INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND SETTLER TEACHERS: SETTLER TEACHER/COMMUNITY MEMBER COLLABORATIONS TO ENHANCE TEACHER PRACTICE

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Indigenous Community Members and Settler Teachers:
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Abstract

Settler Teacher (ST) and Indigenous Community Member (CM) relationships are occurring in education settings across the province of Ontario. This project explores the challenges and possibilities of the ST/CM collaboration and how they enhance teacher practice and contribute to decolonizing education, centering Indigenous knowledge, and fostering systemic transformation. To focus on the historical and current effects of colonialism, coupled with settler ignorance in education settings, I have located my positionality as a white woman engaging with Indigenous education. The project is grounded in decolonizing theory and examines relations to knowledge, others, self, and land, offering a framework to appreciate and interrogate ST/CM collaborations. The project situates these collaborations within professional learning theories and Indigenous education research. Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM) with a narrative inquiry approach was utilized in the project. Five pairs of purposively selected ST/CM pairs who worked, or were working, in Ontario schools participated in the project, using semi structured oral history interviews and conversations. The core insight is that strong, trusting and respectful ST/CM collaborations is a foundational aspect of systemic change in Indigenous education but requires sustained effort and practice. While much research speaks to the importance of relationality, this study gestures to the *how* of relationships. Participants identified six relational foundations of trusting and respectful collaborations, including listening, awareness of positionality, willingness to un/learn, stepping up/forward/back, bridging gaps, and holding hope. Recommendations within the dissertation invite STs and CMs to continue to share their voices, together or individually, and strongly recommends that researchers, schools and school

boards consider how their research and practice can engage with and deepen ST/CM collaborations. Fostering quality ST/CM collaborations to informs teacher practice and supports Indigenous education will require a deep understanding of the ST/CM relationship and a deep understanding of living into trust and respect.

Dedication

To the Settler Teachers and Indigenous Community Members who have trusted me with their stories for this project. Chi-miigwech, Marrsii, Hiy hiy, Wela'lin, and Thank You does not even begin to express my gratitude. And this is for the Settler Teachers and Indigenous Community Members whose stories have not been told…yet.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> Seven Generations Teaching: What we do today impacts the next seven generations to come. Conversely, what happened in the past seven generations impacts us today. …We can have a positive impact on the next seven generations or a negative impact depending upon our choices as individuals and as a collective. (Lavallee and Poole, 2010, p. 273)

Reflecting on Lavallee and Poole (2010), I continuously contemplate this project's impact on participants and on the education system. Considering how writing about their experiences might affect their personal lives and those not ready to share their stories gives me pause. The pause comes as recognition of the loss to education of Indigenous[1] epistemologies through violent settler genocide and colonialism. The absence of Indigenous voices is by design and continues to have effects in education. The pause comes as I contemplate the strains and antagonisms in relationships between settler teachers (STs) and Indigenous community members (CMs). Much has been written about settler teacher challenges when teaching Indigenous content including lack of knowledge, fear of making mistakes, or not knowing someone who is Indigenous to connect with (Battiste, Mi'kmaq, 2013; Dion, Potawatomi-Lenapé, 2009, 2007). However, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of ST and CM collaborations and the outcome of these collaborations on the STs, CMs, and all students in publicly funded Ontario schools. To examine this fraught educational history, I return to my own participation in an ST/CM relationship as an entry point to examine these collaborations more broadly and the effects they have on those directly and indirectly involved.

In this project I interviewed five STs from Ontario schools and five CMs. All STs were white, and four worked in public education, while one was from the Catholic school system. Of the five CMs, three were also teachers in Ontario public schools, two of whom held Indigenous lead positions within their school boards. All STs interviewed were white. Each interviewed

[1] Indigenous is used throughout the paper when referencing First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people. Where a specific Nation or identity is known, it will be utilized. I recognize that Indigenous people are not a monolith, and I do not suggest that using the term Indigenous is a replacement for distinct identities.

participant was involved in an ST/CM collaboration with another project participant and was interviewed individually and jointly with their collaboration partner. The partners had met between five and 12 years previously while working in their respective roles. While their work began in education settings, they opted to continue their relationship beyond that. Four pairs chose to work together after meeting in educational spaces, while one pair was obliged to work together because of their role in the education system.

It is important to note here that the use of the words "collaboration" and "collaborators" are inherited terms from the education system. For some, this terminology can evoke discourses of conflict, strife and war, and cooperation with those viewed as so-called enemies. In education settings we often speak of teacher collaborations and encourage teachers to be in collaboration with each other. Within this dissertation, collaboration is used to identify STs and CMs who are in a relationship with each other, working together to improve Indigenous education in Ontario schools. Through the interviews conducted with participants the use of this terminology shifted from collaboration to relationship to challenge common assumptions of what it means to be in "collaboration" and to be a "collaborator". True to the findings of this dissertation, collaboration and relationship become interchangeable terms as it progresses, as do collaborator and partner.

Context

In September of 2012 I took on the role of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit/Equity resource teacher for a large southern Ontario school board. The Indigenous lead role I held was created as a response to the release of the Ontario Ministry of Education's (MOE) *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*[2] (The Framework) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The goal of the Framework was to improve the achievement of Indigenous students and

[2] The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007) was updated in 2014 with an Implementation Plan that included performance measures. The performance measures do indicate the importance of connecting with community members for data sharing and connection to curriculum needs. No further update has occurred since.

close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The Framework addresses areas that include student retention, graduation, literacy, numeracy, and advancing to post-secondary studies (Ministry of Education, 2007). The document outlines the responsibilities of the MOE, Ontario school boards, schools, and practicing teachers in Ontario to meet the mandate. Boards are tasked with providing timelines and strategies to meet targets as set out by the MOE. Boards are also responsible for ensuring that classroom teachers improve their understanding of how Indigenous students learn, as well as increasing teacher learning of "First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture, histories and perspectives" (p. 6).

The Framework guides the work required of the Indigenous lead. There are two specific measures of success from the goals that ground teacher learning supports for Indigenous students. The measures are:

1) Increased satisfaction among educators in provincially funded schools with respect to targeted professional development and resources designed to help them serve First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students more effectively (p. 14)
2) Integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples (p. 17)

The Framework (2007) indicates there is a lack of knowledge of Indigenous people by educators in the province. It highlights areas where knowledge is lacking, inviting us to consider what we do and do not know and understand about Indigenous people (p. 6). As an objective of the Framework is to improve teacher capacity to teach this material, what do teachers need to learn to teach? It indicates what the Ministry, school board, and schools will do to facilitate teacher learning, but is broad in scope regarding how the learning will occur. The Framework (2007) states:

> …the Ministry will strive to increase the knowledge of all Ontario educators about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit issues and raise their cultural awareness by encouraging faculties of education, the Ontario College of Teachers, school boards, teacher federations, and professional associations to provide appropriate training and professional development focused on Aboriginal histories, cultures, and perspectives for teachers, principals, and supervisory officers while schools will strive to… increase knowledge of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures among all school staff. (p. 18-19)

The above statements, in relation to this project, invite us to consider what might STs learn about themselves based on the Framework. What do they learn about Indigenous people? How do STs learn about themselves in relationship with and to Indigenous people? In what ways does this learning impact understandings of their responsibilities of teaching Indigenous content?

A year prior to the roll out of the Framework in 2007, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[3] (TRC) had begun their work. As I came into the Indigenous Lead position for the Peel District School Board in 2012, the ongoing TRC hearings played a part in the professional development sessions given by the board. I travelled to Edmonton for the final day of the TRC hearings. It was there I bore witness to survivor testimony and took part in workshops. Travelling to the Edmonton TRC event with Indigenous CMs from Ontario reinforced how important ST/CM relationships are to teacher development. On the first day of the event, I fell into conversation with a CM about what we had witnessed that day. She thought I was Indigenous. When she found out I was not she wanted to know why I was attending. Our conversation touched upon what witnessing survivor testimony would mean to the role of Indigenous Lead in a school board. How was I going to share what I saw and heard when I returned to the Board? How was it shaping my relationships with Indigenous people, with teachers, with students? We discussed how survivor stories could affect ST education moving forward. She shared concerns regarding burdening CMs to do the teaching in classrooms. We talked about reciprocity and how it was being demonstrated in the role I held.

The questions this conversation initiated are foundational to this project. What will STs never know? What is the responsibility of STs to know? Who do STs become as they know and not know, as they learn and unlearn? I must consider my truth in hearing these stories, the

[3] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2006-2014) was a part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement with its mandate set out in Schedule “N” of the agreement with the goals being set out in the Terms of Reference (Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, Schedule N, May, 2006). I was able to attend the final TRC event in Edmonton, Alberta, in March of 2014.

experiences I will never know, and my responsibility in relation to what I cannot know. What does it mean to learn from a CM? Why do we require survivors to tell their stories over and over? Are we asking survivors to reproduce the discourse of the poor, pitiful "Other" so that STs can feel better and go away thinking they have done something by listening to their stories?[4] How does this impact the understanding of the complexities of this learning? Who is responsible for teaching what in the ST/CM relationship? What are the responsibilities of the ST and how do STs learn about their responsibilities given that the Framework is not clear in this regard?

Other considerations, such as re/location, appropriate remuneration, and hierarchy, are significant additions to the initial conversation. In these collaborations, does the CM have to leave their community to do the work being asked? When the CM is away from their community supporting STs, who bears the burden of doing their work in the community? How is the CM compensated for the work they do within the ST/CM collaboration given that the ST is being paid full time? If the CM is compensated, is it commensurate with what an ST is paid for the time spent in the collaboration? Are these collaborations able to move into relationships that flatten power structures? How can there be assurances that ST/CM collaborations are not parasitic with the ST taking from the CM, but not giving back? I also pondered the question of the potential impact of the ST/CM collaboration, concerned about ST/CM collaborations being extractive or abusive towards the Indigenous CM and their community. How do these collaborations invite STs to think about how they might abuse these relationships? And in what ways can this project disrupt negative patterns in the ST/CM relationship?

The 2007 Framework had a 10-year timeline and that there was an expectation that an updated Framework would be released in 2018. That has not happened to date of this publication, with no indication of when a new Framework will be released. In the resulting policy vacuum, school boards and teachers have been able to choose what content about Indigenous

[4] Dr. S. Dion, personal communication, April 7, 2021

people to focus on. Teacher autonomy has set the path of Indigenous education in schools and classrooms across the province. Support for content selection is available to teachers through the Indigenous Lead or Indigenous Education Department of their school board if they wish to utilize it. Many teachers do engage this support option, but there are still teachers who choose not to. Choosing not to may result in using resources that perpetuate harm or not having any Indigenous resources for students at all. Currently the only mandated components that remain from the Framework are the requirement for Boards to have a voluntary and confidential self-identification process and an Indigenous Education Advisory Circle.[5]

Part of a life practice I have experienced as an Indigenous lead, a Masters' student, and now as an Ph. D. student in the Indigenous cohort, has been considering my positionality. In the next section, I will address this in relation to the project.

Locating Myself: A White Woman's Place in Indigenous Education[6]

> Our knowledge is valid, real and concrete. I do not make comparisons with eurowestern methods of searching. There is no need to. There are many pathways to knowledge. (Absolon, Anishnaabe-Kwe, 2011, p. 12)

Kathleen Absolon's (2011) opening paragraphs in her book, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know?,* encapsulated in the above quote, resonated deeply with me and my own journey of engaging with/contributing to Indigenous education. My interest in exploring ST/CM relationships stemmed from having participated in an ST/CM collaboration for several years. I have done a significant amount of self-reflection on how those who were also in ST/CM collaborations have been in relation to land, knowledge, others, and self. Throughout my time in working with a CM, I have kept notes of my personal experiences, situating myself, considering how the relationship might serve the community, reflecting on the mistakes I have made and whether I have owned up to them, where the journey has taken me and the CM, how I related

[5] N. Bertrand, personal communication, May 4, 2021.
[6] For further reading regarding white women in relation to Indigenous knowledges, see Moreton-Robinson, A. (2021) *Talkin' up to the white woman: Indigenous women and feminism.* U of Minnesota Press.

and continue to relate to others, and who I am now with respect to who I was when I started this journey.

I remind myself here that part of locating myself in the work has been acknowledging that this is not a study. Study is a word that comes with great weight given how much harm has been done in the name of "studying" people. I rely upon Simon and Dippo (1986) who share: "We use the term 'project' … as an activity determined both by real and present conditions, and certain conditions still to come which it is trying to bring into being" (p. 196). This project, and my location within it, has been to contribute to change as well as developing and strengthening Indigenous education within the Ontario education system. Simon and Dippo (1986) go on to state: "As the notion of project suggests, this is neither a neutral nor arbitrary interest. Rather, it is an interest organized by a standpoint which implicates us in moral questions about desirable forms of social relations and ways of living" (p. 196). The goal of my research project was to contribute to the understanding of the "social relations" of ST/CM collaborations and how these relationships change what and how teachers teach about and with Indigenous people and Indigenous content in the Ontario curriculum.

In *Revelations of a White Settler Woman Scholar-Activist: The Fraught Promise of Self-Reflexivity,* D'Arcangelis (2018) posits that self-reflexivity asks one "how to be attentive to and negotiate one's social location, which would include attending to the White researcher's predilection for glossing over colonialism" (p. 339). While she recognizes a place for self-reflexivity in (re)search, she is convinced that there are issues with it and how white researchers use it. D'Arcangelis (2018) asserts that white researchers cannot become mired in avoiding or ignoring colonialism or the history of colonization. As I understand it, to be self-reflexive required doing the work myself, not burdening community members with educating me. It has required me to understand how my privilege has impacted the work I sought to do. I must attend to how I have thought about myself as a (re)searcher as well as a participant in an ST/CM relationship. D'Arcangelis's (2018) warnings of the danger of self-reflexivity in white researchers forced me to

recognize the significance of my whiteness. I have questioned whether I have been a white researcher who finds ways to skim over the surface of the deep-seated colonialism or if I have been humble enough to call it out.

Being self-reflexive has not automatically allowed me to locate myself when it came to having a relationship with both Indigenous CMs and Indigenous content. I have observed that as a white (re)searcher, humility has been necessary as I considered my place in the space and remember where I come from. I am reminded of the work of Monika Vrzgulová (2019) and the fact that I confronted "ethical and moral questions about my role as a listener and as a partner in the [relationship], as well as being a scholar with the goal of using the interview in my…work" (p. 431). I related these questions to being asked, **"**So, what, you go to some ceremonies and now you're an expert?" What I could be knowledgeable about is sharing what occurs within an ST/CM collaboration, which led to the question of what have I shared and how? In discussing this with the Indigenous CM I am in collaboration with, he affirmatively said to me, "Anything you write will add to putting the native people on the pedestal. It is showcasing the work that we have done together."[7] So it has been through the ceremonies I have attended, and the ST/CM relationships I have participated in, that I have been able to see how and when teachers have made a deep connection to Indigenous worldviews and realities, that they have unsettled themselves and their relationship to land, knowledge, others, and self.[8]

My knowledge is located in my understanding and sharing of how ST/CM collaborations can bring about an enhancement of learning of knowledge of Indigenous people and Indigenous content. I see the ST/CM connection as complimenting the integration of Indigenous content and knowledge into the Ontario classroom. The opportunity to perpetuate Indigenous stereotypes is great in the absence of an opportunity to learn from and with a CM. Without such connections, teachers, left to their own devices, often find reasons not to teach the curriculum

[7] Thunder (CM), personal communication, September 7, 2022
[8] Dr. V. Shah, personal communication, March 8, 2022

expectations on Indigenous content, availing themselves of the "perfect stranger" (p. 329) stance that Dion (2007, 2009) has written about. Dion (2007, 2009) states that settler people portray themselves as "perfect strangers" to Indigenous peoples, thereby perpetuating their continuing ignorance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

As I considered what might be shared with me during my research, I was aware that within this project I have witnessed different perspectives. In being self-reflexive as an ST participating in an ST/CM collaboration, I have considered how to engage with those who present ideas or ways of being with the ST/CM collaborations I have not agreed with. Lichtman (2013) shares, in the chapter, "Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research," in her book, *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide,* that "a researcher is expected to analyze data in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretations, or fraudulent analysis" (p. 54), and that above all researchers should "do no harm" (p. 52). I have turned my attention to what I have learned about myself. Thus, as I coded the data I was provided, I have reminded myself there is not one right way of thinking. Instead, I have positioned the data as a tension that invites the reader to not essentialize perspectives. While acknowledging the existence of those tensions, I have invited my own self-reflection to learn in this process. Whenever I did not agree with a participant's position, I asked myself:

a. Is it my ethics that are the problem?
b. Am I policing a CM from my ST positionality?
c. Is it my place to agree or disagree at all?
d. Is the opinion or position being taken by a participant harmful? If so, to whom is it harmful?
e. Is the opinion or position being taken by a participant relevant to this project? How will it affect the project overall?

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous are all impacted by colonialism. There was a possibility that how participants have been impacted by colonialism had shifted what they

shared in the ST/CM relationship. I have also been cautious that I have not written in a manner where it would be seen as doing the work of community members. I come from a position that my participation in an ST/CM collaboration was a positive one. This project, and the selection of participants, did not leave space for interviewing those who may have had negative relationships. I acknowledge those negative relationship may have happened, but they were not the focus of this work.

Finally, my mind turns to being self-reflexive regarding the learning opportunities I have participated in. Here I consider Marie Battiste (2013) and Willie Ermine's (Cree) (2007) concept of ethical space. ST/CM relationships I have participated in have held that in-between space. It has been a place that as a teacher, I did not need to be the "know-everything" sage on the stage. I could say "I don't know what I don't know" and sit down and learn in a more open, humble, and holistic manner. It has been within the ethical space that I have seen ST/CM collaborations exist. Here, teachers from the education system could be connected to the Indigenous CM in ways that one does not see in Eurocentric education. The connection to Indigenous community members might have shifting a teacher's mindset from paternalistic and colonizing. Engaging in the ST/CM collaboration provided opportunities in Ontario classrooms that connect those who are learning to relations to land, knowledges, others, and self.

What I Know

In examining my experiences in an ST/CM collaboration, I have been reminded of Marie Battiste's (2013) sharing how Willie Ermine (2007) utilized the idea of ethical space as related to "the two sets of intentions confronting the in-between space that connects Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems" (Battiste, 2013, p. 105). This has been the space that existed, this in-between space, the ethical space, between me, as an ST, and a CM. This ethical space

allowed us to consider important questions: Why don't I know this? What is my responsibility to know? Who/what does not knowing serve?[9] How is my sense of self implicated in not/knowing?

These questions caused me to wonder how the CM existed in this same space that has been created in the ST/CM relationship. Battiste and Henderson (2021) share that Indigenous scholars "find themselves in this liminal space between Eurocentric and Indigenous Knowledge systems, developing their academic achievement from Eurocentric disciplinary knowledge foundations and belonging to the Indigenous Knowledge traditions" (p. vii). CMs have experienced a similar liminality as they walk in two worlds. By entering an ST/CM collaboration in education, they occupied space in both worlds. They are insider/outsiders because they are Indigenous community members, while also being present and working in schools, either currently or in the past.

Reflecting on my own experience of being in this ethical space, I have contemplated the discomfort that allows teachers to resist teaching Indigenous content, despite their capacity to endure 'not knowing' in other topics. I pondered how Grade 4 Social Studies teachers, who have never lived in/experienced the Middle Ages, have been comfortable teaching it. Similarly, how do Grade 10 History teachers who were never in WWII confidently teach about it for weeks? If a teacher is comfortable teaching about WWII and the Middle Ages because they have learned about these times and spaces in preservice and in-service teacher education, would they be unable to learn Indigenous content and concepts and become comfortable teaching them? Would an ST/CM relationship assist the teacher in being comfortable and not avoiding teaching Indigenous expectations and content?[10] Participating in an ST/CM collaboration has encouraged learning in a different way, requiring respect of the knowledge that has been shared in the space.

[9] Dr. S.D. Dion, personal communication, February 21, 2021.
[10] Dr. S.D. Dion, personal communication, April 7, 2021.

I have been taught that knowledge happens as it needs to, whether being in circle, talking about the water, telling stories, or connecting to the teachings. STs from the education system have been connected to Indigenous CMs in a manner not common in Eurocentric educational settings.[11] There are no full agendas, time limits, or school bells that force a flurry of activity in a finite amount of time during the collaboration. We learn when we are supposed to learn. I am reminded of a conversation that Richard Wagamese (Ojibway) (2016) speaks of in his book, *Embers,* about how participating in ceremony can impact how we learn. He shares:

> ME: What is the purpose of ceremony?
> OLD WOMAN: To lead you to yourself.
> ME: How?
> OLD WOMAN: By giving you an idea of who you want to be and then allowing you to create the experience of being that way.
> ME: Which ceremony is the best, then?
> OLD WOMAN: Life. Choose what leads you to the highest vision you can have of yourself and then choose what allows you to express that. What you express, you experience. What you experience, you are.
> ME: How do I prepare?
> OLD WOMAN: Breathe… (p. 29)

In reflecting on my own partnership with a CM, I recognized that non-Indigenous STs and Indigenous CMs have been working in collaboration with each other, yet very little is known about the nature of these relationships. We have such scant information from either the ST or the CM perspective in these collaborations about why they wish to be in relationship with each other. Questions about these collaborations arose about how they have come to be and what has been returned to each participant, and each community, from them.

I acknowledge that my relationship came out of a CM noticing the settler ignorance I was working with and the discomfort I had in teaching Indigenous content. In connecting with Indigenous leads in boards of education, and in turning to the literature (Dion, 2014; Cannon, 2012; Korteweg & Fiddler, Weagamow and Onigaming First Nations, 2018), I learned that other regions in the province have supported ST/CM collaborations, as they saw it as beneficial to

[11] Thunder (CM), personal communication, May 2013.

have settler teachers work with a community member. While we, as the Indigenous lead, would speak of the fears STs shared, the hesitancy to teach Indigenous studies or embed Indigenous content into their practice, there was little conversation about what happens when STs and CMs were working together and if they support in-service teacher education with Indigenous knowledge. In my experience, the connection between the CM and ST in collaboration has built teacher practice and led STs towards creating an ethical space that makes room for Indigenous knowledges and voices that have not been valued in Ontario classrooms.

While there are more and more of these relationships occurring, there is also the potential for harm if we are not attentive to the need for respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Brayboy, Lumbee, et al., 2012; Kirkness, Cree, & Barnhardt, 2001). This led me to question how we bring attention to acknowledging and reducing the possibility of parasitic relationships instead of affirming and amplifying the ST/CM collaboration. Although not all STs and CMs engage in the same way (see Chapter 5), there has been knowledge that came out of the engagement that moved into classroom spaces and schools, as well as back and forth between the two participants.

Consideration has also been given to where the power lies in an ST/CM relationship. What have STs taken from the collaboration and have they given back? When this concept overlaps with the idea of power within the ST/CM collaboration, thought can be given to how to ensure that STs are not taking from the CM without reciprocity. Chapter 5 will discuss the web of reciprocity that STs and CMs spoke of during their interviews. Indigenous scholars such as Dion (2014) and Toulouse (Anishnaabe-Kwe) (2018) have shared how non-Indigenous STs can learn from and with Indigenous people in reciprocity. Is there a way to acknowledge multiple knowledge systems between STs and CMs, or even generate new, merged knowledge systems? These questions remind me of Battiste's (2013) call for a "trans-systemic evaluation of both Indigenous knowledge and Euro-Canadian knowledges" and how to bring them together to create a "new cognitive framework for curriculum, systems, and training" (p. 33). This project

focused on how the learning has moved beyond knowledge transmission that flows only from the CM to the ST. Both Chapter 5 and 6 share insight into how the ST and CM negotiated multiple knowledge systems.

ST/CM Collaboration Profiles

In this project, the participants have shown that ST/CM collaborations have much to teach us about the benefits and challenges of working together in education settings. In this section I will provide a short profile (see Table 1) of each pair to aid in understanding each individual is and how they came to work together. All STs are white. Three of the CMs, like the STs, work as teachers in Ontario public schools, while another held a full-time staff position. One CM does not work for any school board but participated as a guest speaker. Collectively, the CMs represent five distinct Indigenous communities, and their interactions provide valuable insights into ST/CM collaborations in education. These profiles, like the transcripts of their interviews, have been anonymized to ensure that any information they provide will reduce the possibility of harm to them or any situation they may speak of.

Table 1:

Summary of Profiles of Purposively Selected Settler Teachers and Indigenous Community Members

Summary of Profiles of Purposively Selected ST/CMs						
Pseudonym	**Identity**	**In collaboration with**	**OCT teacher?**	**Number of years in collaboration in education setting**	**Geographical location**	**Current status of collaboration**
Shirley	CM	Randy	Yes	Five	Northern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.
Randy	ST	Shirley	No	Five	Northern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.
Wilfred	CM	Emily	Yes	Six	Southern Ontario	Continue to work together in collaboration
Emily	ST	Wilfred	Yes	Six	Southern Ontario	Continue to work together in collaboration
Jennifer	CM	Alexandra	Yes	Three	Southern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.

Alexandra	ST	Jennifer	Yes	Three	Southern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.
Noah	CM	Maggie	No	Four	Southern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.
Maggie	ST	Noah	Yes	Four	Southern Ontario	No longer working in collaboration.
Thunder	CM	Krista	Retired	Eleven	Northern Ontario	Continue to work together in collaboration
Krista[a]	ST	Thunder	Yes	Eleven	Northern Ontario	Continue to work together in collaboration

[a]Krista is the only name that is not a pseudonym in this list.

ST/CM collaborations have been opportunities for engaging in what Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) call the "sticky points and slippery slopes"[12] of moving towards "education-as-reconciliation" (p. 261).[13] While Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) conducted research with teacher candidates, my project has indicated that the relationship between practicing STs, in collaboration with CMs, has been a productive one for each party; for Indigenous students, families, and communities; and for non-Indigenous students.

In 2014, while presenting The Listening Stone Project[14], Dr. S. Dion quoting Margaret Kovach (Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux) (2009), shared that "we know what we know from where we

[12] Korteweg and Fiddler categorize sticky points and slippery slopes as "those difficult moments or uncomfortable points in contention that emerge or stick out when divergent narratives or values clash, resulting in a cultural interface of complexities (Nakata, 2011) when complacent White settler normativity is unsettled (Regan, 2010), interrupted or exposed" (p. 261).

[13] There are several Indigenous activists and writers who are sharing their viewpoint on reconciliation and how it is not actually moving forward in Canada. From the purchase of a pipeline in the West that will snake through Wet'suwet'en lands in British Columbia and the subsequent treatment of land protectors, the racism evident in Nova Scotia that was endured by lobster fishers of the Sipekne'katik First Nation who were exercising their fishing rights, to the 1492 Landback Lane defenders of the Six Nations of the Grand River in Ontario, some Indigenous people have stated that there is no reconciliation in Canada. Anishnaabe writer Riley Yesno has written articles on the topic of reconciliation published in the Toronto Star and McLeans. Idle No More and Defenders of the Land have made a joint statement regarding truth before reconciliation. Activist and podcast host Ryan McMahon has stated that there must be decolonization before reconciliation. Senator (deceased) Murray Sinclair has also shared that reconciliation is not about tearing down statutes or renaming buildings. Youth activists are asking for truth as the Canadian government leaves unfulfilled promise after promise on the table. For some there will not be education-as-reconciliation as there is no truth that has been understood by non-Indigenous people in Canada.

[14] From The Executive Summary, Dion (2014) "The purpose of the research and evaluation was to learn from the inquiry how educators, policy makers, and community members contribute to FNMI student well-being and achievement in provincially funded schools" (p. 4).

stand" (video clip "Research Project Limitations, 3:15). Where STs "stand" should be informed by the Framework's (2007) stance on the "integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the right cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples" (p. 15). In the future, a revised Framework (2007) should move STs forward in the learning. The Framework's (2007) goals on pages 14 and 17, coupled with the importance of closing the education achievement gap for Indigenous students, perpetuate the narrative of the poor Indigenous child who lacks education while also telling STs that they do not know what to teach or how to teach it. The latter point allows STs to remain stuck in their discomfort instead of moving forward in their learning.

There are a variety of ways that STs and CMs engage in collaborations. Not every interaction between CM and ST will develop into a collaboration in the education setting, nor should it. Having STs and CMs share how their relationship came to be was one focus of my inquiry. This project included my own experiences of being an ST in relation with a CM, as well as experiences shared by others who have encountered similar opportunities. The relationships I included in this project have moved beyond those where the ST was still questioning, "What can I do to help?" to the ST understanding their role was not to teach Indigenous knowledge, but to be aware of their position as settler when teaching.

While researching these ST/CM collaborations, I made sure to look for significant areas of caution, such as what happened if the relationships were appropriating Indigenous knowledge or how STs addressed settler ignorance in the classroom or PD sessions. The ST/CM collaborations in this project recognized the humanity of Indigenous people, and STs appreciated the value and legitimacy of Indigenous knowledges without appropriating Indigenous knowledge. Consideration was given to understanding what is removed or lost from the community in a CM/ST collaboration and how these collaborations could have occurred without harm to the community. The project investigated how CM/ST collaborations negotiated

the length of the relationship, the boundaries of the relationship, and whether the nature of the relationship had been a mentee/mentor or something else.

"I Don't Know How to Teach This": The Lament of the Settler Teacher

When taking on the role of Indigenous Lead, I recognized I had no concept of how to "be" this role and to prepare teachers to bring Indigenous content into their classrooms. As a white ST, I had to navigate privileges and barriers of my own in doing this work. I had to face my own settler ignorance and that as a white woman, I had little knowledge of Indigenous realities. These challenges are ones that many non-Indigenous STs have. In addition, I experienced resistance from teachers who were unwilling to engage Indigenous knowledge, shown through comments such as, "I don't have any First Nations students in my class, so I don't need to include this," or "There are no Aboriginal students in this board." Teachers associated teaching Indigenous content with Indigenous students rather than an educational reform. They showed little understanding that teaching an Indigenous student was not a requirement to utilizing Indigenous content in classrooms. Many teachers were surprised when presented with the Framework. They were unsure what was being asked of them, both in the Framework and by the board. The refrain appeared to be rooted in lack of knowledge and included taking the position of Dion's (2009) "perfect stranger" (p. 178). Dion (2009) shared the teachers knew "that ways of teaching that reproduce stereotypical representations are inadequate," but a fear of harming, of offending, and of doing it wrong or being controversial, allowed them to take the position of "perfect stranger" (p.179).

Contemplation of these questions and discussions with colleagues in a similar role across the province led to conversations of ways to build learning opportunities for STs. My research investigated ST/CM collaborations and how they impacted teaching practices with Indigenous knowledge and content in the classroom. The intentionality of building such relationships allowed for STs to engage deeply with Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and to build a respect for culture, values, and beliefs (Dion, 2007). The long history of

teacher education, and the education system generally, grounded in Eurocentric ways of learning and teaching, has meant that many of the practicing teachers in the province are ill-equipped to teach Indigenous curriculum or ideas. Classroom teachers' immersion with Indigenous communities and community members can provide a way forward in moving Indigenous education into public school classrooms.

Research Questions

From my experiences, I propose that ST/CM collaborations are integral to ongoing teacher learning and education in Ontario public schools. Given the challenges that STs face in teaching First Nation, Métis, and Inuit studies courses or expectations, engaging in ST/CM collaborations has been useful, even necessary; yet these collaborations have come with questions. The main research question of this project is: *What are the possibilities and challenges of ST/CM collaborations for Ontario settler teachers and Indigenous community members?* Sub-questions include:

a) What is the nature of the relationship between STs and CMs?

b) How do ST/CM collaborations impact STs understanding of colonization and what and how STs teach in Ontario schools.

c) What is the impact ST/CM collaborations have on the experiences and perspectives of CMs?

To elicit answers to the (re)search questions, this project required a theoretical framework that helps to make sense of relationships between STs and CMs.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical framework I use and connect this dissertation to relations to land, knowledge, others and self. Chapter 3 moves into the review of the literature with a two-fold focus on theories of professional learning and the current available literature about settler teacher/Indigenous community member relationships. Methodology and methods are contained in Chapter 4, including an insight into my insider/outsider perspective in this work. In Chapter 5, I explore the themes that were shared in the data which gestures to the *how* of the

ST/CM relationship. Chapter 6 shares reflections on my conceptual framework and a discussion of the findings in dialogue with the literature in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 7 shares the summary, recommendations and conclusions arrived upon in this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this project has been informed by decolonizing theory, which has contributed to my knowledge, understanding, and thinking about ST/CM collaborations. It provided an opportunity to create space and listen to voices that have not been centred in the dominant discourse. Utilizing a decolonizing framework created space for decolonization to occur within the post-secondary system that this dissertation has been written for. It allowed me to connect the un/learning of the ST/CM relationship to the expectations of Ontario education system and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2007), which opened the door for me in engaging with and learning from Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Decolonizing Theory

Decolonizing theory begins with an understanding of colonization. For the purposes of this project, I understand Coté-Meek's (Anishnaabe-Kwe) (2014) conceptualization of colonization as the violent appropriation of Indigenous lands by settler populations, legitimized through fabricated narratives, myths, and what she identifies as "ideologies." Through Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi) (2012) I view decolonization as the systematic dismantling of colonial bureaucratic structures, cultural frameworks, and linguistic systems, accompanied by the rejection of psychological constructs that perpetuate colonial domination and assumptions of Indigenous inferiority. I note that Mohanty (1996) underscores the necessity of "unlearning" as a critical component of decolonization for colonizers and settlers, grounded in the cultivation of ethical and equitable relationships between formerly colonizing and colonized groups. Finally, in Ugarte (2014) I come to understand that decolonization constitutes not merely a broad political and social phenomenon but also entails a profound transformation of individual consciousness as supported by the work of Thaman (2003).[15]

[15] While I rely on decolonizing theory for this project, there are other relevant literatures including those on settler colonialism (See Jodi Byrd, Glen Sean Coulthard, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Patrick Wolfe and

In Tuck (Unangax̂) and Fine's (2007) *Inner Angles: A Range of Ethical Responses To/With Indigenous and Decolonizing Theories,* Tuck speaks of "that which is cloaked, overshadowed by colonizer's guilt – the acknowledgement of oppression and the simultaneous retreat from responsibility for change" (p. 153). ST/CM collaborations are a relationship where Tuck and Fine's (2007) position on ethics and guilt can come up against decolonizing theory. Tuck and Fine (2007) discuss the questions that often arise from settlers from their guilt, stating that when faced with examples of colonization they respond with:

> "I didn't know." "I didn't mean to." "I don't know how to stop it." "What can I possibly do?" These questions freeze, petrify. These responses of white guilt and colonizers' guilt distract from what a real/an ethical conversation about ongoing colonization and ongoing decolonization requires: preparedness, listening, reflection, and reparation. (p. 155)

As I move forward to the manner in which the project addresses decolonial work and decolonizing theory, I am reminded that Tuhiwai Smith (2005) has pointed out that "[d]ecolonizing research is not simply about challenging or making refinements to qualitative research" (p. 6). The project has also attended to the ethics of decolonizing theory.

In the next section, I focus on decolonizing theory as it relates to education and explore the following four aspects:

1. Relations to land – what does it mean to give land back in a colonized state and how does that impact decolonization?
2. Relations to knowledge – decentering Eurocentric knowledge
3. Relations to others – how interconnectedness impacts relationships with each other
4. Relations to self – how self-reflexivity can move the self to healing

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Lorenzo Veracini); Indigenous resistance (See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang and Alfred Taiaiake) and resurgence (See Michael Asch, John Borrow and James Tully [Eds], Jeff Corntassel and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson); and on whiteness (See Aileen Moreton-Robinson and George Yancy). While important frameworks, the exploration of these literatures is beyond the scope of this thesis. This project is specifically focused on decolonization as it pertains to relations to land, knowledge, self and others within the context of formal public schooling.

Absolon (2011) shares that "decolonization and indigenizing is about both knowing and having a critical consciousness about our cultural history" (p.19). How has decolonization worked (or not) in the education spaces of Ontario? While Absolon (2011) is speaking specifically to Anishinaabe culture when she says, "our cultural history," non-Indigenous STs must be critical of the dominant history we have been taught if we are to truly decolonize spaces. By being critical of the dominant history used to date, STs can trouble their relationship with decolonization. Being critical also means being aware that "the politics of decolonization and indigenizing is a conscious and necessary part of the journey" (Absolon, 2011, p. 19). Utilizing decolonizing theory within this project invited participants to consider their place in this space, their relationship to self and to each other, and to their work within the education system.

Relations to Land

I return to Coté-Meek's (2014) dimensions of colonization and relate them to education. The Ministry of Education determines the curriculum and what is taught in classrooms. The "square boxes of the classroom"[16] as Thunder (CM) calls them are both physically and educationally distant from Indigenous ways of knowing and how learning from the land can occur . Teachers have the agency to select classroom content to meet curriculum needs. Yet classroom spaces continue to be the primary location where learning is expected to take place. In colonized educational spaces, the dominant discourse is the preferred method of knowledge transference. STs often rely upon Eurocentric traditions or "this is how we have always done it" as being the "proper" method. Value is given to Eurocentric ways of learning conducted predominantly in classroom spaces.

