Reflective exercise • What have you learned about yourself • Positive? Area to grow in? • What would you have wished there was more of from the training? • Do you feel prepared Deciding what to do during break • Practice on interviews Ending – Exhortation activity: Toast • Have each member come up to give a toast to everyone else • Provide a stone with a word that represents each participant Planning for after the break (Data analysis, collection, and steering committee) • Invite members to be part of the steering commiteee	Materials ☐ Charity vs. Change ☐ Action plan sheet (p. 79-80) ☐ Problem tree (p. 77-78) ☐ Bring photos from previous session ☐ Provision of a stone that has a word that represents each of the participants ☐ Food for party
Reflection Question(s) for journal: What have you learned from taking part in this group?		
Adapted from:		

Youth Researcher Contract

As a participant in the "Nothing About Us, Without Us" research team, I commit to learning about the purpose and tools of research and evaluation. I will work in partnership with my peers and with the principle investigator Fred Chou.

Over the course of 8 workshops throughout the first semester, I will:

- attend all meetings on time;
- participate in all activities;
- ask questions; and
- maintain confidentiality;
- respect the opinions of others at the workshop.

After the workshops, I understand that I have the choice to continue to work with my research team. This continuation will be to evaluate the education system in Chilliwack to improve services for youth. Upon continuation of the research project, another contract will be signed to ensure that I understand the circumstances of the next phase of the project.

_____

Youth Researcher (Print Name)

_____   _____

Youth Researcher (Signature)   Date

_____

Guardian (Print Name)

_____   _____

Guardian (Signature)   Date

Adapted from Youth Participatory Evaluation Project (YPEP) Participatory Booklet, p. 5.

Principle Investigator Contract

As the facilitator and principle investigator of the "Nothing About Us, Without Us" research team, I commit to providing research training in a respectful and caring manner.

Over the course of 8 workshops throughout the first semester, I will:

- attend all meetings on time;
- participate in all activities;
- treat everyone with respect;
- ensure that opinions are validated and taken seriously; and
- create a safe and participative environment that ensures authentic participation.

After the workshop, I will continue to work with my research team to plan and carry out the evaluation of our youth program this year.

_____

Research Leader (Print Name)

_____   _____

Research Leader (Signature)   Date

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this training group is to help you gain skills to conduct research as youth co-researchers for a pilot project to explore ways to improve the six-year completion rate in the Chilliwack public school system. It is an opportunity to evaluate the school system in order to improve the community of Chilliwack. Another goal is to help you gain awareness of how your experiences in the school system affected your life journey. The results of this study will be to provide feedback to the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council and the Chilliwack School District. The reason for having you as co-researchers is to make sure that alternative education student voices are being represented in the decisions these organizations will make—nothing about us, without us.

You will take part in the research model known as Participatory Action Research (PAR) using a research method called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). You will be working together with a graduate level researcher from Trinity Western University to explore what helped, hindered, and what did students in alternative education wished for from the school system that would have helped them in their educational journey.   The training will prepare you to be involved in the whole research process. The research process involves shaping research questions, implementing research, collecting data, presenting the results, and coming up with action plans based on the results. If you choose to take part in conducting the research as co-researchers after the training, another informed consent form will be provided. This informed consent is for the training component only.

In taking part in the training, you will receive the following benefits:

- You will be paid $8 honorarium for each hour of training (only includes workshop hours)
- You will gain a better understanding of yourself and of others who are in alternative education
- You will gain research skills and other transferable employment skills
- You will receive mentorship from a Master's level student researcher from Trinity Western University

There are also potential negatives in taking part in this project. Because you will be exploring personal experiences of your own educational journey, it may bring up past experiences which may be negative. Sometimes in exploring your educational history may result in strong emotional or psychological issues that may arise in-between workshops, if you are unable to find help in those situations please contact the Crisis Center (1-800-784-2433) or online help (www.youthinbc.com). You can also speak to the training facilitator, school counsellor, and/or contact the Chilliwack Ministry of Children and Family Development (1 604-702-2311).

I have read and understood this statement. Any questions I have had been answered and I understand and agree to the above statement.

Participant's Name: _____   Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Guardian Name:_____   Date:_____

Guardian Signature:_____

Confidentiality

As a group member, I _____ agree to the following:

I will not reveal any information that can identify members within the group. This includes names and characteristics that can relate to certain individuals. I understand that the reason for this is to maintain confidentiality so that everyone has the opportunity to feel safe within the group.