Decolonizing theory proposes that, as a concept, "land" is not necessarily physical. Land as pedagogy is about challenging settler associations of land with ownership of property. Jimmy and Andreotti (2019) share that "sense and sensibilities stand for a set of ways of being that

[16] Thunder (CM), personal communication, May 2013.

emphasize inter-wovenness, shape-shifting flexibility and layered time…where every 'thing' (including humans, non-humans and the land) is a living entity" (p. 14). We are in relation to land, and it is in relation to us. How do we own something that we are in deep relation to? How do we instead learn from and with the land? Decolonizing theory invites us to divest from notions of ownership[17] and instead consider that we live in relationship with the land.[18]

Absolon (2011) states that "the animals, the earth and Creation are the original teachers of the Anishinaabek" (p. 25). In elementary and secondary education, we have seen more calls for a return to land-based learning grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. By inviting CMs to bring Indigenous ways of knowing and being into education settings, space is being created to learn from and with Indigenous knowledge. This "created space" can be viewed as going toward the land. Taking students out onto the land to learn moves them towards focusing on the benefits of being outside and demonstrates the importance of the connection between land and people.

For many non-Indigenous people, giving land back is an explicit returning of title and physical land. In this project, the concept of returning to land or giving land back leans on Absolon (2011), Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) (2011), and Jimmy and Andreotti's (2019) conceptions of land as pedagogy. It also connected to the ideas of Kimmerer (2013) who states that the land teaches us, that we are not the most important thing on the land, and that land is much more than the dirt under our feet. In discussing the differences between modern (secular) societies and traditional (sacred) societies and their respective views of land, Grande (Quechua) (2015) shares that "the sacred is viewed as subordinate to the secular, space is subordinate to time, and tradition is subordinate to progress" (p. 102). Houston (2015), in her response to Grande's (2015) chapter, "Red Land, White Power," points out that "if you listen to what the land

[17] Dr. V. Shah, personal communication, December 8, 2021
[18] Dr. S. Dion, personal communication, March 29, 2022

is telling you, it is hard to ignore all the connections and relations to the living world spreading out from it. There is no external relation. Land is life" (p. 131).

Land back/returning to land as a theme in decolonizing theory is woven throughout this project. As Kimmerer (Potawatomi) (2013) says,

> I like to imagine that when Skywoman[19] scattered her handful of seeds across Turtle Island, she was sowing sustenance for the body and also for the mind, emotion, and spirit: she was leaving us teachers. The plants can tell us her story; we need to learn to listen (p. 10).

Relations to Knowledge

Dion (2009) reflects that "Battiste calls for a decolonizing of the curriculum, a process that will require Aboriginal educators to be actively part of the transformation of knowledge" (p. 67). I extend this thinking to include the need for there to be a system of education wherein it is Indigenous people who set the curriculum, based on inherent rights and Indigenous ways of knowing.

One need only look at the canon of English literature or the outline of a Grade 10 History course, prior to the release of the revised Canadian and World Studies – History curriculum (2018, p. 107 & 131), to see that Eurocentric dominance is at the forefront of learning with little space given to multiple ways of knowing and being. It is within this relation to knowledge that we can consider education differently, that we trouble the Eurocentric aspects and consider how we can move from an "I've made it, I've got mine" ideology to one that values interconnectedness. Consider the roles that are valued within mainstream public education. Why is the education system only now finding a way to include Indigenous language teachers in teacher education? Why are the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Studies courses in secondary schools' options as opposed to compulsory courses? Questioning the "holidays" that are centered in schooling begins a conversation that disrupts the Eurocentric cornerstone of the Ontario school calendar.

[19] Kimmerer shares the Creation story of Skywoman in the first chapter of her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. The story of Skywoman is shared among many Indigenous peoples with variations depending on geographical location and Nation.

Why do we need a punitive system of consequences when we have seen that Restorative Justice, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, is beneficial for students?[20] In considering how one goes about decolonizing Indigenous education, Battiste (2013) states:

> It is about self-determination, deconstructing decisions about curricular knowledge, and re-energizing education and knowledge to the contexts of lives. Also, it is about deconstructing decisions about curricular knowledge and reframing education and knowledge to the contexts of people's lives, a *sui generis* or 'one of a kind' education and learning. It is not a singular or total theory, but multiple theories, strategies, and struggles. (p. 107)

In this section, I examine Eurocentric dominance in the school calendar. Above I spoke of the "square boxes of classrooms", but I also consider how we insist on the "square boxes of the calendar."[21] Our school calendar runs on an industrialized model with no respect for the cultures of others, particularly Indigenous peoples. The calendar is based on an agrarian model that allowed for white, male students to be on the farms during key times of planting and harvesting. The education system itself is also predicated on an industrial model that ensures we turn out students as perfect products who will conform and follow the rules. Grande (2015) shares:

> The need for understanding other cultural patterns as legitimate and competing sources of knowledge is critical. In this context, the voices of Indigenous and other non-Western peoples become increasingly vital, not because such peoples categorically possess any kind of magical, mystical power to fix countless generations of abuse and neglect, but because non-Western peoples and nations exist as living critiques of the dominant culture, providing critical knowledge and potentially transformative paradigms. (p. 95)

Sathorar and Geduld (2018) affirm that "decolonizing education involves disrupting dominant discourses. It requires the current Eurocentric content and methods to be challenged" (p. 10).

Situating education in a more inclusive, non-Eurocentric model would allow for Indigenous ways of knowing to be incorporated into the learning. Simpson (2011) shares how her "approach to this work is not rooted solely in the intellectual; it is rooted in my spiritual and

[20] Tucker Petrick, K. (2010). *This teacher's experience with restorative justice and restorative practice: A narrative.* Nipissing University, North Bay, ON.
[21] Thunder (CM), personal communication, May 2013.

emotional life, as well as my body…" (p. 19). As ST educators, if we connect our understanding of learning to Indigenous knowledge, we centre other ways of knowing. Recognizing that learning from and with Indigenous CMs benefits students can engage STs in decentering the dominant way of doing things in the Ontario classroom. It is a fine line to walk. STs need to understand the difference between appropriation and appreciation to make the knowledge connection. To engage with this relation to knowledge, I rely on Battiste (2013), who states "decolonizing Indigenous education first and foremost must be framed within concepts of dialogue, respect for educational pluralities, multiplicities, and diversities" (p. 107), thereby challenging everything that Eurocentric dominance stands for. A model of education based on Indigenous ways of knowing respects this framing. It is moving from Eurocentric viewpoints to valuing another knowledge. A movement towards valuing other knowledges would strengthen how students learn.

Trans-systemic Knowledge Systems. Decolonizing theory recognizes that education prioritizes Eurocentric knowledge systems above all other knowledge systems. This prioritization creates a divide in education, valuing one system of learning over any other (Brooks, 2020). Decolonizing theory instead assists educators in viewing the relationality that exists within education. Battiste and Henderson (2021) explain it as a melding the two knowledge systems, stating,

> trans-systemic synthesis between Indigenous and Eurocentric Knowledge systems is searching for an enfolded knowledge system that reveals wholeness, rather than fragmentation of logic and causality. Yet, in this synthesis, it is not a quest for a grand theory of everything…This emerging synthesis can often appear undefinable and immeasurable but interconnected and relational. (p. viii)

To value Indigenous knowledges requires STs to recognize themselves as in relationship with: in relationship with a CM, relationship with themselves, relationship with the world around them, and relationship with the knowledge systems of others. STs and CMs find space to engage in trans-systemic knowledge systems.

Challenging the Eurocentric dominance of the education system calls for the decentering of settler ways, recognition other ways of knowing and being, learning from them as we reflect on our positionality as STs, and being open to change as a state of being in an ongoing learning stance. I am reminded of the words of Kovach (2009) in the prologue of *Indigenous Methodologies*: "We know what we know from where we stand. We need to be honest about that…I have a responsibility to help create entry points for Indigenous knowledge to come through" (p. 7). I am not Indigenous, but I have a responsibility to challenge Eurocentric dominance and create space for other ways of knowing and being, particularly ways Indigenous to this land, within educational spaces. Through a relation to knowledge that values Indigenous ways of knowing and being, STs can create "one of a kind" programs for all students. The opportunities for all who work and learn within the education system to truly find a personal relation to knowledge is closer than imagined. In these trans-systemic spaces, no one knowledge system reigns supreme. Instead, creating a space that acknowledges multiple knowledge systems is beneficial for all (Battiste, 2013; McDermott et al., 2021).

Relations with Others

The Two Row Wampum belt reminds us of how we should be in relation to one another. Alfred Manuel (Ktunaxa and Secwepemc Nations) (2015) shares "the story our Elder told us: Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples should be travelling in two canoes on the river together, but each moving under their own power and in control of their own direction" (p. 240). He goes on to welcome everyone to work towards decolonization, stating

> we invite all Canadians to join us to help move the final obstacle together. We can accomplish this as friends and partners…Or we can do it as adversaries…Our path toward decolonization is clear. It is up to Canadians to choose theirs. (p. 227)

In a similar vein, Coté-Meek (2014) states: "At a fundamental level, decolonization is a process that is both counter-hegemonic and self-determining" (p. 35), a location in which this project was grounded. The ST/CM collaborations that occurred were not forced or encouraged by colonial systems of education. They "broke the rules" of conformity.

In publicly funded education in Ontario, being in relation with others means that the voices of Indigenous CMs are included in the system in a variety of ways. All school boards are required to have a First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Advisory Council to ensure the schools support the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007), as well as providing opportunities to share knowledge and best practices. Many boards have gone well beyond an advisory council and provide other opportunities for sharing Indigenous knowledges. The Toronto District School Board has an Urban Indigenous Education Centre focused on infusing Indigenous ways of knowing across the required Ontario curriculum to reduce the achievement gap for Indigenous students. The Waterloo Region District School Board has added Anishinaabemowin to the offerings in their International and Indigenous languages program, a first of its kind in the south-western part of the province. The Ministry of Education has provided funding for an Indigenous social worker and Indigenous graduation coaches within school boards. These commitments create a space for non-Indigenous educators, students, and families to learn ways of being in relation with Indigenous peoples.

Despite positive moves by school boards, we have not yet reached a point where Indigenous peoples are the architects of Indigenous education. Colonial education was not set up with Indigenous sovereignty in mind. In *Colonized Classrooms,* Coté-Meek (2014) clearly describes that "schools became one of the primary methods utilized in the colonial project to suppress and eradicate Aboriginal peoples, including their ways of knowing and understanding" (p. 52). Several policy papers have been written, such as *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), and *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of the Future* (1998), all of which clearly state that Indigenous control of Indigenous education is fundamental to sovereignty (Coté-Meek, 2014). In reality, implementing Indigenous sovereignty over education is a slow-moving goal at best, and non-existent at worst.

Yet, Alfred Manuel's (2015) story of the Two Row Wampum tells how to be in relation with others in a decolonizing way. When related to education, there must be two education

systems that run parallel, but do not interfere with each other. While the Ontario education system is not at this point, there is room for Indigenous sovereignty in Ontario education systems. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) Call to Action #10 states:

> We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:
>
> i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
> ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
> iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
> iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
> v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
> vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
> vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

As I read Call to Action #10, I am left with a number of wonderings that informed this project. This particular Call to Action references reservation schools run by the federal government, rather than the public system I work in. Nevertheless, I continued to grapple with whether meeting the Call to Action in Ontario public schools honoured treaties and non-Indigenous people who might find themselves in relation with Indigenous peoples, much like the ST/CM collaborations in this project. I wondered what room there was for the Ontario education system to transform the Education Advisory Council from an advisory to governing role, or if a different funding model could be put in place in Ontario, wherein the Council would determine how the Indigenous Education Grant[22] monies might be spent. These shifts could be viewed as radical but would be a decolonizing way forward for education, a way that would find us in relation with each other.

[22] The Indigenous Education Grant monies amount was historically found at line 5 of the Grant for Student Needs (GSN) Proposal produced by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The 2023-24 school year projected an allocation $137.7 million across school boards in the province. In 2024-2025 the GSN was renamed Core Education Funding (CEF) and no longer has line 5. Instead, Indigenous Education Funding is located in the Classroom Fund and Learning Resources Fund and not readily evident in the breakdown.

Settler Ignorance. Questions about how STs understand and enact settler ignorance and how CMs addressed settler ignorance lie within the framework of decolonizing theory. I was reminded of Dion's (2007; 2009) concept of the "perfect stranger" and how non-Indigenous people "claim the position of 'perfect stranger' to Aboriginal people" (p. 330). Dion (2007) shares that the perfect stranger position "is informed simultaneously by what teachers know, what they do not know, and what they refuse to know" (p. 331). Battiste and Henderson (2021) further explain that

> knowledge is filled with absences and gaps, such that learners are both what they know and what they don't know. Moreover, if what we know is deformed by absences, denial, or incompleteness, our knowledge is partial and limited. This view of knowledge suggests that acknowledging ignorance is an essential part of learning. (p. vii)

For teachers who moved beyond refusal to know and into ST/CM relationships, how did they reconcile their positionality as the "perfect stranger"?

The building of an ST/CM relationship launches the ST towards becoming an anti-racist and anti-colonial teacher. It works by having STs recognize their privilege, that their way of knowing and doing has aligned with and upheld the dominant discourse, and that there was another way of learning that enhances teaching practice. For Tuck (2007), decolonization requires "preparedness, listening, reflection, and reparation" (p. 155) by settlers. Reparation "requires coming clean, coming out, investing in infrastructure, honoring sovereignty, *unforgetting*. Unforgetting can happen within an epistemological frame that rejects individualism, and so doing, occupation" (p. 155). By moving past the refusal to know into a listening and learning stance with an Indigenous CM, STs were no longer the "perfect stranger" (Dion, 2007, 2009). If they held on to being the perfect stranger, refusing to know, they would not move into relationship with the CM.

Relations to Self

Schools have been, and continue to be, places that harm students, particularly those who are seen as the Other. The Indian Residential School System, as part of a policy of

colonization, was a site of genocide for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, culture, language, forms of government, and economies (TRC, 2015, p. 133). The TRC document goes on to state: “It is time to abandon the colonial policies of the past, to address the legacy of the schools, and to engage in a process of reconciliation with the Aboriginal people of Canada” (p. 133).

> Paraphrasing Grande (2004), Coté-Meek (2014) states that
>
> while an education for decolonization must trouble colonist education, decolonization also requires a praxis that enables the dismantling of colonist forces (2004: 26). She contends that there is a need for a pedagogy that cultivates a sense of collective agency, both to curb the excesses of dominant power and to revitalize Indigenous communities (Grande, 2004: 26). (p. 32).

In her work on decolonizing education, Brooks (2020) relies on Sium et al. (2012) when she states, “it is difficult to find examples of this in progress because decolonization is ‘moving towards a different and tangible place, somewhere out there, where no one has really ever been’ (Sium et al., 2012: 11)” (p. 10). In the context of this project, I wondered what the ST/CM collaborations brought to those who are participating in them. Does the relationship undo the colonized education of the ST, while allowing decolonized education frameworks to flow through the relationship that the ST/CM create? Sandra Styres (Kanien'kehá:ka) (2019) in *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* (Smith et al., 2019) states that “decolonizing praxis actively engages with colonial relations of power and privilege in order to unsettle and disrupt the status quo within educational contexts” (p. 32). These questions were front of mind throughout the interview process in this project.

Healing is part of becoming decolonized and finding ways to be in relation to self. Healing occurs in many ways. It can be individual, where one finds their own ways to heal. It can be communal, happening within the community a person lives, works, plays, and loves. It can be formal, such as therapy or participating in ceremony. Or it can be a combination of any

of these ways, as one sees themselves as moving from being colonized to being decolonized. Examples of healing are connecting to your language and culture. Coté-Meek (2014) states:

> it takes time to become decolonized, and we do not become decolonized without engaging in a lengthy process of freeing ourselves from colonial and imperial domination and control on multiple levels, including the mind, body and spirit, and within many contexts, such as family, community and larger society. (p. 35)

In the context of this project, ST/CM collaborations expanded beyond the "colonial and imperial domination" Coté-Meek (2014) speaks of and allowed the participants to engage in a way that was not under the control of any educational institution. This created space for learning a shared history that has silenced Indigenous peoples' voices for generations. What is necessary to heal and become decolonized is the need to acknowledge our interconnected history that is steeped in colonization and oppression (Battiste, 1998; Coté-Meek, 2014). When an ST/CM collaboration honoured this knowledge, a form of decolonization began to occur and created both an ethical space and a space for healing.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

Through this journey in academia, I have focused on two aspects: the relationships I build and the reading I do. These separate components work together and are in relation to each other. When researching of ST/CM collaborations, the literature review connected deeply to these relationships. As shared previously, I am a white woman conducting this research, thus I would never say my "cultural framework" is an Indigenous one. The ST/CM collaborations I have participated in have provided me with some understanding of what Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) (2001) calls "the importance of relationships, that everything needs to be seen within the context of the relationship it represents" (p. 43).

I found myself in the position of searching for literature that related to the relationships I have participated in. I understood that my purpose with the literature review was not to be critical of past work, but instead to determine how this project has added to the existing body of work. Wilson (2001) states that

> by telling what others ha[ve been doing] in the area being studied, a literature review in the dominant tradition is their way of putting a [project] into its context. And by doing the review in a style that is not critical, but builds upon the work of others, it can also form the context for relational accountability in working from an Indigenous paradigm. (p. 44)

I approached the literature review by building upon the work of others and presenting it to those in the "dominant tradition" as my way asserting that the relationship between ST and CM has led to positive knowledge building in the Ontario classrooms and schools. Therefore, I used both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (re)search methods and literature to support my (re)search.

As I read through the literature, I came across a variety of texts that might have been overlooked as supporting materials in an academic paper. Writers such as Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) (1995), Leanne Simpson (2011, 2013), and Richard Wagamese (2016) share stories and teachings that provide opportunities to dig deeper into the ST/CM relationships. In adding these "non-traditional" texts to my literature review, I have been able to present my (re)search in a way that demonstrated I knew my place in the space, and that the Elders and

knowledge keepers I have had the privilege of learning from and who have allowed me to bring their ways of knowing into my own teaching practice, have been a valuable resource in building upon multiple knowledge systems in the classroom.

Theories of Professional Learning

The work within ST/CM relationships amplified spaces and voices focusing on professional development and learning outside of Western methods in education institutions. CM/ST collaborations interrupted the assumed neutrality of typical professional learning that does not ask the educator to situate themselves in the learning. Using theories of professional learning as a framework in the project encouraged those who work within education institutions and systems to be critical of the way we "have always done it". Opfer and Pedder (2011) note that professional learning "must be conceptualized as a complex system rather than an event" (p. 3), which provided space to consider the ST/CM collaboration as an example of professional teacher learning. As I used decolonizing theory for this project, the professional learning that STs/CMs participated in would need to be decolonized as well. Learning had to be done in relation to land, knowledge, others, and self-described in the theoretical framing. If there was no relation to these four aspects of decolonizing theory, then is the professional learning truly decolonized?

Professional learning plays a significant role in what could be termed the education of teachers. A recent article from the Ontario Principal Council's magazine, *The Register*, defines professional learning as "an internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge with information in a way that challenges previous assumptions and creates new meanings" (Ontario Principals Council, p. 31). Teachers in elementary and secondary public education participate in a defined number of professional activity or professional development days.[23] I suggest that professional learning is not what happens on those days in the context of theories

[23] Professional activity and professional development are used interchangeably within the province of Ontario and this proposal.

of professional learning. In my role as Indigenous Lead, I have seen firsthand that large swaths of professional activity days are taken up with procedures such as Health & Safety training, staff meetings, department meetings, and independent time to set up classroom spaces. Little if any of these activities are done in a decolonized way but instead are a laundry list of "to do" tasks. There is little opportunity for teachers to engage in learning or to have engagement with learning that centers themselves as learners or centers students.

Assumptions about professional learning are rarely explicitly discussed. Only infrequently do we trouble these "philosophical assumptions" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 704) or provide a critical analysis of them (Butler et al., 2002; Duncan et al., 2007; Hagar, 2004; Webster-Wright, 2009). We assume that learning does occur in professional learning, that it only occurs in the work setting, and that it must have a specific process with outcomes that allow us to measure change. I argue that this assumption is incorrect and that changing our view of professional learning creates decolonized spaces that honour diversity and non-Eurocentric ways of learning.

Goodnough (2018) states professional learning needs to "promote active learning; provide ongoing teacher support and be embedded in a culture of learning; be based on teachers' needs, the needs of their students and connected to larger school and school district initiatives; and foster collective participation" (p. 2181). These aspects relate to the goals of the Framework (2007), particularly performance measures 7 (p. 13) and 10 (p. 15), and what may be an outcome of the ST/CM collaborations. Webster-Wright's (2009) viewpoint that "professionals learn, in a way that shapes their practice, from a diverse range of activities, from formal PD programs, through interaction with work colleagues, to experiences outside of work, in differing combinations and permutations of experiences" (p. 705) veers away from the performance measures of the Framework (2007). Webster-Wright's (2009) criteria relate to what may be reported as occurring within the ST/CM relationship. Where Goodnough (2018) focuses on active learning and a culture of learning, Webster-Wright's (2009) outlook relates back to the

need for a relation to knowledge, to what Battiste (2013) was talking about when she spoke of "one of a kind learning and education" (p. 107). Both Webster-Wright (2009) and Battiste (2013) are asking us to pull apart what we know and reframe it, to look at it from all sides, before we try to put it back together.

Using decolonizing theory, my discussion below will focus on the following aspects of professional learning theory: personal experience and beliefs, centering of different knowledge systems, and embedding of learning/collaboration into practice.

Personal Experiences and Beliefs

The personal experiences we bring to professional learning can truly shape how the learning occurs. Opfer and Pedder (2011) point out that "teachers bring both past experiences and beliefs to their teaching and learning" (p. 12) and that "teaching is influenced by beliefs but also leads to the modification and formation of belief systems" (p. 12). Learning and unlearning is difficult for many and learning to learn takes a great deal of effort (Katz & Dack, 2014). Learning does not come naturally, due to what Katz and Dack (2014) call a "natural predisposition to preserve and conserve [our] existing beliefs, understandings, and behaviours" (p. 15). We stick to where we are comfortable and do not move to trouble or challenge our experiences or beliefs. We often have a desire to work with those who think as we do so as not to challenge our learning or self-image as learners.

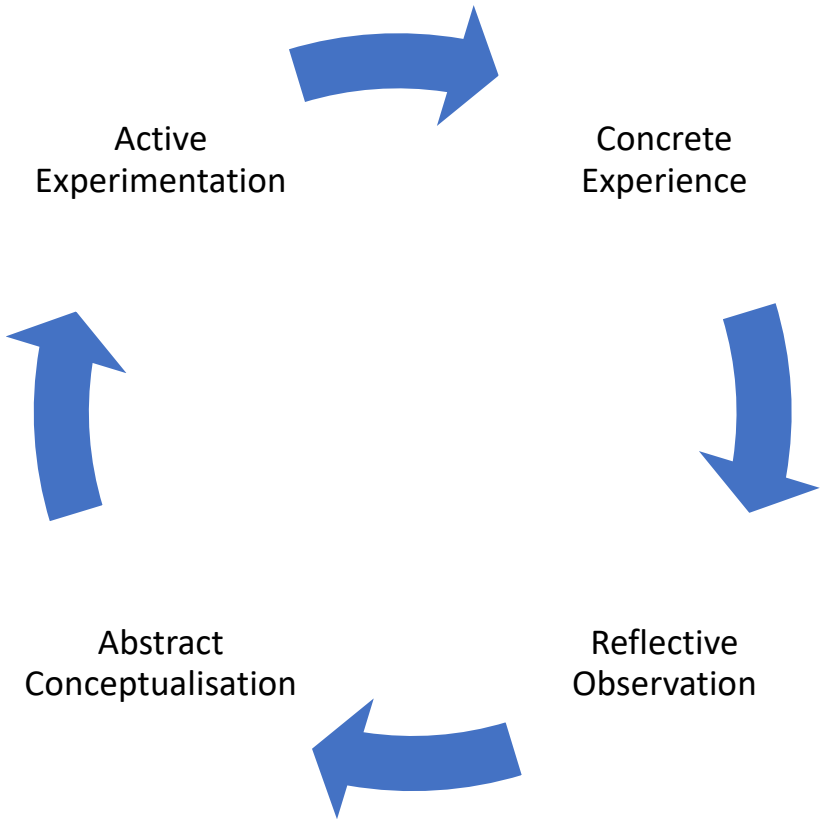
While reviewing multiple theories of professional learning in Philpott's *Theories of Professional Learning: A Critical Guide for Teacher Educators* (2014), Eraut's (2004, 2012) "just in time" learning and Kolb's (1983) Experiential Learning Cycle came to the forefront. Philpott describes this learning as knowledge that is "learned at the point at which it becomes relevant to developing practice. This suggests a reorganisation of the relationship between academic and professional components" (p. 33). Through engagement in an ST/CM collaboration, both parties came to the work at a time that is "right" for them, or "just in time." It was not forced, not bound by process or procedure, and, while based on individual need, it also became a community-

based effort in learning. The learning was not purely academic in these relationships. There was not a formal agenda that guides the learning. There may have been professional components of the collaboration in that what was shared could have been taken back to both the ST and CM's professional life. STs and CMs determined the learning for themselves, based on where they were within their collaboration and what the needs of the relationship were. This might have been viewed as unstructured, but was, in fact, "just in time learning" that engaged the collaborators in individual ways.

Kolb's (1983) experiential learning theory is often favoured as one can enter the cycle at any point of the learning. The cycle contains four elements that are considered entry points to the experiential learning cycle (see Figure 1). Entry can occur at any point on the cycle. While the cycle (Figure 1) could overlay the ST/CM relationship given that it permitted learning to take place in a non-linear fashion that allowed for multiple opportunities to consider the un/learning, it was akin to being stuck in a loop. Kolb's (1983) approach to professional learning is often used and accepted in the dominant discourse of professional learning, but in relation to ST/CM collaborations I cannot accept all aspects of it. A teacher may be able to utilize this model to improve an aspect to performance in their classroom. However, time to reflect may not be available immediately to determine success or if the success would have been inevitable (Philpott, 2014). For this reason, as well as the fact that this is a significantly individual-based cycle, this model did not relate deeply to the ST/CM relationship. However, it bears mentioning here given that the components of the cycle do engage the learners at the beginning of the relationship. I posit that for the ST/CM collaboration to begin there was an entry point into this cycle at some time after their initial meeting. Which point depended on how the ST/CM met and under what conditions the relationship grew. For example, some may have meet at a conference and began their relationship there. Others may have been introduced through their daily interactions with others.

Figure 1:

Kolb's experiential learning cycle



Note: Recreated from D. Kolb, 1983, reprinted in C. Philpott, 2014, Critical Publishing. Copyright 2014 by Carey Philpott.

Centering of Different Knowledge Systems

What teachers require when they start out in their chosen profession shifts and morphs throughout their career. We are all assimilated or indoctrinated into what we learn in our respective Faculties of Education. We leave the faculties with the contrary understanding that we are required to continue to learn and that as educators we already know how to do this. Olson and Katz (2001) use the metaphor of the mind being an empty container and share that "teaching becomes an exercise in telling and learning, an exercise in remembering" (p. 243). In

this project, professional learning moved beyond the concept of the empty container and demanded an unlearning of Western notions of professional learning.

Philpott (2014) relates Eraut's (2012) theory to initial teacher education and connects it to the work of McNamara and colleagues (2014), who speak to "re-focusing the status of teachers as learners; the importance of the adult educator in workplace learning; re-conceptualizing support roles in teachers' workplace learning; (re)generating the diversity of spaces for workplace learning" (p. 34). As with "just in time" learning, what is needed to be learned is "learned at the point at which it becomes relevant to developing practice" (p. 33). I connect learning what is relevant back to being in relation with knowledge. ST/CM collaborations were not bound by the square calendar nor the square box of the classroom. The learning that occurred is trans-systemic, not valuing one knowledge system above the other (Battiste, 2013; Battiste & Henderson, 2021; McDermott et al., 2021). The learning occurred because the ST and CM are in front of the learning, or as Battiste and Henderson (2021) state:

> They generate visions of the future and foundation for hard-line front workers in schools and institutions, ensuring our Indigenous Knowledge systems and Indigenous rights are respected and addressed. They embody the horizon of potentiality, possibility, and empowering hope to which countless other Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous allies hold tenaciously as we do our work. (p. iii)

For this project, the STs were experienced teachers and not engaged in initial teacher education; however, they were engaged in the concepts outlined for Eraut's (2012) "just in time" theory to be applicable, particularly (re)generating the diversity of spaces for workplace learning.

Embedding of Learning/Collaboration

In considering theories of professional learning there is a focus on content-driven needs of teachers. This leads to a flurry of activities which are believed to embed the learning and cause change to occur. These activities tend to be delivered in rigid, one-off, sit-and-get formats that do not allow for connection to the workplace and are difficult to transfer from the venue where they occur to the school (Gravanni, 2007; Katz & Dack, 2014, Webster-Wright, 2009). However, ST/CM collaborations, as professional learning, were non-traditional and often not

driven or supported from the top. Katz and Dack (2014) use the term “vertical capacity building” when discussing the traditional format of “presentations, workshops, conferences and training sessions” (p. 26) and share the limitations of a vertical capacity building form of professional learning. They point out that “this is problematic in the sense that vertical capacity building can’t possibly be ‘just in time’ and ‘job embedded’ in the way that individual schools and teachers often need it to be” (p. 26). As shared above, the un/learning takes place when and where it needs to, not in a “ballroom” (Katz & Dack, 2014). STs and CMs found the content they needed around them and within the knowledge systems of their relationship as opposed to traditional professional learning of books and presentations.

Philpott (2014) also explores the concept of communities of practice in the works of Lave and Wegner (1991). Communities of practice relate well to the ST/CM collaboration, especially when focusing on Philpott’s statement:

> [C]ommunities of practice is a theory that regards learning as situated, tied to a particular sociocultural context and a set of practices. It also means that learning is about developing identity, relationships, practices, and tacit knowledge as well as explicit knowledge. Learning is as much about becoming someone as learning content. (p. 37)

When we look at Dion’s (2007, 2009) “perfect stranger,” and using the ST/CM collaboration to move past being a stranger, then moving into communities of practice makes sense as a framework for professional learning. Communities of practice provide places for STs and CMs to be in relation to self and in relation with others as foundational to building relations to knowledge.

We can consider ST/CM collaborations to be in line with Nuthall and Alton-Lee’s (1993) “Goldilocks Principle,” wherein they need to be “just right” to work. Each collaboration had its own processes and procedures that worked for the participants for learning to occur. As well, the ST/CM collaboration must be viewed as a holistic approach and not an atomistic one (Webster-Wright, 2009). The learning that was done, as well as how it was done, should not be pulled apart and separated for review. Instead, looking at the “why” of the learning, as opposed

to the “how,” better informed the (re)search. Dividing the learning into parts did not provide insight into the reasons behind why the ST/CM collaboration worked for the participants. While un/learning was grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and the collaborators found themselves in relation with land, with knowledge, with themselves and with each other, it did not provide an accurate portrait of all that occurred in the ST/CM relationships. ST/CM collaborations are not for everyone and a “one size fits all” approach will not have a meaningful outcome for the participants.

This project also conceives of professional learning opportunities that create space for learning not just with the brain, but with the heart and body. Recognizing and troubling power and privilege in professional learning moves us from the linear, activity-based model of first this, then this, now this, and finally that. Centering the learner, their relationship to self, their relationship to land, relationship to each other, and the need for reflexivity in the learning, was a circular, spiral process that contained layers upon layers, interwoven with un/learning opportunities.

Settler Teacher/Community Member Relationships

A review of the literature relating to ST/CM relationships uncovers a lack of knowledge about such collaborations. In my search, I found that the most relevant articles related to two main categories in education: work with pre-service teachers, and work with in-service teachers who were servicing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. While the literature pertaining to pre-service teachers is focused on reaching STs before they are in front of students, and the research regarding in-service teachers recognizes they are already in classroom spaces, similar goals and challenges emerged that informs understandings of the ST/CM relationships in relation to land, knowledge, others, and self.

Goals of ST/CM Relationships

Within the literature, the goals of the ST/CM relationships included creating spaces that allowed for learning (Blimkie et al., 2014; Cannon, 2012; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Lees, 2016),

learning about Indigenous knowledge systems (Blimkie et al., 2014; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Lees, 2016), building respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018), and shifting mindsets that are grounded in bias and stereotypes through self-reflexivity (Blimkie et al., 2014; Cannon, 2012; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Lees, 2016).

Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) and Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) focus on changing praxis to improve relationships with Indigenous students in the classroom. Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) view the learning done by the pre-service teachers as "reconciliatory pedagogy" (p. 4), intended to "challenge the concept of the educational gap" that pushes "educators to adopt a new perspective on their own deficits surrounding Indigenous history, culture, and contributions within an experiential learning opportunity" (p. 3). Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) worked with their teacher candidates to provide insight into learning the ways of developing respectful relationships with the Indigenous community and students the pre-service teachers would be working and learning with. They demonstrate that this could be done by

> explicitly decolonizing their nascent teacher identities as the way forward towards a new ethical relational stance (Donald, 2009) with Indigenous peoples and by learning to honour IK [Indigenous knowledges] and perspectives (Battiste, 2013; Bissle & Korteweg, 2016; Kanu, 2011), in a pedagogical approach that we term education-as-reconciliation. (p. 255-6)

Cannon (2012) intends "to place a developing literature on settler-Indigenous alliances into a productive and more explicit dialogue with anti-oppressive educational theory and praxis" (p. 21). This is shift of mindset where each side has a role to a play in the movement. He states that "so long as we are focused on racism and colonialism as an exclusively Indigenous struggle, we fail to engage non-Indigenous peoples as 'allies' of Indigenous education and sovereignty" (p. 21).

An important goal within both the research in preservice and in-service education is what Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) focus on, asking "[teacher candidates] to define their emerging teacher identity as a question of 'who are you as a teacher of Indigenous students and how will

you provide a culturally safe, inclusive, and pride-installing environment for Indigenous students in your teaching'" (p. 260). STs' teacher identities played a role in how they became involved and engaged in the ST/CM collaborations within this project. Garcia and Shirley (2012) focused on Indigenous in-service educators and students exclusively. They were looking to "ignite a critical consciousness around the ways in which Indigenous knowledge systems exist, or do not exist, in the schooling contexts and what these processes suggest for social justice pedagogy serving Indigenous students and communities" (p. 76). Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) provide a different entry point, looking at reducing the achievement gap for Indigenous students through experiential learning for pre-service candidates instead of considering a teacher's identity or critical consciousness.

All found that experiential learning through connections to Indigenous community members led to deep reflection and shift in mindset. What differed, however, was how researchers met the goals. While some include the use of Indigenous texts, films and documentaries, others rely entirely on connections to Elders, knowledge keepers, or community members. Some researchers had participants embedded in Indigenous classrooms or communities and participating in immersive learning opportunities. For my proposed project, I engaged with connections to Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members.

While methodologies varied in the literature, two characteristics emerged that demonstrated deep learning:

1. Reflection is required to focus on ensuring Indigenous students are welcome, safe, and included in classroom spaces that value Indigenous ways of knowing.
2. That action, most often seen as experiential learning, plays a valuable role for STs to connect to land, knowledge, others, and self.

Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) and Blimkie et al. (2014) utilized reflection throughout their work to gain insight into what participants were thinking before, during, and after the work, whereas for Garcia and Shirley (2012) self-reflexive work was only

conducted during and after their project. From the reflection that occurred there was evidence of a shift in mindset and understanding of participants' relations to land, knowledge, others, and self. In the work that I undertook with STs and CMs, I considered how self-reflection led to the ST/CM collaboration initially and what, if any, place it held throughout the relationship.

The action, or experiential learning, contained in the literature ranged in variety, yet played a role in how the STs engaged in the learning offered to them. Blimkie et al. (2014) did not have their participants engage in collaborations but did use guest speakers as a connection to experiences that STs had not engaged in prior. Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), Lees (2016), and Vegh Williams (2013), all engaged Indigenous CMs and STs to work together through experiential learning that moved STs forward in their relations to land, knowledge, others, and self, while decentering Western education. Discomfort in the learning was reported by STs throughout the literature and that discomfort focused the learning, while also shifting the mindset of the ST. While Garcia and Shirley (2012) worked exclusively with Indigenous teachers and students, they did make moves of "performing decolonization" (p. 76), or engaging educators in learning they had not previously had, such as connection to community and relations to others and self. As with any work, the goals that were determined at the beginning did not come without limitations or challenges. The literature reviewed shares challenges for both STs, CMs, and the (re)searchers who engaged in the projects.

Challenges Found in the Literature

There were challenges found in the reviewed literature which are best organized under the aspects of the decolonizing theory: relations to land, relations to knowledge, relations to others, and relations to self.

Relations to Land. There were several different contexts within the literature reviewed, but all were quite literal in the connection to physical land as places on a map or where one could attend and learn. For Vegh Williams (2013), creating of space within the work conducted was difficult to do. Her project took place in a "reservation border town district" (p. 26) with a

growing Indigenous population, yet non-Indigenous residents had little knowledge of the land they occupied or the community members who were there every day. During the project, Vegh Williams (2013) came to note that both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in the project wanted to conduct collaborations to create professional learning within their community, but they did not have "the resources, time or personnel to pursue this important issue" (p. 29). Thus, there was little or no way for the participants to build a program that allowed for a connection to the land they were on.

For Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), it took six years of reconfiguring the B.Ed. course they taught to move forward towards outdoor classes and "land-as-pedagogy" (p. 258), providing ways for the pre-service STs to be connected not only to community, but within communities. They sought ways to provide opportunities for STs to be on the land, utilizing "outdoor classes that were purposefully sequenced to demonstrate Land as first teacher…" (p. 258) and they were diligent in not "reproduce[ing] settler attachments to wilderness or special places" (p. 266). They focused on finding ways for STs "to contend with their settler privilege of wilderness access or special place-based communion at the expense of Indigenous peoples' sovereignty on their own territories" (p. 266).

Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) provided pre-service teachers with what they termed a "service-learning opportunity" (p. 12) where the ST travelled to a First Nations school and worked there "on a weekly basis…for a minimum of one hour per week" (p. 12). For their participants, few had ever been in a First Nations community. Participation was on a voluntary basis without credit in their program. Reports from those who participated included "fear about entering what one termed the 'forbidden land', while another disclosed that they had 'never stepped on reserve land, merely 40 km from where I was born and raised'" (p. 15). I wondered how the participants viewed land, their relationship with land, and the land as teacher (Kimmerer, 2013), however, this was not discussed by them during their interviews.

Relations to Knowledge. There were repeated refrains of what STs are missing coming into ST/CM collaborations, including a distinct lack of knowledge of, or relationship to, Indigenous peoples, used as reasoning not to teach Indigenous content (Blimkie et al., 2014; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018). Vegh Williams (2013) and Lees (2016) share that STs' lack of training and knowledge ensures an uninterrupted perpetuation of bias and stereotypes as well as maintaining a hierarchy of valuing one knowledge system over another. For Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), pre-service STs felt the programming "had little personal relevance, unless you were from a small town with a significant or visible Indigenous population, or you were a specialist in Indigenous Studies" (p. 262). Attached to the concept of not knowing, or lack of knowledge, was the attitude of what Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) call "reluctances-resistances" (p. 258), or how pre-service STs "were committed to a teacher professional identity based on a mythos of Canadian neutrality to avoid any disruptions to a Eurocentric settler status quo in curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 258). Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) and Cannon (2012) attribute this myth of "Canada the Good" to a commitment of not wanting to gain knowledge if it will interfere with how they view the country as a whole. Cannon (2012) concludes that "doing this work involves upsetting people's investment in seeing Canada as a fair, generous, and tolerant nation" (p. 21).

In moving through the collaborations or teaching that was engaged with, the literature revealed a shift that occurred with respect to the STs relations to knowledge. Scholars reviewed in this section noted the challenge of finding time for STs to shift their knowledge of Indigenous peoples and communities. Poitras and Danyluk (2017), found that, while STs who spent time in community did experience a shift, there was a correlation between spending less time and a smaller shift in knowledge. Small positives like this finding are overshadowed by the resistance to learning throughout the literature that impedes forward movement in STs' relations to knowledge.

Relations to Others. There were significant challenges noted by (re)searchers pertaining to relations to others. What I found to be the most common challenge listed in the literature for STs was a repeated refrain of not knowing an Indigenous person or people. A particular challenge, indicated by Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), was that their program contained a lack of opportunity to engage with Indigenous peoples. This gap in the pre-service teacher system enabled STs to blame Indigenous folks for the education achievement gap experienced by many Indigenous students. As the pre-service ST could/would not view this from a colonized perspective, they did not recognize that they were perpetuating stereotypes and myths regarding Indigenous peoples and education. For those who participated in Lees' (2016) project, where the perspective was from the CM point of view, there was evidence of an ongoing, well-founded mistrust of STs coming in to do the learning. Despite their mistrust, several CMs who took part in Lee's (2016) project suggested ways to build relationships, including feasts or eating together, finding ways to build trust, and having structured time with participants. Community members shared how these actions moved the participants towards building relations to others.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations require significant amounts of work to overcome historical harms. The findings in this project have shared how STs and CMs addressed their relations to others through the collaboration as well as the challenges and possibilities of their work together.

Relations to self. The initial lack of STs' relation to themselves and their lack of knowing is evident throughout the literature. Korteweg and Fiddler's (2018) first "sticky point" with pre-service teachers was: "Why do we have to take this course when Indigenous education really has nothing to do with me (as a Euro-White settler Canadian)?" (p. 262). Throughout the literature, pre-service and in-service teachers positioned themselves as not being able to teach Indigenous content due to lack of knowledge, being afraid, or feeling responsible (Blimkie et al., 2014; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Lees, 2016). DiAngelo (2011)

described the resistance to the learning, or what she described as an outcry, as white fragility. Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) speak specifically of the

> toll of emotional labour as we had to regularly monitor the TCs' feelings, their White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), or confidence levels (Milne, 2016), as well as attend to their affective processing of intense feelings such as guilt, embarrassment or frustration. (p. 260)

Lees (2016), who focused on the reflections of the Indigenous CMs, found that the fragile feelings of the non-Indigenous participants lead to CMs being burdened with worry about them. Indigenous participants felt the need to sooth the teacher candidates, with one CM stating "I found myself wanting to create a safe place for them from the get-go…" (p. 372).

In the (re)search, several authors saw a deepened a sense of relation to self after STs participated in a relationship with a CM or Indigenous community. Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), while discussing teacher candidates who completed their program, shared that

> while a few of the TCs found the distinction between institutionalized racism and systemic violence against Indigenous people difficult to face, there were significant openings and a hopeful willingness by many to grapple with their own personal complicities in these systemic conditions. (p. 268)

While shifts in the literature reviewed are notable, I wondered if STs sustained that different relation to self after ST/CM collaborations ended.

The most significant challenge with relation to self was a continuous thread throughout the readings of guilt or fear that led to a perceived inability to teach Indigenous students or Indigenous content. Tuck and Yang (2012) discuss what they call "settler moves to innocence" (p. 10)–moves that are made by settlers to evade feelings of guilt and avoiding the difficult work of reconciling their own positionality. This refrain of guilt, of not knowing, of not being taught about Indigenous peoples, of having never learned Indigenous content, and of feeling responsible, ran throughout the literature and positioned STs as Dion's (2007) "perfect stranger." The not knowing or refusal to know must be addressed by STs in order to move to a new relation to self, while also enhancing relations to others.

Ongoing Questions

My project builds on the work of Korteweg and Fiddler's (2018) optional "specialized Honours BEd course" (p. 255) for pre-service STs, and Blimkie et al.'s (2014) "infusion" (p. 48) of Indigenous content throughout a BEd program. What STs and CMs have said about working with each other in this project sheds light on what occurs for all parties when collaborations are invitational or not. I have questioned what may occur if ST/CM collaborations grow within the Province of Ontario education system and become gently mandated.[24] Will this mean that STs and CMs will have the opportunity to showcase how reconciliation education opportunities can be a method of decolonizing and increasing relations to land, knowledge, others, and self for who participate in the education system? Based on the dearth of literature related specifically to the kind of in-service ST/CM collaborations in this project, experiences from the participants enhances current understandings of ways to close the knowledge gaps in the colonized education system that CMs, STs, and students engage with each day. Finding ways to amplify Indigenous ways of knowing and being through these relationships does not come with a roadmap. The sharing of the work that occurs between CMs and STs deepens current pedagogical understandings of any learning that occurs. It includes comprehending how important the quality of the relationships is to the participants.

I was excited to see the different approaches that scholars have used to look at these unique relationships. I am confident that the work presented in this manuscript enhances the current body of literature in a meaningful way and promotes conversations around how these relationships have and can occur. According to Cannon (2012): "We also need to place developing literature concerned with the building of settler-Indigenous alliances into productive dialogue with educational literatures aimed at building anti-oppressive pedagogy" (p. 25). The

[24] Dr. V. Shah, personal communication, February 16, 2022.

information that came from the ST/CM interviews can act as a part of the foundation for the possibility solid settler/Indigenous relationships that could change education.

In the next chapter, I share the methodology and methods I used, along with a conceptual framework for how I envision ST/CM relationships can promote a decolonized practice of relations to land, knowledge, others, and self, along with a shift in pedagogy that has long been needed to welcome Indigenous students. What is more, the practices that support Indigenous learners are also good for all students.

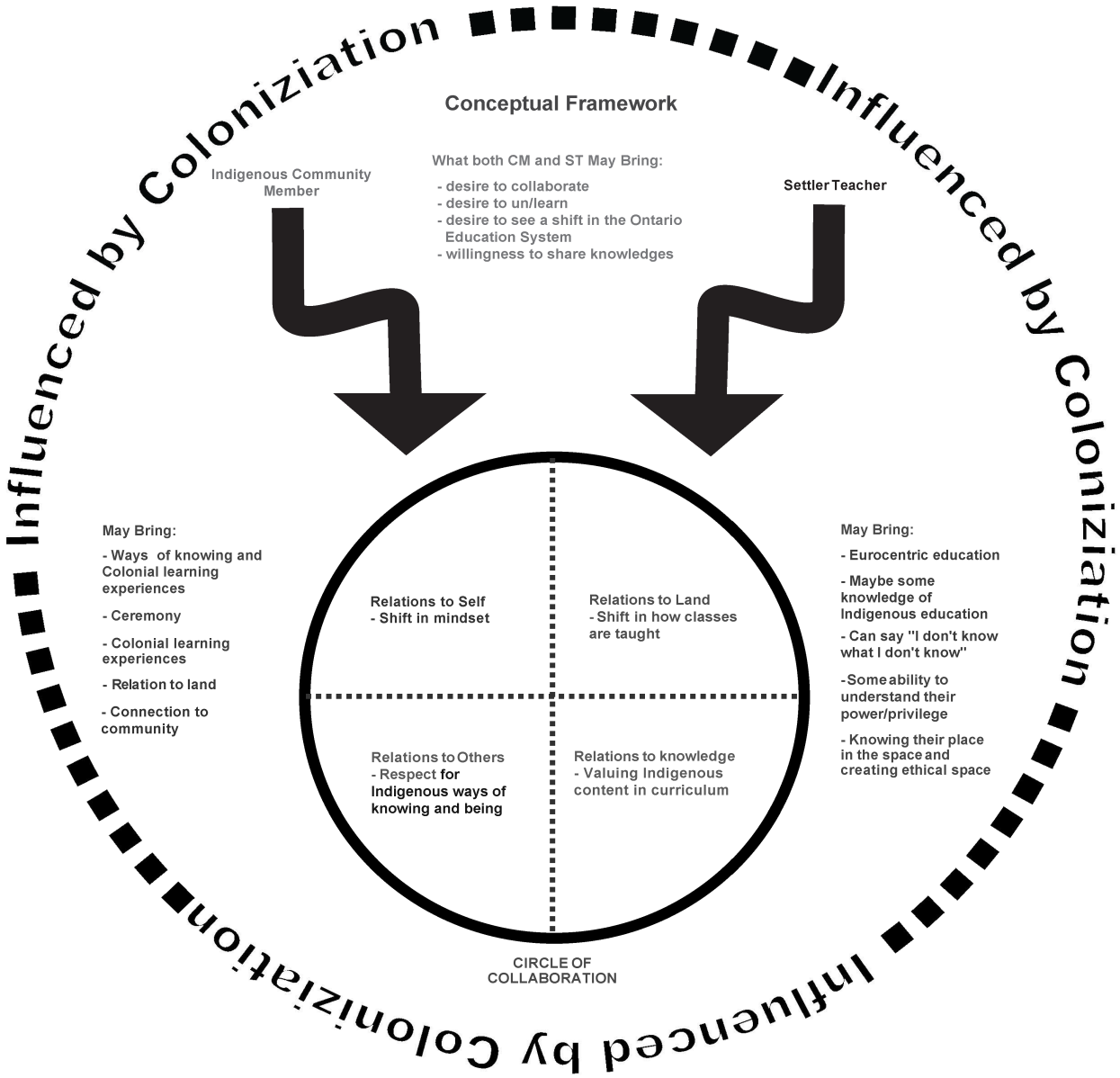
Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

ST/CM collaborations are relationships that came about in a variety of ways. There was no formula to determine a “good” ST/CM collaboration, nor could one determine if it would be successful from the outset of the relationship. I believe it was the members of the collaboration who determined how it worked, what made it work, and how to move forward if challenges arose. Within this section, I will be utilizing a combination of Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CIRM) as the methodology and qualitative oral history interviews and conversations as the method. I will share the characteristics of the ST/CM relationship, as shown through the data.

Prior to determining how the collaboration moved forward, it is necessary to recognize that each participant brought a variety of experiences and attributes to the ST/CM collaboration. Some experiences were shared by both participants while others were exclusive to only one of the participants. The new knowledge that was created often defined the relationship for each pair. ST/CM collaboration attended to the mind, body, and spirit for those who participated, and resulted in a shift in mindset of what education is and what it can be. Figure 2 depicts my initial conception of the ST/CM collaboration.

Figure 2:

Conceptual Framework of the ST/CM Collaboration



What Gifts Did the CM Bring?

Each Indigenous CM brought different gifts and knowledge to the ST/CM collaboration, such as stories, ceremonies, or artefacts they use as learning tools. In the interviews, CMs

shared their connection to education and what it meant to them. CMs discussed their experiences with Western/Eurocentric and Indigenous education, and STs were able to understand and consider how these lived experiences were a gift of knowledge and learning that the CM shared with them. The CMs who participated held knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, took part in ceremonies when appropriate within their communities, and were involved in education. The most significant characteristic the CM brought was their own good way of knowing and being, which they shared with their collaborator in ways that were rooted in their communities, their cultures, and their identities as Indigenous people. CMs shared their knowledge with someone who was willing to un/learn.

What Gifts Did the ST Bring?

STs also identified gifts they brought to the collaboration, such as a piece of Indigenous art that engaged them, or stories of how they came to the learning. Practicing teachers have been steeped in Eurocentric education. However, even though participation was limited to current teachers who were thoroughly embedded in western knowledge systems, the STs in this project made sense of their socialization as teachers and what relation they had with Indigenous peoples and knowledges. STs articulated their reflexive knowledge, as well as what they did not know that they did not know, while in the ST/CM collaboration. In conjunction with their relation to knowledge, other, and self, STs strove to recognize their power and privilege within both the education setting and the ST/CM relationship. Consideration was given to their positionality in the collaboration and how space was created between the ST and CM. Similar to the CMs, most STs shared who they were and their own knowledge**.**

What Did the ST/CM Collaboration Look Like?

When I consider what this collaboration looks like I see two paths coming closely together, but not quite touching. The CM and ST are each on their own path, which do not merge or intersect. They run parallel to each other, enough that those on their own path could hold hands if they wanted to. Between those two paths are the attributes the collaboration

participants share. But what happens when the two paths come together? In that space between the paths, are trans-systemic knowledge systems founded? If so, how does this affect the participants' relation to land, knowledge, others, and self?

What Did the Outcomes of the ST/CM Collaboration Produce?

Viewing the outcomes of the ST/CM collaboration through a decolonizing lens, I am cognizant of the fact that every relationship is unique. These relationships were not cookie-cutter patterns meant to reproduce sound bites or laminated lesson plans. I envisioned the project as a circle of collaboration, where the two paths that the ST and CM have been travelling arrived through their shared commitment to their relationship. There are four characteristics within this circle that came out of the ST/CM relationship for all who attend to the un/learning occurring within them. These characteristics are:

1. A shift in how classes are taught – relation to land
2. A valuing of Indigenous content in the curriculum – relation to knowledge
3. Respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and being – relation to other
4. A shift in mindset – relation to self

I asked what new knowledges, knowings, and insights were birthed in the ST/CM collaboration and how they affected the positionality of the ST and CM. In what ways did the characteristics of the participants drive the relationship towards new knowledges and what might be new ways these possible new knowledges informed ST and CM relations to land, knowledge, self, and others?

My Insider/Outsider Perspective

Throughout the interviews and conversations with participants I was acutely aware that I held a privileged position as both an insider and outsider. As I engaged with the collaborators, I recognized my insider position was more modern than the one Merton (1972) described. Hellawell (2006) notes that "Merton defines the insider as an individual who possesses *a priori* intimate knowledge of the community and its members" (p. 484); however, I found this definition

too narrow for my research. Instead, I preferred what Hellawell (2006) and Laycock Pedersen and Nikulina (2021) presented as an insider-outsider continuum. I also placed the ST/CM collaboration on this continuum when thinking of how they worked within the organization of Ontario education. Laycock Pedersen and Nikulina (2021) rely on Herr and Anderson's (2014) continuum, where I am both an insider, as "the researcher [who] studies themselves or their own practice" (Insider section), as well as an insider in collaboration with other insiders in that I was "the researcher who studies a group they are a part of" (Insider in collaboration with other insiders section). But I was also an outsider in collaboration with insiders, being "the researcher (an outsider) [who] approaches a group, such as an organization or community members (insiders) to initiate a project" (Laycock Pedersen & Nikulina, 2021, Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s) section). To pinpoint the multiple locations I take up on the continuum, I was an insider by virtue of being an ST who is in relationship with a CM, and an insider in collaboration with other insiders because I worked with/work with all of the participants in some way over the years. I became an outsider when approaching CMs to participate, but also when approaching other ST/CM collaboration pairs to engage in this project.

Advantages and Disadvantages to Being an Insider/Outsider

While collecting the data from all of the interviews, I came to recognize that there were advantages and disadvantages of being an insider/outsider. There are strengths in both positions, yet the areas of growth within them led me to reflect on how the data collection might have looked if I was not the one conducting it.

My most significant example of the advantage to being an insider/outsider in this particular project comes from the ease with which I was able to locate and solicit participants. As stated previously, as a former Indigenous lead, I knew eight out of the ten participants from my time in that role. The participants who were new to me were Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST), who I met after my relocation to my current role, yet they agreed to participate without hesitation. While I was anxious about reaching out in case folks said no to me, it turned out that

they were all eager to participate and share their story in order to deepen knowledge of ST/CM collaborations and improve understanding of what these relationships can do for education. Thus, the purposively selected sample of participants worked to my advantage.

Other important advantages have included being able to connect with individuals in a timely manner, a shared understanding of the language of education in Ontario in general and Indigenous education specifically, as well a level of trust that I have referred to earlier in this chapter. It was not necessary for me to provide deep explanation of acronyms, what the Framework is, or how it was used. I was often able to meet those in southern Ontario when I was visiting with family/friends, which helped move the interviews along. The trust I received from all participants grounded the interviews for both me and the interviewee(s) as there was no need to spend significant time building it. Without these advantages from my insider/outsider perspective, I am not confident that the participants would have shared so openly nor been so confident in their responses to the questions I was putting forward. It is also important to acknowledge here that I believe the relationships I had with participants were a significant reason why no one chose to drop out of the project. As an insider, that demonstrated the trust that STs and CMs had in the importance of the work they did, how it related to this project in particular, and the trust that we had built in our own connections outside of the project.

Along with advantages of being an insider/outsider came disadvantages. In my situation, I was too close to the work that was done by the collaborations and wanted all of them to be as positive as the one I was in. Significant moments in the data were difficult to parse as it all seemed to be important. Despite reading the transcripts repeatedly, it took significant time to determine what was logically important, as I attached emotion to what was being shared. The outsider portion of myself had to step forward and take over to make connections to the research question and sub-questions. This resulted in an extended data analysis time as I had to ask questions about the data coding twice to determine what was elicited as answers to the guiding questions. Engaging with the data in this way is not a negative as it allowed for a more

fulsome understanding. Had I simply been an outsider who had no pre-conceived ideas of what an ST/CM collaboration could be, the writing of chapters 5 and 6 may have moved more quickly. That being said, the data has been analysed both from the perspective of an insider and an outsider, which has resulted in a more authentic presentation.

I have stated that the trust provided to me by the participants was an advantage, and I am confident in that finding. However, there is a small disadvantage contained within that advantage. Because the participants trusted me, knew I had been in a role either identical or similar to theirs, and was in an ST/CM collaboration, this sometimes meant that they would either discuss a time when they saw me doing the work, for example conducting PD, or, would explain a story by starting at a point where they knew I had prior knowledge.

This disadvantage was particularly true of both interviews with Thunder. We worked closely for me to do real time edits within his transcripts so that he could ensure that what he was saying was portrayed accurately and flowed from one idea to another. When conducting the edits, Thunder shared that he felt so frustrated by the transcripts because he recognized he often started his answers in the middle as I already knew the story he was telling.[25] His answers carried on from where and when we had last spoken. As an insider, I did not recognize this pattern until he pointed it out. When I had read the transcripts, I simply inserted the knowledge I already had from our previous conversations and connected it all together, even though that was not the data I had in front of me.

This new understanding of my insider/outsider disadvantage led me to question if this happened in other interviews as well. I am aware that the shared knowledge of educational language sped up the interviews because I did not have to explain it constantly, but did it also mean that details were unconsciously omitted because of our shared understanding of the

[25] Private conversation with Thunder (CM), August 5, 2024.

ST/CM collaboration in our roles? I would like to return this question with participants once this project is completed.

The disadvantages to being an insider/outsider were not ones I considered as significantly harming the data collected, nor the analyzing of it. Instead, I consider these to be matters that require further exploration in the literature, as the area of ST/CM collaborations continues to develop and deepen. The advantages and disadvantages of being an insider/outsider conducting this project about ST/CM collaborations were equal in importance to understanding how these relationships impact education in Ontario schools. Had I not been able to see the responses from both sides and maintain the trust I had within each of the relationships, it would have been easy to only focus on positive aspects of the collaborations. Instead, as I move into answering the major research question, recognizing my privileged vantage point ensures that I do not shy away from discussing barriers and challenges and continue to check that the participants' voices are heard as they were expressed.

Research Methodology

> Research is implicated in the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, in the production of theories that have dehumanized Māori and in practices that have continued to privilege Western ways of knowing, while denying the validity for Māori of Māori knowledge, language, and culture. (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 185)

While Tuhiwai Smith (2012) speaks specifically of the Māori in this quote, her idea resonated with me in considering the methodology of data collection and analysis.

At this juncture, I share questions that have come from Margaret Kovach (2021) regarding "who can 'do' Indigenous methodologies" (p. 38). I have grappled with this question throughout this project as I had no desire to appropriate knowledge or methodologies that I had no right to. This project that I embarked on as a non-Indigenous person required relations and relationship in order to meet the four Rs (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001) as well as to answer Kovach's (2021) questions of: "Do I have a relationship with the Indigenous community with whom I seek to conduct research, the community I seek to represent through

my researcher's voice?" and "Am I trusted by that community?" (p. 39). Kovach (2021) points out that "who can 'do' Indigenous methodologies is less about identity than it is about relationship and responsibility" (p. 39). Further, Wilson (2008) states "…that the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)" (p. 99). It was through the methods selected to support Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CIRM) that I demonstrated a commitment to community as well as respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and accountability in this project.

As the purpose of this project is to not only gain insight into ST/CM relationships, but to also determine what it is that these collaborations might give back to Indigenous students, families, and communities, the research methodology used was grounded in CIRM using a narrative inquiry approach.

Brayboy et al. (2012) define a CIRM perspective as one "which fundamentally begins as an emancipatory project that forefronts the self-determination and inherent sovereignty of Indigenous peoples is rooted in relationships and is driven explicitly by community interests" (p. 424). The tenants of CIRM ground it in Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, that it is decolonizing, and that the needs of the community come first and foremost in the project (Battiste, 2000; Brayboy et al., 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Thus, the Indigenous epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies[26] that are the foundation for CIRM were forefront in this project. Without them, the project would not have served Indigenous communities or Indigenous education in Ontario schools. As a non-Indigenous ST conducting this project using

[26] While there are many definitions for epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies, I prefer the words of Brayboy et al. (2012) who state "We use epistemologies to mean ways of knowing or how peoples come to know the things they know. Ontologies refer to how we engage the world [how people "be"]. Axiologies refer to how people value what is right— in other words, axiologies refer to particular types of value systems" (p. 425).

the dimensions of CIRM, I was consistently aware of my reasons for engaging in Indigenous methodologies and troubled what it meant for a non-Indigenous person to use them.

While using Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies, I used a decolonizing lens to consider the implications of the results of the project. I was reminded of Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) position that:

> Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring [Indigenous peoples'] concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from [their] own perspectives and [their] own purposes. (p. 41)

Brayboy et al.'s (2012) conceptualization of CIRM focuses on work being rooted in "relationships, responsibility, respect, reciprocity and accountability" (p. 423) and research as "a process of fostering relationships between researchers, communities, and the topic of inquiry" (p. 423). For the purposes of this project, the meaning of communities was important. As the CMs involved were from a variety of Indigenous communities, then community had different meanings for each participant. Kovach (2021) provides examples of Indigenous communities as "territorial, organizational, or communit[ies] of interest" (p. 39). Thus, Indigenous CMs defined which community the findings of this project belonged to.

CIRM provided a focus to this project, decentering settler identities and centering respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). For the project to avoid perpetuating colonization and causing harm means that the research conducted with Indigenous CMs will recognize and center the expressed needs of Indigenous peoples and communities (Garcia & Shirley, 2012; Kovach, 2009). There is a dual intent to improve learning for all students, together with the importance of including Indigenous ways of knowing in parallel with colonial perspectives. Garcia and Shirley (2012) point out that critical Indigenous qualitative research

> is research that is decolonizing because it recognizes the ways in which Western science subjugated and marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems and thus works to legitimize Indigenous values, language and knowledge (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith,

> 1999; Swadner & Mutua, 2008). It is also research that promotes transformation within Indigenous communities (Grande, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). (p. 81)

The use of CIRM within the project made space to focus on changing the system while strengthening what already existed in the Indigenous community.

In the use of CIRM, I was reminded by Brayboy et al. (2012) to be sure I was not engaging in "damage-centered research" (p. 430). Brayboy et al. (2012) go on to guide the reader to consider the words of Eve Tuck (2009), who shares "In damage-centered research, one of the major activities is to document pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe…In a damage-centered framework, pain and loss are documented in order to obtain particular political or material gains" (p. 413). While participants did not avoid pain, loss, or damage in their stories, I did not assume these emotions would be present. Thus, I did not enter into conversations with a framework that focused on damage.

Throughout the first few chapters, I have used the term "relationship" when discussing ST/CM collaborations and "relations" to land, knowledge, others, and self. The relationality of the participants with each other, with myself as (re)searcher, and with the sharing of knowledge is vital to using a CIRM. Relationality contained within this writing is connected to deepening knowledge about ST/CM collaborations. Wilson's (2001) words resonated with me when I was considering using CIRM. He states,

> To me an Indigenous methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments for better or worse. (p. 177)

This has been the foundation for my beliefs within this methodology. I return to Wilson's (2001) statement:

> …rather than asking about validity or reliability, how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the methodology so that when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship. (p. 177)

In the next section I will explicitly identify the methods I utilized as I learn from the ST/CM collaborators who agreed to participate in my project.

Methods

> Essentially, I am saying that Indigenous re-search methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations. They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships. (Cardinal, 2001, p. 182)

The methods that I selected for this dissertation were oral history interviews and conversations. The work of Glesne (2016) and Lichtman (2013) on qualitative research guide the process of how my project will be conducted. Glesne (2016) laid out a clearly delineated process that informed the way the interviews will be conducted. “As researcher you want your…questions to stimulate verbal flights from respondents who know what you do not” (p. 96). Lichtman’s (2013) chapter on “Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research” provided deep understanding of practices and pitfalls when conducting this type of project.

In becoming a qualitative researcher, the words of Lynn Abrams (2016) resonated with me as I considered how I was in relation to the participants, how they were in relation to me, and how they wished to be seen as being in relation to each other and schooling in Ontario. Abrams (2016) states that when conducting interviews, we are looking to participants to share “what happened to them, how they felt about it, and how they recall it” (p. 78).

How Did Participants Join the Project?

Because there are two distinct participant categories, the ST and the Indigenous CM, invitations varied based on my relationship with one or both in the collaboration. For the ST category, any in-service settler teacher practicing in a school in the province of Ontario and participating in an ST/CM collaboration was eligible to take part. Settler teachers would be identified as those who are not Indigenous to Canada regardless of the amount of time that they have been in the country. This was an important distinction given that Black and racialized educators, and educators who are newcomers to Canada may or may not consider themselves

settlers. I recognized that Black and racialized educators may be coming from colonized countries and have a close relationship with colonization. I also recognized that many African, Caribbean, and Black-identifying teachers have not been viewed as settlers in comparison to White teachers, given the violent ways in which their families may have been forced to come to North America. It was these very complexities that I hoped to engage with in this research and have welcomed all educators who are not Indigenous to these lands (although they may be Indigenous to different lands) to participate in this project as both settler and non-Indigenous teachers.

Indigenous CMs who chose to participate were First Nations, Métis, and Inuit from across Canada. With the focus of the project being on relationships occurring within the Ontario provincial school system, including all Indigenous identities from across Turtle Island, the selection criteria recognized urban Indigenous peoples as well as those who lived on reserves. CMs came to the relationship from cities, towns, or reserves, and it was the ST and CM who determined what their collaboration brought to the education sphere within schools in the province of Ontario. Indigenous CMs did not include those who were Indigenous to lands beyond Turtle Island.

All of the participants I asked to take part in the project were STs and CMs I knew who were in an ST/CM relationship, although I was open to the possibility that I could have been introduced to other STs and CMs in collaborations who might have been willing to participate. In only one partnership did I approach the CM to participate first as I know the CM well. All STs and CMs I asked agreed to participate. There were no refusals, and no one dropped out of the project.

I was reminded of Lichtman's (2013) caution about being friends with those who participate in the work. She states:

> Researchers should make sure that they provide an environment that is trustworthy. At the same time, they need to be sensitive to the power they hold over participants.

> Researchers need to avoid setting up a situation in which participants think they are friends with the researchers. (p. 54)

As I knew at least one participant from each ST/CM collaboration, I was keenly aware that their participation might have damaged our relationship. I had to be prepared that asking them to be interviewed, and subsequently writing about the experience, could have caused a fracture should I view the work they did differently than they saw themselves. I considered the struggle of how I write my findings up in a respectful way should my viewpoint have disagreed with an Indigenous CM.

While consideration was given to the length of time of the ST/CM collaboration, I also considered the use of the square calendar when contemplating a time limit on the length of a relationship. I was more interested in the relationship that came about than attributing a required length to it. My understanding is that (re)search is relational and defining the ST/CM collaboration with a length of time would have restricted it to a box of the square calendar, a restriction that I was not interested in. The diversity in ST/CM relationships challenged a single way of being in relation to each other throughout their collaboration.

It is notable that of five CMs, two were not OCT certified teachers, two were currently practicing OCT certified teachers, and one was a retired OCT certified teacher. When asking folks to participate, conversations were had with CMs who were OCT certified to determine if they felt that, in that role, they were an Indigenous CM and were able to participate. All of them indicated that they were comfortable in being considered an Indigenous CM for the purpose of the project. In considering this intersection of identity I questioned if they would have participated in the project had they indicated they did not believe they fit the definition of CM I provided. In Chapter 6, I will consider other ways that the CM could have chosen to identify and the possible impacts on the project.

As outlined in the protocols for this project, participants have selected pseudonyms for themselves with the exception of myself. Thunder (CM) is a pseudonym for the person I am in

collaboration with, but I did not select an alternative name for myself as I provided insider/outsider perspective. Having a pseudonym would have hindered the addition of that viewpoint. ST or CM will be placed in brackets behind the individual names for clarity.

Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST). Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST) were located in a medium sized public-school board in Northern Ontario. Shirley (CM) came from further north in the province than where she worked, whereas Randy (ST) was born and raised in the town where the school they worked in was located. Randy (ST) was an OCT qualified educator who has been teaching for over 25 years, with all of those years being at the same school. Shirley (CM) worked for the school board at the time that she and Randy (ST) met but was not a teacher. Shirley's (CM) background was in social work. At the time of writing, Randy (ST) remained working as a teacher at the same school he and Shirley (CM) met at, while Shirley (CM) has left the education sector and moved to another position in the city. While Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST) did not know each other prior to their first meeting, Randy (ST) went to secondary school with Shirley's (CM) husband and did remember him when Shirley (CM) shared her history. Randy (ST) and Shirley (CM) worked together in their collaboration for approximately five years and remained in touch at the time of writing. At the beginning of their collaboration, Shirley (CM) was expected to service several schools in the board. Randy (ST), on the other hand, was stationed exclusively in his school.

From their interviews, it was evident that the work that they did, and that Randy (ST) continued to do in the school, was focused on what was best for students and how to ensure teachers were meeting the needs of Indigenous students, while also learning that they do not know what they do not know. The roles that they held within the school board since their collaboration began have shifted in some ways. There was no longer a role such as the one that Shirley (ST) held that was designated for supporting students coming from the north. Instead, there was now an Indigenous social worker in the board who serves all schools. Randy's role

(ST) has morphed into a half time Indigenous grad coach.[27] There was another half-time Indigenous grad coach who served the school he worked in as well. In 2025, there was also the addition of an Intermediate Indigenous grad coach to the team. There have been several times when Indigenous grad coaches from other schools have come to Randy's (ST) school to shadow him and have taken information back to their own schools. At the time of this writing, the school board was considering making the Indigenous grad coach jobs central roles, supervised at the board level, unable to be held by those who were not OCT teachers.

Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST). Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST) both worked in the same large Southern Ontario school board and were OCT qualified. Wilfred (CM) has taught for 11 years and Emily (ST) for 21 years. Wilfred (CM) has taught at a variety of schools in his board and was in a central role in Indigenous education. Emily has held roles at several schools, has been in a central role for the board as a resource teacher, and has now dipped her toe into the administration sphere. Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST) began working together when Emily (ST) was a department head in the school they both worked in. Emily (ST) actively sought out Wilfred (CM) to join her department when he was in the process of changing schools. They were in that department together for four years. This was where they have indicated their collaboration began. They came from very different backgrounds and education journeys that led to them being in the same school. Emily (ST) grew up and attended school in Southern Ontario. She began teaching directly after completing her B. Ed and has remained the same school board for her entire career. Wilfred (CM) was raised in Southern Ontario as well and has lived almost his entire life in the community in which his school board is located. Wilfred (CM) worked in the

[27] Some school boards have Indigenous graduation coaches to help Indigenous students obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and successfully transition into postsecondary education, training or labour market opportunities. This program is a flexible, culturally sound program that allows boards to build a supportive process for Indigenous students to succeed in school. Retrieved from: https://www.ontario.ca/page/indigenous-education-ontario, December 22, 2024

financial industry for over 20 years before becoming a teacher. He did teach on reserve for a short period of time before being hired by the board he is currently with. Wilfred (CM) was quite open during his individual interview about his loss of family and culture as he was a child of the Sixties Scoop and has been on a reclamation journey of his own. They continued to be in relationship as co-workers through a variety of interior and exterior opportunities where they taught and wrote together. Through their work they amplified Indigenous brilliance and created spaces for teachers to learn in order to remedy the settler lament of "I don't know how to do this."

Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST). Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra's (ST) relationship began when they both worked at the same large Southern Ontario school board. Both of them were born and raised in southern Ontario and engaged in all of their post-secondary education there as well. Neither has worked outside of southern Ontario, although Alexandra (ST) did participate in a secondment for an equity agency for a period of time. She found that experience to be beneficial to the role she took on when she returned to her board. Both Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) were OCT certified teachers who have each been teaching for 25 years. They began their teaching careers directly out of the Faculty of Education. During the time of their collaboration, they were in the same department in central roles where Jennifer (CM) supervised Alexandra (ST,) beginning in early 2019, and their relationship developed from the work they were engaged with for both teaching staff and students of the board. Prior to their collaboration they had not worked together in any capacity. Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) worked together for approximately five years. Jennifer (CM) has since relocated to a different school board and Alexandra (ST), at the time of writing, no longer held a central role in her board, but did continue to find ways to engage in Indigenous education opportunities for staff and students in her current school. They remained friends and got together whenever their busy lives allowed them to do so.