I am able to discuss about my own experiences within the research training, as long as it does not reveal identifiable information about members within the group.

I understand that group leaders will need to break confidentiality in circumstances that the safety of the group and/or myself is compromised. I also understand that there are legal responsibilities that the group leader has to abide to and he/she will need to break confidentiality to meet those mandates.

Client's name:_____   Date:_____
                    (name)   (signature)

Facilitator's name: :_____   Date: _____
                     (name)   (signature)

Guardian name: _____   Date: _____
                     (name)   (signature)

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Appendix G: Co-researcher Confidentiality Agreement

Co-researcher Confidentiality Agreement

As a co-researcher in the research project "Nothing about us without us", I _____ agree to the following:

I will not reveal any information that can identify participants involved in the project. This includes names and characteristics that can relate to certain individuals. I understand that the reason for this is to maintain confidentiality, so that research can be conducted in an ethically responsible manner. I can only discuss about participants within the research team meetings and with the principle investigator.

I am able to discuss about my own experiences within the research project, as long as it does not reveal identifiable information about other participants involved in the project.

I understand that in circumstances where the safety of the participant and/or myself is compromised, I will need to break confidentiality. In these situations I will first report to the principle investigator to ensure that these situations are handled appropriately. I understand that there are legal responsibilities that I and the principle investigator have to abide to. In these situations confidentiality will need to be broken to meet those mandates.

_____ Date:_____
Co-researcher's Printed Name and Signature

_____ Date: _____
Principle Investigator's Printed Name and Signature

Appendix H: Participant Informed Consent Form

"Nothing About Us Without Us"
Youth-led Solutions to Increase High School Completion Rates
Participant Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Fred Chou, M.A. student in Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University

Supervisors: Dr. Robert Lees, Chilliwack Ministry of Children and Family Development (phone: 604-649-6758)

               Dr. Janelle Kwee, Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University (phone: 604-513-2034)

Co-Investigators: Jake Harms, The Education centre; Jordon Florence, The Education Centre; Kara Firth, The Education Centre; Mya Martens, The Education Centre; Richard Tatomir, Trinity Western University; Scott Wilson, The Education Centre; Taylor Stevens, The Education Centre

Contact Information: If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Fred Chou by email at fred.chou@mytwu.ca or phone at 778-883-6632.

               If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Sue Funk in the Office of Research, Trinity Western University at 604-513-2142 or sue.funk@twu.ca.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the research project. Together we hope to explore ways to improve the education system in Chilliwack.

Overview of the Study
Our objective is to explore what helped and hindered you from finding success in the mainstream program. We also want to find out what you wished for from the Chilliawck school system that would have been helpful in your previous educational experiences. We want to make sure that your voice is being represented accurately when the school district makes decisions that may impact you and your peers—*nothing about us without us!*

This study is part of a larger research program that seeks to examine the low six-year completion rates in Chilliwack, and hopes to improve upon this issue from the perspectives of youth in alternative education.

Time Commitment
During your participation in this research, you have the opportunity to participate in two interviews. The first interview will ask you multiple questions relating to your mainstream school experience, this will last 30 minutes to an hour. Both interviews will be audio recorded and analyzed to find relating themes to the research question – what helped/hindered, and what is wished for from the education system. After analyzing the results, we will request a second interview by contacting you via phone/email. This interview will be to confirm the results that we attained from the first interview and will take no more than 30 minutes.

Potential Risks and Benefits
While discussing your experiences, certain topics may make you feel uncomfortable as we will be exploring your educational history. You may take a break or choose not to answer particular questions. If at any time you want to

discontinue the interview, you are free to do so. If the interview raises any emotional difficulties please inform us and we can help connect you with the school counsellor or a counsellor at the Chilliwack Child and Youth Mental Health. If you experience these emotional difficulties and need immediate psychological relief, please contact the Crisis Center (1-800-784-2433) or online support (www.youthinbc.com)

Interviews and data analysis will be conducted by the youth co-researchers from the Education Centre, some of which may also be your peers. The principal investigator is also assisting the school counselor, Brent Pinckney, though his internship with the Chilliwack Child and Youth Mental Health. With this knowledge please note that you have the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your participation will give alternative students a voice that will be heard and taken seriously. We want to hear about your experiences so that improvements to the system will involve your views on how the school system can be enhanced. This information will help inform the Chilliwack education system on how it can improve to be more equitable for youth in similar circumstances as yours. Suggestions for social change will be based on the results. These results will be presented by the principle investigator and co-investigators to the Chilliwack school board and the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council.

Compensation/Renumeration
To compensate for taking part in this study, you can choose to have a $15 McDonalds or Walmart gift card either before or after the interview.

Your Rights
The co-investigators will be conducting interviews with yourself and other alternative education students. There is a possibility that some of your classmates may be involved in this study. To make sure that your privacy is protected, any identifying information will be kept separate and your name, address, email, and phone number will not be linked with the report. Your names will not be associated with the information you reported. All information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other participants. Information will only be disclosed if you provide written consent signed by you and your guardian or if it is required by law. The information from the study will be identified by code number and kept in a locking filing cabinet. Electronic date will be kept in password protected hard drives and will be encrypted. Only the principal investigator will have access to the information.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You will still receive the gift card for compensation for your time. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from your interviews will be destroyed, unless you wish for the data to be kept for analysis.

Your signature below indicates that you have had your questions about the study answered to your satisfaction and have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

_____   _____
Printed Name of the Research Participant   Date

_____
Research Participant's Signature

Appendix I: Interview Protocol

"Nothing About Us Without Us!"
Interview Protocol

Participant #:   Date:
Interview Start Time: Interview End Time:
Informed consent ☐   Informed consent copy to participant ☐

Introduction to study:

1. **Introduce yourself**: Introduce who you are and your role as a student co-researcher.
2. **Purpose of the study**: Explain to them that the purpose of the study is to investigate ways to improve the Chilliwack school system. It is to get the perspective of alternative education students who have been through the system to find out ways to improve it. This will be done by looking at what helped, hindered, and what students wished for from education system that would have helped them succeed. Explain to the participants that they have been chosen because they are students who have been through the mainstream education system and that they have a perspective of the school system that others might not have. There perspective is especially important if their views were not taken seriously by the school system.
3. **Procedure**: There will be two interviews. The first interview will be 30 minutes to an hour long. The second will be less than 30 minutes. The first interview is to get all the general results of what helped/hindered/wished for. While the second interview is to see if the categories formed from the results were indeed true and if there was anything the participant wanted to add or remove. Please inform the participant that the second interview is voluntary and will be conducted through phone, email, or in person.
4. **Potential risks**: Inform the participant that the potential risk is that it may be difficult to talk about some of the subject matter especially if they have been hurt in the past. It may bring up emotional difficulties. Inform participants that they have the right not to answer any questions or to stop the interview without any penalty. It may help for them to take a break during the interview. IF there are any emotional issues, that get raised up they can speak to the school counsellor or to a counsellor at Child and Youth Mental Health and the research team can help to set that up.
5. **Benefits and compensation**: Participants will receive a $15 gift card to McDonalds or Walmart. This will be given at the beginning of the interview so that the participants know that there is no penalty for stopping the interview. The participants will also receive the benefit of getting their voice heard by the decision makers. Explain that this is students working with students to get their voices heard and to improve the school system in order to help others who have faced similar circumstances.
6. **Confidentiality**: All the information will be kept safely stored in locked file cabinets and password protected hard drives and data will be identified by code. The end report will not have their names linked with the information. Information will not be disclosed unless permission is granted.
7. **Consent**: Explain that taking part in the interview is completely voluntary and that it is their choice to do the interview. If they do not want to answer certain questions they may choose not to. If they choose to stop the interview there will be no penalty.

Demographics Information

Preamble: As you know, I am interviewing students from the Education Centre to understand where the education system may have failed them. First I would like to start off with some demographic information.

    i. What school year are you in?_____

    ii. How many years were you in school for?_____

    iii. What was your previous school prior to the Education Centre?_____

    iv. Have you dropped out of school before? Y / N

        a.   If yes, how many years were you away from school and when? _____

    v. Age:_____

    vi. Date of birth:_____

    vi. Gender:_____

    vii. Ethnicity:_____

    viii. Contact after the study for the follow-up interview: yes ☐   no ☐

        a.   If yes, how would they like the interview to be conducted?