Noah (CM) and Maggie (ST). Noah (CM) and Maggie (ST) began their collaboration in 2012 after a chance meeting at a teacher organization workshop. Maggie (ST) was an OCT certified teacher who has over 25 years' experience in a large Catholic school board in southern Ontario. Prior to teaching, she did work in private industry related to promotion and public relations. She has spent her entire life living in southern Ontario and had not ever considered going to the Arctic until she began working with Noah (CM). Maggie (ST) continued to live in southern Ontario and work in the same school board at the time of writing but considered herself privileged to have been able to travel to the far north within her past role as the Indigenous lead. Noah (CM) was born and raised in the far north. He is a proud Inuk and a motivational speaker/activist who has travelled the world speaking about his home in the Arctic and his culture. He is currently not working in education and resides in southern Ontario. At the time of the first meeting of this pair, Noah (CM) was working with a wildlife preservation organization and educating people about life in the Arctic. He spoke to a variety of community organizations beyond education. Maggie (ST) and Noah (CM) worked together to provide learning about the Arctic in a variety of ways including presentations in schools, taking teachers and students to the Arctic, the creation of a variety of print and film resources, and presenting at international Indigenous conferences. During the time of their collaboration, Maggie (ST) was employed in a role in her board that focused on Indigenous education. She no longer holds this position and was back in the classroom as of the writing of this project. Noah (CM) was exploring new projects in the field of television about the Arctic. They remained friends and were regularly in touch with each other.

Thunder (CM) and Krista (ST). As stated above, for the purposes of this project Thunder (CM) used a pseudonym, while I used my real name. This was necessary to ensure that Thunder (CM) had anonymity. I could not have that same anonymity given I was the researcher and included information from an insider/outsider perspective. Thunder (CM) and I met in 2012 and began working together in 2013. We were introduced by a mutual friend who

was also working with Thunder (CM) at the time. Thunder (CM) was a retired OCT certified teacher who had taught, and been an administrator, across the province of Ontario since the 1970s. He had also held positions at the local college in his hometown and worked regularly with the school on his reserve. I have been OCT qualified since 2003 and worked as an administrator in a medium sized Northern Ontario school board at the time of writing. Education was the fourth career I have had, and this was my fourth school board. In 2013, when Thunder (CM) and I began working together, I was employed by a large Southern Ontario school board in a central role that focused on Indigenous education and equity, and Thunder (CM) was conducting work with teachers in both the Catholic and public-school boards in that area. His focus was, and continues to be, educating teachers about Indigenous knowledge and ways of life. I was at the beginning of my journey with Indigenous education when we met and was expected to provide PD opportunities in the area of Indigenous education for teachers in my school board. Through the work that Thunder (CM) and I did together, we brought teachers to Northern Ontario for multi-day learning opportunities, as well as having him come south to provide PD to large groups of teachers on several occasions. Thunder (CM) regularly went into classrooms in the board I was working for to work with classes of students. We continued to work together until I left the role in 2016. He continued to work with the board for a few more years after my departure. At the time of writing, Thunder (CM) and I remain friends, and we live in the same town, visiting regularly. Thunder (CM) and his wife continued to offer retreats to those who wished to learn about Indigenous ways of knowing and several of the teachers I brought to work with him between 2013 and 2016 continued to attend these weekends to expand their knowledge.

Data Collection and Organization

Data collection consisted of oral history interviews and conversations conducted face-to-face wherever possible. All participants were asked where they wished to conduct the interviews and conversations. I recognized that there may be spaces that either the ST, CM, or both would

have preferred interviews and conversations based on their relationship, such as classrooms, community spaces, and/or participants' homes. For the conversation between ST and CM, the pair chose a place that had meaning for their collaboration, perhaps where it began or where they believed they have had the most learning success. It was important to honour these spaces in any manner the person being interviewed required. For example, I inquired if the CM accepted tobacco to be part of the project. If they did, I made tobacco ties and offered them when I asked for their participation. Another example would be if the ST and CM always started their work with a smudge, and wanted me to join them in smudging, I engaged in this ceremony with them. I did not conduct the smudge–as Kerr and Ferguson (2021) state, "while drawing on Indigenous knowledges, do not engage in ceremony, medicines, or practices that should be led by an Indigenous Elder" (p. 708). Based on the work of Lees (2016), where the community members who worked with her suggested that it was important to build relationships and that food helped to do this, food and beverages were provided to build community between myself and the participants. Appendix A contains the interview and conversation protocols that I engaged with during the project. Appendix B includes the questions for the individual interview, and Appendix C questions for the joint interview.

Interviews were held with individuals first, followed by a collective conversation with each ST/CM pair. For the pair conversations, I asked both the ST and CM to bring an artefact that represented their relationships. With the semi-structured interviews, the questions were meant as starting points and participants answered in any way they wished, being it through story or the sharing of written responses as examples. Participants must be comfortable to share in a way that worked for them and that they believed represented their story accurately. Similar to Vegh Williams (2013), I looked to "shift the locus of control from the academic researcher to the participants" (p. 29). I was also a participant in an ST/CM relationship and had to be aware of the insider/outsider position I had and that I was what she calls a "reciprocal collaborator" (p. 29).

It was important to allow the collaborators to speak of their view of the relationship, of their place within it and with what has come from it both individually and in relation to each other. I interviewed the participants separately so they might share challenges and barriers more freely than if they were sharing in front of someone, they had built a relationship with and whose feelings they might have been deeply concerned about. As well, in conversations, one participant might have been more vocal, or extroverted, or who might have taken up more space than the other person. In allowing for individual interviews, space was created to share in a way that he/she/they may have been more comfortable with. Appendix C outlines the questions for joint ST and CM interviews. While these were starting point questions, supplemental questions arose during the interview process. I was interested in learning how these collaborations came to be and to understand that STs and CMs could co-construct some questions to share their collaboration wholly. Beginning with a question of "How did you come to be in a settler teacher/community member relationship?" was a way to open the conversation up when introducing this project. Participants could choose not to answer a question or questions if they were not comfortable with them, or if they did not believe it related to their relationship.

After conducting the individual interviews, bringing the ST and CM together for a conversation provided an opportunity for them to co-share their relationship. It also gave me the chance to notice aspects of the relationship that I would not have seen in an individual interview, such as the flow of dialogue and energy between ST and CM, how they greeted and said farewell to each other, who took the lead and who was quieter, how they expressed themselves when together versus apart, and what knowledge(s) emerged and was co-constructed *in relation.* These components of the conversation collectively provided insight into the entire relationship in a holistic way. It was not an exhaustive list of questions that arose. Again, participants could choose not to answer questions that did not relate to them or made them uncomfortable.

For all interviews and conversations, I requested audio recording of sessions. With respect to all interviews, I provided questions ahead of time, explaining that the ST and/or CM being interviewed were not bound by these questions alone. This allowed them to consider how they wished to present information, as well as to determine what they were comfortable sharing. I was not interested in surprise questions that may have left people feeling anxious or as though they have been tricked into saying something. I requested permission to take supplemental notes during all sessions. These supplemental notes provided me with an opportunity to record observations, hunches, emerging themes, and follow-up questions, and in the case of the conversations, note my observations of emotion, flow between the CM and ST, or any gestures or interactions that occurred. All interviews were transcribed as soon after recording as possible. Given my background as a court reporter, I transcribed the recordings myself. These transcripts were provided to the participants for their input and to ensure that they were satisfied that the information they wished to share had been done authentically and accurately. Once STs and CMs had each approved the transcription my analysis began.

Data Analysis

I began by listening to all audio recordings as I read the transcripts. As I combed through the data collected, I returned to the major research questions and the developing conceptual framework to determine themes and participants' relations to land, knowledge, others, and self. The themes were assessed based on the four Rs (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001) and accountability to the community I sought to serve (Brayboy et al., 2012; Wilson, 2008). This accountability was nuanced as I was responsible to the ST, the CM, the pair together, and the wider Indigenous education community that benefits from the knowledge gathered in this project. As I related these themes back to the research questions, I continued to take written notes on all forms of data. These notes were built and added on to over time as the data was analyzed and reanalyzed.

Once the data was coded and categorized based on the research question and conceptual framework, I considered data that did not quite fit within the conceptual framework, and other ways of understanding the data that went beyond my initial conceptual framing. This created another layer of accountability to the work. I returned to the data to recode and refocus where necessary. Upon completion of coding, the findings were shared with the participants, and they were asked to review them and share feedback of what resonated and what needed adjustment.

The ethical relationship I attended to throughout this project contained principles of ownership of the information being shared and considerations for how it will be shared. This led to the information contained in the next section, explicitly regarding ownership, control, access, and possession of the data collected. It also led me to question what came into play regarding the work that STs and CMs did together and how that was shared within their relationship as well as within the education system.

OCAP® (2022) – Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession

In investigating CIRM, as well as considering the 4Rs (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001) and accountability (Brayboy et al., 2012; Wilson, 2008), the tenets of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®) were relevant to the knowledge sharing in this project. The principles of OCAP® (2022) from the First Nations Information Governance Centre are as follows:

> **Ownership** refers to the relationship of First Nations to their cultural knowledge, data, and information. This principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns his or her personal information.
>
> **Control** affirms that First Nations, their communities, and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking control over all aspects of research and information management processes that impact them. First Nations control of research can include all stages of a particular research project-from start to finish. The principle extends to the control of resources and review processes, the planning process, management of the information and so on.
>
> **Access** refers to the fact that First Nations must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities regardless of where it is held. The principle of

> access also refers to the right of First Nations' communities and organizations to manage and make decisions regarding access to their collective information. This may be achieved, in practice, through standardized, formal protocols.
>
> **Possession** While ownership identifies the relationship between a people and their information in principle, possession or stewardship is more concrete: it refers to the physical control of data. Possession is the mechanism by which ownership can be asserted and protected. (First Nations Information Governance Centre, training page)

I enrolled in the *Fundamentals of OCAP*® course that is offered through the organization to provide myself with an understanding of how to honour the appropriate permissions to share data. With respect to ownership, Indigenous CMs engaged in these collaborations in education settings are the owners of the information they choose to share. Control required CMs to have control over how this project was conducted with them and what happens to it. With respect to access, CMs identified how they wished to have access to the information they provided through the sharing of my thesis in the Faculty of Education at York and it was my responsibility to ensure that was done. Finally, with respect to possession, I discussed with the CMs what mechanisms they are comfortable with in how I stored and maintained their information.

By attending to the relationship of the ST and CM, while also attending to the relationship I built with participants, a space was created to ensure the work of this project was not engaging in cultural appropriation or centering dominant culture paradigms. It was important that I recognized that I was both an insider and an outsider in this project, that my identity and social location played a role in how the interviews and conversations were conducted and received by myself. I have been gifted so many opportunities to learn, and this project was a way for me to give back by supporting STs not to replicate harmful patterns within the ST/CM collaboration. I understood that the OCAP® (2022) is specifically related to First Nations peoples and is not intended to govern all Indigenous peoples. However, the general principals are ones that connect to levels of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility for the CM participants and were a way to build trust in this project.

Chapter 5: Living into Trust[28] and Respect in ST/CM Collaborations

In this chapter, I share my findings from the individual and pair interviews of the five ST/CM collaborations who agreed to participate in this project. Collaborators appeared to have pleasant feelings about meeting and forming a collaboration with their partner, due to the work they did together. While nostalgia may have affected their memories, several of the participants still shared feelings of anxiety about participating in the project and what they felt had to be built into the relationship. Each story was unique: some were thrust together as co-workers, as in the case of Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST); others met through their roles in education, such as Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST) and Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST). Maggie (ST) and Noah (CM) and Thunder (CM) and I (ST) built our collaborations from chance introductions at education events. Thunder (CM) and I have had conversations in the past about why this project needed to be done and why it was appropriate for me to be the one to investigate and write it.

A common theme that emerged was the foundation of trust and respect within the ST/CM collaborations and how the participants lived into these ideals. I was interested in what trust and respect meant and how they were fostered and sustained over time. This chapter begins with an exploration of what CMs and STs meant by trust and respect and then explores the building blocks of trusting and respectful ST/CM collaborations. These include listening, awareness of positionality, willingness to un/learn, stepping up and stepping forward, bridging gaps, and holding hope. I have an immense sense of gratitude for what was shared with me, as it relates to understanding what constitutes a trusting relationship and a respectful relationship.

While trusting and respectful relationships are the foundation of the ST/CM collaboration, I have come to understand that the collaboration was more than just showing up and expecting trust and respect. Trust and respect are complex concepts, and a trusting and respectful relationship is constantly evolving and changing. We cannot simply arrive at a trusting and

[28] Living into trust and respect signifies the way of living this relationship for STs and CMs in this project.

respectful relationship; we have to continuously work at it and live into it. Thunder (CM), when asked why he would participate in an ST/CM collaboration given how much trust it requires, stated: “It’s almost like if you didn’t participate in what you believe, you would be existing for nothing” (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024). His belief in the trust and respect in these collaborations is connected to a piece of his identity, and he also believed that the collaborators must live into the trust and respect as the relationship grew. I was emotionally moved by this idea as his collaborator, given how I understood the way I engaged in this work as a journey with no destination beyond continual un/learning and relearning.

When listening to determine what makes these relationships one of respect, I noted the language used by the participants. Often, participants used the word “trust” and “respect” interchangeably for what they described. In their comments, respect was defined using words such as “we are partners in the work,” “she recognized I was on the path…,” “she’s very smart,” and that respect was “an important component of the ST/CM collaboration.” In discussing what made her relationship with Randy (ST) a respectful one, Shirley (CM) expanded her definition of the relationship by sharing how the learning they did from and with each other outlined the way she and Randy (ST) engaged with each other and the education system. She shared the following:

> So, he was helping me understand that process [the Ontario school system] because I was helping him understand the challenges that our remote students experienced in the community academically, emotionally, the physical environment. So, I helped him understand, educated him in that sense. And so, he educated me in this world. So, it felt like there was two different worlds coming together… (Shirley, CM, December 13, 2023)

I found that even though Shirley (CM) did not say the word “respect” here, her tone and body language conveyed that she considered these interactions with Randy (ST) to be respectful, and a significant part of how their collaboration became a respectful one. They recognized and honoured the knowledge the other had.

Discussing the nature of the relationship within the ST/CM collaboration, CMs named their personal life experiences with others as being different than the trust that was built with the

ST they worked with. This view of the collaboration included Shirley (CM) speaking of her experience in the education system and how it made her feel versus how she felt about the trust in the relationship she and Randy (ST) have. Shirley (CM) noted of her educational experience:

> I was raised [up North], and I was the dirty Indian going through the school. I was told by the V.P. you might as well quit school now, you're never going to make anything of yourself. So, when Indigenous students are told that through their lives, you believe it. So, I believed it. (Shirley CM, December 13, 2023)

This story indicated Shirley's (CM) lack of trust when she began working in a school, but when she spoke of her collaboration with Randy (ST), she came to trust him and the ways that they lived into trust and respect as a pair. She outlined their relationship as follows:

> SHIRLEY: He was definitely one of a kind. I've met others through the process, it seems as though other relationships were built because of my relationship with Randy, and because Randy was saying she's doing great work, you need to support her. He was my go-to person, and people trusted him. And if he trusted me, then they trusted me. It was vice versa.
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> SHIRLEY: The same for me. I could tell parents you can trust him and because they trusted me, they were more open to, at least, communicating with Randy. (Shirley CM, December 13, 2023)

When sharing this second part of her story, Shirley (CM) showed me how trust mattered to her, to the collaboration with Randy (ST), and how it affected the students and families they worked with.

As I continued to dig into the transcripts to understand the way that participants defined trust, I was reminded of how Wilfred (CM) shared his life experience. While the following quote does not use the word trust, I selected it based on Wilfred's (CM) emotion and body language when describing what was taken from him as an Indigenous person who was adopted.

> And my experience is, you know, not growing up in my culture, and being adopted, and then having to find that community again like in my late 20s, my early 30s again. And then learning all of everything that I have to learn now that I've missed, things that I will never get back. (Wilfred CM, March 2, 2024)

The harm Wilfred (CM) described signaled to me that he could have chosen not to engage in an ST/CM collaboration because of the treatment he had received. Instead, however, he did

engage in an ST/CM relationship. He and Emily (ST) spoke of the trust built between them. As a part of their conversation, they shared this story:

> WILFRED: Like I think in my opinion, like for me, I trust Emily.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> WILFRED: Right? And she has an innate ability to kind of feed off the way that I'm thinking, or that I'm feeling, or whatever. And I think that's her accountability is that piece is, like when you've known somebody for, I don't know, like five or six years, is that about (indiscernible)....
> EMILY: Yeah.
> WILFRED: And then worked with each other for the same amount of time. And I think the fact that I trust her when it comes to those things, and also like we have open dialogue. Like if there's something I don't like, I feel like I have trust and I have that comfort level where I can go to Emily and say, you know, like I don't like how this is going, or I don't like this, and there's, and there's an aspect of like, there's not a lot of judgment there. And I also think I understand my positionality, like having like, like ADHD and, and having like those hard times trying to like focus on stuff. Or if I get too emotional about stuff and I can just kind of step back and she understands that about me. And I think she trusts my ability to work through that. And so, like the accountability piece is like I think it's just us being able to talk to each other because we do have that relationship, right. Like I don't know what you think, but I don't, I've never had to hold you accountable for anything.
> EMILY: Well, I think we've built trust over a lot of years of now working together so, in the classroom, and through the writing opportunities, and through teaching the AQ there have been times where, I mean you had to, I guess, show me trust for us to be able to move forward. And I think that that's why we've been able to continue to work together so well is because it's, we've always been able to have any conversation that we need to have about something you don't like, or something that's not working well, or a time that I need to step in, or step out. (Wilfred, CM, and Emily, ST, April 27, 2024)

Emily (ST) and Wilfred (CM) demonstrated how STs and CMs defined trust in the collaborations as I witnessed the respectful manner they shared in the interview. During this exchange, the collaborators shared without hesitation the trust in their relationship. They spoke openly about their work together and the way trust was built from that work. It was evident that they considered this to be their shared story of how they built trust. While other pairs spoke of the trust in their collaboration, I found Emily (ST) and Wilfred's (CM) conversation illustrated their trust in the relationship. They trusted each other enough that it was possible to disagree. They built on each other's thoughts and were able to understand each other using more than just words. The ability to disagree in this manner and remain committed to the ST/CM collaboration is important to understand for those who enter into similar relationships.

In each pair, the theme of trust and respect was a ribbon that ran through what they shared with me and each other. Collaborators used 'trust' to describe trust in the person they were working with; trust they saw being built with Indigenous students, families and communities; or trust being built with teachers in the school. For some, it was trust to step in or step out at the right moments of conversations or learning. For others, it was knowing that their collaborator trusted them to understand and work together to build a relationship where they could talk openly and without judgement or anger. Several of the STs spoke of trusting themselves to know when to listen and when to speak, or when to stand behind, beside, or in front when the pair was working with other STs, which I will explore further in the building blocks below. The trust that was built led to a mutual respect of each other and the work that was being done. While the ways that the STs and CMs checked in on their relationship varied, they all respected the way that the other engaged with them.

Even though not all participants used the words "trust" or "respect," it was evident throughout the conversations that the comfort they had in working with their partner was built on how they lived into trust and respect. They were willing and able to share stories and knowledge, to visit their collaborator in their homes, and to share about their ST/CM relationship with others. The level of trust was also reflected in how they were willing to share openly with me, and in turn with anyone who reads this project, with the hope that the research will deepen knowledge of these types of collaborations. No matter which word or concept they utilized, significance lies in how they worked to create the relationship, described below, as the relational foundations of trusting and respectful ST/CM collaborations. As trust and respect are the foundation of the collaboration, relational foundations best describe what holds up the relationship.

Relational Foundation 1: The Importance of Listening

In considering the amount of trust that was demonstrated in the conversations, I have given thought to how the collaborators are living into trust and respect in these relationships.

After spending time with the transcripts, I concluded that listening was the foundation where the trust began and how the pair strengthened their collaboration. Several of the STs shared that listening was the beginning of the living into trust and respect, and felt it was a way that they could demonstrate a commitment to un/learning and the collaboration. Maggie (ST) explained it for herself as follows:

> MAGGIE: …So like one of these questions here, so that's how I, how I identify within that relationship. I identified always as somebody who was there to listen and learn.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> MAGGIE: I learned very quickly in these relationships with Indigenous people, don't ask so many questions, sit, and listen. I was often told, stop being a teacher. That was one of the early [things] [an Elder] used to say to me. “Well put your notepad away. You don't have to be a teacher.” But, but I– “No, no, no, no. Just sit and listen. You will get what you need from this talk that will resonate with you and stay with you, and next time you'll get something different. There's no need to put it on pen and paper.” (Maggie, ST, April 28, 2024)

When I was being interviewed, I was taken back to when I started my role. I learned that listening was the cornerstone of my relationship with Thunder (CM), but this approach was not welcomed by my employer, and I had to explain to my bosses that the work we were doing was important and beneficial. Holding the space in the way I did, and knowing my place within it, allowed my collaboration with Thunder (CM) to grow. I shared the following in my individual interview:

> KRISTA: So yeah, that's sort of how that story happened. And I'm blessed with that. It's a privilege that I was able to be sure that I was willing to sit and listen because a lot of the senior folks in the board didn't understand the way that I would conduct myself in those relationships. That I was not the lead. I was the lead in title, but when we would sit together, I didn't take the lead because we were all– There was no hierarchy at that table.
> INTERVIEWER[29]: Yeah.
> KRISTA: Everybody had a say, and every say was equal and important, and everybody got an opportunity to explain their position. And boards don't do well with that.
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
> KRISTA: They struggled and so I got a lot of backlash. (Krista, ST, July 3, 2024)

[29] As outlined in Chapter 4, an interviewer was required for the conversation with the Thunder, the CM I work with. Dr. Gyllian Phillips, Professor of English Studies, Nipissing University, was kind enough to conduct the individual and pair interviews with Thunder and me.

While Maggie's (ST) example included the opportunity for people she worked with, especially Noah (CM), to see her listening in action, my example was less easily observed. Either way, the listening that Maggie (ST) and I engaged in provided a way for us to live into the trust and respect we were building with our respective CMs.

Shirley (CM), Randy (ST), Maggie (ST), and Noah (CM) all spoke of the need for the ST to listen more and talk less to build the trust and respect that was eventually obtained. Randy (ST) noted that listening was a necessity not only for himself, but for the entire system. Randy (ST) stated:

> And so that's one of the things that our system has to do is talk less, listen more, and then implement. Believe them [Indigenous people and partners] with what they're saying, try really hard to implement what they say they need. (Randy, ST, December 13, 2023)

Relational Foundation 2: Awareness of Positionality

Each partner's self-identification was an important component of the ST/CM relationship. What distinguishes common understandings of positionality with how the participants described their positionality is that their personal identification was *relational* in nature. The self-identity of each participant was re/formed by the other member of the partnership and the relationship as a whole. For example, STs were quick to list how their privilege and positionality influenced the relationship and what it meant about their roles and responsibilities. While no individual said it was important to their collaboration to have their partner directly self-identify, I was not surprised that STs provided labels learned in equity work over the past decade, often declaring their race, gender identity and/or sexual orientation, socio-economic status, job title, and their class/financial privilege.

Emily (ST) and Maggie (ST) specifically shared their varied identities when describing their positionality in the collaboration. By purposefully positioning their settler identity, these STs demonstrated how their mindset has been shifted because of the ST/CM collaboration they have participated in. As Emily (ST) listed several labels for herself, she connected them to her privilege. In this quote from Emily (ST), she explains that based on the need of the situation, the

CM she worked with would indicate her roles and responsibilities. This give and take required a deep understanding of each other and had a significant impact on the work they did. She stated:

> So, I would say that I am in all ways the epitome of privilege. I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class, university educated, white woman. And so, when I am engaging in collaboration with an Indigenous community member, but I mean particularly Wilfred, since [there's] many members I've spoken with and worked with, but Wilfred is the one, of course, I have the closest relationship with. I approach it from a place of his voice is central and I'm there in either a supporting role, or a partner role, or standing in front if I need to stand in front, if that's what he needs from me. And I take that direction from him. (Emily, ST, February 10, 2024)

Similarly, Maggie's (ST) awareness of her positionality meant she understood her place as a learner. Maggie (ST) stated: "I am new to this learning, and new to these tables, and I show up as a settler white woman at the door, and I have to know my place" (Maggie, ST, April 28, 2024).

Interestingly, CMs identified themselves relationally in terms of their own lived experiences and/or those of their ancestors. They did not identify using the labels that Emily (ST) and Maggie (ST) shared in their excerpts above. Wilfred (CM) shares:

> Like, I think about, being a member of the Métis Nation but I also think about like, my, I guess it would be my great grandmother's, her reserve, and, and then like her marrying a Métis guy and then having to leave the reserve and then building a life somewhere else. And it was all of those things that, that was, like that was put on that half of my family that, you know, they never asked for. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

For Wilfred (CM), his identity and positionality came from what he knew and what he was aware was taken from his family and how it still affects his family now.

When asked about identification, Thunder (CM) chose to talk about a past experience with a particular area of the education system, when he became a teacher. He stated:

> THUNDER: Oh, that's a big one. Oh, in my younger years, I was probably early 20s, I might even have been 22 or 23. Somewhere around there. The government was looking to try to solve the Indian problem. And that again was in, in about 1968, 69, 70s. And the government, which I give the title Indian Affairs...
> INTERVIEWER: Right.
> THUNDER: ...we're going to start closing down, closing down the Indian Affairs house offices and turn that responsibility over to the Native people. And we were recruited; a group of people were recruited. I was one of them. But some of them came from Burnt Church, Eskasoni [in] Nova Scotia, Northern Quebec, into Ontario, and as far as northwestern Ontario. And they, they put us to, they put us to go to school. And I think

> they called it The Institute of Learning in Toronto in a special program for Native people. So, I met Native people really for the first time from someplace else. And to listen to their, listen to their stories, listen to the, what their dreams are, and to find out their problems are the same as mine. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

It was important for Thunder (CM) to share how he came to be in education to identify himself in the ST/CM collaboration he engaged in with me.

Noah (CM) shared that his feelings of pride played a significant role in how he identified himself not only within the ST/CM collaboration with Maggie (ST) but generally working with STs.

> Because I'm a proud Inuk and I'm very proud of where I come from. What we have as people, traditionally, culturally, you know, sharing that alone might give people an understanding, awareness and support, I guess. In a way they understood more about who we are and why we do the way we do. And I thought it was a good spot to start. (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024)

Noah (CM) had not considered doing his motivational speaking in schools until he met Maggie (ST) and discovered there was a place for him to share his story with students and staff. Noah's (CM) understanding of who he was, and his pride in his identity, prompted his desire to share about his culture with those who were willing to learn. By being in an ST/CM collaboration, he found a place in education where he could share with more people than he had ever considered before.

For CMs, speaking about their Indigeneity was not immediate. During some interviews, CMs did not discuss their identity as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit until later in the conversation. I wondered if, through my role as researcher, they felt they were already identified by their role in the research as an Indigenous community member and thus did not feel a need to restate their identify out loud. I also considered the expectation in equity work that white folks identify and name their power, privilege, and place out loud for those in the space to hear. Was this declaration of identity an example of performative solidarity or equity work that did not actually lead to transformation? I am reminded here, through the work of Sara Ahmed (2005, 2012), that declaring your identity in this manner is not doing the work. It is simply stating who you are,

rather than doing the work to undo the privilege you possess. I continue to question the possibilities for transformation in loudly declaring your power and privilege and if this might be a form of resistance or unwillingness, disguised as willingness to be in relation.

Relational positionality included both social identities and roles within an educational institution. Alexandra (ST), when preparing her answers in advance of the interview, self-disclosed her identity without prompting. “In terms of how I identify myself with it, I guess within it, a teacher–at the end of the day. As an educator, being grateful to learn from Jennifer (CM)” (Alexandra, ST, June 14, 2024). Self-identification as a teacher was not surprising from an ST, particularly someone such as Alexandra (ST) whose role was to primarily work with educators in her school Board through professional development opportunities. As Alexandra’s (ST) boss, Jennifer (CM) set boundaries on supervision of her collaborator by focusing on how Alexandra changed and how she demonstrated understanding of the need for change. Jennifer (CM) was aware that her role could create pressure. She stated:

> I am walking into [something] where I’m an Indigenous person supervising a settler who is doing the work of Indigenous Education. And that could be a dynamic that is intimidating for that person. So, you know, there was some intentionality of knowing that, like, we are partners. Letting her know that we are partners in the work. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Jennifer (CM) shared how both she and Alexandra (ST) had to willingly let go of some of their pre-conceived notions of workplace hierarchy to position themselves in relationship. Who they were influenced the connection they had with each other.

Several participants’ identification in the collaboration included their knowledge of their collaborator, including geographical location, knowledge of institutional systems, setting of boundaries, as well as how they believed their partner might identify them. This is an important aspect of relational positionality. Randy (ST) described how he understood Shirley’s (CM) view of his positionality when they first started working together. He shared:

> She realized that I was not just providing lip service when I said I want to work with Indigenous kids, and she recognized I was on the path, which is way, way, way back at the beginning. But she recognized that I was genuine with the kids and the parents. I

> was able to approach it the right way. Or not a wrong way maybe I should say. (Randy, ST, December 14, 2023)

Randy (ST) saw himself through Shirley's (CM) eyes, impacting his awareness of being in relation with Shirley (CM), and the families he served as Indigenous grad coach. Similarly, Noah (CM) concentrated on identifying Maggie's (ST) abilities as they worked within each other's worlds, given where they were located.

> She's very smart in a sense of how industry, corporations, and people worked down south compared to me and so the more she got to know me it was easier for her to introduce me to this world in a sense that they understand. Like, I can do that. It was a very good correlation of North meets South. (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024)

For each ST or CM to be a part of an ST/CM collaboration, they not only recognized and understood their positionality but also observed that their partner knew and understood their own positionality as well.

An understanding of their positionality means STs also possess an understanding of what they can and cannot teach about Indigenous knowledge and ceremony. Professional development work that the pair undertook was determined partially by working with a CM who could speak about their culture and who could determine what they would and would not teach to STs or students. When discussing how she and Jennifer (CM) planned and prepared together, Alexandra (ST) referred to it as the "how" of the teaching. She shared:

> ALEXANDRA: …And I mean we [Alexandra (ST) and Jennifer (CM)] have big conversations about that. Like I'm not…
> KRISTA: You're not teaching culture.
> ALEXANDRA: Right, I'm not teaching culture. Yeah, that's not my culture. I'm not teaching that, right, and I think that seeing that partnership of like, "Oh, I'm going to teach them how. Could you teach about residential schools?", for example, right, and this is the how. Whereas Jennifer would be like, "And here's the culture," right? I think for that collaboration–like it was so, I think, integral, right, for educators to witness that and then ideally take that model back into their space. (Alexandra, ST, June 9, 2024)

Alexandra's (ST) example was one of several instances in the interviews of the willingness to understand positionality within the relationship. Each participant, whether in their individual or pair interview, stated that STs can teach about Indigenous experiences, realities, and perspectives based on the learning they engaged in, but they are in no way allowed to

teach culture (i.e., ceremony). STs would protest they did not know how to do this work and did not want to offend Indigenous people. Many participants noted that STs could participate in ceremony in their learning, but they were not to perform ceremony with students. Participating in ceremony when asked to do so did not offend Indigenous communities; instead, it reflected an un/learning and relearning.

An important tension arose in this work–the added burden that the collaboration could have on CMs, Elders, and knowledge keepers. The burden of teaching settlers was, and continues to be, held in the community. With this burden comes the settler request that CMs should leave their community where they are needed. How do we keeping asking for CMs to give so much to institutions that have harmed, and continue to harm, Indigenous students to ensure that the learning continues in those institutions? This tension was not a part of the questions asked of CMs. There was acknowledgment from some CMs that not every ST who might want to engage with a CM would be able to do so as not every CM would want to be part of a collaboration for many reasons. If I was to return to the participants for follow up, I would want to explore this tension further with CMs specifically to identify how they might suggest this be addressed. It would be important to take the lead from CMs in moving this concern forward in a manner that best addresses the inequity of the situation.

Relational Foundation 3: Willingness to Un/learn

Willingness was a relational foundation that stands on the foundation of trust and respect. Part of willingness to un/learn was a willingness to learn each other's story. This requires being honest about history. Within the ST/CM relationship, this honesty included knowing the lived experiences of CMs and their communities long before they began to work with an ST. It also required that we possess a common understanding of the terminology being used and how the un/learning was occurring.

Every participant and pair named the importance of constantly un/learning and relearning, and while we had different understandings of concepts, the STs tended to take on

the CMs' understanding of various concepts and protocols. For example, STs un/learned about colonization and changed their conception of and relationship to it over time, based on colonization's effects on CMs and Indigenous communities. They adopted an orientation of change towards their identities and the definitions of key concepts and terms. Furthermore, the foundation of trust and respect in ST/CM collaborations was supported by STs' willingness to be wrong. STs may have approached the collaboration with an attitude of being a "good" person (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018, Marom, 2017), but their focus needed to shift from whether they are a good or bad person to focusing on how the quality of the relationship matters to the work they are doing. They must have been willing to understand there was not a right answer or an arrival point. It was constantly changing. We were willing to be completely wrong in everything we have held true to that point and honestly willing to un/learn and relearn.

STs and CMs knew who they were and their place in relation to each other. CMs recognized that the ST they were working with may have been experiencing a shift in mindset, most often through recognizing that the partner was un/learning and relearning. A relevant example of the changes STs and CMs experienced in collaboration came from Alexandra (ST) and her work with Jennifer (CM).

> …[I]t developed into a really trusting friendship that I could ask hard questions at times, right, and I can be more vulnerable and say, "like this is what – help me understand this" or even in any challenges I was experiencing I felt there was a safe space created, right, where we could have these open and honest conversations and we had each other's backs in a variety of ways. (Alexandra, ST, June 14, 2024)

In her Indigenous Lead role, Alexandra (ST) engaged in un/learning and relearning directly linked to her role and her collaboration with Jennifer (CM). To show willingness to un/learn and relearn, the ST moved along with changing ideas and identities and detached from the idea that they must have the right answer. Maggie (ST) shared: "You cannot just do the learning in isolation" (Maggie, ST, April 28, 2024). Her position made sense if STs leaned towards the learning the CM provided.

The ST, however, cannot simply follow the ways of the CM to ensure they are a good "decolonizing educator." There was no one answer, and there was no endpoint in the willingness to un/learn, because the knowledge would change with each CM. Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) discussed the fact that the knowledge was always changing, sharing:

> ALEXANDRA: Yeah, absolutely and I think too…well, it was like open communication. Like I felt like I could always go to Jennifer with whatever, right, that was happening or ask questions or… and I think that was integral really, right? Yeah.
> JENNIFER: And I will say, like yeah, especially because the Indigenous Community never always agrees. Like that is a beautiful hallmark of some people who are like, "Well you have to do it this way, or any other way is wrong", and then somebody else is like, "No, if you do it that way that's wrong. You have to do it this way", and poor Alexandra was like, "I don't want to piss anybody off."
> ALEXANDRA: Yeah.
> JENNIFER: Yeah, and like me being there, being like we are never all going to agree – what do the kids want to do? Or, what do the teachers need? …So, you know, like the community is never going to agree on the right approach or the community is never going to…the communities are never going to say the same thing. So, there has to be open communication…and I think that also with trust like are we doing the… like we have to think, what are our guiding principles? What are the things we're being held to what are we trying to accomplish and where there is disagreement, there are questions. We got to stick to what we've got by what we're trying to do. Without judgement. (Jennifer, CM, & Alexandra, ST, June 26, 2024).

Wilfred (CM) shared a similar sentiment:

> Like there'll always be things that I think, like I'm often of the opinion, and I'll tell this to people, is that you can have 10 different First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in the same room and you're going to ask them a question about education or pedagogy or whatever, and you're going to get 10 different answers. And I think Emily realizes that. Like I think she understands that, but I also think that she trusts me to kind of be that voice of those 10 different people in in the room. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Both Jennifer (CM) and Wilfred's (CM) statements reminded me of a comment Thunder (CM) often made when I visited with him. When asked by settlers if they were allowed to participate, he would say this knowledge was for everybody. It could not be owned, and it was constantly changing. During our pair interview, he shared a story about how he moved STs along in their un/learning. He started his sharing with this quote:

> And I kind of touched on it a while ago when I first started, and I said I was very afraid to announce and give my secrets away that I thought were mine. But they're not really mine. They belong to everybody. (Thunder, CM, July 12, 2024)

For Thunder (CM) the “secrets” he spoke of were Indigenous knowledges, which he did not consider to be his to own. Instead, these knowledges belonged to everyone. He believed when an ST was willing to learn about Indigenous knowledge, they were also willing to un/learn and re/learn. He was very open in helping others to un/learn about his culture and recognized that this changed STs views overall. While considering Thunder’s (CM) stance on STs being willing to un/learn and relearn, I recognized that CMs did not need STs’ willingness. If STs chose not to engage, then CMs could simply disengage from that ST and go where there was willingness to un/learn. This was a level of agency that demonstrated CMs were not forcing anyone to un/learn, nor were they begging for STs to do the work.