            Email   Phone   In-person (Circle one)

            Inform them that with email we cannot ensure confidentiality

        b.   Contact information: _____

Contextual Component

1. As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your experience of the Chilliwack school system?
2. What was your overall experience of the mainstream education system?
3. How does it compare with the alternative education system?
4. What is your overall experience of the alternative education system?
5. What happened that made you leave mainstream education? Please tell me more.

Helpful Events & Incidents

1. In what ways did the mainstream education system help you stay in school and find success?
   a. *Probe: What were key moments or key experiences?*
   b. *Probe: How did it impact you?*
   c. *Probe: Can you give a specific example?*
   d. *Probe: How did that help you in your experience?*
   e. *Probe: What are some other incidents?*

In what ways does the alternative education system help you stay in school and find success?

Helpful Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by …?)	Importance (How did it help? Tell me what it was about … that you find so helpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

Unhelpful Events & Incidents

1. What made it difficult for you to stay in school and succeed?
   a. *Probe: What kind of things happened that made it harder for you to succeed in school?*
   b. *Probe: How did it impact you?*
   c. *Probe: Can you give a specific example?*
   d. *Probe: How did that hinder your experience?*
   e. Probe: What are some other incidents?
2. What hinders your success in alternative education?

Hindering Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by …?)	Importance (How did it hinder? Tell me what it was about … that you find so unhelpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

Wish Lists

Summarize what has been discussed up to this point with the participant as a transition to the next question.

We've talked about what's helped you to do well (name them), and some things that have made it more difficult for you to do well (name them). Is there anything I am missing?

Next I would like to ask you about what you wished was available that would have helped you.

1. What did you wish was available in the mainstream system that would have helped you succeed or stay in the mainstream system?
   a. *Probe: What else would have helped?*
   b. *Probe: What is it about _____ (wish list item) that would have been helpful?*
   c. *Probe: What do you mean by _____ (wish list item) [for more clarification]*
2. What do you wish was available in the alternative education system that would help you further succeed?

Wish List Item & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by …?)	Importance (How would it help? Tell me what it is about … that you would find so helpful.)	Example (In what circumstances might this be helpful?)

Debriefing

At the end of the interview, review the interview and summarize the results with the participant. Give the participant an opportunity to ask questions or make any further comments and give them time to debrief their experience of the interview. You can inform them about the possible supports as mentioned in the informed consent. The following debrief script should be provided:

"We were involved in doing a semi-structured interview in order to explore your views and experiences of being involved in the mainstream education system. This interview serves three purposes: (1) it was an opportunity for you to voice how you felt about the education system; (2) the results will be presented to the Chillliwack school board and the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council along with suggestions on how to improve the school system based on your perspectives; and (3) it will be incorporated into a thesis project conducted by Fred Chou, the principle investigator. The principle investigator intends for these results, along with the whole project, to be published in a scholarly journal so that it can benefit other youth in similar educational journeys as yourself. It can be used to improve practices for the Chilliwack education system and for other educational systems as well. The results of the study may also be presented as a poster in the school. You will be informed of the results before we create this poster. These results may also be presented at future research conferences. Do you have any further questions about this study, interview, or anything else?

A summarized copy of the results will be provided to you once the research is completed, please let us know what is the best way to contact you. You also have the option of seeing the completed thesis upon request of the principle investigator.

You can discuss with the principle investigator after this interview. Also if you want to contact him you can call him or email him, his contact information is on the informed consent. He is available for contact from 9 am to 9 pm for the duration of the project and 6 weeks after the project is done. He can help connect you with resources as well.

If you feel emotionally upset after this interview, we encourage you to contact the school counsellor or any of the resources provided in the informed consent. You can also inform us so that we can make sure that you are connected with resources from Child and Youth Mental Health.

Do you have any further questions or concerns before we end this interview?

Thank you for your time and contribution. "

Dissemination

Would they like a copy of the final results?   yes ☐   no ☐

How would they like to contacted for the final results?   Email   /   Mail   (Circle one)

Contact information: _____

_____

Appendix J: Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement for Transcriptionist

CONFIDENTIALITY AND NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

WHEREAS, Fred Chou agrees to furnish _____ certain confidential information products for the purposes of transcription;

WHEREAS, _____ agrees to review, examine, inspect or obtain such confidential information only for the purposes described above, and to otherwise hold such information confidential pursuant to the terms of this Agreement.

BE IT KNOWN, that Fred Chou has or shall furnish to _____ certain confidential information and may further allow _____ the right to transcribe the interview data of Fred Chou on the following conditions:

1. _____ agrees to hold confidential or proprietary information or trade secrets ("confidential information") in trust and confidence and agrees that it shall be used only for the contemplated purposes, shall not be used for any other purpose, or disclosed to any third party.

2. No copies will be made or retained of any written information or prototypes supplied without the permission of Fred Chou.

3. At the conclusion of the research project, or upon demand by Fred Chou, all confidential information, including prototypes, written notes, photographs, sketches, models, memoranda or notes taken shall be returned to Fred Chou or destroyed upon Fred Chou's request.

4. Confidential information shall not be disclosed to any employee, consultant or third party unless they agree to execute and be bound by the terms of this Agreement, and have been approved by Fred Chou.

5. This Agreement and its validity, construction and effect shall be governed by the laws of British Columbia.

AGREED AND ACCEPTED BY:

Date:_____

By_____ Witness:_____

Title:_____

By_____

Title_____

Appendix K: Second Interviews Template

Participant: Name / #

Date: _____

Interviewer(s):_____

CRITICAL INCIDENTS		
Mainstream		
Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
Incident	Incident	Incident
Alternative		
Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
Incident	Incident	Incident

Follow-up/Clarification questions:

Questions:

1. Are the helping/hindering incidents and wishlist items correct? Y / N
2. Is there anything missing?

   _____

3. Is there anything that needs revising?

   _____

4. Do you have any other comments?

   _____

   _____

   _____

CATEGORIES		
Mainstream		
Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
Category name Incident	**Category name** Incident	**Category name** Incident
Category name	**Category name**	
Category name	**Category name**	
Category name		
Alternative		
Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
Category name Incident	**Category name** Incident	**Category name** Incident
Category name		
Category name		
Category name		

Questions:

1. Do the category headings make sense to you?   Y   /   N

   _____

2. Do the category headings capture your experience and the meaning that the incident or factor had for you?   Y   / N

   _____

3. Are there any incidents in the categories that do not appear to fit from your perspective? If so, where do they belong?   Y   /   N

   _____

Wrap up question:

1. What are three recommendations that you would make to the school board to improve the schools in Chilliwack?

   A. _____

   B. _____

   C. _____

Appendix L: Table for Tracking Emergence of New Categories

Date of CI/WL Extraction	Participant #	Date Categorized	New Categories Emerged	Notes
February 13, 2013	35	March 7, 2013	All new categories emerged	
February 21, 2013	60	March 7, 2013		
February 28, 2013	45	March 14, 2013	6 HI; 5 HE; 5 WL = 11	
February 28, 2013	12	March 14, 2013		
February 21, 2013	18	March 28, 2013	4 HI; 2 HE; 2 WL = 8	
March 7, 2013	03	March 28, 2013		
March 7, 2013	09	March 28, 2013		
March 7, 2013	27	April 11, 2013	-3 HI (M); -2 HI(A); - 1 HE(M) = -6 (combined incidents)	
March 28, 2013	83	April 11, 2013		
March 28, 2013	62	April 11, 2013		
April 4, 2013	28	April 18, 2013	1 (WL, M)	Exhaustiveness met here. At this point this formed a new category because it repeated what was being said already
April 4, 2013	39	April 18, 2013		
April 4, 2013	77	April 18, 2013		
April 11, 2013	23	April 22, 2013	-1 (WL-M), +2 (WL-M), +2 HE-A, +1 HI-M, +2 HI-A = 6 categories	Reassessment of categories
April 11, 2013	07	April 22, 2013		
April 11, 2013	53	April 22, 2013		
April 18, 2013	34	April 22, 2013		
April 25, 2013	91	April 27, 2013		

Note: HE = Helpful; HI = Hindering; WL = Wish List; M = Mainstream; A = Alternate

Appendix M: Co-researcher Participation Project Update for Parents/Guardians

"Nothing About Us Without Us"
Youth-led Solutions to Increase High School Completion Rates
Co-researcher Participation Project Update

Principal Investigator: Fred Chou, M.A. student in Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University

Supervisors: Dr. Robert Lees, Chilliwack Ministry of Children and Family Development (phone: 604-649-6758)

Dr. Janelle Kwee, Counselling Psychology, Trinity Western University (phone: 604-513-2034)

Contact Information: If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Fred Chou by email at fred.chou@mytwu.ca or phone at 778-883-6632.