Thunder (CM) explained a particular instance where he was teaching about living on reserve and how he had to show the STs he was working with that what they saw was different than what he saw. They discussed a picture of a broken window with a pillow pushed into it. He explained that he saw it as a loving act of a mother putting her pillow in the window to keep her children warm, rather than, as the STs viewed it, people not caring to look after their house. He saw a shift in their thinking, an un/learning of all they had been taught and a relearning of how to view things differently was evident to Thunder (CM). Thunder explained what he saw in the STs’ un/learning like this:

> So that's what we're doing here. And that's what covers that whole thing. How do you affect the student? How do you affect the community members? Well, those settler teachers have to get that too, because they are community, so it's to keep asking the same question over and over again. We kind of know it already, but we’ve just got to go ahead from there. (Thunder, CM, July 12, 2024)

The manner that Thunder (CM) taught his culture, and how he opened the learning for anyone who wanted to engage in it, indicated his positionality and how he identified within the ST/CM relationships he has. He no longer considered it “secrets that are [his],” but instead knowledge that everyone used to shift their positionality and understanding.

An important finding in this study is that in addition to STs, CMs were constantly un/learning and relearning as well, in relation to their ST. They influenced each other. For

example, the data shows that CMs had different views on decolonization, which means that they, too, were constantly un/learning and relearning, and that there is not one right answer to complex challenges or one approach to, or understanding of, complex concepts. As part of the guiding questions to the conversations, participants were asked about decolonizing practices. The individual interview question was: “In what ways do you see your collaboration influencing decolonizing approaches in Ontario schooling to support Indigenous students, families, and communities?” Both Thunder (CM) and Wilfred (CM) shared notable answers as neither wished to use the term “decolonize.” Thunder (CM) shared:

> THUNDER: I don't think I want to go to the term of decolonizing.
> INTERVIEWER: Okay.
> THUNDER: I don't think I'd go there. It's too abrupt.
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
> THUNDER: I think I’d go to the more of a flow...
> INTERVIEWER: Okay.
> THUNDER: ...of change. And I think that's what I was trying to do with the teachers...
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
> THUNDER: ...is to give them a flow, someplace they can go and still do their function under the policies. But that flow is right beside it.
> INTERVIEWER: Right.
> THUNDER: And you, at the end of your semester you can look back and see how that change was made. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

He explained in a later conversation that he considered decolonizing to have more than one meaning. He shared the following view:

> Colonization is here, but you want to change that momentum to go back to, you know. It's like everything in a Native way, or Native culture, there's always two sides to everything. And to get it back is to realize a lot of the things we do when we connect back up to the natural world is we find a place of release where we can for one second go sit underneath that tree and just sit quiet and let that thing flow away and then you get back up again. You're back to where you were. So, I think in my term of decolonization, I don't like the term itself. That's a very abrupt thing. And I’d much rather find the levels of, what do you call them, understanding, I think. Levels of understanding. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

Thunder’s (CM) perspective was not new to me given that I have worked with him for over a decade. Instead, it supported the work we attempted to do in teacher training to move STs Indigenous education forward. Thunder’s viewpoint connected to how he viewed the world he has lived in for over 70 years and how he has seen the work of decolonization fail. Thunder’s

(CM) description of flow reminded me of the Two Row Wampum – two boats could travel on the river without interfering with each other. Thunder's (CM) description of colonization as having levels of understanding reminded me of meditation and being present in the moment. Throughout our decade of working together, being present in the moment has been paramount to Thunder (CM)'s teaching of STs. His inclusion of understanding as different levels was, therefore, not surprising.

For Wilfred (CM), the word "decolonize" is extremely problematic. Wilfred (CM) shared:

> KRISTA: In what ways do you see your collaboration influencing decolonizing approaches in Ontario schooling to support Indigenous students, families and communities?
> WILFRED: It doesn't.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> WILFRED: They, I think probably what Emily [ST] is talking about is my, like I hate that word, like decolonize.
> KRISTA: Tell me more about that.
> WILFRED: It's, it's just such a stupid concept to me. Like, people talk about decolonizing stuff all the time and, okay, God, I love them for it. Go be, be you. Right?
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: But I don't understand how you, how you decolonize a system that is steeped in, like we walk into a building everyday with four walls, or our classrooms with four walls, we are on a timeframe, like you start at what 8:30 and you finish at 2:15 or whatever. There's a bell. There's an anthem. There's, there's standardized testing. There's tests. There's marks. Like even just giving marks out. There's expectations. There's the division of grades and the division of skill sets within those grades. There's the capitalistic colonial nature of what education is all about. It is like the production of workers and the production of that, and that's not even talking about the commodification of marks and how that exists into post-secondary, into university and colleges and things like that. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Wilfred's (CM) new-to-me understanding of decolonization caused me to reconsider how this word was used in education and equity settings. Wilfred (CM) and Thunder (CM) were brutally aware that colonization was not going away any time soon. Nevertheless, neither said that good work was not happening. In fact, they both went on to share thoughts on the work that they had seen being done without applying the term decolonization to it. Wilfred (CM) shared during his individual interview that there must be an understanding that colonization was occurring and he, much like Thunder (CM), found ways to work beside it. He shared:

> And so, I think it's okay that you understand that that colonial system exists. I just think that running parallel to it there needs to be a centring of other voices. Like, and it just can't be like Indigenous voice, like First Nations, Métis, and Inuit voices. It has to be African voices. And it has to be other Indigenous people from other parts of the world. It needs to be Palestinian voices. It needs to be Afghani voices. It needs to be Black voices and Caribbean voices. And it needs to be all of those things that are equal, as equal as the colonial system that's already in place. It needs to centre those voices within a system that's already there, because you, unless you take the entire system now, that curriculum, the grades, the everything, the buildings, everything and if you leave it the same, then you'll never decolonize. But you can like, like I said, centre other ways of knowing as being just as important, just being as equal, right? (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Wilfred saw where colonization continued in the school system, but also where he thought it could shift to a parallel process. He shared the following about the calls for support he received in his role:

> WILFRED: …So, we want to put a mural on the wall. Okay why? Like we're constantly asking why. Like what are the curriculum connections? How is it promoting Indigenous ways of knowing and learning? What is the experiential aspect of it? Because that's what Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are about. Tell me about your story work process when you're developing something like that. All of those things are an aspect of, if you're going to build an outdoor classroom but you're going to make that classroom and the land it is sitting on, that's the teacher. Then you're starting to understand what decolonization is about. But for the most part education doesn't know what that means, right?
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: Like they're still transferring the form and function of what they're doing inside just to an outside place. And it's not the same. And so, I think it's okay that you understand that that colonial system exists. I just think that running parallel to it there needs to be a centring of other voices. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024).

Emily and I, as the STs from these two ST/CM collaborations, were aware of the perspective of our respective CM, and willingly understood and honoured the CM perspective by explaining the CMs' teaching in either the classroom or with other STs without using "decolonize" to demonstrate un/learning within the collaboration. Emily (ST) credited the learning she has done with Wilfred (CM) as the reason she made a shift away from using "decolonizing" and how it has affected her understanding of it. During her individual interview she stated:

> EMILY: I am very trained by Wilfred (CM) to say this is absolutely became central to my learning, especially in the last, in the last few years. We cannot decolonize education. It would have to be burnt down and built from scratch.

> KRISTA: And there would be chaos in between?
> EMILY (ST): We cannot decolonize...
> KRISTA: Okay.
> EMILY: ...a classroom because the classroom itself is a colonial construct. However, we can be anti-colonial.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> EMILY: We can be anti-oppressive. We can call out anti-Indigenous racism. We can centre Indigenous knowledges. We can centre Indigenous ways of knowing and learning and being. (Emily, ST, Feb. 10, 2024)

She went on to say that using the word “decolonize,” or describing her work as decolonizing education, did not have the meaning it once did. For her, the more the word was used, the less meaning it had. It had become an educational buzz word, without meaning or substance.

From my insider/outsider viewpoint, decolonize was not a word I used. Much like Thunder (CM), the CM I worked and learned with, I related decolonization to the shift in education to hold space and value Indigenous knowledges and stories. While Thunder (CM) called the process of decolonization “a flow,” I mostly noticed how STs recognized Indigenous students in their classes and the need to be teaching Indigenous curriculum whether there was an Indigenous student present or not (Krista, ST, July 3, 2024).

Shirley (CM) took a different approach to the question of how the ST/CM collaboration influenced decolonizing approaches in school. She acknowledged that she had witnessed how the ST/CM collaboration influenced the school she worked in to support Indigenous students, families and communities. She agreed that there had been progress, but she also shared there was still a lot of work to be done.

> I think now with the Indigenous centres and the safe space where we can see ourselves, knowing that there's a place for me to go, that's helpful. Developing relationships with somebody within the building is crucial so that I have a go-to person if I need help, if I just want to share something, somebody who really understands without me really having to say anything, until then I don't think we're going to able to decolonize because our kids are shy, nervous, anxious, afraid, and really can't even get to the place where they can learn in their classroom because they're experiencing all of those feelings. (Shirley, CM, Dec. 13, 2024)

The interviews provided valuable insight into how the participants viewed colonization within schools, and the way they willingly un/learned and relearned a concept of decolonization within

their collaboration. All participants shared a similar understanding that colonization continued to rule within schools in Ontario and that it would continue to do so for a long time to come. Each ST/CM pair was looking for the cracks in the system where they could find space to make small changes given that there is no way to burn down the system without something to replace it. I explore some of these ideas in the following section.

Similar to complex understandings and shifting perspectives of “decolonization”, Wilfred (CM) extended this thinking to the concept of reconciliation. Wilfred (CM) shared:

> WILFRED: And then I was talking about reconciliation before and she's very much like looking for reconciliation. And she does like a lot of really cool projects that kind of help to, you know, develop things that can lead to reconciliation. And I've told her what I think of reconciliation before as well. Like I don't really believe in it. I think that it's a big mountain to climb, and I always kind of laugh when people talk about–I'm getting off topic–but I think it's always funny when people talk about reconciliation and they talk about it as a two-way street, or like a two-way thing. Both parties coming together.
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: And I'm of the opinion that like it's not really that. It's like a bridge and First Nations, Métis, Inuit are this side of the bridge, and everybody else is on that side of the bridge. If you want reconciliation you need to come across the bridge to our side.
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: And I think she also understands that, right. Like she understands that reconciliation is like her part.
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: Especially in our relationship I think, I think she understands that it's her part, and I'm not going to be working towards it. Like I'll accept it, but it's not like an active thing that I'm going to go out and look for. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Wilfred’s (CM) response troubled the idea of what many STs might have thought reconciliation was, while being unwilling to un/learn and relearn. He was clear that his ST/CM collaboration with Emily (ST) was different because of the work she had done and the humility with which she approached it. However, Wilfred went on to point to tension he saw that decolonization would be used to avoid actually doing the work. He shared the following experiences:

> WILFRED: I mean, I get it. Like I understand like the decolonizing approaches in Ontario schooling to support Indigenous students, families, and communities. I get it. I just don't think it's truthful. I don't think it's honest.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> WILFRED: Like I think if you want to be honest you can do two, like you can follow two paths. You can be like, “Okay, we've got our system in place. We're having tests. We're

in a room. We're not outside learning off the land, right? There's nothing experiential about English.
KRISTA: No. We're stuck in 194 days of a square calendar.
WILFRED: Yeah, exactly. Right? So, there's nothing experiential unless you, unless you make it experiential. And take a really good example to me, in our work we get a lot of schools calling us up and going like we want to put a garden in, and we're like, okay, why? Because it's reconciliation. No, no, no. That's not reconciliation. Why are you putting a garden in? Oh, we want to do classes. Classes on what? Well, we're going to take the kids out there to learn. Learn what? Well, we're going to have like an outdoor classroom. And the more you pressure them into like giving you an answer, it's just like we're going to do the lesson that we were going to do in the classroom, but we're going to go sit outside and do it. What's the difference? Like, there is no difference. You're still taking that lesson from- you're just taking it from inside to outside. There's no curriculum attachment to the garden, to the garden itself. Like how are you learning from the garden?
KRISTA: Yeah.
WILFRED: What's the garden teaching you?
KRISTA: Yeah.
WILFRED: Rather than you're going to learn just in the garden, right? So, we want to put a mural on the wall. Okay why? Like we're constantly asking why. Like what are the curriculum connections? How is it promoting Indigenous ways of knowing and learning? What is the experiential aspect of it? Because that's what Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are about. Tell me about your story work process when you're developing something like that. All of those things are an aspect of, if you're going to build an outdoor classroom but you're going to make that classroom and the land it is sitting on, that's the teacher. Then you're starting to understand what decolonization is about. But for the most part education doesn't know what that means, right? (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Reconciliation, and the visible changes that can come from this work, would require a significant amount of time and commitment. In Jennifer's (CM) opinion, working with an ST collaborator helped to move other STs who were new to the learning, through PD, as the ST collaborator could share that they have been in the same place as the ST who was engaging in the learning. They understood the feelings of shame in not knowing the history of Turtle Island, Indian Residential Schools, and the Sixties Scoop. Until the shift in mindset occurred and STs moved beyond shame and guilt, there was a high probability that they would remain stuck.

Jennifer (CM) spoke of how she viewed reconciliation and being accountable to the community within the ST/CM collaboration. She referenced writer/advocate Jesse Wente, and her belief that reconciliation was the job of the ST. More specifically, the ST in the collaboration must demonstrate to the CM they are engaging with that they have relinquished their resistance

and were moving towards reconciliation. When settler folks did the work of reconciliation, they demonstrated that there was accountability on the part of the colonizer, as well as an understanding that Indigenous knowledge and stories were missing from education, but that they had "the mechanisms and the funding and the framework to do a thing about it" (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024). For her, this equated to reciprocity work even though that was not the term she used to identify it.

Part of willingness means seeing the ways in which Indigenous people are sharing, sacrificing, and giving and to reciprocate in whatever way possible, if not more. Noah (CM) also did not use the word reciprocity but instead shared how the work he and Maggie (ST) engaged in was woven into their ST/CM collaboration. Noah (CM) described reciprocity within the ST/CM relationship as, "We can all get along, work together, accept who we are, accepting each other for who we are, where we come from, and not try to control where you're from" (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024). For both CMs, the basis of reciprocity was valuing the other person and a willingness to return whatever was possible to the relationship. Their outlook on reciprocity in their ST/CM collaborations and the work they engaged in informed the way they witnessed their partners stepping up, stepping forward, or stepping back throughout their time together. I will explore this in the next section.

Relational Foundation 4: Stepping Up, Stepping Forward, Stepping Back

Several of the collaborators spoke about moments where they had to re-position themselves within the relationship when engaging with other STs outside of the partnership. Engagement with other STs required them to step up, step forward, or step back within the ST/CM collaboration based on the needs of the moment, whether an actual, physical movement or a figurative one. ST/CM collaborators were not always in a shoulder-to-shoulder position, and participants named that in the data. If an ST was stepping up, they could have benefited from being seen as the good person. Stepping forward might have meant risking many aspects of the ST's self, such as security, your work, or even your physical being. When stepping back, rather,

the individual was taking their lead from the very people who are most affected by the situation. Standing side-by-side could create both benefit and risk (Shah, 2024). In any of these positions, there was communal gain to settlers, depending on the motivation and the extent to which they stepped up, stepped forward, or stepped back.

Emily (ST) and Alexandra (ST) explained that sometimes, when working with their CM, they were physically required to step into spaces. Alexandra's (ST) example was the most significant: "There were times when I would stand beside her and then there were times when I need to go in front of her, if that makes sense, based on the questions or things like that, right?" (Alexandra, ST, June 14, 2024). Alexandra's (ST) illustration of stepping up, stepping forward, and stepping back included how she, as an ST, demonstrated to others that there were questions she needed to address with other STs. Alexandra (ST) and Emily (ST) had both been involved in situations where other STs were engaging in harmful and hurtful questions towards the CM including microaggressions or overt racist comments, as well as more subtle comments that required another ST to call out the behaviour.

When discussing some of the challenges the collaborators faced, Shirley (CM) revealed that not all STs in the school wanted to work with her.

> SHIRLEY: It was challenging when I got resistance and pushback.
> KRISTA: And that would have come not from working with Randy, but from the system?
> SHIRLEY: Yes, from the system partially, mostly teachers who weren't willing to accept that the kids I supported required something different than the typical kids in the classroom who were from here. (Shirley, CM, December 13, 2023)

Randy (ST) and Shirley (CM) both spoke of how Randy (ST) had to step into some situations with colleagues, who were not listening to Shirley (CM), who was acting in her role as Indigenous counselor. Randy had to step in front and call them into the learning. Randy (ST) shared his view on it by relating how he would step into the space:

> [O]ur relationship was not damaged when my colleagues made these giant missteps. And I participated in the relationship because I could really help. And I could help Shirley with being a voice at a staff meeting. And I would say I/we fought with staff, a lot, in the beginning, and I was sometimes put at tables where there were some particularly unmoving teachers and had to spend a PD Day like exhausting myself trying to get them

> to recognize how they could change, and why they should change. (Randy, ST, December 14, 2023)

Shirley recognized that while Randy (ST) was willing and able to change, the resistance she received from other STs in the building was not easily shifted. This example spoke directly to the reciprocity in the ST/CM collaboration as well as the work that the partners would do when faced with settler resistance.

Wilfred (CM) clearly pointed out that while he and Emily worked together in the partnership, they stood within it differently. When speaking about their roles in the relationship, he used an example of Emily (ST) stepping up and forward, then stepping back while he stepped forward to share his views:

> WILFRED: But I think, like our partnership really works well when we're doing stuff and we're writing stuff or we're, yeah, I think she's, like she's really the workhorse and I'm just kind of like I'll say “Let me see it and then I'll let you know if we're on the right track,” and nothing's like gone off the rails a little bit, but yeah. Like I, and I guess I trust her a lot, right...
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> WILFRED: ...to do the right thing, and to do her due diligence. And she's got like a good mindset…So yeah, I think that's our relationship and where I stand in it. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

For Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST) there was an understanding in their work of how each stepped up, stepped forward, or stepped back and at what point that happened. Emily (ST) put herself out in front in organizing the writing or work they were doing to begin with but took the lead from Wilfred (CM) afterwards to ensure the work met the plan they had.

Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) focused on a particular instance where Alexandra (ST) had to step forward at an all-staff PD. Together they recognized that to move the work along, Alexandra (ST) needed to share that she understood the staff’s perspective in not understanding what was being taught because they had not learned this knowledge before. During their conversation with me, they shared that there were several occasions were stepping up, stepping forward, and stepping back occurred.

> ALEXANDRA: But that there were times when you needed to be front and center and your voice needed to be centered, right, and I was standing behind. And then there were

> times when we needed to stand up together and then there were times when it was important for me to be answering certain questions or fielding like certain learning. That was…I think that was kind of new to me in terms of facilitating, I think, right, because I hadn't really probably been in a necessarily a relationship like that. I'm just trying to think. Yeah.
> JENNIFER: Yeah, I agree. Like I actually, I totally agree. That whole ability to…like we engaged in strategic behaviour, it was strategic and intentional. Like I'm going to say a thing because this is the question they're asking or this is where the lack of clarity lies and if I say a thing it's going to land better because it's coming from me standing and living in my experience and my skin and there were times in places where it was like, okay, this is a question that they have and like most of our teachers in our strategic plan were not Indigenous identifying teachers and so for me to say the thing might come off as preachy or judgey so it was like, "Okay, Alexandra, like you have to step forward because they can feel your experience." (Jennifer, CM & Alexandra, ST, June 26, 2024)

In our pair interview, Thunder (CM) had also shared that when STs step forward, it sometimes shifted the focus to their identity and away from the CM. In certain situations, he found it necessary to achieve a larger goal.

> Yeah. I've got to teach my stuff and hand it over to affect the people that live in their territory. So, I think that's what I do, you know, is how I try to affect other people, and how I try to affect teachers who have power. And those things I told Krista, I says, "Somebody's got to write it. An Indian writing that stuff they'll say he's just a cry-baby, eh? You're just crying in your own soup there. Get out of that mud. You're just feeling sorry for yourself." But somebody else has got to say it who is relative to us in the long run from coming from behind. So, I think that's the biggest part of that thing about collaboration and experience and how you rope all that stuff together. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

While Jennifer (CM) called this "strategic behaviour" within the work they did together, it raised an important tension. There were complexities in stepping up and forward if doing so was going to recenter settler identities at a point where there is a need for willingness to un/learn and relearn. During individual interviews, participants were asked how to avoid re-centering settler interests and identities while conducting PD or learning opportunities together. I was curious about how they did this work while moving Indigenous education forward. I had grave concerns about posing this particular question to other ST/CMs. My own answer was: "So, to be perfectly honest, I would say that doesn't always happen. I would say absolutely there are a lot of moments where the work of the collaboration is about the settler teacher" (Krista, ST, July 6, 2024).

There were several different approaches to answering my question and varied responses on how to deal with the inherent resistance within the work. Some participants recounted times when STs were told they needed to take on new learning and how that did not go well. Emily (ST) shared “If you have somebody who is derailing [the learning] because of their feelings, that part of it is to call out the fact that, okay, well, now you are centering your feelings and your guilt over actual action” (Feb. 10, 2024). Jennifer (CM) indicated that in her view the professional development she offered with Alexandra (ST) as her collaborator focused on starting where the STs were and then trying to shift their mindset as an initial start to the learning. This may appear to be centering settler interests and perspectives; however, Jennifer’s (CM) view was that starting the learning with what STs wanted to know, and then having the ST/CM collaboration model how the learning benefits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, created spaces where the centering of ST interests shifted to the centering of Indigenous knowledge and learning. Jennifer (CM) stated the following in her individual interview:

> JENNIFER: Yeah, and maybe I'll have a unique take on this but when you're trying to move folks along the continuum of being able to do this is that whole notion of start where they are.
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> JENNIFER: And the starting where they are actually is in a place, I think, for everyone that centers the settler identity because given all of the reasons that people don't do the work: I'm afraid of saying something wrong. I don't know enough about this. I haven't learned this. That space does center the identity of the settler trying to do the work. So, the whole role, the whole relationship, the whole point of engaging in this work is to move people away from that. But to me the way learning happens is you have to anchor the learning to your own experience in order to make it real for the person experiencing it and in order to move them away. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Jennifer (CM) continued by providing a view in how to move people forward in the learning, having seen this herself in the work she did with Alexandra (ST), as well as being an educator in the provincial education system. Jennifer (CM) shared her view of how the learning centers the STs experience and interest. She stated “So, you know, when you have people who are at the

very beginning of the journey, you have to actually lean into their own identity and experience to move them away form their own identity and experience" (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024).

When asked this question, Randy (ST) turned his mind to the teachers who were pulling others along with them. He viewed STs who were already on the journey as needing to "use their friendship, their relationships with those other teachers to get them off the center" (Randy, CM, December 13, 2023). Randy's description of ST resistance and the challenge of moving beyond centering ST identities indicates the education system continues to struggle in doing this work.

For Maggie (ST), the question caused her pause as she considered that, in fact, the relationship often did center ST identities and interests. In this excerpt she points towards times she was aware she centered her interests. Her self-reflection and reflection of the system were stated as follows:

> MAGGIE: Oh, I would say it was not a straight line. I would say probably sometimes it, you know, slipped a little.
> KRISTA: Sure.
> MAGGIE: Kind of like, this is our system, we got to work with it. You know that kind of stuff. How did I work to– That's a tough one.
> KRISTA: And maybe there's no answer.
> MAGGIE: I think I come back to sometimes I caught myself and I'd step back, and again it's coming back to listening and understanding that if it's different than let's say the way I was comfortable with it, it often meant pay attention.
> KRISTA: The discomfort meant...
> MAGGIE: Yeah.
> KRISTA: ...pay attention?
> MAGGIE: Yeah. Pay attention.
> KRISTA: Got it. Got it.
> MAGGIE: Because it's so easy to fall back into the ways we know, and the, you know the system that we work in. And I will tell you; it's a very different system. (Maggie, ST, April 28, 2024)

Maggie (ST) demonstrated the tension of recentering settler feelings where some participants slipped back and forth, sometimes in the same sentence or paragraph. There was not a clear yes or no in the data as to whether we should decenter settler identities. During the interview, Maggie (ST) and I both admitted that we had recentered our ST identities while trying not to do so. In working together, practices and actions were shared among STs and CMs including

demonstrating an understanding of what should and should not be done by STs, as well as increasing inclusion of Indigenous knowledge directly from Indigenous people. The ST/CM participants I had conversations with signaled that their collaborations allowed them to be agents of change and held space for Indigenous voices.

The insight provided by the participants contradicted my initial thinking about the question. I had expected that there would be concrete examples of how the collaborators had specifically engaged in strategies to unsettle the ST identities. For example, settler teachers who consistently cry while residential school survivors tell their stories are weaponizing their settler tears. Presenters and other STs will often rush to comfort those crying, thus shifting the work from un/learning to dealing with ST emotions. This led me to the recurring question of how to move the work forward without re-centering the interests and needs of STs in the process. A quote from Wilfred provided a way for STs to move beyond their own identities. He stated clearly:

> And I think, as a settler educator, that you have to maybe constantly just remind yourself every once in a while, that you are a settler educator. And then that comes with a lot of responsibilities, and it comes with a lot of humility, and things like that. And it's the ones that don't remind themselves of that, that kind of play into things like white saviorism, or just saviorism, or those aspects of being an educator. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

Wilfred (CM) noted that STs should be in a perpetual reflexive mode in order to understand the ways in which stepping up, stepping forward, and stepping back could be fraught with the complexities of recentering settler identities. As the system changes, and as STs do more of this work, I wonder if there will be further shifts.

Jennifer (CM) is very clear on where the responsibility lies to learn/unlearn and engage in reconciliation. She states:

> So, you know this pre-pandemic world that we started living in, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission… as an Indigenous person, I don't need to reconcile anything right?... I've heard Jesse Wente say that he wakes up every day and has to reconcile already because he exists and I'm like, “yeah you kind of do” especially like you're…I live in this settler world. I work in this settler world. And I've been socialized by this settler world and so I don't have to reconcile anything. The reconciliation is the job of

> the people that Alexandra was doing her work [with] within the system. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

For Alexandra (ST) and Jennifer (CM), given that they were in roles that required them to work together right away, and that they did not choose each other to be in collaboration with, it was not surprising that they did not have time to reflect on the impact on their own teaching first. Being in central roles, they would have been in front of STs providing professional development before being in classrooms. During the pair interview, Alexandra (ST) referred to it as “role modelling” the relationship and it came from the work they were doing with teachers during professional development sessions, as well as with Indigenous families. The willingness to share risk and burden closely related to the work that Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) did together. In order for them to role model the ways they shared risk and burden, the pair had to first engage with the STs in the open forum of professional development delivery. The role modeling they exhibited included stepping up and stepping forward, sharing of risk and burden and the idea that the ST was not required to know about all things Indigenous, which will be discussed next.

The collaborations demonstrated that the ST was not the holder of all knowledge in the classroom. Receiving trust and respect within the collaboration promoted CMs leading and STs stepping back. There was evidence of times when the ST would remain in the background for significant portions of the delivery of learning, while at other times the pair stood shoulder-to-shoulder. ST/CM collaborators who presented professional development opportunities had anecdotal reports from STs who attended the session that indicated their role modelling moved practicing STs beyond just understanding the importance of including Indigenous content in their lessons and into the sphere of valuing Indigenous voices and knowledge. Thunder and I were both still in contact with STs who had attended professional development of this type. We were often told that STs had continued their learning journey or that STs have brought friends who were beginning their journey to professional development events.

What I was surprised to hear is that the perspective of the CMs did not include any comments about their STs and saviourism. Rather, CMs commented on the distinct roles in the relationship and that the collaboration supported each person sharing risk and burden together. In particular, CMs expressed their respect for the work the ST was engaging in. Wilfred (CM) shared his respect for Emily (ST).

> I think that I respect her ability to be like that ally in education for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. She doesn't really have, like, the ego that some people have where it's like, “I know what's best for you.” And she doesn't, and she doesn't come across as like that white saviour complex either. So, it helps. (Wilfried, CM, March 2, 2024)

Wilfred’s (CM) view of Emily (ST) as an ally who tried not to be a white saviour echoed other CM interviews about the ST they worked with. The CMs saw the STs willingly positioning themselves in relation with them, as opposed to taking a stance of positionality of doing to and for the CM. The CM was also willing, in this situation, to see the ST outside of white saviourism because of how the ST worked with them.

Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST), in their individual interviews, also spoke of STs finding their way in the work of reconciliation and determining when to step in and out. They both spoke of Alexandra (ST)’s examination of whether or not she should be in the Indigenous Lead role she held as she is not Indigenous. For Jennifer (CM), it was important that Alexandra (ST) did the work with her, but Alexandra (ST) questioned whether she should be the one doing the work. In my own interview, I pointed out that I never considered the role I had as being mine. Instead, I was holding space until someone who was Indigenous stepped into it. I was reminded that I received backlash from senior admin when I presented my perspective of my role to them.

> …I got a lot of “You need to remember who pays you and you need to remember that you're on this side not their side.” And I would say, “No. My job is to make education better for Indigenous families and communities and to hold this space until an Indigenous person comes to take this role,” right? Like that's my job. (Krista, ST, July 3, 2024)

As an ST, knowing when to step up, step forward, or step back was an important skill. It was not one that came easily, and it took a significant amount of time to learn; however, it was an

important part of the ST/CM collaboration. It ensured that the work stayed at the forefront of what happened in schools and forced those in senior leadership positions to consider how they engaged in Indigenous education.

The willingness that participants may have considered as a simple coming together to do the work at the beginning of their collaboration blossomed into a deeper understanding within the relationship. The foundation of living into trust and respect provided momentum for stepping up and stepping forward discussed here. Willingness also informed the next section on bridging gaps as a central part of the collaborations.

Relational Foundation 5: Bridging Gaps

Participants outlined gaps that they identified as being challenges to their collaborations, particularly in relation to current learning in Indigenous education. They also provided insight into how gaps might be narrowed and bridged. Gaps, as outlined by the collaborators, included gaps in understanding within institutions; gaps in how ST educators related to Indigenous students, families, or CMs; and gaps in curriculum and pedagogy. The ways in which ST educators tried to close the gaps matter as much, or more, than the intention to close the gap. Participants shared a variety of ways the ST/CM collaboration, and the existence of the relationship in general, informed what was and is being taught within Ontario schools. While much was shared about how the relationships impacted the participants, and how STs in the collaborations are teaching in schools after the experience, the lasting impact were the changes in what is delivered to students in the classroom. In this section I will discuss types of bridging that surfaced in the interviews and how closing the gaps influenced the ST/CM participants, Ontario schooling, and in some instances, all aspects of the collaborations.

Institutional Bridging

Participants shared examples of the institutional bridging they had to manage throughout their collaboration. In two of the relationships, both the ST and the CM shared that there was an exchange of knowledge with respect to the bureaucracy of the education system.

Participants spoke of challenging system processes they faced which had to be addressed. Some STs shared how the collaboration changed their teaching and learning in Ontario schools. Some CMs described moments when it seemed that the pair was taking on entire school boards, or large groups of STs who were resisting the learning. All partnerships shared that they had to understand what they were working towards to be able to work together.

Both Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST) indicated that Randy (ST) taught Shirley (CM) more about institutional systems than she was aware of when she started her role at the school. In turn, Shirley (CM) shared knowledge of navigating institutions with the families she supported, helping bridge the gap for them. For Noah (CM) and Maggie (ST), Noah (CM) described their ability to maneuver through institutions as "…a very good correlation of North meets South" (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024). Maggie (ST) was often the "bridge" between Noah (CM) and the school board. She often helped Noah (CM) understand schools and school boards administrative constraints, such as invoicing or scheduling. Presentations, for example, could not go into recess as there were logistical and contractual needs to be considered. Maggie (ST) named challenges as "logistical things like recess" (Maggie, ST, April 28, 2024) and Emily (ST) identified tensions caused by "systemic realities like report cards, and curriculum expectations, and timelines, and money, and busing restrictions" (Emily ST, February 10, 2024).

Alexandra's (ST) view of institutional bridging in the pair interview went beyond dealing with the minutia of the system. In both of her interviews, Alexandra (ST) shared that she often felt she needed to step out of the work to make way for an Indigenous person to take the role. It was through her conversations with Jennifer (CM) that she came to realize that doing the work together was an act of reconciliation. She stated: "When Jennifer (CM) came on, after the first year, I said to her, 'I think this should be an Indigenous person.' Jennifer (CM) was great though, she's like, 'Alexandra, I am Indigenous. You're a Settler. This works" (Alexandra, ST, June 14, 2024). While Alexandra (ST) did not specifically use the word "bridging," the fact that

she remained in the role after these conversations with Jennifer (CM) signaled she understood that the work she was doing contributed to closing institutional gaps.

Beyond logistical challenges, there were also deeper challenges as Jennifer (CM) shares below:

> The challenges were like, and I will just name it, is nobody cared. Like nobody who held a pen, who wrote a cheque, who distributed a budget, who could bring the work to the forefront of what was happening at the time. It felt like, I'm not going to say nobody cared. It felt like nobody cared. This was just compliance. This is a thing that we have to do because we get stuff from the ministry to do this work, and we have structures and mechanisms and reporting that we have to do to prove that we are doing this work. And so, we are just going to comply and here's your thing, but this isn't the single biggest concern of our board. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Jennifer (CM) was not the only collaborator who discussed the lack of care demonstrated by the system. I found that both STs and CMs talked about institutional bridging to move the work forward.

Maggie (ST) spoke of how she was the connection between the work she did with Noah (CM) and the school board senior administration to have more teachers engage in learning from and with community members about Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Randy (ST) described the considerable time it took to convince both teachers and school administration that some students should go home for the goose hunt, and consequently, should have their assignments grounded in CRRP[30]. Unfortunately, these STs did not hear what Shirley (CM), and Randy (ST) were telling them about student needs. Shirley (CM) also shared that often Randy (ST) had to be the one to share student needs with the STs in the school as they would not listen to her. This lack of trust that STs had towards Shirley (CM) was difficult for her and made her role in the school stressful. I wonder if the stressful part of Shirley not being trusted by

[30] CRRP is Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy and “reflects and affirms students’ cultural and social identities, languages, and family structures. It involves careful acknowledgement, respect, and understanding of the similarities and differences among students, and between students and teachers, to respond effectively to student thinking and promote student learning.” (https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/assessment-evaluation/crrp-ae, retrieved August 24, 2024)

STs in her school came from the fact that she worked almost exclusively with students and families.

Jennifer (CM) connected the constraints of the system to the length of time it takes for change to happen and why. She stated:

> If you want to leave this [Indigenous education] to Indigenous teachers only then what you're saying is, you don't value the work getting done. You value who does it more than you value the impact. And for me, the future of this is we have to lean into settler teacher/community member collaborations because that's where we leverage impact. For a long time coming, for a couple of more generations, at the very least, we are going to have largely settler teachers doing the work of Indigenous education. That's just the reality and if we don't lean into those collaborations with intentionality by saying we have to have community members, we have to have lived experience, we have to have settler teachers in there because they're actually the ones who make up this system. If we're not leaning in to prepare the settler teachers to lead the work, then we're hamstringing the work, and it won't get done. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Jennifer (CM) believed that the changes will be slow moving for the foreseeable future, or until Indigenous knowledges are valued as much as the dominant settler knowledge base. Jennifer's (CM) belief was echoed by other participants, who coupled their assessment of the current system with a modicum of hope that relationships such as the ones they were engaged in would make changes within the Ontario school system. Participants believed that if others were able to see the value ST/CM collaborations bring to students, families and communities, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, the pace of change could quicken. Many system processes were out of the control of the collaboration and the collaborators. In my position as an insider, I too, saw the same challenges from the data playing out in the education system and school boards. As an Indigenous lead, it was not surprising to me that each of the collaborations spoke of the logistical nightmares they encountered.

ST/CM collaborations contributed to institutional bridging by supporting learning in classrooms with Indigenous and non-indigenous students as well as during PD sessions for STs. CMs held a variety of roles. Noah (CM) and Thunder (CM) had opportunities to present to students, whereas Jennifer (CM) and Wilfred (CM) had been teachers in the classroom before moving into central roles working with teachers. Shirley's (CM) role was entirely with students

who had come from out of town to attend school in the city she was located in. In all these situations, the ST they were working with also held two roles in their school or board. One role would be to appear before students in some capacity, and the other was to work with their peers, providing education for embedding Indigenous education in their curriculum.