Dear Guardian(s) of the Co-researchers,

Thank you for your commitment to the "*Nothing About Us Without Us*" research project and for allowing your child to take part in this project as a co-researcher. This letter is to provide an update on the status of the project. It is an amendment to the "Participant Consent Form" that your child has signed to take part in this research project as a participant. As part of the participatory nature of the project, the research team (the youth co-researchers, Dr. Robert Lees, Dr. Janelle Kwee, and myself) decided that it would add depth to the study if the co-researchers took part in the study as participants. Their involvement as participants was voluntary and there was no pressure to take part in the study. However, given that your child is both a participant and a co-researcher, they are an identified participant in the study and therefore they will be identified as taking part in the study as participants in future disseminations of the project, which includes publications and presentations. Though they are identified participants in the study, specific comments that they shared will not associated with their identity, which will remain anonymous and therefore kept confidential.

In sharing this information, we want to offer you the opportunity to contact us with any questions or concerns about your child's participation in the study. If you would like to take this opportunity to raise concerns or ask further questions about your child's involvement, please let myself (Fred Chou) know by **May 24th, 2013** by contacting me at 778-883-6632. I invite you to ask any questions about this letter or about the research project in general. If there is no contact by May 24th, 2013, it will be assumed that you respect your child's decision to take part in the study as participants and they will remain as identified participants.

The reason for this letter is to be transparent in the research process and to ensure that you are fully informed. The project is at the data analysis phase and is nearly complete. The youth co-researchers have been amazing and have contributed extensively to the project. They shaped the project, recruited, interviewed their peers, collected data, analyzed data, and soon they will be presenting their results. Through this project we hope to promote change within the school system in a manner that ensures that the perspectives of youth who have dropped out or are in alternate education are validated. We will be presenting our results on June 11th at 7:00 pm at the Chilliwack Public School Board meeting at the School District Office (8430 Cessna Drive, Chilliwack). This meeting is open to the public and you are invited to take part in the meeting. As space may be limited, if you are interested in coming to this meeting please email me at fred.chou@mytwu.ca.

Sincerely,

Fred Chou

Appendix N: Authorship Agreement for Research Assistants

Title of Research Project: "Nothing About Us Without Us!" Youth-led Solutions to Improve High School Completion Rates

Anticipated Project Period: October 2012 – August 2013

Principal Investigator (as per ethics form): Fred Chou

Thank you for taking part in the research project as research assistants. Through this project we engaged in exploring ways to improve the Chilliwack education system by researching factors that helped and hindered students in alternate education and/or who have dropped out, stay in school and find success. This form acknowledges your contribution to the project as a research assistant. Any future publications or presentations related to this research study will acknowledge your contribution. Where this contribution corresponds to co-authorship qualifications (described below), you will have secondary co-authorship status. Further, as you have engaged in a participatory action research study, your reflections, involvement, and specific contributions (i.e., decisions made during meetings, personal communications, artwork, and social action) in shaping the research project may be incorporated into the thesis and future publications. These reflections, involvement, and contributions will only be documented after you have been given the opportunity to review and confirm its addition.

I acknowledge that, in order to qualify for authorship, a contributor must make an original scientific, professional or intellectual contribution deemed to be substantial and integral to the particular research. I also acknowledge that it is necessary that a potential author: (a) understand the meaning and significance of the results and conclusions, (b) take responsibility for the scholarly nature of the research upon its completion, and (c) be appreciably involved in either (or both) designing the research or substantively writing the results up for publication (this includes the interpretation of the data and the formulation of conclusions).

Tasks and contributions that represent intellectual investment in the project and that are taken into account when considering authorship recognition include:
- *Attending all training sessions and team meetings*
- *Completing all training activities*
- *Calling and coordinating meeting times with participants*
- *Meeting with participants to conduct the study procedures*
- *Basic editing, proofreading, typing, literature search, and similar logistic support*
- *Maintaining regular contact with Fred Chou*
- *Data collection, data extraction, data entry and data management tasks*
- *Maintaining confidentiality of participants*

Additional tasks and duties are potentially open to negotiation at the discretion of Fred Chou

In exchange for completing the above in a satisfactory and timely manner, I understand that I will be given secondary co-authorship on a future publication and/or formally recognized in an acknowledgements section, introductory paragraph, or footnote.