I also engaged in institutional bridging in my role. In this excerpt, I share my first experience dealing with the Finance department to purchase tobacco:

> KRISTA: But then there would be other things like the first time I ever tried to put through tobacco, right, with the Finance department, as an expense.
> INTERVIEWER: As an expense.
> KRISTA: Right? I had to go buy it. I don't smoke. So, I go, and I buy it and on top of that I bought it on reserve so there's no tax on it and I put it on my expense account, and I didn't know any better. And so, I get this call,
> "Can you come down to Finance on the second floor?"
> And I'm like, "Yeah sure. No problem".
> So, there I am and I'm like, "Hey, how's it going?"
> And they say "Um, you can't do this."
> And I'm like, "Yeah, we need to."
> "Well, yeah, but you can't."
> "Okay, why?"
> "We don't pay for tobacco or alcohol."
> I said, "Uh-huh. Do you understand what this is for?"
> "It's tobacco. Like they're smoking it."
> I said, "Ummmm…No. What do you know about Indigenous culture?"
> And they are like, "I don't have time for this."
> I say, "Okay. So, tell you what, I'm going to go back upstairs. I'm going to talk to my superintendent. I'm going to write a really nice email for them to send you. And then we will get it sorted out."
> Right? And you don't be snarky [with the Finance people] about it, but it was having to educate Finance about what tobacco was or why I'm buying it. Like we would do a lot of work with the Métis Nation, whether it was the local Métis Council or whether it was the Métis Nation of Ontario, and so I would buy gifts like maple syrup or honey from local vendors or you know, things like that, where that I could get a receipt for it and having to explain why those are the gifts and it's not a mug. Like first of all, nobody wants another mug, I don't even want another mug with our school board logo on it. Like nobody wants that. But this is why this is an appropriate gift, right? … and we would always purchase from GoodMinds and GoodMinds wasn't a tendered vendor with many school boards at that time, right? So then navigating helping the owner at that time to say, "Hey, are you are - did you apply?" and he'd be like, "Yeah. I'm on it. I'm doing it. I'm just waiting for the tender process to go through." And so, then I would have to justify why I'm buying from GoodMinds, which was often easy because the books weren't available anywhere else. It was before Amazon was a real thing. And you know Chapters was a big thing but just having to do those pieces, like the colonialism and the colonization of processes and protocols is very hierarchical and "*thou shalt"* do it this way. (Krista, ST, July 6, 2024)

This institutional bridging also contributed to the building genuine ST/CM partnerships as there was a need to take on the institution to gain access to the resources required to do the work. Without a willingness for STs to step forward (as explored in the previous section), there is a distinct possibility that some of the ST/CM relationships would not have grown due to a lack of trust and respect.

A tension that I found in the data around institutional bridging were the challenges of accessing and paying for resources, either human resources or print/digital resources. I am reminded of how Jennifer (CM), Alexandra (ST), and I viewed this challenge within our roles. I shared about having to explain to finance staff in the board, who were not aware of their positionality, about purchasing tobacco and how honorariums should work (Krista, ST, July 3, 2024). By failing to accept or understand their positionality, people in the system also failed to meet their responsibilities as laid out in the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. While I have no hard and fast answers to this tension, it is imperative for me to bring them forward in this project.

Relational Bridging

Relational bridging in this project is what becomes possible in the learning of others because of the ST/CM collaboration. In all of the collaborations, both ST and CM attended to the education of students and educators in a number of ways. Shirley (CM) dealt almost exclusively with Indigenous students outside of the classroom, yet the collaboration she was in with Randy ensured two things: 1) that teachers learned about the Indigenous students she supported and who were in their classrooms; and 2) that through the work she did with Randy, he learned to take valuing Indigenous knowledges into the classroom space so that all students could learn to respect Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In his individual interview, Randy connected reciprocity to teaching history. He considered what knowledge of history was being transmitted to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students:

> I don't know if this is appropriate for me to say, but I think it is one of those things that's going to be like seven generations. It's going to take that long for us to get, like, the collective colonial us to get off our high horse and get to an even plane with our Indigenous youth…We– it is going to be a long time. And I tell my kids in the history class, "You're learning a history your grandparents have never learned. And when you try to tell [your grandparents] this, they're not going to believe you and they're going to correct you, and yell at you about the right way of history." I tell the kids, "But you know better, and they'll die soon. And you're not going to change their mind." (Randy, ST, December 13, 2023)

Being able to talk about Indigenous history with Indigenous youth had a great effect on both Randy and his students. In a lesson discussing World War I, Randy (ST) recounted a shift in the conversation. A few of the Indigenous students in the class began texting back home with a family member who had knowledge of other family members who enlisted in World War II. This led to the students looking up their relatives online, including relatives that they had heard of from other relatives. "[I]t was really neat that they could find like a great uncle, or a great granddad, or– it was a really, really, really cool day. But I would have stopped way before that without the collaboration" (Randy, ST, December 13, 2023).

Thus, Randy's (ST) relational bridging with Shirley (CM) led him to create a relationship with the students he was teaching, connecting the dots of learning from and with students in his class in an authentic way that had meaning for them. He related his new ability to continue pushing the learning forward concretely to his collaboration with Shirley (CM) and the reflection that he would not have done so prior to their relationship. The collaboration built the genuine relationship needed to construct the relational bridge, resulting in Randy (ST) creating a space for students to learn and text with their family members during class. Relational bridging was understood to be a part of each collaboration of the pairs who participated. It was forged in the trust and respect and the willingness named in relational foundation 3.

During the pair interview with Shirley (CM) and Randy (ST), it also became apparent that these collaborations were important to ensure that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students saw Indigenous representation in positions of power. While Shirley did not "teach" in the colonized sense of education, she and her work were seen by Indigenous students as

important because she had a highly regarded position and took up space within the school. Indigenous students might bring non-Indigenous friends to the Indigenous space to see Shirley interact with them and experience her knowledge for themselves. Shirley was often able to build relationships with the non-Indigenous friend who accompanied the student to the Indigenous Center creating a relational bridge for the three of them.

Relational bridging set the foundation for pedagogical bridging. For example, the responses to the interview questions, whether individual or pair conversations, reflected that the ST/CM collaboration impacted the experiences and perspectives of the CM through the relational bridging. The work the pairs did together often allowed outsiders to observe how such collaborations make changes. It also created a space for CMs to see changes occurring while returning to work in schools with STs again and again.

Jennifer (CM) spoke of relational bridging by foregrounding the lessons that large groups of STs were able to take away from their ST/CM PD sessions. She compared it to teaching students to conduct research projects. It provided insight on how relational bridging impacted everyone.

> We are the human beings live doing the work, but it's the same reason you don't ever only use primary resources or secondary resources. Like you want to hear from people. You want to hear from analysis. You want to hear opinion and observation. Like you want to hear all of it because if we're going to do it right people need that, you know, for directions up, down, and inside–they need all of it. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Relational bridging has taken many forms as outlined by the STs and CMs. It is because of relational bridging by these participants that the possibilities for leaning have been shared beyond their ST/CM collaboration and have benefited the education systems they worked in.

Pedagogical Bridging

ST/CM relationships supported pedagogical bridging by informing pedagogy within the Ontario education system. Regardless of the position CMs and STs held, their roles impacted students in the classroom in a significant capacity. For example, Noah (CM) would speak in front of large groups of students of various ages. He was able to focus on the knowledge he

chose to share in a format that worked for him. Both Noah (CM) and Maggie (ST) commented on the impact of his presentations on students, sharing incidents where students reached out in different ways to explain how much they learned during the presentations. Noah (CM) measured his impact on students by sharing what he saw happening after presentations.

> I've seen some students or talked with some students I have worked with and they're doing magnificent stuff. Incredible, magical stuff. Far ahead of what I can accomplish. And some of the ways they were inspired by a class trip to the Arctic and that engagement and just keeping an open mind and open heart and understanding that collaborative work can work if you gave it a chance and I gave it a chance over and over. (Noah, CM, July 6, 2024)

Thunder (CM) believed installing ST/CM collaborations throughout teacher training would change education. He stated that people could effectively learn through teacher education programs, as long as there was input from Indigenous people. In his individual interview he shared:

> So, I think over the time though that teacher education and teacher training courses at university, the best thing is study what people say…I think that the world is changing very rapidly. And we just got to keep in step. We've got to take the two roads and build them to make one. And if not to make one, at least have stop overs here and there once in a while to have a place to rest. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

For Thunder (CM), the connection of the learning STs could experience in their teacher training was a pedagogical bridge, especially if Indigenous voices were part of the program. His experience teaching STs for more than a decade has given him a perspective that those who come to do the learning were doing so because there was a space in them that craves and needs to understand Indigenous knowledge and how they can engage with it or make sense of their understanding of it within themselves. He called it "the void".

Thunder (CM) spoke to this notion of the void as both a sad thing and a positive thing. It was sad because it existed in so many people, but it was positive because, as he saw it, people have a desire to learn. The void was a knowledge gap for STs which manifested in a variety of ways. Even if someone wanted to learn, if they did not know their bias, or they were unable to recognize it, they were going to provide resistance and pushback within the void. For Thunder

(CM) and I, the void is the collective lack of knowledge about Indigenous ways of knowing and being and resistance and pushback often occurred when identity, knowledge, or sense of self was threatened. It could be a refusing to find out or keeping that “perfect stranger” (Dion, 2009) intact. Or it could be that the STs were choosing not to learn, not to close the knowledge gap that maintained the void. While Thunder’s (CM) void connected to centering settler identities in relational foundation 4, he also stressed its importance to teacher training. To Thunder (CM), the void made space for him to share his experiences and to speak as an Indigenous person working in education and sharing his culture. Given that he still works in education in a variety of ways, he believed the best way to deal with the void was in faculties of education so that the STs there could go into classrooms and reduce the presence of the void in the students they teach.

When discussing the void, Thunder (CM) considered what has been lost by humans and how that has happened. He returns to education as things that used to be learned at the knees of grandmothers. This thread wove through both his interviews. Thunder saw growth when STs learn from and with Indigenous people, saw the impact on these teachers as well as the education system. He attributed the growth to STs addressing whatever they were missing inside themselves. He explained:

> Well, there's a lot to be said about people doing things for other people. And it's just that people tend to forget that they are human. And they just haven't heard the stories. They haven't heard the stories, the childhood stories that are told by grandmother about how the animal characteristics, how an animal is named to be something and, and what it represents…And that’s what we’ve forgotten I think today. A lot of those little stories that are born from those things that give us little check marks, I guess. (Thunder, CM, July 12, 2024)

He shared a story of how the bear lost his tail to demonstrate how what seems to be a child’s story can teach much more. Thunder (CM) pointed out that children might get a laugh from the story, but they were also learning a significant amount about how to treat others and how to live a good life. The “little check marks” that he describes are the lessons he indicated the children are learning from the story. He also believed that adults who have never heard

these stories in childhood could learn from them as grown-ups and thus receive the lessons he spoke of. He considered those stories as something lost along the way. STs, however, by doing this work and being in such collaborations, had an opportunity to learn something they missed and find a way to share it in classrooms. When stories were in classrooms, whether brought by a knowledge keeper or read by an ST from a picture book, Thunder (CM) could see the education system moving towards valuing Indigenous knowledge and helping provide those "little check marks" found within the stories he was telling.

Through his work with teacher candidates, Thunder (CM) came to believe that STs can understand that they did not need to be afraid of the learning. They were allowed to learn about culture and Indigenous knowledge, thus stopping the settler lament from reaching students in classroom spaces and perpetuating the negative side of the void in the coming generations. As an adult who had received the stories from Thunder (CM), I can attest that when you walk away you know more about yourself than when you sat down with him. The void was a tiny bit smaller and my connections to the world around me seemed stronger, particularly as an educator.

When considering pedagogical bridging, I was reminded of part of the conversation I had with Wilfred (CM). We were discussing holding space and how holding the space within the collaboration included an understanding of the self, of the collaborator, and of the environment in which they were working together. When asked how he saw himself as a representative of Indigenous knowledge within the collaboration, Wilfred (CM) stated:

> But there's also like I think with her and I, and I think we have an understanding where it's like– she's very much like the– she might disagree with this but I'm going to say it anyway. Like she's really -- like the technical aspects of things. I'm not very good with those, like writing pedagogy or curriculum. I'm more of like a social teacher really, where it's not– like I'd rather just sit in a room and have conversations with kids and not ever have to teach them anything. Or, like they have to discover it, kind of thing. And so, I think in our relationship I'm kind of that, right. I will never be a gatekeeper. Like I'll never tell somebody to go like, you can't use that novel, or you can [use it]. I will say like you shouldn't teach culture. And like you can teach about culture, but don't teach culture. But I don't, I like, I hate the kind of the gatekeeping aspect of a lot of the stuff that happens in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

I interpreted Wilfred's (CM) description of himself a "social teacher" engaging in conversations as "not ever having to teach them anything" as a form of pedagogical bridging. Wilfred (CM) was both teaching the students and refusing the role of gatekeeper in relation to the STs he also taught. Refusing to gatekeep was a pedagogical bridge because he supported others to engage in their own learning in a gentle manner. He was not there to shame anyone but instead found other ways of guiding them into learning.

In relational foundation 3, *Willingness to Un/learn*, participants discussed their different views on decolonizing, but it is interesting to hear how the participants spoke about the impacts of this work on teachers they are working with. Noah (CM) provided a pragmatic view of pedagogical bridging by relating it to how colonization has affected society and how it will continue to do so for some time to come. When asked about how the ST/CM collaboration influenced his approach to decolonizing, he focused on how the work he did with Maggie (ST) could shift colonization in the long term, stating:

> …the work we did was more about awareness, inspiration, motivation and collaboration and decolonization is going to be a lifetime word, you know, because it's 200 years, 300 years for them to burn the bush. It's going to take another 200 years to regrow, which it shouldn't but, ultimately, I think my in own opinion all we can do is make it aware. (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024)

Noah's (CM) point that colonization will take a lengthy time to dismantle is connected to my conceptual framework (Figure 2) in this project. In my framework, colonization continues to push on all of us but learning from and with each other connects us in the knowledge of others. While Noah (CM) may have come to the ST/CM collaboration with this point of view intact, he maintained this perspective during his work with Maggie (ST) and saw shifts in thinking with teachers in the province. The presentations he brought to the schools in Ontario made space for a shift in the mindset of the STs in the schools he went to. This shift led to some of those STs continuing their learning journey and taking that into the classrooms for the benefit of all students.

The responses of the STs and CMs in these five collaborations provided thoughtful and thought-provoking ideas for me about how the gaps they identified can be bridged in a variety of ways. Since these conversations occurred, I thought about what did not come through in the data. Aside from Thunder's (CM) belief that learning about Indigenous people and the collaboration of ST/CM should be introduced in teacher education, participants did not share different views of how they believe pedagogy should work in Ontario education. I am curious how follow-up questions with this group of ST/CM collaborators could unearth participants' experiences of pedagogies in Indigenous and settler educational systems. Nevertheless, the bridging STs and CMs witnessed and worked towards leads to the next section of this chapter. They used the institutional, relational, and pedagogical bridging to poke holes in the resistance they saw and shine light on the final major theme: hope.

Relational Foundation 6: Holding Hope

Hope is not a nebulous entity, but a robust, tangible concept. Intertwined with listening, awareness of positionality, willingness, and bridging gaps, hope signified another relational foundation of trust and respect in ST/CM collaborations. Holding hope, as with the other major themes, supported the participants in their partnerships while facing challenges and barriers. An enlightening example of the conditions that created these relationships came through Shirley's (CM) answer to the question of what excites her about collaborations like the one she is in. She shared:

> It gives me hope. And it makes me feel like all of that hard work and questioning whether or not I should be here, or could be here, that because of the challenge of coming to work into a school system after my experiences, I really questioned whether or not this was something that I can do. But getting through that process and having developed these relationships with settler teachers and getting to the end where it was hard for me to leave because there was so much more work that I wanted to do. I wanted to invite others in who were willing and wanting to be the support that these students needed. The support that Randy needed. Because he can't be the only one. (Shirley, CM, December 13, 2023)

Shirley (CM) showed understanding of how hope can emerge out of an ST/CM collaboration, along with the benefits for students and teachers alike.

As CMs observed their collaborator STs doing their own learning, hope was built and held in opposition to hopelessness they may have previously felt about STs willingness to understand their obligation to un/learn and relearn. CMs' stories appeared to be grounded in what had changed and the hope of necessary changes in the future. Both STs and CMs know that colonization is ongoing, in the present and for some time to come. Yet, participants held the belief that being in ST/CM relationships allowed them and their collaborators to work in the liminal spaces happening in school boards and classrooms across the province.

Shirley (CM) also signaled that the ST/CM collaboration changed her view on what schooling could be like, even though she was aware that education could cause her more harm. The trust that came from the relationship she had with Randy meant that she could see movement in the system, as well as how he made himself accountable to her and their collaboration. When asked about how the collaboration influenced un/learning for her with respect to land, self, knowledge, and others she shared the following:

> Well because of Randy, and you, I have so much hope. I have a level of trust and confidence that the school, the colonial school system may eventually change to better support our Indigenous students. I think the areas where there's always going to take some work is consultation and trusting Indigenous partners. As much as I never wanted to work in the school system because of my experiences, I did it because I care about the students…So, I took the chance. And I felt, and I believed, that if I connected with the right people who had a good heart, wanted to make some positive changes, that that was the opportunity that I had and I took it. It was very satisfying with what I was able to accomplish during that short period of time. But like Randy said, it was exhausting. (Shirley, CM, January 31, 2024)

Shirley (CM) explicitly used the word "hope" when speaking of moving STs forward, as well as the possibilities the ST/CM relationships brought to the educational system. She viewed what she saw in the collaboration in a manner that provided her with this new point of view. When asked about how the collaboration was able to push aside the centering of STs interests, she stated, "That's a question that gives me all kinds of feelings, because I have hope, and I believe, and I trust that the system is moving into a direction where there's more awareness and

understanding" (Shirley, CM, December 13, 2023). This was a significant shift for her given that her early experiences with the education system were not positive.

Thunder (CM) expressed his hope differently. He equated hope to the sharing of information about Indigenous people and the ST/CM research specifically.

> THUNDER: And I think we're in a state in the world right now, you know, like we need writings like Krista's to write about the shortcomings of her educational system. I hope that what she does is going to help.
> INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
> THUNDER: Yeah. And that's what I see is there's a glimmer of hope. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

I understood Thunder's (CM) definition of hope as coming from the trust and respect that we have developed with each other over our ST/CM collaboration. I was concerned that this form of hope centered my settler identity (discussed in relational foundation 3), and I must continue to reflect on that in any future discussions of this project. Thus, I write this cautiously because I do not want STs reading it to think that the reason to engage in an ST/CM collaboration is to receive recognition.

Thunder (CM) also saw a shift in teachers he has worked with but understood that not everyone who learned from and with him would understand. He shared the way in which he found hope with the STs, but that he also realized there was so much more yet to be done. Thunder (CM) connected the hope and the learning in the following way:

> THUNDER: And slowly the first little ceremony I did with them in that room became almost the starting point of everything that when we got into the accommodations where we were going to do the work. We started off with connecting up our mutual feelings. And then from there sometimes questioning things, but not really. It's just accepting that and adding what you needed. And that relationship with Krista I think just mushroomed. That they wanted more. So, I adopted what I always do, is I do things through applying hands on. Well, I try to pass a lot of that stuff on to people that when you make something you're changing something and you're giving it a new life. Simple things like making a birch bark basket. So, it's nothing to make a birch bark basket. You can use a piece of paper and do it, you know. But to really understand the essence of taking that living matter off that tree and putting it down in front of you and realizing that you've affected the life of that tree. And whatever you're going to make out of it you have to make it perfect. Not perfect perfect, but as best as you can. To fold that and you always put that on a pedestal someplace and say well I did one thing right. I did one thing right. And that was the premise of employing things like craft work, because then it connected

people back up to all the essences of life. But I think those teachers needed that. They ate it up like you wouldn't believe…But it connected to people.
INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
THUNDER: And I think the teachers that did come, percentage wise, I would say 90 percent of the people had that same euphoric reaction to the things that we did. Some people left, you know, still trying to figure out how to make the basket. You know what I mean?
INTERVIEWER: Right. Yeah.
THUNDER: And trying to do what they're taught in school is to make the perfect basket. They forgot the learning that goes into it.
INTERVIEWER: Yeah.
THUNDER: So, we dealt with all kinds of stuff and when I had those teachers, they talk with all these acronyms, ADD. I don't know all of them acronyms, but they label the kids, so they don't have to deal with them. And what I'm telling them is, even a person with limited ability could make this basket. It might not be the best, but it's still a basket. And you got to reward them for that, you know. So that's how I did the teacher training thing. And I think we've missed that at Teachers College. And I always wish that it could be part of the Teachers College, but that's something for the future, maybe. Even though they think that they have it, the mechanics is there but not the philosophy. (Thunder, CM, July 4, 2024)

Jennifer (CM) pointed to how the work of ST/CM collaborations lent itself to the future. In their roles, Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) were looking towards what Indigenous education could be and the possibilities within their work and their collaboration. Jennifer (CM) stated:

> I think about listening to Niigaan Sinclair a lot who talks about, a 21st century employability skill will be the ability to work with Indigenous people because the population is growing and exploding at a rate that the rest of the population in Canada is not. And so we have to think about what lands on the student desk that's going to equip the students to exist in a world with Indigenous people, where they see Indigenous folks as having value, where they see the cultures as having an important place, where they understand Indigenous contributions to current realities and where they don't risk having those stereotypical views that people have of Indigenous folks that I even just heard about yesterday in a conversation I was having and where they aren't going to be freaked out because somebody in their workplace, at their part-time job, is going to smudge. Or they smell sage burning and don't think that someone's getting high. Right? Like these are the small things that people need to be ready for and that only happens based on demographics when community members are in relationship with settler teachers and give settler teachers the skills to go out and teach that to the kids because that's the demographic reality. Yeah, so that's the possibility; we got to lean in more because that's who the teachers are and there are more settler teachers than there are community members and there are more settler teachers than there are folks who identify as Indigenous in places of power and influence in school boards. So that's… it's the way the work has to get done or it doesn't get done. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

For Jennifer (CM), this was where the hope and possibilities of ST/CM collaborations were headed in education.

Emily (ST) felt hope in the arena of calling out/calling in as part of the work she saw needed to be done. For Emily (ST), the hope moved into areas where STs were able to signal that other STs needed education and understanding of what can come from learning from and with an Indigenous CM. She relayed an event that happened recently in her school and shared what she hoped people around her would be empowered to do if they were in the same position.

> EMILY: I would say that [what] was really interesting is when I called out this anti-Indigenous racism publicly and he [the vice-principal] fought back publicly and told me I was wrong because he had Indigenous friends. That's not the word he used, but Indigenous friends, and so on, and fought back with me in public. Afterwards the principal, like the principal sort of tried to intervene and shut it down then bring us off to the side, and the vice principal was still arguing with me, and the principal said, “Emily was a hundred percent right to do that. This is exactly the work that the Board says we need to do. And we have been asked to call it out. So, she did exactly what....”
> KRISTA: No matter what our position.
> EMILY: No matter what we need to call it out when we see it. And that principal and I don't necessarily, I would not say we are aligned in a lot of ways, but him saying that unequivocally to the vice principal, and then following up with that, with the whole staff saying Emily did the right thing...
> KRISTA: Yeah.
> EMILY: ...I think gave others maybe permission, or I hope that it made other people feel like they could call out in the future. (Emily, ST, Feb 10, 2024)

Emily’s (ST) experience of calling out was an application of the learning she engaged in through her collaboration with Wilfred (CM) and was a part of how she conducted herself in all she took on. She could have let the comment slip by but used it as an opportunity to create a space of learning fueled by the hope and trust from her collaboration.

In order for hope to have meaning it must, in fact, be meaningful. This is better explained by who was in receipt of the hope that they saw in the work they were doing. In some ways this was described in a leave a gift/take a gift manner. In reviewing Jennifer’s (CM) individual interview, she pointed directly to the relationship between what was requested of school boards in the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007) and what community

could see was happening based on the work she and Alexandra (ST) conducted together. Jennifer pointed out that

> The community gets to know, too. Like the whole point of this is to provide some accountability that "Hey, we noticed a thing that we're missing in Ontario education, and we have the mechanisms and the funding and the framework to do a thing about it." And the community role is to help us keep accountable to this thing being done. (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024)

Noah's (CM) explanation of who the hope was for came in the form of a letter he received from a student. For Noah (CM), he could not only see the hope that the young person found in his presentation, but he was also left to ponder how many others he had touched in the work he did with Maggie (ST) by bringing presentations to the south. He stated:

> And she said like…she just thanked me for my presentation because it made her live. She seemed better, like, I guess. And so, things like that really, you know, it broke my heart. But at the same time, it made me feel like that I can see the world through her eyes. I did inspire and change…some of the students' worldview, or opened some possibilities in learning different things and like, I truly believe I did a lot of good. That's one letter, you know, like one letter and then you know, some of them didn't even write... So how many of them are around the world? (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024)

The view that Noah (CM) shared here narrowed my thoughts of what trust did within the ST/CM collaboration and brought into focus that hope was closely connected to trust. Noah (CM) connected Maggie's (ST) knowledge base to their collaboration and how it allowed them to grow the work that they were doing. He did not see them divesting themselves of their identities. Instead, he and Maggie (ST) experienced an identity shift from individuals to a unit, identifying them as

> coworker, colleague–we became best friends. We're friends up to today. And, you know, I admired the work she did, and the sacrifices made to not only [for] my work but a lot of Indigenous people. I admired that. When we became friends, it was a lot easier to be myself, and to do the talks I did, to present what I wanted to showcase. (Noah, CM, June 16, 2024).

This interconnectedness demonstrates how they have moved from being two separate people to seeing their work with each other as a third liminal space.

Wilfred (CM) also made a statement about his relationship with Emily (ST) and how their collaboration reached so many more people than when they worked alone. His point further

bolstered how I saw hope and trust intertwined in the collaborations to create a third space. Having trust in each other meant that they could do good work together. Wilfred (CM) was excited because, much like Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST), he felt they were reaching so many teachers. Wilfred's (CM) hope is contained in this passage:

> WILFRED: I just feel like it gets to more people.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> WILFRED: Like I feel like, again, when talking about our collaboration, and specifically like when you look at her, and what she does, and then you look at what I do, there's more people that are apt to listen when we both come together. Right? They get the theoretical part from Emily, and this sounds really like tokenizing, but they do get like, they have the authentic voice there as well.
> KRISTA: Right.
> WILFRED: And I think that because there's equality amongst us, like I listen to her talk about things, and she'll make suggestions about things to do. And for the most part it's like, okay, yeah, that makes sense. And then I'll make suggestions about content, and she'll listen to it, and that makes sense. So, I think we have a, like together, we have a much broader voice...
> KRISTA: Right.
> WILFRED: ...than if we were doing it singularly. (Wilfred, CM, March 2, 2024)

His hope and optimism, even though he has said he is a pessimist, was evident in what he feels about how they make a difference and who they make that difference for. Wilfred (CM) shared the gift their collaboration left as well as the gift he has taken from it.

In the instances above, the collaboration itself became a third space in which they were continuously questioning how they work within the collaboration and what hope means within the relationship. And even though the third space allows them to be remain as individuals, it also co-creates a new identity of the pair as Noah (CM) outlined. In that space they are continuously questioning what hope was and found ways to center multiple truths about how they are in relation to each other and the work.

In her individual interview, Emily (ST) extended her view of hope as trust in a direction that took me by surprise. She explained that she understood how oppression played a role in Indigenous CMs not trusting or wanting to work with education systems, but that collaborations such as the one she was in provides opportunities for "all families, and students, and educators to learn more." She included the hope she gained from seeing the newcomer students, as well

as this generation of Canadian students, have a chance to learn about Indigenous people and history. Emily (ST) told stories of what she heard from students in the classroom and their parents that gave her hope for more people to engage in Indigenous education in the future. She shared the following:

> EMILY: …So, I'm thinking of a few examples. One would be within my NBE [English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices] classrooms. Many of my students are first generation Canadians.
> KRISTA: Okay.
> EMILY: Their own parents were not educated in Canada, or if their parents were educated in Canada, they're probably around my age quite frankly at this point. And so were in the 90s receiving their education here in Canada and know nothing about Indigenous people in Canada. They at best probably know a lot of stereotypes. And the number of students because of that mandatory NBE class who get angry, disgusted, upset, outraged, who go home and tell their families what they're learning. I've had kids say I made my mom watch that documentary with me and she needed to see it. She didn't know anything about that, and we talked about it all day. I've had parents come in for student led conferences, which was what we would call parent teacher interviews, and at the student led conferences I said, “You know, he seems very engaged in the learning.” And she says, “You don't even know. Every single day the first bit that he's talking to us he's telling us what he learned in your class that day, and what he's upset about, and what questions he has. And drilling us with questions and information.” They said, “We think we're getting the lesson every day. When he comes home, he gives us a lesson as to what we're doing as well.” And the power of the fact that there are now all of these families that are now participating in intergenerational learning, where their children are teaching them what they didn't know about the realities of Indigenous Canadian relationships, and a loss of sovereignty, and what is land back, and foster care system, and Truth and Reconciliation, I think shows the value of having Indigenous education be not only included, but mandatory within the Ontario education system. (Emily, ST, April 14, 2024)

I had not considered how far-reaching hope was from the work that the ST/CM collaborations. To understand that a definition of hope included trust, coupled with the stories of where participants saw their relationship reaching into the cracks of the work being done and taking root, leads to the further discussions in Chapter 6 and the answers uncovered for the major research question.

Concluding Thoughts

In reflecting on what I thought would come out of these conversations, I am reminded that I tried not to have pre-conceived notions of what other ST/CM collaborations might look like. I considered that there would be similarities in them, which have been borne out through my

repeated reading of the transcripts. But I also believed that there would be glaring differences, which has proven to be false. Here I will share the significant surprises I noted when assessing the data.

As a settler teacher, the CMs who agreed to be interviewed could have skipped the questions pertaining to their experiences with the ST, but they did not. Nor did they shy away from speaking of what they saw occur in classrooms in Ontario that they were invited into. While not all aspects of each experience were positive, which did not surprise me, the participants viewed them as learning opportunities. I found it extremely surprising that only one pair of participants indicated that there were challenges with each other. When asked about challenges within the relationship, all participants spoke of challenges in the system, challenges with senior administration, and challenges with Boards as a whole. Jennifer (CM) did acknowledge that Alexandra's (ST) feelings of needing to bow out of the role she held as an Indigenous lead was a challenge to their learning with each other. However, it was not named as being a challenge that led to the breakdown of the collaboration. Instead, it cemented the work they were doing together and how being in relationship mattered to the work. Throughout all interviews, any negativity was about the challenges experienced with senior admin or the Board itself (see Chapter 6). No negative comments pertained to the collaboration or the relationship with their partner. While watching participants answer questions about their relationships, I did not detect any deception or attempt to subvert their answers. They all appeared to be answering honestly and in a forthright manner. While I did have a relationship of sorts with each participant, I did not recognize that anyone was trying to "sugar coat" their answer to put a positive spin on the findings of the project.

The concrete way hope was described and located as an outcome of the ST/CM collaborations caught me off guard. While conducting my literature review, I had not come across hope in the limited number of articles I found. While hope was in those articles, it was not articulated as being a part of the relationship. Yet, in the interviews I conducted, hope was

explicitly stated by several collaborators or was alluded to or inferred when talking about the possibilities within the relationship. As an insider, this connection to hope as a solid entity gave me pause as I had not considered that others would feel the same way as I did about the possibilities for ST/CM collaborations in Ontario education. From an outsider perspective, I was also surprised to feel hopeful while reading about the collaborations, as I presumed that hope was something that would happen only for those on the inside of the relationship. I had not considered that I might be able to engage in hope for the future, as it seemed like I should be more "objective." It was at this point that I recognized I was not as much of an outsider as I outlined in the opening paragraphs of this section. Even though many of the participants did not use the word hope in particular, the way that they used the word trust was interchangeable for hope. While periods of despair due to the challenges arose for those engaged in the collaborations, the despair did not taint the work they did, were doing, or continue to do.

The data collected from the ST/CM conversations and the findings shared here in Chapter 5 have provided deep, meaningful, and authentic insight into the nature of trusting and respectful ST/CM collaborations. Living into trust, listening, awareness of positionality, willingness, bridging gaps, and holding hope are essential relational foundations to building and sustaining ST/CM collaborations and will be analyzed in relation to the major research question in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Discussion

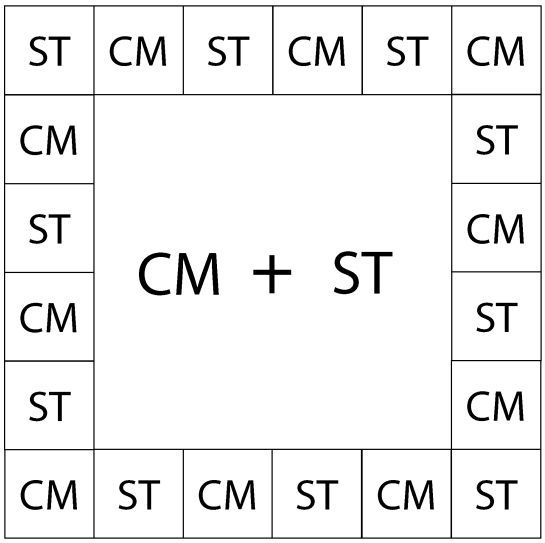
I am a quilter. I look at the beauty of a whole piece of fabric and then cut it apart, only to sew it back together in a new way that enhances the beauty of the fabric. I think about the findings of this project as a quilt made of beautiful, individual blocks[31]. Throughout the course of this dissertation process, I have quilted, quite literally, at every step along the way. It has been the reward for writing chapters and editing drafts, but it also allowed me to make meaning of the data and think about how I shared it within this dissertation. The quilt has become a metaphor for the ST/CM collaboration. After data analysis, it was evident that there were multiple quilt blocks stitched together into a different pattern than it was originally conceived as. This results in a multi-faceted quilt with a pattern that draws attention to several areas of the collaboration.

Each ST and CM have their individual experiences and their own individual quilt blocks. The product that resulted from an ST/CM collaboration came from what was initially two individual people side by side. After coming together in an ST/CM collaboration, bringing their knowledge and identities together, they create a third, intertwined identity. As each informed their collaboration in a variety of ways, they stitched together a third shared identity, or quilt block, that stood apart from each individual person or each individual quilt block. How I imagine this as an image is depicted below in Figure 3.

[31] A quilt block is most often a square or rectangle made up of smaller squares, rectangles or triangles sewn together to create a pattern. When sewn together quilt blocks create a pattern and become the overall quilt that is either a square or rectangle. – Emily (ST), Jennifer (CM) and Anita G., personal communication, June 20, 2025. Anita G did not participate in this project but is a quilting friend who participated in the conversation about how to explain a quilt block to non-quilters.

Figure 3:

The ST/CM Identity as Quilt Blocks



My conceptual framework comes from the center block of this diagram. This third shared identity was stitched together with trust and hope to co-create a new pattern. This third space can be likened to McDermott et al.'s (2021) "beyond-space" (p. 25) where the ST/CM understanding is moving past the Eurocentric ways we have been taught for so long. While the authors speak of how we are steeped in Eurocentrism, we also live "in a time when more people are acknowledging how we have all been marinated in the ravages of this single truth" (p. 25). McDermott et al. (2021) ask: "How might we shift – to think, relate, and engage – beyond the logics of Eurocentrism?" (p. 26). The third space became the truth of the ST/CM collaboration, which does not deny or avoid Eurocentrism but engages beyond it. It is here that I note that how participants *felt* about themselves and about each other changed how they *thought*. It is because they felt trust and respect, they could change engage in un/learning differently and deeply. This pathway created an understanding of the ST/CM collaboration flowing from feeling to un/learning to changed thinking, including hope and possibility, validating that Indigenous knowledge happens as relationships. It is not enough to say we need to be in good relationship with each other. It is not enough to say that relationships are important. This dissertation is

highlighting the elements of the *practice of being in relationship* that help to sustain and grow it, particularly in an ST/CM relationship with the contextual and historical dynamics of these lands.

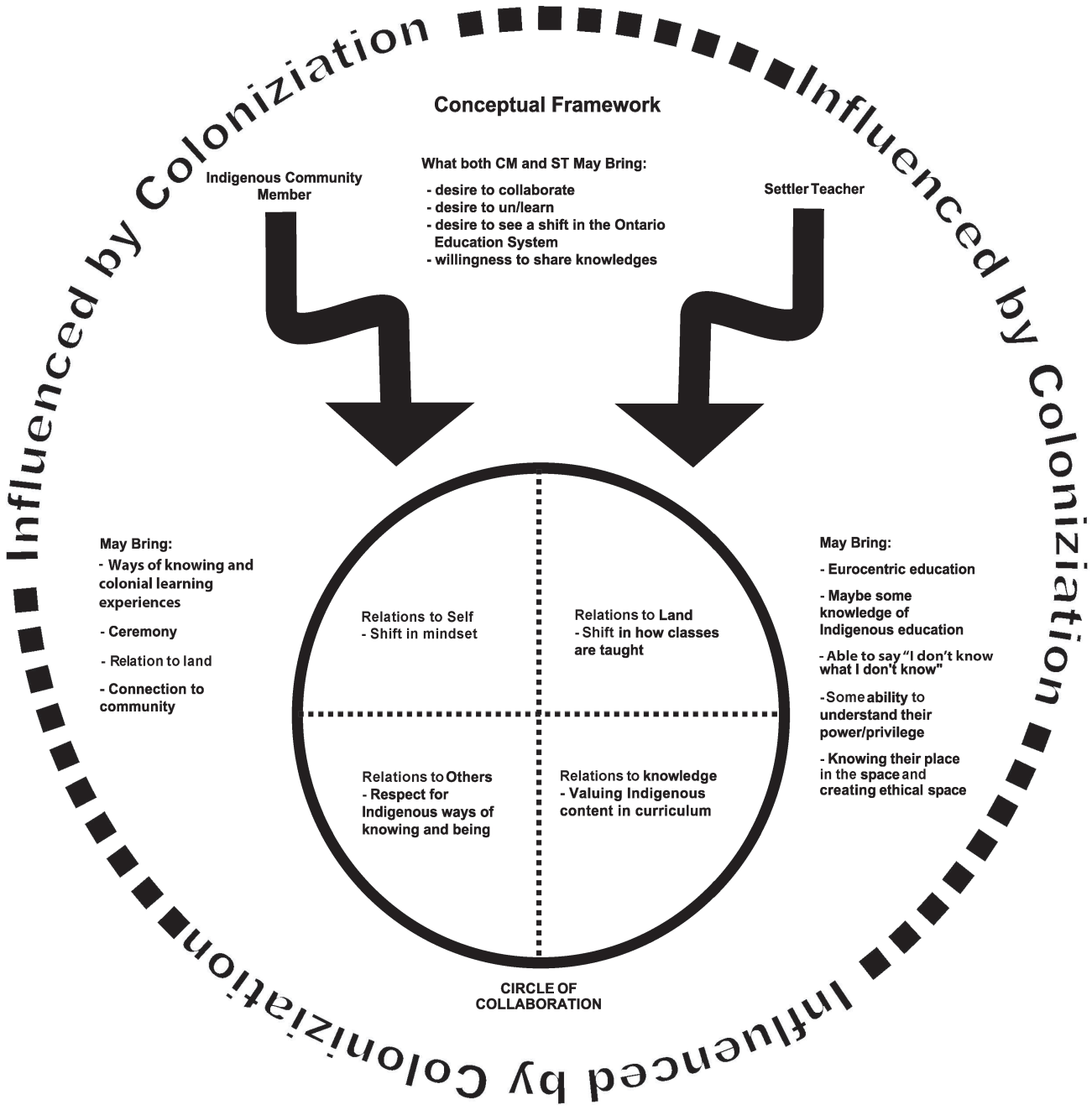
In the following sections I will engage with the literature that I have relied on to inform this project and the ways in which it connects to the data collected. To begin, I turn to discussing the changes I have made in my original conceptual framework (see Chapter 4). I present a reconfigured conceptual framework based on the findings from the data.

Changes to my Conceptual Framework

My original conceptual framework (Figure 2) is based on the literature review and my assumptions about ST/CM collaborations and collaborators. As I considered how the ST/CM collaborations co-created the third space, alongside the collaborators' identities within their relationship, it was necessary to reconfigure the conceptual framework to reflect the complexity that emerged in the interviews. My first iteration in Figure 2 considered the collaboration as a whole quilt. This re-conception revealed limitations to the project that will be discussed in a later section.

Figure 2:

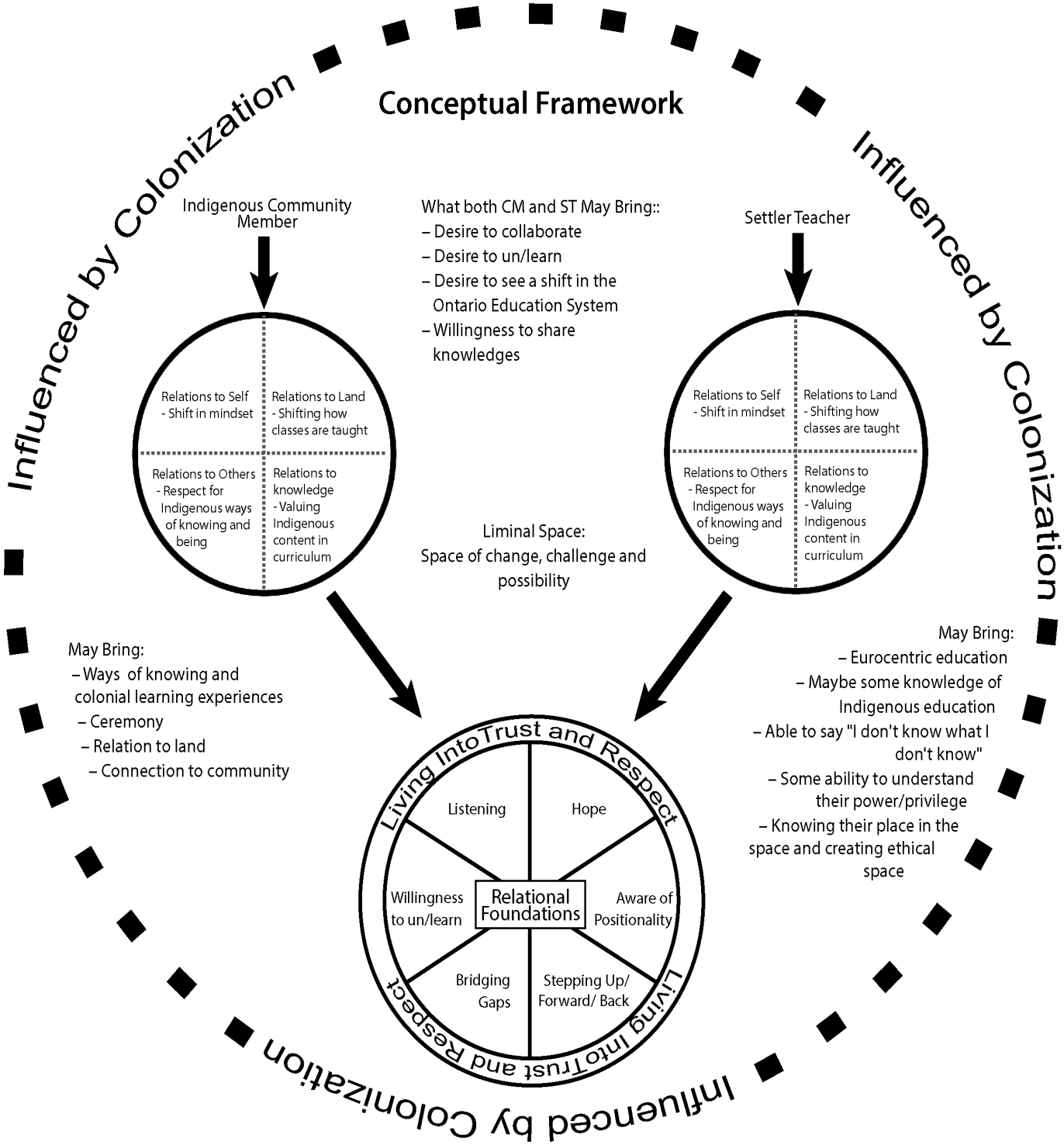
Initial Conceptual Framework of the ST/CM collaboration



What I have come to understand is that this framework did not account for the liminal space where the co-created third identity exists and relational accountability occurs. Based on the analysis of the interviews, I have reenvisioned the conceptual framework. I originally viewed the individuals in Figure 2 by their identity of ST and CM, indicating that they may bring certain knowledge and understanding with them. This resulted in the creation of what I titled “the circle of collaboration” which appears as a landing space for the ST and CM. I understood “the circle of collaboration” as the landing spot of ST and CM collaboration, which contained four characteristics I considered to be outcomes of the ST/CM relationship. However, Figure 2 did not leave room for the liminal space that occurs between the ST and CM, or what happens in the co-created third identity. Since the figure no longer represents my understanding of ST/CM collaborations, I have reenvisioned the framework based on the relational foundations identified in Chapter 5, as outlined in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4:

The Liminal Space of Reciprocal Relationality in ST/CM Collaborations



While the ST/CM collaboration continues to be influenced by colonization, the individual actors use the possibilities in a liminal space to create a more dynamic and agentic relationship. The original "Circle of Collaboration" has been removed and replaced with the relational foundations revealed in the data (see Chapter 5). Instead, the diagram of the "Circle of Collaboration" has become the depiction of each of the collaborators and the relations they bring to self, land, knowledge, and others in the work. The liminal space, in the center of the figure, contains the relational foundations as they are concerted through the relationship. The ST and CM engagement with each other through the relational foundations allows them to live into the trust and respect of the collaboration. Living into trust and respect surrounds the relational foundations, holding them with care, given that both challenges and possibilities lie in the relationship.

The re-conceptualized framework deliberately did not change what the collaborators *may* bring to the collaboration. This project is not intended to provide a blueprint of how an ST/CM collaboration is brought into being. What each person does or does not bring to the collaboration was not clearly defined by any participant, nor did I have a pre-conceived idea of what these contributions might or should be. I have opted not to change the "May Bring" sections of the diagram because I do not want to risk this project being viewed as a checklist or blueprint that must be followed to engage in an ST/CM collaboration.

Much like Hickey and Riddle's (2024) discussion of relational pedagogy, this new conceptual framework considers that as STs and CMs are "coming into relation, they do so according to the contingencies of the moment and their positionality as beings-in-relation" (p. 3276). The liminal space I outline is "where a shared space…is provoked as the setting of the pedagogical exchange" (p. 3276). This space was where the relational ethic of solidarity (Hickey & Riddle, 2024; Margonis, 2007) was practiced, where the co-created third identity grew, and where the participants saw the other as a collaborator in the work they were doing together. They have used the relational foundations to live into trust and respect. When I located myself in

this project in Chapter 1, I had considered that the ST/CM collaboration existed *within* the ethical space (Battiste, 2013; Ermine, 2007). Instead, I now view the ethical space as what has been co-created by the collaboration itself. This is the space where the idea of letting go of the illusion of "doing the work right" was conceived. It is the space of challenge, change, and possibility that the STs and CMs have spoken to throughout their interviews. While the liminal space can be a blurry, uncertain space, it is also a space of negotiation and struggle with trust and respect, holding up the collaborators as they do this work.

Thus, the relations to self, knowledge, others and land did not change drastically from the original Figure 2 diagram. Instead, the relations circle represents each individual and the new, third circle indicates the relational foundations and foundation of living into trust and respect identified by the participants. Considering the "contingencies of the moment" (Hickey & Riddle, 2024, p. 3276) could mean many things based on the situation that the collaborators find themselves working in. It raises the question of who the ST and the CM need to *be or become* to make the ST/CM collaboration work and whether there are pre-determined expectations and orientations of each prior to engaging in relation. Further research by other scholars may wish to explore this particular question of the characteristics of those who enter into ST/CM collaborations.

I will now move into the next section to provide an overview of the articles that guided my research throughout this project.

Overview of Relevant Literature

The main research question of this project asked: What were the challenges and possibilities of Ontario settler teacher and Indigenous community member collaborations? In reviewing the data, the most important aspect of the collaboration was the quality of the relationship. The most important learning was that relationships can offer both challenges and possibilities. While the STs and CMs in this project described their relationships as very positive, they named other examples of ST and CM partnerships or other relationships they had as

extremely negative. As such, it was important that I explore the third shared space created in these five ST/CM collaborations in which they were able to foster trusting and respectful relationships based on these six relational foundations: listening, willingness to un/learn, bridging gaps, awareness of positionality, stepping up/forward/back and hope.

As demonstrated in my literature review (see Chapter 2), there is a lack of knowledge and scholarship on the nature and possibilities of positive ST/CM collaborations outlined in this project, and the conditions required to grow and sustain relationality. Most of the literature I located spoke of the individual identities of participants throughout their projects as opposed to the quality and embodiment of the *relationships* that emerged. Furthermore, these articles did not describe ST/CM relationships as fluid negotiations that co-create those who partake in them, as I found in my project. Later in this chapter, I will further elaborate on this notion of co-creation when I re-examine my conceptual framework of the ST/CM collaboration. However, there were a few articles that helped me refine and extend my thinking about both the challenges and possibilities of these relationships. Below, I begin by placing my findings in dialogue with the literature on similar collaborations described by Garcia and Shirley (2012), Vegh Williams (2013), Blimkie et al. (2014), Lees (2016), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) and McDermott et al. (2021). I have charted the parameters of the seven articles I originally utilized in my literature review to better understand how they relate to my project. I have recently connected my work to Schnellert et al.'s (2022, 2024) project of education change networks (ECN) but have not included those projects in the chart and will instead make mention of them as they arise in relation to this chapter.

Table 2:

Table of Articles Relied Upon

Seven Articles That Also Sense-Make ST/CM Collaborations					
Authors	**Title and year**	**Pre-service vs In-service**	**Chosen collaborations vs forced/mandatory collaborations**	**Size of sample group**	**Make up of collaboration**

Blimkie, M., Vetter, D. & Haig-Brown, C	(2014). Shifting perspectives and practices: teacher candidates' experiences of an aboriginal infusion in mainstream teacher education.	Pre-service	Mandatory as part of Bachelor of Education Program	48	Non-Indigenous teacher candidates and 3 University staff (identity not provided)
Garcia, J. & Shirley, V.	(2012). Performing decolonization: Lessons learned from Indigenous youth, teachers and leaders' engagement with critical Indigenous pedagogy.	In-service	Chosen collaboration	Did not specify	Indigenous educators and Indigenous youth
Korteweg, L. & Fiddler, T.	(2018). Unlearning colonial identities while engaging in relationality: Settler Teachers' education-as-reconciliation.	Pre-service	Mandatory as part of Bachelor of Education Program	5 cohorts of B.Ed. teacher candidates, but specific number not mentioned	Indigenous research team member, non-Indigenous teacher candidates
Lees, A.	(2016). Roles of urban Indigenous community members in collaborative field-based teacher preparation.	Pre-service	Chosen collaboration	6 Indigenous CMs and grad students (number not specified)	Indigenous and non-Indigenous
McDermott, M., MacDonald, J., Markides, J. & Holden, M.	(2021) Uncovering the experiences of engaging Indigenous knowledges in colonial structures of schooling and research.	In-service	Mandatory professional development	14	4 participants identified as Indigenous, 10 did not
Poitras Pratt, Y. & Danyluk, P. J.	(2017). Learning what schooling left out: Making an indigenous case for critical service-learning and reconciliatory pedagogy within teacher education.	Pre-service	Chosen	13	All non-Indigenous

Vegh Williams, S.	Outsider teacher/insider knowledge: Fostering Mohawk cultural competency for non-native teachers.	In-service	Chosen collaboration	8	4 Indigenous CMs and 4 non-Indigenous

There are some noteworthy differences between my project and the ones listed above. First, with the larger projects of Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), Garcia and Shirley (2012), and Blimkie et al. (2014), they used focus groups, reflective assignments or questionnaires which is significantly different than the more intimate interviews I conducted with participants. I examine the conditions that create strong ST/CM relationships, which I found to be different than the authors whose work informed my literature review. As such, the nature of the ST/CM relationship itself, the possibilities and challenges within it, and the conditions that build and sustain it, came forward from my research. My project was more in line with the smaller projects of Vegh Williams (2013), McDermott et al. (2021), Less (2016), and Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) where participation ranged from eight to 14 participants. Where these authors differ from my work is that they were very focused on either the relationship with the community (Lees, 2016; Vegh Willims, 2013) or how the teachers were engaging with the knowledge (McDermott et al., 2021; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017). Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) were focused on education-as-reconciliation through relationality, while Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) described reconciliatory pedagogy with pre-service teachers. Lees (2016) looked at the role of the CM in teacher preparation, and Blimkie et al. (2014) focused on pre-service teachers experiences with an “Aboriginal Infusion” (p. 47). Therefore, within the literature on these types of collaboration, the number of participants and the type data collection allowed for different relational foci to emerge in the research.

There were not many articles that described the conditions needed to build these strong relationships. I looked to the major projects that speak to similar collaborations noted above to

determine congruency and incongruency with existing literature. There was greatest congruence with my finding “willingness to un/learn,” with far less congruence with the other relational foundations. This incongruence reaffirmed the importance of this project is important. Below, I compare my findings to the findings in these articles. However, more recent work by Schnellert et al. (2022, 2024) focuses on relational accountability through education change networks (ECNs) connected to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The authors found that willingness to unlearn, hopefulness, and building relational accountability were key aspects of settler teacher and Indigenous educator relationships. While Schnellert et al. (2022, 2024) are working with a larger scale of participants than I did, their commitment to hearing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices in their research is similar to my work, as they too, conducted interviews, listened to the audio recordings, and read the transcripts of the recordings. Engaging with this particular type of collected data on such a deep level fosters a deep connection to understanding the themes found in the research.

Instead of focusing on the impact on students (Garcia & Shirley, 2012, Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017), STs (Blimkie et al., 2014; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Lees, 2016; McDermott et al., 2021, Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017, Vegh Williams, 2013), CMs (Garcia & Shirley, 2012; Lees, 2016; McDermott et al., 2021; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017, Vegh Williams, 2013), or schooling as a whole (Blimkie et al., 2014; Garcia & Shirley, 2012; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018, Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017, Vegh Williams, 2013), the focus of this project is on the quality of the relationship between the ST and CM. It is not that the ST and CM do not care about the impact. It is that the relationship is so central to impact and there is inadequate attention paid to the relationship in both research and practice. This dissertation centers relationship. While the words “being in relationship” are often heard in Indigenous education circles where STs are present, there is little discussion of what that means in practice. My project shares the conditions, or relational foundations, that are required to be in good relation with an ST and CM,

and to be in collaboration together. Below, I share my understanding of how the findings of the dissertation sit alongside other research.

However, I acknowledge that it is not appropriate to *speak for* CMs. The viewpoints shared throughout this chapter are from the CMs directly, with as little of my interpretation as possible. The five CMs who participated in the project had a wide range of identities and different perspectives. It was a privilege to have an opportunity to hear from people who are Anishinaabe, Cree, Métis, Inuit, and Mi'kmaq. The variety of identities brought ideas and knowledge to the collaborations, lenses that STs have not always had an opportunity to learn from. It is also important to point out that three of the five CMs were teachers and two of the teacher CMs were still practicing at the time of interviews as it they come to the collaboration with a different lens of education than those who are not teachers might have.

Findings in Dialogue

A dialogue between existing research and the findings in this project point to the significance of liminality within the ST/CM collaborations. My understanding of liminality is an in-between location, a third space, a place of possibility, complexity, change, negotiation, and struggle. And within the liminality of the ST/CM relationship is the consideration that some CMs are experiencing another layer of liminality as insider/outsiders as both educators in schools and community members in the different communities to which they belong. These multiple layers of knowing for three CMs mean that they possess knowledge of having been educated in the education system, of working within the system as teachers, and also of working alongside education systems as Indigenous community members. Each of the relational foundations from Chapter 5 must take liminality into account, as it offers insight into the third space of the ST/CM collaboration, the space where individual quilt blocks form a new quilt. The following sections revisit the relational pillars in relation to existing research.

Living Into Trust and Respect

Trust was a theme throughout many of the articles I reviewed but was not the major theme for any project involving pre-service teachers. In Blimkie et al. (2014), I was surprised that trust did not play a larger part as they were seeking to "develop respectful relationships with Aboriginal people…" (p. 48). The work they were doing with pre-service teachers had a greater focus on un/learning and re/learning for their participants. Vegh Williams (2013) and McDermott et al. (2021), however, focused on the importance of trust and building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in education, similar to what STs and CMs spoke of in their interviews for this project. As both articles were working with in-service teachers, one could expect that there may be a different level of knowledge about Indigenous perspectives and knowledge than that of pre-service teachers. Korteweg and Fiddler (2017), Blimkie et al. (2014), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), and Lees (2016) worked with pre-service teachers seeking their teaching degree. Their participants were working with a CM as a way to enhance the learning of teacher candidates so that eventually they would teach about Indigenous ways of knowing and being in classrooms they would work in. I posit that pre-service teachers' limited knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as well as their lack of choice to engage in learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and being impacted their participation. Building trust and respect *may* happen in forced learning environments like those mentioned but is quite difficult and possibly unlikely if participating is a means to an end (i.e., obtaining a degree). Thus, I find that the importance of trust and respect were more clearly pronounced in my project than in Vegh Williams (2013) and McDermott et al. (2021). This focus on trust and respect remains an important focus to bring to the literature as outlined by my dissertation on these types of collaboration.

The Importance of Listening

The first relational foundation, ***the importance of listening,*** speaks to the collaborators' active demonstrations of listening and understanding what they have heard so they can reflect

and act on the learning. Naming listening explicitly as a component of collaborations was only briefly mentioned in other research.

The type of participants and the data collection in Vegh Williams' (2013) project closely mirrored my project. She worked with four Indigenous and four non-Indigenous volunteers who participated in group meetings over a period of six months. Her focus was "on the development of a cultural competency professional development program" (p. 25) specific to the Mohawk Nation. While many of the ST/CM collaborations in my project went on to create professional development training for other STs, only Maggie (ST) and Noah (CM) specifically focused on the specific identity of Inuit. The other four ST/CM collaborations professional development work touched on several Indigenous groups to provide understanding of the many Indigenous people of Turtle Island.

A nice addition to my findings is the component of the relationship between listening and talking, also brought forth by Vegh Williams (2013), that listening also means being conscious of how much you talk and how much space you are taking up. She created a "Developmental Trajectory of Understanding" (p. 33) to explain how the participants advanced through "cross-cultural understanding" (p. 32). During focus groups, non-Indigenous participants tended to speak over and above the Indigenous participants. In the receptivity stage of her model, she recommended non-Indigenous educators focus on "listening and refraining from dominating the discourse" (p. 33) because that is not what occurred in the focus groups. Vegh Williams (2013) showed that the Indigenous participants would not share their opinions as "they believed the non-Native participants were not ready to listen" (p. 36). This experience is a departure from what the STs and CMs shared about the importance of listening in the collaboration and that not only did each feel heard, but they also felt the other was listening, which improved the work they were doing together. Vegh Williams' (2013) participants pointed directly to issues of trust, which were connected to the lack of listening. Thus, much of what was shared in the literature and my findings is similar. I have placed listening as the first relational foundation throughout this

dissertation as it is the primary element of developing the ST/CM relationship for reflection and action, grounding the work that STs and CMs do together. For Vegh Williams (2013), listening was necessary for building trust. In fact, listening is necessary for reflecting, acting, and building trust.

Awareness of Positionality

The relational foundation, ***awareness of positionality,*** focuses on participants knowing who they are, how their positionality affects those around them, how they relate to the other person in the collaboration, and how they outwardly display an understanding of their position. One cannot be aware of their positionality if they are constantly hanging on to the privilege that comes with their position.

Blimkie et al.'s (2014) case project of pre-service teachers' experiences with an "infusion" of Indigenous "content and pedagogies" (p. 47) throughout their B.Ed. focused on STs' apprehension about embedding learning into their lessons. STs in my project discussed a similar stumbling block in professional development work they did with other STs in their boards. Blimkie et al.'s (2014) participants felt "they lacked credibility and authority to teach Aboriginal content" (p. 59) which reminded me of ST and CM conversations about meeting resistance amongst other STs when engaging with them in professional development. Several ST/CM participants, including Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST), and Wilfred (CM) and Emily (ST), spoke of those they worked with in a way that felt similar to those in Blimkie et al.'s (2014) research. While the participants of Blimkie et al.'s (2014) project and my project were working with teachers at different points in their careers, the challenges of knowing one's position were not dissimilar. In both cases, the positionality of the hesitant ST led to them wanting to remove themselves from the burden of doing the teaching and working in Indigenous education. However, STs in Blimkie et al.'s (2014) situation who were open to the learning did not react in the above noted away, which mirrors the STs of this project who were working with a CM. In the literature, the awareness of positionality has shown up as resistance (Blimkie et al., 2014,

Korteweg &Fiddler, 2018), fear that “it’s not their [STs] place or that their knowledge was inadequate because they were not Indigenous themselves” (McDermott et al., 2021, p. 33), or moves to settler ignorance (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018).

Awareness of positionality informed the collaborations between STs and CMs. This finding from my research was echoed in several articles. Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) used their course

> to demonstrate that settler-teachers can change their perspectives, enact positive influence, build stronger genuine relationships with Indigenous families/communities, and improve learning conditions for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) students in classrooms as education-as-reconciliation. (p. 257)

Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017) found that “pre-service teachers who were able to regularly spend time in the community experienced a shift toward examining their own positionality with several indicating transformative learning as a result” (p. 19). They attribute the shift to “submersive moments [which] are indications that students were entering a different layer of critical consciousness, one that holds the potential for students to see their role in reconciliation” (p. 19). Immersive experiences of learning were frequently mentioned by STs and CMs in this project. Both Thunder (CM) and I (ST) described how he engaged with STs–inviting them to his home or one of his lodges, as removal from the trappings of the Western world–through immersive community experiences that also acted as submersive moments for his guests. While Lees’ (2016) did not speak to either submersive or immersive moments, her participants, Indigenous community members, invited candidates into their homes. One Indigenous participant stated:

> It’s like entering your space, you know. We enter their space, it’s a classroom four walls you know. Let them come walk into our homes and let them see what’s on the walls…I think one of the things they need to see is there’s a continuing story here. (Lee, 2016, p. 371)

Based on the findings of my project, and the findings of the authors noted here, submersive or immersive moments, whether it is entering community member’s homes, learning on the land, or attending ceremony, can foster participants’ awareness of positionality.

Willingness to Un/learn

Willingness to un/learn described a person's ability to divest from what they think they know and adopt new knowledges. For STs in this project, unlearning can be best described as an uncomfortable step akin to shedding one's skin and growing a new one, or it can be easy if the embodied knowledge has always felt wrong or uncomfortable (e.g., growing up steeped in colonialism). Unlearning can include a willingness not to know the answer and the ability to say they do not know. McDermott et al.'s (2021) project focused in on the "counternarrative of willingness to engage in the work despite its messiness" (p. 38). Similarly, STs in this project spoke of their need to be willing to engage the work despite their own discomfort. From the responses of STs and CMs in my project, I found that participants possessed a willingness to accept the concept of not having one *good* answer of how to engage in the work.

ST/CM collaborators had to show up in the relationship prepared to let go of what they thought they knew about the Other and themselves. STs had to relinquish the idea of what it means to be a "good" decolonizing person and recognize there is no one "good" way to do the work (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018, Marom, 2017). This was a letting go of what they thought they knew about how to do the work. In comparison, Kerr and Ferguson (2021) extend this idea and focus on unlearning "colonial logics" (p. 708) as a means of building ethical relationality. This speaks directly to how I viewed the ST/CM willingness to un/learn within the collaboration. Both CMs and STs learned from and with each other because they did not stick to an idea of what they thought they knew about each other or about the possibilities of schooling. Possibilities opened because they worked together, creating a liminal space in which many things happened that neither person alone was able to do. Thus, the co-creation of the shared identity of the collaboration forced the letting go of desires of exceptionality and fantasies of goodness, innocence, and purity so that they might build a new understanding of the nature of their collaboration and each other.

McDermott et al. (2021) and Battiste (2013) speak of the importance of trans-systemic knowledge systems in which readers can consider how the colonial knowledge we swim in each day can invite Indigenous knowledges and ways of being into the pool. I found that STs and CMs in this project, similar to Battiste and Henderson's (2021) understanding of academic scholars, "[interweave] and [intraweave] an entanglement of knowledge systems, languages, concepts and feelings that create a liminal space" (p. vii). This liminal space allowed for a reimagining of connection to self and others through collaboration as relational beings. However, while these scholars have named the importance of knowledge systems being valued similarly, what this project found was a clear understanding of two different knowledge systems, but they were not placed on equal footing. In moments of disagreement or dissonance, the STs deferred to the CMs knowledge in the relationship and placed Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing as the dominant discourse as opposed to their knowledge that they knew to be steeped in colonial thinking. As Battiste and Henderson (2021) note, possibilities arise by bringing Indigenous knowledge forward with respect. This can be further supported by Philpott's (2014) sharing of Eraut's (2012) "just in time" (p.33) learning, connecting with each other at the right time and engaging with their need to (re)generate the diversity of spaces to learn in.

Blimkie et al. (2014) also noted that their ST participants grappled with "understanding[ing] that 'not knowing' is an opportunity for learning" (p. 58), ultimately demonstrating perhaps a willingness, but difficulty, to un/learn and re/learn. But I find that STs understanding of themselves as "not knowing" references Dion's (2007, 2009) concept of non-Indigenous educators as "perfect stranger[s]" (p. 329). Are we, I wonder, continuing to witness the manifestation of settler moves to innocence a decade-and-a-half after Dion identified the concept? Has declaring "not knowing" become another manifestation of settler innocence that fails to result in learning, unlearning, and/or relearning? STs in this project did not speak of themselves as the "perfect stranger," but both STs and CMs did speak explicitly to seeing other STs actively engaging in being the "perfect stranger" during professional learning sessions.

They recounted still hearing other STs claim they've never taught an Indigenous student or that Indigenous students were not enrolled in their schools. These types of statements were prevalent when I began in my Indigenous Lead role in 2012. While STs and CMs indicated that these statements are less frequent, it is also less professionally acceptable to utter them. Vegh Williams (2013) noted how non-Indigenous participants claims that their lack of understanding of the community they were teaching in was problematic. Indigenous participants saw their non-Indigenous colleagues' "cultural disconnect" (p. 30) as refusal of the non-Native teachers to understand or learn about the community they were working in. In contrast, my participants showed how the actual act of building relationships between STs and CMs challenged the performance of the perfect stranger in a way that did not occur in Vegh Williams' (2013) project.

Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) sought to cement their teacher-candidates' newly emerging identities as teachers through decolonizing practices. More explicitly, while paraphrasing Marom (2018), Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) stated, "we had to disrupt and expose our TCs' ignorance as settler-colonial complacencies, rather than permit them to assume a professional teacher identity that cloaks ongoing colonialism" (p. 255). While the STs I worked with were already established teachers well into their careers prior to the ST/CM collaboration, their teacher identities were also steeped in colonization. They needed to disrupt the "settler-colonial complacencies" (p. 255) that were baked into their professional personas. I would suggest that challenging these complacencies was more difficult for STs in this project because they were both already cemented in their teacher identity, and they were constantly surrounded by the colonialization of the curriculum they were expected to teach. They had to break these molds to be willing to un/learn. Unlike Korteweg and Fiddler's (2018) participants, who were taking a specific course of project to obtain their Bachelor of Education, the STs and CMs I interviewed came together either by selecting each other or through their workplace.

My findings show that while we do want to respect and acknowledge that there are two different knowledge systems, one of the dangers I have found with trans-systemic learning is

that it positions the two systems as equal. Both of the knowledge systems have been affected by colonization but based on the historic and systemic power imbalances, and when the purpose is to decolonize the system and improve the ST/CM relationships, the CMs' perspectives must be weighed more heavily when there is disagreement or dissonance on how to move forward.

Stepping Up/Stepping Forward/Stepping Back

The relational foundation of ***stepping up/forward/back*** highlighted the moments in the ST/CM collaboration where the participants were in the position to stand shoulder-to-shoulder, to step forward, or to step back, depending on the needs of the moment or context. These moments often related to conversations or actions that were occurring with ST colleagues in PD settings or settings where the collaborators were working to improve the education opportunities for Indigenous students. I found connections to a "relational ethic of solidarity" (Hickey & Riddle, 2024; Margonis, 2007)–also referred to as "relational accountability" (Schnellert, 2022, 2024)–and my findings. These scholars' views of the relational ethic of solidarity, or ethical accountability, is similar to the manner ST/CM collaborators did their work together, and how STs recognized the extent that colonial knowledge was deeply ingrained in everything they did. This was a move from a place of inaction to a location of responsibility to the work and a level of commitment to the collaboration. Mairi McDermott (2021) described the coordinated dance of ST/CM advocacy as "stand beside so that I can know when, where, and how to interrupt" (p. 39). Similarly, my participants, particularly Emily (ST) and Alexandra (ST), stepped up/stepped forward/stepped back as needed when working with their CM.

In many cases, CMs in my project were required to step up, without the option to step back. Some indicated they had been brought into projects in a tokenistic way or overburdened because they were the only Indigenous person outwardly known in the organization. I recognize that the CMs who spoke of these tokenistic moments were sharing that there was no opportunity for them to step back–they were expected to step up on behalf of all Indigenous

people. These CMs had not previously experienced working with STs who stepped forward so they could step back. The dynamic between ST/CMs replicates what Ermine (2007) described as “Indigenous and Western knowledge systems com[ing] together [where] a space emerges for ethical action and conversation” (p. 3, as cited in Schnellert et al., 2022). While Ermine (2007) is well cited in the literature, the way that the ST/CMs in this project created opportunities in their work offers a unique portrayal of how ethical space can be used to sustain Indigenous and non-Indigenous educator relationships. When CMs spoke of their current ST collaborator, they did describe the new, liminal space of their relationship as one being an ethical space and a location of change.

For Garcia and Shirley (2012), who worked with Indigenous students and educators exclusively, the concept of “collective solidarity” (p. 88) was prevalent in their results. Like the responses of the CMs and STs in this project, their participants were looking at how they could change the system to make it work for Indigenous students and families. They go on to say:

> The idea of “banding together” to “remove ourselves from the control of these entities that govern our schools” supports the praxis of collective solidarity (Grand, 2008) among Indigenous peoples and our allies. (p.88)

Because CMs experienced co-creating ethical space with an ST collaborator, they were prepared to put their trust in me and give me permission to write this dissertation. I equate writing the dissertation to stepping up and stepping forward within the relationships I have with the participants.

When speaking of their ECNs, Schnellert et al. (2022, 2024) do not speak directly of being given permission to write about the ECN relationship. Instead, Schnellert et al. (2022) speak of “honouring Indigenous pedagogies” and how they “learned from and with [their] participants” (p. 4) which is another form of stepping up/forward/back. They go on to share their belief that “bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, educators, and local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and sharing our preliminary work sheds some light on practical examples of meaningful reconciliation in K-12 schools and in research” (p. 9). While somewhat

different to my experience of researching and writing the dissertation, the overall goal of enhancing knowledge and relationships is similar. While few scholars discuss stepping forward/back/up in the same way as the ST/CM collaborators in this project, the other articles summarized above focus on the significance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks being in conversation.

Therefore, the ST/CM collaborations attended to stepping up/stepping forward/stepping back by focusing on who stepped up/forward/back and how that was determined by the collaborators based on the conversations and events occurring when action was required.

Bridging Gaps

Bridging gaps focused on understanding gaps within institutions, relationships, and pedagogy and how the ST/CM collaboration informed these gaps. Bridging gaps in this project highlights not only the gaps, but the importance of the shared third space in overcoming the gaps where other literature simply gestures towards them.

Like Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), Blimkie et al. (2014), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), and Lees (2016), I initially attempted to focus my research on how teaching practices could have changed the experiences for Indigenous students in the classroom. I expected I would hear about specific strategies and practices that the STs and CMs used in relation to the classroom experience of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Instead, participants told me about the impacts on other STs and students of the projects the collaborators engaged in, such as group presentations to classes or whole schools, events they organized with other Indigenous presenters, and the support they provided through COVID-19 school closures in 2020/2021. There was no direct evidence they shared about how these activities impacted learning. Many of the CMs felt that it was a good step towards representation of Indigenous people and knowledge in the education system. However, there were still concerns that teachers in the system were not understanding why Indigenous education is important. Many educators are still only a step or two away from finding an excuse to return to being the “perfect

stranger" (Dion, 2007, 2009). Had I dug more deeply into this portion of the interview I wonder what the collaborators would have told me about what they see students learning and how we can halt the move to returning to the "perfect stranger" (Dion, 2007, 2009) and the impact of the learning.

I found that the views of the ST/CM collaborations in my project were focused on the conditions (the relational foundations) of the relationship because, as stated earlier, the quality of the relationship is so important to the collaborators. As I examined the bridging gaps relational foundation, I turned to the literature regarding relational pedagogy. This was one of three ways to bridge gaps in my findings, with the other two being institutional and pedagogical. Hickey and Riddle's (2024) approach to relational pedagogy in particular mirrors what STs and CMs shared about their collaborations. Specifically, the authors' focus was "to define the general coordinates–the *conditions*–under which the pedagogical relation proceeds" (p. 3273). Hickey and Riddle (2024), paraphrasing Moll (2019), speak of participants as "mutual constituents" (p. 3272) in their collaborative work and how they consider and trouble their positionality as it relates to the "pedagogical encounter" (p. 3272). In comparison, Schnellert et al. (2022) take the ides of mutual constituents a step further. They share that their ECN project "contributes to existing literature by illustrating how non-Indigenous researchers can work with equity-deserving groups to develop relational pedagogies and accountability" (p. 9). I contend that how STs and CMs in my project bridged gaps is related to both Hickey and Riddle (2024) and Schnellert et al. (2022, 2024).