Agreement:

I understand the above.

I agree to the above-stated conditions.

I have received a copy of this agreement for my own records.

I have noted the special conditions listed at the end of this document

_____   _____

Name   Witness

_____   _____

Signature   Signature

_____   _____

Date   Date

_____

Principal Investigator or Designate

_____

Signature (and Position)

_____

Date

Special conditions:

In addition to if the above-stated conditions are not met, this agreement can be renegotiated if the principal investigator deems that unanticipated large changes have been made in terms of research design, analyses, theoretical elements, conclusions or individual contributions.

Appendix O: Hart's Ladder of Participation

Hart's Ladder of Participation

Non-participation/ Participation	Level of Participation	Description
Non-Participation	Level 1: Manipulation	Youth are involved, but used by adults to communicate the messages of the adults. Youth are consulted, but no feedback is provided to them.
	Level 2: Decoration	Youth are involved, but are only involved to make it seem like they have an impact on the decisions. Unlike manipulation, adults do not pretend that a cause is inspired by youth, rather youth are used to support the adults own cause in an indirect way.
	Level 3: Tokenism	Youth are provided with a voice symbolically. Their voice has no impact on the decisions made by adults.
Degree of Participation	Level 4: Assigned but informed	Youth do not initiate the project, but they understand that they have a sense of ownership.
	Level 5: Consulted and informed	Adults design and create the project. However, youth are consulted for the decisions that adults make. These opinions are considered by the adults.
	Level 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth	Adults start the project and decision making powers are shared with youth. They are involved in the decisions made about the project.
	Level 7: Youth-initiated and directed	Youth start the project and all the decisions are made by youth about the project.
	Level 8: Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Youth start the project and take part in full partnership with adults. Decisions are shared and youth are supported by adults.

Note. The higher the level results in higher level of engagement and participation. Based off of

Hart's (1991) Ladder of Participation and adapted from Chen et al.'s (2007) p. 132.

Appendix P: Poster of Results for the Education Centr

Note. Actual size of poster was 80 cm x 125 cm

Appendix Q: Board of Education Meeting Presentation

Chilliwack School District *Partners in Learning!*
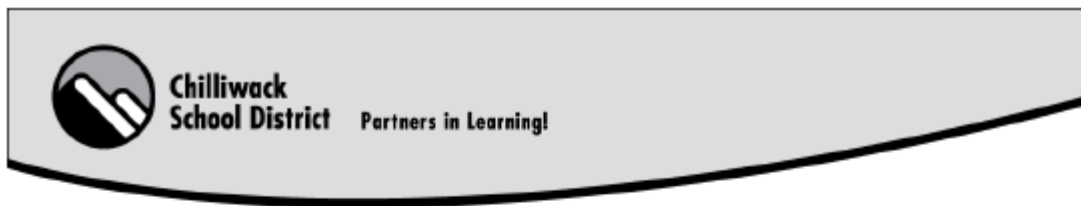
Board of Education Meeting   June 11, 2013

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT #33 (CHILLIWACK) held its regular board meeting on June 11, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. at the School District Office.

<u>ALTERNATE EDUCATION RESEARCH STUDY</u>

Superintendent Novak and Assistant Superintendent Arul-pragasam, introduced members of the Raising Hope Research Team. Fred Chou (Principal Investigator), Richard Tatomir (Co-facilitator), Chereca Weaver (Co-facilitator), Kara Firth, student, Jordan Florence, student, Mya Raber, student and Taylor Stevens, student, presented information regarding the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study supported by the Chilliwack Social Research and Planning Council (CSRPC). Youth were involved in all aspects of the research which explored the perspectives of students in alternative education and youth who have discontinued with school, what helped and hindered their retention and success in the Chilliwack education system. The study ensures that youth voices are incorporated in decisions that affect them.

Recommendation:
- Focus on Prevention: Gauge and Promote Positive Engagement
- Alternative Education for Alternative Learning
- Incorporate Youth Voice: Nothing about us without us

Note. This was only a segment taken from the Board of Education Meeting highlights, taken

from http://www.sd33.bc.ca/sites/default/files/Board%20Summary%20-%202013-06-11.pdf

Appendix R: Research Team Logo

Note. Logo inspired by the research team, created by Taylor Stevens