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 also spoke to the practical aspects of the work of educational systems in terms budgets and policies, but in a less personal way than the STs and CMs of this project. Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), Blimkie et al. (2014), Poitras Pratt and Danyluk (2017), and Lees (2016) were working with pre-service teachers in faculties of education as opposed to the STs and CMs I interviewed who were engaging in K-12 school boards. These authors pointed to the gap that Indigenous Education was not mandatory for pre-

service teachers. Making changes in educational systems to address Eurocentrism and uphold Indigenous knowledge(s), experiences, and learning can involve practical aspects, such as budgeting and policy development and enactment. While the projects involving pre-service teachers (e.g. Blimkie et al, 2014; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Lees, 2016; Poitras Pratt & Danyluk, 2017) were less closely tied to these administrative issues, the ST/CM collaborations described in this project would be heavily influenced by any decisions around budgets and policy. Nevertheless, Blimkie et al. (2014) point out that "education accords and policy documents can only go so far. The teachers in each classroom and the administrators and trustees in each school and school board are entrusted with seeing policy move to practices" (p. 62). Furthermore, Vegh Williams (2013) and Garcia and Shirley (2012) identified that for in-service teachers, much like the CMs in this project, school boards acted as gatekeepers, placing limits on what and how Indigenous knowledge and content was infused or embedded in classrooms.

What can often feel like depersonalized challenges, such as budget constraints and inadequate policy/policy implementation, is actually quite personal and is deeply connected to the ST/CM relationship. I recognize there may have been difficult situations in dealing with budget and policies that were personally difficult, yet it was not written about in these articles. However, the ST/CM collaborators in this project spoke directly to the personal difficulties with policies, procedures, and the funding available, or not, to them for doing the work, which adds context and nuance to how Indigenous educators and their allies experience the impacts of these wider administrative choices. For example, Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) both spoke to the feeling that no one in upper administration who controlled the money truly cared about their portfolio and that they had to go to the Indigenous Education Officer to have them step in regarding the spending of dollars earmarked for Indigenous education. These systemic challenges actually impact the relationship and become very personal. In considering policy, it is worth noting again that the last update to the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework*

was in 2014 (see Chapter 1), and no new updates have occurred to date. Schools and school boards are working with a document that is over a decade old. Indigenous education has seen forward movement, but what school boards are choosing to do, or not do, is either grounded in out-of-date policy or is subject to the value placed on it by those who set the policies and directions of school boards, namely superintendents, Directors of Education and trustees. Thus, this dissertation supports the literature by elucidating how decolonial education can be supported in the upper echelons of educational leadership.

The STs and CMs in this project were quick to point out the limits and constraints they were under in working within schools in Ontario. They found these to be a significant challenge and referred to it often. Policy, procedure and budget are not noted as areas of challenge or constraint in the other articles, and this project has added to understanding the relational impacts of the structural constraints of doing the work as mentioned repeatedly by STs and CMs in their interviews. Fighting against non-responsive policy and procedure together was a large part of the ST/CM collaborations by working collectively to overcome these external conflicts. Therefore, the articles I looked at named the conflicts of gatekeeping and policy limitations but did not speak to how partnerships were formed/reformed in the image of conflict or how they could overcome these barriers.

Holding Hope

The relational foundation of ***hope*** centered on what STs and CMs witnessed emerging from their collaborations. They spoke to hope within the relationship, hope for the education system, hope that change is occurring in schools, and hope for each other.

The hope STs and CMs found in these three areas was evident to them when they examined current practices in Ontario education, witnessed changes in the work they did as a part of the collaboration, and what they believed was yet to come should the work be allowed to continue. Garcia and Shirley (2012) and Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) found the theme of hope in their work as well. Garcia and Shirley (2012) understood that “hope, empowerment, and

transformation [were] embedded in the personal agency of individuals" (p.87) in their project. The participants in this project mentioned hope as a significant factor for taking part in the research and what they experienced within their ST/CM collaborations.

In contrast to hopes of STs and CMS, Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) speak of "the hope for settler teacher education-as-reconciliation" (pg. 268). During the six years their project lasted, they "were quickly reminded of how deeply entrenched settler-colonialism is in education by the repetition of colonial stock responses or persistent sticky points by multiple cohorts of TCs" (p. 269). Nonetheless, they hoped the experiences they provided moved pre-service teachers forward into settler teacher education-as-reconciliation. This form of hope is vastly different than what emerged from interviews with STs and CMs. Whether in their individual or pair interviews, CMs and STs characterized hope as arising from their relationships and leading them into the future. They identified that the ST/CM collaboration was focused on the hopefulness of the relationship itself. However, there was very little data collected in this project regarding how the collaborations impacted students in Ontario schools, which I will address in the limitations of the project section later in this chapter.

While STs and CMs did not speak of empowerment or transformation within their interviews, I believe if follow-up interviews were conducted, they may explicitly capture how they view empowerment or transformation in relation to the hope emerging from the collaboration. Hope was more personal in this project than how Garcia and Shirley (2012) saw it in their research. The development of ST/CMs' relationships over time may have played a factor in fostering hope on a deep level, or that the collaborators have witnessed change during their work together. It is also possible that fighting together against external concerns could have brought participants closer together. Either way, hope is important to the ST/CM relationship, but it is not something that as a system we focus on or foster.

I posit that the experiences of the participants in the above projects are very different from what has been experienced by STs and CMs, by virtue of the fact that their participants

were placed in forced learning environments. Poitras Pratt and Danyluk's (2017) service-learning, Korteweg and Fiddler's (2018) specialized Honours B.Ed. course, and Blimkie et al.'s (2014) "Aboriginal Infusion" (p. 254) required pre-service teachers to take part in these courses or experiences in order to graduate. Lees' (2016) participants were graduate students participating in a teacher preparation program that required them to participate in community experiences in a variety of schools. Being placed in mandatory learning situations can lead to resistance to the learning, as noted by Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) in their "sticky points" (p. 262). In this project the STs and CMs, with the exception of Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST) who were placed together by virtue of the roles they applied for, were self-selected partners who had the opportunity to develop their collaboration on their own terms. Each pair, including Jennifer (CM) and Alexandra (ST), had the agency to co-create their collaboration as they needed it to occur. It would be of interest to know if the participants in the cited articles remained in contact with any of the community members they learned from given that the STs and CMs from this project all remain in relationship with each other. If they did maintain contact, was it hope that helped to develop that relationship?

An Outlier

Neither STs and CMs in this project, nor six of the seven articles in the literature on similar collaborations, discussed the personal emotional cost or the amount of time required for doing this work. Lees (2016) is the only project that specifically discussed how Indigenous participants in her project gave up a significant amount of their personal time to engage with the non-Indigenous participants. Her article gestures towards time being an important aspect of the work they were doing as indicated by the Indigenous participants. Lees (2016) Indigenous community members wanted settler teachers to spend more time with the community but also felt that inviting non-Indigenous teachers in would burden community members. Similar to Lees' findings CMs in this project alluded to the fact that they gave a significant amount of their personal time to the ST, but they were never specific of regarding a deep personal cost in doing

so. Where her findings and mine differ was in the trust, or lack thereof, of the community members in Lees' project for the non-Indigenous teachers entering the community. In the ST/CM collaborations, however, CMs trusted their ST collaborators.

When creating my interview questions, I did not specifically ask about time or personal cost. Nevertheless, some STs acknowledged how the collaborative work took CMs from their community and family. Yet CMs did not mention the personal time commitments of doing the work with STs. Thunder (CM) instead spoke of his belief that ,given the knowledge is for everyone, he was willing to spend his personal time to share with others. Nor did STs directly mention the personal time they gave to engage with the work of the collaboration. In some cases, CMs felt their ST understood they needed to do their own learning in order not to burden the CM. During the paired interview, no collaborators characterized either the work they had done together or the research process as "work." Despite the significant time commitment, none of the CMs (or their STs) felt it was a one-way output from CMs to STs. They were engaged in a relationship that was actual mutual reciprocity. It did not feel like we are wasting our time, or giving up everything, as we were receiving during the same process. This result differed from Lees' (2016) participants, who indicated some folks in the community would not participate due to worries about the relationship being extractive in nature. It would be worth exploring participants' points of view regarding time and personal cost in ST/CM collaborations in subsequent projects.

This has been an area of reflection for me as a researcher because I initially was wondering about fairness, are people being taken advantage of and what is the personal cost to them, and it actually became in what ways is this collaboration and work also positive. An area of growth for me is that I did not potentially envision these relationships as life-giving for the CM as well. I had a deep concern that these relationships were only extractive for the CM. I am grateful for the sharing of CMs, who indicated that this knowledge is for all and that sharing it is meaningful for them.

The connections between the literature and the data from this project have provided much to consider. The projects that I drew upon all contained participants who were not in self-selected relationships or participant groups. Instead, participants in these other projects engaged in research as a means to obtain their degree, to create professional learning opportunities for in-service or pre-service teachers, or to inform the operation of schools in their communities. However, they offered important extensions and points of consideration to deepen my understanding of the relational foundations.

Limitations of the Project

In reflecting on this project in general, and the interviews specifically, there were a number of limitations in the project that are important to note. These limitations do not negate the findings of the project; they raise interesting questions and considerations for the methodology, and the overall conclusions generated by the research that will support future projects in ST/CM collaborations and Indigenous education more broadly.

As I have noted several times, the number of participants was limited to five pairs of ST/CM collaborations, as this was the number of collaborations I was aware of. What might the data have reflected had the sample size been larger? How might that have affected the data? Additionally, I may have missed other collaborative pairs who were working in the same school board as participants in the project. Having perspectives from different pairs working in the same school area may have yielded further nuance on the nature of collaborations between STs and CMs.

Coupled with the sample size, I am aware that three of the five CMs were teachers, both practicing and non-practicing. Do the CMs who are or were employed as teachers in schools view themselves as CMs who teach in Ontario schools or teachers who are CMs? While speaking to Jennifer (CM), post-interview, I was curious how she might identify herself if she

was in a different collaboration[32]. She would obviously not be an ST. Jennifer (CM) stated that in that particular case she would consider herself a community member teacher or CMT. An extension of the project could look at how Indigenous educators might be in collaboration with other Indigenous community members. Instead of seeing the majority of the CMs also being teachers as a limitation, I view the capacity of these participants to take on the role of teacher and CM as a strength. They are boundary spanners (Shah et al., 2022), able to apply the lens of two-eyed seeing (Bartlett et al., 2012) perspective to the project, understanding and applying knowledge from both parts of their identity.

As noted early in the dissertation, all STs in this project are white. This was not by design, but by happenstance. As schools become increasingly diverse, both in student population, and more slowly within teaching and school staff, it would be important to engage in research of collaborations with CMs and racialized and/or Indigenous teachers who do not consider themselves to be in the community member role. I am drawn to the words of Jodi Byrd (2011), Chicksaw scholar who calls for a horizontal reading of settler colonialism and relational experiences of colonialism and power asymmetries. Byrd (2011) shares:

> we can see the complex dynamics of colonial discourses that exist horizontally among histories of oppression and inform continued complicities as historical narratives vie for ascendancy as the primary and originary oppression within lands shaped by competing histories of slavery colonialism, arrival, and Indigeneity.(p. xxxvi)

Understanding collaborations is this area would only continue to enhance learning through deepening the knowledge base that is currently available.

One key area of congruence between Korteweg and Fiddler's (2018) project on settler teacher candidates and the ST/CM collaboration in my project, is that neither project required individuals to erase their individual identities to be part of a collaboration. In their 2018 project of settler teacher candidates engaging in relationality through the "specialized Honours BEd course" (p. 255) they created and co-taught, Korteweg and Fiddler (2018) explain their personal

[32] Personal conversation with Jennifer (CM), November 9, 2024.

relationship and share “how a collaborative partnership of Indigenous-settler could connect while juxtaposing our identities in such a way that our differences–cultural, racial, socio-economic, educational, knowledge systems–were highlighted without subjugation, erasure, dominance or denial” (p. 256). Similarly, participants in my project shared that the collaboration was informed by how each person’s identity could exist without being valued above the others challenging the hierarchy inherent in Eurocentrism. However, when there was a point of contention or difference of opinion, STs valued CM knowledge above Western knowledge in the space, recognizing that Western knowledge is the knowledge of colonization. This is different than Korteweg and Fiddler (2018), who identified what they call a “sticky point” (p. 261) for their participants in determining:

> …how willing or resistant the TCs were to opening themselves up to teaching-as-reconciliation through re-learning and contending with Canada’s real history of colonization against Indigenous peoples, engaging with decolonizing their own teacher identities, or expanding their active, genuine engagement with Indigenous students and families. (p. 261)

This differs from the ST/CM relationships of this project where each individual has their own separate quilt block that represents them. While their block is part of a new quilt that represents the ST/CM collaboration, the entire quilt includes a new block made up of the ST/CM relationship where STs did not dominate the relationship and were able to exercise humility when engaging with Indigenous knowledge. STs deferring to the CM’s point of view was not identified as a “sticky point” in the data at any time and I relate that to the willingness that participants referred to. Coming into an ST/CM relationship with the idea that one knowledge system is dominant would undermine the relationship and would require that system to be decentered. The ST/CM collaboration allows for the expansion of knowledge, not the narrowing of whose knowledge system is most important.

In addition to the small sample size, the geographic areas that participants were working in was relatively small. Only one pair of collaborators conducted their work in an area could ostensibly be called the mid-north of Ontario. The remaining four pairs all worked in the central

part of the province. With no representation from school boards in the far north, eastern or western parts of the parts of the province there is a wondering about what would be shared that might be different based on a variety of factors including relationships with local Indigenous groups, local customs, or values and what community connections look like in the area.

Related to the limitations of the geographic areas the collaborators come from, I note this project only focused on CMs from Turtle Island and particularly the traditional territories of the Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee were where the STs were located. Because the traditional territories were specific to these Nations, their teachings often informed what is being taught in the school boards where the collaborations occurred. While CMs who were interviewed identified as Anishnaabe, Cree, Mi'kmaq, Inuit, and Métis, the STs working in the schools may have received more PD focused on the teachings and knowledge of the Indigenous people whose traditional territories they were teaching on. ST/CM collaborations taking place in different areas of Turtle Island might be influenced by the teachings of the Nations in those traditional territories. These teachings could inform ST/CM collaborations in those areas and provide different experiences and data because of it.

What was not addressed by participants in this dissertation was the ST and CM relationship to land. Many people speak about the importance of relationship to land and that was central to the conceptual framework initially. When I started to think about what that looks like in schooling it became hard because with the exception of professional learning or teaching on land how else are we thinking of it in education? In interviews many of the collaborators appeared to avoid the question about their relationship to land. They did not refuse the question. Instead, it appeared as an avoidance, was glossed over or not addressed, or the answers quickly moved on to other areas of interest. This may have occurred for a number of reasons. One could be that some people are just coming to terms with their own relationship with land. Or perhaps they had not given much thought to it prior to the interview. Or it may be that a CM wanted to say "give back our land" but they did not because I am a settler teacher asking the

question. I am curious if one of the reasons folks did not answer this particular question is because they were working in locations in the province that did not have an immediate connection or border with a First Nation reserve. Unlike some of the other limitations discussed, I believe the questions of land would require a more comprehensive approach to understanding the role of land in the consciousness of the ST, the CM, and their collaboration in general.

The limitations I have outlined in this section are areas worthy of further project when looking at ST/CM collaborations. There is so much that can be shared from such collaborations, and I encourage those who are in them to pursue their own research on their unique relationships to further enhance the literature and understandings of the vital role ST/CM collaborations play in education.

Chapter 7: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The time and energy that STs and CMs contributed to this project are a continued testament to their commitment to each other, to the relational foundations of their collaboration, to the work they have done, and, in many ways, the work they continue to do today. When I asked these 10 people to participate in this project, there was no hesitation in agreeing to be interviewed. When I shared the lack of information in the literature about ST/CM collaborations with my participants, they were not surprised. Instead, they were eager to contribute and to share their knowledge, based on their experiences, both individually and relationally. This project and subsequent dissertation shared a specific type of relationship between Indigenous community members and settler teachers that resulted in the identification of a liminal space in the collaboration. Had I only found that space to exist in one of the ST/CM collaborations, it may have been an anomaly. However, I found this liminal space in collaboration was inherent in every pair I interviewed, and I am confident in its existence as a true component of the collaboration. The liminal space, and its role in ST/CM collaborations, is a unique contribution of this project to the literature on relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, and to Indigenous education more broadly.

In this chapter I will share the summary of my findings, my recommendations to future researchers seeking to understand ST/CM collaborations, and a final thought on possibilities of ST/CM collaborations.

Summary

The findings of this project were not what I expected when I embarked on this journey. As a “pracademic” (Posner, 2009), one who engages both practice and academics, I anticipated the answers to my interview questions would be filled with practical, solid strategies for engaging students, teachers, and senior administration in school boards in learning to value Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. Instead, I found deeply meaningful connections to self and each other that resulted in increased understanding between collaborators and the

possibilities of stronger collaboration. I am reminded of Snow's (2018) work as I consider my positionality within this project and share that "from the outset of entering the contested space of Settler Ally working with an Indigenous community, I have reflected on my motivations, my process, and my role in shaping and telling the story of the research" (p. 9). I note here that besides my own process of engaging in this project, the process of interview, transcript review and final dissertation review allowed me to think deeply about the cycle that occurred with STs and CMs. Each interview contained forms of care that occurred prior to the interviews (including discussions of the ethics of the project, and risks to the participants) during the interviews (sharing of food and beverages, ensuring participants were comfortable to move on to questions, or reminding them they do not have to answer questions) and after the interviews that was not named in my original methods description. For example, discussing with participants how they felt about the interview outcomes was a form of after-care of the relationship I had built with each of them throughout the project. In discussions after her review of the dissertation Emily (ST) asked me how my perception of participants change or evolve because of this work[33]. I noted that it did not change my perception, but it did allow me to understand the intricacies of the relationships of the participants. I am left to wonder if my positionality led me to expect that the conversations with collaborators would center on the impact on education, which was not what the participants were excited to share.

I return to the main research question of this project, which is: What were the challenges and possibilities of Ontario settler teacher and Indigenous community member collaborations? At this stage, I am left with two significant learnings. The first is that strong relationships have a huge influence on the possibility of systemic transformation for staff, students and families in schools. The second takeaway is that relationships are hard because they require consistent effort, practice, and discipline. Below I elaborate on these specific points after having the

[33] Private conversation with Emily (ST), December 12, 2025.

privilege of interviewing the participants, who have made a difference in education through their commitment to relationality.

Systemic Transformation Depends on Strong Relationships

When we talk about education, it is not unusual to hear educators say that relationships matter. The question that I am often left wondering is what does that mean in practice? The importance of relationships as an idea tends to be thrown out as a forgone conclusion, but there is inadequate attention paid to which relationships matter, and what they look like. If they matter so much, why do we know so little about how to build strong relationships and why is space not provided to foster them? Furthermore, while education is quick to say that relationships matter, when faced with making deep systemic transformation, we tend to duck behind policy and procedures as a way to justify continuing to do what has always been done, negating the attention on relationships or the intention of strengthening them.

STs and CMs have both been socialized in ways of dealing with the education system. For STs, we are taught that policy comes first and trumps all else, while CMs have been told that the system does not have space for them and their knowledge. Thus, for STs and CMs, working in collaboration pushes against these ideas and creates fissures in the system that requires a different orientation to system transformation. I am drawn to what adrienne maree brown (2017) calls “fractals” (p. 38), in which she shares that “what we practice at the small scale can reverberate to the largest scale” (p. 44). In other words, where some will see only two people working together and not making significant progress, I argue that what the STs and CMs in this project shared with other STs spiraled within the systems they worked to have a significant impact. In sharing their collaborations in this dissertation, they are impacting Indigenous education on a larger scale yet again. All of these collaborations and the resulting shared knowledge/praxis ripple out to influence education in Ontario schools.

This project may have only had 10 participants, yet each collaboration had an impact on students, other educators, senior administration, or in some cases, the education system.

Throughout the data that I collected in this project it became clear to me that the ST/CM relationship was making systemic change in Indigenous education in Ontario schools but was both a challenge and a possibility at the same time. It was a challenge because the collaboration was grounded in the importance of the relationship, which requires effort, practice, and discipline. It was also grounded in possibility because the relationship was so important to the collaborators that it changed how they approached education. It was through living into trust and respect, grounding the relationship in the relational foundations they identified, that the collaboration was able to make changes which in turn led to the collaborators seeing those changes within the system.

brown (2017) goes on to share the following about the systems we are working in:

> So many of our organizations working for social change are structured in ways that reflect the status quo. We have singular charismatic leaders, top-down structures, money-driven programs, destructive methods of engaging conflict, unsustainable work cultures, and little to no impact on the issues at hand. This makes sense; it's the water we're swimming in. But it creates patterns…And this may be the most important element to understand—that what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system. (p.45)

Consideration of the systems that brown (2017) highlights leads me to wonder how policy attends to relationships and vice versa. When one works in any system, policy has a role in the work being done. While policy itself is deeply political and relational (its own liminal space), it is important to share that the ST/CM collaborators worked *within* the policies and procedures of the school board to enact change. They did not indicate a desire to remove them. Instead, ST/CM collaborators leveraged their relationships to reinterpret policy as a pedagogical tool to raise critical consciousness, educating those who negated the work or who were rigid in adhering to the policies despite the barriers they created for students and communities. The relationship promoted small changes that rippled through the system. The relational dynamic of the ST and CM allows for systemic transformation by extending the relational foundations towards those in power as conditions to support change.

Strong Relationships Require Consistent Effort, Practice, and Discipline

In knowing that relationships can lead to systemic transformation we must then turn to the idea that relationships are hard and require effort, practice, and discipline. All STs and CMs in this project shared their deep commitment to the relationship and each other in various forms. While the origin stories of each pair were vastly different, they all indicated that their commitment to each other was a practice they undertook together. They devoted time and energy to the relationship through the relational foundations and shared the challenges together as they arose.

The work and the relationship that they engaged in demanded a discipline that went beyond showing up. They were prepared to have difficult conversations, to listen with an open heart to really hear the other and were willing to learn from and with each other. CMs and STs practiced stepping up/forward/back as a form of friendship and allyship. None of this was easy work. In discussing with Emily (ST) the idea that their relationship could be called a lucky fluke of two people who liked to work together, she shared that while her meeting Wilfred (CM) may have been chance, the "careful trust built over years of action, calling in and idea exchanges was not a fluke," but instead came from "commitment and a sincere desire to collaborate"[34]. When asked the same question, Jennifer (CM) indicated:

> I would say that all relationships are hard work. This is especially true of relationships where identity is at the core of the matter. Alexandra (ST) and I did work so we could trust each other. We made choices. We engaged in productive struggle. We always centered serving children and teachers and the TRC so that we had success criteria against which to gauge our actions. Our friendship is the result of the work we did and wasn't a fluke.[35]

The impact of the relationship within the ST/CM collaboration moved them forward as allies and accomplices in Indigenous education. These were long-term collaborations that lasted several years in most cases, with some still working together today. For those no longer officially working together, their relationship remains intact and is still highly valued by both

[34] Private conversation with Emily (ST) July 6, 2025.
[35] Private conversation with Jennifer (CM), July 6, 2025.

people. None of the collaborations broke apart due to conflict or argument, but instead the ST and CM stopped working together because of a change in roles or movement to another role.

Within the collaborations, CMs indicated they witnessed respect and accountability in the STs and many saw hope for change to the system because of the ethical relation of accountability they experienced. They considered the work that they put into the collaboration, as well as how the ST attended to the relationship with them when discussing hope for the system. In all cases within the data both STs and CMs indicated that they attended to their collaboration throughout their time together in order to move the work forward and while it was not always easy, it was meaningful and worthwhile. Even though relationships are hard, there must be a commitment to staying the course because that is when we experience its true possibility.

Overall, the possibilities were limitless in ST/CM collaborations, but the challenges of policy and procedures, along with continued settler ignorance remain as obstacles to be addressed. In considering that relationships are work, I return to the liminality of the ST/CM collaboration. Participants spoke of the value of the collaborations they took part in citing that "they're integral" (Alexandra, ST, June 9, 2024), that participating in them is "reciprocity" (Randy, ST, December 13, 2023; Alexandra, ST, June 9, 2024) and that "it moves the work forward" (Jennifer, CM, May 25, 2024). They spoke of how the work done in collaboration matters not only to them as individuals, but to the education system as a whole, and how participating is a worthwhile endeavour. Given that this project has investigated both challenges and possibilities in each of the relational foundations, it is evident that ST/CM collaborations are not always neat and clean but instead are complicated and complex and speak to what liminal spaces can offer as places of learning and systemic transformation.

I will now move to the recommendations that have arisen as I have worked through this dissertation.

Recommendations

Throughout this project I have carefully considered where ST/CM collaborations can find fertile ground in order to grow. While these relationships are not for every ST or CM, and there are certainly STs in education who are not yet ready to engage with a CM with trust and respect, we continue to recognize the need for collaborations like those shared here. I return to brown's (2017) "elements of emergent strategies" (p.40) and share my recommendations as fractals, considering the "nature [of] the relationship between small and large" (p.43) to "adaptive" and its "nature [of] how we change" (p. 43). My initial recommendations are for those who participated in this project, followed by those who are interested in entering into an ST/CM collaboration. I follow with systems-level recommendations for schools and school boards, then conclude with suggestions for future researchers.

To STs and CMs, either those who participated in this project or those in other ST/CM collaborations: share your experiences from your perspective in any format you wish. No one knows what you have experienced better than you have. While those who engaged in interviews with me were generous in their sharing, I am confident that they have more to say on topics other than those I had questions about. They may consider taking the collaborative experience in a different direction than this project did, or they may wish to dive more deeply into the quality of the relationship. What you have to share is important in continuing the work you have been doing together. You may want to consider presenting at a conference, or writing an article, or you may even produce a podcast about your experiences together. What you have shared here may be only the beginning of what you share. Your voice from your unique stance is filled with knowledge and power and I encourage you to use it to enhance the work you have done and continue to do.

To CMs who are considering engaging in a similar relationship to those shared here, I would like to make some suggestions based on this project. This thesis is intended to highlight the importance of relationships in Indigenous education. It is necessary for many more people who are in such collaborations to speak about them. With only five pairs in this project the need

for more CMs like you to share the challenges and possibilities of the collaboration in Ontario schools is vast. Your CM voice about what makes an ST/CM collaboration work must be unfiltered and unfettered. By openly sharing about your CM experiences in collaborations with STs you are walking the path of openly discussing relationships that have not been shared before. Your lived experience in the relationship is what is needed to provide the insider view of what makes the collaboration work.

I would be remiss if I did not also discuss boundaries as I share recommendations with CMs. The setting of boundaries and adhering to them is a component of the ST/CM collaboration that was shared by some CMs, as well as some STs, in this project. Wilfred (CM) in particular was clear that he had nothing to reconcile, that he would not span that boundary– settlers need to do that work. This work comes with a cost of your time, your knowledge and your experience, but you cannot be beholden to the work at your own expense. You can exit the work at any time for reasons that do not need to be shared. These boundaries are necessary for both you and your ST to know how to relate to each other and how the collaboration will work. These relationships only work if the parameters are shared with each other so that you and your partner can build a trusting and respectful relationship. I am not suggesting that you share a blueprint to collaborations but having you share your experiences in a manner that works for you will continue deepening the knowledge of ST/CM collaborations.

To STs who believe that they want to engage in an ST/CM collaboration, I suggest to you taking time to reflect deeply on who and how you will be, should you accept an invitation/opportunity into such a relationship. You must understand not only your current positionality, but if you are willing to change in ways you cannot yet fathom. To participate is to comprehend that as an ST you are undertaking the formation of a new ST identity. You will need to consider answering the questions of who you are and who you want to be as an educator. This includes practicing letting go of being a “good” (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; Marom, 2017) decolonizing teacher and moving towards engaging with the relational

foundations to build the relationship. I relate this to the adaptive element that brown (2017) speaks of as it requires components of change to be in these relationships. The change can be infinitesimal or immense, but change occurs in these collaborations in the coming together in the liminal space. Based on the comments of some CMs and STs in this project, you are encouraged to move past the idea that everyone wants decolonization or even believes it is attainable. This unilateral viewpoint of moving to decolonization is what we have been taught for many years. Instead move towards decolonial work and determine how you can work with another to build a foundation of trust and respect and engage with the relational foundations as conditions of the work that is necessary for all students in our schools. Then interrogate how you will use your voice to share this with other educators.

If you are going to do this work, then you must comprehend the magnitude of what you are doing and be prepared for change. As Alexandra (ST) said, “I think of the idea of heart-work, and it’s hard work” (June 9, 2024); as such, STs have to reflect on what will they do if this is hard and how hard is too hard. As I recommended to CMs, you also have to give yourself permission to exit the relationship if needed. But in the case of STs I recommend that if you are exiting, you consider how you will find a way to do the work up to and including the point you exit. CMs do not ever get to leave the work fully because of their identity. This is different for STs. You can take your identity and walk away from the work, but my recommendation is that you do not do so fully.

For STs I also recommended you find a format in which you can continue to share your experiences without commodifying it. To participate in an ST/CM collaboration is sacred work. It should not be commercialized with selfies, social media posts, or putting you, as the ST, in a higher position than occupied by a CM. To do so would not be engaging in the relational foundations of the collaboration, nor would it be working towards the trusting and respectful foundation of the relationship.

With little research to rely on at this time, I recommend that future (re)searchers learn more about ST/CM collaborations and perhaps participate in their own researcher-community member collaborations so that they can research, reflect, and write from a place of immersion. What they find may be similar to the liminality that my participants did, or it may be that the participants they engage with have entirely different experiences., There is much yet to be shared about ST/CM collaborations in education and adding to the lexicon of literature regarding such relationships will provide further spiralling of knowledge. Consider the time and structures you put in place to foster ST/CM collaborators, to further education, as it is not a neutral site of learning (Schnellert et al., 2022) but instead is fraught with competing political stances (Garcia & Shirley, 2012; Korteweg & Fiddler, 2018; McDermott et al., 2021). I urge (re)searchers to remember that the ST and CM are the leads in any project that they engage in. Thus, knowing your own positionality and your purpose, whether you are coming from an insider/outsider perspective (Hellawell, 2006; Herr & Anderson, 2014; Merton, 1972; Laycock & Nikulina, 2021; Vegh Williams, 2013), or another viewpoint entirely must be pre-determined before you are ready to begin. Not knowing your positionality and not being willing to engage with the relational foundations, can cause far more harm. The six relational foundations named in this project are an excellent starting point for your research and the relationship you will enter into. You will engage in ways that are different than the five pairs of my project but ensuring what you are doing moves towards a positive impact is central to the work–it is a must.

It is highly recommended that school boards engage with ST/CM collaborations and determine how they can foster these relationships and partnerships. It is incumbent on the school board to provide training to prepare STs to take on this role which includes a history of settlers and Indigenous people that is not told only from the settler perspective. In providing training to STs, school boards must consider how they can invite Elders, knowledge keepers and local treaty partners to work with both the board and STs. If boards are contemplating mandatory professional learning for Indigenous education, then consideration of including the

six relational foundations will assist in ensuring the preparedness of STs to engage in future possible ST/CM collaborations. Boards will need to determine how they ensure that their requests of CMs to work with the board and STs are invitational and respectful in nature, including appropriate compensation. Professional learning opportunities are often the space where ST/CM relationships form when given time and space to do so.

When schools and/or school boards learn of ST/CM collaborations, it is imperative that they provide time and resources to support both the ST and CM. In doing so, time and resources must avoid the temptation to turn the collaboration into a product or commodity. The collaboration needs to be allowed to exist in whatever form it has taken organically, without interference. The board and schools are encouraged to seek out and foster these existing collaborations within their sites so they can meet board goals as related to Indigenous education. Boards need to consider how to ensure that this work will not be extractive for the CM, while also ensuring that the collaboration ultimately connects to Indigenous education.

Not every ST is going to be ready to engage in an ST/CM collaboration, nor should every ST be a part of one. Boards must determine how they will work with CMs to engage in the work of an ST/CM collaboration and adjust their policies and procedures accordingly, particularly those that relate to Indigenous education, equity and inclusion, as well as budget and finance as it pertains to Indigenous education. If a school board has indicated in their multi-year strategic plan, mission statement, equity and inclusion policy, or any other policy document that relationships with Indigenous partners are important, then they must follow through with valuing ST/CM collaborations and not use policy as an obstacle to the work of the collaboration. I note here that ST/CM collaborations cannot be micromanaged. That is not support. Senior administration (principal, superintendent, director of education) must accept that they will not know all of the components of the collaboration as there are areas of the relationship which will be off limits. It is difficult for systems to support ST/CM collaborations due to an expectation of transparency, but transparency cannot be mistaken for surveillance. Based on the relational

foundations of the work being done, and the need to live into trust and respect, trust must be extended to the collaboration for it to flourish within the system and be adaptive (brown, 2017).

Concluding Thoughts

This dissertation is one of a very few within the literature about Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations in education. It is unique in that the focus is on the quality of the relationship that occurred between the ST and CM, how they worked to build that relationship, and how that relationship can lead to system transformation. Change can only occur in the context of trusting and respectful relationships. The work of being in collaboration is hard, but worth every battle as it matters to students and teachers. The sharing of this project will inform the literature on how people can engage in an ST/CM collaboration to inform their practice and support Indigenous education within their schools and school boards.

I find it only fitting that the last words in this project are not mine, but those of a CM. When considering the outcome of both this project and the ST/CM collaboration, Jennifer (CM) states:

> I'll share, if you're doing it right–the relationship–if you're doing it in the right way, you're doing it with communication and trust, then the marker, the evidence, the outcome for the relationship itself is, if you're doing it right, [is that] you should end up as friends. (Jennifer, CM, June 26, 2024)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview and Conversation Protocols

To engage participants in the interviews and conversations I wish to conduct I am mindful of making my requests in a culturally responsive and respectful manner. I will enact the following protocols before, during and after the interviews and conversations. This will include the following:

1. All participants will be invited to determine the location of their interview and conversation. It is important that they are comfortable in a space of their choosing. I anticipate that locations may include classrooms, homes, backyards, gardens, lodges, or Indigenous Centres. I will always travel to them and do not expect them to come to me.
2. All participants will self-select their seating and may direct myself as to where I am sitting based on their comfort. For example, if we sit at a table or in chairs facing each other will be up to the participants.
3. Conversations or interviews will open with a smudge or ceremony should a CM or the ST/CM pair advise that they wish to do so. I will only participate in smudging or ceremony if invited to do so. I do not assume I will be invited to do so.
4. Inquiries will be made by myself regarding CMs and accepting tobacco. If a CM does accept tobacco, then I will make tobacco ties and offer them in a respectful way. Wild tobacco will be tied in read cloth using ribbons in white, yellow, red, and black. I may make the inquiry of the ST or directly of the CM depending on who I have a relationship with.
5. For the conversation that occurs together both the ST and CM will be asked to bring an artefact that reflects their collaboration.
6. I will provide food and beverages at all interviews and conversations. Inquiries will be made as to dietary restrictions prior to the interview or conversation taking place.

Appendix B: Interview Guide for CM and ST

All questions will be provided to the participants prior to undertaking the interview. Explanation of the use of ST/CM will be shared with those being interviewed.

Interview Questions for CMs

1. How did you come to be in a settler teacher/community member relationship?
2. How do you identify yourself within the ST/CM relationship?
3. How do you define the relationship between yourself and the ST?
4. What drew you to forming this relationship?
5. Why would you participate in a relationship such as this one?
6. In what ways do you see your collaboration influencing decolonizing approaches in Ontario schooling to support Indigenous students, families, and communities?
7. How do STs and CMs engage in relation in ways that do not recenter settler identities and interests?
8. Did challenges exist within your ST/CM collaboration?
    a. What limitations did these challenges have on benefits to Indigenous students, families, and communities? (Only to be asked if challenges are identified)
9. What possibilities exist in the ST/CM collaborations for students, families, and communities in Ontario schools?
10. What excites you about this collaboration?
11. Is there anything else would you like people to know about ST/CM collaborations?

Interview questions for STs

1. How did you come to be in a settler teacher/community member relationship?
2. How do you identify yourself within the ST/CM relationship?
3. How do you define the relationship between yourself and the ST?
4. What drew to you forming this relationship?

5. Why would you participate in a relationship like this one?
6. In what ways do you see your collaboration influencing decolonizing approaches in Ontario schooling to support Indigenous students, families, and communities
7. How do STs and CMs engage in relation in ways that do not recenter settler identities and interests?
8. Did challenges exist within your ST/CM collaboration?
    a. What limitations did these challenges have on benefits to Indigenous students, families, and communities? (Only to be asked if challenges are identified)
9. What possibilities exist in the ST/CM collaborations for students, families, and communities in Ontario schools?
10. What excites you about this collaboration?
11. Is there anything else would you like people to know about ST/CM collaborations?

Appendix C: Questions for ST/CM conversations

As this is a conversation it will be less structured than the interview. STs and CMs will be invited to bring their artefact to share. Possible prompts include the following:

1. Please share about the artefact you have brought and how it reflects your collaboration.
2. What is needed for this work to be accountable to the ST, the CM and to the collaboration.
3. What is needed for this work to be accountable to Indigenous students, families, and communities?
4. In what ways has your ST/CM collaboration influenced un/learning in your relationship to land, knowledges, others, and self?
5. In what ways have you shared your ST/CM collaboration experiences with others?
    a. Who did you share with?
6. What shared suggestions would you have for others who wish to engage in an ST/CM collaboration?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share?